An After-School Literacy Program and the Educational Value of Taekwondo

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Abstract

This article describes the results of an after-school literacy program in an urban public elementary school, combining writing and taekwondo instruction. The study discusses the potential educational benefits of martial arts training in enhancing psychological well-being and academic achievement. While empirical evidence of the relationship between taekwondo and academic performance is lacking in the educational literature, the collected words of these fourth-grade participants illustrate a dynamic sense of engagement and expression in physical and written form.
Reflections on an After-School Literacy Program and the Educational Value of Taekwondo: A Preliminary Analysis

by Derek Van Rheenen, Ph.D.

Introduction

Over ten years ago, as a newly hired faculty member here at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), I helped coordinate a literacy program combining writing instruction and taekwondo training for fourth graders at an urban, public elementary school in Richmond, California. The program, known as Project Teamwork and cosponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Writing Project, was a national effort at combining athletic and academic skills development in under-resourced and underperforming educational settings. Like many such efforts, the program was well intentioned and poorly funded. The program likewise had no formal research agenda other than broadly promoting academics through sport in urban American communities. Three other pilot programs were developed as part of Project Teamwork, taking place in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Mississippi. The Bay Area project was the only pilot program to utilize a martial art as the sport to be combined with academic skill development. One day per week for twelve weeks, twenty-four fourth graders received forty-five minutes of taekwondo training, followed by forty-five minutes of writing instruction.

The program benefited from the voluntary efforts of some well-qualified instructors, as well as several student athletes from UCB, who served as mentors to these young students. The decision to utilize taekwondo as the sport to be paired with academic enrichment rested primarily with Dr. Ken Min, father of UCB’s Martial Arts Program (UBMAP). One of the lead authors of the Project

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1 As noted on their website (http://www.ucmap.org/about.php), “since its inception in 1969, the Martial Arts Program of the University of California’s Berkeley campus has had a twofold mission. In addition to providing successful, quality technical instruction in all martial arts/sports, the UC Martial Arts Program also endeavors to maximize the academic resources of the university to develop martial arts/sports through research into their philosophical, spiritual and scientific implications.” Project Teamwork, and this paper about the after-school project, are consistent with the mission of UCBMAP.
Teamwork mission statement and corresponding materials, UCB English Professor Don McQuade, witnessed firsthand the educational and personal benefits of taekwondo when his own son had begun the practice of this martial art under Dr. Min's tutelage. As a result of this relationship and the connection between UBMAP and Project Teamwork, fifth-degree black belt and eight-time national taekwondo heavyweight champion Kim Royce served as these fourth graders' martial arts instructor. Royce had earned both his academic and taekwondo degrees at UCB. Two experienced elementary teachers from Richmond and Oakland, who also were teacher consultants from the Bay Area Writing Project, provided hands-on writing instruction to the students involved in the program. I served as site coordinator and participant observer. I was there to learn how these students learned. As such, I was in charge of documenting the results of the program. This paper reports these results, reviews the literature, and provides a preliminary analysis of the educational value of taekwondo in one small public school in northern California.

The underlying premise of this project, like many other after-school programs across the United States, was to use athletic participation as an incentive for academic engagement and performance. The vision statement of Project Teamwork attempted to draw this apparent connection between school and sport: "The belief that sport can be used to bind young people's attachment to school and engagement in learning is an article of faith; the United States leads the world in support for scholastic and community sports programs. Scholar athletes across the nation demonstrate that athletics and academics are interrelated arenas for learning where young people can practice, reflect, and advance their skills. The qualities of self-discipline, perseverance, and hard work necessary for excellence in sports are transferable skills available to the young student as much as to the young athlete" (Project Teamwork White Paper, February 25, 1998). So sport would be the hook. Indeed, these fourth graders from Grant Elementary School agreed to stay and write after school in order to kick and punch in novel ways. These mostly African American and Chicano American schoolchildren practiced the discipline of writing while learning the art of taekwondo.

