

Teaching Toward a Sense of Joy 1

There is no doubt that good training in martial arts is hard work, but done correctly, it is also fun. If it were not fun, fewer people would train long enough to get the benefits of the hard work. Benefits and fun combine to produce a sense of accomplishment and joy.

I hope the following exposition of BUSHIDO-KAI's teaching methods will make clear both the goals and the challenges of teaching effective, life-enhancing martial arts to students of many levels.

Edward Hallowell in his *The Child Roots of Adult Happiness* suggests that happiness in the personal growth of a child has five repeating steps. At BUSHIDO-KAI, the "child" may not be a child at all but an adult going through the stages of learning that a child typically goes through. Hallowell's steps are as follows:

1. **connection**- in a good educational system (martial or academic), the student feels a connection with the environment, the teacher(s), the material, and the process. This begins the cycle;
2. **play**- when material is introduced, the student can play with it, becoming familiar with it informally;
3. **practice**- when the student practices, the structure of the assigned work will probably be more formal;
4. **mastery**- after a certain amount of time (in the martial arts, it may be months, years, or decades), the student has a mastery of the material for his/her experience, level, age, or grade; and
5. **recognition**- the teacher or school recognizes that mastery, small or large, and the cycle begins again.

Connection

At BUSHIDO-KAI, we try to create *connection* from the moment a potential student walks in. We are personable, avoid sale pitches, answer questions honestly and completely, suggest the potential student watch as many classes as he/she would like, and offer trial memberships over a reasonable length of time so the prospect knows he/she is making a good decision. We do not set up short trial terms or sample lessons to "sell" the prospect on the school. The school should sell itself both initially and over the long term.

It is challenging to "connect" with a diverse population of potential students each of whom may be looking for a different martial arts experience. We use our 3-month trial membership to evaluate the student while the student is evaluating us. If we feel we cannot provide a worthwhile and enjoyable experience for the student, we will help him/her arrange to try another school.

Play

Although supportive instructors teach BUSHIDO-KAI's beginner classes, the traditional material they teach provides little room for students to "play." To avoid jumping to the next step (Practice) before the student

comfortably integrates the material, I encourage instructors to have a student perform various iterations of a standard technique in whatever way the student likes. The instructor then tests their versions. Inevitably, our standard version has a much higher rate of success than do their played-at variations. This proves to students that there is a method to our madness by letting the student “play” more than most traditional schools would allow. The rationality behind our standard method is explained so that the student has principle to guide further practice.

For most people, rationality is diametrically opposed to play. That is the reason people resist taking notes in the martial arts. They came to play, not to be told what to repeat. Sure, they do not want to be bored with repetitive practice, but worse, they think, is to be challenged by having to use their minds. However, if we consider play differently, rationality will not seem so foreign and distasteful. Play is the informal gathering of data to support a rational thesis as to how and why certain techniques and practices work. Play, in other words, is part of the rational process. Play within the bounds of a rationally conceived system is called “practice.” Practice integrates the rational concept so that it becomes super-rational, that is, so it does not have to be re-reasoned. There is a mini-cycle at work: play turns into rationally justifiable concretes that, in turn, offer material to practice.

Practice

The vast majority of martial arts classes are “practice.” At BUSHIDO-KAI, however, we incorporate “play” into the practice by doing a great deal of variation, application drills, and non-standard repetitions so that the student practices without being bored. Our goal is to produce students who can teach orthodox technique as well as adapt them to their own practical needs.

The challenge is to prevent play from taking over practice. Because BUSHIDO-KAI teaches several levels of students at the same time, some may need to “play,” some may need to “practice” more seriously. We vary the formula so that each student gets what he/she needs over time.

Class participation tends to lean toward practice, play with what is practiced, and then return to strict practice in order to successfully complete an exam.

Next time: *Teaching toward Joy 2: Mastery & Recognition*