



Implementation and Dissemination of Traditional Taijiquan in a Public Elementary School: Fostering Wellness & Mindfulness in Young Learners

Organizations: Eastern Medicine I-Ching Acupuncture Clinic, PLLC; Woodside Elementary School

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ABSTRACT: Taijiquan, 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 traditional Taijiquan among school aged public elementary young populations. Through field observations, a long-time Taijiquan practitioner and doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine proposes research of this Eastern practice involving young people.

INTRODUCTION: Taijiquan 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 and demonstrates its cultural significance with increased potential for inclusion in STEM education.

During the 2022-2023 school year, traditional Taijiquan was introduced to a formal physical education class in a public elementary school by the PE teacher who is also one of the co-authors of this poster. It was an unexpected surprising fact that after one session of Taijiquan for each PE class over a two-week period, the whole school, including administrators, teachers and students, was inspired to learn this ancient unique form of exercise. As a retrospective descriptive study, this poster aims to explain and further explore the feasibility, benefits, challenges, and strategies involved in the introduction of Taijiquan into a physical education curriculum of a public elementary school as well as the dissemination of its practice among young learners and educators. This research also combines both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including literature reviews, surveys, interviews, and observational analyses.

In March 2018, children at a local Juvenile Justice Detention Center participated in one Taijiquan demonstration session. The results were impressive. A majority of them wanted Taijiquan 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 Taijiquan and a formulation of its hypothetical application among elementary school students.

Five years later, a PE teacher, also inspired by its unique philosophy and movement, added Taijiquan into his curriculum for two weeks in January, 2023. Nearly 600 students from kindergarten to 5th grade participated in its demonstration presentation and practice, its history and Yin Yang core theory. As a result, more than 60 students voluntarily enrolled in an after-school weekly Taijiquan Club. Their first project was a demonstration for the Family Fitness Night in May, 2023. This poster will describe the details of a potential PE curriculum project.

LITERATURE REVIEWS: China's Taijiquan was added to the Representative List of Intangible Culture Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO on December 17, 2020. It is also planned to be a category in the 2026 Dakar Youth Olympic Game. The *Harvard Medical School Guide to Taijiquan* has been published in 2013. The literature review encompasses studies highlighting the physical, psychological, and cognitive benefits of Taijiquan.

OBJECTIVE: The primary objective of this research poster is to report the effects of incorporating traditional Taijiquan into the daily lives of public elementary school students. We aim to share observations of changes in physical health, mental wellness, emotional regulation, and overall academic engagement following the implementation and dissemination of traditional Taijiquan practices in a school setting.

METHODS: To conduct our study, retrospectively, we collaborated with a formal physical education (PE) class at a local public elementary school, which involved nearly 600 students from kindergarten to 5th grade as participants. Each participant attended a traditional Taijiquan session for one time over a period of two weeks. The poster also employs a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. Surveys were administered to students, teachers, and parents to gauge attitudes, perceptions, and potential barriers regarding Taijiquan implementation. Interviews with the PE teacher, administrators and the five Taijiquan assistant volunteers who have experience teaching Taijiquan, provided insights into pedagogical strategies and challenges. Observational analyses were conducted to evaluate the impact of Taijiquan sessions on students' behavior and engagement.

TAIJI IMPLEMENTATION: Before the class, the PE teacher had made both written and verbal announcements about the upcoming Taijiquan class to the students. Traditional Taijiquan sessions were conducted during the 3 PE periods in the morning from Monday to Thursday for the first week from January 23rd to 27th, 2023 and during the 3 PE periods in the afternoon from Monday to Thursday, from January 30th to February 2nd, 2023 for the second week. Each session lasted 45 minutes. The experienced qualified Taijiquan teacher and several Taijiquan assistants guided the students through its fundamental theory, fundamental movement of the Taijiquan walk, fundamental forms of one third of the entire 108 forms, including breathing exercises, mindfulness practices, etc.

