

**Teaching Taekwon-Do in a club: It's not just all-about the student ...*****Club Instructor protocol for parents***

4th dan Candidate thesis

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This essay addresses key reasons for International Taekwon-Do (ITKD) Club instructors to be aware of and responsive to the parents of their students. It identifies typical parental behaviours and attitudes of parents toward their child and class instructors. These behaviours and attitudes if not recognized and responded to in a positive fashion have the potential to negatively influence the student, the instructor and class. In conclusion the essay offers guidelines or protocols for clubs, useful for both sole charge and multiple instructor clubs.

The strength of this essay comes from my experience as an ITKD instructor for over 13 years. As an instructor my focus and heart has always been and remains for the student. Yet when we form a club it is not the simple dynamic of individual students joining a class. My club has seen students and their families happily engage in events, attending with faithful regularity. And I have had classes interrupted by parents and found myself the focus of parental anger and disappointment over issues that don't seem to warrant such emotion. I have experienced parents who have been supportive and engaged in the club suddenly withdraw their child from the club on a seemingly minor issue. In particular a recent withdrawal of a student from my club has prompted me to deepen my awareness of the parent dynamic in the class and club. The growing recognition of the parental impact has led me to develop a strategy to foster mutually beneficial lines of understanding between myself as instructor and parents. When one signs on a young student the parent in essence also joins adding to the dynamic of the club. My observation of the critical influence of this parental dynamic is the impetus for this essay.

The parent is, and remains, the first and most important teacher that a child will have. The Hebrew word for parents is *horim*, and it comes from the same root as *moreh*, teacher.<sup>1</sup> As instructors we are teachers in a scenario that sits inside a much wider picture. We need to be clear and mindful of our boundaries and expectations to those involved in our club. For our young students, parents will generally be the fee payers of classes, uniforms and gradings. They are the primary transporters to classes, competitions and extra activities such as fundraisers and social events. They will be the encouragers and champions for both the student and hopefully the club. Parents will know the student better than anyone else. They have the most complete understanding of their child's physical, social development and family history. The parent is the most important person in a child's life. They are a team already when they arrive in your class. Joining a club means the making of a new team and there will be tension as the dynamics shift to make room for you as the instructor. It is not enough to focus solely on the student.

There is in youth sports what some call the "athletic triangle," consisting of coach (or instructor), athlete, and parent.<sup>2</sup> It's critical to realize that within this three way relationship are the "dyads"<sup>3</sup> of instructor and child and instructor and parent. While we often focus on our students it is vital to realize that an instructor's role in relating to parents critically affects the consequences of participation for young athletes.<sup>4</sup> We ignore these relationships at peril to the health of our clubs. Positive recognition and response to these dynamics requires the instructor to develop a welcome

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<sup>1</sup> <http://inspirelifefq.blogspot.co.nz/2011/03/parent-quotes.html>) Rabbi Kassel Abelson, sourced 27/09/13.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission, SPORTS COACH An online magazine for coaches ISSN 1836-604X VOLUME 30, NUMBER 1 2008. **Dealing with parents: promoting dialogue.** Author: *Kristy McLean*, School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland **Issue: Volume 30 Number 1**

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

and orientation for the parents that sits alongside the welcome and orientation provided to the students.

Research shows that it is becoming necessary for sporting organizations to devise parent codes of conduct.<sup>5</sup> But rules may not be enough for our parents. Running a club requires instructors to not only understand our students. We must also engage with parents to broaden everyone's learning and so foster the ethic and spirit of Taekwon-do. Club instructors need to possess a basic reasoning behind the behavior they seek in order to foster a harmonious learning environment. It is reported that

“... qualitative research suggests that parents are often unaware of the impact their behaviour has on their children and their subsequent sport participation. For example, when asked to list positive parental behaviours, parents and players alike thought that parents should be ‘positive, encouraging and non-critical’. However, when listing negative behaviours, parents thought that they should ‘not coach from the sidelines’, whereas players thought parents should ‘not yell at the referee’.”<sup>6</sup>

Research notes that a key understanding is that the

“... players saw yelling at the referee to have a detrimental impact on them during games; whereas parents did not seem to understand that their children suffered the consequences of their behaviour during games. Increasing this understanding of parent behaviour at sporting events has important implications for the dynamics of the coach–parent–child relationship.”<sup>7</sup>

