

The Learning Circle

The Learning Circle is a four-step process that will help you teach students how to perform any technique or series of techniques, and then how to perform those techniques themselves, as you envisioned.

As an effective instructor, you have a vision of how well your students should execute the techniques you teach them. The Learning Circle provides the strategies and methods to enable them to bring your vision to life.

The Learning Circle is an easy and quick process, which you and your instructors should accomplish in two to three minutes. Read the entire process carefully, and then repeat each step three times as you introduce the process into your class environment.

The four steps of the Learning Circle are:

1. Create a vision.
2. Execute technique(s) with your students.
3. Tell students how to execute the technique(s).
4. Students execute the technique(s) as a team without your help.

Step #1: Create a Vision

When teaching a technique, always begin with the VISION. Often, this is a quick creative story for students to envision in their minds, while performing the technique. You want to create an atmosphere of excitement with your story. The more exciting and dynamic your story, the more excited your students will become.

There are three basic story scenarios that create excitement for the technique(s) you want students to perform:

- 1) Street, or self-defense
- 2) Sparring
- 3) Graduation/show or tournament

When creating a story always give a reason why students are performing the technique.

Example #1

Position: The instructor is in front of the class, which is standing at attention.

Excitement from the instructor: *"I am excited to show you a three-move self defense technique today."*

(It's very important to the success of the Learning Circle that you and your instructors demonstrate real excitement when teaching the techniques. You must be totally committed to the techniques if you expect to help your students learn and perform them as you envision. If the excitement is not obvious and real, then select some new techniques!)

Why: *"This technique is designed to protect you from an attack. Let's pretend you are walking home from school tomorrow and a bully or attacker approaches you from behind and grabs you."*

(Assign the role of attacker to an instructor, qualified helper or student.)

Vision: *"Watch these three moves carefully."*

(The instructor first performs the moves slowly. The second time, he does it faster to show students the end result and to excite students about the moves. [Do not hurt the "attacker!"] The third time the instructor demonstrates the technique, he shows students what it should look like in the air.)

The students are now excited to try the technique. They know why and when to do it; they understand the beginning, the middle and the end and how much time it takes; and what it should look like when it is completed.

Example #2

Position: The instructor is in front of the class, which is standing at attention.

BLACK BELT RETENTION

Retention-Building Strategies for the Owner and Instructor

Excitement: *"Today we are learning a backhand reverse punch, which is an awesome move to use when sparring."*

Why: *"This is a dynamic sparring move to use as an offensive technique. When your opponent is waiting, lunge in faster than he is able to react, hit him, score the point and move away."*

Vision: *"Pretend the score of your tournament match is tied or you are competing for the gold medal at the Olympics. You only need one point to win. Your opponent is right in front of you bouncing. Lunge toward him, pivot, punch your opponent, cover and exit the pocket before he is able to hit you."*

(The instructor demonstrates the technique quickly and shows students where to strike. He creates a dynamic visual goal for his students to achieve. Now, his students are excited and motivated to do the technique. Finally, the instructor guides his students from watching the move to performing the move on their own, efficiently.)

Once you've completed Step #1, move to Steps #2, #3 and #4, so students learn how to perform the techniques as a team.

Step 2: Execute technique(s) with your students.

Example of Technique Instructions:

"Follow my steps."

"Block 1, step forward palm strike 2 and back kick 3."

"Good, let's do it together again a little faster."

"Block 1, palm strike 2 and back kick 3."

"Excellent, now how many moves are there?"

"Exactly, good answer, 3."

This helps students to remember the number of techniques from start to finish, especially when there are five to eight techniques in a set.

"I will do it one more time with you (pre-frame)."

"Ready, follow me."

"Block 1, palm strike 2 and back kick 3."

Step 3: Tell students how to execute the technique(s).

Example of Technique Instructions:

"Perfect! This time I will tell you the technique(s) and you will do them without me."

(The instructor has the freedom to move among the lines of students, observe their techniques and note those students who are having trouble executing the techniques, correctly.)

"Ready team!"

"Block 1, palm strike 2 and back kick 3."

"Good, a little faster; ready."

"Block 1, palm strike 2 and back kick 3."

"I'll help you once more; then you do the technique(s) yourselves as a team." (Pre-frame)

"Let's do it by the numbers. You say them with me."

"Ready and 1, 2, 3."

"Very good."

The skill levels of your students and the number of techniques will determine if you should use the numbers. They work very well with beginners.

Step 4: Students execute the technique(s) as a team without your help.

Example of Technique Instructions:

"When I say go, all of you do the technique together by the numbers."

"Ready, go!"

The first time you direct students to complete Step #4, you will probably notice a few stragglers. It is normal for 5% to 10% of your students to make mistakes or forget some of the techniques in the set when they execute it the first time. Students typically improve their technique as they execute it the second, third and more times. Carefully observe students' technique, so you are able to help them execute the technique completely, accurately and efficiently by the third time.

Establish a balance between providing students with too much help and requiring them to be responsible for their learning. Your role is to improve and sharpen

BLACK BELT RETENTION

Retention-Building Strategies for the Owner and Instructor

their comprehension, cooperation, focus and learning skills. If you execute the technique with them too many times, then you are apt to weaken those skills.

Instruct your students clearly that you will only show them the technique three times and only perform it with them three times. It is their responsibility to understand and execute the techniques that fast. Tell students to ask other students in the class to help them. Don't be mean; but force them to be responsible to learn and to use other tools to accomplish their goals.

Use this method, sparingly; however, since it is your responsibility to teach well enough that none of your students will need those other "tools." It's all part of establishing that balance. Students must also learn the skills to pay attention. Even though you've observed students who are having problems with the technique, allow them to finish the set. You will only need a few moments to provide students with the feedback to correct their technique(s).

"Excellent, class!"

"This side of the room was quite loud."

"Ready, go!"

"Wow, one more time with speed and loud kias or numbers." (This is the third time.)

"Ready, go!"

The Learning Circle is now complete.

Instructor's Evaluation

After completing the four steps of the Learning Circle, evaluate the success of your instruction. If your students are executing the technique well, then you've excelled, using the Learning Circle method. Conversely, if you observe too many students having problems with executing the technique(s) as you envision, then you may want to introduce fewer moves or explain the technique again and start from the beginning.

(If you are utilizing disguised repetition games and drills, especially Black Belt Practice time, then you have time to help those students you observed earlier, without interrupting students who are practicing the next drill or set. It's an efficient classroom method: Everyone is doing drills and you are quickly helping the few students who need additional instruction.)

Your evaluation and any re-training will assure that all your students understand the drill and are prepared and enthusiastic for an exciting, dynamic, experience as they master the day's technique or techniques.

[Note: The Learning Circle process can be condensed to just two repetitions of each step, but this is only recommended for students at a higher skill level and with techniques that are easy to master. After acquiring experience with the Learning Circle, you will be able to recognize easily when to adapt this Learning Circle variation. When you are teaching forms, don't do them on a person. First, perform the form slowly and explain each move; second, show your students the form in fast motion; and third, only then move to the next technique. It is important for instructors to execute the form or technique three times to avoid laziness!]

The Learning Circle Instructor's Quiz for Evaluation and Improvement

Training Level 1

School Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor's Name: _____

What is the primary goal of the Learning Circle?

What are the four parts of the Learning Circle? Shortly explain each step.

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

4: _____

How many times do you repeat each step?

Why is the Vision so important?

Should you help the few stragglers mentioned in Step #4 or continue the process? Please explain your answer.

How do you know if you were successful when finished?

What should you do to improve your understanding and use of the Learning Circle?