TAIJI DISSEMINATION: To promote the dissemination of traditional Taijiquan, we collaborated closely with school administrators such as principals, teachers, and parents. We organized an after school Taijiquan Club for 5 weeks from March 18th to April 21st, 2023. Over 60 students from 1st to 3rd grades designed by the school volunteered to enroll in the club. Only 50 students were allowed in due to space considerations by the school. It was the biggest club ever in the school. Also, others such as administrators, teachers and staff were encouraged to attend the simultaneous club training sessions for familiarization with the Taijiquan principles and incorporate mindful practices into classroom routines. Parents

were also encouraged to attend Taijiquan Club sessions in order to practice at home with their children. On May 19th, 2023, 10 students voluntarily enrolled to perform Taijiquan with their parents' permission and support in the Family Fitness Night.

RESULTS: From the first day of the Taijiquan class announcement to the last day involving Family Fitness Night, this project carried on for nearly 6 months. The study yielded promising results. Public elementary school students who participated in the traditional Taijiquan sessions demonstrated improved physical health, including enhanced balance, coordination, and flexibility. Moreover, students reported a reduction in stress levels and an increased sense of emotional well-being. Traditional Taijiquan appeared to empower young learners with tools to cope with stress and emotions effectively. The school staff, students and parents were impressed with the beautiful form and the unique exercises way, etc. They even requested a short Taijiquan video from the Taijiquan teacher and assistants to play to the students during each short break in the classroom to calm and empower them.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: An important finding was the impact of traditional Taijiquan on the students' academic engagement. Participants showed improved mental focus, attentiveness, and concentration in their classrooms. This improvement positively correlated with academic performance, as students demonstrated enhanced learning retention and a positive attitude toward their studies.

SOCIAL SKILLS: Another significant outcome was the positive influence of traditional Taijiquan on the students' social skills. The practice of Taijiquan seemed to foster a sense of cooperation, empathy, and respect among peers, contributing to a more harmonious and inclusive school environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The literature reviews and our research suggest that the implementation and dissemination of traditional Taijiquan practices in this public elementary school can foster wellness and mindfulness in its young learners. The inspiration for this project originated from a previous experience with students enrolled in a detention center in March, 2018. The difference is that the detention center students experienced only one 45-minute session and demonstrated similar results. From that experience, a hypothesis was formulated to test it in a public elementary school setting. It is great to note that approximately 5 years later, this hypothesis would be proven to be effective.

Traditional Taijiquan has demonstrated potential in enhancing physical health, mental well-being, emotional regulation, academic engagement, and social skills, making it a valuable addition to a school curriculum. Based on our findings, we recommend that public elementary schools consider integrating traditional Taijiquan practices into their regular educational programs. By introducing traditional Taijiquan sessions, schools can create a supportive and nurturing learning environment that promotes students' overall development. Additionally, we encourage further research to explore the long-term effects of traditional Taijiquan on young learners and its potential role in fostering lifelong wellness and mindfulness.

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

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES: Findings reveal that integrating Taijiquan into school curricula can have positive effects on students' physical health, concentration, and emotional regulation. However, barriers such as time constraints, teacher training, and curriculum alignment need to be addressed for successful implementation and dissemination. For example, the timeline for this project was originally supposed to start at the end of October, 2022 for two weeks in the fall semester, followed by another two weeks charted for the spring semester in 2023. As mentioned earlier, this project was conducted from January to May, 2023. The 2nd barrier is that the teachers, administrators and other staff appeared unfamiliar with Taijiquan and its benefits as a valuable exercise. A third barrier is a fixed mindset that blocks students from expanding their experiences and understanding of cultural differences. Fourthly, when forming the club, the school, with students from preschool to 5th grade, limited the number of participants from 1st to 3rd grade only. Even if over 60 students enrolled, only 50 were allowed in any session. This unintentionally excluded many excellent, highly capable students from other grades to join the club. This poster concludes by proposing recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders interested in fostering the adoption of Taijiquan as a valuable component of elementary education.

DISCUSSION: This discussion section delves into the potential strategies for overcoming the identified challenges. Collaboration between physical education teachers and Taijiquan instructors can bridge the gap in expertise. Integrating Taijiquan into existing physical education classes and mindfulness programs can address time constraints. Professional development opportunities for educators interested in teaching Taijiquan are essential. Moreover, the alignment of Taijiquan with curriculum standards can enhance its acceptance as an educational tool rather than a mere extracurricular activity.

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