

Teaching children en masse by Sonya Robinson - October 2013

If you teach children's classes then you'll know from experience that keeping them engaged can be challenging. Make that a class of over 15 children at once and the challenge is compounded.

This is why I am going to "walk you through" one of my typical Kiwisports Sessions - the average class size is well over 20 and share with you some of the things that have worked well for me and when slightly modified will hopefully be useful to you.

Thanks to the development of a comprehensive Syllabus designed by Master Paul McPhail delivering International Taekwon-Do to primary school aged children in Schools has been made quite easy.

The Kiwisport Syllabus is based around 8 classes, each of approximately 45 minutes in duration. Classes are held weekly. Our focus (International Taekwon-Do's) is senior primary age groups (Years 4-8) however this is flexible depending on the needs of the School.

Last term for example, I was in two different schools over two different days.

One day was spent taking 6 Sessions of New entrants to Year 2's i.e. 5-7 year olds and the other was 5 Sessions of Year 3's through to Year 6's or 8-11 year olds. Same syllabus but definitely taught very differently!

Each class has the following 6 aspects:

1. Introduction – information
2. Warm-up
3. Fundamental movements
4. Kicking techniques
5. Releasing Techniques
6. Recap of Information and/or Core Values

To keep it simple I usually set up the Hall with just 2 large focus pads next to each other in front of me and indicate to the children as they enter the School Hall that behind one pad is the boys line and behind the other is the girls line. I am in my Dobok and bare feet. Making sure that they are all barefoot it's then "take a seat, cross your hands and cross your feet".

Lesson 1

- Introduction –
- "I am Mrs Robinson or Maam to you..."
- Taekwon-do is a Korean Martial art. Where is Korea? (interesting answers come forth – even giving the clue that it's between two different Asian countries doesn't always help!)
- Details about the Founder
- Our Art is a modern Martial Art etc...

2.

If the children are quite young i.e. new entrants to Year 2, I'll usually just tell them one of the facts i.e. "Taekwon-Do comes from a country called Korea - now where does Taekwon-do come from again - hands up please" walking them through it, praising their listening when they get it right and repeating their answer.

For the older children I'll let them guess, giving them 2 to 3 tries before I venture any clues or information. At the beginning of the second Session I'll teach them how to come to attention to ask and/or answer questions in the Taekwon-do way.

Just before the warm-up, I will teach them that our first position or stance is "Charyot"- or "Happy Feet".



This is because 1. The foot positions are just like the penguins in the movie and 2. If you look down at your feet with your heels together and your toes out, your feet are smiling at you, because they are happy. "Charyot – show me your happy feet" is a great quick prompt for them.

We repeat whilst doing "Charyot", "Kyon-ye" (they bow and say Taekwon) and "Junbi!" which I nickname "train track position" - your feet are on the train track - ready for action" About 3 or 4 times – getting faster and faster – by which time they've got it and are smiling – even the older children.

I then get the whole class to turn 90 degrees and face another wall so that I have two long lines to look at – I shift so that I am at landscape instead of portrait were it a page layout. I can see them and they can see me.

School children tend to stick together quite closely so often I have to ask them to put their arms out sideways and make them float like seaweed - if they can still touch each other then they're too close and need to spread out sideways more.

- Warm-up – definitely joint rotations, jogging on the spot etc... no games in the first lesson we need to maintain some decorum and set the scene.
- Fundamental Movements – I always start with teaching them how to form a proper fist

From Junbi – "arms out, straight and long and strong like a ruler"

If I say "curl those fingers, thumbs on the outside and meet them in the middle" whilst gently knocking my fists side on against each other in the middle of my chest – they follow and they've all got it.

3.



“Rulers”



Proper fists



Meeting in the middle

We then put one fist back on our hips upside down and we are now practicing science – the science of action (punch!) reaction (punch! =P!) as we swap (P!) and swap (P!) – getting faster and faster and faster! More smiles – and pretty good technique too.

“Because the shortest distance between two points is a straight line (P!), our punches must be straight (P!) strong (P!) because long (P!) makes them powerful!”

They’ve already done over a dozen middle front punches and are still quite happily “edutained”.

“OK, let’s count to ten in Korean - repeat after me...” They repeat after me, as we punch and count together.

