

A Framework for Building Quality Instruction

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A significant amount of research has been carried in recent years regarding the importance of *'Quality Teaching'* on student learning outcomes within the school environment. In fact, much literature points to the quality of teaching as being the single most important factor within the schooling system that influences student achievement levels. *Quality Teaching* can also positively impact retention levels in school in the senior years. The concept of *Quality Teaching* is considered more important for example, than the curriculum, available resources, and even the size of the class.
- 1.2 This essay introduces at a high level the theory behind the concept of *Quality Teaching* and why it is important for raising student achievement levels.¹ This essay then explores how the concept is relevant to instructing in Taekwon-Do schools. Finally, this essay concludes by exploring some of the benefits for organisational growth in having a strategic, system-wide focus on the concept of *Quality Teaching*.

2. What does *Quality Teaching* look like?

- 2.1 The literature that explores the concept of *Quality Teaching* points to the following recurring themes and characteristics as being present. Highly effective learning environments occur when:
- All students are expected to learn successfully with no exceptions
 - Those imparting knowledge have a deep understanding of the content they are teaching
 - Those instructing can identify where each student is up to in their learning, and then direct their teaching to the individual needs of each student
 - Continuous feedback is provided to all students about their learning
 - Those instructing continually reflect on their own teaching practice and strive for continuous improvement
- 2.2 Each of the above themes is explored in more detail below.

All students are expected to learn successfully with no exceptions

- 2.3 In highly effective learning environments all students are expected to learn successfully. This is a challenging concept, as the 'soft bigotry of low expectation' is a core aspect of human nature. That is, people make judgements (often unspoken), that an individual will not be able to do something. The judgement rightly or wrongly, then leads to a low expectation of that student in most tasks, most of the time.

¹ It is important when reading this essay not to infer that the quality of instructing within International Taekwon-Do is not good. Contrary, we are fortunate to have many dedicated, talented, exceptional people who expertly instruct in ITKD schools. In addition it is important to note the subtle difference between quality instructing, and quality instructors. Quality instructing is a learned skill, an art if you like.

- 2.4 Effective learning environments are built around an unflagging culture that every person is capable of learning, and develops instructors on the same basis - that every student is deserving of a chance to learn and is capable of learning. In these environments there is an intolerance of low expectations communicated overtly amongst those instructing.
- 2.5 One way to develop such a culture is for those instructing to understand that all students are diverse and learn in very different ways. Effective instructing practice must therefore adapt to accommodate the different learning styles of individual students. There are many different theories and models of learning styles – exploring learning styles in detail is beyond the scope of this essay. However, for the purposes of illustration, one of the more commonly known learning style models is the three *Learning Modalities; Visual, Auditory and Tactile (Kinesthetic)*.
- 2.6 The basic premise of the Learning Modalities model assumes that no single instructional process will provide optimal learning for all students. That is, people have different predominant ways of processing new information. Some people learn most effectively by watching something being done (the visual learning style), some people learn most effectively by listening to something being explained (the auditory learning style), while others learn most effectively by touching something or performing an activity themselves (the tactile learning style). In general most people will learn something under each of the above learning styles. However, for most people, there will be one learning style, or a combination of two learning styles, that is more effective for them than others.
- 2.7 What is interesting about learning styles theory is that the younger a person is, the more independent, or siloed, each of the styles are. One approach to learning will be significantly more effective than others. As people mature and learning habits develop, the styles become more integrated. Another interesting aspect of this theory is that teachers, if not consciously aware of the different styles of learning, tend to instruct in the most predominant way in which they themselves learn.
- 2.8 What this means in practice, is that in order for all students to learn successfully a combination of instructing to suite each of the learning styles is required when teaching a single concept. Teaching a new technique to a Taekwon-Do student, for example, the feet positioning in an L Stance, could involve:
- Visual learning: looking at a diagram of an L Stance, drawing a picture of the L Stance, placing paper cut-outs of feet on the floor into an L Stance, watching another person execute an L Stance, watching how many L Stances are performed correctly in a pattern, using a line of the floor to position the feet in an L Stance;
 - Auditory learning: listening to an explanation of the feet positioning of an L Stance, asking students open questions about the foot positioning in an L Stance;
 - Kinesthetic learning: carrying out execution of the L Stance, physically moving the feet position of the student, students physically correcting the feet position of a fellow student, using props, such as a stick placed between the heels on the floor.

