

## Taekwon-do: Building Strong Foundations.

Deciding on a topic for this essay was incredibly challenging as I had many ideas and had to narrow them down to the one Taekwon-do angle that stood out the most for me. I had initially thought it would be useful to have some written discussion on my process and how it has been for me at my age to prepare for my black belt grading. After much writing and recording of my process I thought I had it sorted; that was until the Sunday just gone when students from our clubs junior class (for which I am an assistant instructor) performed a demonstration for the schools gala day. I realised then that I needed to write my essay about that, my journey with them and apart from enjoying working with these children my reason for doing so.

I will digress momentarily to explain where I come from with this personally.

Within our family it was never okay for girls to 'fun fight' or retaliate with any aggression in confrontational situations, in fact one was taught to retreat at all cost and never rock the boat either physically or verbally and at all times behave like a lady (whatever that really meant one would have to wonder). There was limited merit to this philosophy for me as a different set of rules applied to my brothers (and that is another story completely). I was consequently robbed of much personal power and denied the opportunities or tools to learn how to appropriately deal with conflict and its best friend the bully. This is not a criticism of my parents, the same rules applied at school, it is simply the way things were then, girls who spoke out were considered mouthy and those who physically defended themselves were considered tomboys and neither of these titles were the desired norm. In the meantime the boys who scragged and fought each other were 'just being boys'.

Several times over my (both paid and unpaid) career I have been in places that have harboured bullies; not so much the physical bully but the insidious verbal or emotional bullies whose intimidating behaviours have never been challenged well enough and therefore allowed to continue; because I was never equipped to deal with these behaviours I had to learn, by trial and error as an adult. When I began working with children I realised after a good deal of behavioural management study and even more realistic hands on opportunities that bullying can begin very young and it is certainly the adults around them that can either perpetuate or help to modify any inappropriate and unacceptable social behaviours. Turning a blind eye and ignoring these behaviours does no-one any favours. The unchecked early childhood bully enters junior school with those behaviours well in place, if their teachers do not have children of their own or well developed behaviour management skills or in fact are bullying personalities, those behaviours become deeply entrenched and difficult to resolve, the child can then take those behaviours to college and further into adulthood, their own relationships, families and future workplaces.

In my experience the bully has often been bullied themselves, their behaviour is learned and therefore will have a victim mentality that justifies their actions to themselves and a consequence of this can be a defensive and angry attitude. Their behaviours can be devious and they can become very adept at doing it so that it is undetected by those in positions of authority and in fact can turn it around so they seem credible and blame someone else for their behaviours. They are often not popular but can have such a hold through intimidation that those around them will seemingly befriend them (for all the wrong reasons); they feel if they stay on the right side of the bully who seems to hold all the power they will be safe from being bullied themselves and the consequence of that is that those young people can then become party to group bullying. This is very destructive in our society and very hard to undo particularly for the victims who continue to be bullied or are bullied for trying to speak up: So the cycle continues.

In our society, good moral values used to be taught at home or at Sunday school or both but is sadly in some cases no longer the norm. If not taught then society becomes bereft of good human values and lacks the foundation to develop a good and caring society and a consequently more peaceful world.

At all levels I can see that Taekwon-do with its physical discipline and moral culture can be of great assistance in turning those who are morally bereft, around. For those students lacking in the experience of good values in their up bringing the attraction to Taekwon-do may be through the fighting aspect of it; I can see it is possible that those drawn into it through this avenue can be dramatically, morally changed by their involvement and the sound rules involved in being allowed to be a student.

The Tenets Courtesy - Integrity - Perseverance - Self Control - Indomitable Spirit, embrace the human values necessary to help those who lack moral education. The 'do or way' of Taekwon-do comes into predominance here and is as important as any other part of Taekwon-do.

So why not start early?

At the end of 2004 Mr. Livingstone talked about starting up a junior class and welcomed any senior student, who was interested, to come along and help out. As I had, as previously mentioned, trained and worked with little people for many years the idea of working with them at Taekwon-do appealed greatly. So over the past two years I have had the pleasure of working with the Wednesday children's Taekwon-do class and I have observed as children have arrived with little if any ability to stand still for any given time, to the place they are now, standing tall in straight even lines and still when required, trying and having success doing things they never would have had the opportunity to do before, being courteous, polite and considerate to one another and most of all turning up to class with enthusiasm and the desire to do their best each week; not only that but they are wonderful little role models for new students and their peers. It is wonderful to see them lined up in their little peoples Dobok's going through their routines and knowing they will be better young people for the self discipline and values they are learning now through Taekwon-do. They are offered incentives by means of trophies for student of the week, term and year. They earn certificates for attendance and are now able to grade into the senior ranking system. Every hand shoots up when Mr. Livingstone asks who wants to be a Black Belt. They are growing up with Taekwon-do and by involving them at a very young age we can ensure they are exposed to the values and disciplines they need to become responsible, disciplined and caring adults.

