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The Thesis Committee for Tennille D Moten certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

PROMOTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MARTIAL ARTS IN A  
COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM

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PROMOTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MARTIAL ARTS IN A  
COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM

by

Tennille Moten

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

Health and Sport Science

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## **Abstract**

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The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences and perspectives of participants in a community-based TPSR martial arts program designed to promote positive youth development among at-risk African American adolescents living in an urban environment. Case study methodology was used to investigate and analyze the experiences and perspectives of participants, relative to the benefits of martial arts, relevance of martial arts on life, youth development, and skill acquisition. Participants were four male members of the YMCA Community Action Plan (Y-CAP) program. Data sources included observational field notes, case files, and interviews with Y-CAP staff, participants, and parents. The specific questions that guided the research were: What was the objective of the martial arts club; What knowledge did the participants gain from their martial arts experience; Did the martial arts club promote positive youth development among at-risk youth; and Did the martial arts club experience promote physical skill and technique development? Results brought into view four diverse cases that proved relevant and informative in capturing the experiences and perspectives of participants in the martial arts program.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For most inner-city adolescents, the transition into adulthood can be a difficult process to endure with the issues that affect disenfranchised urban communities in the United States (US). These issues include poverty, violence, criminal activity, lack of physical activity resources, unsafe environments, a lack of support, school dropouts, drug abuse, and prostitution (CDC, 2009; MacKay & Duran, 2007). To be fortified against these negative influences, youth need to feel they are included and capable of making life decisions, have a positive role-model or someone in their corner for support, and they need to take education seriously for academic achievement and success in life (Ennis, 1999).

This study was conducted in Memphis, TN. The challenges facing urban youth across our nation are readily apparent in this mid-sized Southern City. Issues of violence and physical health status are especially pressing. Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the population of young Americans living in poverty. *Save the Children* (2009) reports that one and six children 17.5%, lives in poverty in urban American communities. According to the *Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR)* in 2007, there was an estimated 1,405,337 violent crimes that took place in the US. In 2007, violent crimes inside the Memphis city limits dropped by about 7 % from 1,262.7 violent crimes per 100,000 residents reported in 2006 (Commercial Appeal, 2009). Data from National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicate that 17.6% of children and adolescents are overweight in the U.S., and are at risk for health problems during their youth and as adults (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

In Tennessee, as throughout the nation, incidence of obesity is higher in males than females. Tennessee also has a higher proportion of children and teens that are overweight or obese with 32% being females and 38% being males (Wilcox, Phillips, & Brannon, 2009). The 2007 Memphis City Schools (MCS) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in partner with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a survey on obesity in that school system and compared the results to the other rate of US students. Specific findings showed that MCS has a 16.2% obesity rate as compared to the national rate of 13%, but showed an equal percentile of obesity and dietary behaviors.

These circumstances weigh heavily on education, healthy living and success of the urban communities. Children who live in urban areas struggle daily to survive and escape the poverty that limits their opportunities and ability to picture a positive future. Students are confronted with many challenges that drain their energies, distracting them from living active, healthy lifestyles (Ennis, 1999). Holistically, these circumstances affect youth development and “at-risk” adolescents.

Humans develop through many stages in life physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially. The most important stages are childhood and adolescent stages that are combined and referred to as youth development (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological perspectives provides theory for youth development principles, the significance of incorporating challenging activities and supportive relationships, both which last and are modified to fit particular youth development programming. Bronfenbrenner’s idea of human development is that development is generically promoted by engaging in regular lasting activities that are increasingly challenging over time as people gain mastery in skill (Hamilton et al., 2004).

Youth development programs have struggled for years to come up with challenging ways of reaching youth in community-based programs. They have noticed that youth were interested in playing sports and games more so than sitting and listening to lectures on individuality and getting along with others in the community. A curriculum model that began with the publication of *Beyond balls and bats*, Hellison (1978) was created for teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) to troubled youth through physical education. This model uses physical activity as a focal point to teach individual and social responsibility and to promote social and emotional outcomes in youth participants (Hellison, 2003). In recent decades, TPSR has also been widely applied in community-based programs proving effective in helping teach students to take responsibility for their own self-discovery and well-being and for the well-being of others (Hellison & Martinek, 2006).

What makes the proposed study unique is that it will explore the effectiveness of the TPSR model combined with martial arts content in promoting positive youth development among at-risk African American youth in an urban environment. Violence has been called an epidemic in America because it saturates our culture and people from all segments are susceptible to violence (Brown, 1979). African American males in urban environments are perhaps at the greatest risk of violence (Fingerhut, Kleinman, Godfrey, & Rosenberg, 1991). In 2005, the CDC reported homicide rates among ages 10-24 years, race/ethnicity, and sex in the US reporting that African American males and females was highest with males 58.3 deaths per 100,000 population and females 6.6 deaths per 100,000 (2009). Given the environment they live in, lack of positive role-



models, bad behavior in school and feelings of being outcast, it is easy to see how urban youth may turn to violence and aggression.

Despite these issues, many studies have indicated that martial arts practice, when delivered with appropriate instruction, is often related to lower levels of aggression or violence (Nosanchuk & MacNeil, 1989; Trulson, 1986). For many years, community-based TPSR programs have incorporated martial arts practice with youth development principles (Hellison, Martinek, Cutforth, Parker, & Stiehl, 2000; Wright, 1998; Wright, 2001; Wright and Burton, 2008; Wright, White, & Gaebler-Spira, 2004). However, Wright (1998) admits people often question the wisdom of teaching martial arts techniques to “at-risk” children who, as a group, are statistically more likely to be involved in violent behavior. He addresses this concern in part by pointing to evidence from martial arts studies and TPSR evaluations indicating that neither appears to increase levels of violence or aggression on their own and arguing the combination of the two if anything would have the opposite impact (Wright, 1998). Wright (1998, 2009) further argues that reducing the impact of youth development programs to a single variable, such as violent behavior or academic achievement, fails to capture the full range of benefits and positive influence that may come from a youth development program or a holistic model like TPSR. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences and perspectives of participants in a community-based TPSR martial arts program designed to promote positive youth development among at-risk African American adolescents living in an urban environment.

