

The Origins of the Two-Person Drills for Sticks and Sabers

I didn't start out wanting to develop a system just to market and sell. It was a natural extension of an organic process that started with me asking questions, then researching and developing the answers.

I have been doing Filipino martial arts (FMA), which is comprised of stick training, knife training, and empty-hand training, for over 25 years. I have studied in four different styles. After about 12 years of training, I had developed a reasonable amount of skill and began to teach others. The systems I had studied were very complex, deep, and profound. It took a very long time to be able to teach people how to effectively use them. In our culture nowadays, most people don't have the amount of time needed to invest in training to become proficient enough to defend themselves.

The ultimate goal of all drills is to increase your ability to use those skills and techniques under the stress of sparring and real-life situations. In other words, you want to be able to be free and spontaneous, and have an answer to every combat question. I was having difficulties in teaching others to have good responses, without freezing or fear, in a reasonable amount of time, given only several training sessions per week.

It was around the same time that I was introduced to two other systems that are very primordial and simple. They are brutal, quick, easy to learn, and effective in real-world combat. One advantage of simple drills is that they can be quickly used in combat. The disadvantage is that they are limited in their responses. This can create problems when you are being attacked by more proficient opponents.

Combat has a direct relationship to consciousness and awareness. The higher the state of consciousness you are in, the easier it is to operate "in the zone". Complex techniques can be more readily executed from this "state of being". The lower your state of consciousness, the more the primordial and gross motor movements, like responses, become. For example, when I was a bouncer in Washington D.C., on a good night I could do all kinds of complex movements to control any situation. However, if I was surprised, in a bad mood, or in a low state of consciousness, I automatically resorted to the more primordial kickboxing techniques.

I then asked a simple question; "Was there a way that I could take the simplistic drills and bridge the gap to the more complex drills?"

So I began researching every system of FMA. I looked at any sword or knife system I could find. Simultaneously, I began breaking down the complex drills into their basic parts.

While analyzing the complex drills, I found that they too were missing certain responses or defenses. It was possible to mutate the complex drills into multiple variations that covered all the attacks and defenses, but the mathematics and complications became staggering. When training students they would often find it difficult to keep track of all the variations of those drills, and it became a very time consuming and overly complex process. I also learned that because of the complexity, when sparring, those techniques often went right out the door.

From my research, the breaking down of the complex drills, and using the simple drills, I began to isolate and identify every possible technique and angle of attack and every possible response to those attacks. I was able to catalog all the basic building blocks.

Using one of the primordial drills from the simple system, I began adding all of the different responses and attacks in the same format. After about four or five years, during which time I was also developing other systems, I had created and integrated a system of simplistic drills that covered all the basic attacks and responses.

It took me another four or five years to organize all those drills into a mutable modular methodology. I used different frames of references to reorganize the same material into different modules. In other words, I could rearrange those same drills and all the techniques into different sets. The advantages of a mutable system are many, including the ability for you to teach students in different ways. You can combine any single drill with any other drill. You can combine two or more together until you arrive at completely spontaneous sparring. This allows you to endlessly create new patterns of teaching. It prevents your students becoming bored, as well as constantly challenging you in new directions.

In addition, in the last four or five years, I began adding more complexity to the very simplistic drills. I ended up following all the basic mathematical possibilities and found the bridge that connected all the simple drills to all the complex ones. I had discovered the "Rosetta stone" of martial arts. Simple techniques layered and integrated with the complex ones allows a practitioner to easily use any technique along this scale. An adaptable continuum. Furthermore, you can train all aspects of combat. You can choose to focus on range, distance, timing, footwork, body defense, check hand or live hand, and fakes and feints. All manner of strikes from knives, swords, machetes, sticks, and sabers can be used. Slashing, hacking, thrusting, broken strikes, flicking strikes, and pommel or handle strikes are covered.

People learn differently and the mutable modular system accommodates this easily. Instead of mechanically following preset patterns, the mutable modular method allows you to see more of the connections between the different techniques. This constantly challenges students to see and think differently about the same material and thus fosters a more creative and ongoing deepening of their understanding.

There are advantages and disadvantages of preset patterns vs. spontaneous free-form chaos. Preset patterns allow two practitioners to know exactly what they're about to do. That means when training two partners you can train very rapidly, and with an intense amount of aggression, while minimizing the potential for mistakes and injuries. You can also maximize repetitions and deeply burn a particular response into their neurological habit patterns.

In addition, preset patterns allow practitioners to engage in actual combat techniques repetitively while being able to focus on different aspects of combat. For example, one could train footwork, timing, range, variable emotional intensity, and even proper body mechanics and structure.

