

## Teaching Martial Arts, Teaching in the Classroom

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In my view there is little difference between teaching martial arts and teaching in a college classroom. They both require the same essential elements. Based upon thirty years experience in practicing Tae Kwon Do and Judo under excellent instruction and twenty years of teaching at the college level, I offer, for your consideration, what I believe are five qualities essential for good teaching. While this list is not exhaustive, each quality contributes, individually and collectively, to good teaching. For this article I will address my comments to the teaching of the martial arts of Judo and Tae Kwon Do. I have received, however, very positive feedback of my classroom instruction, through university student and peer evaluations, by applying this same approach when teaching at college.

First and foremost, it is vital for a good instructor to have ethical integrity. In other words, teachers must do what they say they are going to do. They must be at practice always and they must teach the art which they say they are teaching. I have often heard, after a demonstration by a beginning student, the question “where did that come from?” We should not teach our students techniques that are outside the disciplines of Tae Kwon Do or Judo simply because it looks good, it’s spectacular, or it appeals to the instructor. A good instructor must know the subject taught. Most important, a teacher must hold one’s self to the same rigor and standards they hold their students. To truly understand the fundamentals, at least well enough to teach them, one has to continually reach for a higher level. A good instructor never becomes complacent; rather they must continue to learn their subject, over and over and over!

Second, and closely related to ethical integrity, a good teacher will have ethical humility. No one should ever claim to know more than one actually knows. Teaching a technique one reads about, views in a video, or skills only heard about violate this element. Teach the art, Judo or Tae Kwon Do, that you say you are teaching and only teach the techniques within that art that you have been taught and have practiced extensively. Always remember you have specific responsibilities to both the student and the discipline you represent. As such, all that you do should be in accord with the proper standards and demeanor current in the specific art.

Third, a good instructor must comprehend the principles of learning. Too often we take for granted our understanding of the term “learning.” Good instructors have a well-grounded perspective of the processes involved. To keep learning at an optimal level, practice and repetition are related and necessary. Retention is based on usage. The logical implication is that

we need to practice and constantly repeat our exercises to continue to gain, and retain, knowledge and understanding. Yet repetition alone is not sufficient to guarantee proper learning. Both the desire and the motivation to learn are essential elements in the learning process as well. In other words, the good instructor will continually motivate the student and, at the same time, create an even greater desire within the student to succeed. It is then and only then, when the proper mental attitude is instilled, that the student is truly ready to learn. The learning must also be fun. Learning that is accompanied by pleasurable and satisfying sensations is stronger than that which is unpleasant and unsatisfying. Additionally, the learning must be active and not passive. Too much instruction, where students stand around and listen to lectures, is bound to reduce their ability to absorb material. Therefore, a good instructor will understand the basic principles of learning such as repetition, emotion, fun, and active participation, and they will appreciate how these principles are all interrelated and occur together, not separately and independent of each other.

The fourth essential element for good teaching is; simply, do not make favorites in the class. We are human and as such, tend to like some people more than others. As a result we might have a favorite student or two among the class members. But do not MAKE favorites. Do not busy yourself with one student while the others stand around doing nothing. Do not give an inappropriate amount of time to certain students, even if they have more ability than the rest of the class. As a good teacher your task is to teach everyone, not a select few. If you teach the entire class, you will not make favorites.

Finally, a good teacher understands that teaching, especially Tae Kwon Do and Judo, is much more than teaching techniques. A special aptitude and ability to get your instruction across to the student so they are able to “see” what you are trying to teach them is vitally important. As such, a good teacher’s method of instruction is very important to the process. The fifth essential element in teaching then, closely related to “not making favorites,” is to include the entire class in the instruction. Often, the instructor or the top student will demonstrate a technique and then have the class follow through the best they can. While necessary for the class to see the proper execution of the technique, this method of teaching shortchanges the students in the class. Once the class observes the technique done in the proper manner, the good instructor will then have an inexperienced student demonstrate the same technique in front of the class. The instructor can then correct any flaws in technique, and then select another inexperienced student, perhaps even with less time on the mat, also to demonstrate. Over the course of the class every student should have the opportunity to demonstrate, allowing the entire class to provide the instruction. While it is necessary for students to see the technique done properly, for learning purposes it is also

necessary for the students to see it done improperly, and have those imperfections corrected and the important points highlighted. Thus the saying, “you learn as much from white belts as you do from black belts.”

In conclusion, teaching anything, especially to young minds, is a great responsibility no matter the circumstances. Teaching the martial arts of Judo and Tae Kwon Do can be particularly difficult, yet no more difficult than teaching in a college classroom. Certainly the old saying “there are no bad students, only bad teachers,” has some degree of validity. Most students will learn what is taught to them. Since we all want to be good teachers we need to have some sense of the characteristics that make a good teacher. If we start with the assumption that those who teach have reached at least a basic level of knowledge and proficiency in the art they are instructing, then it follows that the characteristics that separate good teachers from bad ones focus on ethics and philosophy. A good instructor, therefore, will understand that we can never really “teach” anyone anything. Rather, all we can really do is provide the proper situations to which the student may react some way or another. By so reacting they will learn. In providing the proper situations a good teacher will do so with: (1) ethical integrity and, (2) ethical humility. (3) The good instructor will understand and apply the basic principles of learning in a holistic manner, (4) never make favorites, and (5) include all students in the instructional phase. We must teach intelligently and avoid the crutch of routine. And most important, the good teacher will forever be a good student.

### **Bibliography**

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