Case study methodology was used to investigate and analyze the experiences and perspectives of participants in a community-based TPSR martial arts program, relative to

the benefits of martial arts, relevance of martial arts on life, youth development, and skill acquisition. Specific questions that guided the research were:

- What was the objective of the martial arts club?
- What knowledge did the participants gain from their martial arts experience?
- Did the martial arts club promote positive youth development among at-risk youth?
- Did the martial arts club experience promote physical skill and technique development?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In exploring ways to promote youth development through martial arts in a community-based program, some specific topics of interest were indentified to shape the current study. For each, the literature is reviewed here with an emphasis on recent research. These topics include: 1) Underserved Youth; 2) Youth Development through Sport; 3) TPSR Model; 4) Student Perspectives; and 5) Martial Arts and Youth Development. A brief conclusion of the literature review is provided to show relation of previous investigation to the current research.

### **Underserved Youth**

Generally, underserved youth are characterized as impoverished, living in low-income housing, single- parent homes, amongst violence and are rejected from society. Wright (1998) suggests that the psychological and physical effects of poverty are more severe on younger children than any other age group. This is a critical point because the current trend is that younger children are increasingly more likely to live in poverty (Save the Children, 2009). That is why it is important to reach the children of the future, take action and provide them with the opportunity to succeed in life.

Dewey (1900) stated over a century ago that education is the key to opportunity, to justice, to facing the marvels and dangers of the world. It is hard to deny, however, that today some US schools and curricula are not in tune with positive values. Many are created by insensitivity or insufficient care in prior planning on the part of the receiving districts, others by resilient racist suppositions on the part of educators or administrators even in some of the most self-consciously progressive white communities (Kozol, 2005). Kotlowitz discusses some of the history of the school districts and the poor, overcrowded

conditions and states that although the school system is the main issue behind many of the education problems; the children bring their problems with them to school (1992). Some youth live in surroundings with almost unlimited resources, while their poorer peers struggle. Knop, Tannehill, and O'Sullivan (2001) say these impoverished condition makes it hard for "at-risk" youth to be focused, to be taken seriously, or to live the "American dream".

Within impoverished communities, crime rates are at an all time high among the youth population and some are concerned about their public safety (Hellison, 2001). Youth violence perpetrated both by and against young people, results in enormous physical, emotional, social, and economic consequences (CDC, 2009). Increasingly, policy makers and the public are examining and confronting the root causes of juvenile crime and violence (Pipho, 1993).

Drugs and violent crimes are closely related and constitute major problems in the US and other countries. David D. Friedman (2009), an activist and economist, points out three broad categories showing the influential links between drugs and violent crime: 1) acts of violence under the influence of drugs; 2) violent crime resulting from making and selling drugs; and 3) violent crime in the attempt to ban and crack down on drugs. Not having proper economic resources to make ends meet, leads people to criminal acts to survive. People resort to selling drugs, stealing and committing fraudulent acts to pay bills to provide for their families that often end in violence (Friedman, 2009). He concludes that policies that reduce the demand for illegal drugs can usually be expected to reduce the violence associated with the sale and use of such drugs (Friedman, 2009).

Coupled with social inequities like those mentioned above, urban youth are subjected to health inequities such as increased rates of asthma, obesity, and diabetes (CDC, 2009). Molnar, Gortmaker, Bull, and Buka (2004), conducted a study in Chicago, Illinois, where the purpose was to investigate lack of physical activity associated with increased risk of obesity and cardiovascular disease, conditions associated with lower socioeconomic status. Urban youth activity levels and limited safe space for recreation were researched in this study. Data obtained from 1378 youth 11 to 16 years old, living in clusters of 80 neighborhoods. Parents estimated the time it spent to plan recreational activities and it was incorporated into the study. A resident's assessment of the neighborhood safety for play was created; along with data on disorder measures derived from video observations. Results showed that physical activity averaged 2.7 hours/week, varying importance to the neighborhoods. Using hierarchical linear regression, SES, age, and male gender, but not body mass index, were independently associated with physical activity. Lower neighborhood safety and social disorder were significantly associated with less activity, controlling for demographics. One mechanism for reduced physical activity among youth may be the influence of unsafe neighborhoods. Neighborhood interventions to increase safety and reduce disorder may be efficacious in increasing physical activity, thereby reducing risk of overweight and cardiovascular disease. The authors concluded that one mechanism for reduced physical activity among youth may be the influence of unsafe neighborhoods. Neighborhood interventions to increase safety and reduce disorder may be efficacious in increasing physical activity, thereby reducing risk of overweight and cardiovascular disease.

Reasons for childhood obesity in urban communities are complex resulting from poor nutritional choices, unsafe playgrounds and facilities, and lack of fitness programs in the community. To develop physical activity programs that are appealing to adolescents in such settings is a challenge (Knop et al., 2001). The scarcity of healthy behaviors among impoverished communities may somewhat explain urban adolescents' lack of interest in physical activity and physical education classes (Ennis, 1999). With the negative impact of poverty in the community, youth may find it difficult to see how physical education is significant in their lifestyles (Collingwood, 1997).

Stiehl in Hellison et al. (2000), defines an unsafe environment as one in which the physical, as well as emotional and psychological well-being of youngsters is at risk. Constant threats of varied sources ranging from gangs, family dysfunction, sexual abuse and verbal insults to condemned buildings, and violence in the school and streets makes the environment a dangerous place. Despite the circumstances, adolescent are supposed to focus on learning, positive social interaction, and overcome the adversities that weaken their spirits to be good citizens and take care of themselves.

Many neighborhoods in urban environments are unsafe and dangerous for adolescents to function and progressively explore for significant life experiences. The neighborhood is a critical environment that influences child and youth development on a positive and negative level (Park & O'Neil, 1999). Negative social conditions, such as crime and physical disorder, found in urban neighborhoods are often related to negative outcomes such as infant mortality and low birth weight, juvenile delinquency, high school dropout, child abuse and neglect (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002).

Creating a safe learning environment is essential for student success (Timken, 2005). Stiehl, in Hellison et al. (2000), explain that schools should be held accountable of caring for the students as a whole person and not just their academic achievement. They suggest having a sense of compassion for the students' well-being, learning new skills through experience, and providing challenges for empowerment and youth development. Timken (2005) discussed teachers being aware of struggles with self and others in the community to provide responsive, inclusive and meaningful experiences for all students regardless of their backgrounds. Teachers should be "socioculturally" conscious, going beyond safe learning environments to produce social justice and fairness, creating climates that empower students to partake in their self-discovery (p.86). Teachers are aware of inequities of education, society and sports and need to provide an environment of open mindedness, allowing student voice, choice for increasing relevance and meaningfulness. Violence in the schools can cause lack of participation of students in healthy physical activity. Adolescents need to feel safe physically and psychologically before participating. If the environment is unsafe, then student tend to have second thoughts of being involved in physical activity (Knop et al., 2001).

