

***Does being an instructor help or hinder our own training and progression in Taekwon-Do?***

***How do you know?***

***Pros and cons?***

***Advice for others?***

An essay written as part of grading requirements from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Dan.

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## Introduction

As I am not a club instructor, I have approached this essay as an assistant instructor. I have been assisting as an instructor for almost 10 years and this has been primarily in children's classes, with some adult's classes whilst instructors were away. I have also taught small groups in combined trainings and at camps, which have been mainly in areas of power breaking and have also been a student of Taekwon-Do for about 36 years.

In this Essay I will explore the training path of a Taekwon-Do student and how this can naturally progress to instructing should the student choose to instruct. Then I will look to see if instructing is helping or hindering the student and how we would know.

It would be remiss of me to not include the Do in this essay as not only is Taekwon-Do a physical martial art but the Do also translates to "art or way of life", so when looking at Taekwon-Do instructing I will be considering how it affects the person outside the training area.

## The background

People decide to learn Taekwon-Do for many reasons, such as

- Fitness – wanting to join a club with regular physical classes.
- Friends – wanting to meet people and make new friends.
- Self-defence – learning to defend oneself and others.
- Hobby - learning something new as a pastime.

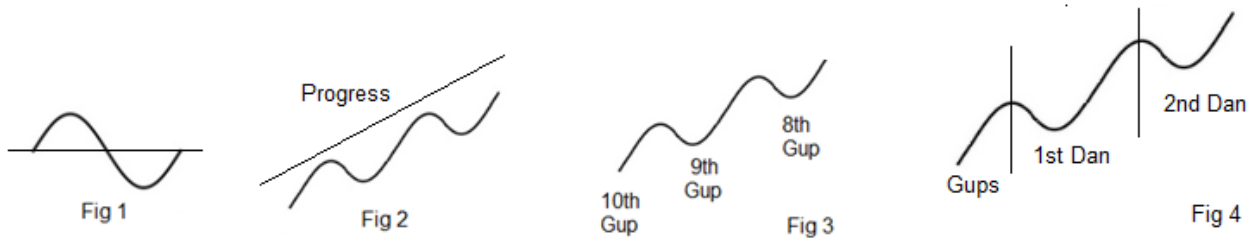
We say that students become Instructors to teach, however I think the underlying reason is still the same, it fulfils a personal need, some of which are;

- People like to be helpful, and by helping others they feel needed and have self-worth.
- By teaching we are often seen as proficient or an expert in a topic so have status.
- Instructors consider teaching a student to a higher level than themselves a personal success.
- People like to prove they are better than others and unfortunately instructing can allow this ego.
- Money, either part time or full time, an Instructor can make money, how much depends on the person.
- People like to connect with others and by teaching are able to share a bond through a common interest.
- and the most common one I hear is to share the benefits of Taekwon-Do with other people.

Instructing for most people starts as a black belt which means that the student has about 3 ½ years learning from their instructors. Instructing is not limited to black belts as many students assist where needed, but the attainment of the rank is often seen as having a good knowledge.

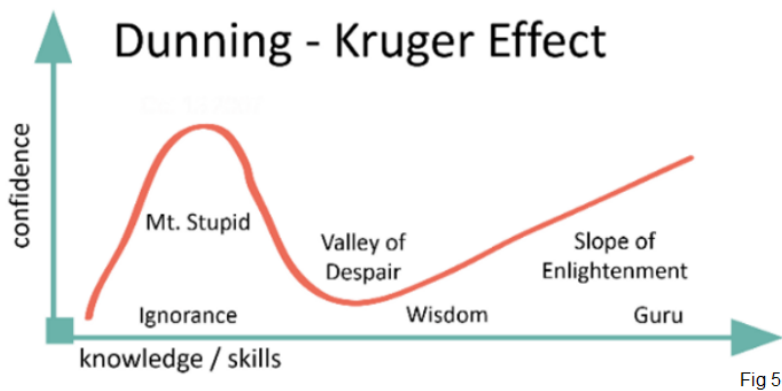
## Growth of a student

Lets have a holistic look at how a student can grow and to try and explain this I'll loosely use a well known idea in Taekwon-Do called sine wave. (Fig 1) where the wave represents the growth or progression in Taekwon-Do.



