

TEACHING KIDS TAEKWON-DO IV DAN THESIS BY JAMES CHACON

1. INTRODUCTION

- a. THE INSTRUCTOR**
- b. YOUNG STUDENTS**
- c. PARENTS**

2. THREE TYPES OF LEARNING

- a. VISUAL**
- b. AUDITORY**
- c. KINESTHETIC**

3. WORKOUT

- a. OPENING CEREMONY**
- b. WARM UPS**
- c. PATTERN DRILLS**
- d. RELAY RACES**
- e. SPARRING**
 - i. STEP SPARRING**
 - ii. FREE SPARRING**
- f. SELF DEFENSE**
- g. CLOSING CEREMONY**

4. GOOD AND BAD BEHAVIOR

5. CLASS SIZE AND STRUCTURE

6. CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

Teaching kids Taekwon-Do has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. At times, however, it has also been difficult and challenging. It is not, however, a decision that should be taken lightly. While there will be many days of victory, encouragement, and accomplishment, there will also be days of disappointment, frustration, and loss. To have a successful class for young Taekwon-Do students, there are many factors to consider.

THE INSTRUCTOR

There are many things an instructor must consider when developing a kids Taekwon-Do class, things that often times are extremely different from the traditional adult or advanced classroom environments. Teaching styles need to be flexible, multifunctional, and above all else, attention grabbing and engaging. Instructors must be patient and fun, while still maintaining control of the classroom. In addition, instructors must be creative, observant, and above all else, willing to learn valuable lessons from the students that they themselves are instructing. There is no fine science, no magic formula, no textbook definition to create the perfect classroom environment. Much of what is presented in class comes from years of trial and error; learning, relearning, or unlearning habits; and often times, changing plans mid-flight.

When Master Blakeley and I began teaching really young children (five years old and up), we were not sure exactly what we had gotten ourselves into. We weren't sure if we had made a mistake and the kids were too young to absorb what we wanted to teach them. I remember working on fundamental exercises with the kids. By the end of class, they were picking up bits and pieces, which was reassuring to a doubting mind. By the next class, however, it was like they had never seen the exercise before. It felt like we were back at square one every class period. Then, one day the light bulb would light over their heads and we could tell they understood and were retaining what we were teaching. When that happens, it's exciting and reminds you of why you are teaching Taekwon-Do in the first place: because you were once that awkward, uncoordinated, distracted, perhaps even rebellious kid that someone took the time to mould and mentor, whether in school or sports, and thanks to them, you now have the opportunity to pass that on.

YOUNG STUDENTS

The first thing to understand about having young students in class, is that traditional tactics are a lost cause. As discussed above, we spent class period after class period teaching the same stuff over and over, until finally one day, it made sense. It wasn't the kids' faults for not being able to learn at that age but more that we had to learn how to teach kids. We were using techniques that we use with older students and expecting the same results. Grand Master Lang often tells us "remember what it was like to be a white belt," but we had to take it even further and remember what it was like to be a very young child.

Young students have a limited knowledge base, which can make terminology, instructions, and tactile concepts very confusing and frustrating for them. Most young individuals have trouble knowing which hand is the right and which is the left hand, so we came up with a way to help them understand the difference. Standing in front of the class, we turn and face the same direction they are. We raise our right hand in the air and ask them to do the same. We then use our right hand to slap our right leg several times and explain to them that the hand and leg that stings is the right hand and the right leg. We then proceed with the drill. They think it's great fun watching an adult act silly, and they learn something at the same time.

It is important to note that young students have a smaller vocabulary than adults do, so you have to learn to talk at their level. Explaining "indomitable spirit" to an adult can be a challenge; just think what it's like for a five year old trying to learn the same concept. Young students also have not outgrown the "mirror image" concept and they will repeatedly move their left arm if you are facing them and you move your right arm. It is important to always do the techniques with the students, facing the same direction as the students, so they do not get confused as to which arm or leg to move. Remember also, that young students have a shorter attention span, therefore you shouldn't spend too much time explaining a technique. It will only confuse and bore them. It also helps to make a game out of drills whenever possible. You need to keep the class moving and the segments short. You need to be loud and animated. They feed off of your excitement and energy. Drills should be ten to fifteen minutes per drill. Repetition,



Students getting ready for Peewee class

repetition, repetition. The trick is to come up with different ways to present the same information.

