

Final Paper

Lessons Learned in Advising the Gifted – Application to Martial Arts Instruction

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Lessons In Advising the Gifted...

Application to Martial Arts Instruction

Introduction

Martial Arts is a multi-dimensional activity that services many kids of various talent areas and talent levels. Students choose this activity for a variety of reasons and they all have different goals. The instructor's goal in teaching martial arts (at least in my organization – the American Taekwondo Association) is to help create independent and “complete” people. This isn't done by indoctrinating them into a rigid way of life, but by using our techniques and philosophy to support their growth towards becoming whole. Gifted students often have special issues that can be addressed by this type of training. Many students that I deal with in the North Scottsdale area are identified as gifted. There were two important lessons (among the many) from the *Advising the Gifted* Course I will focus on for this essay. Firstly, regarding the concept that it is important to perceive the unit of intervention as the student, not the classroom. How can this be accomplished when this is a for-profit business that must have a certain number of students to survive? Secondly, how the interventions (in this case instructional methods, curriculum and class planning) could be based on a multi-dimensional model that accounts and supports specific talents and intelligence. This multi-dimensional model can help instructors become better able to support the students in their goals. (Note: when referring to “martial arts” this only applies to martial arts as taught by the American Taekwondo Association[□] and Karate

for Kids[□] – some concepts do not apply to other styles of martial arts as I cannot support how they work with children).

The Student as the Unit of Intervention

At first glance this seems like a high-minded concept, but impractical in a classroom situation. If a teacher has 30 kids and no assistants, how can they possibly be expected to individualize all parts of a child's experience? In martial arts this could even be worse since we typically see the students only 2 to 3 times a week for 45 minutes or so and we have hundreds of students to instruct (it is probable that a full time Karate for Kids[□] instructor may instruct more students in a week than the average elementary teachers deals with in their entire career). However, the martial arts environment does lend itself to personal instruction in many ways. In addition, there are some additional ways to personalize instruction for the students.

The Karate for Kids[□] and American Taekwondo Association[□] focus allows instructors to be able to individually connect with students. It is important to understand how this works so instructors can continue to pay attention to these factors in the school. One, the students (and their parents) *choose* to be there so they are motivated and enthusiastic about the instructors and the subject – it is *not a mandated* activity. Two, there are regular goals that the instructors all support (i.e. every 2 months the students “graduate” and get their next belt). This is a kind of celebration so the instructor gets an opportunity to connect with the students more regularly (in this fashion) than an elementary school teacher (they don't even “graduate” from grade to grade really – graduations are at 8th grade, and 12th grade). Third, students who may be falling behind, or who just are very motivated may do private lessons. Fourth, the instructor's job is not just to develop some specific skill - though they are tested on knowledge - learning skills and values are

a larger focus. This values orientation allows us to also connect with the individual students. All of the points here are important as a start for instructors to follow through with. The next step is developing tactics and strategies for individualizing within the context presented.

In the next section we will present tactics that can be employed, but our overall strategy needs to include a framework for implementation of these ideas. While we have stated that our activity lends itself to personal “connection” how can we make sure each student gets their needs met. Particularly when we are talking about 600 students (and growing) in Scottsdale alone. One way is by improving tracking systems. Since students may not have the same instructor for each class, the instructors need to know special needs and plans. Some possibilities include using their existing tracking card system (each student turns in a “tracking card” before class to the instructor). This can be coded or notated to include actions that the instructor ought to take or the special characteristics of the child. In addition, a training system needs to be developed for the instructors to educate them on the system and the actions that are suggested. Instructors also need to be trained how to identify children and also to communicate this back to the overall system. Though this is in a martial arts context, it is not much different than what elementary teachers should go through when kids move up a grade and into another classroom setting at the end of the school year.

Applying Multi-Dimensional Intelligence Models

The concept of multi-dimensional intelligence is not new. The current popular model is Gardner's (1983) model which has 8 dimensions:

- ☐ Linguistic intelligence ("word smart"):
- ☐ Logical-mathematical intelligence ("number/reasoning smart")
- ☐ Spatial intelligence ("picture smart")
- ☐ Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence ("body smart")
- ☐ Musical intelligence ("music smart")
- ☐ Interpersonal intelligence ("people smart")
- ☐ Intrapersonal intelligence ("self smart")
- ☐ Naturalist intelligence ("nature smart")

Based on Gardner, Kerr listed five areas: Mathematical, Spatial-Visual, Verbal, Musical and Interpersonal (Leadership) and expanded on the definitions to provide a model to identify and intervene with gifted children when advising. For example, a verbal talent may be identified by observing a “gift with languages”, and a suggested intervention might be “seek a mentor in local community or at a college or university”. This is a model for us to format the actions we should take based on the students talents.

To apply this to martial arts we can correlate the model here to specific identification and applications in a classroom (martial arts classroom) situation. In martial arts, this needs to be simple enough to allow it to work with a variety of instructors, a variety of personality types, and with only the aforementioned time to work with the kids (2 to 3, forty five minute sessions a week). The actions suggested here are only a guide. The actual actions taken with the child

depends on where their other strengths lie and his/her personality. (Note: for clarity, “forms” are referred to often. In martial arts, forms refer to a series of techniques that are performed in a specific order and direction).

Application of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences to Martial Arts Instruction

Intelligence (Gardner)	How it Might Be Discovered (Martial Arts Context)	Examples of Possible Action
Linguistic	May not be readily applicable.	Write out the moves of a form. Creatively describe who they are defending themselves against.
Logical-mathematical	Always knows how many moves are in the forms, knows exactly how many steps to take between move A and B.	Have them count the moves of their form or calculate angles of attack.
Spatial	Able to do technique combination in multiple directions, understands distancing,	Provide many different varieties of ways to perform moves. Let them draw the forms as a special project.
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Coordination is exceptional, can easily perform moves forms.	Give them challenges regarding more complex moves. "Special projects". Demonstration team. Do their form backwards.
Musical	Has good rhythm – combinations and forms "flow" well.	Let them be part of demonstration team that does forms to music.
Interpersonal	Is a great example of respect and courtesy. Is a great communicator.	Have them be part of leadership training program for kids.
Intrapersonal	Is a great example of honesty and integrity.	Point out these values in class – use them as a positive example.
Naturalist	May not be readily applicable.	Special projects – how we show values (respect) to the world around us.

The above is only a starting point for further development. We need to be able to adapt this initial model to be able to service a variety of students with a variety of instructors and improve their ability to meet individual needs.

Two additional benefits of developing this model are firstly, that we can help gifted kids who may be weak in some areas by identifying them and suggesting alternate actions. Also, we may be able to use this model to identify children who may be closer to “average” and come up with individualized interventions (instruction actions). In other words, we can view these as continuums which, based on the student, we can draw a variety of possible activities they can do.

Conclusion

Though the scope of this paper limits this discussion to envisioning a framework for application of the theories of this course, rather than developing a full training system, it suggests some exciting concepts for dramatically improving the ability of our instructors to meet specific students' needs. There are still difficulties with the time we will be able to spend with each student, but with further development of the model, development of training programs for instructors and creating systems to help the instructors manage these interventions, we can get closer to our goal of helping create independent people. We want to make a significant difference in children's (and adult's) lives. This knowledge can serve as a beginning.

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