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Teaching to the Adult Student

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Preface

This paper speaks to the developing Instructor in traditional martial arts who is moving from a recipe method of teaching classes to deliberate development of the martial arts community and the students. This paper focuses on the adult student and could be modified for publication for martial arts teachers. The structure, with the various categories and sub headings was meant to fit into a magazine type format, but this could also be broken up into a series of blogs should a resource be found that is relevant.

As I finalize this paper for submission, I find that I did not address one obvious element of adult learning which involves distinguishing and teaching to visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. As the standard methods of the UTF classes teach in each of these ways so that all learners can access the material, it did not seem to be the contribution I could make to the topic of teaching to adults.

There are several ways one might measure the success of an Instructor in the Universal Taekwon Do Federation. There are core values, knowledge and skills that define the UTF and are being refined and better articulated continually. The Instructor's ability to teach and demonstrate these is one important measure. Without that, success certainly cannot occur since it would only be by accident that what was taught was consonant with the UTF's philosophy, methods and principles. Looking at the Instructor's students themselves is another way. An Instructor could have deep understanding, but without the ability to convey it to others the role of Instructor has certainly been failed, even if the person is a strong student of the art.

The UTF Instructor must be deliberate and thoughtful about how the art is conveyed to the students, a complicated and multi layered exercise. In the UTF, effectively

teaching requires encouraging the development of both physical ability and character. The physical technique development has a high focus on the purity of the force, or what we sometimes call "good technique" and low priority on strength used to get a superficially effective result without using the key elements of living force. The character of the student is just as important and is shown by his/her relationships, commitment to the community and attitude towards training.

However, can one be an effective Instructor without students? If not, this brings in the added component of engagement and retention. The student's motivation for beginning a martial art and the Instructor's concept of success in the art can be quite different. The student may have a very clear idea that exercise and fun are the reasons for beginning a recreational activity and could evaluate the class on its ability to deliver these two things. As the UTF Instructor works on the subtlety of delivering true force and building the character of the student, it is very possible to teach classes towards the Instructor's goals that are neither physically strenuous nor fun.

I shall explore the idea of this path, where the student's goals and the Instructors can become the same, even when the beginning goals are divergent at the beginning. This requires navigating the distance between what the student thought they would get (typically) from martial arts training and what we believe they can get if the art is practiced at its deepest level. Moving students towards a focus on the "Do", or a way of living is the ultimate measure of success. If this is accomplished, the Instructor has created a learning experience that can extend far beyond the time when the student stops attending classes. The students are then living as martial artists, which may or may not have anything to do with putting on a uniform each week.

This paper will focus on teaching to the adult student. This tends to get less attention in black belt discussions about teaching than the challenges presented by the young student. The challenges involved in engaging, managing and developing children and youth can feel more pressing, both because their non engagement can be disruptive to classes and because proportionately there are more of them. Adding to this can be a cultural dynamic from the martial roots of the art that can lead to a belief that each adult student must be responsible for their own learning and path—that the student must come to the art rather than the art to the student.

I believe we can do more to engage the adult learner, however, while not harming the benefits of the ethic of self-responsibility. I think this can happen in a few ways, which I will discuss. Understanding that there are different paths to the art with different motivations behind them enhances the connection of the adult student to

the community. Once engagement has occurred, there is a middle phase where the Instructor's goal is to bring the student's goals into harmony with the art's ultimate goals for mind, body and spirit connection. Once this happens, the student and Instructor are working towards the same goal and the modes of teaching can shift. The expectation of more autonomy can be placed on the student at this milestone. Key elements that may help the Instructor's optimal teaching to the array of adult students will be discussed.

Underlying all of this is our ability to connect the student with the Do. If we can connect the student with the opportunity to use the art to live deeply meaningful and connected lives we have spoken to the core of the human life well lived. As one common method for doing this incrementally is the end of the class message, this paper will intersperse the discussion of the types of students with sample messages which reflect an idea of how the Instructor can make these connections for the particular student type. These samples are in *italics*.

PATHS TO THE ART FOR THE ADULT STUDENT

There are at least seven major types of paths to the art for the adult student in my experience. Each has its own path to the first class and its own opportunities and challenges to the engagement phase. More than one type can be combined in the same student.

