

Getting From Here to There - on a Bicycle Built for Two

Integration of concepts and methods from other martial disciplines.

The Martial Arts of the Philippines (FMA) have a drill - a pattern known as Hubad that is practiced between partners. The point of the drill is to establish a pattern of movement and interaction that builds reflexive responses to stimuli and to develop sensitivity to the partner's energy that will facilitate a very fast and appropriate response to changes in the partner's movement, energy, or strategy.

Such things are sometimes called "dead drills" because they are repetitive, but IMO, when done right, this kind of training is anything BUT "dead". A feature common to many such patterns is that they can be cyclical or regenerative in nature, maintaining interaction between partners in a continuous flow. They may have only a single movement - or several, but they usually have three components:

1. Avoid an attacking energy of some kind.
2. Reposition the body for a counter.
3. Offer the counter-strike as the new attacking energy (for the partner to continue the cycle).

This sounds much like the usual Aikido practice, except that these drills don't suffer the single-iteration start-and-stop feeling of typical Aikido practice where partners are moving all the way to termination every time. This practice consists of performing the Ai-Ki portion of the movement - escape, and maneuver - and then re-generates before the (ego-pumping) termination, thereby saving valuable time and generating four times the number of stimulus-response cycles of the escape-maneuver phase of practice.

If you practice throwing every time you enter, then when you enter under stress you may feel compelled to throw. For this reason, competent firearms training involves more practice drawing than firing, and it intentionally segregates those two skills cognitively to insure that drawing doesn't necessarily terminate in a discharge. From a liability point of view, it may be a good idea to consider this principle for empty-handed tactics as well.

Although these kinds of drills can be confusing to learn at first, once the pattern is established, it becomes like riding a bicycle: The balance is reliable and the motion is continuous and self-sustaining as the mind becomes free to notice other stimuli and to ponder tactical considerations like navigation, direction, intent, etc. By this time, the pattern becomes merely a framework of interaction from which virtually endless variations of maneuver and technique can creatively flow and be explored - in varying degrees of duration and intensity (or resistance).

Full techniques, including throws, immobilizations, etc. may be practiced - after which the flow returns, allowing the practitioner to “swim in the energy” of their partner and of the interaction, thereby developing certain sensitivities and the ability to blend; to find techniques; and to apply them within an interactive environment in a training (rather than competitive) spirit.

Once you’ve established a bicycle pattern, and are familiar enough to “ride” it - that is to keep the pattern moving smoothly without losing your place or falling down - and hold a conversation at the same time - you’re ready for some real fun. You can:

- Begin to vary your threat stimulus; your movement; and the entry to your termination.
- Find and use full terminations - either partner executing any termination they discover when they discover it (or make up other rules).
- Work mirrored terminations.
- Work complimentary terminations with resistance, even truncating termination so you can re-enter the drill and continue more quickly.

You may notice how quickly your movements become more efficient, natural, and well-timed. And, you may notice how much more easily you work henkawaza because you are more acclimated to operating in the dynamic energy environment. You may notice how much more sensitive you become to your partner - and how rapidly that happens.

Consider the construction of your bicycle carefully: What happens when an entrance doesn’t deliver you to chikaku? What do you want to do when that happens on the street? This can inform your design - and your “riding” habits.

In firearms training, there’s a concept called “immediate action”. It’s what you do immediately and automatically when the gun doesn’t go “bang”. This is an emergency procedure that’s programmed based on statistical probability of what will most quickly correct the issue. And, in any competent training program “immediate action” is heavily trained-in.

Bicycles are a good high-intensity training staple for dynamic interaction with your partners. They’re challenging to implement, but once you’ve got them going you’ll cover much more training distance with them than you can without them.

Bicycles are some of my most cutting-edge advances for accelerating Aikido training.