

A comparison between Driver Training Academy’s “Class-Driving” Learn-to-Drive program and the Australian Government’s “Keys2Drive” and “L2P” programs.

By Trevor Sobey BEd(ALD), dipProfCouns

Background:

When considering the cost / benefit of learn to drive programs on offer, it isn’t always easy to recognise different values between programs at a superficial level. It is tempting to simplify the decisions with a sentiment like – ‘something is better than nothing’. However not all training programs are equal and few training matters have more potential for danger than driver training.

Comparison	
“Class-Driving”	“Keys2Drive” and “L2P”
<p>“Class-Driving” is a style of driving developed by Driver Training Academy, based on acknowledged expert theories and practice.</p> <p>Two formats of delivering the learn-to-drive program are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Five consecutive full days, 2. Three-hour after school sessions over a school semester. 	<p>“Keys2Drive” is Australian Federal Government funded program where several driving lessons are provided under specific conditions.</p> <p>“L2P” is a Victorian State Government program administered through Local Councils aimed at assisting disadvantaged youth to obtain appropriate supervised driving practice.</p>
<p>Proactive in structure: using an established driving style which the author believes to be ‘Best Practice’. This approach progressively develops students through a ‘patterned advance path’ of 17 exercises.</p>	<p>Reactive in structure: instructors are trained to observe errors and develop correction strategies. Parents (and private tutors) are assisted in providing corrective practice. This is patterned through four stages of learning.</p>
<p>Uses a ‘peer group’ learning model: Three participants rotate roles between ‘driver’, ‘coach’ and ‘assessor’; facilitated by an instructor.</p>	<p>Uses one-to-one instruction method. Lessons are usually one hour or less and reinforced by private practice.</p>
<p>Uses agreed ‘boundaries’ for the duration of the learn-to-drive program: At the completion of each exercise the participants rate their compliance with the written boundaries on a five-point scale, followed by a short (often humorous) discussion. This process is an important ‘tool’ in providing a catalyst for attitude development.</p>	<p>Behaviour agreements between parents and participants are encouraged in the first months of solo driving. There is evidence that this is a satisfactory practice.</p>
<p>Changing learner roles more than 17 times provides analytical insight into personal driving standards in</p>	<p>“Keys2Drive” participants are asked to imagine these roles as a means of predicting their readiness for solo</p>

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comparison to set standards.	driving.
Assessor: Each participant takes turns acting as an 'Assessor'. The important lesson reinforced during the 'assessor role' is that there is a 'right' and 'wrong' in driving. Each assessment passed when acting as the 'driver' becomes a 'mile-stone' of achievement towards the goal of becoming a "Class-Driver". The Government's driver licence test is never used as a reason for learning any message. Relevancy is always connected to legality, safety, vehicle sympathy and smoothness.	Looks forward to one assessment conducted by the Government Officer. All the training has this main assessment as its focus, in the mind of the participant (and often the instructor). Information 'keyed' into the mind using the relevance of the licence test becomes irrelevant after the test and is subconsciously discarded by the mind.
Seeks to prove the learner has passed through the 'beginner' phase with appropriate knowledge and habits using Competency Based Assessments. A Statement-of-Attainment declares that the learner is of a standard where a dual-control vehicle is not required.	Seeks to enable private tutors to provide experience to the standard of the tutor's habits and beliefs using instructor guidance and web site information.
Specific driving techniques are used which enable smooth vehicle operation. Smooth and predictable vehicle operation is used as an intrinsic reward to motivate positive behaviour and develop insight.	Driving technique adverse: Instructors are told that specific technique is not important and should not be a focus of training. This 'school-of-thought' sees learning to drive as a long, wide, deep learning journey where the learner's ideas are as valid as the instructors.
Seeks to move learners to drive independently of the instructor one task at a time. This process commences from theory to demonstration, diminishing assistance from instructor and 'coach', to unaided practice and finally assessment. Once the assessment has been passed that driving task is assumed to be competent and the learner drives without assistance when performing at that level.	Seeks to move the learners to drive independently through a continuous generic process which helps the learner to <i>"find your own way"</i> . The course authors label other driving instructor approaches as: <i>"do as I say, do it my way"</i> including any training style which uses instructor direction.
Provides theoretical assistance to parents (private tutors) about learning strategies and involves them in practical	Provides assistance to parents (private tutors) by having