In their transition to adulthood, adolescents in many impoverished communities are forced to face this range of inequities yet they are uncared for, do not identify with their families or society, and lack the support and resources to change. They need a caring adult's support and companionship to guide them in making tough choices and decisions (Hellison et al, 2000; Schilling, Martinek, & Tan, 2006). Stiehl, as cited in Hellison et al. (2000), talks about how adolescents are easily influenced, distracted and emotionally intense, needing a trustworthy and honest adult as a role model and parenting figure to

seek sense of purpose, values and moral support. While acknowledging the importance of relationships between adolescents and adults and what the relationship should consist of, the emerging field of youth development emphasizes program guidelines to promote a holistic development among youth for program success (Hellison, Martinek and Walsh, 2007).

### **Youth Development through Sport**

Hamilton et al. (2004) argue that youth development is applied in three different ways, the three P's: a natural *process*, *principles* of youth thriving, and *practice* for success. The natural process is the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act on the environment. Principles of youth thriving are the philosophy used in youth development for commitment to enable all young people to thrive. Lastly, practice for success is the application of the principles to a planned set of practices, or activities, that foster the developmental process in young people (p. 4). With all P's combined comes a fourth "P" *policy*, referring to action taken on a local, state, and national level for youth development programs. Experiencing full well-rounded development at a youthful age enables individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life, and later as adults, because they gain the competence to earn a living, to engage in civic activities, to care for others, and to participate in social relations and cultural activities as an adolescent (Hamilton et al., 2004).

In youth development, personal assets for the physical are good health habits and health risk management skills (Hamilton et al., 2004). Physical activity contributes to total health (Merki & Merki, 2003). In youth development programs that incorporate Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) into the curriculum, use physical



activity as a motivation to teach valuable life skills (Hellison, 1978, 1995, 2003; Hellison et al., 2000, Wright, 1998, 2001; Wright et al., 2004). Youth development programs provide “urban sanctuaries” where youth feel safe among peers and granted the opportunity to participate in the life of their community through service, the arts and social action (McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994)

Intellectual development is cognition, being able to reason and think out abstract situations (Merki & Merki, 2003). Being successful in school, learning life skills, making good decisions, critical thinking and reasoning are all personal and social assets to youth development (Hamilton et al., 2004). Petitpas, Champagne, Danish, and Gullotta (2000) examine the role of sports participation in the social development of youth, ages 6-20. Several questions were explored to develop competent youth and strong communities through after-school programming, where The National Football Foundation: Play it Smart Program sports experience was used as a vehicle to enhance the academic, athletic career, and personal development of high school student-athletes. It is concluded that with appropriate management and guidance, sports participation appears well-positioned to serve as a potential vehicle for developing social competence and for deterring destructive behaviors in youth.

Newton et al., (2007) examined the effect of a caring-based versus a traditionally-focused physical activity intervention on underserved adolescents’ perceptions of the caring climate, the motivational climate, empathetic concern, enjoyment, and future anticipated participation. Multiethnic youth participants ages 9 to 17 were involved in two National Youth Sport Program (NYSP) sites participated in the caring group of 90 youth systematically experienced themes of caring while the traditional group of 263

followed prototypical NYSP training, practices and procedures with no specific emphasis on developing a caring climate. Self-report assessments were gathered after 5 weeks for both settings. After accounting for demographic differences findings show that the caring group perceived significantly higher levels of a caring climate, empathetic concern, future expected participation, and lower levels of perceptions of an ego-involving motivational climate (Newton et al., 2007).

### **TPSR Model**

Don Hellison introduced the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model more than 30 years ago and continues to refine develop and disseminate it. TPSR is an empowerment-based instructional model that has been developed through enduring fieldwork, designed to address the issues of underserved youth, mainly those living in urban environments (Wright & Burton, 2008). This model evolved from years of interaction, self-reflection, and Hellison's own beliefs and values regarding his work with "at-risk underserved kids". This alternative program has been successfully implemented into community-based extended-day programming, in-school physical education, school athletics, park district and community programs, as well as outdoor/adventure education and alternative schools (Hellison, 1995, 2003; Hellison et al., 2000). Many teachers and youth workers have applied the TRSR model in school (K-12) and community settings with students and participants of all socioeconomic backgrounds throughout the world (Hellison, 2003). Wright (2001) explains that student responsibilities are framed as the core levels of the model:

There are five major responsibilities, each described in terms of specific behaviors.

The first and fourth levels promote social responsibility, *Respecting the Rights and*

*Feelings of Others and Helping Others.* The second and third levels promote personal responsibility, *Effort and Self-direction.* The fifth level, *Outside the Gym,* promotes transfer of the other levels into different settings. (p. 27)

When TPSR is implemented into any program, five general instructional strategies are suggested to be used along with a class format (Hellison, 2003). The instructional strategies are: awareness, direct instruction, individual decision-making, group decision-making and counseling time. These strategies are stressed to share power with the kids and to negotiate any issues they may have. This encourages them to evaluate and modify any necessary responsibilities (Hellison, 2003). Hellison (2003) recommends a specific format to follow that provides the framework for implementing TPSR. First, there is an awareness talk to remind students of their levels of responsibility. Then the lesson takes place by way of physical activity, but integrating personal and social responsibility into the lesson. After the physical activity comes a group meeting to evaluate the lesson and give comments, opinions and ideas. Lastly, the reflection time takes place where the students reflect on the extent to which they have been responsible, using self-evaluation (Hellison, 2003).

