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KickAct: the Implementation & Evaluation of a Youth Empowerment & Leadership Program

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**KICKACT: THE IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION OF A YOUTH EMPOWERMENT &
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

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PIM 74

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of
Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in
Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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Advisor: Professor John Ungerleider

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Date: 03-30-2016

This paper is dedicated to generations of traditional Chinese martial arts teachers. May their spirit and wisdom guide the new generations in finding creative ways to safeguard justice, inclusiveness, peace, and well-being for all.

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I'm grateful to my mother for always encouraging me to follow my dreams. I'm grateful to my fiancé Curtis McBride who encouraged, assisted and supported me during my last years of education.

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ABSTRACT

KickAct is a program that combines martial arts and performing arts to empower youth and engage them in creative social change. Youth experience a lack of community engagement and partnership with the adult. Many youth face additional challenges, ranging from lack of support in school to violence at home, that can negatively impact their life. KickAct is designed to provide youth with the necessary skills and experience to thrive as active participants in their communities. Due to inconsistent attendance and participation, it was not possible to determine whether the workshop format was a successful method for youth empowerment. However, the workshop proved to be an effective tool for an initial youth group assessment.

Introduction

As many other European youth had, I experienced alienation and disempowerment derived from living in a problematic world, shaped by adults, without any opportunity to change it. Currently, worldwide youth still experience a lack of engagement and maintain low rates of participation in shaping their communities and the world. While youth empowerment and leadership programs have the goal of generating better leaders for the future, my hope is to recruit youth as the leaders of the present. My optimism is that youth, given that they are developing views of the world, could find new creative ways to solve worldwide issues.

This capstone was inspired by years of experience working with youth as a martial arts teacher and extra-curricular programs instructor. I became a student at SIT Graduate Institute with the hope to learn how to combine my passion for Chinese martial arts and my desire to empower the youth. During my year at SIT, I designed a combined martial arts and performing arts after school program for youth empowerment. I developed a workshop based on that program during the practicum phase of my Intercultural Service, Leadership and Management program. I named my program and workshop KickAct, such that “Kick” refers to the martial arts and “Act” refers to the performing arts and youth engagement in Social Action. The workshop format could potentially reach more youth because it does not require a long term commitment, as opposed to an after school program.

The following review should clarify the need for this youth empowerment workshop and program, and why I planned a multi-intervention program. I will then describe the KickAct program, the workshop KickAct, and its evaluation.

Literature review

Lack of Community engagement and lack of adult-youth partnership

Youth engagement is not just about their participation in their communities; rather, “Authentic youth engagement requires that young people have actual authority and responsibility, as well as opportunities to develop the skills needed to make sound decisions” (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2007, p.5).

From a literature review, it became apparent that youth lack community engagement. As indicated by McLaughlin: “Youth interpret a local landscape void of engaging things for them to do as adult indifference” (McLaughlin, 2000, p.1). Research mostly involves at-risk youth, but indicates that “Troubling signs are everywhere that youth of all descriptions-not just so called disadvantaged youth-find insufficient supports in their communities to be able to move confidently and safely toward adulthood” (McLaughlin, 2000, p.1). Although youth-adult partnership can impact individuals and communities, “Youth-adult partnership remains an innovative idea in the United States. Very few adults have worked closely with youth, in a sustained fashion, on issues of common concern. Consequently, there exist few social norms or institutions to support the creation of intergenerational partnerships” (as cited in Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2008, p.16).

Finally, unemployment is further excluding youth from society and limits their chances to attain independence, and “[...] offsetting the idea of getting married or starting a family” (Membis, 2013). One finding of the World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) report is that “[...] the worldwide unemployment rate among 15 to 24-year olds of 13 percent, or 74 million youths, is set to rise” (Butler, 2015). Among the unemployed youth are also educated youth: “They are discovering that their \$40,000+ a year bachelor’s degrees are doing little to find

them a job to offset the surmounting debt they may have incurred as undergraduates” (Membis, 2013). Lack of engagement, lack of community support, and high rates of unemployment are issues that are seen among youth in the State of Oregon, where the KickAct workshop was implemented.

Oregon youth

Among other issues of concern, Oregon youth have a very low graduation rate, high school dropout rates, and indicate a lack of engagement in the community and a supportive environment in school. In the past few years, the graduation rates in the State of Oregon were the lowest nationally: “For the past four consecutive years the state of Oregon was ranked last in the nation in high school graduation rates” (Dorris, 2015). Moreover, as reported by the Foundation for Educational choice: “[...] dropouts cost the state of Oregon \$173 million in tax revenue each year, and more than \$200 million in annual Medicaid costs. Considering the likelihood of incarceration among those who do not complete high school, the state could potentially save up to an additional \$37.5 million in incarceration costs each year should graduation rates increase” (House, March 2010, p.21).

Findings of the 2014 Oregon Student Wellness Survey indicate that many students in the 8th and 11th grades felt that school work was not meaningful or important, did not believe that things learned in school would be important later in life, and also indicated a lack of a supportive environment in school (Oregon Health Authority, 2014). Therefore, it is evident that youth in Oregon are experiencing a lack of engagement and need curricula that are more pragmatic. In grade 6, 63% of students stated that they like school, whereas only 39.6% of the students in grade 11 did (Oregon Health Authority, 2014). Also, while 66.4% of grade 6 students felt that school work was meaningful and important, only 44.1% of grade 8 students and 25.1% of grade

11 students indicated that they felt school work to be meaningful and important (Oregon Health Authority, 2014).

Finally, only 41.3% of Oregon students in grade 11 believed that things learned in school will be important later in life (Oregon Health Authority, 2014). This data could show that youth perceive a disconnectedness between what is learned in school and their role in society.

Although, due to the quantitative nature of the survey, the reason behind the youths’ negative perception of school is not clear, the 2014 Oregon Student Wellness Survey also points out a “lack of a supportive atmosphere in school” (Oregon Health Authority, 2014), especially for the youth in grade 11. Therefore, youth in Oregon may feel disconnected not only from the outside world, but also from the adults and their peers in school.

Compared to the state of Oregon, the city of Springfield, where I implemented the KickAct workshop, has a lower estimated median household income and higher crime rates. The high school on-time graduation rates in Springfield are below the national average and in some schools below the Oregon “state average of 72%” (Hammond, 2015). It should be noted that the Academy of Arts and Academics is a non-traditional curriculum school focused on visual arts and that the Thurston High School is located in the city area with the highest median income.

Table 1: On time graduation rates in Springfield, OR Source: <http://schools.oregonlive.com/grads/>

School	District	2015 class size	% of on-time grads	Number of dropouts
Academy of Arts and Academics	Springfield	84	87%	7
Thurston High School	Springfield	303	75%	53
Springfield High School	Springfield	336	65%	94
Gateways High School	Springfield	77	22%	22

Because of its low graduation rates, and high rates of school dropouts, Oregon seems to need programs for youth empowerment. The city of Springfield, due to high rates of youth criminality and poverty, in addition to low graduation and high dropout rates, may need the KickAct program even more greatly.

Solutions to youth issues

Among the solutions reported in literature are youth engagement, critical thinking and youth participation in extracurricular activities. Research suggests that “addressing student engagement issues holds promise as a method to improve school dropout rates” (as cited in Hampton, 2012, p.24). Other research suggests that young people are best helped to solve problems by engaging them as problem solvers (Pittmann, Irby, Tolman, Johalem, & Ferber, 2003). Moreover, McLaughlin points out that Youth Community-Based Organizations have been successful in filling the gap left by families and schools and that, of these organizations, “All are youth-centered, knowledge-centered, and assessment-centered” (McLaughlin, 2000 p.9).

Research shows that the level of adolescent participation in community activities is associated with:

- behavioral well-being
- increased academic performance
- increased likelihood of college attendance
- greater school engagement
- reinforcing positive social values or setting an example (as cited in Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, 2007).

From the literature review we can deduce that youth participation in extra-curricular programs can improve their life at home, in school and in their communities. These programs engage the youth in critical thinking and are usually youth, knowledge and assessment-centered.

