
AFFECTING GOOD PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE FOR CHILDREN IN THE DOJO

“Students should learn something new each class, but one or two new actions are enough for one session. Each lesson should reward the student with pleasure, satisfaction of achievement, and the sense of vigorous, joyous movement.”

– Bruce Lee

OVERVIEW

Lifelong learning and personal excellence are fundamental characteristics of *Jujitsu* and the other martial arts.¹ Many great transformations are witnessed and experienced by the *jujitsuka* (students of *Jujitsu*) over the course of their training, particularly those engaged from a young age.² Much of this success however, is dependent on the implementation of an effective teaching philosophy that is capable of transmitting complex concepts and actions to children. This is by no means an easy feat, and demands a great deal of sustained focus and critical thinking on the part of the *sensei* (the teacher). This paper will argue that good pedagogical practice is essential in achieving that goal. It will critically analyse that notion with reference to academic opinion and the writer’s own personal experience. This paper will also present a number of practical strategies to assist all *sensei* and other mentors in fostering an energetic and engaging learning environment for children in the *dojo* (the *Jujitsu* classroom).

WHAT IS PEDAGOGY, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN THE DOJO?

Pedagogy can be simply defined as the art of instruction or teaching.³ However, terminology aside, it is a much more complex concept that encapsulates the wider elements of the teaching/learning dynamic.⁴ It has been described as the ‘act of teaching together with the ideas, values and beliefs by which that act is informed, sustained and

¹ Jason Winkle and John Ozmun, ‘Martial Arts: An exciting addition to the Physical Education Curriculum’ (2003) 74(4) *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 29; Edward Vockell and Hans Kwak, ‘Martial Arts in the Classroom’ (1990) 64(1) *The Clearing House* 61-62.

² Jason Winkle and John Ozmun, ‘Martial Arts: An exciting addition to the Physical Education Curriculum’ (2003) 74(4) *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 29; see also generally Françoise Boudreau et al, ‘Psychological and Physical Changes in School-Age Karate Participants’ (1995) 4(4) *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 50.

³ ‘Pedagogy.’ 2014. In *Macquarie Dictionary*. Accessed July 23, 2014.

<https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/features/word/search/?word=pedagogy&search_word_type=Dictionary>

⁴ Jenny Leach and Bob Moon, ‘Recreating Pedagogy’ in Jenny Leach and Bob Moon (eds) *Learners and Pedagogy* (Paul Chapman Publishing, London, 1999) 268.

justified,⁵ and a process in which the centre lies a 'personal view of the purposes of education, what constitutes good teaching, and a belief in the purposes of the subject.'⁶ Because it is a term that is so 'amorphous' in meaning,⁷ it is also worth looking at the etymology of the word for some further clarification. 'Pedagogy' derives from '*paidagogos*' in the old Greek, which was a term given to an educated slave who bore responsibility for the social development of their master's children.⁸ Thus, whilst there is no precise all-encompassing definition for 'pedagogy', it suggests a common theme involving a commitment to the facilitation of a child's psychosocial and cognitive development. *Jujitsu* is an art that emphasises and implements that commitment through mentorship and collaborative and peer learning.⁹ Indeed, the contemporary popularity of *Jujitsu* is no coincidence; it is its solid teaching structure and philosophy that makes it so attractive to parents as an incubator for their children's holistic growth and development.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT YOUR TEACHING

Teaching children presents a unique challenge to any *sensei* regardless of whether instruction is given in the school classroom or the *dojo*.¹⁰ Young *jujitsukas*' psychosocial skills are still in the early stages of development and their ability to understand what is conveyed to them depends largely on being able to relate to it in some way. Hence, it is very common for children to throw questions at the instructor that pierce at the very heart of a concept; often it begins with 'why?'. In those circumstances, it is vital for an instructor to know how to respond. Instructors are themselves 'lifelong learners who continuously and critically reflect upon their personal capacities to meet the needs of young learners'¹¹ and this means being able to think critically about the action of teaching. It is therefore necessary for the coach not only to know the principle behind *why* something is performed one way and not another, but also to know *how* to communicate that point effectively where a child can be satisfied of the purpose and relevance of its application.



