

Canadian finds niche with 'Taenglish'

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A Canadian taekwondo master, Guy Larke, shouts "Ready to kick!" in a taekwondo gym and begins his lesson in [English](#).

His students are Korean, but seem comfortable with the English-speaking atmosphere, as they shout back "Yeah, turn kick uh!" and "I [can](#) do it!"

Taekwondo taught in English has swept the already English-fired-up nation, with educating children in English long having been a craze among Korean parents. For years, however, the nation has only embraced typical classroom settings lined with English books.

Larke's class is more than just an English lesson. It is a lesson in "Taenglish," a portmanteau word of taekwondo and English.

Korean martial arts traditionalists see Taenglish as a heresy. According to them, it is acceptable to teach Western sports in English in Korea; but teaching traditional sports, such as martial arts, in English violates tradition.

Nonetheless, a Taenglish boom is providing a needed twist for the overtired and stressed children of typical English classroom lessons.

Though Taenglish lessons are taught in English and involve three sets of six books with basic vocabulary and expressions, Guy Larke says, "It is not an English grammar program," through an email interview with The Korea Herald.

Rather than attempting a somewhat forceful conversation with students, he says, "With Taenglish, students get to let off some steam through English speaking, and at the same time learn their nation's martial art."



Guy Larke (right) teaches Taeglish to a student. (Courtesy of Guy Larke)

Taekwondo is taught to some children for discipline and concentration purposes. “It does change behavior,” he said, “Kids that come in ‘out of [control](#)’ truly experience change and become ‘under control.’”

“A rude boy in my class, I had pushed for nearly a year, has now earned his first black belt, and on top of that he became one of the best in his English class at school.”

The taekwondo master, who owns his martial arts and [marketing](#) company Kisa-Do (The Knights’ Way) says Taeglish benefits both students and teachers.

“I met many great masters that had little marketing or PR knowhow, and sadly some of them actually had to shut their schools down due to this weakness. Ever since, I wanted to bring recognition to the real Korean masters and ethnic martial arts. I thought that I could preserve Korean arts and help the traditional masters [stay](#) in business through [programs](#) like this.”

Larke’s efforts to expand Taeglish lessons have saved a number of the nation’s small-sized taekwondo gyms from possible bankruptcy. An increasing number of branches have continued to open since the first class in March 2007.

The master, who furthered his martial arts capability through training in Korea, had trouble finding an English speaking institution when he first came here. “I wanted many other foreigners to find best martial-art masters in Korea,” as it was hard to find an English-speaking master. Larke had made new opportunities for English speakers who yearned to learn taekwondo.

The martial art master of four disciplines in taekwondo, three in hapkido, three in taekyeon and three in bongukgeom says he and his close friend Kim Sung-hoon, who founded Taeglish with Larke, plan to create similar programs for hapkido, karate and wushu as well.

Larke shared his strategies to [spread](#) them not only in Korea but throughout the world. “I have written articles about Taeglish for the Taekwondo Times in the U.S., Seni Beladiri in Malaysia, and Rapid Journal in the Philippines, and my present work is to expand the franchise to [Japan](#), [China](#), and the United States.

“All these things I owe to this country.” he says. Larke thinks of Korea as his second home, but still feels it is not easy in some ways to live here as an expat. He recommends expats in Korea find a passion and a niche while they are here.

Larke is now training with those masters whom he has been longing to meet for 10 years a retired Hong Kong star Wong-Ho, Bongukgeomdo grandmaster Lee Jae-sik, high ranking master in Hanminjok hapkido [Scott](#) Seo, and Jeong Kyung-hwa, a taekyeon grandmaster.

By Hwang Jurie (jurie777@heraldm.com)