In Hellison et al. (2000), the responsibility model is described as student-centered and aligned with state-of-the-art criteria for youth development programs in the following ways:

- 1) treats kids as whole people, with emotional and social as well as physical needs and interests, and as individuals, not just members of a gender or race or other group;
- 2) empowers them to make decisions within an explicit set of life values;
- 3) prioritizes both emotional safety and the need for a relationship with a caring adult;

and 4) accomplishes all of this through the medium of fitness, motor skill instruction, sport games, and other human movement activities. (p. 35)

TPSR is focused on moving responsibility to the student for making choices that could enhance their lives and the lives of others. To achieve this, program leaders need to let some of the authority go and help the students to reflect on their attitudes and behaviors toward themselves and others. Therefore, a TPSR program leader must be able to put youth first by caring for their well-being, and prioritizing student relationships. This builds youths' strength, individuality, voices and capacity for making decisions (Hellison et al., 2000).

Walsh (2008) used the TPSR model created by Hellison (2003) and Theory of Possible Selves created by Markus and Nurius (1986) to conduct the study and the combination of both developed the "Career Club", which was a program specifically designed to better assist youth in understanding and facilitating reflective discussions on their future decisions. It consists of youth that were familiar with the TPSR model and wanted to possibly become coaches in the future. The Career Club was empowerment-based giving youth leadership roles of coaching younger students and used basketball as the content. The club also encouraged participants to become aware, self-evaluate and set goals, with attention to experiences related to contemplating possible futures. This study introduced pedagogical structure of Career Club by joining similar purpose, goals, passion, and settings of two credible sources, i.e., TPSR and the Theory of Positive Selves. Career Club was taught weekly for nine sessions, 90 min each, at an inner city elementary school in a large metropolitan city. Participants comprised 12 seventh- and eighth-grade boys and girls who had at least 1 year and up to 5 years of experience in a

TPSR program. Data sources included document analysis, lesson observations, formal interviews, and observational field notes. Themes were classified into the following categories: hoped- for-selves and feared selves-a delicate balance, coaching as a necessary component, and coming to understand possible futures. These results indicated that Career Club was effective in providing the participants a meaningful career exploration experience related to coaching. Data also suggested these coaching experiences facilitated reflective discussions on realizing their future orientation choices.

### **Student Perspectives**

In the past, curriculum design and implementation has been the sole responsibility of teachers, administrators and researchers, people whom are in authority and leadership. Researchers have rarely asked students for their thoughts on education (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). Because education is only effective when it reaches and is received by students, some curricular experts recommend inviting students to partake in the critique and reform of education (Cook-Sather, 2002). Cook-Sather (2002) argues that including student perspectives can improve current educational practice, revive existing conversation on education reform and construct new ideas to make education more relevant to students.

Student perspective research in physical education is conducted from a social constructivist perspective that offers a theoretical perspective on learning (Rovegno & Dolly, 2006). According to Rovegno and Dolly (2006) constructivism is a theory of learning and is not a prescription for teaching; the theory of constructivism originated in the field of psychology from research conducted on cognition and has since been applied

in classrooms and even physical education. Rovegno and Dolly (2006) explain the theory of constructivism in the context of physical education as follows:

Cognitive knowledge of movement and fitness concepts and cognitive and social processes (eg. analysis, decision making, social responsibility, effective group interactions, etc.) are critically important in physical education and are explicitly part of the national curriculum standards or curriculum guidelines in Scotland, England, Australia, and the USA. In addition, theories of learning developed within the motor learning domain have long been either directly based on theories developed in general psychology or strongly resemble such theories. For example, information processing and schema theories in the motor domain are both based on the same theories in cognitive science. (p. 242)

Adding to constructivism, Schwedt (1994) declares that a constructivist believes that understanding the world is achieved through interpretation; to gain a descriptive understanding of the values, meanings, and actions of the subjects under study.

Interpretation being a valid empirical framework to human inquiry, interpretivists seeks to understand human life through the mind. With that being said, Pope (2006) describes interpretivism as a constructivist, understanding human life through thoughts, feelings, emotions, values, and consciousness in the social world.

To gain a better understanding of students in the school setting, Dyson (2006) argues that student perspectives research takes a social constructivist approach. He focuses on viewpoints, opinions, and/or judgments creating a student-centered approach to research, determining the students' views as they relate to their experiences of the curriculum. Dyson adds that by studying experiences constructed by students, researchers can

develop perceptive knowledge of teaching and learning in school environments.

“Listening to students can provide valuable perspectives and new insights into the complexities of teaching and learning that can then be applied to improving the quality of physical education in our schools” (p. 343).

With student perspectives on innovative curriculum, Dyson (1995) studied *Project Adventure* in two urban alternative elementary schools with 106 third and fifth graders to reveal their perceptions and experiences of the adventure education curriculum. The students spoke well of the curriculum, highlighting goals such as cooperating with others, challenging themselves, and taking risks. Successful and non-successful factors were reported: trusting each other, problem solving, having fun, not having fun, attitudes towards competition, and communication. This research applied the interpretive approach, taking into consideration students’ voice when planning physical education curriculum and determining the experience and perception of students’ in physical education. Student voice uses students’ quotes. Student quotes embodies “actual words of the students” where they express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs on the PE program (p. 331).

Dyson (2006) reveals that research that explores student voice can be complex and time-consuming with gathering and reporting of authentic student contribution. He suggests techniques to facilitate student perspective with conducting student peer interviews or students acting as volunteer cases whose experiences of the PE curriculum could be tracked. With these suggestions, students can feel comfortable enough to express their views, providing an active voice. This approach is of particular relevance to the current study as such a case study design was employed to represent the way

individual students experienced, interpreted and applied the lessons in this TPSR martial arts club. Moreover, the TPSR approach itself integrates student voice and perspective as part of the educational process (Hellison, 2003).

### **Martial Arts and Youth Development**

Birrer (1996) has claimed in recent decades, Asian martial arts have become popular with people of all ages around the world. At that time an estimated 75 million people worldwide practice martial arts, reporting 8 million in the US. People practice martial arts for many reasons: self-defense, health and recreation, self-confidence, fitness and conditioning, self-discipline, social and environmental support, sports competition, and psychological, philosophical and religious purposes.

