

Traditional Karate and At-Risk Youth

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ABSTRACT

This case study is of an at-risk youth that has participated in traditional karate classes. The study specifically examines the effects of the classes on her self-esteem, self-control, communication skills, social skills, and responsibility. This case study is on going and at this point in time there is not enough data to draw a significant conclusion. It is recommended that the methodology be revised.

INTRODUCTION

This research project is a case study of one individual considered an at-risk youth. That individual is "Jane," a 14 year-old girl who has been placed on probation in the Minnesota judicial system for minor offenses. The aim of this research is to observe the effects of traditional karate classes on her self-esteem, self-control, communication skills, social skills, and sense of responsibility. This is an on-going research project that will continue to add a new case study every six months.

Many studies have shown that participation in martial arts has a positive effect on various desired personality traits (Duthie, Hope, & Barker, 1978; Kurian, Caterino, & Kulhavy, 1993; Madden, 1990; Nosanchuk, 1981; Trulson, 1986). Some of the studies focus specifically on youth at risk, and some merely look at the general population of people who participate in martial arts. Kurian, Caterino, & Kulhavy (1978) found that the longer one participates in martial arts training, the more one's anxiety decreases and independence increases. It's been suggested that participation in traditional martial arts does not increase aggressiveness as previously thought (Nosanchuk, 1981), but can actually reduce aggressiveness (Trulson, 1986). In addition, it was found that after only one semester of participating in karate, students experienced a reduction in depression and perceived vulnerability (Madden, 1990).

Trulson (1986) found that it was the traditional elements of the martial arts training that had a positive effect on juvenile delinquents. These traditional elements include meditation, philosophy, an emphasis on respect, and katas (forms). He also found that non-traditional martial arts, such as a kickboxing class, had an adverse effect, actually increasing aggressiveness and opposition. Although the Trulson study used traditional Tae Kwon Do in the study, elements discussed are also present in traditional Karate-Do.

METHODOLOGY

Jane was chosen to participate in a scholarship program that allows at-risk youth to participate in traditional karate lessons free of charge. As a part of the scholarship program, the student agrees to participate in this study. She was chosen on the recommendation of her probation officer and at the discretion of the karate instructor. The instructor chose her because she showed interest in karate lessons and had a record of only minor offenses. At the time of

entering the scholarship program, Jane was attending public school and participating in a corrections program as a term of her probation. In that system she was at the top level receiving the maximum amount of privileges.

The duration of the scholarship program was indefinite, and Jane's participation was voluntary. The classes taught traditional Shito-Ryu Karate-Do. Classes of this style of karate are very formal, following strict Japanese traditions of bowing, meditation, exercise, philosophy, and reflection. The exercise aspect follows a strict curriculum of kihon (basic movements), kata (memorized forms), and kumite (sparring). Classes met four times a week for an hour to one and one half-hours.

The study included on-going reports by the researcher, monthly reports by the instructor, interviews with a parent every three months, and an interview every four months with the probation officer. The data collected will also be compared with future case studies. This method was chosen in order to take advantage of a triangulation of different data sources.

RESULTS

After two months of participation in the scholarship program with an average attendance of twice a week, reports were given by the karate instructor and observations were made by the researcher. The instructor reported that upon initially entering the program Jane was very quiet and reserved. He commented that "she had a fear of making mistakes almost to the point of paralysis." After two months of involvement, the instructor reported that Jane's physical techniques had improved greatly and her confidence had also increased. However, she was not yet able to add the shout to the techniques as typically done in class. When Jane's father arrived to pick her up, the instructor observed tension between Jane and her father but thought it was "nothing out of the ordinary."

Observations by the researcher included an increase in her confidence when performing the learned techniques and also less hesitation to try new techniques. Her communication skills had improved slightly. Initially she avoided any conversation and had a tendency to mumble and showed signs of stress. After two months she did not exit conversations as quickly and used a clearer tone of voice when speaking. While in class she displayed self-control; when she was frustrated or self-conscious, she did not lash out inappropriately at the instructor or others in class. However, when dealing with her father, she displayed much opposition and inappropriate behavior. This behavior was observed during the initial introductions when Jane enrolled, while she spoke on the phone with her father, and when he came to pick her up from class.