In many instances, these types of extracurricular programs are utilized not merely as an incentive for academic engagement, but as an intervention to combat juvenile delinquency and aggression, manifested in school and street violence. As the mission statement of Project Teamwork attests, the underlying faith in such interventions is that athletic and corporeal training will teach pro-social values such as discipline, respect, and humility. These values, in turn,
can be transferred to other facets of life and achievement arenas such as school, where these learned characteristics will help enhance performance. Even more broadly, the physical training associated with sport may increase the participant’s self-esteem and sense of control, among other psychological benefits. This commonsense belief that sports build character has been hotly debated in the literature, as has the idea that sports, by their very nature, could decrease delinquency and violence, especially when the activities themselves may appear aggressive and violent to an outside observer. Similarly, the research on the benefit of athletic participation on academic engagement and achievement is likewise mixed. The following paper seeks to analyze the role of taekwondo training within this literature, focusing in particular on the educational value of the martial art in and of itself, as well as a possible means to other social benefits. Of particular interest is whether the practice of taekwondo might enhance intellectual engagement and academic achievement more effectively than other physical activities, such as more modern, competitive sports. This exploration will perhaps provoke more questions than provide definitive answers. Fourth-grade students from a poor urban school in Richmond, California, help humanize and enrich this research, as these children of color kick and throw punches in the air in a small classroom temporarily turned dojang (도장 formal training hall).

A Makeshift Dojang

In white robes cinched tight with white belts around their small frames, a group of ten- and eleven-year-old children kick and shout in unison: Kiyup! Kiyup! Their teacher, wearing a far larger white robe with a contrasting black belt instructs: “Now that you’re learning taekwondo, you’re not learning to fight. You’re learning how not to fight.”

Taekwondo, often translated as “the way of foot and fist,” teaches basic blocking, punching, and kicking techniques, and then combines these elements into more fluid and complex patterns of movement. In its purest form, it is an art of self-defense. The philosophical foundations of taekwondo, however, involve far more than mere physical activity. The “do” refers to a moral doctrine, dating back to Confucius, and the active practice of meditation. While the Chinese character “do” is a “compound symbol meaning a man’s body in the form of walking ... and another meaning the head, thus inferring that one thinks while walking” (Lee, 2001: 45), the Korean derivation of the word “do” is derived from the word meaning “to help” or to educate in finding the way. The dojang, then, is a place for meditation and practice, an educational space for intellectual, physical, even spiritual, training.
At Grant Elementary School, one of the classrooms had become a makeshift dojang for learning the practice of taekwondo on Thursday afternoons. As part of the limited budget of the project, each fourth grader was provided a uniform (dobok) with a corresponding belt. In taekwondo, students move through a series of belt levels as their knowledge, skills, and techniques increase. Beginners, such as the fourth graders introduced to this martial art for the first time, wear white belts. Their teacher, Kim Royce, wears a black belt, indicating his advanced level of status and ability. Further levels of expertise are recognized among black belts, from first to tenth dan or level rank (Law, 2004). Kim Royce was a black belt, fifth dan.

As evidenced by its inclusion into the Olympic Games, taekwondo can be a competitive martial art. Modern programs emphasize full-contact sparring and self-defense, focused on scoring points and defeating your opponent. Traditional programs focus more heavily on self-control, noncontact sparring, and conflict avoidance, as noted in Royce's initial instruction to the fourth graders. Traditional programs incorporate philosophical teachings and meditation, as well as respect for the instructor (Law, 2004; Nosanchuk, 1981; Nosanchuk and MacNeil, 1989; Trulson, 1986). According to Lee (1989: 58), it is precisely its traditional, philosophical character "which makes Taekwondo an art rather than a mere assortment of physical techniques." The taekwondo training within Project Teamwork emphasized the traditional tenets of the martial art, including self-defense and nonaggression. Kim Royce, who had been both a student and an instructor within the U.C. Berkeley Taekwondo Program, had made this teaching clear from the beginning of the after-school project in Richmond when he told the fourth graders that they were not learning to fight, but to avoid such confrontations. In fact, the ultimate goal of traditional martial arts is seeking never to use the art and eliminate the need for violence altogether (Bäck, 2009).

