

How to Teach Martial Arts to Adults and Kids Without Losing Your Mind

**A quick start guide to
understanding why
adults and kids learn
differently and how to
cater to each for
maximum results**

By Jason Stanley
www.KarateTeaching.com

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	Page 5
2.	The Most Common Mistake Instructors Make	Page 7
3.	The Biggest Mistake Instructors Make	Page 13
4.	The Solution	Page 18
5.	Summary	Page 23
6.	Recommended Reading	Page 24

Introduction

How would you like teaching to be easy? How would you like to have an abundance of ideas to keep your students enthused and your classes buzzing with excitement?

For many of us teaching adults can be nerve-wracking and teaching kids can be a headache, but with what you're about to learn you'll gain an understanding as to why adults need to be taught differently to teens, who need to be taught differently to kids.

You're just about to discover the "drivers" for each and how to cater to all of your classes to improve skill sets and performance.

The result will be an increased enthusiasm from all, greater student retention, and a severely decreased stress level for you – the teacher.

And less stress is a good thing, right?

Just before we get started, let me share a little of my own experience so you understand why I might be qualified to share this information with you...

I first started teaching in 1993. My first experience "flying solo" was with an adult class one night when my instructor was unable to attend.

I was excited but extremely anxious about what I was going to teach. I scribbled some ideas down on a piece of paper and nervously took my list onto the floor with me, which of course didn't instill any confidence in my students.

I bumbled and stumbled my way through class, modeling as best I could what my instructor did and referring back to my list to see what to do next. My instructor made it look so easy, but what I learned from that class was that teaching was a heck of a lot more difficult than I initially thought.

Ten years later in 2003, I opened my own school here in southern California, teaching up to 30 classes per week.

Over the last 5 years teaching full time, I’ve racked up over 5,000+ classes of floor time, in which the learning curve has been steep but very rewarding.

This is a huge difference in experience when compared to the part-time, twice per week schedule I used to carry out for my instructor back in 1993. Back then I taught maybe up to 100 classes per year – now I teach around 1,500.

Over the years I’ve experienced a lot of frustration, made a heck of a lot of mistakes, and at the same time developed some excellent ideas, concepts and methods to aid in the learning process.

To further build my teaching skills in 2005 I became a certified professional trainer with [Peak Potentials](#) as a Train the Trainer graduate.

Now with 22 years martial arts experience and 15+ years of teaching, I want to share with you some of the key points to improving your classes and how to avoid the common pitfalls new instructors (and some stubborn ones who refuse to change) make.

I’d like to acknowledge and thank my instructors: Richard Callaghan, Tommy Morris and T. Harv Eker. From each of you I’ve learned so much and without you none of this would be possible.

So now let’s jump right in and see...

The Most Common Mistake Instructors Make...

The most common problem I see instructors making is that they try to group all students together.

A local Tae Kwon Do school in my area teaches from ages 2 (yes, 2 years old – can you believe it?) up to 70 years old in a single 2 ½ hour long class twice per week.

Furthermore the class isn't divided by rank or age.



Now this is an extreme case of poor structure in my opinion. And while most of us don't use the "one size fits all" concept to teaching martial arts, many schools only have 2 sizes.

Some schools split classes into "adults" and "kids". Others keep the ages all together but split into "beginners" and "advanced".

Some schools offer to let the parents train with the kids to increase student numbers because the parents are looking for an activity to do with their children.

These might seem like good ideas in the beginning but in the end will cause frustration and a decreased overall skill level.

Here’s Why Class Structure is So Important

If we look at the way martial arts is most commonly taught, it’s through a fear-based, militaristic system where the fear of not performing, or not getting something right results in punishment – sometimes extreme punishment.

This model isn’t suitable for most schools and modern day martial arts. And you don’t have to be a genius to realize that traditionally martial arts weren’t taught to kids. Martial arts weren’t designed for children at all.

They were designed as Martial (fit for combat) Arts (refinement of technique) to teach skills to villagers to defend homes and towns, and to armies to help in conquering and defending countries.

This is a far cry from teaching kids basic self defense, confidence, and discipline, or how to win a tournament trophy. At the end of the day as an instructor you might teach an adult some serious self defense techniques that could take the life of an assailant. And most adults have the maturity to realize the seriousness of the potential of what they’re really learning, whereas many kids don’t.

