“The Methodology of Teaching”

Historically, teaching has been called both an “art” and a “science”. The artistic viewpoint contends that since teaching is:

“Art” = humans giving knowledge to humans, it must place flexibility, moral values and emotional considerations as the first priorities. On the contrary, the scientific viewpoint holds that teaching is:

“Science” = a disciplined process that must follow systematized rules and doctrines to be successful.

Most teachers find that a balanced combination of art and science produces the best results in the classroom. A structured curriculum and disciplinary method tempered by flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of the students creates a positive learning environment. As a teacher, you must find the balance that best suits your personality and the atmosphere of your school.

Avoid the extremes in teaching. An overly structured or overly disciplined atmosphere discourages innovation and natural skill development. Conversely, a classroom without structure and discipline will find students insecure and unfocused. If your classes start moving toward an extreme, gently guide them back to the desired equilibrium.

This section of the Instructor Development Course is designed to assist the new instructor in structuring his/her curriculum (scientific viewpoint) and implementing it into his/her daily teaching method (artistic viewpoint).

Curriculum Development

Skillful teaching requires a structured curriculum that applies to students at each skill level. Martial arts curriculum is based on the following progression of learning:

- Learning how to condition the body
- Learning how to defend one-self
- Learning about the art
- Developing inner strength and spirit
- Integrating the mind and body
Let’s examine a sample structured curriculum for students at different stages of training in the martial arts. Perhaps, every element may not fit in your method of teaching, but you will probably find a related concept that will. Analyze each stage for “intent” rather than “content”.

In addition to the objectives and teaching methods for each stage, a structured curriculum should include the appropriate “skills” for each belt level, for example: techniques, self-defense, pre-arranged sparring, etc. A Qualified Instructor will constantly update his/her structured curriculum as he/she develops new teaching and training skills, this will keep his/her teaching skills fresh and innovated.

**Beginner stage** (0 months to 12 months - 9th, 8th, & 7th grade)

1. Objective:
   - To introduce the new student to fundamental movements and the school’s rules & regulations

2. Prerequisite:
   - Meet the instructor’s criteria for acceptance as a student

3. Teaching techniques:
   - Establish primary and intermediate goals
   - Give the student a mental picture of how to perform each new skill correctly to allow for internal feedback
   - Teach through simple verbal explanations and physical demonstrations

4. Supplementary training:
   - Example: Use wall mounted stretching bar for flexibility and basic coordination skills

5. Possible reasons for drop-outs:
   - Frustration due to physical or mental shortcomings…
   - Frustration because class is moving too fast or too slow…
   - Frustration because the class does not meet the student’s expectations…

**Intermediate stage** (12 months to 2 years - 6th, 5th, & 4th grade)

1. Objective:
   - Integration of individual movements

2. Prerequisite:
   - Successful completion of beginner course
   - Strong basic skills
3. Teaching techniques:
   - Emphasize improving the transition between movements through combination drills
   - Practice timing and spatial awareness in controlled partner drills
   - Remove extraneous movements and streamline basic skills

4. Supplementary training:
   - Heavy bag - stationary/moving
   - Target - stationary/moving

5. Possible reasons for drop-outs:
   - Over-training, class or practice injuries
   - Lack of goals or motivation
   - Plateau in physical improvement

**Advanced stage** (2 years to 3 years - 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, & 1\textsuperscript{st} grade)

1. Objective:
   - Organization, speed and accuracy skills defined

2. Prerequisite:
   - Successful completion of intermediate course
   - Smooth and fluid execution of skills

3. Teaching techniques:
   - Improve timing through reflex drills
   - Encourage automatic execution of skills
   - Provide opportunities for internal motivation through self-guided practice

4. Supplementary training:
   - In-depth training for speed, reflexes
   - Muscle-specific strengthening exercises

5. Possible reasons for drop-outs:
   - Student has learned enough to meet his original goal
   - Boredom with lack of new skills
For teaching to be meaningful, it has to be “useful” and “effective”. To meet these objectives, approach every class with a natural but disciplined attitude and with the intention to create a positive atmosphere in which learning can take place. The solution for effective teaching is to have a “well-formulated” approach. Devise and use a consistent method for teaching new skills.