The emphasis on philosophy and meditation within current forms of taekwondo may well separate it from other modern sports, which focus primarily on physical training and competition. While several authors have celebrated the spiritual and aesthetic possibilities of certain sports (Barthes, 1993; Jackson, 1995; Mitchell, 1997; Pressfield, 2001), traditional training in taekwondo explicitly incorporates these philosophical teachings. It is possible, then, that the philosophical and spiritual aspects of the martial art provide

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For an interesting discussion of the moral distinctions between the practice of traditional martial arts and participation in modern sports, see Bäck (2009: 217-237).
greater opportunity for a more textured learning process, one in which mind and body are trained simultaneously in the dojang. This kinesthetic yet mental training places value in concerted movement, from performing a kick to writing with a pencil, where form is indeed central to performance. The formal patterns (kata in Japanese, or poomsae in Korean), in fact, provide the vehicle for such moral-philosophical training. As Bäck (2009: 230) notes, “martial arts schools hardly ever have philosophy lectures .... Rather, in the spirit of Zen Buddhism, the practitioners are supposed to gain this sort of practical wisdom and spiritual insight via the physical practice itself.”

The desired outcome of the activity is likewise critical. Competitive activities or sports that emphasize winning above all else focus primarily on “the attainment of specific psycho-motor outcomes, ... where [sic] learning and development in both the cognitive and affective domains tend to be secondary, incidental, and not major concerns” (Lombardo, 2000: 2). Where taekwondo develops in character and practice as a modern sport, it may therefore run the risk of straying from the philosophical tenets underlying this traditional martial art. Its potential educational value may also be negatively impacted as a result of this modern development. As such, there may well be a negative relationship between increasing the level of competition in sport and meaningful opportunities for learning, particularly if we value education as promoting open-mindedness or mindfulness. Competition may, in fact, have the opposite effect, closing in on strategy and outcome at the expense of intellectual or spiritual exploration. Of course, this is not solely the case with sport; classrooms and schools in our culture are often structured similarly, teaching to the test, rewarding scores as outcomes rather than fostering learning for learning’s sake.

Then again, it may not be the level of competition that poses the problem for learning. It may be an overreliance on training the body at the expense of the mind. In both the classroom and on the playing field, the body functions as a medium for discipline and dominance. That is, the body is a medium of expression, controlled and restricted by the social structure (Douglass, 1978; Mahiri and Van Rheenen, 2010). Educational institutions, while reifying the division of mind and body, likewise train both the physical and pedagogic body. As Watkins (2005: 3–6) demonstrates in her study of the New South Wales education system in Australia, “the school’s intention to ‘cultivate habits of thoughts and action’ could be read as a form of institutional control leading to the production of docile bodies .... The pedagogic goal, therefore, was not simply for a child to acquire a body of knowledge but a knowledgeable body: that they had habituated the skills necessary for academic success.”
Sport has similarly been used to train the mind and body. Like the official teaching and learning that takes place in schools, sport, too, has an educational function. The education of youth through sport has often been framed as the building of character. Character implies a kind of socio-moral quality, a set of personality attributes befitting a well-adapted, successful social actor. Legendary basketball coach John Wooden's "Pyramid for Success" includes the following character traits: adaptability, alertness, ambition, competitive greatness, condition, confidence, cooperation, enthusiasm, faith, fight, friendship, honesty, industriousness, initiative, integrity, intentness, loyalty, patience, poise, reliability, resourcefulness, self-control, sincerity, skill, and team spirit (Eitzen and Sage, 1986). Feezell (1989: 215) writes, in reference to Wooden's lengthy collection of characteristics, "Not mentioned in this laudable list are wonder, questioning, Socratic ignorance (uncertainty), skepticism, reflectiveness, and critical ability." While not particularly moral or ethical in nature, these latter qualities, if transferred to the classroom, would seem to be valuable in promoting intellectual curiosity and engagement. Advocates of taekwondo claim similar educational and moral values inherent to the traditional martial art. As noted by Chun (1975: 8; quoted in Law, 2004: 17), "Through strict discipline, taekwondo trains both the mind and body, placing great emphasis on the development of moral character. In other words, control of the mind, self-discipline, kindness and humility must accompany the physical grace." Given the potential psychological benefits of sport, then, these activities have likewise been used as interventions to remedy existing social problems.

