

Advanced or Basic?

“Those are advanced techniques”, or “Those are just basics”.

“Advanced techniques are the basics mastered.”

But, what defines “basic” or “fundamental”? I suppose that’s an issue of perception and of priorities. What skills shall we consider most important to have first? The ideas I have of what is "advanced", and "what comes first" - are a bit different from anyone I know.

We also don't teach henkawaza or even kaishewaza as "advanced" so much as to demonstrate the relationships and interrelated nature - and continual ebb and flow - the conversational nature of Aikido.

We don't teach ikkyo, nikkyo, sankyo, yankyo, gokkyo as separate things so much as component parts of a fundamental structural arrangement. We call those techniques, collectively "the big five". There's an inference there that influences the cognitive model a student adopts...

For instance, Kotegaeshi and Nikkyo are structurally the same from Nage's perspective: If Nage begins from the same hanmi and employs the same foot-work, when Uke attacks with alternate hands we will see, in one case kotagaeshi termination and in the other nikkyo. (We call this mirrors or mirrored structures).

Kotegaeshi and Nikkyo are also complimentary "terminations of the dialogue" - in that resisting one facilitates the other - and vice-versa. We call this relationship “complimentary”.

In a single workout, one may show Kotegaeshi AND Nikkyo simultaneously from a given entrance movement - irrespective of the specific attack - while also teaching henkawaza between the complimentary techniques - because they are structural mirror-images of each-other.

Despite *sounding* complicated, it's really structurally simple, and very intuitive to anyone who hasn't been conditioned against noticing it (e.g. by rote presentation). This accomplishes data-compression by leveraging the repetitive footworks to teach what a traditionalist would call at least two distinct techniques. They would also assign a special label: "henkawaza" to the "advanced" practice of exploring the complimentary nature of the mechanics of these two terminating methods.

A traditionalist would call this "advanced" - and it would be “advanced” within their cognitive model - because it would consist of several lengthy, independently-learned and presumed or implied as distinct neurological programs that need to be rearranged and partitioned and re-run without handy points of entry into serial processing for them to get from “start” to “end”.

From our perspective, we call this “basic exploration of the gross fundamentals”. Beginners take to this rapidly if provided the opportunity to do so. You're really only doing one thing - stepping one way and applying a rotation to the extremity through the lever of the hand - and perhaps reversing that rotation when the partner so insists by resisting.

The student isn't locked into rote as they are with longer programs that don't demonstrate these fundamental relationships from an early time. If data comprehension is a goal (it is for me) then this is a shorter road to allowing the student to achieve creative expressive within the paradigm. THAT facilitates virtuosity and development and generalization into other contexts because it's not cognitively constrained by rote or various inferred constraints of thought or movement or order of operations. The inference is instead toward open exploration and practical use of the fundamental structures and the principles from which they were derived.

Watch kittens at play - or any other young thing learning - and notice that they explore and learn based on relationships and interrelatedness of things. They draw meaning from association. This is the natural way of learning. Wrestling coaches know this way, and most martial arts instructors would (rightly) be humiliated by the swiftness with which the average junior varsity wrestler learns - and can apply - a new technique under stressful dynamic conditions. This isn't the swiftness of youth or the “simplicity” of wrestling technique. It's simply wisdom in understanding the way that learning takes place – and that learning fast is easy and fun while learning slow is difficult and draining.

In your dojo culture, does “advanced practice” mean the practice is particularly dangerous, or does it mean the activity is “privileged”? Is the purpose to prevent students from injuring themselves or others? Or, is the purpose to construct and maintain an artificial feudal society within the dojo?

Are the answers to these questions rationalizations, justifications, excuses, and “tradition”? Or, are they based in quantifiable, objective, scientific application of best-practice teaching principles; sports science; kinesiology; cognitive sciences; and an honest response to the 21st Century social contract that a paying student builds the best and quickest competence from receiving the best coaching of which the instructor is really capable?