Combining sports with other activities

Although sports alone have proven beneficial for youth development, the combination of sports with other youth development practices has proven even more valuable. Linver, Roth and Brooks-Gunn found that participation in sports or other organized activities had the greatest development outcome, and that those who were involved with both sports and other activities had even greater benefits (Linver, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

Intentional integration of sport activities into youth development practice is important: “Emerging research clearly indicates that if youth sports are intentionally taught, organized, and managed in a way that fosters positive physical, social and emotional development in youth and adolescents, the benefits for sport participants are wide-ranging across a number of indicators and hold true across diverse cultural and geographical boundaries” (Greenwood et al. 2010, p.9). These findings indicate that it is most beneficial to combine martial arts with other activities in a youth program. Additionally, findings suggest that sports should be taught by professionals with specific training in youth development and empowerment.

Finally, according to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, humans learn and realize their potential in different ways (Gardner, 1993). Since school curricula tend to focus on math, logic and science, extracurricular programs can develop skills and interests that are usually not nurtured in school. The martial arts alone would just help develop a few of the multiple intelligences, such as the bodily-kinesthetic and the interpersonal intelligences. Combining the martial arts with other extracurricular activities would develop multiple intelligences. Literature

findings support arranging the KickAct program as a multi-component extracurricular program that combines sport with other activities.

KickAct program design

KickAct is a combined martial arts and performing arts extra-curricular program designed to empower youth and engage them in creative social change. Besides the martial arts and the performing arts, the KickAct program also includes meditation, dialogue, team builders and ice breakers, service and leadership activities, and time spent in the outdoors. My idea is to offer the program through a for-profit social enterprise by partnering with local and international churches. The social enterprise, also named KickAct, would be established in the State of Oregon and be registered as a B Corporation. I identified various future growth opportunities to increase revenue and amplify the social impact of KickAct. Through offering instructor courses and entrepreneurial training, youth who have been enrolled in the KickAct program may create branches in other cities and states. Additionally, by partnering with churches internationally and offering international exchange programs, KickAct could also expand overseas through affiliation. Moreover, the KickAct social entrepreneurial effort could become a business model to propose to martial arts instructors through social franchising. The ultimate goal of KickAct is to change the martial arts market, so that services are provided to unserved markets, and that martial arts programs focus on social change, rather than merely on profit. Finally, youth enrolled in the program that excel in their skills and commitment, could form a professional martial arts performance team.

KickAct Theory of Change

KickAct aspires to empower youth in the US and internationally and to encourage them to engage in creative social change. A supportive environment, partnership with adults, and meaningful youth participation are the conditions for youth development and leadership.

During my year at SIT Graduate Institute, I developed the KickAct Theory of Change. My initial project idea combined martial arts and performing arts. The main goal of the program was to teach leadership to the participants through planning, implementing and evaluating a martial arts performance. The purpose of the show was to raise money for charity. Through the Youth Leadership Program class, I learned about the importance of integrating youth development with youth empowerment. Therefore, I incorporated dialogue, ice breakers and team builders into my initial project. Moreover, the Youth Leadership Program course taught me the importance of providing the youth with opportunities to actively participate in service and advocacy. Hence, I added regular service hours at local organizations. Finally, SLM classes at SIT Graduate School, such as Social Entrepreneurship, helped me envision the program on the market and its sustainability.

The KickAct Theory of Change, as illustrated in figure 1, includes three different levels of youth engagement. At the most basic level is youth development (bottom of figure 1). Chinese martial arts and performing arts classes, meditation, dialogue, ice breakers and team builders provide the youth with the necessary skills for critical thinking and leadership. Youth development is assisted by creating a safe, challenging and rewarding environment, where adults share leadership with youth.

At the next level is youth leadership and community service (figure 1). The youth plan, implement and perform a show that will generate donations to be given to charity. In the process,

the youth can develop leadership and partner with adults in their community. Moreover, the youth would be enrolled as volunteers at local nonprofit organizations to obtain experience in addressing social issues. By successfully putting their ideas into practice and accomplishing their tasks, youth could gain a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem: “By engaging young people as valued partners in challenging and supported opportunities to contribute and exercise skills, YEPs aim to improve young people’s beliefs in their personal worth as well as their ability to shape their lives and environments” (as cited in Morton & Montgomery, 2011, p.14). Through shaping their environments and communities, the youth would gain an increased sense of belonging. Self-discipline in the traditional martial arts is not merely conducive to self-control and respect of the rules but also to perseverance to bettering oneself: “The character training inherent in traditional martial arts teaches an individual to become more self-aware and to actively pursue character growth through the constant evaluation of thoughts and actions and subsequent adaptation of thoughts and actions for the better” (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004, p.284). Consequently, the KickAct’s youth could analyze their attitudes toward others and shape their aspirations toward an ideal just society. Finally, to express their ideas and motivations, the youth need speech skills and confidence speaking to audiences. The youth would be motivated to develop speech skills because of the need to effectively perform on stage and communicate with partners in their community.

The final level is social change, the outcome of the KickAct Theory of Change. Through youth development, youth leadership, and community service, the youth learn how to be active participants in their communities and become involved in service, advocacy, and community coalition. The empowered youth actively participate in democracy and creatively solve social issues.

The KickAct Theory of Change must be integral to the monitoring and evaluation stages: “The theory of change will help programme staff and evaluators understand what the project is trying to achieve, how, and why. Knowing this critical information will enable staff and evaluators to monitor and measure the desired results and compare them against the original theory of change” (Corlazzoli & White, 2013, p.9).

Monitoring should occur weekly and monthly, while the evaluation should include a program evaluation at the midterm (after 5 months), and at the conclusion (after 10 months). Finally, a post-program evaluation is necessary to measure long-term outcomes. The monitoring of program implementation should include the quality of the services provided, staff performance, the feedback of the various stakeholders. Administrative and fiscal activities should also be continually monitored.