Taking time to know our parents can be vital. While not all parents will have unreasonable expectations of their children, those parents who do can have a damaging affect on the moral of the club and the instructor. Some writers believe that “One of the biggest challenges to the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

coach–parent relationship is dealing with parental expectations.”<sup>8</sup> Not everyone can be the like the next Dan Carter, Dean Barker or Carl van Roon of Taekwon-do, a truth often not appreciated by parents. As instructors we frequently encounter this unrealistic and high-pressured attitude to sporting development. Research which shows such expectations can have the opposite effect to that intended also indicates that “material and emotional support from parents as well as expertise and emotional support from the coach are crucial ingredients for the cultivation of talent.”<sup>9</sup> Again we see it is vital that we understand the parent and the parent understands their key ways to contribute to the positive potential of their child. This understanding does not come automatically to an instructor when s/he sets up a club or to parents when they enroll their children.

Information from the official ITKD website<sup>10</sup> is understandably focused on the student. Alongside information about Taekwon-do, its history and development, there is information for the individual in terms of how they will fit in as a student. In the FAQ’s section the focus is on the student in a club setting. The FAQ’s Parents page likewise addresses issues a parent may have in terms of their child’s care and development.<sup>11</sup> The role of the parent seems to be peripheral and subsequently not directly addressed. As students begin in my club I have been clear on the expectation for the students in terms of behavior, attendance, uniform etc. The ITKD addresses these points in detail at the Green belt level in the techniques handbook “Rules of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> International Taekwon-do Foundation of New Zealand © 1996-2013 <http://www.itfnz.org.nz/>

<sup>11</sup> International Taekwon-do Foundation of New Zealand © 1996-2013 FAQ’s Parents Page. <http://www.itkd.co.nz/parents.php>.

conduct”.<sup>12</sup> Information for parents revolve around providing information of what equipment their child might need, detail of events that sit alongside regular class attendance and the request for fees to be paid in a timely fashion.

We are not as transparent with expectations of parental involvement and behavior. We operate as if a clear contract is in place whereby the instructor is the authority in the room and has responsibility for the training and well being of all the students. We also want parents to be supportive and engaged in their child’s commitment to the sport. So while we assume parents will relinquish their children into our care for the total of class time we don’t always make it clear where their responsibilities lie and ours begins in terms of training, development and grading. I have experienced parents, particularly of young students, who involve themselves in the class time often interrupting with comments regarding discipline, correction of form or technique. In one instance a parent disrupted the class by questioning my training approach to their child. The teacher-student relationship did not provide the parent a satisfactory avenue for prior understanding of class dynamics nor a sense of trust that their child was not being targeted when repeated correction was being offered. Instructors need to be proactive in building relationship with new parents, providing teaching scenarios and usual class protocols and practices so parents can relax while their children are in our care.

It also helps the instructor to signal to parents what we have learned to be helpful or unhelpful influences in our student’s development. Parents frequently over commit their child in a range of

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<sup>12</sup> International Taekwon-Do techniques handbook, 2012 Edition © International Taekwond-Do Foundation of New Zealand. Coloured Belt Techniques Syllabus, (6<sup>th</sup> gup #7.d Theory no page #.)

academic and sport pursuits so children are often tired and faced with unhealthy or unrealistic demands on their stamina and capabilities. They have unrealistic expectations about what they and the child can fit into a day. These unrealistic expectations can impact our classes with significant consequences for the child, ourselves as instructors and wider club.

Parents will enroll their child in Taekwon-do perhaps for a variety of reasons. Some reasons may only become apparent over time. As instructors we need to be aware not only of our student's development but also of the potential for a changing dynamic within the parent. Craig Stewart of Human Health and Development of Montana State University in an article on this topic notes that

“...when you ask parents what they want their child to get from participating in a sport, they often give responses that don't jibe with reality -- they want the team to win, but also want every child to play and have a good time.”<sup>13</sup>

Which as Stewart goes on to say is “virtually impossible”.<sup>14</sup> Parent and instructor need to talk over expectation and realistic stages of development and grading. Without that understanding, trust and agreement there will be confusion and stress.<sup>15</sup> Stewart goes on to talk about the “other 50 percent” of coaching -- the part that deals not with the game but with the students and the parents. In Taekwon-do while it is often seen as an individual sport we do work as a team and other students are integral in a club being able to train and develop students. Students need each other for sparring partners and yet progress individually in their grading. Parents often lose perspective of the wider club picture not appreciating the inner dynamics of club teaching.

