



President's Message



November-December 2007

YOUNG PEOPLE & ITF TAEKWON-DO

This message is addressed particularly to the parents of young children and to our Taekwon-Do teachers

Young people – children, pre-teens, and adolescents – are an extremely important clientele for ITF Taekwon-Do schools. In fact, our young people represent the future of the ITF.

Taekwon-Do is a healthy outlet for the energy that young people seem to have in abundance. In fact, many students are first attracted to Taekwon-Do because of the physical activity. For those who are interested in learning a combat sport, ITF Taekwon-Do offers that... but also much more. We encourage our students to value and cultivate the tenets of ITF Taekwon-Do: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit. Our students are also taught the importance of fully developing all four facets of Taekwon-Do: as a sport, a martial art, a way of life, and as a tool for social development.

When I do grading or conduct other activities in clubs, I like to take some time to talk to the groups of children and adolescents. I ask them two main questions:

The first question is, “**Why do you like practicing Taekwon-Do?**” The most frequent answers from the youngest kids are that they like the free sparring, they like learning the patterns, and they want to become black belts. The adolescents often say that they like the discipline and how it helps them to be more focused. It is interesting to note that in adolescence they become more conscious of the importance of staying in good physical shape. In addition, the girls often say they are interested in learning self-defense techniques.

The second question I ask is, “**Why did you start practicing Taekwon-Do?**” Most of the time the young people say it’s either because they have a friend or a sibling who practices Taekwon-Do or because their parents made them. Sometimes they say they practice Taekwon-Do simply because it’s fun.

Some students are particularly interested in participating in competitions. This means devoting a lot of time and effort to training, but they enjoy the challenge of competition. An added incentive is the opportunity for international travel and to make new friends. For example: In June of this year, hundreds of young people from countries around the world traveled to Quebec City (Canada) to participate in the ITF World Championship competitions and to enjoy a wide range of activities that were organized for them.

As our teachers and parents know, our young students are really proud of the skills they acquire. They work very hard to achieve the goal of earning a black belt and at the same time they are having fun! Teachers and parents also know that the principles and attitudes learned in Taekwon-Do will serve the students well as they progress through their school years and into adult life.

The Benefits of Taekwon-Do for Young People

Experts tell us there are many reasons to encourage young people to participate in a martial art such as ITF Taekwon-Do or in another structured physical activity. It can increase their self-knowledge, build character, and improve leadership skills. Students learn how

to have a healthy life style and that can help to reduce the risk of many health problems later in life.

The benefits of Taekwon-Do training for young children also include increased physical activity, improved listening skills, learning to function in a group and to respect others. All ITF students memorize the Student Oath and recite it at each class. It is important that our teachers make sure that their students understand the meaning of the oath, particularly what it means to “build a more peaceful world”. Of course, the explanation must be adapted to the age of each group of students.

It is often said that participating in sports helps young people to develop a positive attitude and to understand the importance of honesty and sportsmanship. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Much depends on the organization and on the teachers. Teaching young people is an important responsibility.

Elite competitors

I always say that everybody should be able to practice Taekwon-Do. But it takes more than just desire to become an elite competitor. To become a champion, a student needs both talent and excellent coaching. From my personal experience, I believe that a club needs a talent detection program. For example, I added a special box on examination forms that the examiner would check if the student showed unusually strong technical qualities.



This is a good way to identify potential elite competitors, because the examiner is often the person best qualified to determine if a student has the natural talent essential to become an elite competitor. Generally, the student’s parents don’t know a lot about Taekwon-Do, so they cannot tell if their young person has this potential. Even Taekwon-Do teachers are not always able to identify the students who have that potential. This is because the teachers must pay equal attention to all the students in their classes, and also because instructors do not necessarily have extensive competition experience.

I have trained many elite competitors – including world champions – and this was the method I used to identify potential members for my elite team. You need to be looking for them proactively. Having a winning team can bring many advantages to your club. Everyone will be proud of the team’s success and of the instructors who have guided the team. Students who compete at a high level often become leaders in their home clubs. And having an elite competition team attracts positive publicity for your club and for ITF Taekwon-Do.

Safety in Competition

The ITF is very concerned about the safety of all its members and athletes. Though other martial arts and combat sports allow knockouts, the ITF allows only light contact.

It is important to understand that the tournament rules of the ITF have been developed for use at world championships and other competitions at the international level, mostly for Black Belts. Many countries apply different rules for competitions at the local and national levels. For example, where I live in Quebec (Canada), contact to the head and face is forbidden for children and for all the color belts.

The ITF philosophy is reflected in the tournament rules, and this is why we do not tolerate violence. Our students are encouraged to develop good technique and, more importantly, good control.