Key Point: 40 year olds learn differently to 14 year olds, who learn differently to 4 year olds.

Each group has different drivers, or a different motivation for training. Each group also has different goals and different learning processes. To lump everyone together in one class and to expect good results is naïve.

"The older we become, the more serious we become about life. An adult laughs an average of 15 times per day; a preschooler laughs an average of four hundred times."

- Source: The definitive guide to body language,
by Alan & Barbara Pease

What's appealing to a 4 year old is completely different to what a 14 year old finds intriguing. And the hard work ethic and willingness to push the limits with an adult can't be applied successfully to a child.

Yet so many schools continue to mix adults and kids in the same class and then wonder why the standard is low and the class numbers are small.

As a teacher if you're using this model, I highly recommend that you try splitting your class. Separate your classes into 3 groups for maximum learning absorption. The model I use is 4-7 years, 8-14 years and 15-adult.

Now when I'm teaching each of these groups I can cater to the different thought processes, different motor skill levels and different drivers for each class.

A class for adults (15 & up) should obviously be more serious, more physically intense and more technically based than a junior class (8-14 yrs).

A peewee class (4-7 yrs) should be taught in a way to utilize the creativity of a child's mind for best results.

And a junior class needs to be taught at a level somewhere in between.

What Motivates Martial Arts Students?

Ask yourself what drives little kids? If you don't know or can't think of anything, I have a simple solution for you... just ask some 5 year olds what they like about karate!

You'll get all kinds of answers but the common theme will be FUN. It's not for self defense – they don't even know what that means. It was their parents who filled out the form and told you that's the reason why their kids are training.

Kids are incredibly creative and so they love to learn in a way that stimulates that part of them. They don't like standing there doing 25 minutes of repetitions so they'll turn their brain off and not absorb a thing!

Remember their main driver is FUN. They want to be like the Power Rangers or their favorite video game or TV superhero. They don't care about the history of Okinawa. They don't want to know the importance of hip dynamics when making technique. They couldn't care less about the meaning of the kata.

Now ask some older kids and young teens why they like karate and you'll get a different variety of answers. Some will also tell you because it's fun, while others want to learn how fight. Some just like that they feel more confident and want to be part of a group. But rarely does a kid say they want to do karate to increase their fitness or to stay out of trouble. Again, those reasons are why the PARENT wants their child to do karate.

When you ask an adult the same question, the most common answer is for self defense, followed closely by wanting to get fit, tone up and lose weight. So use these 2 factors to enhance your classes. For adults if class is practical, intriguing, hard work and rewarding then they will attend.

However this doesn't mean that your adult class should be so serious that it's not fun either. Don't you like to have fun? I know I do. And I'm sure you do too. And although adults come to training often for

very serious reasons, it's important to have them feel as though they enjoyed class. A little humor here and there and a friendly yet serious environment is a good model.

Do you see how each of the different groups WANTS something different from martial arts training?

And that's one reason why so many schools fail when it comes to teaching children. Instructors try to teach kids like they teach adults, or vice versa when really they need to be taught differently because they have different needs, wants and levels of understanding.

Bottom line is this:

Adults like to train with adults so they don't have to hold back when sparring or applying self defense technique. They like to train hard, be serious and get a good workout without worrying about injuring a child.

Kids will beg to come to your class as long as it's fun.

And parents will force kids to do something if they think it's good for them... but those are not necessarily the kids you want in your class.

Classes are so much easier for you as a teacher when your students want to be there, so teach in a way that makes it FUN for kids. Likewise, teach your adults in a way that serves their more SERIOUS needs.

"Different ages have different drivers. To become a better teacher, communicate at their maturity level. Don't try to make a 5 year old act like an adult, or teach your adults in the same class as your kids!"

How to Further Refine Your Class Structure

To further enhance the learning experience and ease of teaching for you, split your classes into 3 different ranks - Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced.

"Wait a minute!", I can hear you say. "I only have 14 students in total. If I split them up into 9 groups I'll have 1.55 people per class!"

That's a good point... and you should only split the age groups once you have sufficient numbers to fill each of the classes. First you might just split into "Beginner" and "Advanced" groups for each age group. Then as your student numbers increase, add an "Intermediate" class also.

