

## **The Referential Integrity of Aikido**

**By Daren Sims**

### **What is it?**

Whilst assisting a friend with some database design principles this weekend in the early hours of Saturday night/ Sunday morning, the success of our efforts and the turn of the conversation to Aikido brought forward the concept of 'Referential Integrity' and how it could equally be applied to our Aikido practice.

Firstly for the non-IT people and probably a few IT ones as well a quick explanation of what 'Referential Integrity' actually is.

Lets use the aikido membership forms as an example. The forms take data or information from individuals that will eventually find its way into the NAF Membership database which is looked after by our fine fellow Mr. Alan Prescott.

Now, the way that data is held is to use something called a table – a bit like an electronic file. This holds a set of related items in rows or if you are a bit old fashioned you can call it a record.

So in the example all of the information we have relates to a student.

To hold this information we would have a students table. In it are all the details of all of the students in the NAF. For example; membership number, name , telephone number, address and so on.

To save some space we'd keep the details of the students club separately. No need to have 'Templegate Dojo, Herbert House, Templemeads, Bristol' repeatedly saved with the student details.

Instead we'd have a dojo record (in a dojo table) which would contain details of the dojo where the student practices. This way we'd only need to store this data once.

To link the 2 together we'd allocate a reference number to the dojo and add this reference number in the student records. Lets say Templegate is dojo no. 1.

*Hope you non - IT people are still with me.*

So every time we add a new student for Templegate into the students table we include a 1 under dojo details so we know they are from Templegate dojo.

Ok ...got that?

So those cleverdick database designers have come up with a way of applying a rule to prevent errors when new records are added to the database. What this rule will do is check the dojo number against the dojo table to ensure its valid.

If there are ten dojos in the NAF numbered 1 to 10 and Mr Prescott tries to enter dojo number 50 this nifty rule will recognise that this is not a valid number and will not allow it.

This preserves the correctness of the data....this my friends is the concept of referential integrity!!!

So, pausing to collect thought...what the heck has this got to do with Aikido?

### **And this means what for aikido?**

I will explain....I hope...

In the Aikido world we see techniques practiced in many different ways.

When we travel or go on courses we see aikido practiced in a way that is different to that in which we are used to.

Even within the Templegate dojo we have instructors of (very) widely different physiques naturally moving differently. We also get lots of visitors passing through Bristol who come to share a practice with us.

There is a huge temptation to see something that is different from what one has grown accustomed to and therefore to criticise it.

Ever since I started Aikido – this art of harmony, I can remember many times hearing such criticism. On many courses I've heard instructors say 'No not like that – it is wrong'. Then I've seen another instructor do what I'd heard was wrong and make it look right.

I am sure that I am not alone in the confusion that this has caused.

### **10,000 forms**

On recent courses Pierre Chassang has explained the definition of 'Ai-Ki-Do' for us.

My own understanding of this is that it is to 'unify the man with ki according to the principles of the Tao'.

It is not an easy concept to explain and I hope my simple translation is not too

offensive.

Pierre has further explained that by bringing the elements of the Tao together, that is Yin and Yang it is possible to create 10,000 forms.

(Further explanation exists in the book 'Aikido' by Nobuyoshi Tamura – 8<sup>th</sup> Dan of the Tokyo Aikikai)

With such available complexity it is no wonder that there are so many variations of Aikido practice, so many different ways to move and also so much uncertainty of what is correct movement and what is not.

### **Help is at hand**

Fortunately for us Pierre reminds us that there exists a set of references to measure aikido against.

Through these we can distinguish between good and bad practice and therefore continue to strive for improvement.

As we are often reminded these references (with a very simplistic translation) are;

Shisei – Posture

Kokyu – Breathing

Kamae – relationship/position

Maai – Distance

Irimi – Entering

Tenkan – Receiving / turning

Ura / omote – front and back

Tai sabaki – Body movement

Kokyu / Ryoku – Co-ordination of mental energy and physical force

These bases then are the references of Aikido. Learn these and then measure your practice against these base elements.

When you practice - If all are present and in proportion then the practice is good. If these rules are transgressed then there is work to be done.

Just like the rules in the database you can see that the rules of aikido have been broken and the practice is invalid.

If all are correct then drinks all round ! .....the practice is valid!.

### **In a nutshell**

So do not hastily judge the practice of others and expect everyone to be the same. Use the bases of aikido as measures – any practice to realise Ai-Ki-Do where the base exists is good, no matter how strange or different it may appear to be.

Using these rules gives us the Referential Integrity of Aikido and allows us to validate our practice and eliminate wasteful and dangerous habits.