

Teaching in Detail

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Ever since karate came from Okinawa to the shores of Japan in 1922, the concept of group rather than semi-private training dominated its instruction. Since karate grew up in the Japanese universities, it is only logical that teachers would teach their growing numbers of enthusiasts in large drill classes. There are many benefits to group classes, but, of course, they lack the personalized touch of the small Okinawan backyard class.

What is really missing when we lose the “personalized touch?” I suggest it is detail. Very, very few martial arts schools in the modern world teach with detail. I remember taking two-hour judo classes back in the '60s in which 30 minutes was “warm-up,” 30 minutes technique drill, 15 minutes actual instruction, and 15 minutes free sparring. It was not teaching so much as boot camp. We developed speed, power, and reflexes — all-important attributes — but we didn't learn much unless we came in early and stayed late to tap the experience of the senior students. Nowadays with many schools offering 45-minute classes that cover only belt requirements, one is happy to imitate those requirements accurately enough to get the next colored belt. This is learning of a sort, but it is elemental learning, not more advanced, detailed study.

So few schools offer details of correct form, of effortless power, of varied application, partially because so few instructors have learned in detail. They simply do what they learned to do in the way they learned to do it. The other reason one seldom sees instruction in depth is that many students are afraid of it. It smacks of learning which smacks of school which never was much fun anyway. The idea of taking a sort of college course in martial arts makes the student feel that he will not only show himself to be inept, but be bored to death doing so.

Fortunately, these fears are not well founded. *Unfortunately*, they do influence many potential martial artists who want their training simple, not too taxing, a little sweaty, and full of success (represented by a new rank at the end of a month or two.) There is no simpler way to present martial arts than to have the 45-minute workout, drilling on the new stuff you need to know for rank. After all, what else is there?

Plenty. So much in fact, that even the rank requirements that took Stu Student 2 months to “master” could have been taught over a period of 6 to 8 months with more depth than Stu ever dreamed possible. “But won't that slow down my progress?” Stu asks. No, it will only slow down the rate at which you make your next rank. Rank does not always equal progress and what little progress rank represents often does not equal depth of knowledge.

Can a modern martial arts school embrace both depth of knowledge and still keep its students happy? Well, first let's admit that no method of instruction keeps everyone happy. Not everyone who started college last year got into Harvard—some because they simply could not qualify, others because they preferred other types of education. Each school exists because it makes *some* students happy. That is as it should be; but there

are ways to balance detailed instruction with variety and training in the rank requirements. At BUSHIDO-KAI, we do it every week and in three martial arts.

To get this balance, one must first attend a school in which the instructor is not just highly ranked, but very knowledgeable, has excellent teaching skills, and believes in teaching **detail**. If the instructor does not present the knowledge, there is nothing to study. For the student, it really takes only a little more time and effort than it would to attend a superficial requirement-oriented class, but the result is the difference between a college degree in English Literature and an elementary school spelling bee.

Next time, we will discuss why Conditioning does not equal Training.