

Balanced golf instruction
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Well, folks, here we are at the Supremely Balanced School of Golf. What can the advocates tell us about this method of teaching beginning golfers?

"Our approach to golf development was formerly based upon the wildly successful, but now sadly and unfairly pilloried educational model known as Whole Language. It seems that the right wing fundamentalist fascists have defamed our model so successfully that publishers and speaking circuit organizers are no longer fettering those of us who selflessly worked for the social good of the nation. So we've moved on, chameleon-like, and now we have distilled the essence of these in-favour approaches into our old model. We've called it Balanced Instruction because who could criticize such a name? In our publicity blurb we indicate that we have deconstructed the structures and features of golf. (Just between you and me, it was pretty easy to morph the old with the current system – the Whole Language stuff still sits in there - just like a hidden file in a Windows folder.)

We know intuitively that golf is an irreducibly holistic experience best learned by authentic experiences. We enter all our novices in the US Open because that's authentic golf. The teacher's role is that of motivator/facilitator - we empower our students to grow in golf while experiencing a sense of enchantment. We do not teach skills, of course, even though some emerging golfers may naively request help with their swing. We explain that swing is only a sub-skill of golf, and to emphasise it out of the context of authentic golf is time-wasting, or even developmentally inappropriate. Students may choose to practise their invented swing during the Open itself, of course. The principles of the conventional swing are eventually induced by the learner who is highly motivated during an Open, but probably bored to tears and disheartened by artificially timetabled swing practice on a lonely practice range. We know that the swing will evolve naturally, and that feedback is pointless - even damaging to the self-esteem that learners need if they are to take risks with their golf. Admittedly, some teachers initially struggle with this radical non-interventionist aspect.

Because golf is such a natural, holistic pursuit, there is no need to demonstrate grip, stance, or even which end of the club is best to hold. Gradually, through playing in authentic tournaments, the golf game of the novice will more and more closely approximate that of Tiger Woods. If for any reason development is slow, probably caused by earlier misguided attempts at skill instruction, we provide entry into even more golfing majors, such as Augusta, or St Andrews - additional immersion in real golf is the only answer. Golf improvement depends largely on the learner's establishment of a self-regulating and self-improving system, not on anything an instructor might provide.

We are also conscious of the developing golfer's learning style. We advise the visual learners to focus their learning transactions on watching the golf on TV (with the sound off) at every opportunity. The auditory learners actually go to golf courses, but wear blindfolds - better to focus attention on the sound of the ball being struck. They also make use of brain-based golf education employing a looped audiotape of a ball being struck. When played during sleep, this procedure repatterns the golfing region of the brain for these fortunate students. The kinaesthetic learners must actually swing the club regularly, but their oneness with the game is dramatically enhanced when they cannot see the ball. The feel is the thing. Because our teachers are so skilled they are also able to use multiple methods, tailor-made to parallel each of the multiple golf intelligences our students may display.

Our students avoid endlessly repeating chipping and bunker shots, as that involves fractionating the great game. Similarly, we consider driving ranges and putting greens are merely mind numbing traps used by old-fashioned, ignorant instructors who fail to understand the implications of balanced golf. Golfing-for-meaning is our mantra, because golf is such a very personal activity. Only by considering the golf experience from a developmentalist-constructivist-relativist perspective can we move away from the notion of goals prescribed autocratically from the mind controllers. Every golfer has unique background experiences from which to draw inspiration in forming their singular appreciation of golf.

We exhort our students to become critically literate in the game. Golf's ideology needs to be unpacked and its ambiguities made apparent. Its meaning must be provisional and always multiple, never able to be fixed or determined. Foucault, a former French Open winner, noted that critical golf was about " ... identifying the dominant cultural discourses - themes, ideologies - in golf and discussing how these discourses attempt to position and construct players, their understandings and representations of the world, their social relations, and their identities."

So, we believe that players can progress far beyond the shallow objectives of the ball-in-hole-in-minimum-strokes model that dominates in certain entrenched mainstream quarters. Who really benefits from this approach, we ask. Far from being manipulated by the dubious intentions of the rulers of the game, our players are encouraged to achieve satisfaction of their own diverse needs, which may be markedly different from those of course-designers, or of self-appointed traditionalists. The golfers transact with the course, bringing their own unique understandings and experiences to the event - they should not feel obligated to conventional notions of what the process should mean to the player.

We encourage our learners to disengage from the tyranny of the ball. This aspect of golf is too often over-emphasised, as it's really only marginally relevant to the game. The golf ball is only one embedded cue to the deeper transacted meaning of the golfing experience. Students are sometimes bemused when we instruct them to pay as little attention as possible to the ball - just a quick glance is all that is needed as they stroll along the fairway (to ensure that their prediction is correct, and it is a ball not a cowpat). Striking any ball that meets the definition of a ball will do, it needn't be your own - in fact such an action is a genuine indicator of the degree to which one's comprehension of the true potential of this exciting game is developing.

How much success on scores are we having with our balanced, golfer-centred philosophy? Unfortunately that question is very revealing of a failure to keep up with modern conceptions. You are still dominated by out-dated reductionist models of golf. One cannot validly and reliably keep scores without debasing the golfing process. Scores do not reflect all that is entailed by golf - they fail to capture more than the most minuscule element of the whole game. Scores are likely to be used to compare golfer to golfer - which is an unconscionable intrusion on the innate developmental trajectory of each individual seeker of golf prowess. We absolutely eschew objective standards of achievement developed by the controlling establishment designed solely to subjugate the ordinary golfer. Scoring is just a form of standardised assessment, and doesn't teach anyone anything. In fact, it is positively harmful to developing students, merely putting their miscues on the public record. The effects of this exposure on their self-esteem can be devastating - discouraging them from wanting to engage in life-long golfing. We encourage our students to engage in their own form of self-assessment, an innovation that ensures delightfully stress-free rounds. Failure-free golfing, we call it.

Our approach stresses the relevance of golf in a societal context. We want our students to grow as world citizens, rather than simply learn a game. We emphasise higher-order golfing skills - how golf meshes with societal structures. Ultimately, we believe that a more tolerant, humane and just society will eventuate from our efforts. The elimination of world poverty is not an unrealistic outcome for our program.

We also have numerous anecdotes from our dedicated golf teachers who find the balanced, hands-off approach so much more rewarding than the drill and kill practice sessions they formerly endorsed. They are exhilarated to be part of this important redefinition of the essence of the game. They seem to especially appreciate the manner in which their students' golf improvement is now assessed.

We anticipate that our balanced approach will sweep the golfing world. It is new, innovative, flexible - everyone's a winner. And we won't stop there either. We are developing a revolutionary, egalitarian basketball scheme in which the net is automatically lowered to below the height of the approaching dribbler. We have plans to take on swimming coaching for beginners using our proven immersion techniques. The sky's the limit! Maybe we could use our approach for beginning skydiver training too!"