

Teaching the "Do".

Those testing for 5th and 6th dan in December 2011 were asked to write on the subject of the Do. Several topic options were given to choose from. These are their essay. (Mark Banicevich's withheld for the time being due to it containing un-released ITF information)

Mr Matthew Breen

What are the challenges of teaching the *Do* in the 21st century, and how do we address them?

We don't notice gradual change very well, in something we're constantly exposed to.

A child today looks essentially identical to how he looked yesterday, and yesterday he looked the same as the day before. And over the course of a year, we don't realise that he's changing at all... until we get out the photograph from a year ago and are confronted by the compounded total of three hundred and sixty five days of gradual change.

It can be disconcerting.

The culture of New Zealand society and the culture of our organisation is something we're immersed in constantly – day after day, year after year – and so it's unsurprising if we don't notice the gradual shifts and changes of attitude that occur within them, until we're confronted by the evidence.

I can still recall a moment that highlighted for me that there had been a significant realignment of attitudes within our culture – one I had not been aware of as it slowly evolved around me. And it took the equivalent of that old photograph to drive the point home.

In the early 90s, the Auckland Regional Team had a coach who endeavoured to draw out our top performances. His key strategy was based around negativity – he would belittle our efforts; scathingly criticise our fitness, willpower, and motivation; abuse our characters; and scare us with stories of how we'd be crushed by the opposition. And we knew he was daring us to prove him wrong... so we did. Every time he told us we were weak, we'd be stronger. Every time he told us we couldn't do it, we did it. Because we weren't going to let him be right when he told us we weren't good enough.

And while it was certainly fashionable at the time to say we hated him, we really didn't. The training worked, and we knew it was how he would make us good enough to win.

That coach took a long break from Taekwon-Do, and returned some years later. And some of us who had competed on that team under his leadership were now coaching Auckland ourselves, and we invited him to run the team training one evening.

"This will wake them up," we thought.

And he ran it the same way he had ten years earlier. Right away, it was obvious to us as coaches that it wasn't going to work. In ten years, the coach hadn't changed, but the students

had. Instead of an immediate deference to whatever the authority figure dished out – because he was the one in charge and you do as you're told – we could feel the atmosphere in the room was one of disapproval. Ten years earlier, the response to “You aren't good enough!” was “Yes we are, and we'll prove it to you”. But this time, the response was “Who do you think you are?”, and “What gives you the right to talk to us like that?” The students did as they were told, but they didn't thrive on the abuse the way we had the first time around.

Even more interesting to me than the students' reaction was my own. Because I watched him teach that class, and my thought was “He can't talk to them like that!” Despite the fact that he'd talked to *me* like that, and it had worked, I was horrified. In ten years, it wasn't just the attitudes, and the culture, and the students that had changed – I'd changed too.

There's a saying (attributed over the years to various authors including Albert Einstein and Benjamin Franklin): “Insanity is repeating the same behaviour and expecting a different result.” But sometimes, it's expecting the same behaviour to provide an identical result that's crazy.

One of the ways that 21st century culture has changed is an increase in the volume of unsolicited information we all deal with every day – television advertising, telemarketing, banner ads, spam. And just as bacteria can develop a resistance to antibiotics, so too do we evolve our own defenses against unwanted content – MySKY, Caller ID, popup and spam blockers filter out a lot of it, but we also become very good at simply ignoring anything that isn't relevant to us.

The majority of our students take up Taekwon-Do primarily for its physical aspects – exercise and fitness, self defence, and competition. Tournaments in particular have ramped up in significance in New Zealand in the last decade, culminating in the World Championships victory in Wellington 2011. With the focus on *Tae* and *Kwon*, we as instructors run the risk that the non-physical, philosophical aspects of the art – the *Do* – will be perceived (perhaps subconsciously) as unsolicited additional content and caught up in the students' mental spam filters.

This gives us two challenges to deal with: *Perception* and *Presentation*.

Firstly, in order to have the *Do* embraced by the students, we must ensure that their perception of it is as integral to the Art... not as a cosmetic layer tacked on over the ‘truly vital’ kick-and-punch. Reference to the philosophical aspects of the Art in advertising, promotional material, and mission statements are insufficient – every class must include focus on the *Do* to some degree in order to reinforce its integral and inalienable status.

Secondly, the presentation of the Philosophy and Moral Culture chapters in the Condensed Encyclopedia is not well-suited to today's students. The General's thoughts on these topics yield a dense wall of text – daunting to a generation conditioned by Twitter, SMS, and Facebook updates to expect information in easily-digestible chunks.

While the General's writings remain available for the dedicated student, we can make the *Do* more accessible to the masses by distilling out key points and core concepts into a set of concise axioms, no longer than a pattern meaning – the sort of length that allows a student to post one that speaks strongly to them as their Facebook status, for example. With this set of philosophies available, it becomes easy for an instructor to pick one to highlight in each

class, or each month, or each term. Instead of tackling the entire Moral Culture chapter in one go, the instructor can focus on a single key concept, and relate it to the themes of the classes and to the students' daily lives. Once the *Do* becomes *relevant* to the students, it's less likely to be automatically thrown in the spam folder by their mental filters.

Our society and the attitudes of our students are constantly evolving, and our approach to teaching must evolve along with them. Just because we believe the *Do* to be important won't suffice to impart that same belief to our students – "Because I said so" isn't always a good reason for today's members. Integration of the *Do* with the rest of the syllabus, rather than separation, will be key.