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<sup>13</sup> Montana State University- University Communications-MSU News. <http://www.montana.edu/news/1521/parents-have-conflicting-goals-for-their-child-s-sports-experience> by Carol Flaherty. February 25, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Stewart warns that the " 'athletic triangle' of players, coach and parents is prone to miscommunication or, even worse, no communication."<sup>16</sup>

Research shows that

“When conflict between coaches and parents is not adequately resolved, communication stops and animosity develops. Parents who think their child is not being treated fairly often feel “powerless” and frustrated that their concerns are not being addressed. Coaches who sense parental discontent often feel “persecuted” and unappreciated for all the time and effort that they devote to coaching young athletes. Left further unresolved, conflicts can escalate to verbal and, in rare cases, physical altercations that not only reflect poorly upon the individuals involved, but can also tarnish the sport, embarrass the sponsoring organization, and divide an entire community.”<sup>17</sup>

Reflection on a real situation supports the points of this assignment and the importance of its theme of engaging with parent as well as student.<sup>18</sup>

Student J came into the club at the age of 5. J’s parents were very enthusiastic and strongly encouraged their child to be a serious student of Taekwon-do. The child had been with another club but the parents felt their child’s learning was too rudimentary, simple and undemanding and they had withdrawn the child.

The parents didn’t interfere in class time but they sought out extra information so they could assist their child in training at home. As J continued in the class she began turning to the parents to look for approval rather than the instructor. If “mistakes” were made the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences – Youth Sports Research Council, *Enhancing Parents-Coach Relations in Youth Sports*. <http://youthsports.rutgers.edu/program-areas/24-articles/61-enhancing-parent-coach-relations> Gregg s Heinzmann EdM director research youth sports council Rutgers the State University of NJ, School of Arts and Sciences. 2013.

<sup>18</sup> I encourage local instructors to share correspondence received from parents with their regional director to provide learning for all instructors.

parents had quite serious conversations with J who would then be made to come to apologize to the instructor. I tried to explain to the parents that their child had plenty of time, at the age of 5, to develop his skills and the focus was to nurture rather than force development and important that he enjoy the training.

J's skill level was developing but then he began to consistently make mistakes and was not able to move on. While her prior performance seemed to indicate she should have been making good progress she suddenly couldn't concentrate and continue her development. It was at this stage that I became aware the parents had enrolled J in a number of other extracurricular activities. My response to his slowed development in class, to ensure that he was suitable prepared for the next level was to delay his next grading. This was upsetting for both the parents and the student. While I did explain the reason for not sending their child to grading I believe that a prior level of developmental understanding and trust in the instructor was not in place for the parents to appreciate my decision. They were unable to see the wider picture of their child's development. They withdrew their child from the club.

As an instructor you will have learned how to teach a student. As a Club leader you must also learn how to work with parents. The instructor needs to engage the parents in the culture of the club. The instructor needs to

“sit down with parents and outline the importance of positive support and enjoyment for the participant. In doing so, it is important to spell out their top priority is the welfare of the child, and that the principal goal is that the child is enjoying both the learning and participating/competing aspects of their involvement. Increasing the pressure and



demands placed on the participants is not going to create a champion — especially not a happy one.”<sup>19</sup>

“(P)arents play a critical role in providing opportunities for their children to participate in youth sports, but parents receive very little education on how to create a positive sport experience for their child-athlete.”<sup>20</sup> On reflection and considering material from other sources I have identified key points in understanding parental involvement. I am also now more aware of core protocols for parents which an instructor needs to implement alongside their teaching and training skills.