Theory of Change

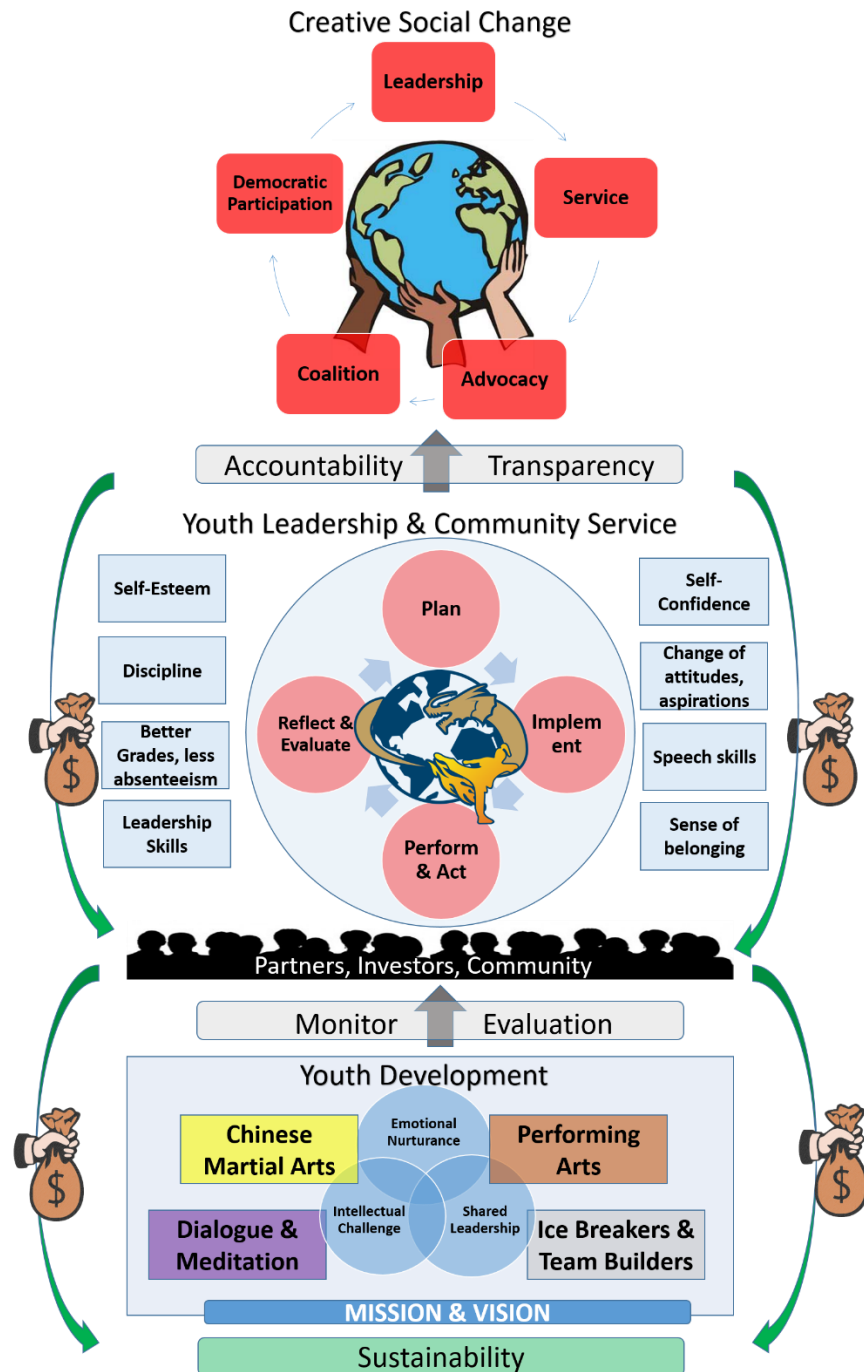


Figure 1: theory of change

Chinese Martial arts

Traditional Chinese martial arts are taught as a system for health and self-defense, yet also include values derived from Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Grounded in Chinese cosmology, traditional Chinese martial arts posit that individuals are active participants in the cosmos. Every participant is thus responsible for the world around them and interacts with every other participant in the cosmos. The realization of human connectedness is relevant to global citizenship. Moreover, Chinese martial arts, based on dedication and discipline, can provide youth with a structured environment to safely partner with adults. That structured environment can fill a gap for those youth who are lacking a supportive environment at home or in school.

Chinese martial arts can be traced back to the Xia Dynasty (夏朝), about 4000 years ago, when a system was developed for self-defense and military training in ancient China (Wong, 2014). As with all traditional Martial Arts throughout history, Chinese martial arts involved a variety of training. The martial artists engaged in many forms of physical conditioning and trained in the use of many different weapons. This training also included a considerable amount of time spent outdoors, where military conflict and activity took place.

Gong fu (功夫), or Kung fu as it is commonly known to Westerners, means *effort* and in China the term can be used to describe an activity in which effort is required to obtain skill or ability. Kung fu is recognized as skill attained through effort. The purpose of practicing Traditional Chinese martial arts is not competition, but rather an aspiration to self-cultivation. Traditional Gong fu includes hard or external techniques (force vs force) and soft or internal techniques (use the opponent's force).

Martial arts have a positive impact on the general well-being of the participants:
“Traditional martial arts practice usually incorporates an element of meditation and breath

control, and takes place in an environment of discipline, self-respect, and courtesy to others. These practices improve psycho-logical health by promoting relaxation, self-esteem, and mind-body coordination” (as cited in Woodward, 2009, p.41). Being taught ethical behavior is important in learning moral behavior: “Youth in a Tae Kwon Do class that emphasized physical skills related to fighting plus the philosophy underlying Tae Kwon Do (i.e., reflection and meditation) reported lower levels of anxiety and aggression, increased self-esteem, and improved social skills in comparison to those students who received training in self-defense skills only” (as cited in Gatz, Messner, & Ball-Rokeach, 2002, p.37).

While they are seen by many as violent disciplines, martial arts have proven to be efficient to help violent adolescents in “[...] coping with the complexities of an often dysfunctional family environment” (Twemlow & Sacco, 1998, p.505). According to Twemlow and Sacco, the philosophy of the martial arts instructor and his/her relationship with the students facilitates the process: “The “bad” ethics of the street or pathological family are slowly replaced by the “good” ethics of the teacher” (Twemlow & Sacco, 1998, p.515).

Martial arts also play a role in targeting executive functions: “Computerised training, classroom instruction and curriculum, aerobic exercise, mindfulness training and martial arts have all been found to have a positive effect on child executive functions” (as cited in Fitzpatrick, 2014, p. 161). Three main components of executive function are inhibitory control, working memory, and attention (Garon et al 2008). Poor executive function in children is likely to manifest itself in a number of noticeable ways in the classroom:

- Disorganized desks and messy lockers
- Hard time sitting still
- Hard time following sequential instructions

- Hard time managing time
- Difficulty in controlling impulses
- Poor interpersonal communication
- Difficulty cooperating with others (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that “coordinates higher-order cognitive processes and executive functioning” (as cited in Johnson, Blum & Giedd, 2009, p.3), develops during childhood. Anyway, executive function continues to mature during adolescence: “executive functions develop as the prefrontal lobes mature during childhood and early adulthood” (as cited in Fitzpatrick, 2014, p.160). This is especially important in explaining the risky behavior of many adolescents: “Steinberg, Dahl, and others have hypothesized that a temporal gap between the development of the socioemotional system of the brain (which experiences an early developmental surge around puberty) and the cognitive control system of the brain (which extends through late adolescence) underlies some aspects of risk-taking behavior” (as cited in Johnson, Blum & Giedd, 2009, p.3). Traditional martial arts, besides impacting the general well-being of the youth, could also help improve executive functions and reduce risky behavior in adolescents. As a result, youth who practice traditional martial arts could earn better grades in school, deal better with their life, and be less prone to risky and unwanted behavior.

Performing arts

Performing arts, combined with martial arts, can encourage youth self-expression. Performing arts positively impact youth development in multiple ways: “Sustained student involvement in theatre arts (acting in plays and musicals, participating in drama clubs, and taking acting lessons) associates with a variety of developments for youth: gains in reading proficiency,

gains in self-concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others” (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999, p.2).

In the KickAct program the performance creates a continuum with Chinese martial arts, youth creativity and leadership, and social service. The performance is the culmination of the youth effort in the planning and implementation of a show. Most important, the performing arts are taught to the youth utilizing the forms and methods of the Theater of the Oppressed founded by Augusto Boal. According to Boal: “Theater is change and not simple representation of what exists: it is becoming and not being” (Boal, 1985, p.28). The purpose of the Theater of the Oppressed is to engage people in observing themselves and for them to reflect and have a dialogue to accelerate the process of liberation: "The Theatre of the Oppressed creates spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future, instead of waiting for it"(Boal, 1992, p.5). When participating in after school programs, the youth can learn drama skills through games and exercises. After identifying and analyzing a problem, the youth represent it in their play. Subsequently, they discuss possible solutions and apply them in action in the play. In summary, performing arts, not only could encourage self-expression, but would also be integral to the development of critical thinking skills.

Meditation

Traditional martial arts include meditation practices. Meditation has been reported to be a useful tool to enhance psychosocial and socioemotional functioning through positive changes in self-esteem (Benson et al, 1994). According to Norton C., “[...] meditation allows the individual to come to a fuller and deeper understanding of the motivations, desires, fears, and at underlie behavior and make up everyday life” (Norton, 2010, p.151). Additionally, meditation can help the youth relax and focus on the program. In-depth interviews conducted among the participants

in a study of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) among urban youth yielded the finding that: “all in-depth interview participants reported experiencing some form of benefit and enhanced self-awareness as a result of MBSR program participation” (Kerrigan, et al, 2011). Meditation practices that are included in the traditional martial arts training, as well as specific activities in the KickAct program, could help the youth deal with everyday stress and gain self-esteem and self-awareness.

Dialogue

According to Mills, the goal of liberal education is to create self-cultivating men and women, and equally important, self-cultivating publics (Mills, 1959). In a statement evocative of Dewey, Mills wrote: “We must proceed in such a way and with such materials as to enable him to gain increasingly rational insight into these concerns”. (Mills, 1959, p. 369).