Parent:

Perhaps the most common of the groups of adults who begin training, these are adults who found the school because they believe martial arts will be good for their children or their children saw a movie and clamored for classes. Finding the time locked up anyway, these parents frequently start training on a lark, with a slightly amused look on their faces, never imagining this for themselves. Many of these parents have at least a moderate fitness level and a bit of an adventuresome spirit. Their lives are also generally ruled by formidable logistics and demands on their time, often including parenting, child activities and events, marriage, working and household management.

Most typically, this type of student trains as long as the children are interested in the classes. The goal for the Instructor is to encourage an independent connection to the art. This means making a strong case that martial arts are compelling enough to build training into the multiple demands on their time for people who typically value their children's balance of activities over any such balance for themselves.

As long as their child trains in the art, the Instructor has opportunities to have this student experience the value of training for themselves. It will be important that connections between a well balanced life and being an effective parent, spouse and employee are made regularly for this student to see a long term value proposition.

Today we worked on several things that required being fully present in the moment we were in. How many people missed opportunities for counter attacks in free sparring because you couldn't react fast enough? In the "walk in the park" exercise where we turn and pick the right technique for the target, everyone had a hard time reacting as quickly as they could have. Why? Because our minds get tied up in other thoughts other than the moment we are in. If you are evaluating how effective your technique just was, you are not fully present for the one you are doing now. If you are thinking about what time it is or how you wish your partner would hold for a particular technique, your mind is not fully here now and you will be slow and the technique will not be as good as it can be. How often are we all doing that in our lives—doing one thing but thinking about others? Talking with a child and thinking about our work day? Listening to our spouse and checking our text messages? Practice mindfulness here and practice it in your lives—giving your full attention to your children, your spouse, your job and you will be more effective in each of these relationships. Being fully present is a skill that needs repetition, just like anything else.

Seeker

The Seeker is the student who has found Taekwon Do because of its reputation for being a unifier of mind, body and spirit. These students often is drawn to ideas, new experiences and spirituality because of the promise that it will provide personal growth and connection to something bigger than themselves. These students are rapt during the end of class messages that link training with wider aspects of being human. They are not as fed by the physicality of the class as other types might be and can need pushing to plunge into the "body" part of the triad. Getting this student out of their mind can help, as the suspension of literal thought, or the "empty mind" is integral to the Taekwon Do students' advancement. Once the student has that feeling of flow, when body, mind and spirit are aligned with no separate consciousness of any one of them, the training can take them into a place inside themselves they did not know existed.

How many of us have felt stress today at some point? Here is something to consider: most of the time stress is felt because we are bringing the future or the past into the

present moment. Take the stress of being late for instance. I was late to teach a self defense class lately because traffic was so horrible. I felt my stress level rising. And then, because a friend had recently talked to me about this idea, I thought "how am I bringing the future into this moment?" The answer was immediate, I am thinking about the future when I walk into a room of people who have been waiting for me, likely feeling frustrated. Feeling stress about that future moment was not helping them and it sure wasn't helping me. In the moment I was in, nothing was happening. I was warm, comfortable and safe in my car. This thought allowed me to be just in the moment. When I got to the site, I apologized for being late, but was mentally and emotionally able to start the workshop immediately with clear focus. Within 10 minutes everyone had forgotten about the lateness, we were in a new moment together. How much do we burn up ourselves and our relationships with stress coming from the past or the future? Notice the next time your stress level goes up. When you think about the promotion test coming up, are you stressed? Why? Pay full attention to your training and each moment of the test will take care of itself. What's the one big thing that makes the difference between a white and a black belt? Repetition. Take care of the moment you are in, give it your full attention and you will be more fully present, and effective.

Athlete

For the athlete, the promise of strenuous exercise and the accomplishment of physical goals is the draw. These students come in two different sub types which can be quite different. If the adult athlete has previous experience with sports or activities that require skill building to be successful, the physical path to Taekwon Do can feel quite familiar. Coaches would have already worked with them to see the connection between center and force. They could have already experienced and reconciled themselves to the process of undoing what can feel natural in favor of effective technique.