#### **Helpful points of understanding for parents to better support their child in ITKD club**

- Parents need to trust the instructor’s judgment when it comes to assessing skill and readiness for grading. It’s impossible to be completely objective about one’s own child.\*
- Parents should be advocates for their child. However, they can’t and shouldn’t attempt to solve all of their child’s problems. In addition, it is important for parents to recognize the benefit of letting their child make mistakes. ITKD provides an opportunity for children to develop character, but only if parents allow youngsters to experience occasional failure. A child is more resilient than a parent may think.\*
- Parents either watch the class or join and become a student. Experiencing the joy and sadness of a child’s athletic career can bring parents closer to their children and make life more rewarding, but it’s the child’s life – and there needs to be some separation. The

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<sup>19</sup> Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission, SPORTS COACH An online magazine for coaches ISSN 1836-604X VOLUME 30, NUMBER 1 2008. **Dealing with parents: promoting dialogue.** Author: *Kristy McLean, School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland* Issue: *Volume 30 Number 1*

<sup>20</sup> Minnesota PLAYS TM <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/mnysrc/programs/mnplays.html>.

focus is on the child. If a parent is interested in Taekwon-do they are more than welcome to also join as a student.\*

- Parents must remember that the instructor is a dedicated teacher. It is important to trust that their child's instructor is doing the best they can for the student. Rarely, is an instructor out to get a child.\*<sup>21</sup>

### **Class protocols for better understanding between Parent, Student and Instructor**

- The Instructor decides when to grade or not.
  - It is important to realise that the readiness of a child cannot be judged by the progress of other students.
- Class discipline is overseen by and issued by the instructor
- Parents can be vital for a child's participation in class. Parental support is critically shown by ensuring children arrive on time and in uniform, that registration and fees [which keep clubs viable] are done in a timely fashion. Parents are not ITKD coaches, that is the role of the instructor.
- Interruptions in class time are not permitted other than for extenuating circumstances. If parents have concerns bring them to the instructor following the class when the details are fresh. It reasonable to ask for an explanation if one is uncertain about any training.

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<sup>21</sup> (\*material adapted and expanded) Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences – Youth Sports Research Council, *Enhancing Parents-Coach Relations in Youth Sports*. <http://youthsports.rutgers.edu/program-areas/24-articles/61-enhancing-parent-coach-relations>

Gregg s Heinzmann EdM director research youth sports council Rutgers the State University of NJ, School of Arts and Sciences. 2013.

Similarly while we look to educate and inform our parents it is vital that instructors are prepared for parents.

### **Skills for Instructors to foster good parent interaction**

- Come prepared and on time \*\*
- Use positive discipline vs. physical punishment\*\*
- Supervise properly\*\*
- Avoid sarcasm and public criticism\*\*
- Strive to be fair\*\*
- Admit when you are wrong\*\*<sup>22</sup>
- Be patient
- Don't raise your voice
- Be clear fair
- Be friendly but professional
- Design your protocol and structure of your class
- Make it clear even before a parent signs up their child the expectation the club has of the parent and their behavior and involvement.

This upfront work avoids misunderstanding when the tensions can build during busy schedules and grading preparations. This preparation is especially helpful for sole charge clubs when time management is vital to ensure good teaching time and liaising with parents both happens.

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<sup>22</sup> (\*material adapted and expanded) Ibid.

## Conclusion

I firmly believe that Taekwon-Do is a discipline that serves our students well in their physical, moral and spiritual well-being. As instructors we plant the seeds for all this to happen. A seed will not grow unless properly nurtured. The ITKD training of our students takes place in a wider environment. It is a privilege of the instructor to be involved in a young person's life. For most effective development we need to work alongside and support our parents as well as our students. Support takes place best when there is clear communication of roles, responsibilities and expectations. The establishment of Parents and Instructor Protocols is a positive means to enrich the "Do"<sup>23</sup> of our students' lives as they engage in the ITKD journey. It is my desire that this journey, as stated in our Student Oath, "builds a more peaceful world"<sup>24</sup>.

**Hung Tri Nguyen**  
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<sup>23</sup> In [Korean](#), *tae* (태, 跆拳道) means "to strike or break with foot"; *kwon* (권, 拳) means "to strike or break with fist"; and *do* (도, 道) means "way", "method", or "path". Thus, *taekwondo* may be loosely translated as "the way of the foot and the hand."<sup>[2]</sup> The name *taekwondo* is also written as *taekwon-do*, *tae kwon-do* or *tae kwon do* by various organizations. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taekwondo> accessed 12 October 2013

<sup>24</sup> Gen Choi Hong Hi, *Taekwon-Do (the Korean Art of Self-Defence)* 1995, ITF, NZ p 368.

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