Dialogue provides opportunities for reflection on social topics. “Well-facilitated peer dialogue allows teens a safe space to share personally, analyze issues, address conflict, and envision themselves as leaders taking social action” (Ungerleider, 2012, p.381). Through dialogue, the youth can analyze the world around them and explore alternatives to the conventions of the adult world. Taking action to change the world is a result of increased sense of self-esteem in the community: “The purpose of dialogue in YPLP is to empower young people to speak their mind and feel that their voices are heard” (Ungerleider, 2012, p.382). The function of the dialogue in the KickAct program is to give a voice to the youth and to encourage them to speak their mind and reflect on social issues.

Service and leadership activities

Youth plan, implement and perform martial arts and performing arts shows. The proceeds of the show are given to charity. During the implementation of the plan, the youth are engaged in problem solving tasks and encouraged to make their own decisions with the support of adults

that they create partnerships with. Empowering youth and engaging them in community activities allows them to interact with adults and have guidance as they develop the skills needed to make decisions and solve complex issues (Brennan and Barnett 2009). Through representations of their views of the world, the youth educate the audience about social justice, environmental issues, and advocacy. Most important, the youth learn to think critically about social issues: “[...] service learning should help students go beyond acts of “charity” to develop the skills and perspectives of critical reflection and action central to the pursuit of constructive social change” (Claus & Ogden, 1999, p.3).

As pointed out by Lakin R. and Mahoney A., reviews, assessments and evaluations of youth programs “suggest that involvement in community service is related to healthy outcomes across multiple realms” (Lakin & Manoney, 2006, p.514). Among the positive outcomes from participation in community service are a stronger self-image and improved interpersonal relationships and skills, such as social relatedness, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, sense of community, empathy, nurturance and altruism (as cited in Lakin & Manoney, 2006, p.514). Most importantly, community service provides opportunities for the youth to experience the practice of learned concepts and ideas, linking “action and doing on the one hand, and knowledge and understanding on the other” (Dewey, 1932, p.107). Through service, the youth enrolled in the KickAct program would learn by doing, develop critical knowledge about social issues and a sense of connection and collaboration.

Ice breakers and team building activities

The ice breakers and team building activities will encourage productive participation and establish “mutually empathetic and mutually empowering relationships”. The framework of the program is grounded in:

1. Emotional nurturance: creation of an environment where the youth feel safe, appreciated and feel free to express opinions and emotions
2. Intellectual challenges: to gain critical skills, confidence to speak their mind and a sense of contribution
3. Shared leadership: adults share leadership with the youth; the youth are given opportunities to collectively and individually experience and exercise power; youth take action for social change (DiBenedetto A. & Ungerleider, 1997).

Ice breakers and team builders are useful tools to create a sense of “tribe” for the youth.

Everyone in the tribe can feel safe, find their role and make a contribution to the group.

The Outdoors

The KickAct program also involves time spent outdoors, training martial arts, meditating and cleaning city parks. The goal is to teach the youth to practice their routine physical training outdoors and to appreciate and take care of the environment.

The deficits of outside play in children and adolescents “[...] have resulted in significant increases in emotional and psychological disorders, decreased capacity to deal with stressors, and decreased physical fitness” (Mainella, Agate, & Clark, 2011).

Availability of green spaces impacts mental health and well-being: “Studies in various groups such as students, inner city girls and workers reported associations between green space with a variety of psychological, emotional and mental health benefits” (as cited in Lee and Maheswaran, 2010).

Nature holds great importance in Chinese martial arts philosophy. The Zhuangzi, one of the main founders of Daoism, “promotes an ethic of “following natural spontaneity (ziran)” (ch.5) and of “complying with the natural spontaneity of things” (ch.7)” (as cited in Selin, 2003,

p.161). Based on these ideas, I believe that spending time outdoors could help deconstruct social artifacts. As indicated by a study investigating the perceived impact of outdoor residential camp experience on the spirituality of youth: “In this environment, experiencing structured and unstructured time alone influenced their spirituality, by providing them with opportunities to reflect on their lives” (Sweatman & Heintzman, 2011). Through reflecting on their lives and experiencing the naturalness of being “a human being”, the youth could learn to review and criticize social constructs.

KickAct workshop design

According to Dewey, “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflection on experience. Reliving of an experience leads to making connections between information and feelings produced by the experience” (Dewey, 1933, p. 78). Modern researchers also tend to affirm Dewey’s ideas; in his book *Biology of Learning*, James Zull indicates that “[...] the learning cycle arises directly from the structure of the brain” (Zull, 2002, p.19). According to Zull, the brain carries out four basic functions: getting information (sensory cortex,) making meaning of information (back integrative cortex,) creating new ideas from these meanings, (front integrative cortex,) and acting on those ideas (motor cortex). Zull suggests that if we ask our students to do these four things, they will exercise their whole brain (Zull, 2002). The various components of the workshop aim to guide the participants through the whole learning cycle. The objective is that leadership behavior is learned.

Following this model, I designed a workshop consisting of three sections. Each session includes martial arts, dialogue, meditation, ice breakers and team building activities. Each

session is 2 hours long. Since the first session contains a longer introduction with a questionnaire, I decided to not include a performing arts activity; only the second and third sessions of the workshop incorporated performance activities. This choice was expected not to reduce the efficacy of the workshop given that the youth would probably not be ready to act out new ideas. In fact, during the first session, the youth will likely be too busy processing new information and getting acquainted with the martial arts, the meditation and the dialogue. The activities were generally ordered in the same way for the three sections:

1. Introduction
2. Ice breakers
3. Martial arts
4. Meditation
5. Dialogue
6. Team builders
7. Performing arts
8. Conclusion

Chinese Martial arts

The martial arts class provides the youth with discipline as well as opportunities to build self-esteem and self-confidence. Although a long term martial arts training is required to fully achieve these things, it is possible to trigger the wanted behaviors for the short term period of the workshop. In addition to learning basic motor skills, basic martial arts skills and a basic form, the youth are introduced to group work. The specific martial arts style taught in the KickAct workshop is Meihuaquan 梅花拳 (Plum Blossom Boxing), martial arts largely practiced “in village settings in Henan, Hebei, and Shandong province” (as cited in Zhang, Green, &

Gutierrez-Garcia, 2016, p.18). Meihuaquan is considered a vernacular martial art. Vernacular martial arts:

- Do not adhere to a structured curriculum
- Emulate vernacular movement and musical forms
- Are structured hierarchically based on a familial model
- Are traditions that meet the need of local groups (Zhang, Green, & Gutierrez-Garcia, 2016).

A mixed quantitative-qualitative study that had the purpose of investigating the social foundation of the revival of Meihuaquan in rural Northern China, concluded that: “The fundamental reason for Meihuaquan revival is that it cultivated the sense of group identity for local people in northern China. This kind of group identity is not only about social relationships, but also spiritual life; not only accepted by males, but also recognized by females; not only felt by older people, but also supported by the younger generation; not only favored by peasants, but also practiced by college students. In short, Meihuaquan established the identity of its members, local people and government by many strategies, and kept the balance between the three factions” (Zhang, Green, & Gutierrez-Garcia, 2016, p.18). For these reasons, Meihuaquan seems to be the right style to use when trying to educate the youth to build community and to engage in social change.

Performing arts

Because of the short length of the workshop, the youth will not have the time to put new ideas into action. Nevertheless, through acting out ideas elaborated in groups, they will activate the motor cortex and complete the learning cycle: “In Popular Theatre, through ‘acting out’

participants are involved in a process that is critical and analytic, a mimetic process that has transformative potential” (as cited in Conrad, 2004, p.11). Popular theater is done in 6 steps:

- Problem identification
- Analysis of the problem
- Codification: problems are put into dramatic representation
- Presentation of the play
- Discussion of issues and solutions
- Action: solutions are applied in action (Anderson, Michol, & Silverberg, 1994)

The form of Popular Theatre that best serves to initiate critical thinking is Forum Theatre. In Forum Theatre, the traditional passive audience is transformed in active audience by letting the spectator stop the scene and participate in the performance with a realistic solution. According to Boal “Forum Theater is a reflection on reality and a rehearsal for future action. In the present we re-live the past to create the future” (Boal, 1998, p.9). Furthermore, “The performance is an artistic and intellectual game played between actors and spect-actors (Boal, 1992, p. 243). In summary these are the steps:

- The show is performed as a conventional play that depicts a view of the world
- The spect-actors are asked if they agree with the solutions represented
- The spect-actors are informed that the play will run a second time and that they can take the actor place whenever they are making a mistake. All they have to do is shout “stop!”
- The spect-actor who shouted stop takes the place of the actor
- The actors intensify their oppression (Boal, 1992, p. 243-244).

