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Muska's Claim Reconsidered – The Spectrum or A Spectrum of Teaching Styles

It was in the late 1960ies that I, as a beginning assistant-professor of Sport Pedagogy at Free University Amsterdam, read Muska Mosston's "Teaching Physical Education". That time I felt very positively surprised by Mosston's book. I think that two factors played a major role. Firstly, since I perceived the presented Spectrum of Teaching styles as a practical and supportive heuristic for the organization of teaching-learning situations, it strongly affected my negative prejudices concerning North American (PE) teaching theory (I had learnt that this theory was generally behavioristic and consequently irrelevant for real educational practices). Secondly, due to my professional preparation I could easily empathize with two important premises of Muska Mosston, namely (a) PE should be a teaching-learning enterprise and "movement is the essence of our subject matter" (Mosston, 1966, 24), and (b) education/teaching ought to aim at student's independence in decision making.

Anyhow, the acquaintance with Mosston's book caused that I started to look for more Mosston publications. During a number of years I checked international journals, reference lists and catalogues on the name Mosston. Because I did not come across again the name Mosston, in the middle of the 1970ties I slowly came to the conclusion that "From Command to Discovery" had been the last master piece of a scholar who meanwhile had retired or even passed away.

In 1984 I came for the first time in my life to the USA as a participant in the pre-Olympic congress in Eugene (Oregon). Saturday 21st of July, I sat on the grass during lunchtime in front of one of the buildings of Oregon State University, when Risto Telama approached me saying "Bart. I want to introduce you to somebody". I rise to my feet and Risto says "Muska, this is Bart Crum – Bart, this is Muska Mosston". Flabbergasted I react with "Muska Mosston?, I thought he died years ago". Then Muska grasps my upper-arms and gives me a good shaking, saying "Young man, I'm very much alive and you will be a witness of that". After I told Muska about my first reading and appreciation of his book and my search for more Mosston-writings, we had a long discussion. The foundation for a lasting friendship was laid. Within two years Muska (and Sara) were twice in Amsterdam to lecture and to spend some beautiful days with my family. In the years after I visited Muska a couple of times in New York and New Jersey and in the course of years we had a regular exchange of letters. I had the privilege to come to know Muska as a warm friend a creative thinker and a charismatic teacher.

Returning home from a Middle-Europe trip on Thursday 21st of July 1994, exactly ten years after my first meeting with Muska, I find a letter in which Muska announces to come to visit us in September in connection with a conference where he had a lecture. The whole family enjoys that news. Two days later, while thinking that Muska was very

much alive, I received Sara's phone call with the message of his death the day before. Some of us have lost a close and warm friend, all together we have lost a very special colleague, a creative scholar and an inspiring teacher model.

I decided to share these personal notes because they form the background for the more critical part of my talk in this symposium.

Muska was not only creative and inspiring. When discussing the ins and outs of "The Spectrum", he was also proud, vulnerable and stubborn. Since I seem to be stubborn too and certainly critical, it is true that Muska and I repeatedly had hot professional debates. These debates always focused on the same issues. For the purpose of this symposium, especially in order to provide the discussant with some entries, I will briefly discuss three of them, one major point and two less important ones.

(1) It is without doubt that Muska started and developed his Spectrum conception as just one heuristic device that could support teachers in the planning and realization of their classes. Neither more nor less. I'm afraid, however, that Muska, striving for refinement of his instrument and experiencing enthusiastic approval from practitioners all over the world, in the course of years gradually started to reify the Spectrum. I remember a discussion in which he claimed that the Spectrum forms the Alpha and Omega of sport pedagogy, a panacea for all teaching problems.

I had and have a quite different opinion. Although I value Mosston's Spectrum as a very valuable and useful instrument for the improvement of teaching decisions as well as for reflection on teaching, I want to underline that this Spectrum is just one heuristic map on teaching and that other maps for teaching methodology are indispensable. I can agree with the fundamental proposition of the Spectrum that teaching is governed by a decision making process. For me, problems emerge with the next proposition of the Spectrum, namely, that since teaching is a decision making process, the criterion 'who decides?' and the dimension 'student's dependence versus student's independence' form the only, or at least the most important, basis for an exhaustive classification of teaching styles. The 'who decides' criterion is certainly an important methodological issue, but I think that the 'how is decided about what' question forms a criterion that might be more essential.

I think for example that, especially within PE, teaching methodology is very much dependent on how the subject matter is perceived and how content is consequently divided and sequenced. The following is a brief explanation to make my point better understandable. I got my professional education within a tradition in which the human body is pre-dominantly viewed as body-subject (not only as an object) and in which a relational view of movement (movement as meaningful action) is in the forefront. In this tradition the teaching method of 'guided discovery' is rather preferred. Then, however, 'guided discovery' gets a quite different operationalization than in Mosston's books. According to 'my' 'guided discovery conception 'landscaping' is an important teaching strategy. This is to say that by changing the movement-landscape (e.g. by narrowing or broadening the balance beam, by changing the angle of the mini-

tramp, by introducing slower or bigger balls, by crating an outnumber situation in play) a PE teacher guides his students by clarifying the learning problem. In doing so the teacher gives the students opportunity to discover (partly by the tacit knowledge of the body-subject) and appropriate way to solve the presented movement problem.

Another important issue for methodological decisions can be found in the theory on differences in action-structures of students and differences in their learning styles. Since questions such as “how is embodiment and movement viewed?”, “what is the action-structure of the learners and how do they learn?”, “how to divide and sequence content?” are not explicitly discussed in the theory of “The Spectrum of Teaching Styles”, I think Mosston’s model is a Spectrum rather than **The** Spectrum.

(2) Muska claims that his Spectrum represents 11 landmark styles which lay in the scale of dependence-independence dimension. I wonder whether this is fully correct. I would like to question the scale-character of the Spectrum. I think, for example, that Style E (the inclusion style) introduces another criterion than ‘dependence-independence’.

(3) The first edition of “Teaching Physical Education” presented a real Spectrum figure. From Style A through Style G there was an increase in independence of the individual learner. According to Mosston’s educational philosophy (“which promotes independence in decision making, independence in seeking alternatives, and independence in learning” (Mosston, 1966, XII) Style G, giving the maximum independence, was viewed as the most desirable style and Style A (the Command Style) as relatively undesirable. A striking change has been introduced in the second edition, namely the Non-Versus notion. Then a graphic representation is presented in which each style is equally important and desirable. I have the feeling that this Non-Versus ideas is at odds with Musk Mosston’s original educational philosophy.