Ask yourself, "What is the minimum number of students in any single class I'm willing to teach?" Then once you reach a little OVER that number, split your classes. The reason I say "over that number" is that you'll usually lose a couple due to the change in class times. However, don't worry – in the long term you'll gain far more students through an improved structure than you would ever have been able to handle with your old format.

(To learn even more about structuring your classes, increasing your student retention and modeling a hugely successful business model check out the Recommended Reading section at the end of this publication.)

Once you have divided your classes into adults, juniors and peewees and then split each age category into advanced, intermediate and beginner levels you will have an excellent base to work from.

You can cater to the different age and experience levels and your students will get so much more from class.

Now you just have to avoid...

The Biggest Mistake Instructors Make!

In my experience the biggest reason people quit training in martial arts is because of boredom. Boredom is an emotional pain. And when something becomes painful people avoid it like the plague.

For people to keep on training the pain/pleasure scale needs to be tilted in favor of the pleasure side.

People will continue to do something as long as the pleasure outweighs the pain. So to keep your students longer, cater to their needs and make their classes enjoyable.

Before adopting my current teaching methods, I know I lost 100's of students over the years because I let boredom creep into my classes. And I also see other instructors set in their ways believing that teaching the “traditional way” is best - believing that the masters were never to be questioned – that they were simply 100% correct.

This is not said to disrespect our martial arts forefathers, but to realize that times, cultures and drivers have changed. Some training methods once deemed worthy and the only way to develop a particular skill or flexibility are now less favored by better educated instructors.

For example, when I first started martial arts we followed what our instructor learned from his instructor – to stretch with a partner. However after I read Thomas Kurz's “Stretching Scientifically” I realized why stretching with a partner is a BAD idea. Your partner cannot feel the extent of your muscles stretching and should NEVER be the one pushing you further. By the time they react to your feedback, injury may have already occurred.



Common sense would suggest this might have been a bad idea in the first place, yet so many people follow blindly with what was handed down to them, myself included.

Same goes for doing the same thing in every class and learning exclusively through repetitions. True, as success coach Tony Robbins says, "Repetition is the mother of skill" – with which I wholeheartedly agree. However, realize too that repetition is also the mother of boredom.

And as we've discovered boredom leads to pain which leads to lower class attendance.

So What's the Trick to Learning While Keeping it Enjoyable For All?

There are many ways outside the scope of this e-book, but one trick is to disguise your repetitions.

Students still need to repeat techniques to develop muscle memory. And while some people argue that it takes a few hundred repetitions to develop skill, others say a few thousand are required.

"Whatever you know best is what you'll do under duress."

For example, consider the simple action of catching a ball. It's a learned skill that you practiced hundreds, perhaps thousands of times. Now if someone tossed a ball at you, your reaction (or subconscious technique) would be to shoot out your hand and grab it. Guaranteed a small toddler won't yet possess this skill. Thrown a ball it's more likely the ball will bounce off the toddler's head leaving them dazed like a stunned mullet.



Learning martial arts is similar. Each technique must be developed to a point where students don't think but simply act. However, making people stand in line and practice punching or kicking 100 times each for 20 techniques is a monotonous way to learn - particularly when every class follows that same repetitious format. Basics, line work, kata. Basics, line work, kata. Basics, line work, kata. Boring, boring, boring... painful.

Adults might put up with this in the short term but eventually they'll become bored. Try teaching like this to kids and your class will shrink faster than a burning candle.

Ways to Avoid Boredom

Now of course the way to disguise repetitions is to use drills and exercises that contain the techniques that you're trying to develop. Practicing punching fresh air teaches you how to become really good at punching fresh air, but doesn't teach you much else. So drills that include a partner or a group of people are essential.

Drills I use in my classes are broken down into three basic categories:

1. Individual Exercises
2. Partner Exercises
3. Group Exercises

For the development of skill a good mix of each of the 3 categories is required. Individual exercises like basic repetitions are okay for some parts of your class. Partner exercises take the learned skill to the next level and group exercises take the skill one level higher again.

For example, let's consider making a simple reverse punch. Here's how the drills may differ:

Individual Exercise - might be simply standing there practicing punching fresh air in front of the mirror.