According to Boal, “The game is spect-actors-trying to find a new solution, trying to change the world-against actors-trying to hold them back, to force them to accept the world as it

is” (Boal, 1992, p.244). The game simulates breaking the status quo, typically protected at all costs through the structural functionalism perspective. Kubow and Fossum indicate that schools show the structural functionalism perspective: “[...] schools adopt many structures that seems aimed at the maintenance of predictability and stability” (Kubow & Fossum, 2007, p.36). Through forum theater, the KickAct’s youth could build experience in speaking out to break the “status quo” and actively interpose to subdue an oppressor.

Meditation

For the workshop the participants did three different kinds of meditation: a mindfulness meditation, a Qi gong, and a guided sitting meditation. Mindfulness exercises are an easy way to introduce the youth to the practice of meditation, because they teach how to be aware of the present moment, rather than focus on something: “Derived from Eastern contemplative traditions, *mindfulness* involves attending to the present in a sustained and receptive fashion” (as cited in Mendelson et al., 2010, p.986). Awareness of thoughts, without focusing on them, is fundamental to the practice of Daoist forms, as well as other forms of meditation that are part of the traditional Chinese martial arts training. Because sitting meditation is not appreciated by everyone, for the second session I decided to try a dynamic Qi gong 氣功 (translated as “work on energy”), which is a form of meditation in movement. A dynamic approach could be better for those youth who have a hard time sitting still and relaxing their postural muscles. Furthermore, I planned to use Liangong Qi gong, a system created by Dr. Zhuang Yuan Ming in 1974, to address patients who suffered from acute pain. Tests on over 10,000 patients confirmed that this kind of practice was effective in relieving pain and stress and provided long term flexibility and muscular toning (Sharp, 2011). Finally, for the third session I planned a sitting guided meditation.

Dialogue

For the dialogue I chose specific topics that would help me engage the participants in reflecting about:

- the issue: lack of support in school and at home and lack of partnership adults
- what has been done: how they have participated in their communities
- what could be done in the future: what the youth could do to change the world

Dialogue topics and questions for the three sections:

1. Section 1

- ✓ Theme: Adults share and listen to the youth.
- ✓ Questions: In what ways did you experience partnership with adults? Can you give some examples of situations in which you felt listened to or not listened to by adults?

2. Section 2

- ✓ Theme: Youth participation in their communities
- ✓ With a partner, participants share examples of ways they have participated in their community.
- ✓ Questions: In what ways do you participate in your community? Did you find any limitations to participate?

3. Section 3

- ✓ Theme: social change
- ✓ Question: What are the ways youth could change the world?

In order to ensure a safe and respectful environment for the dialogue, for the first session of the workshop, the participants are introduced to group norms:

1. Respect
2. Don't interrupt
3. Let each speaker finish and give space before the next
4. Listen intentionally and with an Open Mind
5. Use "I" statements; speak for yourself
6. Don't attack another speaker for differing views
7. Keep confidentiality: who says what in the dialogue group stays in the group

(Ungerleider & Norton, 2015).

Partnership with a religious community

A study from the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life indicates that 16% of the people around the globe have no religious affiliation (Pew Research Center, 2012). Nevertheless, a majority of the worldwide population practices one or more religions. Although religion or faith seems too often a cause of local and international issues, after September 11, efforts for religious dialogue and collaboration have grown. In January 2016, I had the pleasure to attend a conference presented by the World Affair Council of Oregon: "The Human Face of Migration, Displacement and the Search for Home". At one of the breakout sessions, Sister Millie Reavis, Member of the Institute for Christian-Muslim Understanding, Ned Rosch, founder of Jewish voice for Peace, Wajdi Said, President of the Muslim Educational Trust, and Jan Musgrove Elfers, executive director of the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, specified how they started to collaborate after September 11, in the effort to defeat Islamophobia. Moreover, they indicated that religions are often portrayed as a cause for division and wars. In fact, while maintaining their differences, religions share common values and have the common goal of "helping people out". Finally, they pointed out that educating youth of different religions

to reciprocal understanding and engaging them through common goals of social change is essential.

Through partnering with the Catholic community, my hope is to utilize the KickAct program to empower and educate the Catholic youth to universalistic values. The Catholic community is already a well-established international community. By partnering with the Catholic community, it is possible to access youth worldwide. At any rate, the program does not have to be limited to the Catholic communities; instead, there is enormous potential to propose the same youth empowerment programs to different religious institutions. Empowered youth, members of diverse religious groups, could become the voice for peace worldwide.

A martial arts-based program could easily suit religious groups. As a matter of fact, the practice of Chinese martial arts has been combined for hundreds of years with philosophical and religious principles, in particular Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. The martial arts developed differently in different religious contexts, such as the Daoist Wudang temple and the Buddhist Shaolin temple. Nevertheless, every Chinese martial arts style aims to cultivate body, mind and spirit. Spiritual elevation is considered the highest achievement of practicing Chinese martial arts.

Kick Act workshop implementation

The KickAct workshop was implemented at the St. Alice Catholic Church in Springfield, Oregon. The partnership with the St. Alice Church had some advantages. First, it provided me with 34 participants without cost to enroll them; second, it gave me access to a community with

shared values and goals; third, because the St. Alice Church shared a desire to empower the youth, our partnership found a strong mission alignment.

The implementation of the workshop was limited by several factors. Most importantly, youth attendance and participation to the workshop were inconsistent, hence impacting the results of the evaluation. Also, cross-cultural issues, given that most of the participants of Mexican background, may have influenced the implementation of the workshop.

First session

The first session was attended by 17 youth. Considering that the activities were all-new experiences for most of the participants, the first session went rather well. The ice breakers gave initial spark to the workshop; most of the youth seemed to enjoy them. The 30-minute martial arts session was also welcomed enthusiastically by most of the youth. As it often happens with beginners, some were laughing and not taking the training too seriously while others were putting effort into it and feeling inadequate to perform the drills. The attitude and the attire of many of the youth were not suitable for a martial arts class. Nonetheless, when working individually punching and kicking targets, the youth started to put more effort in their training and they seemed more confident. Next, I introduced them to “7 Reasons Why Teens should meditate” (Marini, 2016) and to Mindfulness Meditation. I then proceeded with basic mindfulness exercises:

- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing (1 minute)
- Observe an ordinary object: do not think too hard, just observe it for what it is (1 minute)
- 10 seconds count: concentrate only on counting; if you find yourself thinking about something else, start over

Finally, I used a guided meditation from YouTube, that included a prayer of Mother Teresa. When writing the lesson plans, I purposely looked for some Catholic prayers proposed in the meditation format. I thought it would have been effective to combine the religious beliefs with the meditation techniques. In fact, I think the meditation with the prayer was taken more seriously and better executed by the youth.

The dialogue was the most challenging task. I first spent a couple of minutes on the group norms, printed on a poster. Since the literature review suggested that youth tend to feel left out, or made uninvolved by the adults and also indicated the youth lacked support in school, I decided to explore relationships with the adults during the first session: In what ways did you experience partnership with adults? Can you give examples of situations in which you felt listened to or not listened to by adults? After the questions asked were further clarified, nobody seemed to be willing to talk. As suggested by professor John Ungerleider, I just sit quietly and looked at each of the youth. After about 2 minutes I said: “Anyone?” Although somebody broke the silence, the other youth present did not want to talk. It took some time before someone else spoke up, and ultimately three of the youth did the majority of the sharing. One of the youth proposed to just pass, or “popcorn” the talking stick around. Some of the youth just passed the stick around silently, and others simply indicated that they did not have anything to say about the topic. Two girls specified that they did not want to share their experiences. However, one of these two had later shared negative youth-adult experiences. While the topic seemed not to be appealing for the group, I also had the impression that these particular youths were not used to dialogue, but instead saw personal experiences as a private matter.