This "letting go" of old ways in favor of the new can be quite frustrating for the second type of athlete who is used to high levels of physical exertion but not with the subtle development of skill. These athletes may be adults who are dedicated to the health club or to running or cycling, without any access to coaches or others who push for a nuanced understanding of optimal technique. These adults can be impatient with slow discussion of the layers underneath living force. They connect physical exertion with strong effort, which can lead to all kinds of troublesome habits in their technique. The lessons of working smarter are key for this student, but the connection between successful technique and relaxed body is going to be difficult for

them. If they are physically strong, this is compounded as they may be able to concretely complete the tasks in class and at tests in the lower ranks even though their methods are missing the point. Giving them early experiences of failure, where might will not triumph, can be important to open up new avenues of understanding. Pairing them with physically smaller seniors can show them through training that mass and muscles are not the only way to powerful force. Finally, as this type of athlete ages, it will be important to teach the connection between good technique and longevity. Being able to stay physically active longer is important to this student.

We worked on delivering techniques tonight from unusual positions. Who had difficulty delivering the power they usually feel? As we deepen our training, our challenge is to simplify where our power comes from. If you can deliver a hard side kick from nyun sogi, but you can't from narani sogi or from a one legged starting point, what does that tell you about your technique? If you need to push off of the floor to deliver power, than it is not purely coming from your center out. As you begin to work on this deepening understanding of how force is created, you are moving out of the beginning phase of training. If you have been training for a while, you will give up the things that allowed you to feel successful as a beginner (turning the right way when doing basics with the group for instance, just breaking the board without caring too much how). Then it is time to challenge ourselves to deepen our training and giving up the familiar in favor of something new. This usually involves failing on the way to new developments. What does it mean to have a beginner's mind? It means to approach our training the way a baby approaches walking: matter of fact about failure, undeterred as the new way of being is attempted again and again.

Bruce Lee

For this type of new student, the primary motivation is the vision of themselves as powerful, invulnerable to threats and often the victorious underdog as played out in countless martial arts movies. The Instructor can have an easier time with the engagement phase with this student, as so many movies show the cryptic Instructor who has the student do things that don't make sense initially, but are revealed to be quite wise later on. The Instructor can enhance this by periodically providing explicit connection between the current exercise and later achievements and/ or between current exercise and sparring success. This works well in linking this student to the ultimate goals of the martial art, unless the desire to achieve individually over others is strong. It is unusual to find the largely ego driven kind of student in UTF schools, as this type would not have chosen a school with no focus on competition or contact sparring.

We worked today on "de-cluttering" our technique—getting all the extra motions out of our execution, no little move of the foot before kicking, no extra steps on our way to a jumping technique, no movement of the arms beyond what is needed for the technique. When we make our selves be still, in mind and in body, we have a chance to tune in to our center at a deep level and to deliver force from our true center. We also become better at dealing with chaos—when sparring two people, your mind being in any place but the absolute moment is disastrous, right? You cannot respond to what is happening in the moment if your mind is evaluating what just happened or guessing what is about to happen, or thinking about what we might be having for dinner when we get home.

It's easy to see how to translate this into our training in our larger lives, right? Where do you add extra motion when it is not needed to live our best lives, indeed when it might be keeping us from living our best lives? Over correcting your child's behavior? Lining up so many logistics in your life that there is no time for stillness? Finding faults out of our irritation with those around us, when we really are trying to connect? As you practice mindfulness here, practice in your life. When you give a moment your full attention, you can act from your center out and interact with others out of your true intention.

Community seeker

There are adults whose primary motivation is a connection to a community and the ethics of the UTF offers this acceptance and belonging. These adults can be somewhat disconnected to community otherwise either because of some mild impairment in their capacity to relate to others or because circumstances have led them to a more isolated period in their lives. If this is the primary motivation, this student can be less ambitious as far as pushing their own limits or tackling their training with eagerness. This student is frequently faithful in their attendance, eager to please the Instructor, often the last person to leave the dojang and very enthusiastic about community events. This student is engaged easily, but can need some pressure from the Instructor to achieve the physical milestones of success along the way.

We are limited by our minds rather than by our true abilities. In jumping today, those who were having difficulty found that looking at the ground means being anchored to it. Believing that you will fail will create failure. In this class, there are two words that are forbidden from being put together: I can't.

