

Dear WJKA Instructors

I am writing this article in my capacity as the Technical Advisor of the WJKA. I would like to bring forward some thought and observations regarding technical aspects of teaching and training not as a criticism but to emphasize certain points that we may be missing or not correcting in our teachings and our own practice.

I would like to start off by stating I am not going to go into great detail but I want to use three stances (Zenkutsu Dachi, Kiba Dachi, and Kokutsu Dachi) to emphasize my points and also some Kihon basics as well.

I would also like to state that many dojos don't show the applications of the stances. In other words what are their purposes? Why do we need to practice them? The reason I picked the three aforementioned Stances is that most students and instructors understand their purpose and how to do them correctly. However many Karateka don't do them correctly which can lead to poor power and speed and possible knee injury. Further when watching tournaments kumite or even kumite in the dojo I generally only see three stances being used, Zenkutsu, Kiba and Neko Dachi. What about all our other stances why aren't they used? Why do we practice Sanchin Dachi, Sochin Dachi, Hangetsu Dachi and others if we don't use them in kumite? Are they only for exercise or building muscles? I know that you all know the reason for this but do our students know the answer? Do they understand the reason for doing one stance over another? I think in many cases not. As an example of this I would like to start with Kiba Dachi. In many cases when doing Kiba Dachi (while practicing Kihon as I realize we modify the stances by standing higher when doing kumite) the feet are not in the correct position. It seems a minor point if one or both feet are turned out a little but the stance is immediately compromised if this happens. If you think of Kiba Dachi like an Arch Bridge, <http://intrepidberkeleyexplorer.com/Page27Q.html> you can see the design of the bridge is such that the more the weight, ie cars going over it, the more the structure pushes back preventing collapse. Kiba Dachi is the same. Try standing in a good Kiba Dachi and try to move downwards without breaking the integrity of the stance. You will quickly realize the stance won't allow you to do this. However if you transition into Shiko Dachi now you can easily do this. Of course you can't do this in a tournament as it isn't allowed but in a real situation preventing someone from throwing you and transitioning to throw them is a reality. However if you turn one or both feet out even slightly the bridge is broken and will it will fall. Moreover I see in many cases the student allows the knees in this stance to fall inward slightly. This not only breaks the integrity of the stance it also leads to damage to the knees. Knees are not meant to move sideways and when they do especially over time it leads to damaged knees. I see this same problem with Zenkutsu and Kokutsu Dachi as well as other stances. As instructors we must make every effort to ensure our students understand and are doing the stances correctly.

Let's look at Zenkutsu Dachi. It is done with 60/40 split of weight on the front leg and back leg. In many cases the student is not doing this (I am talking in practicing Kihon). I see this especially when the student is doing multiple kicks on the spot. Their hip is slightly back from where it should be due to the fact that there isn't 60 percent of weight on the front foot, so before they can kick they move the hip forward in order to kick and then place it back in the same position, so the next kick has to be done the same way.

This causes them to do a shuffling motion when kicking which of course is wasted motion as well as an inefficient kick. The student tries hard and comes away feeling good having had a great workout but he may as well have gone to an aerobics class as he wasted his karate practice by building incorrect muscle memory which will be hard to correct.

In addition in many cases a student even a senior student may not have his knee aligned with his shin and ankle thus putting stress sideways on the knee and as stated previously causing potential chance of damaging the knee.

In Kokutsu Dachi there is supposed to be a 30/70 split on weight distribution, with 30 percent on the front foot and 70 percent on the back foot. Many times I see a 50/50 split like Kiba Dachi. Also I see the knees not aligned with the shin and the ankles. As there is less weight on the front foot there is less danger of damaging the knee but there is still a potential for damage. The back leg of course with 70 percent of weight on it is cause for alarm. Also the stance is compromised and cannot be used as it is supposed to be.

Let's move on to kicking. Many times I see no compression when students are kicking. They try hard and kick hard but tend to tighten the upper body to feel strength in the kick which of course has the opposite effect. Of course they need to compress the leg at the beginning of the kick by bringing their heel towards their buttocks then as they start the kick the knee is brought forward and while engaging their "core" and just before they reach the point where they can no longer engage their core they will raise the knee up to its final height and finish the kick. Of course this is just a basic concept and there are many more dynamics that must be taken into account but that would take much more explanation than this article can go into. However the point is compressing the leg will bring more explosive power and stop them from feeling the need to tighten the upper body.

Let me finish this article by briefly going into body compression and expansion. I think it is important for students to understand that alignment of the muscles and bones is important in getting the most energy and power from your body. For instance when doing a gidanbarai, we bring our left fist to our ear (left gidanbarai) at the same time we punch our right fist forward creating compression of our shoulders and if we do it fast we get more compression. At the same time we must make sure our students are turning their left fist so it causes their muscle and bone structure to turn as well which in turn causes the muscles of the arms and body to compress at the same time. Of course the timing of the block must coincide with the chest uncompressing due to the natural movement of the body after compressing it. It is natural in this case for the elbows to start an equal and opposite movement which we must ensure the students take advantage and of course at the very last moment the wrist must turn to get the full benefit of the muscles snapping back. Of course this is a very basic explanation of the technique and has not taken into account the whole dynamics of the technique which would take several pages of writing to explain.

So in conclusion I think it is important to emphasize the basics at each and every class. I think it is important for the student to understand why and where a stance should be used and why we practice them. I am also aware that most if not all of you are already doing this. Yours in Budo,

Don Owens