Here we can see the flow of the sine wave, but this does not show any over all progression, so we need to change the wave a little and repeat it. (Fig 2) This shows that each time we cycle though the wave we grow a little bit and if we apply the concept to coloured belts grades, (Fig 3) we see how a student can progress from white belt to coloured belt, and the same idea can apply to the Black belt grades. ( Fig 4)

You will note that in Fig 3 and Fig 4 there is always a down in the growth before it goes up. This is the point where a student gains confidence through attaining a grade and then realises there is so many more techniques and areas to learn in Taekwon-Do and struggling to learn them falls into the pitfall of hindrance in progression often to a level of despair. This is *similar* to the Dunning-Kruger effect (Fig 5)



*"The Dunning-Kruger effect occurs when a person's lack of knowledge and skills in a certain area cause them to overestimate their own competence. By contrast, this effect also causes those who excel in a given area to think the task is simple for everyone, and underestimate their relative abilities as well."*

*So lets answer the question*

The original question we have is *“Does being an instructor help or hinder our own training and progression in Taekwon-Do?”* and my answer to this is simply *“It can be both”*

*How do you know?*

Once the student becomes an instructor they are not only responsible for their own progression but for their new students as well and I think it is natural to encounter hindrances to their training. These may be things such as

- The instructor has the knowledge of what to teach but not how.
- Lack of confidence in public speaking.
- Lack of time planning for classes.
- Unable to answer students questions about techniques not practiced well.
- Focus completely on students giving little time for the instructor.

Often when discussing with Instructors I hear comments like *“im so busy with class”* or *“im not getting much of my own training done”* but have also heard *“you don’t realise how little you know until you start to teach”*

This is where being an instructor can help the progression, in every problem there is an opportunity, and it depends on the instructor as to how quickly they react to the hindrance in their progression as to how fast they get back on track to growth.

It is quite possible to grow by just practicing, but a lot quicker when we realise our shortcomings and make a conscious decision to improve. (see Fig 6) Constructive feedback can help when addressing weaknesses

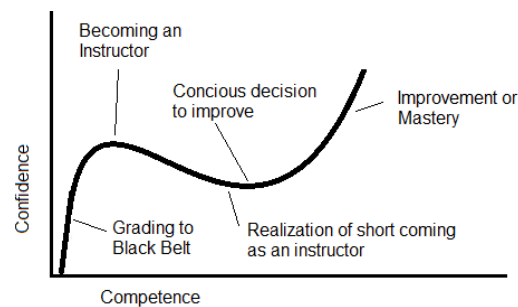


Fig 6

*“Victory comes from finding opportunities in problems.”*

*Sun Tzu*

## *Pros and cons?*

There are benefits to learning Taekwon-Do and many facets of instructing, the following are some of the areas encountered;

**Knowledge** - To be able to teach someone a technique we need to know what the purpose of the technique is, this is one of the training Secrets of Taekwon-Do *“To understand the purpose and method of each movement clearly.”* This has a few benefits, it means that when teaching the technique we are able to demonstrate the application of the technique correctly including when it may and may not be effective, it means that as part of the teaching method if the instructor sees the student doing the technique incorrectly they are able to provide corrective feedback and it means that if a question is asked about the technique the instructor is able to give the correct answer.

Taekwon-Do instructors are encouraged to not give an incorrect answer if they do not know but find out from another source, this is part of one of the points in the Student and Instructor Relationship. *“If the Instructor is not able to answer a student’s question, he should not fabricate an answer but admit he does not know and attempt to find the answer as soon as possible.”* An instructor may then need to plan another class on the correct technique.

Pro: Lack of knowledge allows the Instructor to seek further training to resolve the gap and improve their understandings. Seminars such as Instructor Update courses and Group trainings give the opportunity to improve.

Con: If a knowledge gap is found the Instructor may overlook the technique in further trainings, or at worst fabricate an answer. It is also possible to unknowingly teach a technique incorrectly to the detriment of the Instructor and the student. This can leave both discouraged as minimal progress is made.

**Planning** - Class plans can be as simple or as detailed as the instructor chooses. The plan is usually based on a broad idea which is then broken down into smaller parts. The small parts of a class plan are designed to teach a single technique and then can have the applied application. For a knowledgeable instructor the details of the techniques are usually well known but a new instructor may need to refresh their memory first. This leads the instructor into researching the technique where they either confirm and re-enforce what they know or correct themselves and learn.

Pro: When a class is planned it can make maximum use of the Instructors and students time in the training area, plans can allow the entire syllabus for each grade to be covered or a specific topic such as sparring drills to be looked at in detail. The process of planning gives the Instructor a chance to research what is needed and make sure it is all covered. It helps the Instructors to evaluate their own knowledge.

