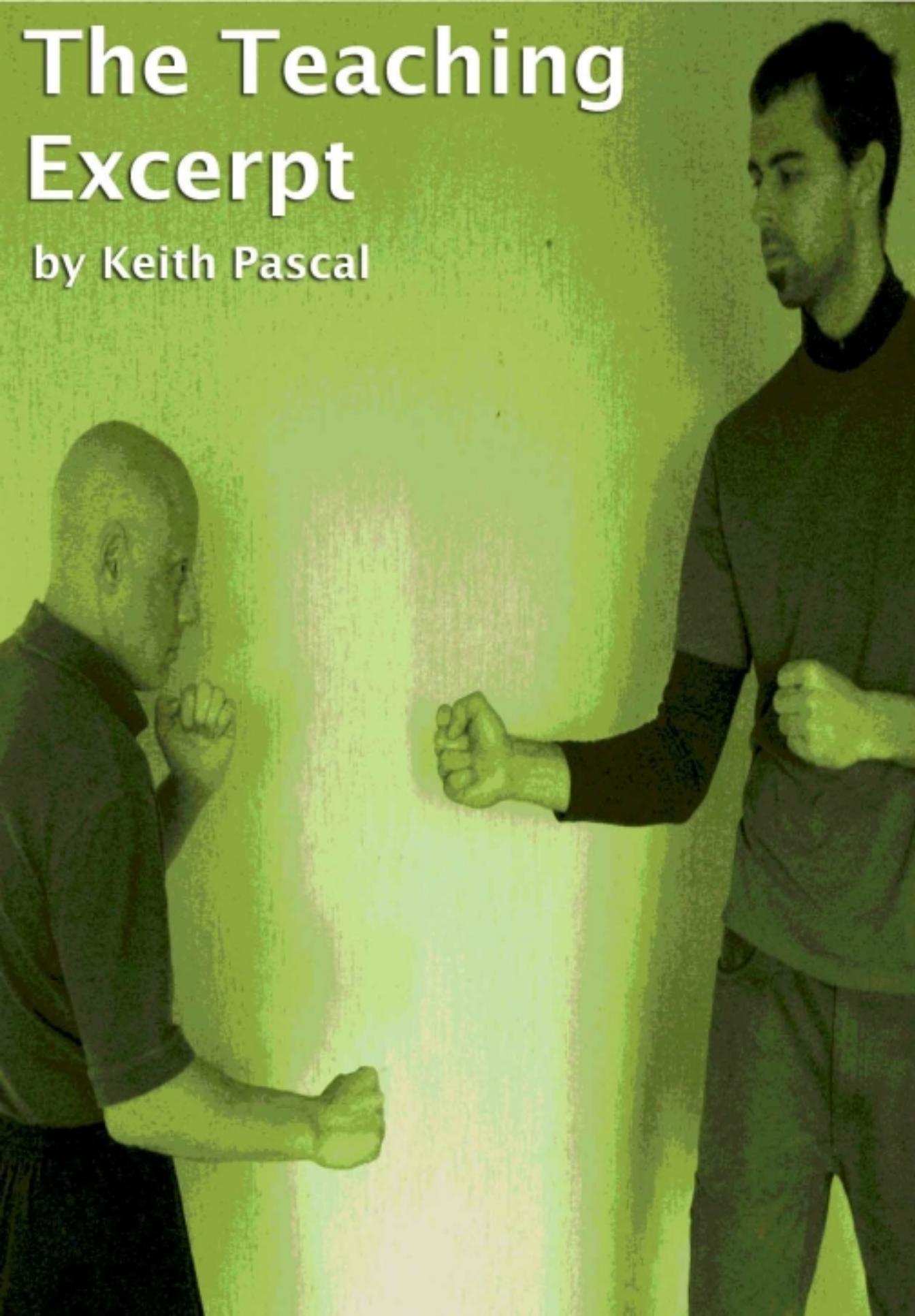


The Teaching Excerpt

by Keith Pascal



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This is an information book only, and no liability will assigned to any party for the rendering of martial-arts training advice or teaching methods. There is always a risk involved in any martial encounter, even training.

If expert counseling of any kind, including legal, is required, the services of competent professionals should be sought for each specific area in question. Do a lot of your own research too -- and be careful when practicing.

Readers are urged to take steps to stay safe while teaching, practicing and making decisions about their martial-arts training and teaching others. There are too many variables. Be aware, plan ahead, and train with safety in mind.

Do what it takes to stay safe, and always avoid fighting, if at all possible.