After all, educational interventions often presuppose fixing a problem, making some schools and some kids more competitive because they are lagging behind or are "at risk." This was certainly the case with Grant Elementary School in Richmond, California. When we arrived, offering taekwondo training and writing instruction, only 19% of these urban fourth graders scored at the national average of the language section, based on the California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) scores. Only 11% of these youths scored at the national average in spelling. One question initially, then, was what would be the outcome of this novel, pilot program, other than providing a safe space in a tough neighborhood to practice a martial art and writing? And was anything more needed to justify being there, two large national organizations and a big university coming into this local community, seeking to make a difference in the lives of a couple of dozen youths? Was there something special about taekwondo training, instead of say, basketball, or soccer or swimming, that might add to the desired outcome?
The Case for Taekwondo

In addition to the potential positive academic outcomes, other psychological benefits have been reported as the result of taekwondo training. Some of the reported benefits include enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence (Brown et al., 1995; Duthie, Hope & Barker, 1978; Finkenberg, 1990; Konzak & Bourdeau, 1984; Martin and Pilcher, 1994; Richman and Rehberg, 1986; Trulson, 1986), increased sense of control (Brown et al., 1995; Madden, 1995; Sanson, 1999), and decreased hostility, aggression, and delinquency (Daniels and Thornton, 1992; Lamarre and Nosanchuk, 1999; Nosanchuk, 1981; Skelton, Glynn and Berta, 1991; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow et al., 2008; Zivin et al., 2001).

For example, one of the few studies referred to in the literature supporting sport as a possible treatment for juvenile delinquency uses taekwondo as an intervention. Trulson (1986) identified thirty-four delinquent teenage boys based on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and provided three different protocols three times a week for six months. The first group received training in the traditional Korean martial art of taekwondo, which included philosophical reflection and meditation, in addition to the physical practice of the martial art. The second group received a modern version of taekwondo training, which only included the physical techniques, but without the philosophical teachings of the sport. The third group, which Trulson refers to as the control, participated in a number of other activities, including basketball, football, and jogging.

After six months, the boys were readministered the MMPI. Interestingly, the first group, which had received traditional taekwondo training, showed decreased aggressiveness, lowered anxiety, increased self-esteem, and improved social skills. The scores indicated that these boys were no longer delinquent. Conversely, those boys in the second group who received the modern version of the martial art showed a higher tendency toward delinquency and a marked increase in aggressiveness. The third group of young men showed no difference in delinquency, yet their self-esteem and social skills improved. If one of the research questions under study was whether participation in organized physical activities could have a positive effect on psychological well-being, it seems somewhat odd that this third treatment was described as a control group. While these boys were not receiving taekwondo training in any form, they were participating in sports. The results seem to indicate that this varied sport intervention did indeed have a positive effect on the third group of boys.

These divergent findings demonstrate that sport alone cannot account for providing either social benefits or liabilities. However, the contextual
combination of exercising both mind and body within taekwondo training seems to have had the greatest positive impact, at least within this study. As Coakley (2004: 184) notes, "It is unfortunate that Trulson did not include a group receiving the philosophical training without the practice of taekwondo physical skills. Perhaps the integration of philosophical training with physical activity is so effective because the physical activity provides opportunities to 'embody' the philosophy."