In a study by Trulson (1986), juvenile delinquents, identified by their scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) received training under one of three different protocols for 1 hour three times weekly for a period of 6 months. Group I students received training in the traditional Korean Martial Art of Tae Kwon Do, Group II students received training in a "modern" version of the martial art which did not emphasize the psychological/philosophical aspects of the sport as the Korean version did but emphasized competition, and group III students served as a control group for contact with the instructor and physical activity. Group I students showed decreased aggressiveness, lowered anxiety, increased self-esteem, increased social adroitness, and an increase in value orthodoxy, as indicated by before-and-after scores on the Jackson Personality Inventory (JPI), in addition to normal MMPI scores at the completion of the study. Group II students showed an even greater tendency toward delinquency on the MMPI than they did at the beginning of the study, a large increase in aggressiveness, and



generally opposite effects of Group I on the JPL Group III students showed no notable differences on any of the personality measures. These data suggest that training in the traditional martial art of Tae Kwon Do is effective in reducing juvenile delinquent tendencies (Trulson, 1986, p. 1131).

Wright (1998) studied a TPSR *Martial Arts Club* offered in an inner-city elementary school in Chicago. He examined the impact of a responsibility based martial arts program on violence prevention. Traditional martial art techniques were taught in the club using TPSR's strength-based teaching approach. The study involved twenty-one male members of the club. Data were collected through interviews about the frequency and severity of conflicts students encountered as well as the conflict resolution skills students reported using. Interview data were then compared with students attendance records in the martial arts club and the perceptions of a school administrator regarding the degree to which each student had problems related to violence or aggression. Results indicated the behavior of the students, with regard to conflict, reflected the values and responsibilities promoted in the club. It was noted that participants who had attended the martial arts club more frequently generally had more positive conflict resolution skills and were seen as less violent by the school's administrators (Wright, 1998).

A collective case study was used with the *Developmental Martial Arts Program* to explore the relevance and perceived benefits of TPSR in adapted physical activity program to five male children with spastic diplegic cerebral palsy (Wright et al., 2004). The researchers used observational field notes, medical records, and interviews with participants, physicians, therapists, and parents. This data generated four themes: increased sense of ability, positive feelings about the program, positive social interactions

and therapeutic relevance. Results indicated that TPSR model combined with martial arts content could be relevant and beneficial to children with disabilities (Wright et al., 2004).

Wright and Burton (2008) explored the implementation and short-term outcomes of a responsibility-based physical activity program that was integrated into an intact high school physical education class. The 20- lesson TPSR program involved 23 African American students in an urban high school that used five themes: (1) establishing a relevant curriculum, (2) navigating barriers, (3) practicing life skills, (4) seeing the potential for transfer, and (5) creating a valued program. This study used tai chi to address the physical, emotional, and mental health issues by incorporating physical and mental relaxation along with the martial arts applications and opened discussions of stress reduction, coping and conflict resolution. As a result students could see the potential transfer of martial arts practice to life skill development.

## **Conclusion**

Given that underserved youth are faced with numerous circumstances in their lives that expose them to negative situations, it is important that they are introduced to unique, positive things to keep them engaged and motivated for success. This review of literature has been presented to provide a theoretical framework and rationale for promoting youth development through martial arts in a community-based program for underserved adolescence. This review highlights research regarding several risk factors and inequities that impinge on the lives of underserved youth, particularly African American males growing up in an urban environment. This review has also framed youth development in terms of the processes, principles and practices needed to effectively serve underserved adolescents. The TPSR model has been described in terms of its key characteristics and

implementation strategies. This review has demonstrated the potentially beneficial links between martial arts practice, youth development, and the TPSR model. Also, a rationale has been provided here supporting the importance of understanding programs from the perspective of the youth they serve and including their voice in research, evaluation, and curriculum development. Based on the information presented here, a case can be made for the potential of promoting youth development among African American adolescents living in urban environments using martial arts combined with the TPSR model. Also, the value of a contextualized understanding of such a program that considers the way youth experience and perceive such programs has been established.

### **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design, setting, participants, and the TPSR martial arts program itself. Also described are the methods of data collection and data analysis strategies used to explore the experiences and perspectives of martial arts club members. This research is part of a larger on-going project directed by Dr. Paul M. Wright, a professor at the University of Memphis. The research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Memphis (see Appendix A).

#### **Research Design**

A qualitative research approach was used in the study to explore the experiences and perspectives of members of a martial arts club that promotes youth development to underserved adolescents using the TPSR model. Qualitative researchers often seek to make sense of personal stories and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). Within qualitative research methods, case study designs are often applied to get a more in-depth description of individuals and their experience of a certain phenomenon (Stake, 2000). Complete cases were developed on four martial arts club members. Each consists of a detailed description of an individual participant and their experience with the martial arts program. Qualitative studies, including case studies, have proven effective in evaluating numerous TPSR programs (Martinek, Schilling, & Hellison, 2006; Schilling et al., 2007; Wright & Burton, 2008; Wright et al., 2004).

#### **Setting**

The setting for this study was the YMCA Community Action Project (Y-CAP) program operating at the Alfred D. Mason YMCA branch near the University of Memphis in Memphis, TN. At the time of the study the Y-CAP program met three days

a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) for three hours after school. There are two staff members and one assistant, who delivered the program to pre-adolescent and adolescent boys who generally had been referred to the program due to problematic behavior, and poor academic performance at school. The program consists of homework, tutoring, snack time, value lesson, physical activity, and free time. One of the unique elements of the Y-CAP program is the value lessons, which are drawn from the Y-CAP Program Value Curriculum Topics (Appendix B). This curriculum consists of 21 topics of core significant life skills to help improve the mental, physical and social capacity of the youth. The lessons in the curriculum assist in dealing with situations that can occur in life and how to cope with them on a positive level. Before this project initiated, the program staff admitted that the physical activity component was unstructured and not connected to other elements of the program in a meaningful way. Based on this opportunity for improvement, a university-community partnership was established between the Y-CAP staff and Dr. Wright. This project, initiated in fall of 2008, involves the integration of a weekly TPSR physical activity lesson into the existing Y-CAP program. The objectives of this component were to increase the effectiveness of the physical activity component and increase its alignment with the Y-CAP value lessons to support the success of program participants.

### **Program Description**

The component added to the Y-CAP program and explored in this study is the Y-CAP Kung Fu Club (YKF Club). This club was designed by Dr. Wright to improve the physical activity component within the Y-CAP program and by blending martial arts content with the TPSR model. The YKF Club name was jointly decided upon by Dr.