The children really enjoy counting out loud at this stage because they’ve already been quiet for over 5 minutes and that’s pretty hard for any child so this is a welcome relief to them. They’ve also just learnt to count to ten in Korean and often by the second or third lesson we are saying it in unison because they’ve picked it up so quickly.

They are watching, doing and saying all at the same time so they are picking it up visually, kinaesthetically –through their own actions, and aurally –through the sound of their own voice.

“A low punch is in front of your belly button. (Demonstrating) It’s still long (P!) It’s still strong (P!) and it’s still powerful (P!) And the hands twist (P!) and Turn (P!) and they swap and swap and swap and let’s count out loud together....”

“So that just leaves us with High, (P!) which is in front of your eyes (P!), and if you were looking at yourself in a mirror (P!) then you’d be punching yourself in the nose!” (P, P, P!) and then we’re doing it, counting again...

“Charyot, Kyong ye” We turn back to the pads and the pupils sit down so that I can give them the “talk”.

4.

We haven't learnt the student oath yet and quite a lot of information has already been given. I do have to tell them that before I let them punch the pads, which they are all busting to do, as Taekwon-Do is a martial art, unlike boxing which is just a sport, we have Tenets or values like their school values. In which case the only way that I'll be allowed to come back to teach them anything more is if they understand that Taekwon-Do is only to be done right here and now during these Kiwisports Sessions OR with a Black Belt Instructor at one of our many Clubs, that's the deal. They can kick and punch the pads as hard as they like because they can't hurt the pads, but they are not to practice Taekwon-do on each other. Deal? I nod my head, they nod their heads - Deal.

I'll demonstrate with the Teacher holding the pad for me, side on to the two lines, so that everyone can see, and I'll do 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 alternating punches (that just so happen to get harder and faster each time) ask them how many? Holding up four fingers and then reminding them whilst demonstrating again that they are to swap and swap, twist and turn just like they were doing before.

If the children are younger quite often I'll get them to do an open fist punch on the pads instead.

I get them to bang the heels of the palms of their hands together first, then use their open fist on their legs so that they can feel just how tough they are, we'll practice the punching action again with the open fist and then they'll very happily do that on the pads and there's very little risk of them hurting their fingers or wrists.



For some classes I'll get them to try both and then do what they are most comfortable with.

So the drill is: the person in front of the pads does their 4 punches, runs to the back of the hall, tags the wall and runs to the back of the OTHER line. This way both their teacher and I get to feel their hard punches. Any questions? Yes Maam, no Maam. Right let's go!

The running serves to shorten the waiting time between punching the pads, keeps them active and all of them are moving all the time - the hall gets a bit noisy and busy but this is what I'm after!

5.

When I have children punching or kicking the pads I will often say just one word for each strike and they will tend to do each strike in time to my voice i.e. – for punching I'll say "straight, long, strong, powerful" for a front snap kick I might say "quickie, flickie, toes, (are) back" or if they are struggling with right side then left just "swap, swap, swap, swap".

If I'm not doing that then I'll give them specific positive feedback on their techniques like "great action, reaction" or "good, those toes are back". Or as required I will sometimes give them simple corrective feedback instead such as "longer, straighter punches", "keep those knees up" etc.... This is cool stuff because I'm still getting to interact with each pupil on a one to one basis, even if only briefly.

I'll generally give verbal notice of when we're about to stop by saying "just two more" and let two more people do whatever it is we're doing. Pads come down and it's "Charyot, Kyon ye" – we all turn to face the other wall and spread out sideways.

"Charyot, Kyon ye" again and "Junbi" - It's time for our first kick which is the front rising kick. (Dynamic stretching)

"This is a kick that just goes straight up (demonstrate) and comes back straight down and straight up (demonstrate again) and straight down (on the spot same foot) so let's do it all together and counting..." we'll do 10 each side.

Jump Change (I do, they do) – jump change with a yell and how high can you get those knees up? (I do, they do) around 3 times so we have done both sides.

One thing to note and this is one of my "bug bears" as an Instructor is that if you are facing a group of students and say "put your right foot back" because you are their mirror - you demonstrate by putting your left foot back.