Teaching the Do to Young People

If Taekwon-Do were just a combat sport, young people would practice it for the physical activity itself and for the possibility to compete against others. Since Taekwon-Do is a martial art, the student will strive to surpass himself or herself rather than making comparisons with others. Keeping the focus on self-development and self-improvement is a sure way to help young students become mentally strong.

This is where Taekwon-Do has a great advantage, because Taekwon-Do is more than a sport. It is based on a philosophy – the Do – that promotes basic human values and has the goal of creating a better and more peaceful world.

ITF Taekwon-Do teachers are now being encouraged to put more emphasis on teaching the Do and to apply its principles in their classes and also in their daily life. Students must be taught not only what behavior is acceptable, but also the principles behind the behavior.



But teaching the Do is not just about teaching moral behavior. It also means assisting our students to develop the positive characteristics that we call the tenets of Taekwon-Do: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit.

For example: How should a teacher react when his student fails an exam or is defeated in competition? I have noticed that some teachers try to comfort their student by telling him not to worry, everything will be OK. The teacher wants to help, and his words do make the student feel better for a while, but teachers need to do more if they want to help students make concrete changes that will lead to success.

To assist our teachers in teaching the Do, for the last four years the ITF has been working with specialists to develop a structured Basic Program for Teaching the Do. This program will be made available to ITF teachers in 2008.

Let's return to the example of the student who has failed an exam: What should the teacher do? Implementing the Basic Program,

- The teacher will identify perseverance as the characteristic that can help his student to be more successful.
- The teacher will help his student to understand what perseverance is, what it means to persevere after failing, to identify the signs of a lack of perseverance and the benefits of persevering. They will look at how perseverance can be applied to situations that arise at home and at school, as well as in Taekwon-Do's environment.
- The teacher will encourage his student to implement specific strategies to improve his perseverance. These strategies include cultivating a positive attitude, making a commitment to improvement, setting goals and making action plans to reach those goals.

The same approach applies to teaching the other tenets, which are all inter-related.

Practicing Taekwon-Do teaches our young people to work to achieve their goals, such as mastering a movement or a technique or participating in a competition. By setting realistic

goals and helping our young students to reach those goals, we are teaching them that success is the result of dedication and hard work. Experience shows that success in Taekwon-Do carries over into other areas of their lives, particularly their school work.

Modify Your Methods When Teaching Young People

The teaching of Taekwon-Do, the Do in particular, must be adapted to the age of the students. For example, even young children can learn to stop and think before acting and to

base their decisions on the basic principles, starting with honesty and respect for others. At the same time, they will also be learning the importance of self-control.

Effective teachers understand that young children learn better by seeing a demonstration of a movement or technique. Just using words to describe what you want them to do is not enough.

For very young children:

It is important that the parents ask themselves:

- Is my child ready?
- Is he or she ready to listen and learn what is being taught?
- Does he or she have the basic motor skills required?



When an activity is not appropriate for the child's cognitive and physical development, the result will be feelings of failure and frustration. This is certainly not what we want for our young people.

Not all children are ready at the same age, so it is up to the parents and teachers to determine when is the right time to start learning Taekwon-Do.

Young children tend to have a short attention span, so classes for them can consist of a relatively short period of instruction and a longer period of structured, supervised activities that the teacher has planned so that they will have the opportunity to practice what they have learned. It is essential that this be more than just time to play. The teacher must explain how what they have learned applies to these activities.

In the martial arts tradition, the teacher tries to correct what his students are doing wrong, but we need to move to a more positive approach so as not to discourage our young people. To motivate our students, we need to encourage them by pointing out what they are doing right, identifying where they could improve, and helping them to find ways to do so.

Involve the Student's Family & School

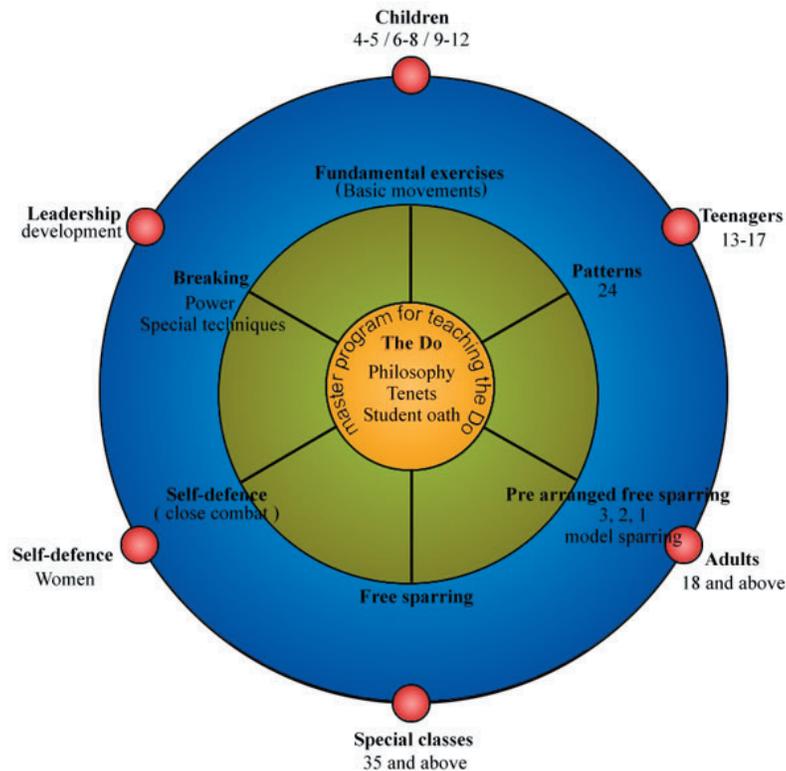
To obtain the best results, all courses must be adapted to the age or skill level of the students and should respond to the needs of those students.