⁵ Robin Alexander, *Essays on Pedagogy* (Routledge, New York, 2008) 4; see also Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 16.

⁶ Jenny Leach and Bob Moon, 'Recreating Pedagogy' in Jenny Leach and Bob Moon (eds) *Learners and Pedagogy* (Paul Chapman Publishing, London, 1999) 274.

⁷ Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 18.

⁸ Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 16.

⁹ Edward Vockell and Hans Kwak, 'Martial Arts in the Classroom' (1990) 64(1) *The Clearing House* 61-62.

¹⁰ Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 329.

¹¹ *Ibid* 14.

IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES IN THE *DOJO*

There are many strategies and techniques that all sensei can implement in order to effect good teaching practices on the *tatami* (the mat). There is no one 'best way', and the effectiveness of any strategy is largely dependent on the circumstances presented in each individual dojo and the good judgment of the coach implementing it. The following suggested strategies are not by any means intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather are of the most prevalent application in the writer's own experience and therefore feature most prominently in mind.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING STRONG COMMUNICATION



Clear and unambiguous communication must exist between instructor and student.¹² Children are inherently more difficult to reach than adults and therefore being able to articulate instructions effectively is a particularly important element of successful teaching.¹³ However, before this articulation can occur there must be a pre-existing conducive learning atmosphere and already well-established pedagogical relationship.¹⁴ This involves 'the relationship between the coach and

the child ... characterised by an appropriate response of the coach to the ... needs of the child.'¹⁵ This response is itself dependent on a number of factors: a willingness to maintain an open and encouraging dialogue with students; a passion and vision that can be easily transmitted to children; a foresight and patience for diverse learning paces among students; and a general awareness of whether what is being taught is being understood. Ultimately, the objective is to enhance the teaching/learning dialogue between the sensei and student, and minimise any associated barriers. Communication, being a skill like any other, is improved with time, practice and the feedback of peers.

¹² Marc Theeboom, 'Martial Arts and Children' in Johan Steenbergen, Paul de Knop, Agnes Elling (eds) *Values and Norms in Sports: Critical Reflections on the Position and Meanings of Sport in Society* (Meyer and Meyer, Adelaide, 2001) 345; see also Jamie Zimron, 'Reflections on Teaching' in Carol Wiley (eds) *Martial Arts Teachers on Teaching* (Frog Books, Berkeley, 1995) 34-35.

¹³ Albert Petitpas et al, 'Youth Development Through Sport: It's all about relationships' in Nicholas Holt (ed), *Positive Youth Development through Sport* (Routledge, New York, 2008)62; see also Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 294.

¹⁴ Nicolette Schipper-Van Veldhoven, 'Sports from a pedagogical perspective' in Stephen Harvey and Richard Light (eds) *Ethics in Youth Sport: Policy and pedagogical applications* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 129; see also Jenny Leach and Bob Moon, 'Recreating Pedagogy' in Jenny Leach and Bob Moon (eds) *Learners and Pedagogy* (Paul Chapman Publishing, London, 1999) 268.

¹⁵ Ibid.

EFFECTIVE CLASS MANAGEMENT AND DELEGATION

A good instructor must always be in control of the learning environment and able to command the attention of his or her students. Much of this depends on effective class management and the support of all other *sensei* and *sempai*. Martial arts generally provide children with a great learning atmosphere due to their structured lessons, however difficulties arise where student numbers become too unsustainable for one sensei to handle. An effective solution is either to break down the class into smaller groups overseen by different coaches, or utilise 'peer pairing' where students are paired randomly, and assisted by the sensei and sempai together. Peer pairing is a particularly useful strategy as it offers the chance for students, across all ages and abilities, to train with someone new and share their learning experiences together.¹⁶



