

Fourth Dan Grading Thesis – Gregory Christie

“Progression in Taekwon-Do through the instrument of instructing.”

“Taekwon-Do translated literally “Tae” means jumping or flying, to kick or smash with the foot; “Kwon” denotes the fist – chiefly to punch or destroy with the hand or fist; “Do” means art or way.”

As an instructor you take on many different personas which could enhance, or potentially inhibit, your own personal progression within advancing through the desired belt levels of Taekwon-Do. The old adage of practice makes perfect could come into play here, as you are continuously reverting back to the basics with every new student you gain, even though you are at a different stage of your own personal Taekwon-Do journey. On the flip side of this you may find that your time is stretched between the needs of students on levels lower than yourself and the desire to only concentrate on the more intricate and advanced techniques that are required to carry you through to the next level you are aiming to achieve.

My ITKD journey began at the Kapiti Taekwon-Do club. My first dan grading was seventeen years ago and soon after that, I knew that I would become an instructor. Something that would be realised only a year later. So this is where my instructing journey started, sixteen years ago. Over these sixteen years I have learnt far more than I ever anticipated. Most notably, I believe that I have learnt how to truly get to know my students and their style of learning, their concentration levels and their personalities. With this, I have realised I needed to individually recognise these traits to be able to teach and guide them through the principals of Taekwon-Do. Every student has individual needs that need to be nurtured and understood.

As an instructor I question whether this was this time well spent. Should I have had more of a selfish stance and considered where, perhaps, I could have been now, seventeen years later in my Taekwon-Do development. What dan could I be going for? Could I already be a Master and if so, would I feel the same as I do now, knowing how much impact I may have had on my student’s lives and their development. The ‘feel good’ factor of training them that it has given me? Who gets more from being an instructor, the instructor or the student?

Reflecting on the past sixteen years since I became an instructor, I decided to open a club of my own for a variety of reasons. The very first reason was, as I looked upon my own training and development and how it has benefited me, my desire to want to benefit others to achieve what I have, and am, still achieving to this day.

Another reason was that as an instructor, it is our duty to create a safe environment within the dojang. I wanted people to feel that there is no difference between them and the person standing on either side of them. There is a hierarchy in the principals of Taekwon-Do, with respect being an integral part of this. Each student is expected to show respect, not only to the instructor and senior members, but also to receive respect from these people in

return. This respect helps to create a feeling of safety within the dojang. I feel through my influence as the instructor the group of people that I have trained and supported, all work together to achieve our common goal of creating a safe space for everyone. Whether this is feeling safe with the support network of a group of like-minded people, or feeling safe by gaining skills that will put us in a better mental, physical or defensive perspective, it is still a feeling of safety.

Other students start Taekwon-Do motivated by the competition and physical learnings. They crave competition and wish to compete in tournaments, little do they know that what they get goes way beyond the physical. They benefit from the social connection to people that they otherwise would never have met if it hadn't been for the inclusiveness that is created within the club. This is a by-product of the club operating as a community of people supporting one another.

When students enter the dojang, as an instructor I attempt to identify their "Do". General Choi Hong Hi defines "Do" as an art or way, and through my learning I believe that "Do" is who people are. This has helped my own journey to better understand the purpose behind why we participate, and how Taekwon-Do has provided purpose within my life. On this journey I realised that just concentrating on my own goals was not the course I wanted to take, I wanted to share the knowledge and experiences I have gained and become an instructor that inspires and encourages, the way instructors I have had over the past seventeen years have inspired and encouraged me. I have respected their teachings and used them to instruct my own students and am proud of where I have come to.

It is the inspiration I have gained through being an instructor that has kept my "Do" alive. When life has brought forth its challenges, I cannot say for sure that I would have continued my journey with Taekwon-Do, were it not for the commitment that instructing students has given me. I have never wanted to let my students down or stop their progression so have therefore used their passion to drive me to continuously improve as an instructor. In the book, *Taekwon -Do (The Korean Art of Self-Defence)*, it discusses the student/instructor relationship. In the section about Instructors (*Sabum*) there is a point made that "An instructor should be eager for his student to surpass him, it is the ultimate compliment for an instructor." Which is the way that I have always felt when it has come to my relationship with my students. My students have constantly inspired and driven me to improve myself so that I can provide more to them as an instructor and constantly improve my techniques so I can better educate them. If I lead by example and put my all into my lessons then this reflects onto my students.

Another way my students have inspired me is by continuing to show up while going through their own tough times. Life presents us all with varying daily struggles, whether these are physical or mental. I have seen students suffer the loss of their parents, bullying at school, failing their Taekwon-Do grades, and many other issues. These same students have continued to show up to training, which is not only inspiring in general, but has driven me and given me purpose as an instructor. I knew they needed structure, the discipline and the support of Taekwon-Do to help them through. Taekwon-Do was offering them something that kept them going which in turn has driven me to keep teaching them.