PARENTS

Parents bring young students to class for a variety of reasons. Some bring them to class to learn discipline or to correct behavioral problems. Many come from single parent families and are looking for a male figurehead in their child's life. Some are home-schooled and come to class to have exposure to other kids or fulfill a sports requirement. Others bring their child to learn how to defend themselves in a society that seems to get more violent every day. Knowing what parents want for their kids helps us to know what is expected from us.

It is also important, however, that parents understand what we expect of them. Parents can be a great asset to your classes, but they can be a distraction. Separation anxiety is an issue for many children and as long as mommy or daddy is there they have an escape. I try to keep the students' attention on me and turned away from the parents, often times standing between the student and the parent when doing drills. Sometimes we ask the parents to leave the building or at least be out of sight during the first few classes. Once the child has been in the class a few times it's usually not a problem.

In addition, parents need to understand what we expect from the children. We have a set of rules that we expect students to abide by. When a student registers for class, they are given a handout of the rules. We also go over class rules with the parents before the student ever begins, so they can help their child understand what is expected from them, such as going to the bathroom and getting a drink before class starts. Potty breaks and water breaks can be very disruptive and once you let one go, they all want to go. I'm sure you will have your own set of rules and specific circumstances that need to be addressed for your school.

As an instructor of young students, you need to be aware that many parents have a limited knowledge of martial arts and they can easily misunderstand the procedures used in Taekwon-Do, especially those meant to display respect and reverence for instructors and seniors. It is therefore important that parents understand why we bow in class. If you do not take the time to explain that it is a sign of respect, some parents may believe it has religious connotations. This goes for meditation as well, as some parents interpret this as praying, rather than a relaxation exercise to clear the mind and get breathing under control.

Get your parents involved as much as possible. They want their children to succeed. Parents can help with etiquette if reinforced at home. They can help with pattern histories, diagrams, and other required knowledge found in the student handbook. The handbook was written for adults and parents can help kids understand the information at the child's age level.

Etiquette is something everyone needs to use daily and a must in all of my classes. Society today often does not emphasize the use of common courtesy and basic manners. The definition of etiquette is: the customs or rules of behavior regarded as correct in social life. There are specific rules of conduct that are demanded from each child. We go over our rules of etiquette each semester and remind them often during classes.

THREE TYPES OF LEARNING

Before you can begin teaching you need to understand that everyone learns in a different manner. There are three basic learning styles; visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Although no single type is better than any other, most people, including children, have one that seems to work better for them. All of the learning styles are very different and their effectiveness varies from person to person. As individuals we all learn better when we are able to use our own personal learning style.

VISUAL

The visual learners are able to absorb information best when they see it, like reading a book, studying pictures or diagrams, or watching how something is done. As an example, someone may have trouble listening to a lecture but if they take detailed notes and read the handbook the whole



Tape on the floor assists visual learners with stances, distance, and foot position

lecture suddenly clicks and makes sense. You could instruct this person through books and written exercises. You could use key words on a board to emphasize information. We use two lines of tape on the floor (the width of a kid's shoulders), to explain stances to the class. We have them do stances down the tape correcting them as they go. Pictures or video of techniques would get across better to this individual. Please remember

that what attracts, also distracts and the visual learner can easily be distracted by movement throughout or even outside the do-jang. If this is a

continual problem, you may need to position the student where their vision is limited until they can learn to ignore the outside distractions.

