

John Matsuoka Black Belt essay:

Is Taekwon-Do Practical for street self-defence. How do you know?

Practical?

This is a double-edged sword to me. In one way, we train, practice, work scenarios with our current syllabus, but most of us, I would say 90% that train in Taekwon-Do, will never have an opportunity to use our training to see if our syllabus will help us in a dire situation, which would be a good thing!

Preparation:

As we go through our individual grades we gain at each level a competency of skills to help the individual to be prepared for a set of scenarios that would require our varied learning. I have a hard time teaching our syllabus as it may help the student because we're trying to have them "blueprint" (as Phil Thompson teaches through Protect Self Defence) some controlled attacks but our club's demographics (Remuera), where the majority of our students come from, do not see the harsher realities of life as news portrays South or West Auckland areas.

I, myself, have never been in a situation where I had to use my training to protect myself or family but I am also aware, through our training (stoplight lessons) of dubious areas to be careful of. I believe, through my 20 years of doing Taekwon-Do, I could get myself out of some dangerous situations should they arise.

Actual abilities:

In this area of actual available techniques, I feel comfortable that my 20 years of training in Taekwon-Do would get me out of a few sticky situations. Learning how to communicate and still remaining calm, being able to "read" a variety of dangerous

situations, and ultimately real protection with the techniques I have learned over the years.

First to be able to shift, move, parry any aggressive behaviour to avoid confrontation.

Second to disable an aggressive encounter with enough force so as not to be harmed nor harm the aggressor too badly, for instance a solar plexus strike to knock the wind out of the person.

Third level of aggressive behaviour will need some of our own damaging techniques available to stop the aggressor trying to overpower you. This would be just brutal behaviour towards you with no respect to the hurt they want to incur on you. Actual ligament damage, dislocating fingers and joints, broken bones or bruised ribs to slow down or incapacitate the aggressor so you can get away safely. Our Taekwon-Do techniques can do a lot of physical injury to the aggressor because of how we practice our syllabus with learning how to break boards and applying sparring movements as a means of understanding the mind-set of an attacking opponent in a controlled environment.

The fourth level of aggression facing you would be an attack with weapons of any sort: sticks, rocks, pipes, knives or guns, etc. At this level of aggression, you would have to put forward everything you have learned at this point of your training and whatever else you can come up with to survive this type of onslaught. In other words, anything that works to survive!

I find that the first encounter suits the gup grades more easily and welcoming to teach.

Senior (chronological age) gups will have a better understanding of the second level of aggression but will still find it more difficult to be aggressive enough to control their aggressor. Their training, at gup level, is very minimal at best to hurt an aggressor aptly to actually prevent the attacker to back off, so to speak. At the worst-case scenario, I can see the defender doing a few inefficient techniques and annoying the attacker to up their level of aggression to dominate the person they are trying to control. This puts the defender in a precarious position that possibly will put the aggressor up to the third level of aggression, which now

puts the defender in a dangerous situation that they would be lost trying to defend themselves. Which brings me to the next level of students:

Junior Black Belts and fresh 1st, 2nd and 3rd Dan Black Belts. I have great respect for any member that dons a Black Belt. I've been through iTKD Black Belt grading syllabus (5 times) and know all too well the hard yards we go through for those rigorous 2 days! I fear that their self-defence knowledge (understanding) and practicing their syllabus for their grading will come up short in a real-life situation. Now don't get me wrong that I think our syllabus is ineffective no not at all. Our system offers something to get better at this but with our current structure it's a part of our grading syllabus but not an intense learning module that would make better use of Taekwon-Do's techniques. Self-defence seminars are an effective learning time but tends to fall short of the need to practice what we learned at club, where it falls into one of five different disciplines, and it shows up in class every fifth session or a very short time frame if part of every training session.

The more senior people (chronologically) 1st-3rd dan, who chose to take longer time between gradings, will have increased their self-defence skills by being exposed to more of the syllabus trainings.

As we approach the more senior level, 4th to 6th dan, there is more exposure to our self-defence techniques being more effective, now coming from a few more years of trainings between gradings. I feel we are always learning to improve our skills of self-defence through developing our knowledge of Taekwon-Do techniques, the real basis of why we keep on training is because we enjoy doing this martial art.

Conclusion:

As you can see this is not scientific but just my observation over the 20 years I have been with iTKD. In my early gup and 1st-3rd dan years, I would have been at 5 trainings a week. I also started attending a Saturday session from 1st dan at Nibun (Auckland Grammar) club. When I built MMC I had the opportunity to teach on Saturday and Sunday since 2010. In other words, my idea for

this subject comes from my personal observation teaching and training a lot of students from white belt to Black Belts.

I do what I love, I love what I do, I love my life!

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5th degree Black Belt