Like the first group of boys in Trulson's study, other researchers have found that taekwondo training can decrease aggression in participants, often related to length of training experience (Daniels and Thornton, 1992; Lamarre and Nosanchuk, 1999; Nosanchuk, 1981; Twemlow et al., 2008; Zivin et al., 2001). While some have found an inverse relationship between aggressiveness and level of belt rank (Skelton, Glynn, and Berta, 1991), Nosanchuk and MacNeil found this relationship to hold only when participants were trained in a traditional martial arts program. These authors found that students attending a modern program became more aggressive as their belt level increased. Thus, the literature draws a clear distinction between modern martial arts, which tend to emphasize competition and aggression, and traditional martial arts instruction, emphasizing the spiritual, psychological, and nonaggressive aspects of training and instruction (Fuller, 1988; Regets, 1990; Trulson, 1986; Twemlow et al., 2008).

Taekwondo and Academic Achievement

While many psychological benefits of traditional taekwondo training have been heralded in the literature, such as enhancing self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of control, there is very little empirical evidence that such interventions enhance academic engagement and performance. While there is some evidence that martial arts training or interventions in schools may lead to reductions in aggression and delinquency, thereby reducing poor classroom conduct and mandatory principal visits by delinquent children (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004; Smith et al., 1999; Twemlow et al., 2008), it is unclear whether such training translates into higher test scores, grades, and educational achievement. In several studies, however, taekwondo has been shown to help children with attention deficit disorder concentrate more effectively, translating into improved academic engagement and performance (Morand, 2004; Ripley, 2003). While Vockell and Kwak (1990) identify several ways in which skills and knowledge acquired in a taekwondo class can improve academic performance, such as physical safety, mental discipline, and familiarity and comfort in collaborative learning, the authors acknowledge that their assertions are based upon anecdotal evidence.
Such anecdotes or testimonials are common. Perhaps the most cited study of the link between taekwondo training and academic performance, referenced on the websites of numerous private taekwondo academies, is a 1994 article by Martin and Pilcher (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Metairie-LA/Patrick-Lees-Tae KwonDo-Plus/131616210202229; http://www.angelfire.com/sc3/tkdplus/test-frame.htm; http://www.tkdtexas.com/stars.php). This study, which looked at 150 nine- to fifteen-year-old students enrolled in taekwondo classes throughout the United States, is not in fact about the effects of martial arts instruction on academic performance, but the effects of such training on preadolescents' and early adolescents' self-esteem. While the results of the study show that students had higher self-esteem after receiving the first cycle of taekwondo training, several websites make the claim that this study found a clear relationship between taekwondo training and increased grades or academic performance. The problem is that this often-cited study does not make such claims. It is not that this relationship does not exist; the literature to date just does not often support a direct correlation between martial arts instruction and improved academic performance. As such, let us return to Richmond, where a group of fourth graders practice their writing after learning the discipline of taekwondo.

Results

In some ways, this after-school program in Richmond offers a cautionary tale against large educational organizations attempting to impact smaller schools and communities with lofty ideals and limited resources. In the 1989 Project Teamwork national document announcing its establishment, the text reads, “Starting with its four pilot sites in Baltimore, Mississippi, Philadelphia and the San Francisco Bay Area, Project Teamwork will expand to a network of twenty sites across the country by 2004 and will support continued expansion to communities with interest and capacity to sustain local programs.” Not only did the project not expand to include additional sites; following the pilot year, the initial financial support and commitment to the effort had ended. And yet, while the national effort of Project Teamwork clearly did not meet its targeted goals, the local successes were plentiful. These successes could not necessarily be measured in higher test scores or grades, but they were witnessed in the human spirit of expression.
Writing Taekwondo

When the fourth graders were done with their taekwondo training, they disrobed, folded their uniforms, and bowed as they left their makeshift dojang. The children were now back in their school clothes and entered the real classroom to be instructed in writing, where they were given water and a snack. The teachers wrote some new vocabulary words on the blackboard in front of the classroom. The words were familiar to the fourth graders because they had just been introduced to them during taekwondo training. The new words were spider walk, ax kick, horseback stance, in and out block. Still excited about their martial arts training, the kids would write about taekwondo. The teachers suggested writing a poem about their experience, providing several templates from which the children could choose. They could choose between an ABC poem and a “sandwich poem.”

