



# The Research of Implementation and Dissemination of Tai Chi for School-Aged Detention Students: A Path to Rehabilitation & Empowerment

Organizations: Eastern Medicine I-Ching Acupuncture Clinic, PLLC; Everett Denny Juvenile Justice Center

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**ABSTRACT:** Tai chi, as a wellness modality, has gained the interest of scientists in the Western world. The purpose of this poster will focus on research and exploration of the implementation and dissemination of tai chi among young populations. Through field observations, a long-time tai chi practitioner and doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine proposes research of this Eastern practice involving young people.

**INTRODUCTION:** Tai chi is a centuries-old tradition originating in China that is practiced worldwide for its physical, mental and spiritual benefits. Listed as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO, it will be an event category for the 2026 Dakar Youth Olympics. Its Western assimilation is the subject of wide-ranging research on adults. This poster sheds light on its wellness effects on younger populations school aged detention students and demonstrates its cultural significance with increased potential for inclusion in STEM education.

In March 2018, children at a local Juvenile Justice Detention Center participated in one tai chi demonstration session. The results were impressive. A majority of them wanted tai chi over other current activities. Several became very emotional. While confiding with his supervisor, one expressed insight and was remorseful about his crime. This report led to the consideration of the physical, mental, and spiritual effects of tai chi and a formulation of its hypothetical application among elementary school students.

**OBJECTIVE:** The primary objective of our research was to investigate the effects of incorporating traditional tai chi into the lives of detained school-aged students. We aimed to assess changes in behavior, emotional well-being, self-regulation, and interpersonal relationships in detention center settings.

**METHODS:** To conduct our study, retrospectively we were invited to present a demonstration at the Denney Juvenile Justice Center in Everett, Washington on Saturday, March 17, 2018. On that day about 50 school-aged detention students (from ages 8 - 18) participated. At that time, according the supervisor, who is one of the co-authors of this poster, their aim was to find a suitable physical educational class for them. They had tried various activities including Yoga. Nothing seemed to work out. They had been even thinking about martial arts. However, in that case, there was a concern that it might cause more trouble for the students and make it worse. In the end, they decided to try tai chi after all. Soon after their decision, the supervisor approached tai chi instructor, the author of this poster.

**TAICHI IMPLEMENTATION:** Traditional tai chi demonstration sessions were conducted in several groups of 10-15 students each, with their session lasting approximately 30 minutes. Experienced tai chi instructors, with expertise in working with at-risk youth, guided the students through traditional tai chi fundamental theory and the fundamental movements of the tai chi walk. This session included performing one third of the entire form emphasizing nature, the concept of the small universe unifying with the big universe, as well as discipline and mindfulness, etc.

**TAICHI DISSEMINATION:** To encourage the dissemination of traditional tai chi beyond the intervention group, we collaborated with detention center administrators who assigned two armed staff at the back of the large activity room. We provided two tai chi assistants and simultaneous training sessions for the staff to become familiar with the principles of traditional tai chi. This enabled them to incorporate mindfulness techniques into daily interactions with the detained students, supporting their emotional well-being and rehabilitation.

**RESULTS:** By watching us perform tai chi, the students commented that the form was so beautiful and enjoyable. After each 30-minute group trial, they said that they felt so good, some commenting that they felt like a different person. They asked questions and were very involved and motivated like regular students seemingly forgetting that they were correctional students wearing orange uniforms. Later after each session, the supervisor interviewed each student one by one while each new group was practicing. Thus, this procedure was followed for all the groups. In total, it lasted for

about a few hours from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. All the students expressed that they had liked it and wanted to learn more.

This tai chi trial yielded significant and unexpected results. Detained students who participated in traditional tai chi sessions demonstrated improved emotional well-being, including reduced stress levels and increased emotional regulation. Traditional tai chi appeared to provide a constructive outlet for emotional expression, helping students cope with their challenges effectively.

**BEHAVIORAL IMPACT:** One of the most remarkable outcomes was the impact of traditional tai chi on detained students' behavior. Especially, one girl who had been convicted of murder, cried and finally realized her mistake. She felt so regretful and guilty for what she had done. Before this, she did not have any feeling of why she did such a terrible thing.

Another person who was involved in a very dangerous and life-threatening experience felt that his exposure to Taiji gave him clearer thoughts and encouraged him to continue to improve upon himself. This young man was convicted as an adult and given a multi-year sentence behind bars. In the State of Washington at the time of this demonstration any Juvenile who committed a Class A felony was mandatorily adjudicated to an Adult Court Jurisdiction. This young man has lived up to his conviction by graduating from college and he just recently published his first book while still serving his time behind bars.

Participants showed a reduction in aggressive behavior and disciplinary incidents. Traditional tai chi's emphasis on self-discipline and respect seemed to contribute positively to the students' behavioral changes.

This became a hypothesis of the implementation and dissemination of traditional tai chi to school-aged public elementary students.

**EMPOWERMENT AND PERSONAL GROWTH:** Another essential finding was the empowerment and personal growth experienced by detained students through traditional tai chi. The practice fostered a sense of self-control, confidence, and a positive outlook on life, which is crucial for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

**CONCLUSION:** This retrospective research suggests that the implementation and dissemination of traditional tai chi practices in this detention center offers a transformative path to rehabilitation and empowerment for school-aged detained students. Traditional tai chi has shown potential in enhancing emotional well-being, self-regulation, and behavioral changes, contributing to the holistic development of critical and vulnerable at-risk youth.

In conclusion, developing tai chi classes for detention center, is effective and important in the learning cycle of school-aged children. This project could support a model leading the way to integrating tai chi tenets into a STEM curriculum while helping children develop a healthy active lifestyle as they contribute to society as a whole.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Based on our findings, we recommend that detention centers consider integrating traditional tai chi practices into their rehabilitation programs. By its introduction, detention centers can create a supportive environment that empowers detained students to cultivate inner strength and self-awareness. Additionally, we advocate for further research to explore the feasibility of including traditional tai chi into the physical education curriculum for detained youth. Thus, tai chi has the potential to play a significant role in fostering resilience, emotional intelligence, and successful reintegration into society.

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