**Introduction of New Skills**

An excellent way to introduce new skills is through the following “5-step” approach:

1. **The first step is to provide information about the new skill.** A brief introduction might include the situation in which to use the new technique and a few key points about correct performance. By summarizing the new skill, you heighten the student’s anticipation for learning. They also can begin to visualize what they must do to learn it.

2. **The second step is to demonstrate the skill.** Demonstrate the skill first at regular speed once or twice, then repeat the movement in slow motion several times. Demonstrate the new skill from different angles so the entire class can clearly see what you are doing. When you are certain everyone understands how to proceed begin step three.

3. **The third step is to explain the mechanics of the new skill.** Divide the technique into several parts, each part should consist of one or two simple movements. For example: when you are teaching a side piercing kick to a beginner, you may want to divide it into six segments:
   - L-stance/middle guarding block with the forearms
   - Raise the knee
   - Turn the hip and fold the kicking leg
   - Extend the kicking leg
   - Refold the kicking leg to the fold position and return to an
   - L-stance/middle guarding block with the forearms

4. **The fourth step is the application.** When the student understands how to execute the new technique, begin teaching simple applications. When the student learns how to perform the side piercing kick well, show him the target areas which are most vulnerable to the side piercing kick.

5. **The fifth step is the final and most important step in teaching a new skill and that is practice.** Only practice can lead students to discover the intricacies of the new technique. The ability to develop and adapt new skills is one of the most potent forces in keeping students interested in their martial arts practice.

**Maintaining Student Interest**

Maintaining student interest is a very demanding and critical area of teaching. Without interested students, who will you teach? Keeping students interested can be loosely interpreted as “consistently keeping their attention”. This can be difficult because attention spans vary from person to person, especially among children. You will need to develop a system of maintaining student interest in your classes. Listed below are a few suggestions:
**Start with simplicity** - In the beginner stage, a variety of simple activities are effective in providing fun and excitement. To motivate new students, “realistic” and “sensible” movements are more appealing than monotonous drills. Start with exciting skills that are easy to understand and perform. Simplicity is especially important in group classes because complex cues can cause confusion. In a group class, the student is less likely to voice his confusion and it will go unresolved. The more confusion a student experiences, the more likely he is to drop-out.

As the student begins to show a genuine interest, start teaching individual movements with more precise explanations and positive feedback. Avoid negative criticism that may cause embarrassment or insecurity. Have patience and a positive attitude in the beginner stage. If there is only one good facet of a new skill, encourage it.

Show your students the possibility for improvement. In learning, there are three possible responses to a new skill:

- The student will adapt to the new skill right away with little or no transition time
- On the extreme, the student will become confused and frustrated and may give before accomplishing the skill
- However; in most cases the student will attempt to overcome his initial confusion and adjust his behavior to meet the demands of the new skill

Strive to lead your students to adaptation or adjustment with every new skill you present. If a student becomes confused and makes a mistake, don’t just say “don’t do that!” Instead provide positive alternatives. Your positive reinforcement will undoubtedly increase the student’s efforts and success.

Make a fire of success - To keep a student interested throughout the beginner stage, help him/her have as many successful experiences as possible. When succeeding becomes the norm in training, the student will try to increase the number of successes. Meanwhile, unsuccessful experiences will gradually fade away.

Teaching a beginner is like trying to make a campfire. If the wood is dry, it’s easy to light the fire. If the wood is wet or the weather is too windy, it is difficult to start the fire and keep it burning. In this situation, you can put some dry branches or paper on even the smallest flame and the fire will grow. Too much wind or a log that is too big will quickly snuff out your hard work. It takes care and patience to get the fire burning. The same principle is true for catching the interest of a new student.

Once the fire catches, you can throw on some larger logs. Then sit back and relax while the fire takes care of itself, with only occasional prompting. This is a good “metaphor” for the intermediate stage of learning. You have to give more frequent and greater challenges to enhance the depth of their knowledge. Teach them complex combinations, applications and strategies. View this as their preparation for the advanced stage. Provide reinforcement and feedback, as well as careful reminders about errors and bad habits. The former will encourage correctly performed movements to develop further. The latter will provide the student with opportunities to expand his/her knowledge of their performance and to study the art in depth.