If they didn't hear you, or are not quite sure what you asked for, they will copy what you do and your left is their right so their right is your left. Make it a habit. This small thing makes a big difference. (just make sure you readjust your directional thinking before driving though.☺)

Next Kick – the Front Snap Kick or Ap Cha Busigi. I nickname this kick the "quickie, flickie, Kickie" because it's quick – it flicks and it's a kick!

A lot of alliteration - the use of several words close together that either begin with the same letter or in this case the same sound – because its' quick, and it makes it "stick" particularly with children.

The Front Snap Kick is the kick that all the children that are on the Kiwisport Programme will use to break a plastic re-breakable board on the 8th or last Session. Telling them this during the 1st Session really heightens their excitement for this often newfound physical activity being presented to them and makes sure that when we then turn and get to kick the large focus pads (believe me the pads need to be large – even for new entrants) that it's done with great gusto and enthusiasm. The pad is going to be a board!

6.

Sometimes by telling them “ say there was a fire but the door you needed to get out of was locked then this is the kick that will break that door down” works well too. Children imagine scenarios quickly. You can urge on greater effort by saying “come on, break that door down!” the results to date have been really encouraging.

Getting each child to do 4 kicks each turn alternating their legs works well as it encourages them to stay full facing to the pad, they get enough of a try but not for too long and they also get to practice with both feet. Recently I have noticed a huge increase in the number of children who favour their left side and in fact all of us should be using both sides of our body.

Each side of the brain works the opposite side of the body – when we are using both sides at once we are encouraging better body and brain integration. Great stuff!

I’m constantly surprised and delighted at just how quickly and effectively these students are able to pick up new techniques and how well they do them too.

Often at this point I’ll ask the teacher to select a couple of pupils, I’ll select a couple of pupils and I’ll get these 4 pupils, making sure both genders and a variety of sizes are represented, to demonstrate the technique we’ve just been doing in front of the rest of the class. I’ll point out the things that they’re doing well – positive reinforcement amongst their peers - the class claps for them when they’ve finished and the whole class is even more enthusiastic than ever.

It’s time to look at a release however more usually for me in my first class, there’s just enough time to talk about the idea of Self Defence.

I state that Self Defence is about staying safe. To stay safe is to stay away from trouble. In school this might mean that if they know someone that likes to pick fights or be mean to other people then they just have to stay away from that person and that’s self-defence.

If there’s time this moves onto “if someone grabs a hold of you we need to know how to get out, so now we’re going to learn how to do a release.”

Standing up in their two lines facing me we will all take one hand and make a big figure 8 on its side or we pretend that we are high fiving the floor – emphasizing the twist and turn. Then we’ll add a big step across with the same foot as hand. My oral cues are “this hand, this foot, over, out!”



7.

I'll tell them "but wait, there's something quite important missing here" and ask them if they can tell me what it might be. Often they'll think about stamping on the other person's foot which means that they are visualising the situation quite well. Only sometimes will they think of the yell.

The two lines then turn around so that they're facing each other - Kyong ye to each other then I'll ask one line to put their right hand out. I'll tell the other line that when I say go, they are to grab the other person's hand and the people on the side that have just had their hands grabbed must get out! - as quickly as possible and run to the side of the hall before they come back.

Then of course we'll swap jobs. We'll do a right hand grab 2-3 times each side before we do the left. Did they twist? Did they do the big step? Where's that loud yell? And run! Get out! Be safe. Once they've got over the boy/girl germs thing if they're middle school and as long as you rearrange any serious mismatches in size they'll get along and just do it.

If the class are younger students or if they are struggling to get out confidently I will sometimes put them into one long line, tell them that we're playing the game "I'm a stranger, you're in danger" grab the first child in the line with my left hand onto their same side right hand and say "get out!". If they don't respond quickly I assist their twist and say "back of the line" which they very promptly do.

By the second or third child they're going in the right direction and moving through quickly enough that you can usually do right and left sides 2 to 3 times each even with a large class in 3-4 minutes.

The first time the class goes through my grip on them is light but firm, and I'll add some firmness each class round so that I'm building confidence but not a false sense of security.

If after 2 or 3 rounds a child just stands there giggling at me I start shaking them and say things like "hey! Can I have your lunch money? Do you have an I-Phone?" And it's all over. They've just told me that they've had enough and it's time to move on.