Those imparting knowledge have a deep understanding of the content they are teaching

- 2.9 In highly effective learning environments those imparting knowledge have a deep understanding of the content they are teaching. This characteristic may be considered common sense. However, it is common that teachers, as well as instructors, in all circumstances, do not have a deep understanding of the content being taught. This can have a negative impact on student achievement levels.
- 2.10 At the very least, an instructor should be humble where they do not have the knowledge, and be willing to learn. A passion for Taekwon-Do and a desire to continue to learn are important and will lead to a deep understanding of the content. In order to an instructor to become and retain credibility, there needs to be a willingness to continue to learn and develop.
- 2.11 It is also therefore important for on-going learning and development opportunities to be accessible to instructors. Instructors also need to think broadly about taking learning opportunities where they can be found. For example, gup gradings, and in particular annual regional gup gradings conducted by a visiting Master, while essentially about the students grading, should be viewed by instructors as a key learning and development opportunity. Instructors should approach the gradings with a view to being open to receiving feedback, and to asking questions about the progression of their students, and use this information to reflect on their teaching practice.

Identify where each student is up to, and teach to the individual needs of each student

- 2.12 Highly effective learning environments know where each student is up to in their learning, and plan teaching around the individual needs of each student. Instructing is a complex job, made more complex when a class is full of students of different ages, rank and ability. No one student at any one time will require the same learning as another. Individualised learning experiences, taking into account what a student already knows, is key to effective learning.
- 2.13 It is clearly not possible to run training sessions with for example, 20 or 30 different lesson plans to suit individual learning needs. Teaching practice in schools has had to adjust significantly in order to accommodate for individual learning experiences. Teachers in classrooms more and more use the students as their own teachers. These days, following some foundation learning, students more commonly work in pairs or in small groups, and 'inquire' into their own learning needs. Students are being taught to identify for themselves what they know, and what they do not know. Students are also being taught to plan for how they might learn what is required once they have identified knowledge gaps. The same concept can, and often does, occur in the dojang. Students at similar levels of development work in pairs or small groups – sometimes under the instruction of a senior ranking member, and sometimes on their own (depending on age and rank). Students give each other feedback and identify their own learning needs.

- 2.14 While not possible all of the time, a fair majority of training time should be targeted at developing the specific needs of students in order that their learning is relevant to them and therefore effective. This is an immensely challenging task, and the bigger the class, the more this task will require considerable ongoing thought and planning, as well as support from other seniors. The rewards are significant however, as students are more likely to remain engaged the more relevant to their individual needs learning experiences are.

Continuous feedback is provided to all students about their learning

- 2.15 The characteristic of continuous feedback is arguably the most important within the concept of *Quality Teaching*. The purpose of feedback is to prompt the use of a desired behaviour or action. Absent good feedback, it is unlikely that students will develop.
- 2.16 Feedback can be formal, that is, there are times when feedback is planned or expected. For example, when a student is asked to perform a pattern for an instructor, or following a grading, feedback is expected. Feedback can also be informal. Catching a person doing something right and praising them, for example, is a form of informal feedback. The power of immediacy in impromptu praise can have a lasting positive impact, particularly if the changed action is in response to prior feedback. People remember the action or behaviour they were praised for and attempt to repeat it. To be effective, it is important therefore that praise relates to a specific action or behaviour, such as “Excellent, I saw how you pivoted your supporting foot when executing that turning kick – great work”, rather than “Excellent, much better turning kick – well done”.
- 2.17 There are a number of elements to consider in order that feedback is meaningful and effective. Where-ever possible, feedback should:
- Be given when the recipient is clearly open to receiving it. In order that students receive the feedback, it needs to be delivered in a ‘low-stakes’ manner;
 - Be given at the same time as there is an opportunity to apply the feedback in order to try and correct the action;
 - Be given for one action at a time, especially for young students. An instructor should focus on the highest priority in order to help a person perform better;
 - Describe the current action and the desired action clearly. Students need to understand the difference between what they are currently doing and what they should be doing;
 - Be separating from the person and focused on the action, to help lower the ‘threat’ of feedback. Instructors should try to depersonalise the feedback by using “a good turning kick looks like this” rather than “you need to do a turning kick like this”;
- 2.18 In addition, instructors could use different methods for giving feedback. One effective method of providing feedback is to ask open questions of the students, in order that they are required to think about the answer. Sometimes this approach can be more effective than telling a person, as a student has had to think about the answer themselves. This is

particularly so when the students have been taught a concept or action previously. Open questions include; “how might this technique be approached differently?”, “how could this action be improved?” Often, people know themselves what they need to do, and if they can articulate it, they are likely to think of it again when they repeat the action.