In my first dan grading, before becoming an instructor, I stated I wanted to become a more rounded martial artist. Being an instructor has challenged me to learn skills beyond those I would have if I had remained a student my entire Taekwon-Do journey. It has motivated me not just as a teacher, but as a person. I've particularly appreciated students from various martial art backgrounds coming through the dojang, sharing their experiences and knowledge. They have inspired my training to evolve by participating in other martial arts, including Jiu Jitsu, Aikido and Combat Hapkido. I have in turn, been able to pass on these teachings to my students to help benefit their techniques and to enhance their skills and knowledge base. Learning these arts has gifted me the opportunity to become stronger in Taekwon-Do. Being an instructor has also allowed me to meet with other instructors and attend various courses and networking sessions, opening up opportunities to learn from them through various seminars and shared experiences.

As an instructor, while I have truly been inspired by my students, I have occasionally felt that I have been held back by the amount of time and admin it takes to run a club. The time required to be an instructor goes well beyond the weekly designated class schedule. It requires forward thinking and constant coaching, not only inside the dojang, but also outside the regular classes. I sometimes feel I have inhibited my own advancement as I have not had as much opportunity to train and be able to meet the technical requirements of my next dan in the timeframe I thought I would. However, while the time commitment of being an instructor may have hindered my progression from a technical perspective, there is no doubt I have grown in all other aspects. I appreciate that being an instructor is a commitment, and managing that responsibility has been another learning curve along the way.

For me the rewards are definitely worth the effort. I feel through being an instructor I have learnt patience, understanding and tolerance. However, I feel like the biggest reward I have received through being an instructor is seeing how the art of Taekwon-Do has motivated and encouraged all of my students to have goals, and to not only reach these, but to go on and surpass them. To see them pass on my teachings and the knowledge they have gained, to the new students as they enter the dojang is so rewarding. I look forward to the seasons to come in my Taekwon-Do journey, from being a student as a colour belt to being an instructor as a black belt, and now a returning student as a third dan. I have done so much and there is so much further that I can do. Learning and teaching every step of the way.

I have learnt my skills as an instructor from the instructors and mentors within the Taekwon-Do organisation this includes the New Zealand chapter as well as the guests we have had from outside New Zealand. Every instructor and student brings a new perspective to an ancient art form that we all feel passionate about, and like life in general we need these different characters and influences, to shape what we have become and how we would like to be perceived by others. Having someone you respect that can guide you will help you grow. Absorb the knowledge and expertise from other instructors and students alike and build a network of support to strengthen the skills you already have. Share your knowledge.

As an instructor there will be days when you feel like you've had enough and are not worthy. This is a normal emotion, and by speaking to others about it will help you understand that you are worthy, you are on the right path and you can still continue on this path. The knowledge you have worked hard at and gained over the course of your Taekwon-Do experience is a pot of gold to someone else who is yet to reach your level. Connecting with others will also help you understand that everyone's journey is different. Some students will come and go. Some students you thought would stay forever will leave or change clubs, and you must not take it personally. Everyone has different needs, and sometimes different instructors work for different students. Life is about growth and without the influence of others teachings we cannot grow to our full potential.

Finally, practise self-awareness. Think about what comes next. For me, that is returning to being a student, while reflecting that I have always been a student, even while practising as an instructor. As a student I will also still be an instructor because any piece of knowledge I have that someone else does not, will be passed on by me. Whether we label it 'Instructor' 'Teacher' 'Mentor' or 'Seonsaengnim' it is still assisting to improve another's skills on their Taekwon-Do journey.

This is said at the beginning of every training session:

Student Oath:

I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do

I shall respect the instructor and seniors

I shall never misuse Taekwon-Do

I shall be a champion of freedom and justice

I shall build a more peaceful world

And this is what I live by. I bring it into my daily life and it guides me and inspires me with everything I do.

A quote by the University of Queens in the US defines learning as "a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning", which are words that I feel still resound with me after sixteen years of being an instructor and over twenty-five years practising Taekwon-Do. I look forward to becoming a student once again, adding more depth to my training and progression.

Through my personal opinions and experiences of my journey discussed I believe that being an instructor has helped my progression in Taekwon-Do. The opportunities I have gained to learn through instructing others have served as inspiration to continue my Taekwon-Do journey. Being an instructor has meant I have questioned whether I have used the time available to me to focus on the technical requirements of my own dan training. This has led to postponement of further development and advancement in my gradings, however what I have gained as being an instructor has, in my opinion, greatly outweighed this as the overall

value of being an instructor to my training and progression I believe has been worth it. I encourage others on their own Taekwon-Do journeys to find the right support and reap the rewards.

Thank you, Beatrice, Sara, Yundi, Dana and Trudi for all the support and encouragement you have given me.

Gregory Christie.