

This is Not a Drill by Bill Myers

In judo practice we often confuse terminology. We have a few things we can usually agree on, as follows:

Uchikomi: Fitting in. Repeating a throw's off-balancing (kuzushi) and entry (tsukuri). Done standing still.

Moving uchikomi: same as uchikomi, except done moving.

Nagekomi: Throwing practice. Essentially uchikomi, but throwing (kake) at the end.

Sutegeiko: Moving throwing practice. Tori throws uke, who provides an agreed upon level of resistance to tori. This is like a one-sided, light randori.

Light randori: relaxed practice of throwing techniques focusing on speed, timing, and technique. Defense against throws relies on body movement (tai sabaki) and counter throws.

Hard randori: strong, muscular practice focusing on power, speed, timing, and technique. Defense against throws relies on stiff arms, body movement (tai sabaki), and counter throws. This is close to competition (shiai), but without the adrenaline and referees.

Drill: Uhhhh, yeah. Here's where the disagreement really begins.

Now, you may disagree with some of the finer points of the above definitions, but they would generally fit into what most people would give for a definition. Some people lump uchikomi and moving uchikomi together. Some people always do nagekomi and call it uchikomi. That's not the important part. The interesting part gets to talking about what a drill is. If you look up drill in the dictionary, it says something along the lines of "instruct thoroughly by repetition in a skill". From that, you might think that uchikomi, moving uchikomi, or nagekomi would fit into the definition, but not so fast.

The word "thoroughly" sticks out to me (I didn't even catch it the first few times that I read it.) By thoroughly, we should think, "how do I have my students do something repetitive that they can use to perfect a skill?" Over the years, I've come to understand (thanks to some mentors) that if the skills learned in a drill aren't applicable to the situation in which it will be used, then it's not a complete or adequate drill. That's not to say that you can't build things up, it's just that you shouldn't think that static uchikomi is enough to get someone ready to apply it to randori. Why not? There's no movement, timing, reaction, or a host of other variables that exist in randori, not to mention shiai.

My searches on the internet for useful judo drills have been relatively fruitless as well. Many videos talk about a drill and show an uchikomi. So, what's a good drill? A good drill is something that teaches a usable skill in the practical application environment. Right away you can see that movement should be involved. So, should reaction and resistance. Unpredictability can come into play as well.

Now, throwing your beginning students into a drill that involves all of these things right off the bat will just overwhelm them. Your more advanced students may well suffer the same fate, so it's best to build up to them. Here's an example:

You want to teach a usable osotogari. Start with a basic hooking osotogari (technically osotogake, but there's a fine line sometimes in practice, so I'll just use osotogari). Move into osotogari with tori moving forward, backwards, sideways, and in clockwise and counter-clockwise circles. Be sure that your students are completing the throws and have them follow-up with a hold down now

and then to keep transitions in mind. Have uke resist with body movements (tai sabaki) and adding some stiff arms (not too strong, but students need to learn to ignore the initial reactionary stiff arms they get from uke). Have tori counteract this by varying the direction of movement (they need to learn to control movement), adding hand snaps, hip fakes, and a setup or combination throw, like seoi nage, ouchi gari, or hiza guruma. Now have uke counter by using osoto gaeshi when tori makes a mistake (like leaning backward instead of forward). Have them switch grips and switch sides.

One extra thing that you can do to make sure that students are working hard and fast is to design races. Give your students a set of skills to practice and give them a certain number of repetitions to perform. Have them compete for speed against the other pairs in class. For example, have uke move in a certain direction (a different one each time) and have tori throw with a hooking osoto five times. Then have them do the same thing, but have uke counter with osoto gaeshi five times. Then have them switch jobs.

Races introduce an element of speed, which causes mistakes to show up that might not show up when done at a slower pace. This is a good thing, because your students need to know this in order to make sure that they're doing things properly.

This is not an exhaustive treatise on drilling, but I hope you've gotten some ideas for turning your uchikomis into applicable skills using drills.
