

DECISION-BASED LEARNING: One More Tool for the Judo Instructor's Toolbox by Mark Lonsdale

Let's start with the concept that people are not good listeners, only remembering a small percentage of what they hear. Visual images have greater impact, and many have become conditioned to watching TV, so we learn more by seeing and watching than by simply listening. The more vivid the image the better the retention, but we learn and retain even more by actually doing a task or skill. Why? Because we have to think and problem solve as we work to find a solution or master a skill. This is why judo instruction has traditionally been 15% teaching and 85% practice.

Traditional judo teaching has been a process of **show & tell** and **trial & error**, followed by several thousand repetitions in *uchi-komi*. While the resulting progress may often be slow, the retention is good because of the repetitions. This process works when development is measured in years, but modern society has come to expect faster delivery and quicker results – a sociological phenomenon referred to as a *McDonalds* or *Drive-thru* mentality. People are willing to sacrifice quality for speed and instant gratification, but this runs contrary to the philosophy of martial arts where we aspire for perfection in form and execution.

While many of the traditional judo training methods are still valid, modern teaching methodology favors **decision-based learning** and **guided discovery**. These place more responsibility on the student to think through problems and not just mindlessly follow instructions. This also allows the instructor to gauge knowledge and retention by asking questions. This decision-based process significantly improves retention since it forces the students to engage their brains as well as their bodies.

Decision-based learning is not just for children, so comes with a range of age-appropriate expectations. The teacher or instructor will modify his or her approach based on the age and experience of the individual, but it can also be used in mixed age groups.

Using chokes and strangles (*shime-waza*) as an example, a junior green belt (12-13 years) would be expected to know one or two chokes but not in any great detail. A competition brown belt should know five or six, along with several entries into those chokes from the guard or turtle position. A *nidan* would be expected to know at least nine strangles and a *yodan* twelve. Dan-grades should also be able to explain the finer physiological difference of a choke versus a strangle (air versus blood flow) and more complex applications and entries into these techniques.

So if the instructor is working with *Yonen* (12 – 13), he or she will begin slowly by asking what they have seen and what they think they know about chokes. For *Shonen* (13 – 16), who are permitted to use *shime-waza* in *shiai*, then a higher degree of knowledge and proficiency would be expected. In conducting a senior competition clinic, the program may include a quick review of the techniques and then move directly into entries, practical applications and tactics.

So how does decision-based training work in the dojo?

The idea is to avoid teaching (talking) too much, but to encourage the students to teach themselves. Instead of simply demonstrating a technique, the instructor will co-opt the class into “exploring” a technique, or a family of related techniques. For the purposes of this paper we will stay with a training session devoted to *shime-waza*.

The instructor should begin by reviewing the potential hazards and safety considerations related to practicing chokes and strangles, especially how to tap out and how to recognize when *uke* has

gone unconscious. The level of experience of the group will dictate how much time is spent on this block of instruction.

The instructor will then begin by gauging the depth of knowledge of the group. The assumption is that, in any class, there are students of various grades and with differing levels of experience. The lower grade students, and those that may be shy, are pitched the easy questions – for example, who knows a judo choke? Or can you name this choke (accompanied by a quick demonstration of *hadaka-jime*)?

Students of higher grade would be expected to know more, and those who are more extroverted and confident will need to field the tougher questions. Examples: Can you name the three primary cross-strangles? What does *juji-jime* mean? What are the three primary rear chokes? What is the difference between a choke and a strangle? Who can demonstrate an entry into *gyaku-juji-jime* from the guard position?

In short order (two or three minutes), the instructor will be asking questions that exceed the student's knowledge-base, but will have focused their minds on the topic. They will also realize that the training is **interactive** and they will be quizzed, so they had better pay attention. In other words, the instructor is holding them accountable for remembering what is being covered.

Moving on, the instructor may ask if anyone can demonstrate a specific cross choke or strangle. Once one of the students demonstrates the technique the instructor will ask for a show of hands to gauge how many can name the technique. The instructor will then explain and demonstrate that technique in greater detail; then give the class time to practice several iterations.

Once the students have grasped the finer points of applying pressure to the sides of the neck with *name-juji-jime* (thumbs in), then *gyaku-* and *kata-juji-jime* are just variations with the thumbs out, or one in one out, respectively. Students will then practice those two variations under the supervision and constructive critique of the instructor(s). They are being led to explore how the edge of their wrists become the most effective tool in each strangle.

