

Study-Create-Renew 2

What about creative martial artists?

In what way does the cycle affect them, and what do they produce as a result?

Most martial artists are not creative, but imitative. They are actually martial artisans, proud of the fact that they can replicate what their art demands of them accurately such that they produce representative examples of Shito-ryu, Yoshinkan Aikido, or Yamanni-ryu Kobudo, for example. Their cycles therefore are not Study-Create-Renew, but are closer to Study-Recreate-Rest. That is as it should be, but in order for martial arts to be called “arts”, there must be some creativity involved at some level. I suspect a style’s founder did not exhaust all the available martial creativity and then pass on his method to others so that they could become skilled but non-creative artisans.

Without founding a new art, the sensei can create within the confines of the established art. He is the one who designs the classes, drills, and technique combinations. Although an intermediate student can run a class by simply imitating what Sensei did the night before, he is less likely to have the skill to perceive what the students need, nor is he likely to be able to create a drill that would help solve their learning problems.

Picture the karate sensei introducing his class to *renraku-waza* (combination techniques). Perhaps he has only two stances and seven basic movements to deal with, but every class he seems to come up with new combinations. Consider his ability to interpret kata. Sometimes the movements are what you think they are, sometimes they are something you had never considered, but Sensei not only considered them, he also worked them out in his head so that you could work on them with your body.

Picture the Aikido sensei whose one-hour class is made up of 3 or 4 segments, each of which introduces a combination of familiar techniques you had never seen before. Instead of complaining that the fluid combination of body repositioning, off-balancing, and fundamental technique would not work on the street (by the way, neither would the karate combinations if taken literally), consider the creativity it took to develop combinations that would flow together in the dojo, and how those “unrealistic” combinations create fluid movement and balance-awareness in the students that practice them.

Do sensei go through repetitive cycles like Study-Create-Renew? I think so, however, I also think that their Study emphasis has been diminished by their teaching role so that they use their attempts at creative teaching to substitute for their own personal study. Their cycle, I would suggest, is more like Create/Study-Renew.

What about the student? Does she have a chance to exercise her creativity? For the most part, the student Studies and Renews but does not Create; however, the more senior the student, the more chances she has to apply her art in semi-free drills or self-defense scenarios. In fact, the more creative she is in applying her art, the more the sensei knows she is mastering it. The more she masters her art, I would propose, the more her cycle becomes Study-Create-Renew.