By training at 100% speed and power, with emotional aggression, you quickly find out what actually works and does not work under real-time conditions. A lot of techniques done slowly cannot be translated into full speed and full power. This is what you might call the crucible or the proving grounds.

One disadvantage of a preset pattern system is that it may not cover all possible responses. If the pattern system has a narrow and rigid response methodology, the practitioner, when faced with an unknown system, will find it difficult to break out of the established habit patterns and adapt to a new incoming attack. For example, those who followed mixed martial arts (MMA) in the early years may have noticed that there were some arts that just did not have appropriate answers. This left practitioners wondering what to do next, which is not the ideal mindset.

I've seen time and time again, when a person is faced with an untrained or unknown technique in stressful conditions, they often freeze and become unsure as to what to do next. The momentum inertia quickly goes to the attacker.

This can also create another disadvantage of the hard-style systems. If a student is constantly being aggressed and hit they can develop a negative fear-based emotional mentality. Have you ever seen somebody get hit 20 times before they learned to apply a front hand defense and then continually flinch thereafter?

The advantages of systems that are based on spontaneous and free-form movement are notable and many. Free-form movement allows you to constantly adapt to new situations, developing the ability to perceive and respond to a person's movements, as opposed to any particular technique. This teaches you to rely on your ability to really see, adapt, and improvise spontaneously. Thinking on your feet allows you to consistently generate answers to unknown questions. In addition, a lot of free-form systems tend to move a lot slower than preset pattern systems. You are able to practice more dangerous techniques that may not be appropriate for high-intensity training. You can train with live weapons instead of padded ones. It also teaches you to practice subtlety of movement, sensitivity, and variability of options. Also, you can work on maintaining calm and peaceful responses instead of building in fear-based reactions.

A disadvantage of chaos systems or free-form spontaneous systems is that there are often many viable untrained responses. While practitioners do develop a sort of organic response system there are usually multiple gaps left in the training. In some cases counters to counters are left uninvestigated.

There is also the "limp noodle" syndrome of the soft arts. Did you know, in the Chen Village in China, the birthplace of Tai Chi, The farmers all used the old-school hand tools. After they had toiled in the fields all day, they then practiced their Tai Chi for hours each night. The modern-day 3 hours practice each week does not necessarily develop the strength, structure, or ability to deal with an aggressive attacker. While students may develop some of the physical skills necessary for combat under relatively controlled conditions, when faced with real-world combat, emotional integrity, techniques, courage, and spirit all go out the door.

In my experience, I have found that a balance of the yin/yang, the slow/fast, the soft/hard, and the chaos/preset patterns must be thoroughly investigated and trained to create a superior warrior. Because of the modular training system, all the ABCs are fully trained in multiple organizational patterns and a moderate exploration into the free-form styles makes this a well-rounded and holistic system.

There are four main organizational patterns to my system. One of those organizational patterns focuses on the left brain/right brain decision-making process vs. the no mind/mushin (what is this meant to say pls?) or "in the zone" modes of consciousness.

A student is given one response to an attack on one side of the body and conversely, the other side of the body is given a singular decision. This teaches the student to repeat one response using a no-mind/no thinking mode while, on the other side of the body, they must make a singular decision. Then the opposite is trained from here. In the modular training modality, that singular decision could be based on a left/right, high/low attack, or a choice of defensive responses. The training rapidly progresses from one side of the body to the other, involving one decision-making step at a time, until all the vital angular decisions have been thoroughly trained.

Within only several hours of training using this modular system, we have taken many students from beginner level to being able to effectively defend themselves, at almost 100% speed and power, against a complete arsenal of totally spontaneous attacks. They were also able to use multiple responses to every attack angle or technique in a fluid efficient manner. The results have been stunning. Unprecedented. We are certain that within one week' of solid training at one of our seminars, you can become very skilled.

At this point, I must say that we are not selling a “magic ninja warrior Jedidiah spartan pill”. Deep skill takes prolonged effort over prolonged periods of time. Real martial arts takes hard work, over a very long time, with excellent coaching. What we are offering is a much more efficient training method to be able to make you combat-ready and street effective in a short period of time.

Our system is fully integrated and layered from the simple to the complex. It thoroughly trains your psychological and your physiological responses to be able to respond in many different and varying states of consciousness. The methodologies harmonize the soft-style chaos with the hard-style preset training patterns. And the modular aspect is completely adaptable and re-arrangeable under many different formats to suit your training or teaching needs.

Whether you are an advanced practitioner or a beginner, I know that you will benefit greatly from these drills. They will definitely increase your skill level quickly, thoroughly, and effectively!