Usually another class is lining up at the end of the hall so we reassemble in our two lines behind the pads to finish the class it's "Charyot, Kyong-Ye and Hae-san – class dismissed".

This for me is a typical first Session.

In the second Session during recap of the first Session I remind them that we have Tenets or values and tell them what they are.

This leads perfectly into a warm-up game of **Integrity versus Indomitable Spirit**.
(AKA Rats & Rabbits)

They're in two lines already. One side is Integrity the other is Indomitable Spirit, when I call out one they have to get to their side of the hall before being tagged, if they get tagged by someone on the other team then they have to swap sides.

They have to listen (practice courtesy), they have to be honest about being tagged, they have to keep going, it's just a tag if anyone gets pushed or shoved the game is over so they are practicing self-control, if they get tagged, they have to do the right thing and just go to the other side showing that they have Indomitable spirit.

This becomes a real favourite and is a great lead in for re-capping the Tenets in later Sessions.

In week three I introduce another Warm-up Game which I call the **Si Jak Game**.

They already know that Charyot is Attention, Kyong Ye is Bow and Junbi means Ready well Si Jak! means Start or Go! So when I say Si jak! They are to run all around the hall listening for me to say Charyot! – it's a race to come to attention, if I say Kyong Ye then they bow until I say Si Jak again. We'll do this 2 or 3 times, if we are going to be doing the flying high kick later on in that Session then I'll add skipping and hopping on each leg which is three more turns. This is a very simple but effective warm-up game that's all about Taekwon-Do.

Both these Games work really well in School Holiday Programmes and in the Mini Kid's Classes that I take at Warrior, so I'm sure that they'll work well for you too.

So I've walked you through a Kiwisport Session and a couple of Taekwon-Do games that have worked for me with these larger classes, following are a few points that I'd like to make around teaching children in general.

- A. **Appearance and Again.** Your appearance is important. Your Dobok should be neat and tidy and I believe that if you expect children to train in bare feet then you should be bare foot too. Body language speaks volumes too. If you appear authoritative then they will respond accordingly because you have shown them via a professional appearance who is in charge.
Children need constant repetition and enjoy familiarity but get bored quickly. If you can come up with another way to get them to do the same thing again then you have provided repetition but kept them engaged too.
- B. **Be Positive.** Give motivating feedback where you can. We all like the idea of success – children even more so. Even constructive feedback can be positively done by asking the child to stop (Pause), tell them what you are looking for (Prompt) and then Praise them for their efforts to correct themselves. Children are like mirrors if you are positive they will be too.
- C. **Communicate clearly and concisely.** Short, simple instructions with a bit of a twist like alliteration or painting verbal pictures make a class more colourful. Children have great imaginations so blend that with yours and you can all have more fun.
- D. **Demonstrate well and Discipline.** If you are facing them then their Right is your Left, and vice versa. Show them what you want them to do by demonstrating any technique clearly and instead of anything else. Children like and benefit from visual and verbal cues.

When children start fidgeting, talking or don't appear to be listening then it's time for a reset. Just as there are many paths to the top of the mountain there are also many different ways to reset children. Here's a few of my favourites.

- "Charyot, Kyong Ye, Junbi"
- Clapping a rhythm which they repeat back to you.
- A change of layout i.e. "everyone turn to face the pads please"
- "run back!" (to one side of the hall) New instruction when they turn around
- "take a seat, cross your hands and cross your feet" –I prefer the children to be on their feet as much as possible although it does bring their attention back to you quickly and if this is for an explanation of something even better.

Occasionally during a Kiwisport Session if the children are being really noisy I will just stop and stand still in our at ease position. It doesn't take long before either the teacher says something or other pupils are urging the noisy ones to "stop talking, we're not doing anything" while they point to me patiently waiting for them!

Some school teachers use a singsong phrase like "eyes to me" to which the children reply "eyes to you" or they give the children short commands like "hands on your head, on your shoulders, on your knees, eyes this way. " which work too.

As these Taekwon-Do Sessions are fairly active and we have lots to share within a pretty short period of time these techniques aren't required very often.

E. **Enthusiasm, Energy, Enjoy!** If we are to inject children with anything let it be enthusiasm. Enthusiasm and energy are infectious so enjoy what you do and the children will too. 😊 Taekwon!