Con: Planning can be time consuming and usually focus’s on the student, it has the potential to drain the spontaneity from classes and can frustrate Instructors if the plan is not followed.

**Research and self directed learning** – Whether it is planning a class or finding an answer to a student’s question, Taekwon-Do instructors in New Zealand have access to many resources. A good start of course is the Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia or the Black Belt Syllabus Handbook. And with the changes over the years in technology more instructional videos are available online.

Pro: With the abundance of information available practically any question can be answered by researching. It allows the instructors to not feel inadequate about admitting they don’t know the answer and can practice in their own time so that they are comfortable teaching the topic.

Con: When reading from a book it is quite possible to misinterpret the book or to only have a book available that is out of date. Content online must be from a reputable source and can also impede progress if the video is incorrect or of poor quality. Research can be very time consuming especially if the topic is very broad or undefined when investigating. *"I don't know what I don't know"*

**Personal Practice in Class** – It is important that an Instructor continues with their own physical training as well as mental growth. Many of the younger Instructors are still interested in competing in tournaments and joining in with events where possible, so like to get the practice. This is where it is important to know what sort of Instructor to be, do they get involved with the class when the exercises are done or do they stand at the front and only demonstrate.

Pro: Participating vigorously in the class whilst teaching allows the benefits of practicing techniques and having a good cardio workout. It shows Students that learn by imitating how the technique is done. It allows the Instructor to accomplish a sense of involvement and strengthens the bonds with students.

Con: Participating in class can put added pressure on the Instructor if they are distracted as the students perform the technique. The students can then practice away from the class an incorrect technique which can take longer to correct. If the Instructor stands at the front of class and instructs only there will be little time to grow and will need to do extra training at another class or club, which can be very time consuming.

### *Personal Experience as instructor*

From my own experience I have always been very self conscious as an instructor, did I get that explanation correct? are the students learning something?, have they enjoyed the class ? When teaching kids classes this is not too much of an issue as I work on teaching one or two new techniques then on having a fun time.

With the adults they expect a little more and the teaching needs to be a lot more focused. One of the things that I have found with my confidence in teaching is student feedback. Whilst I don't ask for feedback, quite often after teaching a class I have students say *"thanks for that I really enjoyed it"* or *"that was great I learned something"* which offers a sense that not only have I managed to become a better instructor but have become better at Taekwon-Do.

Another idea that I have found extremely helpful with confidence in teaching is experience. Because I have enjoyed and favoured Power breaking over the years I have trained with some great instructors and learned quite a bit, this means that I am a lot more confident in teaching it and am able to draw on my own experience. Also as It is something I focus on I tend to practice it a lot more at home.

### *Advice for others?*

Carpe diem, Seize the day

If I could offer any advice to a Student in Taekwon-Do, it would be to;

- Make every moment in your training count.
- Put more effort into each technique.
- Listen with intent to learn as much as you can and ask questions where possible.
- Practice more in your spare time.
- Attend more seminars and events.

In regards to advice to Instructors it's the same as students with the added points

- The sooner you start the quicker you will feel comfortable instructing.
- Instructing can be a small part of a class or co-instructing, it doesn't have to be the whole class or a club .
- Learn different methods of teaching, teaching at front of class and being involved with the class. In the same way that people learn differently we also teach differently.
- Take advantage of all the opportunities and resources that are offered by ITKD, these are things like courses online and being involved at camps and seminars where possible.
- Know that you never get it right all the time and being questioned and then researching the answer is a great way to learn
- Look after yourself, take time out to do your own training, this helps to maintain your enjoyment in Taekwon-Do
- All journeys have different timelines, you do not have to be an instructor in 5 minutes and can take time to become comfortable with teaching.

## Conclusion

In New Zealand we are always working to improve the support for instructors and it is available in things such as Instructor Induction Courses and an increasing amount of literature becoming available, there is also a lot of comradery that has developed over the years between instructors and I believe that the support offered is critical to keeping the instructors balanced and enthused.

Instructing can be both a hinder and a help. We need to look at Taekwon-Do as not only a martial art with technical techniques but also an art that helps to better the instructor as a person. People have their own experiences and idiosyncrasies that they need to work with on a day to day basis, the way that they work through the challenges will decide how quickly they move forward in their progression of Taekwon-Do.

It is after all a personal Journey.

## References

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