The last activity involved two team builders: the hula-hoop pass-around and the Human knot game. The youth were engaged, but because many of them have already done these games before, they were able to find the solution very easily.

Second session

The second session was attended by 34 youth. Due to the large number of participants and the disruptive behavior of some, the second session was more chaotic than the first one. Unfortunately, only some of the youth who attended the first session also attended the second. In addition to this setback, others who had not attended the first session were added that night. Although I had previously clarified with the Youth Ministry that I needed consistency of attendance for my evaluation, I was not informed that there was a high turnover of different youth and that on some Sundays the number of participants could drastically increase or decrease. Since I was already missing some of the participants to the first session and I could not predict who would return for the third session, I decided to have every new participant fill out a pre-questionnaire as well. Due to the time spent reintroducing the workshop and filling out forms and pre-questionnaires, the time dedicated to the activities was drastically reduced. Unfortunately, some of the youth attending this session were highly disruptive.

We started with two ice breakers: the “pulse competition” and the “what are you doing?” game. The participants were divided into two groups; while one of the groups worked well together, because of disruptive behaviors, the other seemed not to work out. The martial arts session was not taken seriously by some of the youth and others simply sat to watch rather than participate. Probably because it is composed of simple movements and since relaxing music was played, the Qigong (meditation in movement) had the most participants and almost everyone was able to keep quiet. For the dialogue, I asked the youth to find a partner and share examples of

their participation in the community. When asked to share with the group, only a few did. Enthused by the need to push for more dialogue, I asked what topics interested them. A few stated that they wanted to talk about Donald Trump; only jokes were shared.

For a team building activity the youth were divided into two groups to solve a maze. As with the dialogue, this activity saw low participation and when I asked why they were not participating some answered that they prefer to watch. Anyways, many commented that they though the activity was very fun.

Finally, I explained what the plans for the forum theater activity were and I asked to form a group that would perform; the others would be the spectators. The actors were asked to represent a struggle of power; the youth who was impersonating the CEO of a big corporation was given packages of M&Ms and asked to distribute to individuals with diverse roles in society: a politician; a doctor; a priest; an actor and the people. The youth were not ready to perform and did not show commitment and dedication to the task. While waiting for the actors, the spect-actors were asked to rank some professions in order of power in society. The performance was weak and the spect-actors did not participate. Furthermore, we ran out of time and the youth pointed out that some parents were waiting outside. Therefore, I had to close the workshop for that day.

Third session

The last session had a very low number of youth in attendance. In addition, the group was composed of some youth who participated to all three the sessions, some who skipped the second session and some who skipped the first session. Stirred by the previous sessions, I announced that to participate they needed to make an effort to do it actively and avoid being disruptive. Surprisingly, almost all of them decided to participate and follow expectations. The session

started with a couple of ice breakers: “Ultimate rock-paper-scissors” and the “Ball phrase” game. When asked to share how they felt when the ball was passed to them and to add a word to the previous one to make a phrase, someone pointed out that they just used random words because they had a phrase in mind that did not match the other youth’s phrases.

For the martial arts lesson, after the warm up and a few basics exercises, I introduced the participants to a form and had them perform it together in a circle. The youth pointed out how it was difficult to adjust when space was lacking and they were expecting to synchronize movements with others. Surprisingly, the sitting meditation with a St. Francis Prayer was the most difficult activity for this session. Although everyone participated quietly and respectfully, only a few relaxed and closed their eyes.

Because of the low participation during the first two dialogue sessions, this time I decided to ask if each of them would share one thing they would like to change in their life, community or in the world. Sexism and racism became the subject for further dialogue, but racism seemed to be an issue that all the participants were concerned with.

Next, the group was asked to use some cardboard tubes to make a marble slide from one wall to the other in the room in a team-building activity. The youth patiently worked together and one youth took most of the leadership role, directing the others to successfully complete the task.

“Invisible homeless” was the topic for the forum theater activity. I wanted the youth to reflect on an issue in the world around them, rather than on a youth issue. Although the participants indicated a strong interest for racism, I wanted to avoid any topic that could be emotionally linked to personal experiences. Homelessness is an issue that can be observed everywhere in Oregon’s cities, but none of the participants was experiencing homelessness.

Therefore, I thought it would have been easy for them to relate to the topic, without feeling directly involved. Since, in the second session, I was not successful in encouraging the youth to participate as performers or as spect-actors, this time I assigned roles. I asked one of the youth to be “the homeless” holding a sign stating: “homeless, need help”; one youth was the business owner who does not want the homeless to be on the sidewalk in front of their business; one youth was playing the police officer who goes to send the homeless away; I was playing a citizen walking by and complaining about the area being trashy because of the homeless; the rest of the youth were spectators. The performance was very well improvised and when it was repeated a second time the spect-actors stopped the scene and made a case for the homeless having the right to be on the side walk. The youth who were performing the business owner and the police officer reinforced their struggle for power and made a case for their right to send the homeless away. After their performance, I engaged them in a reflection about how we can oppose civil rights abuses, and about the importance of having our opinions heard. The session ended with the youth filling out the post-questionnaire.

KickAct workshop evaluation

The initial questionnaire, administrated in the beginning of the first session of the workshop, served as initial evaluation. A second questionnaire, administrated at the conclusion of the workshop, provided a final evaluation. Since my goal was to measure the attitudes and opinions of the participants about youth leadership and participation in their communities, I decided to use 5 point Likert Scale questions.

Table 2: Kick Act Workshop Pre-questionnaire

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Adults listen to me.	6%	9%	18%	58%	9%
2. My school environment is supportive.	0%	3%	27%	42%	27%
3. I feel that I can make decisions that can have an impact on my community.	6%	3%	32%	38%	21%
4. I feel that I can partner with adults to improve my community.	3%	12%	35%	38%	12%
5. I'm involved in volunteering, service and/or politics	9%	29%	21%	21%	21%

(34 participants questioned).

From the pre-questionnaire we can see that initially 63% of the youth felt listened to by the adults, and 18% of the youth neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement; perhaps the youth who gave an answer in the middle felt listened to by adults occasionally. According to 69% of the youth, their school environment is supportive. This data closely resembles the statistical data about supportive atmospheres in schools found in the Oregon student wellness survey by the Oregon Health Authority (Oregon Health Authority, 2014). Although only 6% of the participants chose the low end answer (disagree and strongly disagree), 27% of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed, perhaps indicating that the school environment is not always supportive.

While 59% of the youth indicated that they felt they could make decisions that impact the community, 32% of the youth indicated uncertainty (Neither disagree nor agree). The level of uncertainty indicated may be consistent with a lack of success in making decisions that impact their community or a lack of experience in making decisions. Half of the participants indicated

that they feel they can partner with adults to improve their community. Of the participants, 35% neither agreed or disagreed with the statement “I feel that I can partner with adults to improve my community”. This data could show that youth were not able to partner with the adults or that they did not experience affiliation with adults. Finally, 42% of the youth indicated participation in volunteering, service and/or politics and 38% of the youth did not participate in volunteering, service and/or politics. The remaining 29% responding “Neither disagree nor agree” could show that the youth do not have a clear definition of participation.

Table 3: Kick Act Workshop Post-questionnaire

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Through today’s workshop I gained the tools to have my voice be heard	0%	0%	43%	57%	0%
2. After the workshop, I feel more confident in my skills	0%	0%	43%	43%	14%
3. I feel that I can make decisions that can have an impact on my community	0%	0%	43%	43%	14%
4. I feel that I can partner with adults to improve my community	0%	29%	14%	57%	0%
5. In the future, I will participate in service, volunteering and politics	14%	0%	43%	14%	29%

(7 participants questioned).