Hi,

My name is Keith Pascal. I am the author of *Secrets of Teaching Martial Arts More Effectively*.

I have been teaching and writing about martial arts for years. What follows is an excerpt from *Secrets of Teaching...*

Have you ever wondered whether students should start sparring as beginners or wait until they have perfected their techniques? The following story may provide an answer to that question, or at least give you a starting point for further experimentation.

The story is 100% true.

Will the conclusion be the same for your school, style, and situation? Who knows? But it is worth pondering, wouldn't you agree?

After reading the following anecdote, spend some time asking yourself the following questions:

What are the benefits of waiting before teaching sparring?

What bad habits does sparring foster?

How can you make your training 100% practical, while avoiding sparring?

How can you control your students' sparring progression, if and when you decide to incorporate it into your curriculum?

Will students learn practical martial arts either way? Is all of this a moot discussion?

Is precision really necessary in the martial arts?

Is precision vital in a real martial encounter?

To your martial success!

Keith

Allow me to start our discussion with a true story:

In the late 70s, there was a teacher who had two schools. I won't use his name, because I don't have permission, and the conclusion that I drew from the story is not necessarily the point he was trying to make when he told it.

Anyway, he had two schools in neighboring cities. In one school, he decided to focus on technique. In fact, sparring was never even mentioned. That school did not spar —ever. They only worked on perfecting their techniques, and practicing set moves against each other.

The students in the other school in the neighboring city were taught to spar from the very beginning. They got in the ring at each and every practice session. They were used to going up against opponents.

Then one day, after several years, the teacher brought the two schools together to spar. Can you guess what happened?

Yes. The sparring school kicked the living daylights out of the technique school. The sparrers wiped the mat with the other school. It was pitiful.

So, after they each returned to their respective cities, the teacher started teaching the technique-oriented school how to spar.

The next time they got together, it was a little more evenly matched. After two more times, the technique school started winning consistently. In fact, there was no going back — and no catching up for the other school.

The technique fighters were just too precise for the sloppier fighters. They had a much better foundation.

But the story doesn't end here:

I used this information to model my martial arts classes. And I went one step further — I brought this principle to the high school classroom.

I was a foreign language teacher. The current bandwagon instructed foreign language teachers to have their students practice freely talking to each other

from the very beginning. They wanted them to **spar** from the beginning.

Grammar was out. Practical oral production was in. So, I went against the grain. I focused on grammar exclusively. And those who stuck with it long enough, eventually were taught oral proficiency too.

But now they had a foundation — they would be much better speakers in the long run.

The problem was that not enough of the students stuck with it long enough. I taught first year, and I taught fourth and fifth year. Not many of them stuck it out long enough to get me again for the advanced class — where we really practiced. Maybe this was because some of my colleagues didn't continue reinforcing the grammar enough, so....

I had to develop a different method. I adapted. I gave my beginners as many responses as I could to a couple of questions. Then I turned them loose to ask questions of each other. *Many set responses to only a few initiations.*

It worked! Like a charm. We kept building from there. Any time the responses got too inaccurate, I shifted back to grammar. Then I figured out how they could use their grammar to enrich the limited answers that I gave them to use.

Do you see where this is going? (It had the *flavor* of Spoking.)

Back to Learning Martial Arts:

I was on to something. What I was doing had a similar feeling to the way Steve Golden taught his classes.

We were always building. We never sparred, yet I had the feeling that I was responding spontaneously to a variety of attacks.

Thus, I brought this technique back to martial arts. We worked on technique. We emphasized technique. After we built a couple of responses, they had an opportunity to try out what they learned in a more loosely defined context.

They still weren't allowed to spar, but they were given freedom to respond in a limited context. Can you see how my idea of Spoking came from this strategy of learning?

I modified the technique a bit. Since my students couldn't accurately invent words in the foreign language, they had to rely on me or a dictionary for their building blocks.

But not so with martial arts. I gave them a bit of freedom to use what they already knew.

Of course, I had to tighten their techniques, change timing and angles, but we got some of their techniques to work. This was important to me — I wanted them to have some of my style-driven responses under their belts, but I also wanted them to be able to rely on what was inherently theirs.

After all, the students are allowed to contribute to their fighting style too — within limits.

Consequently, I ended up with a hybrid. I definitely had a technique-driven school. They weren't allowed the complete freedom to spar and get sloppy.

Yet, I made sure that they felt as though they were free sparring to some degree. So, it would be super simple to make the shift over to full sparring — without the learning curve.

Note: I guess someday I will learn how to spar, too. Wink.

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