AUDITORY

Auditory learners, on the other hand, will do much better in a lecture situation than a visual learner would because auditory learners absorb knowledge easiest when they hear it. If you were to have an experiment in your class and handed out written instructions, it is very possible the auditory learners in your class would have trouble following written instructions if you did not verbally explain the guidelines for those who learn best when they hear things. They would prefer you discuss the technique and give them the opportunity to verbalize how this technique works.



Holli Watson assists a student with an L-stance

Something to keep in mind about auditory learners is that they are also easily distracted by outside sounds. Auditory learners will often turn their attention to another part of the do-jang if there is a lot of noise coming from that area, for instance other students counting out loud. If this occurs, you can normally regain their attention through loudly saying their name, clapping your hands, or whistling.

KINESTHETIC

Last, but not least, there are the kinesthetic learners. These people learn best when they use their hands to do things. This person may not always get things quickly when they are written or spoken but if you show them and let them actually physically do it, the new knowledge comes easily to them. This type of student is usually more physical than the other learning types. They are often considered a natural athlete in every sport they participate in. This person may be the easiest to teach the physical techniques of Taekwon-Do.

Kinesthetic learners want to feel what is happening during the learning process. When teaching kicks, I will hold the student's lead hand with one hand, while using my other hand to bring their foot into the proper chamber and take them through the kick including the pivot. Then I have them strike the bag with their foot so they can feel the part of their foot that should make contact.

Just as with the other learning styles, kinesthetic learners can also be distracted, but in a less obvious way than the other two. Often kinesthetic learners will be distracted by a texture on the floor or uncomfortable clothing. They may drag their feet when walking or play with their hair when standing still. They are also the most likely students to interact through touch by either hugging, shaking hands, patting people on the back, or even by pushing a student or pulling hair.

While you can speak to an auditory learner or get in the line of vision for a visual learner to regain their attention, you may feel your options to regain attention are limited with a kinesthetic learner but they really aren't.



Mr. Chacon helps a student position his leg to maneuver the desired kick

Simply by making physical contact by putting your hand on their shoulder, you will immediately gain their attention, even if you do not have their full focus. First, if it is possible to remove the distraction, start there. Cut a stray thread off a uniform, tie loose hair back, keep their hands out of their pockets and off other students as well. If aggression seems to be the issue, assign them a punching bag exercise for a while.

I personally feel that we all favor one learning style, but everyone is equally capable of learning with all styles depending on what you are trying to learn. It's obvious that you cannot teach every technique three different ways each time a class is instructed. However, it's good to keep in mind when a student is having trouble grasping a concept or technique. When a student is having difficulty understanding the instruction given, change the way it is taught. Restructure the information to fit into another learning style.

To assist young students in my class, I encourage the younger students to take the written part of their belt test verbally, even if they know how to read. I feel this keeps anxiety and stress levels down and keeps success rates and self esteem levels up. Helping a student understand the question, results in a better answer. Let's take the attention stance as an example. Young students may not understand what an attention stance is, and it's even less likely that they would understand "ch'a-ryot" if they saw it written, however they understand the verbal command "ch'a-ryot" and will successfully perform the stance upon request. In addition, they don't understand weight distribution or stance lengths, but they can demonstrate

this knowledge by showing me what a walking stance looks like. They may not remember how many moves there are in chon-ji but they can do the pattern as we count the moves together.

I ask each question according to the child's knowledge level and learning style, and accept any version of a correct answer in response. For example, a child may chose to physically demonstrate or verbally explain their answer or even draw their answer, as with pattern diagrams.

WORKOUT

OPENING CEREMONY

Structure of the kids' workout begins the same as for all other classes. We start with opening ceremony, led by the kids. If you're just beginning a class use older experienced students to help or a vice instructor until the kids can learn the ceremony. You'll find that most of them want to be the leader and be in the senior position. As you develop a hierarchy, try to work each of your senior students into the senior spot. This teaches leadership and helps them learn to be in front of a group. If you are doing opening ceremony with new students, the first thing you will have to do is teach them how to line up. As the commands are given in Korean, explain the meaning in English. We follow opening ceremony with a warm up.