The post-questionnaire shows that the majority of those who took the post-questionnaire felt that through the workshop they gained the tools to have their voice be heard (57%) and that after the workshop they felt more confident in their skills (57%). However, 43% of participants indicated uncertainty as to whether they had gained these tools. Of the participants, 57% also

indicated that they feel they can make decisions that have an impact on their communities and that they feel they can partner with adults to improve their community.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare the pre and post questionnaires because of inconsistency in participation. In fact, most of the participants of the first session did not attend the last session, some attended only the last two, and some did not attend the second session.

Observations

Lack of structure

When I partnered with the Youth Ministry at the St. Alice Catholic Church in Springfield, Oregon, I expected to have access to an organized group of youth meeting for church schooling. However, it turned out that the youth attend on a “drop-in” basis. Being accustomed to an unstructured environment, the youth were not ready to participate in structured activities. Therefore, extra time would have been necessary to create a structured environment with specific expectations. Only after clarifying the expectations of the youth, at the third session of the workshop, were all the youth participating. While a couple of youth quit at this session, those who remained seemed to enjoy being in a structured environment. Furthermore, many youth pointed out that they were having fun with the activities I was proposing and that usually they were bored at the church. Finally, some youth followed me to the parking lot when I was leaving and asked if I intended to return. I realized that there was a need the youth had for youth empowerment and leadership programs. Furthermore, it was only after I was able to create a structured environment that the youth began seeing me as a mentor.

Lack of commitment

Regrettably, although parents were informed about the workshop and signed the needed forms, most of the participants merely dropped by to attend the workshop without being informed about what they should have expected. Hence, although the participants were introduced to the goals of the workshop, they lacked the initial motivation to intentionally learn something new. Because, according to Paulo Freire, “Only through engaging students in the terms of students’ own experiences can an educator then build in concepts of learning that dialogues with those experiences to create a more dynamic, empowered, liberatory educational experience” (as cited in Doherty & Ketchner, 2005, p.1), it is important that the youth intentionally engage the learning and empowering process. At the center of liberal education is the intentional learner, framed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities: “Becoming such an intentional learner means developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used. Intentional learners are integrative thinkers who can see connections in seemingly disparate information and draw on a wide range of knowledge to make decisions” (AACU, 2002, p.21). Commitment is also especially important when learning martial arts.

Lack of participation

Throughout the workshop several youth refused to participate in some or most of the activities. Inconsistent participation could negatively affect workshop outcomes. Additionally, while ice breakers and team building activities had the strongest participation, dialogue and forum theater had the weakest. Some of the participants stated that they felt that they should not share their experiences and that they did not have much to say about the proposed topics. In my lesson plans I placed the meditation activities between the martial arts and the dialogue to make

the transition from the more physical and dynamic Kung fu to a quiet and peaceful dialogue. Meditation, an introspective practice, may not be ideal for the youth to do this prior to sharing their experiences in the dialogue activity. Perhaps, it would have been better to have the team building activities between the mediation and the dialogue.

While lack of commitment explains the lack of participation well, I believe another factor to consider was that over 90% of the participants were specifically of Mexican background. While many of these youth grew up in the USA, they have Mexican Spanish-speaking parents and likely speak a second language at home.

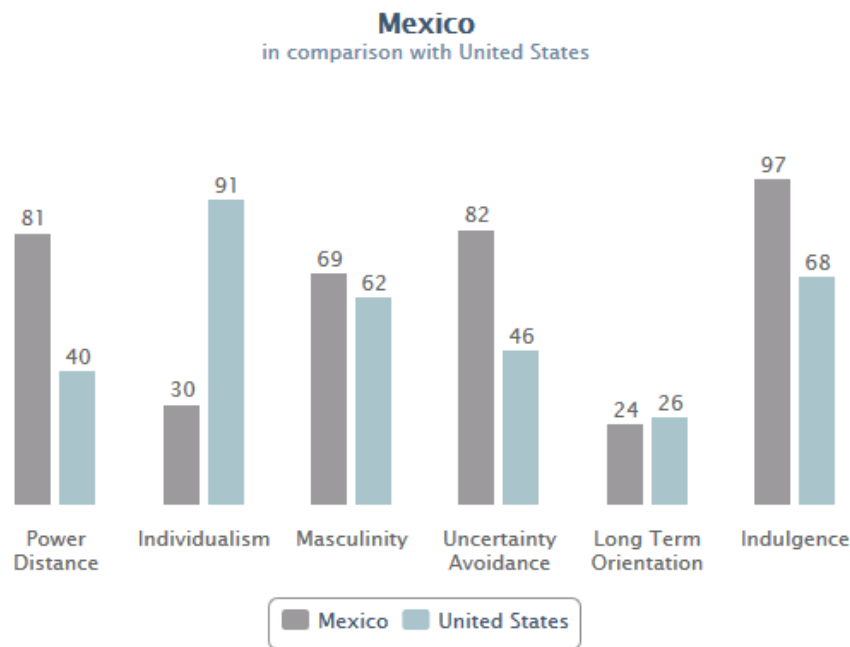


Figure 2: Mexico compared to the US on Hofstede model

As shown in figure 2, members of Mexican culture tend to show a higher degree of uncertainty avoidance: “The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these [...]” (the Hofstede Center, n.d.). High uncertainty avoidance may cause participants to not feel

confident about trying new things. Therefore, participants with higher uncertainty avoidance may require a longer period of time to build trust. Accordingly, the participants of this workshop may require a longer workshop for greater participation.

The time frame

Emotional nurturance and feeling safe are important elements of youth program leadership. Given that a structured environment is present for the workshop, building trust still requires time. Alternately, a workshop may not be the right setup for a multi-component program. For instance, only limited time can be spent on each of the workshop's components. While team building activities and ice breakers are easy to implement, the martial arts and the performing arts require progressive training and a longer commitment. Consequently, it would take longer for the youth to build the necessary skills to perform the martial arts and the performing arts with confidence.

Furthermore, according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, to thrive in a complex world, the intentional learners should become:

“Empowered through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills. Informed by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies. Responsible for their personal actions and for civic values” (AACU, 2002, p.xi).

To become empowered, informed and responsible may require a longer time than the implemented six hours of the KickAct workshop.

Racism

The dialogue topic that most interested the group is racism. The participants referred to racism using the white-person of color dichotomy, but also spoke of nationalism. All the youth indicated being pessimistic about a possible solution to racism. All participants agreed that some youth are racist because their parents are racist. Moreover, the group agreed that, since racism is

caused by struggles for power, there will always be those who disseminate hate toward specific minorities, in order to gain power. It is attention-grabbing how these adolescents pointed to the intersection of race, gender and capitalism in creating and perpetuating systems of oppression. A quote by Bell Hooks illustrates the intersectionality well: “As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realized” (Hooks, n.d.).

The “invisible homeless” performance

The “invisible homeless” performance was intended to open a reflection about people’s apathy when faced with social issues in their everyday life. Although the roles for the forum theater session were assigned, the youth decided what their impersonated role should have said or done. After I acted as a potential customer who did not like the area because the homeless was there, the business owner tried to send the homeless away. One of the spect-actors pointed out that he could not do that because “it is a public space” and “the homeless has every right to be there”. Moreover, she also referred to the business owner as someone rich and making easy money. The business owner replied that “he works hard to be where he is” and next he went to call the police. The police officer was confronted by another spect-actor who stated that “there is no law against sitting in a public space” and that “the homeless needs a space to go”. The police officer replied: “I am just doing my job. I received a call from this business owner. He is losing customers because of the homeless sitting right here. I have to send him away”.

When the spect-actors defended the rights of the homeless, the business owner and the police officer intensified their struggle for power. During the struggle for power, body language changed. The business owner used some gestures while telling the homeless to go away. The police officer became more aggressive and started to move the arms while she was indicating

that she is backed by her position given to her by her job. The business owner became more aggressive when he was told that he makes easy money, but later he looked disconcerted and he took a step back. The youth who played the role of the homeless was just sadly sitting and holding his sign as he was a non-animated part of the scene. He was not told he could not defend himself, but he decided not to. The victim of discrimination was represented as annihilated and in need of help to defend his rights. It is remarkable that topics such as rights, public space, economic inequalities and unjust enforcement were pointed out by the spect-actors.