**Fulfill extrinsic needs** - During the intermediate stage of learning, the student begins to have an interest in the theory and history of the art he is learning and the instructor should be ready to introduce that phase of training to him. This will sustain the student if he feels that he has reached a plateau or bored in his daily practice. Another way to deepen the intermediate student’s interest is to allow him to take an active role in school events, such as public demonstrations and tournament competition. This
will serve as short term goals and provide the student with an opportunity to assess his current level of ability.

It is also at this stage that students should be allowed to try many different methods of practicing their skills, so they can find the best method that is suited to their physical and emotional condition. This will encourage the intermediate student to prepare their own practice plan. The intermediate student may experiment with many different practice methods, be prepared to offer the proper feedback at the right time. If you give them too much feedback, you will confine them. You have to guide them gently in the right direction and allow them to learn from their mistakes. This method of teaching will give the students a sense of progress and increase their intrinsic motivation. This is the best combination for successfully bringing your students through the intermediate stage.

**Fulfill intrinsic needs** - At the advanced level, your students should already know what is important in the martial arts and why they are training. Their purpose in training is no longer only physical. With this in mind, broaden their knowledge of philosophy, history, tradition, etc. Advanced students know the importance of patience and step-by-step progress. Perfection of skills and self-exploration are priorities for them. In one word, what advanced students are looking for is “depth”. How long you keep your advanced students is a measure of your depth as an instructor.

**Professionalism in Teaching**

The final subject to discuss in this lesson is how to communicate with your students in the classroom setting. No matter how trivial this might seem, it is a subject that cannot be neglected. “What you say” and “how you say it” will determine your student’s impression of you as an instructor.

Most importantly, “don’t talk too much”. If you spend half the class talking, your students have to spend half the class listening. They are coming to you to learn a physical discipline that is learned through practice, not over-talking. “Think before you speak”. The qualified instructor will provide verbal feedback to let the students know that he is tuned into them and strive to strike a balance between:

- Ample student practice
- Competent demonstrations and
- Proper explanations

When you explain something, simplify what you want to say and get to the point. If your explanation is about a new skill, make sure most of the class understands it and move on. No matter how well you explain things, there will always be people who don’t understand. Don’t be overly concerned about this. Spend time with them during the practice time that follows your demonstration.

When you address the class, keep your voice firm and sincere. When you talk to your students, your voice will tell them who you really are. When you teach, be yourself. Before you speak, carefully consider what you need to convey to the students. “Know what you are going to say, so you don’t spend twice the time to say it”. In class, your subjects should be confined to the martial arts. The only reason for you to talk is to improve your student’s abilities and to enhance their knowledge.

Though you are serious and commanding as an instructor in the class, always talk to the students gently and with respect. The harmony of the two extremes is the result of proper training. The students will learn from your attitude that you are very serious in class and possess good “people skills”.
The balance of seriousness and sincerity takes time and effort to achieve. Practice at every opportunity. Through practicing “how to speak”, you will gain confidence in your speech and voice. Soon you will deliver exactly what you want to express to your students. This will allow your students to be at ease with your teaching style.

Through “trial and error” you will learn many new things about yourself and your students. Soon you will master the speech, your teaching ability, your martial art and most of all, your potential as a “Qualified Instructor”.

**Maintaining Student Interest**

**Beginner stage** (0 months to 12 months - 9th, 8th & 7th grade)

- Begin with a variety of simple skills
- Teach in a straight-forward manner
- Provide positive reinforcement

**Intermediate stage** (12 months to 2 years - 6th, 5th & 4th grade)

- Introduce academic studies in the art
- Individualize training methods
- Increase intrinsic motivation by minimizing feedback

**Advanced stage** (2 years to 3 years - 3rd, 2nd & 1st grade)

- Broaden knowledge through theory and instructor training
- Encourage perfection of skills and self-fulfillment
- Provide opportunities to assist in teaching beginner level students