Wright and the initial participants. A total of 20 lessons were taught on Wednesday afternoons during the 2008-2009 school year beginning in October 2008 and ending in May 2009. YKF met for 45-minutes once a week and followed the general TPSR lesson format described by Hellison (2003). The primary instructor was Dr. Wright, whom is a certified instructor of Chinese martial arts and a nationally recognized TPSR scholar. The author served as an assistant instructor and Dr. Wright's research assistant during this time period. On three occasions when Dr. Wright was unable to attend, the author substituted as the lead instructor and taught physical fitness oriented lessons. Y-CAP staff members were present for all club lessons but had no direct role in the instruction.

Throughout the program, the TPSR values orientation, class format, and responsibility levels were integrated using established responsibility-based teaching strategies (Hellison, 2003; Hellison et al., 2000; Wright, 1998; 2001; Wright & Burton, 2008). YKF instructors built personal relationships with the members by talking to them before and after the program to gain trust and respect. The awareness talk was conducted in a group meeting at the beginning of each lesson. The members sat on the floor facing each other in a small circle along with the club instructors. The instructor went over goals for the day and/or responsibilities from previous lesson and incorporated the members' suggestions into the day's lesson. After the awareness talk, students would stand and bow to begin the lesson. Generally, a student volunteer would lead the bow.

During the physical activity, students were encouraged to take responsibility by choosing and leading a warm-up exercise to develop their leadership skills. In order to lead they were coached to take the task seriously by speaking loud and clear when teaching to encourage their peers. In each lesson, martial arts skills were developed using

basic movements such as kicks, punches, knee strikes, and gradually progressing to blocks, target strikes, combinations and partner drills. Students were encouraged to choose a skill to lead their peers in practice and demonstrate that skill. They were also encouraged for balance and coordination issues to slow down and focus on the correct form until they became comfortable.

After the physical activity, everyone would gather again in a circle for a group meeting and reflection time. These debriefing sessions lasted just a few minutes and provided opportunities for students to express their thoughts on the day's lesson to peers and the instructor. Students could ask questions, make comments or suggestions about self and/or peer performance in terms of responsibility levels. At this time the instructor would provide feedback and often encourage members to set goals to work on during the week. Finally, everyone would bow to end the lesson. Again, a student volunteer would generally lead the bow. Once the lesson ended, the Y-CAP staff would assume responsibility for the group and usually allowed them to go to the gymnasium for free time as this was the last planned component for the day.

### **Participants**

Participation in the study was voluntary, and parents/guardians provide active consent for their child to participate in the club. The members were all African American males' ages 10-15 years, attending elementary and middle schools. Most came from lower-socioeconomic status according to the club member files; they attended the six public schools in their area. The boys in the martial arts club were all students served in the Y-CAP program with a total of 16 club members throughout the school year. Of those 16 members, the researcher developed four participant case studies. Purposeful sampling

strategies were used to choose four case study participants that would represent a range of personality types, developmental needs, engagement in the program, and levels of problematic behavior encountered at school (Patton, 2002). In choosing the cases, Y-CAP staff members were asked to discuss the potential participants with the research team. In addition to the criteria noted above, the feasibility of collecting all necessary data was considered as it applied to the individual youth's start and end date in the Y-CAP program and their attendance patterns. The use of key informants, who can help identify appropriate participants or cases recommended when researchers are less familiar with such contextual factors (Patton, 2002). Once four individuals had been identified as potential participants, they were approached and asked for their verbal assent. Also, their parents/guardians provided written verbal consent for their participation using the guidelines and procedures mandated by the University of Memphis. In all four cases, consent was granted. The participants finally selected as case studies are described in this study with pseudonyms, to protect participant confidentiality.

All four cases were young African-American boys, with case 1 being an 11-year-old, 5<sup>th</sup> grader at Cougar Elementary. Case 2 is a 10-year-old 5<sup>th</sup> grader who attends Cougar Elementary with case 1, but they are in different classes. The third case is an 11-year-old 5<sup>th</sup> grader, who attends Harding Elementary. Case four is a 13-year-old 7<sup>th</sup> grader, who attends Shillings Middle School.

### **Data Collection**

Data sources for the proposed study were varied and included: open ended interviews with study participants, parents and Y-CAP staff as well as field notes from, non-participant observations from informal pre-program site visits and more focused



observations of case study participants in the Club lessons. Artifactual data were gathered from Y-CAP case files and Y-CAP teacher ratings of participant's behavior. These data sources and procedures used to collect them are described in the following paragraphs.

**Interviews.** Two brief one-on-one interviews and a phone interview were conducted with each case study participant to get an understanding of their views of YKF club, their attitude and feelings about the program, goals that were set and what they learned in the lessons. The first interview was conducted early in the spring of 2009, each lasting approximately 15 minutes. The second interview was a follow-up conducted several weeks later for confirmation of statements taken from the first interview, lasting 10-15 minutes each. A phone interview was conducted with each of the cases and the consenting adult after the youngster had either graduated or reached their time limit of participating in the Y-CAP program. This brief phone interview captured the perceived impact of the YKF club at follow up on the students and their parents' thoughts on the relevance of the club to their child's development. Each call lasted approximately five minutes. One small focus group interview of the three Y-CAP staff members was conducted on the organization, integration, relevance of the Club and their perception of the case study participants and their experience with the program. This focus group interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length.

**Observations.** Observations were made of the Y-CAP program in September and October of 2008, before Dr. Wright introduced the Kung fu Club component. The purpose of these observations was to gain familiarity with the typical Y-CAP program prior to introducing the TPSR component. Through these observations, the author was

able to become familiar with the program schedule, the various program components, staff, and the participants. One of the key elements that stood out while observing the Y-CAP program was the structure in every activity/task that was completed. From the way the students got onto the Y-CAP bus, until they departed to go home, the participants had high expectations to meet.

When the martial arts club was integrated into the Y-CAP, the author started observing the lessons paying particular attention to TPSR implementation and key interactions between the instructor and students. In the final weeks of the YKF club, the author increasingly focused on case study participants' behaviors in the lessons with consistent focus on TPSR responsibility levels of the participants. Field notes were taken at the time of the observation or immediately afterward to ensure accurate and timely documentation of what occurred. The author's reflections and initial interpretation of what was observed was also recorded in these field notes.