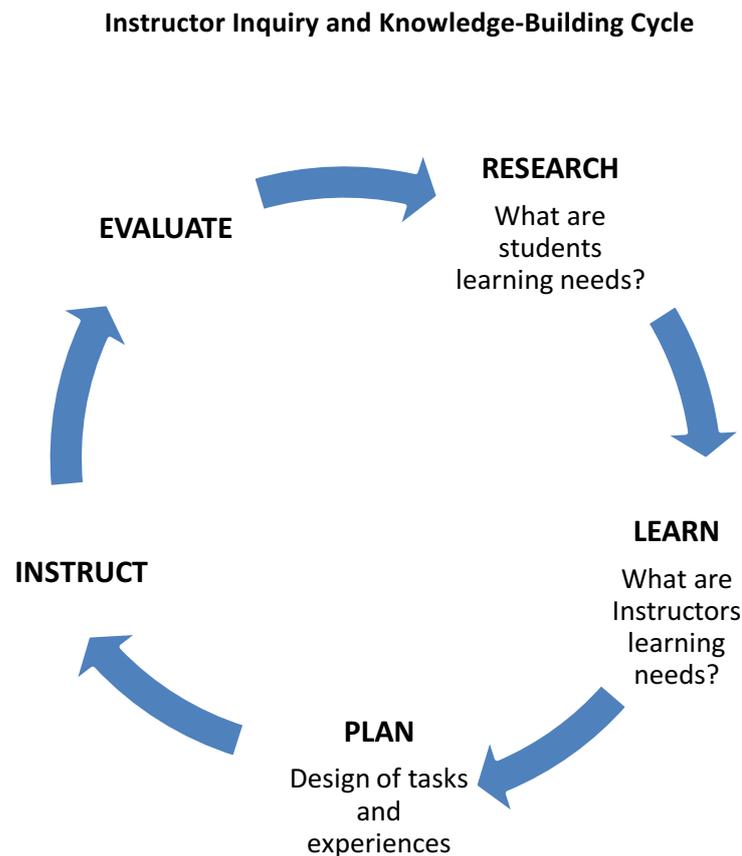
- 2.19 Another effective method of providing feedback is to ask students to repeat the feedback, either in written format or verbally, in the form of a ‘learning goal’. This method has several advantages; primarily it assures the instructor the student has understood what learning is required, and it creates a commitment from the student that they will consciously work on the feedback.
- 2.20 It is really important to follow up on the feedback another time. Feedback should not be given once and then left under the assumption the action or behaviour will change. Instructors should come back to the same feedback at a later time. It can be challenging however to remember all of the feedback given to all students all of the time. Having students articulate the feedback in the form of a goal helps in this regard, because it transfers ‘ownership’ of the feedback to the student. The student will remember and be able to repeat the feedback when asked by an instructor.
- 2.21 Research also suggests that for a ‘learning culture’ to develop and flourish within a team environment, and for students to remain engaged in the discipline they are learning, positive and corrective feedback should be used on a ratio of approximately 5:1. That is, instructors should give positive, reinforcing feedback five times more than they give out feedback to correct an action. The rationale being that if people only ever hear corrective feedback, they will perceive the feedback as continual criticism of them personally.
- 2.22 Care also needs to be taken when giving informal feedback in particular, not to:
- Be over the top with praise – the purpose of this type of praise is not to be nice;
 - Praise too many actions simultaneously – the value of reinforcement will be lost;
 - Start the praise with a negative comment - research suggests that the first three words of the praise will stick with the recipient, no matter what follows.

Instructors continually reflect on their teaching practice and strive for continuous improvement

- 2.23 At the heart of the *Quality Teaching* concept is how those delivering instruction learn and develop their own teaching practice. *Quality Teaching* is not just about content knowledge, the “what” of teaching – it’s also about the “how” of teaching. Learning how to teach, or instruct, should not be considered a static, one-off exercise. Teaching practice needs to be continually developed and scrutinised to ensure that it is working for all students, and over time.
- 2.24 Instructors therefore need to be motivated to continually acquire the knowledge they need to advance student learning. Quality instruction also involves instructors asking themselves how they thought a teaching event went what they should or could have done

better. This 'reflective' practice, based on inquiring into teaching methods, is the basis for improving student learning experiences.

- 2.25 Below is a diagram of an 'inquiry' based framework for instructing practice. The framework outlines five stages that operate in a continuous and reinforcing cycle, demonstrating how instructors should 'inquire' and 'reflect' on knowledge and teaching practice. The overarching purpose is to improve the learning experiences of students.



- 2.26 The inquiry framework involves instructors inquiring into the learning needs of their students. This *research* will involve instructors asking questions, such as what do the students know, and how can I build on what they already know in order to teach them what they need to know. An instructor would then inquire into his or her own learning needs. Instructors will *learn* what they have done so far to contribute to learning, what they can continue to contribute in terms of learning, and what their knowledge gaps are in order to shift learning experiences significantly. Instructors will also inquire into learning resources and tools at this stage. Following lesson planning and execution, this framework promotes the idea that instructors should continually *evaluate* whether the teaching they are conducting is effectively meeting the learning needs of all students. .