From there the students could be asked to demonstrate a practical application of a cross-strangle in *newaza randori*. The instructor is looking for some indication that they know how to apply a cross-strangle from underneath, in the guard position. But before demonstrating the entry techniques, the instructor will ask the students to get into the guard position and try to “discover” at least one practical application of a cross-strangle. He or she may **guide** and **hint** as the students experiment, by suggesting, “Try going deeper on the collar, or roll your wrist as you squeeze....”

Only once the students have experimented for four or five minutes, will the instructor select students to demonstrate what they have discovered. The instructor will then fine tune their performance and demonstrate the best entry for that technique.

Moving on, the instructor will then ask if anyone knows a choke executed from behind. In most cases everyone will know the naked choke, *hadaka-jime*, but they may not know the Japanese terminology. Once they have practiced *hadaka-jime* to a satisfactory standard, then *kataha-jime* becomes a logical variation; and from *kataha-jime*, it is an easy transition to *okuri-eri-jime*. The students have now connected the three basic rear chokes (or strangles, depending on how they are applied).

Okuri-eri-jime is a good starting point to explore (teach) two or three competition applications. The sliding collar strangle is actually a very versatile technique that offers several entries from behind, when *uke* is in the turtle position. Concurrently, the instructor will encourage the students

to explore blocks, counters and escapes from this strangle. (The key to escaping *okuri-eri* is to roll away from the choking hand. Rolling towards it tightens the choke.)

Exploring all six *shime-waza*, including entries and applications, would take more time than the standard 20-30 minutes allocated for studying a new technique in a 90-minute training session; but it makes for a very productive mini-clinic. On subsequent training nights the instructor can then gauge retention and review these techniques, but in the meantime, the students will have six chokes and strangles to experiment with and practice in *newaza randori*.

Going back to the **whole-part-whole** methodology, teaching all six would be considered the **whole**, even though a little overwhelming for some. But because of the similarities between these techniques, each one serves to help understand the others. In later training sessions the individual techniques would be broken down into parts and then systematically reassembled for greater understanding.

This same methodology can be applied to throwing (*nage-waza*), gripping (*kumi-kata*) and joint locks and arm bars (*kansetsu-waza*). Guided discovery is particularly suited to exploring techniques that run in sequences such as counters (*kaeshi-waza*), combinations (*renwaku-waza*), and *osaekomi-waza* escapes.

The training objective of each training session will also influence the teaching methodology. For routine dojo training, instruction is kept to a minimum and the emphasis is on honing techniques through moving *uchi-komi* and *randori*, or by introducing the class to drills such as Kelly's Capers. For the week prior to grading or promotion, the emphasis may move to demonstration-quality techniques, so time devoted to detailed instruction may increase. But again, students should be encouraged to self-analyze their technique, especially *kuzushi*, *tskuri*, and their own control and balance through the execution (*kake*). For pre-tournament training the emphasis will be on tactics, speed, entries, combinations, counters and practical applications.

CONCLUSION

In the near future I hope to write additional articles and conduct clinics related to modern teaching and coaching methodologies, but in the mean time, here are a few basic tips for consideration:

1. Too much teaching (talking) can be a bad thing. The traditional concept of 15% teaching and 85% doing is still valid. Keep in mind that doing and repetition is an important part of learning.
2. Ask questions to gauge a student or class's knowledge before launching into a demonstration. Example, "Who knows a throwing technique that goes to the side?" "Who has a three-throw combination using *tai-otoshi*?" "Who has a counter for *koshi-guruma*?"
3. Make the class interactive by asking if they know something before you teach it. Expect participation even if you have to coax it out of the shy ones. "How many know what *sutemi-waza* means?" "How many have seen *tomoe-nage*?"
4. Use the students' answers and demonstrations as teaching points, even if the student was incorrect. "That was a good effort, but...."
5. Encourage students to read books, look at You Tube and do their own research – especially brown belts and above. "Next week I want you to demonstrate a winning technique used in the 2011 World Championships – plus the set-up," or "Next week we will study variations of *ude-hishigi-juji-gatame* from the guard position."

6. Talk to local school teachers about trends in teaching, and go online to research teaching methods as they apply to child development, learning skills, and coaching sports.
7. Invest in books by respected coaches such as Hayward Nishioka, Neil Ohlenkamp, Jimmy Pedro, and Ron Angus. Judo is one sport where you are a student for life....
8. Sign up for the next coaching clinic in your area, or come out to the National Coaching Clinic taught by Bill Montgomery and Joan Love, prior to the Winter Nationals!!

For additional information related to this subject, read the January issue of **Growing Judo** and the article on **Teaching & Coaching Judo**.