I have pondered what may be the earliest entry level age for children to begin Taekwon-do and it is my feeling that if enough instructors were available then it would be possible to do a very junior class which involves a less physically sophisticated approach but one that encompasses opportunities and encouragement to learn about the tenets. In early childhood education (and I do not include day care here as that is governed by a whole different adult child ratio to say a Kindergarten or Playcentre) children may come to a 'big kids' session when they are emotionally ready to be away from their parents and they are independent in the toilet. I feel it could be possible, judging from my own experiences teaching extended sessions for 'Big Kids', that for most but not necessarily all and because a new round of brain neurons is on the way  $4\frac{1}{2}$  - 5 is the age they could successfully be introduced to Taekwon-do activities and principles. Before becoming involved in Taekwon-do I spent much time teaching some of the very values we learn within the oath and tenets because they were the values I was raised with and have carried through my life.

A simplified curriculum could be worked out as Mr. Livingstone has done with the junior class and a time limit set at say 40 minutes to allow for little people fatigue, the ability to stay on task and the fun factor which leaves them wanting more. The focus could be on simple physical exercises like stretching, skipping, running, jumping, co-operative games and introduction to the moral culture in a fun way. There are many very good children's short story books out there about good reigning over bad, (who is to say one couldn't be or hasn't been written directly encompassing the principles of the art). The instructors would need to have empathy for small children and therefore it would be desirable to involve parents and even more ideal some parents from senior Taekwon-do classes. Having parents involved I could see as a key factor to this being successful and I would be interested in investigating these ideas further. A spin off from involving parents and what seems a common reason for adults beginning Taekwon-do is that when parents bring their sons or daughters to they can so often become students themselves as in my case and the other assistant instructor of the Kids class Mr. Flynn.

Taekwon-do can help our little people hold onto their power and channel it positively in their lives to reach their true potential whilst maintaining humility. If we start them young then surely we have a chance at instilling a brilliant set of values in our future adults equipping them with the skills to effectively deal with whatever life throws at them and from that we will certainly have a good chance of creating a more peaceful world filled with strong, positive thinking, caring, and sensitive people who will not only look after each other but the planet they live on.

Healthy body = healthy mind = more peaceful world.

The laying down of sound foundations will ensure their future is solid. We can be a part of that.

General Choi Hong Hi left us a legacy to carry on past his lifetime and into the future, his legacy was to provide us a template to become better people through Taekwon-do and it's physical and moral culture; we in turn can leave a legacy to those following after us; we do not need accolades for it; the humble pleasure we have from seeing the success of others through our input is enough. I will always be grateful to Mrs. Dale Copeland for encouraging me to come to training with Mr. Tod Rookes (a .k .a. my son); I will always remember and be grateful to Mr. Neill Livingstone and Mrs Kirsten Livingstone as my instructors and Taekwon-do mentors, they have left me a legacy as their instructors before them did and they will always be known to me as key people who helped change and enrich my life in a hugely significant way.

There is enormous pleasure for me in seeing the children that come to our junior class not only in the Do-jang working hard but also out in the street, when they come up and enthusiastically acknowledge me in a friendly, respectful and courteous manner. Another joy is when a parent purposefully approaches one of us to tell us how much their child is benefiting from Taekwon-do or as has happened one parent stood up at the end of the last class last year and gave a short address to everyone there as a means of appreciation for the values we as instructors are teaching their children; a very humbling experience.

Something I always bear in mind when working with children is that they are very much 'on top' in expressing their feelings and if in their communications they lead you feel they respect you then you are probably doing something right for them and by being senior members of the club we are role models and we must always behave in a manner that we would like our children to, to maintain that respect.

In summation I should say that if my apprenticeship (so to speak) in Taekwon-do has given me as much as it has over just 39 months I can only imagine how my life would be had I begun Taekwon-do as early as some of our junior students. At least looking back now, knowing what I do and having travelled the road this far, I have something to compare it to and know it is a brilliant way of life and encouraging our youngsters to come along as soon as they are old enough, will help make their world a better place.

Frances Rookes 2006