

# Lessons From Experimenting With CLA In My Classes

Is it the future of Jiu-Jitsu coaching?



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CLA — “The Chris Led Approach”

When I first started teaching Jiu-Jitsu, coming up with curriculum for my classes was my favorite part of the job.

Creating fancy sequences, using the sequences to explain concepts, and helping each student hit the sequence perfectly.

It was fun. I filled notebooks and note pages in my phone with as many classes as I could.

Recently, however, I've been gradually changing the way I run my classes.

This is for a few reasons:

- I've learned more about grappling this year than ever before
- Most of the students in my classes are pretty experienced and benefit from a more modern approach to their Jiu-Jitsu education
- I don't want to run classes that are very different from the way that I am training myself to these students

And thus, here we are.

Here are some things that I've learned from experimenting with CLA in varying degrees in my classes:

## **CLA is just as much, if not more, work than doing a normal curriculum.**

I think the stuff that I've heard is that if your coach is running “games as practice”, they simply don't want to teach.

I've found the opposite to be true.

Instead of trying to come up with moves and how they work together, running a CL class forces me to think about specific skills and preconditions for those skills to happen.

For example, the other day, I created a class focused on attacking the back from the crab ride. This class broke down the skills required to take the back into 4 games (we only went through 3 of them, and I'll explain why in a moment).

Here are the skills we looked at in this class:

- Maintaining and advancing from chest to back connection versus a seated opponent
- Getting a standing opponent seated
- Getting under an opponent to get behind them

During these classes, the students I was working with were of all levels. There was pretty much every belt level on the mat.

And yet, because of the specificity of the games, it helps equalize the room a bit. Belief matters less, and skill level in specific positions matters much more.

## Does this mean that technique is dead?

I don't think so.

At the end of my classes that are full CLA (only 2 per week at the moment), I include Q and A. I don't know if this makes me a bad ecological instructor, but I find that I personally benefit from asking my coaches questions about technique, so I can't imagine not doing it for students in my classes.

Furthermore, when I teach seminars on my leg lock system (like the Woj Lock stuff) find that it's very important for me to be as specific with technical details as possible.

So here's kind of the interesting part:

Personally, I like to study instructional videos and matches in my own time so I can learn new things from high-level athletes and add them to my game. I also have the luxury of having access to tons of world-class grapplers, either a 5-minute drive from my house or at the push of a few buttons online.

When I do a class, we do our games and then before the live rounds, we do a Q&A section where the whole class has access to me to address their problems of the day.

So my training is not really "ecological". I receive a lot of direct instruction.

It just doesn't really happen in the moment during training. It happens in my self-study during training or when I ask questions to coaches, have conversations with training partners after rounds, or when I go back to the gym later in the day for film study.

I am not a true eco bro, but I am learning.

## What does it mean to be a good coach today?

CLA in Jiu-Jitsu does not mean that coaching is becoming obsolete.

It does not mean that you don't have to teach anymore. I teach more now, except it's more specific, it's more about helping a student recognize the preconditions for them to reach the desired objectives (takedowns, backtakes, leg locks, etc).

Things like my leg locks — the best aspects of my game — are that way because I spent hours doing "micro-drilling", pretty much the least ecological style of training out there.

Micro-drilling is like that scene in Forrest Gump when he's practicing putting his legs together. That's how I got good at leg locks.

This one.

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### Vietnam Basic Training - Forrest Gump



“Why did you break that leg so fast?”

“BECAUSE YOU TOLD ME TO, PROFESSOR.”

I digress.

I want to tell you that that's how you should get good at them, too. It's easy for me to sit on my high horse and say that your leg locks are not as good as mine because you didn't drill enough.

But what if there was a way that you could reach the ceiling faster?

What if (and this is a scary thought) you could reach my ceiling faster than I did? What if you got there so fast that you actually break through the ceiling and set a new standard for the level of leg locking?

Technique is dead, folks.

Sort of.

Not really.

Rather, the way that we as coaches and athletes need to study, deliver, and practice technique is changing.

Monkey see monkey do is still the way, but maybe the monkey would get better fast if it were practicing in a more realistic scenario.

## Closing Thoughts

There's this great quote from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau that I read the other day:

*"No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true to-day may turn out to be falsehood tomorrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields."*

For the longest time, traditional Jiu-Jitsu instruction was replicated without much question. When I first started teaching, I just kind of did what my instructor did because his instruction made me better, so I thought it would make others better, too.

But more importantly, I wasn't experienced or confident enough to teach in my own way, so I had to replicate his teaching style to get reps.

You can't really make anything your own in the beginning because you kind of suck. You have to imitate someone to build competence so that you can eventually learn for real.

And so, where I'm at in Jiu-Jitsu now, it's training in this way and teaching classes to help people learn the way that I am learning.

I'm sure in time, the way I approach Jiu-Jitsu will change in ways I cannot currently predict.

And that's the beauty of this never-ending sport.

If you enjoyed this article and want to learn some of the CLA games that I've used to improve my guard retention, hit this link and pick up a copy of my newest instructional, "DON'T GET PASSED".

Thank you for reading another edition of The Grappler's Diary!

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