WARM UPS

Keep in mind that the kids have been told all day long to "be quiet," "don't do that," and "why don't you play outside." This is their time to let go. Let them have fun and don't be afraid to be goofy with them. Each student comes up to the front one at a time in belt rank order, they bow to the instructor, and then pick an exercise. You may have to pick one for them until they learn the different drills available. You'll find over time that they get very creative with their drills. If the drill is something we can count with, we have them count in Korean. You will have to do this for them until they learn how. Have the entire class repeat the count each time. This teaches them a portion of their required knowledge. Some of the exercises we use are:



Students warming up at the beginning of class by performing the "mountain climber" exercise

Mountain climbers: Have the student that picked the exercise lead it and count if they can, if not the instructor counts for them. They get down in a runner's starting stance and on each count alternate feet. Do to a count of ten. If you want to change it up, speed up the count.

Team sit-ups: Divide the class into two groups. Try to work them in by strength and size. Have them lay flat on their back, side by side and lock arms. Make sure that they are shoulder to shoulder and squeezed tightly together. Have them bend their knees. You want your strongest kids on the outside. As you count they rise to the sitting position. Then give them the command to lie back down. We do this as a contest between the two groups and do it to a ten count. They are disqualified for a count if they use their hands to get up quickly. Best out of ten wins.



Students work together to perform Team sit-ups

Wheelbarrows: The young student often has difficulty doing a push-up so we came up with this drill to strengthen arms. Have them pair up in groups of two. Have one student lie face down in the push-up resting position. The other student will walk to the feet and pick the other student's feet off the floor and place them on their hips. Make sure all of the students know to go only as fast as the student walking on his hands is prepared to go, so you don't have kids falling on top of each other. We have them go to one end of the do-jang and when they get there switch positions and go back.



Students participating in the wheel barrow warm-up exercise during class

Duck walk: Line up the kids at one end of the studio and have them squat down and tuck their thumbs under their arm pits making wings. We have them duck walk to one end of the studio and back. What good is duck walk if you don't get to make noise? They quack all the way through the drill. There are many variations they use for this drill; bear crawl, rabbit hop, crab walk (and yes a crab makes a clicking noise when they walk,). Be careful if you have the students going down the floor and back again. When they turn to come back you can have collisions with slower students, so remind them to watch where they are going.



Students lining up to perform the "duck-walk" warm-up exercise

We try to limit warm ups to fifteen to twenty minutes. I'm sure your kids will come up with new and exciting exercises of their own. Initially when we started, we did exercises that we do with the adult classes like jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups, stretch kicks, and other boring adult exercises. These can still be done but make sure to do fun exercises as well. No matter what exercises or warm-up activities you do, the important thing to remember is that you want them moving, stretching, and strengthening muscles.

PATTERNS DRILLS

You need to work patterns every class if possible. I have specific drills that I use for patterns. Teaching Four Directional punch, "saj-ju tchi-ru-gi", and Four Directional Block, "sa-ju ma-ki", I get a board, tape, or some prop for each student. Put the prop on the floor and have them put their right foot on it. Explain to them that they are not to move it and that they can only pivot on that foot.

For the pattern "Chon Ji", I teach them to turn the direction of the punching hand. Terms like left, right, clock wise, counter clockwise, ABCD, 180 degrees mean nothing to a five year old, so I have them follow their punching arm around. Always do the patterns with them, facing the same direction as they are.

RELAY RACES

Kids like to race. You can use this drill for all kinds of techniques. You can have them run to the end of the studio, do a pattern, and run back. We have them do the same thing with stances. We have a print of a foot on a piece of paper and they have to run to a specified point, set up the correct stance, and run back. You can do kick races. Pick a specific kick (appropriate to their level) and have them perform the kick down the floor, hit a target, and kick going back tagging the next person on the hand with their foot.