**Documentation.** Y-CAP case files were reviewed to gather a background information situation and the reason(s) why the participant was referred to the Y-CAP program. These files includes: the *Intake Packet* that holds the Y-CAP contract commitment from both parent(s) and participant, family household status, and parental concerns of the participant; *Y-CAP Referral Form and Recommendation Letter*; *Childs Self-evaluation* where the child provides a self-report of their situation relative to peers, school, home/family, as well as their personal strengths and weaknesses; *Y-CAP Action Plan* goals made by participant to accomplish in a certain time frame and the parties responsible for goals being met; and *Case notes* where parental contact, letters and reminders to parents are filed. All YKF club participants had the opportunity to complete

a Y-CAP Kung Fu Club Survey every three months that included a self-assessment of their behavior in the Club and evaluation items on what they were learning in the Club as well as their likes, dislikes, and recommendations. The three Y-CAP staff members were also asked to evaluate each of the case study participants' behavior using the TPSR levels as guidelines (see Appendix C) before the club implementation and one time after the club was established.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis involves organizing everything collected, seen, heard and read from the research to make sense of what was learned in the process (Glesne, 1999). Data were analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison to make sense of what has been studied and looked at openly throughout the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Field notes from pre-program observations, case observations, Y-CAP case records, and youth/staff TPSR ratings were accumulated to create individual cases. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. With all of the data present, each individual case was constructed after multiple reading and interpretation of the varied perspectives and data sources. *Apriori* coding strategies (Patton, 2002) were used to note specific passages and portions of the text connected to relevant topics and themes such as respect, violence and verbal aggression, responsibility, caring etc. Also, open coding (Patton, 2002) was to note patterns and concepts that emerged from the data set and were identified inductively, i.e., quality programming and consistency. After each case was developed individually, cross-case comparisons (Stake, 2000) were conducted to identify any overarching themes or patterns, similarities, or key differences that emerged.

As the interviews conducted with case study participants and their parents provided the most direct source of participant perspectives/voice, a thematic analysis was conducted separately on these data. As these interviews were fairly short in duration and guided by structured questions there was consistency in the data regarding the topics covered, i.e. the purpose of the martial arts club, knowledge gained, core values promoted, and physical skill and technique development. Given these consistencies, a more thorough inductive analysis yielded the following themes: 1) benefits of martial arts, 2) relevance of martial arts on life, 3) character development, and 4) skill and technique development.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the research, researchers often used a process of triangulation. Triangulation involves the integration and comparison of more than one data source to establish the accuracy and completeness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing and member check are other techniques frequently used to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). In this study, peer debriefing involved extensive discussions and co-interpretation with Dr. Wright. Interpretive member checks were achieved through the second interview with each case study participant, in which they were given their statements made during the first interview and asked if the statements were true and to add any more statements if necessary. The Y-CAP staff was asked to read and review case write-ups to establish credibility.

A limitation that arose in the study related to the absence of follow-up interviews with one study participant and his parent. It is difficult to signify the meaning of an individual's experience without participant's voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). However,

several attempts to reach them proved unsuccessful and after extensive effort, the decision was made to abandon these efforts. Hence, in one of the four cases data collection was incomplete. While this is unfortunate, the fact that this data source was relatively minor in comparison to all the other information available to develop the case and it is unlikely that the end result would have varied greatly.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter presents findings of four cases studied on their experiences and perspectives of the martial arts club that was integrated into the Y-CAP program. Each case is presented as a narrative following a similar structure and highlighting the overarching themes that emerged from the data, i.e. benefits of martial arts, relevance of martial arts on life, character, skill, and technique improvement. Each case concludes with parental comments and researcher field observation of cases.

### **Case 1**

According to his file at the time, Andrew was an 11-year-old, 5<sup>th</sup> grader at Cougar Elementary. He was a well behaved, honor roll student who enjoyed playing games and sports. Andrew mentioned that he wanted to attend college and become a professional basketball player. He was a hardworking student that loved to make good grades and help others with their school work. He got along well with others and his classmates enjoy his company. It was a rare occasion for him to get into trouble and need redirecting, but occasionally, he would “cop an attitude” and refuse to do his work in class because things did not go his way.

His case file stated that he joined the Y-CAP program November 4, 2008. Andrew’s teacher Mr. Green referred him to the Y-CAP program not mainly for behavior or academics, but rather a positive environment after school. He wanted Andrew to stay away from negative influences at school and in the community. It was noted that Mr. Green felt as though Andrew was a good kid, but easily influenced by his peers to do the wrong thing which caused him to get into trouble. At the time of the study, Andrew lived with his mother, step-father and three younger brothers. The case file noted that his

parents both worked full-time entry level jobs and received government assistance to help support their family. Andrew's parents spoke highly of him in their initial interview with Y-CAP staff saying that he is very helpful around the house with his brothers, doing chores and fixing minor things, but sometimes he would forget his place as a child. They said that sometimes Andrew seemed to know too much about things kids have no business knowing about at such a young age. When adults would talk, he would often listen to their conversation and ask questions about what he heard, so that he will have all the correct facts to be informative to others.

On Andrew's first day in the Y-CAP program, a Friday, it was art therapy day and the boys were finishing a sculpture of a modern Goliath figured man made of pasted newspapers. This program experience was observed directly and recorded in field notes. The newspapers used to create Goliath were all reports of bad news locally, state, nationally and worldwide. The boys worked in groups and each group was responsible for a body part. They had to mold and shape the body parts and color them with paint. They were very creative making a cap for the head, gold teeth and chains around the neck, with designer shirt, pants and shoes. The purpose of the project was to use in a skit they were going to put on for a church group they sometimes visited during the program. During the skit they were going to destroy Goliath and all the bad things that he caused in the world. This was quite a bit for Andrew's first day, but just like the others he had to jump right in and get to work. He seemed to be engaged and enjoying what was going on because he was the one who came up with the idea to add the cap to Goliath's head.

On that following Wednesday, Andrew participated in the YKF club for the first time. He had already heard things about YKF, and appeared eager to get started. From that

first lesson, Andrew showed up focused and with a positive attitude. In observing Andrew in the Y-CAP program, there was hardly ever a day that he needed to be corrected or pulled aside for not being focused on his academics or value lesson. There were a couple of times when he was caught talking during value lesson and lost points for being disrespectful. One Y-CAP staff member stated that, “Andrew is a high achiever who is overly confident. He is a smart kid that needs a little bit of encouragement to keep doing better. Another staff member noted that “he learns valuable lessons in the Kung Fu Club and it helps him and continues to let him know that he needs to be confident and that he can be a leader but at the same time he has to at some point let someone else lead, it lets him step back and I think that as far as the over confidence, its helping him in that area and not let the spot light be on him all the time”.