A sandwich poem is a poem that starts with a word, in this case “taekwondo,” is followed by several sentences, and then ends with the same word.

**Yesenia** wrote:

Taekwondo
Today we did in and out block
I felt strong and happy
It’s fun to do
We learn many things

**Angel** wrote:

Taekwondo
The best thing is running
Building strength
Kicking, punching
When I grow up, I want to have a black belt like Mr. Royce

This theme of respect was reiterated in other poems as well, including an ABC poem written by **Jeanie**:

**Fezell** added:

At taekwondo you
Bow when you
Come in the
Door.
Every team member
Follows instruction by the
Great Master Royce

At taekwondo you
Bow when entering the Dojang
Come in quietly
Give respect to each other
Jump up and down
Kick

Taekwondo • Derek Van Rheenen
In a later week, these fourth graders wrote letters to student athletes at UCB, who served as mentors and pen pals to these young martial artists. Students at Grant Elementary School and Berkeley exchanged correspondence, public school students separated by several miles and several years of school. The hope was to inspire these fourth graders to one day attend a university like Berkeley. The fourth graders were asked once again to write about their experiences with taekwondo.

One student, Angel, wrote the following letter to his pen pal, Marcus, a varsity football player at UCB:

The letter reads (with misspellings left intact):

March 18, 1999

Dear Marcus,
I go to Grant Elementary.
I am part of the Grant School Taekwondo Team. I learn upper blocks and horse back stance. I'm in the fourth grade. Have you ever done Taekwondo.

When learning Taekwondo you must look at your target in front of you. Taekwondo is about spirit.

Sincerely,
Angel
The written words of these fourth graders captured a sense of their engagement in learning taekwondo, expressing how they felt strong and happy. The youths articulated respect for the spirit of the activity, respect for the space where the learning and training took place, and respect for their teacher. The fourth graders wrote about their sense of pride in being part of the Grant Elementary School Taekwondo team. Of note was that these urban youths wrote about something they liked to do. And they wrote once the school bell marking the end of formal instruction had sounded.

Once the pilot monies dried up, the writing teachers affiliated with the National Writing Project left. The student athlete mentors lost contact with the elementary school students, no longer exchanging letters with the Richmond youths. I returned to the comfort of my office as a faculty member at UCB, moving on to new projects. The Grant School Taekwondo Team persevered, however. By an act of tremendous good fortune, the taekwondo instructor, Master Kim Royce, became a fourth-grade teacher at Grant. He met his future wife at Grant. They had a son, now five years old, whose middle name is Grant, in honor of the school where his father and mother taught other kids. Under his leadership and with the support of the principal at the time (there have been four different principals at Grant since he began teaching fourth grade there), he helped turn a bungalow in the middle of the playground into a semipermanent dojang. The Grant School Taekwondo Team continued to flourish, competing at the UC Open Championships for the past ten years. Royce estimates that he has now coached several hundred elementary schoolchildren as part of the Grant school team.

Despite the many positive results following this after-school literacy program, it may appear that there is limited empirical evidence demonstrating a positive effect of taekwondo participation on academic achievement. For example, if we analyze California's standardized test scores for elementary schoolchildren at Grant Elementary over the past decade, we do not find appreciable improvements. Granted, the writing instruction in the after-school program only lasted one year, but we might expect that taekwondo participation alone would suffice to make a difference in academic performance. Does this mean that introduction to the martial art was of little to no benefit to these elementary schoolchildren?

Because pre- and post-tests of psychological well-being were not assessed as a part of this study, it is difficult to identify the potential benefits of participation in this martial arts program. And because we have not tracked the participants longitudinally, we cannot say at this point whether these youths benefited in a meaningful way regarding their self-esteem, confidence, academic
performance, and educational aspirations. The discussion does suggest that future research is warranted, not only on the taekwondo participants at Grant Elementary School, but also on taekwondo participants throughout the United States and elsewhere.