Whether you think you can, or think you can't, you are right, as Henry Ford said. Where your mind goes, your life goes.

Self Defense Student

Usually female, a common path to the dojang door is the student who is feeling vulnerable in the world or is aware of the dangerous elements that exist. While there is a mistaken belief that martial arts training is the best way to learn practical self defense, this student often engages easily as they have a strong (and often first) experience of physical power. This student can be quite gratified by the Instructor's assumption that they are powerful. As the student begins to feel that power come through in their technique, a re-enforcing process has begun that can firmly connect the student to the art. These students are quite earnest and hard working as a rule. As this student is often handling multiple other demands of work, family and parenting the chief competing element is their own sense of importance of an activity that is for them alone. Making the connections between training well and living well can mitigate this pull in much the same way as the parent type of adult learner discussed earlier.

We are very aware in our Taekwon Do community of the Junior Senior Relationship. The norms that we develop around the responsibilities of being a Junior and being a Senior help keep our community and ourselves in balance. It is important to learn and to teach, to give and to receive. For those of us who are parents and bosses and leaders, this is no less important. Reflect on how in balance those two roles are. If you are always giving care to your children but don't have relationships that give to you, you will become depleted. If you are always teaching and evaluating at work but not learning or receiving feedback, you will get out of balance.

Over achiever

Often combined with other types, the over achiever adult can be very focused on the external signs of achievement. Very concerned about promotion, the Instructor needs to be very clear about the internal shifts that need to occur for success. The tension between this student's desire to achieve and the art's standard for quality usually surfaces around green belt. At this point the basic groundwork has been laid and the training becomes more explicitly about deepening and not broadening.

We had some students promoted to green belt today. This is the time, after white belt, that it is most common for students to drop out. Why? Because now the training isn't as regularly exciting. There are not new techniques so often; the training now is

about deepening the things you already know rather than learning so many new things. Our minds hate boredom, they seek the new. Our brains get a nice shot of a feel good substance called dopamine every time we take in something new. The biggest obstacle to progress as our training goes on is ourselves, clearly. As our minds get bored and our bodies get tired, what do we choose? When life gets hectic and it's hard to get to class, what do we choose? Make no mistake, there is a reason why there are so few black belts in the world. The path is full of struggles that come from inside ourselves and are difficult to overcome.

THE ADULT STUDENT: DIVERSITY DYNAMICS

As we step back from this non- exhaustive list of paths adults can take to the martial art and the implication for each on motivation and engagement, there are other factors that lay across this categorization that creates differences also. Age and the life stage of the adult is one. It is uncommon but not unheard of to have late life students. Almost all adults fall in either the young adult or midlife adult stage unless the student has crossed over into Instructor or Master status and is dedicating him/herself to the development of the next generation of student, leader and community. Given the inherent impact on the joints of the physical activity of the art unless practiced with a high level of sophistication, engaging the 60 and over new student may be insurmountable.

I find that the differences in teaching to the young adult and mid-life adult are not ones that need as much explicit attention as the differences in motivation and engagement discussed in the last section. While the young adult and the mid-life adult are working through the balance between connection and individuation through the lens of their own stage, the art's focus on having a balance between both allows for natural flexibility by each student. As the tenets lead us to focus both internally and externally and challenge the motivation behind each with the tenet of Love, teaching to the life stage difference is not critical to success in adults as it is in children in my experience.

Gender is the other major difference in the adult student group of course. Each "learner type" discussed in the last section can be populated more by one gender or the other. That said, there are exceptions I can name for each, where a type generally populated by one gender (for instance the "Bruce Lee" type being mostly male) has women who have come in from the same motivation. Consideration of how to teach all adult student types will address this difference.

Finally, culture and ethnicity is an important overlay of difference. I have not found that the differences presented here need adaptation by the Instructor. One advantage that the art has is its origins in Korean culture that is different, generally, from all American students in our UTF schools. We are all exploring the difference between traditions, norms and standards that were developed from a different context and finding how the friction created by that difference is useful for our own growth and the growth of the community. One such difference I mentioned early in this paper-- the cultural norm of the student seeking out the Master and learning without question or complaint from the opportunities given without understanding the underlying reasoning or connection. The American student who comes and pays for classes generally has an opposite viewpoint, that the Instructor is beholden to the student and should be carrying him or her along a path to success.