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driving for one hour at the program’s completion, after the participant has reached a level of competence. This experience is to provide the parent with confidence in the participant to drive without undue risk.	them attend with the learner on driving lessons.
Provides ongoing assistance to both private tutors and learners through the “Hot-Seat” program.	Provides ongoing assistance to private tutors through interaction with the instructor and excellent information on a web site.
Aims to holistically develop cognitive, psychomotor, attitudinal and connotative skills concurrently. The cognitive / connotative skills include perception, insight and awareness leading to appropriate habitual driving protocols.	Aims to keep driving practice safe by structuring four stages of driving complexity and diminishing control by the supervising driver.
Spatial ability is seen as important to judgement skills and is therefore intrinsic to the holistic development of the ‘beginning’ learner.	Spatiality is not specifically taught as skill, however some vehicle manoeuvring, such as vehicle parking comprise part of the program.

Discussion:

Source of information: Driver Training Academy bases its “Class-Driving” style on “Roadcraft” principles as defined by Perry, D. R. (1979). “Class-Driving” has a thirty-five year history of research and development (see “Story of “Class-Driving Development”) with a recognition that young people are both precious and vulnerable; and a strong motivation to assist young people to remain safe on the roads (see “The Driver Training Academy Story”). This process has produced a field-developed program, the principles of which are strongly supported by research. For example Christie, R. and Harrison, W (2003) provides an endorsement for the timing and general content aim of “Class-Driving”. While the guidelines provided on the “Keys2Drive” web site could be described as thorough and appropriate the program largely depends on the background and attitudes of each local driving instructor. Over time driving instructors tend to be influenced by the limiting effects of licence test procedures and gradually ignore important components of driving which are not included on driving tests.

Alexander (2005 p. 7) “The nature of the Probationary test can often dictate the nature of the preparation that Learners undertake prior to the test”.

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Hirsch (1997 p. 4) "under the current system, the investment of time and money made by individuals preparing for the licence exam, and the standards of driver education, are determined largely by the standards of the licence exam. These standards are arguably low".

The "Class-Driving" program is proactive in nature. Based on a specific 'school of thought' about driving knowledge and technique it produces a more consistent standard driving from graduates than traditional instructional methods. Hirsch, P. (1997) shows that cognitive skills are important to be developed in the early part of learning to drive ('beginner stage'); but not helpful in the 'intermediate stage'. Relevant knowledge is provided in relation to each exercise, then reinforced in practice and the comprehension is assessed at the conclusion of the exercise. For example, the theory of 'torque' and 'gyroscopic effect' is provided as part of 'Difficult Condition Driving' then practiced on steep, bendy gravel roads whenever these are available. The theory of 'pivot-point' is provided as part of a manoeuvring exercise, then immediately practiced. In driving parlance 'Connative-skill' might be described as the ability to relate a previously learned driving principle to a different situation or circumstance. The group discussion and individual reflection on each driving task provides the participant with practice at this skill. Spatial skill forms an important part of judgement. From infancy humans relate the size and shape of objects in relation to the size and shape of our bodies. A new driver takes several hours of driving before he /she can subconsciously relate to the fact that they are not seated in the centre of the vehicle and more of the vehicle is projecting from their body on one side. Many other issues about spatial skill development need to be structured into the learning process. Attitudinal development is enhanced by the constantly referring to 'behavioural boundaries' which the participant agrees to follow at the outset of the training. These boundaries and behavioural episodes noted in the traffic scene form part of the group discussion and personal reflection are instructor strategies used in attitudinal development. The process of each learning task is from reading theory, to demonstration by instructor; to practice assisted on a diminishing basis from the instructor and 'coach', to unaided practice and finally assessment. This repeated process has the advantage of moving the learner to independent driving one task at a time. The "Keys2Drive" is reactive in structure where the instructor identifies driving errors and develops corrective strategies for each error. The individual instructor sets the standard of what is on the learning curriculum and is encouraged to help the beginning driver to '*find your own way*' that is to recognise the validity or the beginner driver's beliefs. This process is aimed to bring the beginning driver early to a self reliant discipline ready for 'solo-driving' (on a probationary licence).

