

## Character Development

*By Daniel Fusco*

Modern-day martial arts, especially Karate and Tae Kwon Do, are greatly recognized for psychological development of practitioners, especially youth. This development is often referred to as “character development”. To better understand this we should define what this is and the chronological stages involved. Developmental psychologist Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994), is well-known for coining the phrase “identity crisis”. Psychologistworld.com describes his theory as, “...The theory describes eight stages through which a healthily developing human should pass from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage the person confronts, and hopefully masters, new challenges. Each stage builds on the successful completion of earlier stages. The challenges of stages not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as problems in the future.”

It goes on to outline the stages of development as:

1. Hope: Trust vs. Mistrust (oral-sensory, infancy, 0–2 years)
2. Will: Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt (early childhood, 2–4 years)
3. Purpose: Initiative vs. Guilt (locomotor-genital, preschool, 4–5 years)
4. Competence: Industry vs. Inferiority (latency, school age, 5–12 years)
5. Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion (adolescence, 13–19 years)
6. Love: Intimacy vs. Isolation (early adulthood, 20-39 years)
7. Care: Generativity vs. Stagnation (adulthood, 40–64 years)
8. Wisdom: ego integrity vs. despair (maturity, 65 – death)

By virtue, martial art training guides the trainee through each stage of development. One simply needs to put forth the effort to accomplish an ability to perform the art to the best of their ability and these stages of development will occur naturally.

Under proper instruction, a student who is held firm to their responsibility and requirements to advance in martial arts will psychologically develop to their utmost ability. As the martial artist progressively advances from beginner to higher level black belt, even to mastership, the aforementioned stages of development will occur.

Let’s look at it this way:

Stages 1 through 3 - the student will develop trust for their instructor and become coachable; will become non-easily influenced by others by learning to put forth their own effort and receive rewards; will find their own strength and weakness and better understand their own unique purpose in life

Stages 4 & 5 – will learn to achieve goals and find own identity without comparing to others

Stages 6 & 7 – will learn to appreciate and respect others and develop a warrior sense of caring to the point of defending the rights of others

Stage 8 – understanding ones part in a greater order beyond a narcissistic view of just oneself

One cannot help but develop these qualities if successful in martial arts. Success dictates it.

Today we see character development being used as a major social selling-point for martial arts programs. This caters to the desire of parents to acquire the most for their children. This does not have to be sold, or packaged as a feature. It exists already in the traditional art of Tae Kwon Do Chung Do Kwan. As well, aggressiveness in teaching does not force this development. It comes through adherence to the pure art, firmness (accountability, not aggression), and teaching love for the art as it has been taught and passed down traditionally.

Teach the art and the art will teach the world.