

## Ski instruction systems — pluses and minuses

### *Some thoughts on what really matters in ski instruction*

For a long time now, I have thought that one of the obvious answers to the stagnant, no-growth situation that the sport of skiing finds itself in has got to be a renaissance of creative, and really effective ski teaching. If ski instruction could only somehow produce real experts instead of struggling intermediates, those skiers certainly wouldn't be tempted to drop out of the sport in search of better ways to spend their money, and their weekends..

The shortest route to such a ski-teaching renaissance would probably be a sharing and blending of creative ideas and success stories from across the whole ski teaching spectrum, official and unofficial, mainstream and alternative. But such a sharing, blending, and synthesis of promising teaching approaches is not exactly in the cards. Why not? I think the obstacle may be the very nature of official ski teaching systems, in all skiing countries, not just in the US.

Ski instruction as I envision it is a creative partnership between an individual teacher/coach and his or her students, a partnership that develops and unfolds and flourishes on a direct, interpersonal, one-on-one level, not in the framework of a formal system of teaching.

When ski instruction becomes a formal system, a sort of brand-name phenomenon such as the so-called Austrian technique, or our own PSIA approach, it has already lost much of this personal creative spontaneity. I would go so far as to say that no system, no structure (or "brand") of ski teaching has ever been ultimately successful, no matter how well it started out, because wrapping something up in a formal package for easy marketing, i.e. branding it, is the first step in turning a live human experience into a fossilized and frozen parody of itself.

I have been active and influential in ski teaching for quite a few years, but I sincerely hope there is no "Lito brand" of teaching. And I hope there never will be. I am into distilling and sharing my own personal experiences on skis, not branding them...

When I was training the instructors for my ski-week program in Aspen, I always asked them not to believe or respect anything that I told them, or anything I showed them simply because it came from me. Instead, I asked these ski pros to take my teaching patterns and ideas and use them as a point of departure in their own personal experimentation as creative ski teachers. If such a period of trial and experimentation, I suggested that they adopt what worked for them and their students, and reject the rest. Above all, I told them not to treat my approach to ski teaching as dogma or as a system to be respected for its own sake.

As you can see, I am very, very, uneasy about the notion of a "system of ski instruction," any system at all.

I am not saying that there is no place at all for structure, for structured formalized systems of ski teaching, whether in the context of PSIA, or for example, my friend Harald Harb's Primary Movements system, I do know that codified and structured approaches to ski teaching are especially helpful to inexperienced ski pros. Such systems are an obvious starting point, and they really help beginning ski teachers to develop and grow as creative coaches.

But in my view, a teaching system is never an end in itself, only another tool that can be used creatively by individual instructors and coaches in a purely individualized sort of way. I would say (only partly tongue in cheek): Up with ski teachers! Down with systems of ski teaching!

I am deeply convinced there is no best way to teach skiing, or to produce expert skiers. A really creative ski teacher tailors his or her approach to the moment, to the student or students, to the conditions, to 101 different factors. A great ski teacher can often invent a new teaching strategy for a particularly challenging student or situation — even though there are many common threads. In the last analysis there are no best teaching approaches, and at the same time, there are many best teaching approaches.

Ski teaching is not a marketable cookie-cutter product, it is an art, one that expands individual horizons. Not just any art but an art of communication, a sharing of insights and movement patterns. And of course, one of the best possible ways to spend a snowy winter.