Implications and Future Directions for Research

If we take these children at their word, their written word that is, the fourth graders at Grant Elementary School learned a lot in just twelve weeks. In addition to learning a horseback stance, they learned to respect others and ultimately themselves. They discovered that learning could be fun, even if it required a lot of hard work. Because the Grant Taekwondo School Team continued after the initial pilot year, many of these fourth graders continued to practice this martial art. To expect that this novel program and introduction to taekwondo would alter the disparities in even one of California's public schools would be naïve. The challenges are formidable. But these fourth graders, ages ten and eleven at the time of Project Teamwork, are now in their early twenties. One area of potential research, then, is to rediscover these young men and women and interview them about how and in what ways taekwondo changed their perspectives toward learning and school, toward the world in which they live. As had been hoped for at the time of the project, it would be interesting to determine how many of these youths went on to graduate from high school. Similarly, it would be worth investigating just how many of these fourth graders from 1999 are now completing college or have earned a baccalaureate degree. If so, it would be worth determining if lessons learned in the dojang influenced their attitude and behaviors toward school and education.

Given the limited number of studies that directly address the relationship of taekwondo and school success, this is an area of future research. That self-esteem and self-reliance improve as a result of practicing this martial art, it is quite likely that these qualities will in turn positively affect academic competence and confidence. The studies simply need to be designed. If we study students who choose to participate in taekwondo independently, rather than as an intervention, we must proceed with caution. The individuals who elect to participate in martial arts in the first place may possess qualities or characteristics conducive to academic achievement. If, for example, we were to look at the general student body at any particular institution that offers martial arts training, comparing martial artists with nonparticipants, we would need to control for like factors, including academic profile (GPA and test scores), family background, income, and parents' education. But where these demographic and
cognitive factors are roughly the same, we can then analyze the possible effect that martial art participation has on academic performance, major selection, time to degree, ultimate career choice, and so on. There may well be differences among martial artists as well, differences by level of proficiency or belt, and differences by type of the martial art itself. These types of studies would allow us also to test a proposition introduced in this paper: whether martial arts in general, and taekwondo in particular, have different effects regarding academic performance than other sports might have. This would suggest a possible study at colleges or universities, contrasting martial artists with other club sports participants or varsity student athletes. Again, the same cautions and caveats hold as to controlling for other factors influencing differences in tested outcomes.

To be sure, the effects of taekwondo training on elementary, middle-school, and high-school students is also worthy of study. As this paper has attempted to demonstrate, Grant Elementary School benefited from having a fourth-grade teacher who happened to be a black belt and a phenomenal teacher, both in the classroom and in the dojang. More schools would benefit from including taekwondo in their educational curriculum. I caution to say that taekwondo training should be included as part of schools' physical education curriculum, not only because physical educational programs across the state and country have been decimated in recent years but, perhaps more important, because taekwondo is far more than simply physical education. At least as a traditional practice, taekwondo is a training of mind and body, an exploration of consciousness. This consciousness recognizes embodiment and works to deconstruct the classical Cartesian division of mind and body.

Clearly there is a need to practice the teaching of a more balanced approach to mind and body work. This approach suggests recognizing the mental discourse of all sport, such as seen in taekwondo, as well as the physical nature of learning. Understanding and valuing a kinesthetic style of learning could promote a similar somatic style of teaching in the classroom. Here coach-
es and teachers of all disciplines have much to learn from the traditional tenets of taekwondo. For example, we might begin to highlight the roles of the student body assisting, rather than competing against, one another. Such a mindset could help to create a more positive and collaborative learning environment in both school and sport. A shift toward a safer, more respectful space for learning requires that we not position youths in ways that limit their potential, put them at risk, and stifle opportunities for success. As a nation, we need to change the way we see the relationship of sport and school. We need to include rather than exclude, to redefine measures of success, and to offer more, rather than fewer, opportunities for personal growth. It appears to me that the practice of taekwondo has known for a very long time how to teach these values to children and adults alike.

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