As I mentioned in a previous message, beginner courses that young people and their parents can take together are a great idea, but eventually it is necessary to have separate activities for each group, because their needs and capabilities are different.

Taekwon-Do teachers should try to work with the education system. Ideally, the dojang,

the family, and the school should all work together to educate our young people. That way, the principles of the Taekwon-Do philosophy can be integrated into the student's everyday life at home, at school, at the dojang, and everywhere else.

The Training Circle illustrated below shows various types of classes (the red circles on the outer ring) with what we teach (such as patterns and sparring) on the middle ring. The Do has been placed in the center of the circle because it should be incorporated into our teaching of all types of courses, at all levels and for students of all ages.



A Career in Taekwon-Do

Many young people don't know what they want to do with their lives and how adult life actually works. Even at university, some are still searching for their ideal career.

Teaching ITF Taekwon-Do is an interesting and challenging career. A Taekwon-Do teacher can build his or her own business. There will be opportunities to travel and visit other countries. And a Taekwon-Do teacher earns his or her living doing meaningful work, reaching out to people of all ages and helping them to live a healthier, happier life.

So we should encourage our young students to plan for a career as a Taekwon-Do teacher. They can start by assisting their teachers to teach classes. Then in secondary school and university, they can choose subjects that will be useful in their future career. This would include physical education but also psychology, kinesiology, business administration, marketing, and many others.

One of my goals is to implement in different strategic countries around the world a university program of teacher training with a specialization in Taekwon-Do. In general, universities are now more interested in innovative programs than they were in the past. Solid reference materials and scientific studies about ITF Taekwon-Do already exist, so I am

confident that this goal will become a reality within the next few years.

In My Family

My wife My Nguyen and I have three children who are now adults and doing well. Practicing Taekwon-Do has given all of them the work ethic and the self-discipline necessary to succeed in life.



Our eldest daughter Joliette is 32 years old and holds a 5th degree Black Belt. She is an Occupational Therapist and has a Master's degree in Public Health Management.

She started watching me practice in our basement when she was about three years old. To keep her interested, sometimes I would ask her to help me. For example, I would put a Styro-foam cup on top of her head, tell her to stand very still, and knock the cup off with a precisely aimed kick. Joliette thought that game was lots of fun!

When she was a bit older, I started bringing her to watch me teach Taekwon-Do classes, and soon she wanted to join in.

So she, like her brother and sister, grew up participating in Taekwon-Do activities. After meeting Joliette, François (who later became her husband) began to study Taekwon-Do as well, and now their one-year-old daughter goes to watch both her parents practice.

Recently, Joliette collaborated in the development of the Basic Program for Teaching the Do, and she and François both worked on the organization of the ITF World Championships held here in Quebec City (Canada) in June of this year. François recently earned his MBA (Master's of Business Administration).

Firmly convinced of the benefits of Taekwon-Do, especially for young children, they are planning a career together in Taekwon-Do. Their goal is to start, along with my son Nicolas, who is a 4th degree black belt, a Taekwon-Do school that will put special emphasis on the physical and mental health of children and of the adults of the "baby boomer" generation.

Be a Good Example

Teachers and coaches must always insist that their students show good behavior. They should explain to students who do not act appropriately why that is not acceptable.

And of course, teachers, coaches, and parents must all set a good example in every way. This means that we must demonstrate the characteristics that we tell our students they need to cultivate: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit. Our example will help them to make good decisions based on principle and to have the courage to do what is right even if others put pressure on them.

Here are few examples:

- If the local law forbids the consumption of alcohol by people under a certain age (18 or 21 or whatever age it is in your country) teachers, coaches, and parents will respect the law and not give alcoholic drinks to underage students.
- Teachers and coaches will demonstrate honesty and integrity during competitions.

Students need to learn to give their best performance every time. Sure, everyone wants to win, but they must play fair. No one enjoys losing, but we can teach our students how to learn from the experience even if they do lose.