SPARRING

STEP SPARRING

Teaching kids step sparring is like nailing Jello to a tree. Three step sparring with and without a partner is all we teach with the belt levels we have in the kids' class. When working the drills, be loud and go through it with them. Explain the command "demonstrate three step sparring without a partner, the defense only." Bring them to attention, have them distance (make sure they get into a good walking stance), step back in a good walking stance low block and "ki-hop" (have them yell loudly). Step forward and punch three times while in a good walking stance and stress that they should punch centerline. Step forward into ready stance. Then give the command "demonstrate three step sparring without a partner the defense only." Bring them to attention then have them step left into a ready stance and "ki-hop." Once again have them yell as loud as they can. Have them step backwards with the right foot into a walking stance and perform an inner forearm block with the lead hand. Explain the proper chamber for the block. After the third block have them counter-punch with the rear hand. Do this with them three times. Ask them if they are ready to try it alone. If they are not ready they will tell you, but they usually want to try it alone. Do not spend too much time on any specific drill. When working with a partner, thoroughly explain that they need to use control because they will be trying everything they can to punch each other. Work with them on timing, centerline, stances, chambers, and using the correct tool.

FREE SPARRING

Toward the end of class I like to have the class free spar. We line them up down the center of the room and face a partner directly across from them. We give instructions that there is no contact and that we do not want



Peewee students
free sparring during class

to hear little thumping noises. We give the command for attention, have them bow to their partner, and step back into a fighting stance. At this point I want them to “ki-hop” or yell. If it’s not loud enough for me I return them to the attention stance and go through the procedure again. It generally only takes one additional attempt to get the students to yell loudly. Your job is to keep them from running into each other and objects in the room. I let them go about a minute, then stop them and return them to their original position.

Have them face their partner, bow, shake hands, and say “thank you” and “you’re welcome” in Korean. Then have them switch partners and go again as time allows. If you have older students that show up for the class following your pee-wee class have them step in and work with your kids.

Sparring with pads can be a challenge if you start your classes with all white belts. I don’t like to let them spar against each other until they can learn what we are trying to accomplish with the sparring exercise. In my classes, the instructors spar with the kids so we can have one on one training time and to teach them the control they will need to be able to spar safely with other kids. They need to earn the right to spar by keeping themselves and their techniques under control. Explain to younger students that if they cannot control themselves during other aspects of training they will not be allowed to participate in sparring where one’s control is important for safety reasons. Please keep in mind when working with the little guys that if they get hurt many times they will just stand there frozen in place. I’ve had this happen a few times and it



Pee-Wee students participating
in free sparring activities

kind of freaks you out until you figure out what's going on. Usually they get hit in the solar plexus and it spasms and they've never experienced this feeling before and it kind of short circuits their system. As they move up in belt rank we let them spar against each other, but keep it very controlled.

SELF DEFENSE

Self defense techniques can be developed in very young students; however care must be taken to keep them from injuring each other. They do not understand how much leverage can be applied to a joint lock, and they are over zealous with release techniques. This can lead to serious injury. We do not use games when we work on self defense. We make sure that they understand this is serious and can be dangerous. Make sure to explain to them that they are not to test the techniques on kids at school or on siblings.



Two students demonstrate hold and release techniques during a self defense workout

CLOSING CEREMONY

Closing ceremony is done by the kids. After bowing out of class, they go to a peg board that Master Blakeley designed. On each peg is a card with the student's name and rank hooked to a key chain with a piece of belt of the rank that they will be testing for. On the back there is a place to sign off for each class and each tournament attended. Students must attend a set number of classes before they are eligible to test. After they successfully test they get to keep the key chain and a new one magically appears by the next class. Belt key chains hang from the pegboard. The key chains contain a belt consistent with the belt the student is testing for as well as the signature card instructor sign at the end of class to track the number of classes a student attends.