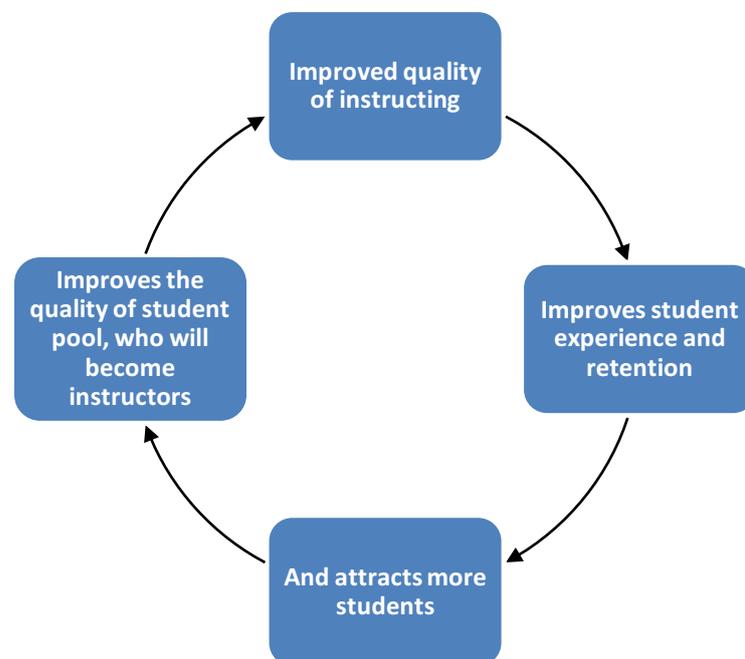
3. The benefits of a strategic focus on the concept of *Quality Teaching*

3.1 Raising the quality of instructing in a system-wide manner, so that instruction is consistent and the standard is high, is fundamentally important for organisational health and growth. Quality instruction is important for several reasons:

- It ensures all students are exposed to the best form of instructing in order to fully realise their potential;
- It helps to retain students – an organisation is at its strongest when it can retain current members;
- The quality of the student pool from which future instructors are drawn is strong; and
- The status of being an instructor is raised.

3.2 Successful organisational growth is multi-faceted. It is unlikely that focusing solely on one facet will on its own realise growth goals. The retention of students and their continued engagement with the organisation is key to successful growth. Raising the quality of instruction will go a long way to achieving this objective.

3.3 The following diagram depicts that a focus on attracting, developing and retaining students through the lens of *Quality Teaching* is a self-reinforcing, or virtuous growth supporting cycle.²



3.4 This virtuous cycle underpins sustained growth: quality instruction leads to a quality experience, which helps to retain students longer as well as attract more students. As a

² A beneficial cycle of events or incidents each having a positive effect on the next.

by-product of a systemic focus on improving the quality of instruction, the status of instructing is also improved. Students taught in this system could develop into quality instructors themselves, and so the cycle continues. This system, once established, is also self-sustaining.

3.5 However success is reliant on the organisation focusing on raising the quality of instructing in a systemic, strategic, system-wide manner. Again, based on how education systems seek to improve the quality of teaching, International Taekwon-Do could improve the quality of instructing through five strategic mechanisms:

- Entry: improve the standard of applicants approved to instruct – set a benchmark standard for those seeking to open a school or to instruct. Consider whether the attainment of a black belt achieves this benchmark all of the time;
- Initial training: improve the quality of initial training for instructors - develop introductory and ongoing instructor courses that focus on 'how' to teach and to improve the quality of instruction. There could also be workshops held within regions where instructors get together to brainstorm and test ideas on the 'how' of instruction;
- On-going development: evaluate and provide regular feedback to instructors as to how they instruct in the dojang – instructors need feedback in order to improve (primarily on 'how' they teach but also on 'what' they teach). One relatively low cost method of achieving this is to use senior Dan's in the regions to visit clubs and join in on trainings. They could observe and then provide formalised feedback to the instructor;
- Recognition: explicitly recognise and celebrate effective instructors – instructors are the organisations main asset – find ways to recognise and celebrate them;
- Manage underperformance: move on ineffective instructors who have been unable to increase their effectiveness through development programmes.

4. Conclusion

4.1 This essay has explored the theory that quality instruction is a learned skill or art that requires a framework focused on core characteristics, in order for it to develop. Those core characteristics include an expectation that all students will learn, instructors having a deep understanding of the content they teach, focused, individually relevant training for students, continuous feedback and instructors who continually reflect on their own practice in order to improve. Much research points to these core characteristics being present for any form of instruction to improve, and to keep on improving over time. This essay has attempted to summarise the core characteristics necessary to improve instruction.

4.2 In addition, for organisational growth, quality instruction is fundamentally important and should not be left to chance. A strategic focus on instructor development would be set within a framework that addresses entry into instruction, initial training, on-going development, recognition and the management of underperformance.