Despite the short duration of the workshop and its limitations, the youth engaged in a dialogue about racism and represented homelessness as a social issue and critically deconstructed it. The participants also appeared to enjoy the workshop activities, especially the team builders, ice breakers, and martial arts.

Conclusion

The workshop was effective in providing an initial assessment for KickAct. Through the workshop it was possible to determine which topics interest the youth and to estimate the strategies that work better with specific groups of youth. According to Fletcher Tembo, every Theory of Change must be informed by the context and “Understanding context involves finding ways to drill down to the particular incentives and interests of the actors involved” (Tembo, 2012). For example, after implementing the KickAct workshop at the St. Alice Catholic Church in Springfield, Oregon, I became aware that I would have to dedicate more time to build a safe and structured environment to run the program there. Furthermore, greater resources would be needed to stimulate the active participation of youth in all the proposed activities. Finally, racism

would be a major issue to work on through the KickAct Program at the St. Alice Catholic Church.

Because of inconsistent attendance and participation, it was not possible to determine whether the short KickAct workshop was successful in empowering the youth. Further evaluation would be necessary to determine the efficacy of the KickAct workshop as a method for youth empowerment. In the future, it would be extremely important to evaluate the level of structure in the youth environment at the hosting organization. Multiple visits to the site to evaluate the level of organization and the youth environment at the hosting site should be required. Also, to ensure a higher degree of commitment from the participants it would be important to find methods for recruitment that inform the youth more comprehensively about the goals of the workshop.

Team building activities and ice breakers are easy to implement when working with new groups. However, the two main components of the KickAct program, the martial arts and the performing arts, require time and dedication for the youth to acquire the necessary basic skills. Intellectual skills may also need time to be developed. Also, three sessions of two hours each is not enough to gain the trust of the youth and create a safe environment. Youth may also require group dialogue practice. For the workshop, the dialogue should be focused on topics chosen by the youth. Asking the youth what they are concerned about is not only a key element of the philosophy of Paulo Freire about liberated education, but can also make the dialogue easier to implement.

Finally, the workshop can also provide an initial exposure to traditional Chinese martial arts and meditation. These disciplines are based on living in the moment, rather than in the past or the future, softness rather than hardness, and the cultivation of body, spirit and mind. My hope

is that more youth will adhere to these kinds of disciplines and learn a lifestyle that will help them to see themselves as both unique and connected to everybody else in the universe. Likewise, I am optimistic that cultivation of the self would help them reflect upon social constructs and fight social injustice.

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Appendix

Lesson plans

Lesson 1. Sunday, February 14th 2015

Main Ideas

Introduction to the workshop, to Chinese martial arts, and to mindfulness. Dialogue about youth-adult relationship.

Focus Areas/Social Skills Emphasized:

- ✓ Competence
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Character
- ✓ Caring/Compassion
- ✓ Connection
- ✓ Contribution

Lesson Content

Time	Lesson	Lesson content
5:00-5:15 pm	Introduction and questionnaire	Participants are introduced to the purpose and goals of the workshop and the research. Participants answer questions from the initial questionnaire.
5:15-5:30 pm	Ice breakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ names game: taking turns, every participant says their name with a specific tone or movement and the rest of the group has to mime the same;✓ Yarn Web game✓ Big wind blows game: one person in the center says "Big wind flows for everyone who...". Those who identify with that statement must move to an empty seat (not the one right next to them). The person in the middle tries to get into a new seat. The person who does not find a seat will be in the middle for the next round.
5:30-6:00 pm	Chinese Martial arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Introduction to Chinese martial arts and the meaning of Gong fu 功夫✓ Meaning of the Chinese Martial Arts Salutation as starting ending of the lesson

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm up: Baduanjing Qi gong 八段錦氣功 ✓ Basics stances ✓ Basic punches and punches with focus pad ✓ Kicks and kicks with focus pad ✓ Lien bu form ✓ Lien bu quan form in circle ✓ Final salutation
6:00-6:15 pm	Meditation and Introduction to Mindfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 7 reasons why teens should meditate <p>http://choices.scholastic.com/blog/7-reasons-why-teens-should-meditate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What is Mindfulness? ✓ Close your eyes and focus on your breathing (1 minute) ✓ Observe an ordinary object: do not think too hard, just observe it for what it is (1 minute) ✓ 10 seconds count: concentrate only on counting; if you find yourself thinking about something else, start over ✓ Mindfulness cues: focus on a sound that may be distracting; ✓ Mother Teresa pray meditation <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvhDGOXDxCY</p> <p>Concentration: focus on something</p> <p>Mindfulness: be aware of the present moment</p>
6:15-6:45 pm	Dialogue	<p>Theme: Adults share and listen to the youth</p> <p>Questions: In what ways did you experience partnership with adults? Can you make some examples of situations in which you felt listen or not listen by the adults?</p>
6:45-6:55 pm	Team Building Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ pass the hula-hoop around (variation with 2 hula hoops) ✓ all aboard ✓ human knot game
6:55-7:00 pm	Conclusion and drop off	

Supplies:

- ✓ questionnaires

- ✓ 2 hula hoops
- ✓ 4 pieces of carton board
- ✓ 1 Tibetan bell
- ✓ 2 focus pads
- ✓ 2 focus pads for kicks

Lesson 2. Sunday, February 21st 2015

Main Ideas

Meditation in movement (Qi gong 氣功). Dialogue about youth participation in their communities.

Focus Areas/Social Skills Emphasized:

- ✓ Competence
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Character
- ✓ Caring/Compassion
- ✓ Connection
- ✓ Contribution

Lesson Content

Time	Lesson	Lesson content
5:00-5:10 pm	Ice breakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Pass the pulse competition; ✓ “What are you doing?”
5:10-5:40 pm	Chinese Martial arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Initial Salutation ✓ Warm up: Baduanjing Qi gong 八段錦氣功 ✓ Basics stances, punches, kicks ✓ Basic blocks ✓ Lien bu quan form ✓ Lien bu quan form in circle ✓ Final salutation
5:40-5:55 pm	Meditation and Introduction to Mindfulness	Lian gong Qi gong: meditation in movement
5:55-6:15 pm	Dialogue	Theme: Youth participation in their communities

		5 minutes Brainstorming: With a partner, share examples of ways you have participated in your community. 13 minutes sharing and discussing with the rest of the group
6:15-6:30 pm	Team Building Activities	✓ The maze game
6:30-6:55 pm	Acting	“Power struggles”
6:55-7:00 pm	Conclusion and drop off	

Supplies:

- ✓ Questionnaires
- ✓ Tape
- ✓ Maze template
- ✓ 1 Tibetan bell
- ✓ 2 focus pads
- ✓ 2 focus pads for kicks

Lesson 3. Sunday, February 28st 2015

Main Ideas

Guided sitting meditation. Dialogue: Youth changing the world. Acting: The world envisioned by Catholic Youth of Springfield, OR.

Time	Lesson	Lesson content
5:00-5:10 pm	Ice breakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ultimate rock, scissors, paper; ✓ Ball phrase game;
5:10-5:40 pm	Chinese Martial arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Initial Salutation ✓ Warm up: Baduanjing Qi gong 八段錦氣功 ✓ Basics stances, punches, kicks ✓ Basic blocks ✓ Group martial arts choreography ✓ Final salutation
5:40-5:55 pm	Meditation and Introduction to Mindfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Guided sitting meditation <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p_yaNFSYao</p>

		✓ St Francis Pray meditation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A96cLV5E6VY
5:55-6:25 pm	Dialogue	Theme: Youth change the world Question: If you could change one thing in the world, what would you change? 2-minute inspirational video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2A-
6:25-6:35 pm	Team Building Activities	✓ Marble pass
6:35-6:50 pm	Acting	“The invisible homeless”
6:50-7:00 pm	Final questionnaire and conclusion	

Supplies:

- ✓ Questionnaires
- ✓ Marbles
- ✓ Cardboard or foam tubes
- ✓ 1 Tibetan bell
- ✓ 2 focus pads
- ✓ 2 focus pads for kicks