GOOD AND BAD BEHAVIOR

There are a million ways to run a class and this is just a brief explanation of some of the techniques I use to run classes at our school. The most important thing to remember above all else, is that these are kids and they need all the help and encouragement we can give them. It's very easy to tell them that they are doing things incorrectly, but it is critical that they get praise as well. Every time I work with them I try to give the entire group high fives and tell students individually that they did a great job in class. Try to always end your class with positive reinforcement.

The average parent criticizes their child as many as eight times for every one time they offer praise or encouragement. It's important to make sure you don't fall into the same pattern. While this may make it sound like we never discipline our students, the truth is we do. Even though we want the class to be fun, it has to be controlled fun. You will have kids that cannot keep their hands off of each other. They push, shove, and horse around. You have to let them know that you are in control and that they have to behave and show common courtesy and respect to everyone. Usually a few push-ups will solve the problem, but occasionally a time-out may be required. If you have to sit a kid down for a while to handle the problem, first, do it in an area that does not lend itself as entertainment for the student being punished or as a distraction for the remaining students in class. Second, don't forget about them. Get them back in with the group as soon as possible. I've seen instructors leave a kid sitting for an entire class. Remember the reason for your criticism is not for revenge or to express your displeasure. It is to help correct a problem. Focus on the behavior or the performance, not the person. If the problem is severe, keep them after class and resolve the problem immediately.

CLASS SIZE AND STRUCTURE

Limit class size in the beginning to 10 students. I like to have at least 2 instructors and ideally would like to have another instructor for each added belt rank. Typically we do not keep students in the pee-wee class beyond green stripe. We move them into the advanced junior's class so they can focus on their requirements, instead of white and yellow belt material constantly. Class times should be limited to an hour and should be held as early in the evening as possible. We meet two days a week and start at 5:30 and run to 6:30. This gives parents time to get off work and have time to get them to class.

It is also important to establish a hierarchy in your classes. The seniors (even if they are an eighth gup) give the kids something to aspire to.

They are your leaders in everything you do. They are an example of how you want all your students to act. They love the spotlight and the added responsibility. Make sure to give them all a chance to be the leader at some point. It's easy for an instructor to focus on one child as the senior and easy for the kids to let one child take over.

Grand Master Lang always challenges us to pick a student at whatever function we are at, and work with that student one on one. Do the same with your classes. Have older students work with the kids. We have upper belts in the kid's class introduce themselves to new students and they mentor them through the first few classes. Make sure that you make a connection with the new students and make them feel comfortable.

Be a kid, but remember you still have to be the most mature, the most responsible kid in the class. Many times it seems like my 19 year old son is more mature than I am. Not everyone can or wants to teach kids. There is not a flaw in your character if you're not good with kids. Most people prefer to work with older, exceptional students, the kind that understands everything the first time information is presented. Use them as examples for your kids. Sometimes the kids you least suspect can become your greatest student. They are all diamonds in the rough, and you can make a difference in their lives. You are not going to retain all, or even most, of your students. You are going to lose them to other sports and school functions of all types, but they will always be part of your Taekwon-do family. Have fun with your students of any age.



Master Blakeley demonstrates in unique skill of defending himself against the attacking army of balloons

Kids grow up so quickly. Enjoy them while you have them. You have to grow old but you never have to grow up.

CONCLUSION

Grand Master Choi Hong Hi wrote in his encyclopedia "If the instructor and ranking belts are articulate, well groomed, polite, confident, intelligent and understanding, this leadership will provide perhaps the best of all possible influences on the student."

Throughout the years that I have taught Taekwon-Do, I have worked with ages from the very old to the very young, with attention spans that are extremely focused to essentially non-existent, with abilities that range from highly skilled to limited. Every Taekwon-Do student is unique. It is therefore imperative, that every Taekwon-Do instructor and every do-jang, be just as unique, in order to create the most constructive learning environment possible that will benefit not only the student, the instructor, and the parent, but also the outside world where they will have the opportunity to demonstrate the values they have gained while in your care.



Mr. Chacon with some of his students from his Taekwon-Do do-jang in Clovis