If a teacher or coach encourages his students to cheat, his students may win in competition, but what effect will cheating have on them? They will become confused and lose respect for that teacher or coach. It is essential that we teach them to be honest and act with integrity, and the best way to teach is to be a good model for them.

- No one knows everything, so teachers and coaches must show their willingness to continue studying to improve their knowledge and skills. We all make mistakes, but we should not be ashamed to acknowledge our mistakes and work to remedy them. This will demonstrate honesty and humility – a good example for our students.

We all know that friends are very important to young people. They have a great need to feel part of the group, and this can lead them into unfortunate situations. But, if their friends are all involved in Taekwon-Do activities, Taekwon-Do will become their way of life. They will learn basic universal values and how to live by them. The Do is an excellent guide and applying its principles will give our young people the courage to resist any pressure from others to get involved in unhealthy or unlawful activities.

Teachers: Remember that young people listen to you. They look up to you and follow your example. ITF Taekwon-Do teachers have a responsibility to give their students much more than just technical training. You want to inspire them to be successful in Taekwon-Do and in life. So, it is important to strive to learn more about the psychology of young people and to search out new methods that will help you become a more effective teacher.

Furthermore, we need to help our young students to develop their leadership skills. The teaching structure of ITF Taekwon-Do integrates the Confucian concept of personal development, which can be described as four stages: to be, to behave, to do, and to lead. Teachers should pay special attention to helping their students to progress and improve their leadership skills. With guidance, even young students can learn to become good leaders. The students, the club, the ITF, and the community will all benefit from this leadership training,

Keep Them Motivated

Young people will remain motivated if their Taekwon-Do activities are dynamic, if they enjoy training, and if they can measure their progress by concrete achievements. They will be encouraged if other family members participate or show interest, if they feel part of the group, and if their teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic.

On the other hand, if young students are bored in class, if they repeatedly fail to reach unrealistic goals, or if the teacher embarrasses them in front of the other students, they will soon become discouraged and drop out.

In Norway:

When I visited Norway last year I noticed that there are a lot of young people in Master Per Andersen's organization (NTN), and a large number of adolescents. Because it is often difficult keeping adolescents interested, I asked how he does it.



Master Andersen explained that he has made an effort to create a welcoming atmosphere for adolescents.

Many young people decide to learn Taekwon-Do because they have been impressed by a Taekwon-Do demonstration and want to learn to perform spectacular techniques. They are very enthusiastic at the beginning, but after they earn their Black Belt, there is a waiting period of 18 months before passing the exam for the second degree Black Belt and a further two years for the level after that. It is important to keep them progressing by setting goals and motivated during these waiting periods.



To do this, Master Andersen organizes a range of activities (a school magazine, parties on various occasions, and others) and the young people are encouraged to bring their friends to these events.

He also uses music, particularly the type of music his students enjoy, in these activities. The right music can raise the energy level and create a positive atmosphere.

Obviously, Master Andersen's up-to-date approach works. His students are highly motivated and happily involved in Taekwon-Do activities.

As I mentioned in a previous message, at our school here in Quebec we respect the waiting periods prescribed by the ITF, but we also evaluate all our Black Belt students every six months during those waiting periods. This works well since for each degree from first to fourth degree, there are three patterns to learn and master. Frequent evaluations give the young student regular feedback, helping them to readjust their training, remain motivated, and reach their goal of passing the exam when the waiting period is over, so they can move to the next Black Belt degree.

We all enjoy receiving praise for what we do well, so teachers should be generous with praise for work well done and goals reached. (It would be counter-productive to give praise to everyone for everything they do.) At our school we have had positive results from a program of monthly "Méritas" awards based on a point system; points are earned for performance at exams or in competition, for respecting the credo, and for academic performance among other criteria.

In Conclusion

Our young people represent the future for the ITF, and we have been working on several projects that will be of particular interest for them.

For the children, a committee has been working on the concept and contents for a "Kid's Corner" on the official ITF Website. Our Website is currently aimed at adults, but this new section will offer information and activities specifically for children as well as information for their parents.

For the adolescents, we will be introducing an Exchange Program. They will have opportunities to visit other countries, to get to know Taekwon-Do students in those countries, and to train with them.

ITF Taekwon-Do is an excellent product that offers positive benefits to people of all ages, but it is a great advantage to start young.

I strongly encourage all parents, teachers, and coaches to continue to support their young people as they learn to live the Taekwon-Do way of life.

I sincerely believe that the complete Taekwon-Do program – when taught in conformity with the ITF by competent, experienced instructors and reinforced by appropriate support from the student’s parents and school – can help even our youngest students to develop a strong mind in a healthy body and, thus, to become good citizens helping to build a better world.



Master Trần Triều Quân
President of ITF

Pictures 3, 5 & 6 are courtesy of NTN Trondheim Taekwon-Do Klubb