As the art has evolved in this country, it certainly has come a long way from its origins. To whatever degree we westerners have been able to maintain the original cultural connection, this should be maintained. It would be a mistake to change this part of its original identity as this is one way that martial arts training can benefit adults in ways that other activities do not. Putting primary responsibility on the students for learning will take them far further than conducting things in a way that would be more completely "American."

IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTING

Pulling back and looking at our pool of adult students with their differences and commonalties, where does that leave the UTF Instructor? Where does success lie that engages as many students as possible and gets them successfully into the middle phase? What will help bring their training focus into line with our understanding of the best training and give each the best chance of becoming lifelong martial artists who challenge themselves to live their best lives no matter how long they are attending classes?

In my thinking so far I have landed on some key elements that will evolve and develop as my experience grows. Here are the elements that seem important at this point in my evolution.

See the students

The UTF Instructor has to see the actual students who are present, see their current state of mind and body and spirit, see their motivation for being present, see their strengths and their challenges. The Senior Belt who is first asked to lead class uses

the menu approach: go to the menu of possible activities for each phase of class, pick one and keep going until the time is up. The Instructor teaches effectively when the class develops organically from what actually happens in the room. During the beginning of class when they may be warming up, notice: who is here? What is the tone? What do you know about who is feeling stalled in their training and who is progressing nicely? How did you teach to them last time and is there a balancing of other types of training or focus that would be needed now?

If you have a group that is still in the initial engagement phase and was seeking recreation as a primary motivation, having a class that has no fun in it or sense of accomplishment will not help them decide to come back. If some students are having trouble seeing what challenge they should focus on next, building in a segment where their abilities are challenged can be key. Have a bunch of new students who thought they were going to get exercise? Better not talk them to death! Design activities that have parameters designed to develop good technique and then let them do them strenuously. If you have a focus predominately on your new students you can lose sight of your more senior students' need for development. They will learn from passing on what they know to Juniors, but be sure to direct the seniors' efforts in a way that will maximize that opportunity.

The Instructor needs to be as fully present as the students must be. Feel the class experience from their perspective, and then establish tension between that and where they need to develop. Deliberately choose something that will start from where they are and encourage them down the path you see. You will not always get it just right, but without deliberate attention it will only happen by accident occasionally.

Make connections

Learning that happens from doing is critical, and we always want to have plenty of room for the student to be learning things that we did not intentionally teach them. An effective teaching array also includes, however, making connections for the students so that they can start to see how one aspect builds on another, how this exercise builds to the new ability, how resisting fidgeting builds the mind, how building the spirit builds our bodies, how training in class connects to a better way of living. We must also push ourselves to keep making these connections for our own training.

Develop yourself (never ask students to do what you do not)

I found over the past few years that the balance of my physical activity has trended away from Taekwon Do class and has expanded to add new challenges. While this choice has left me somewhat ambivalent about whether a 5th degree rank is appropriate at this time, I have become clear on the need for Instructors to be pushing their own limits in all areas of themselves. For example, over two years ago I added to my weekly routine Bikram Yoga, a rigorous form of Hatha Yoga involving the exact same set of 26 poses each 90 minute class in a room heated to 105 degrees. In this class, where exactly the same sequence is taught each time, I came up against myself in stark relief and learned lessons that I brought right back to the classes I was teaching in Taekwon Do.

Thought pattern: 1. The Yoga Instructor is having us hold this pose longer than usual, falling out of it is understandable. 2. Margaret, did you have a certain amount of time that you decided you could hold this pose? 3. There I go again, deciding what I was capable of and then keeping myself confined by my own thoughts. Transferrable lesson: How does my mental expectation of success influence what I am able to do.

Thought pattern: 1. This fidgety person is annoying me and making it hard for me to focus. Why can't they stand still and stop sighing? 2. What does that person have to do with you and your ability to focus? 3. Is this person fidgeting to annoy you? 4. No, she is probably wrestling with a busy stressed mind. This has nothing to do with me. Let me send her compassion. Transferrable lesson: In what ways do our interactions with others help us go further? In what ways might they hold us back? How do we let others, and our reactions to them, keep us from achieving?