Partner Exercise – might be using your partner as a target to help focus technique and teach distance.

Group Exercise – might be a block & counter type drill where one person blocks and counters the incoming technique with reverse punch against 5 different attackers from different directions.

Notice that each of these drills builds on the previously learned skill. This is what I call the *Compounding Teaching Principle* or CTP.

Of course in this simple example an advanced student could jump right into the group exercise and perform at the required standard. However, someone who hadn't yet learned reverse punch would fail miserably because the basic skill isn't yet developed. That would be like expecting a toddler to play baseball before they can catch or throw.

This is why it's so important to split your classes and design your drills for each skill level. There is little value in having a black belt repeat simple drills again and again and again when the skill is already learned. Occasional repetitions of a simple drill are okay to keep basics embedded in the mind, but repeating the same thing over and over at a lower skill level does little for improvement of higher grades.

This is the problem when teaching beginners, intermediates and advanced levels all in one class. If you aim at a low skill level, the higher levels get bored because they feel as though they aren't

improving or getting any better. If you aim too high, the lower grades become frustrated because they can't achieve what you're asking them to do...



The Solution?

You already know it. I keep saying it but here it is again... split your classes and design drills for each level, and use the CTP. This method will seriously change your teaching life.

Here's a gem for you: When teaching a new technique use the CTP. First have your class do the technique as an individual exercise, followed with a partner-based drill and finish with a group drill. This is an excellent way for you to structure your class and for students to gain repetitions without the boredom.

How to Tone Down Adult Drills So Kids Enjoy Them and Learn...

Now that we know that kids, juniors and adults have different requirements it's time to modify adult drills so kids enjoy them and learn effectively.

How do we do that?

We do it by catering to their shorter attention span and by ADDING CREATIVITY to the drill that will stimulate their EMOTIONS.

For example let's say you want to know how to get kids to stand there and do basic technique repetitions. In this example we'll contrast the 3 different classes to illustrate the differences in the drill.

For adults – Simply counting and having them punch to the count is usually fine because adults are more serious and want to work hard and understand why reps are important.

For juniors – Cut down the number of reps and have more frequent breaks between sets, because juniors tend to have shorter attention spans than adults and need the breaks to reset their focus.

For peewees – Make it a game. Kids love games and learn from them because it's FUN. I get my kids to make their basic repetitions using a game called "The Copy Game".

Using the CTP...

It works like this...

In the Copy Game the peewees must copy EXACTLY what I do. I ask them to watch both my hands and feet. I tell them also to pay attention to the stance and to copy my actions.

We do three 60 second rounds with a 10 second break between each. Each round uses the CTP and becomes more difficult than the previous.

So the first round might be from ready stance where I'll do a variety of punches and strikes. In round 2, I'll add some kicks without changing the stance. And in round 3, I'll step into forward stance and repeat the strikes, punches and kicks that we did in rounds 2 and 3.

In this drill we're using short intervals because of the shorter attention span. We are also communicating at their level, by stimulating their emotions and making it FUN. Plus the kids are getting their repetitions without knowing it.

From this example you can see that by taking an adult exercise, then reducing the number of reps, increasing the number of intervals, and adding emotion to it by making it a game, it's possible to disguise repetitions and turn it into a kid-suitable exercise. Using this concept you can easily teach adults and kids without becoming frustrated.

Let me give you 2 more examples...

Let's say you want to teach a peewee some basic evasion and to keep their hands up.

We would first take a drill like "Duck, Jump, Move, Hit" which works like this... (If you own any of my "Dynamite Drills Ebooks" this will be familiar).

Duck, Jump, Move, Hit

This is a fun drill for agility and is great for use with older kids and young teens as well as peewees.

Students stand in a line and perform the drill one at a time. Person #1 (at the head of the line) must perform the commands as the teacher shouts them - jump, duck, move or hit. The teacher has the padded stick in one hand and a focus mitt in the other.

As soon as Person #1 has completed one command, another immediately follows. The teacher will call 4-6 commands in any one set. Then Person #1 moves to the end of the line and it is the next person's turn.

"Duck" - The stick is swung at the head. Students must duck.

