

Excerpts From:

Secrets of Teaching Martial Arts More Effectively

by Keith Pascal

Allow me to start our discussion with a true story:

In the late 70's, there was a teacher who had two schools. I won't use his name, because I don't have permission, and the conclusion that I drew from the story is not necessarily the point he was trying to make when he told it.

Anyway, he had two schools in neighboring cities. In one school, he decided to focus on technique. In fact, sparring was never even mentioned. **That school did not spar —ever.** They only worked on perfecting their techniques, and practicing set moves against each other.

The other school in the neighboring city was taught to spar from the very beginning. They got in the ring at each and every practice session. They were used to going up against opponents.

Then one day, after several years, the teacher brought the two schools together to spar. Can you guess what happened?

Yep. The **sparring school** kicked the living snot out of the **technique school**. The sparrers wiped the mat with the other school. It was pitiful.

So, after they each returned to their respective cities, the teacher started teaching the technique-oriented school how to spar.

The next time they got together, it was a little more evenly matched. After two more times, the technique school started winning consistently.

In fact, there was no going back — and no catching up for the other school.

The technique fighters were just too precise for the sloppier fighters. They had a much better foundation.

But the story doesn't end here:

I used this information to model my martial arts classes. And I went one step further — I brought this principle to the high school classroom.

I was a foreign language teacher. The current bandwagon instructed foreign language teachers to have their students practice freely talking to each other from the very beginning. They wanted them to **spar** from the beginning.

Grammar was out. Practical oral production was in. So, I went against the grain. I focused on grammar exclusively. And those who stuck with it long enough, eventually were taught oral proficiency too.

But now they had a foundation — they would be much better speakers in the long run.

The problem was that not enough of the students stuck with it long enough. I taught first year, and I taught fourth and fifth year. Not many of them stuck it out long enough to get me again for the advanced class — where we really practiced. And some of my colleagues didn't continue reinforcing the grammar enough, so....

I had to develop a different method. What I did was I gave my beginners as many responses as I could to a couple of questions. Then I turned them loose to ask them of each other. Many **set responses** to only a few initiations.

It worked! Like a charm. We kept building from there. Any time the responses got too inaccurate, I shifted back to grammar. Then I figured out how they could use their grammar to enrich the limited answers that I gave them to use.

Do you see where this is going? (It had the flavor of Spoking.)



Back to Learning martial arts:

I was on to something. What I was doing had a similar feeling to the way Steve Golden taught his classes.

We were always building. We never sparred, yet I had the feeling that I was responding spontaneously to a variety of attacks.

So, I brought this technique back to martial arts. We worked on technique. We emphasized technique. After we built a couple of responses, they had an opportunity to try out what they learned in a freer context.

They still weren't allowed to spar, but they were given freedom to respond in a limited context. Can you see how my idea of Spoking came from this strategy of learning?

I modified the technique a bit. Since my students couldn't accurately invent words in the foreign language, they had to rely on me or a dictionary for their building blocks.

But not so with martial arts. I gave them a bit of freedom to use what they already knew.

Of course, I had to tighten their techniques, change timing and angles, but we got some of their techniques to work. This was important to me — I wanted them to have some of my style-driven responses under their belts, but I also wanted them to be able to rely on what was inherently theirs.

After all, the students are allowed to contribute to their fighting style too — within limits.

So, I ended up with a hybrid. I definitely had a technique-driven school. They weren't allowed the complete freedom to spar, and get sloppy.

Yet, I made sure that they felt as though they were free sparring to some degree. So, it would be super simple to make the shift over to full sparring — without the learning curve.

Note: So, I guess someday I will learn how to spar, too. Wink.



This was only a small story taken from Chapter 11 of **Secrets of Teaching Martial Arts More Effectively**. The entire book will be available for sale in June of 2001.

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