The probation officer indicated that the karate classes were the only consistent, positive thing in Jane's life at that time. Approximately two months after starting the scholarship program, her father had been arrested for assaulting her mother. However, despite this, Jane continued to do well in the correction system and is scheduled to be placed off probation in three months.

A month into the program Jane was unable to receive a ride home from the karate school. Arrangements were made for the researcher to provide a ride home after the karate class. This provided additional time for conversation, observations, and data collection by the researcher.

DISCUSSION

Although have data collected from a variety of sources shows progress has been made in Jane's case, two factors make it difficult to arrive at any concrete conclusions. The first factor is the time restriction. This study is an ongoing study designed to collect data over a long period of time. After only two months of participation, significant results may not be possible. Additionally, the progress that was observed, such as the improvement in communication skills, may have been due to the natural process of adjusting to a new environment rather than the karate classes themselves.

The second factor that makes it difficult to come to credible conclusions is the methodology itself. Although there was a schedule to collect data from various sources, the collection system was not specific enough to extract the correct type of information. Jane's progress is difficult to measure because assessment topics were not outlined for the various data sources to report or comment on. As a result, topics were inconsistent from the data sources, which made the information difficult to compare for confirmation or contradictions. For example, the instructor may comment on her self-esteem in a report, but the probation officer may not. Additionally, an individual data source may not report on identical topics throughout the study, which also made progress difficult to measure over time. This method provides no transference to use and compare with future case studies for this project.

In addition to the two major factors above, the class environment made it difficult to collect and measure data. Specifically the class size was a limitation to collecting usable data. When Jane initially entered the program she was the only student in the class, which made social interaction difficult to observe. At this point in time there are three other students in class with her. This environment provides some social interaction but it is very limited. Also the class environment provides little information about other factors that may be influencing Jane's behavior. In class it is difficult to determine if progress or lack of progress is due to her home environment or the influence of peers. The addition of providing a ride to her home helps somewhat in collecting additional information outside of the class.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the methodology for this research study be revised. The revised study should include both qualitative and quantitative data in order to derive more accurate and credible conclusions.

First the criteria being observed and measured should be narrowed down to self-esteem, social anxiety, and self-control. This study continues, and new quantitative data will be collected using the Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss Revised Social Anxiety Subscale of the self-consciousness Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991). These tests shall be completed upon entrance to the program, every 6 months, and upon exiting the program.

Qualitative data should be collected using observation techniques outlined by Patton's *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (Patton, 1990). The observer should not engage in full participation to preserve objectivity. However, the observer should develop a relationship with the student to gain more in-depth information and understanding of the participant's perspective. Knowledge of the study's existence will be limited to the case study, a parent/ guardian, employees, and the probation officer. The other students will not be aware of the scholarship program or of the study being conducted. The observations will be recorded over the entire duration of the case study's participation, which ideally will expand over several years.

The qualitative data will be reported from four sources: the instructor, probation officer, researcher, and a parent of the participant. The criteria to report will be outlined for the data sources as follows:

1. Self-esteem: What behaviors are displayed that indicate Jane's feelings of self-worth, value and importance? (Robinson, Shaver, and Wrightsman, 1991 pp. 115).
2. Social anxiety: What behaviors does Jane display that indicate her level of discomfort while interacting with others? (Robinson, Shaver, and Wrightsman, 1991 pp.179).
- 3 Self-control: What behaviors does Jane display when frustrated, embarrassed, or angry?

The qualitative data shall be collected from the instructor and observer monthly and from the parent and probation officer quarterly.

These revisions will increase the reliability, credibility, and usability of this study. The revised methodology should be pilot tested on Jane and revised if need. Future case studies will then be added to the study.

There is preliminary evidence that shows that traditional martial arts can be used as an effective alternative to assisting at-risk youth. The martial arts can provide an attractive alternative to expensive programs that can include courts, lawyer, incarceration, and rehabilitation.

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