"Jump" - The stick is swung at the legs. Students must jump.

"Move" - The stick is jabbed toward the body. Students must move to the side.

"Hit" - Students must punch a focus mitt held as a target.

Advanced Method

Students must close their eyes while performing the task.

For Small Children...

Call it the "Defeat the Troll Game" in which they may not pass until they successfully evade each attack and finish with a punch. After they successfully defeat the troll (you), they may

proceed to run around some cones, or jump over a bridge made of pads, etc. before returning to the end of the line.

For Adults...

You can make it more serious by replacing the padded stick with a real one, or simply throw a hook punch instead when you call "duck". For the "move" command, simply make a front kick at full speed. For the "jump" command, try to sweep their legs.

Do you see how the same basic drill can be slightly modified for use with all ages while serving their basic yet differing needs?

Let me give you one final example from my "125 Dynamite Drills E-book"

The Stepping Balance Drill

In this drill students need a soccer cone, pad, small hoop, or anything else they can balance on their head safely.

This is a drill for developing focus while stepping.

Here's how it works:

Have your students place the object of your choice on their heads. Starting at one side of the room they must step from one stance to the next balancing the object. If the object falls, they must return to the starting position.

This exercise helps students maintain focus during their transition from one side of the room to the other. If they lose focus for just a split second and look the wrong way, or look down the object will fall.

I do this with my students and start with small plastic rings 6 inches wide (they were part of a ring toss game). Then if the student is successful they are "upgraded" to a small plastic

soccer cone. Once they are successful at level 2, they are upgraded to a focus mitt which is the most difficult of the three objects to balance.

Advanced Method

Have your students step backwards doing the same. Try this with the different stances of your style.

For a greater challenge, have another student try to distract the first by waving their hands in front of them, talking, telling jokes, etc. so long as the second student doesn't physically touch the first and force the object to fall.

For Adults you can start immediately with a focus mitt. Once they can do the basic stepping, have them do it while making a technique, like lunge punch, front kick, etc.

Can you see how this drill serves the needs of all 3 age groups?

Adults like it because it's a challenging drill that refines and improves technique.

Kids like it because it's a challenge and they want to pass to the "next level" – just like a video game. When they pass "level 1" with the ring, they'll come running over to you saying, "Sensei, I did it!" at which point you can take their ring and give them a cone, and so on.

Do you see how this drill uses the CTP differently for both groups?

Pretty neat, huh?

Summary

I think by now it should be clear that it's not hard to teach adults or kids. However it does take patience and practice! Of course there is a lot more to it, but what you've learned from this e-book has given you an excellent base to grow from.

- You now understand why kids and adults learn differently by realizing their different drivers
- You've also learned how to breakdown your classes by age and rank for maximum learning potential
- You've discovered the *Compounding Teaching Principle* (CTP) and how to use this in your classes
- You've unearthed the biggest secret to teaching kids – making it FUN by attaching EMOTION and using CREATIVITY
- And finally, you've learned how to ramp up or tone down basic karate drills to be more serious or more fun for the different age groups.

I hope you enjoyed this e-book and start to use these concepts, ideas and methods in your classes. Utilize them and you'll see immediate positive changes in the enjoyment and performance of your students.

Enjoy!

- Jason

Jason Stanley
www.KarateTeaching.com

Recommended Reading

"The KarateTeaching.com Blog"

Check out my KarateTeaching.com Blog where I share teaching and marketing ideas to help you become a better martial arts teacher and business owner.

See it at: www.KarateTeaching.com/blog

"The Martial Arts Early Learning System"

Written by 10-time Australian champion and national kumite coach, Marco Mazzanti. In this e-book Marco reveals the exact system that he used to grow his struggling school from less than 100 students to a mind-blowing 530 students in just 3 years!

You'll learn Marco's awesome business system for increased student retention and marketing, without compromising your high standards. I highly recommend this if you want to increase your students' skills through a clearly defined approach, or if you want to grow your school and make the jump to becoming a full time instructor.

Check it out at www.EarlyLearningSystem.com

"The Fighting Secrets Revealed Home Study Course"

Learn the strategies and tactics of world class coaches and international fighters. In this 165 page step by step home study course you'll improve your sparring skills for both the dojo and tournament.

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