"Class-Driving" driving technique is based on smooth, safe vehicle operation with the driver always having control options. For example smooth steering technique is encouraged to the point that a vehicle feels as if it flows around a corner; smooth gear shifting is encouraged to the point that a passenger can't distinguish when the gear is changed if he /she have their eyes shut. Enhanced technique is used to provide the participant with intrinsic rewards which motivate ongoing positive behaviour. The instructor is trained to use this motivation throughout the program; for example the instructor might say: "'Coach' tell 'the driver' how smooth the steering was in that turn ... and 'driver' noticed that child playing in the driveway and has slowed". In this way the instructor always links smooth vehicle operation to

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observational insight. "Keys2Drive" instructors are instructed that driving technique is not important and should not be part of the learning focus; instead the instructor validates the learner's ideas.

"Class-Driving" uses a peer learning group model because it is much more effective than one-to-one training in comprehension, speed of learning, attitudinal development and observational insight. Mezirow, J. (1997) Describes the task of the facilitator (instructor) who adjusts the subjective or objective frame of reference towards the learning goal, using the real life experiences of the learners in a non-coercive reflective manner which validates what and how each understands the best judgement of group belief. Mezirow summarises:

"In fostering self-direction, the emphasis is on creating an environment in which learners become increasingly adept at learning from each other and at helping each other learn in problem-solving groups" p.10 .

At the commencement of the learn-to-drive program there are twelve written 'boundaries to behaviour' discussed and each participant signs their willingness to abide by them. On the reverse side of the 'boundaries agreement' is a score sheet for each of the seventeen exercises in "Class-Driving Made Easy" booklet. At the completion of each exercise the instructor leads a short exercise where each participant rates their own compliance subjectively on a five-point scale. This is a time of fun and humour but each participant recognises the potential seriousness of the process and often participates in the process with exuberance. The down-side of group learning is that it takes more time away from other things compared with one-to-one training.

Consistent with Competency-Based-Training principles, each of the seventeen exercises in "Class-Driving Made Easy" is assessed by the peer group to a set standard. This process is important in developing the skills of 'self-assessment' recognising what is 'right' compared with what is 'wrong' or dangerous in driving and provides a series of 'mile-stones' which indicated the progress that each learner is experiencing. In "Keys2Drive" the official licence test assessment conducted by a uniformed public servant is usually the only assessment experienced by the participant. This is a fearful moment when there has been no previous experience with assessments.

The "Class-Driving" program provides assistance to parents and private tutors in the following ways: at the conclusion of the program the parents (and private tutors) are invited to attend for two hours. The first hour they sit in the vehicle while the participant performs a difficult reversing and manoeuvring skill then drives around a circuit which demonstrates smooth, accurate general driving. The purpose of these two practical exercises is to provide the parents with confidence in the participant's ability to drive without the need of a dual-controlled vehicle. The second part of the two-hour session is in the classroom where subjects such as 'Dangerous Driving Errors', "Class-Driving Habits" and "Tutor principles" are discussed. "Keys2Drive" provides assistance to parents and tutors by having them attend on driving lessons and web site information.

Driver Training Academy provides ongoing assistance to the learner and their tutors through the 'Hot-Seat' program (please see "Hot-Seat" page).

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Conclusion:

Emphasis of the "Class-Driving" program is on competence, not just knowledge and good intentions. It includes the cognitive and motor skills necessary to be consistently competent. Similar to a team sport like hockey where there are:

- technical skills, including stick skills (*representing* - car control),
- plus drills and plays (*representing* - the system of driving),
- game play, reading play that is dynamic (*representing* - 'road craft' principles).

"Class-Driving incorporates:

- Competence regularly and progressively proven
- Four elements of learning are practised concurrently
- The goal is safe driving habits, (not to pass a test)

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