SELECTIVE PRAISE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Like with any learning activity, the good performance of students must be recognised and openly commended.¹⁷ The praise, however, must be genuine and is often best applied with words of additional encouragement and improvement.¹⁸ This has the effect of improving children's motivation and self-satisfaction.¹⁹ However, such praise and acknowledgment is not strictly limited to physical finesse. *Jujitsu*, an art that emphasises enduring self-development and self-improvement,²⁰ recognises that excellence comes in many forms from demonstrating excellent skills to possessing a 'never give up' attitude. At the *Kyushin Ryu School of Jujitsu*, each week a student is selected from the junior class to be the 'student of the week' and given the honour of sitting beside the *Shihan* (the Master of School) and calling the bow at the end of class. This rewards a child's efforts and instils in other children's minds the fact that no positive action goes unnoticed, but to the contrary, is itself met with positive reinforcement.²¹



¹⁶ Ashley Casey, 'Cooperative learning through the eyes of a teacher-researcher and his students' in Ben Dyson and Ashley Casey (eds), *Cooperative Learning in Physical Education: A research-based approach* (Routledge, New York, 2012), 85-86; Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 266.

¹⁷ Richard Mehrenberg, 'Pedagogical Inspiration through Martial Arts Instruction' (2013) 3(2) *The Journal of Pedagogical Development* 10, 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jason Winkle and John Ozmun, 'Martial Arts: An exciting addition to the Physical Education Curriculum' (2003) 74(4) *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 29.

²¹ Richard Mehrenberg, 'Pedagogical Inspiration through Martial Arts Instruction' (2013) 3(2) *The Journal of Pedagogical Development* 10, 11.

USING GAMES AS A FUN WAY TO LEARN



The use of games is an effective model of instruction as it not only incentivises student engagement across all ages and capabilities, but assists in developing children's own awareness and understanding of key principles behind games through active participation.²² Naturally, caution must be exercised by the coach in order to prevent instilling in children a general expectation that there will always be games. Rather, it must be

made sufficiently clear to children from the outset that games are an activity rewarding good participation in class. There are many games that instructors can utilise in order to realise this overarching purpose. Two particularly effective games are 'tail grab' and 'poison ball'.

'Tail grab' requires students (segregated by height) to stand in the middle of the mat with a short belt (the tail) placed at the back of their own *obi* (belt). Each student must attempt to remove the others' tails, and prevent others from taking their own without holding onto it. This is an exciting game, even for seniors, but particularly relevant to children as it assists in developing their understanding of the importance of blocking and use of peripheral vision to defend from multiple attacks.

'Poison ball' requires students (segregated by age) to stand in the middle of the mat. The other students and parents are asked to stand around the edges and a gym ball is continuously thrown from one end to the other in an attempt to strike those standing in the centre. Those struck are required to constantly assess their surroundings in order to avoid being struck. Those struck must sit out, until there is only one student remaining. For the older children, sometimes two balls are used. This promotes within those children a greater appreciation of agility and spatial awareness.



Children eagerly look forward to this part of the session, largely because it gives them the opportunity to express their energies and act competitively. These games are also important, not only because of their popularity with the children, but because they help students utilise their peripheral vision and rapidly engage their psychomotor skills. Finally, the games are strategically left towards the end of class because the excitement it builds for children and their parents, leaving them with a positive feeling about training that helps maintain student retention and attract newcomers.

²² Ashley Casey and Ben Dyson, 'The Implementation of Models-Based Practice in Physical Education through Action Research' (2009) 15(2) *European Physical Education Review* 175, 179.

CONCLUSION

In *Jujitsu*, opportunities for cognitive and bodily enrichment and mutual learning are limited only by one's own efforts. That effort is in turn cultivated by the *dojo* and its collective members, who help facilitate a dynamic and engaging learning environment, and the *yudansha* (persons holding a black belt), who have expressly committed to ensure the furtherance of that objective.²³ It is a purpose particularly focused on the development of its younger and inexperienced members whose fulfilment relies on the existence of a strong teaching/learning dynamic. This paper has demonstrated that good pedagogical practice is essential in realising that and has further elicited several practical strategies to assist in facilitating that objective. It is only by actively espousing such practice and strategies that we are able to preserve and continue to promote to children the fundamental tenets of *Jujitsu*, not only as a physical activity, but a life philosophy.



²³ See, for example, the affirmation a newly inducted black belt is required to make upon receipt of their shodan; see also Kathleen Armour, *Sports Pedagogy: An introduction to Teaching and Coaching* (Routledge, New York, 2013) 14.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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