Instructors must find their own edge and push against it in order to speak to students about facing their own limits. Without this, the tone can become preachy and the connection between us all as learners is lost.

Create Dynamic Tension

The tension between two opposing forces creates growth and change. The Instructor does this intentionally over and over again until the student begins to be comfortable and seeks out the tension on their own. Relax your muscles, and then hit harder. Have a strong center and send power out from it. Empty your mind and focus intently. Maintain a little I and a big I. Do hundreds of punches by not caring about how many punches but caring a lot about each punch. Learn and teach at the same time. The list goes on and on, but creating tension between two forces or concepts that are true at the same time is at the heart of the mystery and effectiveness of training.

Teach to Mind, Body and Spirit

Finally, teaching to the adult student effectively means teaching to all aspects of the student. Black Belts leading classes tend to focus on the physical aspect as it is the easiest aspect to build a class on. They may say that building in classes that push the body in both develop broad and deep technique is the way to involve the mind and spirit. I would disagree but believe that teaching to all three is intimidating as it asks us to plumb our depths as human beings and look at the intersection of our own cognition, physicality and spirituality.

Making these connections can take courage, as the examples we bring up to teach from can be personal. We can often not know how such forays into the larger goal of living deep and meaningful lives will be received by people who came in to take a martial arts class. But this is where we can build the best value proposition for people deciding how to spend their time. We need to be clear that in addition to whatever else we might get from classes and training, that it can also speak to our deepest core. Our best lives can be lived through the Do, the way of fully engaging mind, body and spirit.

The intellectually curious Instructor can also access the wider world of thought about the state of being fully human and the way to live our best lives. Some divergent sources I have found recently: from Eckhart Tolle, "Observe the habitual tendency of your mind to want to escape from the Now. Through self-observation, more presence comes into your life automatically." From Don Miquel Ruiz, The Four Agreements, "Be impeccable with your word.....Don't take anything personally.....Don't make assumption....Always do your best, your best is going to change from moment to moment." Or from Shawn Achor, The Happiness Advantage, who writes about the psychology of happiness and how it creates better work performance. Achor advises some practices that have shown to bring happiness. Among them, are meditate (still the mind), exercise, commit conscious acts of kindness. From Julie Morgenstern who writes about productivity, advice to nurture our physical selves, our relationships and to find ways to escape from our work and other stressors into activities that allow complete escape. Much study has been conducted on flow, the complete absorption into what we are doing as the optimal state. These are modern examples of the kind of thinking about the state of being human that has been going on since humans have been self-reflective. I have had interesting conversations with adult students who find connections between metaphors used in training and teachings from the Torah. We will always be thinking about how to be fully human and the path to this through traditional martial arts

training is clear. But we have to articulate it for the developing student so that he/she can begin to grow their vision, expand their goals and to find ways of using their training to grow themselves.

When I got a promotion into a bigger job about ten years ago, I drove home every night feeling beat up by the demands of the job. There were so many tasks, problems and needs coming at me from several directions. I felt unsuccessful, exhausted and stressed. As I was driving and not thinking about anything in particular, it came to me: I was making a classic beginner's mistake when learning to spar multiple people! I was treating each thing separately, getting caught in the middle and being pummeled. I knew the strategy for this: pull back and look at all opponents as part of one big picture. This allowed effective strategies of lining them up so that I only faced one at a time, moving so that they were in the right position for a double response, managing the room so that I was not cornered. This gave me the strategy I needed, changed my relationship to the challenges I faced and increased my effectiveness exponentially.

I feel that most of my development in the years since earning my fourth degree has been focused on the connection of mind and body. I sense that there are unexplored depths of understanding about the spiritual element and the connection there—most of my experiences with this myself are profound but not yet possible to articulate. It is clear to me, however, that the single largest resource I have had when facing life challenges in my adult life has been what I have built and learned in my training.

These types of connections are what we should strive to offer students and are so much more than what they were typically expecting. The best environment for this kind of connection is created by seeing the students in all their diversity, making connections until they can make them their own, pushing our own limits so that we teach from a place of growing, creating dynamic tension and explicitly teaching to the development of the mind, body and spirit. The Instructor who strives for this will create a path of maximal engagement with the students, and give an opportunity for the willing student to integrate the martial arts as a way of living.