Andrew spoke highly about the YKF club lessons learned and the benefits of martial arts. “We get taught a lot of things about martial arts. First thing I learned was the horse riding stance. Second thing I learned was the bow and then we started getting into all the kicking, horse riding and punches, but with the kick, we got to make it 1,2,3 not just a whole 1 and the punch you got to make it smooth”. Andrew said he learned life lessons in martial arts; “Not to go out to pick on people, but I learn to defend myself”. Also, “Having kids to speak out and use their voice, talk loud so they can get use to using their voice”.

The YKF club taught lessons on character that focused on certain skills: respect responsibility and leadership in and outside the club, where Andrew is a wealth of information on the topics:



“Respect is treating someone how you would like to be treated. Not just interrupting people, you got to raise your hand and ask them can you speak. I won’t say just ask, I would just raise my hand and then they’ll call on me. Instead of just asking and just blurting out, that’s disrespectful. Like if you were talking, I would not interrupt you and raise my hand, that’s interrupting too, raising your hand while someone is talking. I would wait for you to say anything about asking questions and I would raise my hand and ask an appropriate question”.

“Responsibility is taking care of things that someone let you borrow or your mom buys”, was Andrew’s reply to the meaning of responsibility. He mentioned demonstrating responsibility in the martial arts club, “Like if you pair up with someone and keeping your temperature low not yelling and not playing, but doing what you are supposed to do”. Andrew considers, “Leadership is being loud, but not too loud. Helping people, but not taking over. When you go up there to lead, you got to speak loud, and say an exercise. I believe when leading an exercise you got to say come up here and lead an exercise, so I believe that’s leadership”.

When asked about his martial arts skills and techniques improving he said, “Yes. I learned new moves and how to defend myself and not just fight; block to defend and not fight back”. He also added “the yoga part, when we had to do all that stuff, even though it hurt, I worked my stomach”.

Andrew graduated from Y-CAP at the end of the school year. By the time he graduated the program, he showed great confidence and strong leadership skills in martial arts. At one of the “Family Night” programs, YKF club did a demonstration for the parents and Andrew introduced the YKF club and told what it was all about. He said the

welcome and introduction very well using his voice with full confidence, using the skills he learned in the YKF club.

Once the YKF club martial arts program was over and students were out for their summer break, parents were asked to comment on how beneficial the club was to their child and if a difference in behavior, academics, and life skills were present at the end of school and thereafter. Andrew's mom mentioned "He learned a lot of valuable lessons, to be non-violent and to use martial arts at appropriate times". Also, she said that he gained "more confidence" because he is "always willing to lead and teach others what he'd learned." Behavior and academics stayed the same because, "Andrew is not a problem child, he just loves to be doing something".

During program observations and interviews with Andrew in the YKF club, the researcher detects that he grasps the concept of what the program is all about and enjoys the time he spends there. He is one of the more respectful students giving 100% at all times. If there is something that he does not understand, he never hesitates to get clarification. During the interview Andrew was very comfortable with talking and giving examples when needed. He was hardly ever directed to elaborate on any question; he wanted to give his opinion. When asked what kids do in the Kung Fu club, he gave a detailed description of a typical day. He talked about the huddle at the beginning of class, kids speaking out and using their voices, to how one should use martial arts for a defense mechanism and teamwork. Overall, the researcher concludes that the program was very beneficial to Andrew in a since that he could be a leader amongst his peers and he cooperates well with others. Andrew came to the program for the positive

environment and influence, but little did he know that he encourages positivity in every way.

## **Case 2**

Justin is a 10-year-old 5<sup>th</sup> grader who attends Cougar Elementary with Andrew, but they are in different classes. Justin is a very quiet and reserved kid who makes good grades, has excellent conduct and perfect attendance every six weeks. He has dreams of one day being president of the United States. Justin sometimes seems timid and afraid causing him to shy off around people. According to Justin's case files, he has been picked on a lot and is often mistreated because of inexperience, clumsiness and sheltering.

On November 20, 2008, Justin became a member of Y-CAP and YKF club. His teacher, Mr. Green thought the Y-CAP program would be a good fit for Justin to develop social skills and improve in his physical abilities. He felt that Justin needed to build up his self-esteem and practice hand-eye coordination with challenging physical activities. Justin is the youngest of 11 siblings; with some of them being old enough to be his parents. Both of Justin's parents are over 50 years-old, unemployed and living on a fixed income. They say Justin never plays with kids in the neighborhood, he watches a lot of Cartoon programs on television, too much in their opinion. Justin's parents said that he behaves like a younger child and needs to mature and act his age.

While observing Justin in interacting with the other boys during the Y-CAP program, he would display the same nervous behavior described by others. He often looked uncomfortable and afraid. For example, during one Y-CAP lesson that was observed and recorded in field notes, the boys were called upon to read from an activity sheet they

were working on dealing with conflict resolution. When it was Justin's time to stand, read his scenario and share his response he was so shy that it took him a minute to build the courage to speak. He was a good reader, but he sounded like a younger child compared to the others. Some of the other kids laughed under their breaths or made fun of the way he talked by mocking his voice. Soon after he took his seat and dropped his head looking embarrassed.

Initially during YKF club, Justin seemed very confused about the skills being taught. For instance, he would appear lost when given movement directions that specified the rights vs. left side of the body, i.e. which leg to kick with or which foot to put in front in the fighting stance. He struggled to grasp the concept of using alternate hand to punch and alternate leg to kick. For example, if the combo was punch right, kick left, he would punch right and kick right. When the group would execute moves in unison, Justin's timing was often out of sync, i.e. starting the movement either before or after the other participants. It was apparent in the first several minutes of his first YKF lesson that he would need additional support and individualized strategies for skill development. This was the approach taken by the instructor and by the end of the school year, Justin showed improvement in coordination. Justin said that learning martial arts was beneficial to him in many ways, "Personally, I learned how to kick better, punch better, learn how to respect people, if we are in a fight and bow". He says that what he learned in martial arts could help him outside of class by, being respectful to others, knowing how to defend myself if I get in a fight and listen to the person who talking". When asked about respect, responsibility and leadership, he replied, "Respect is to not push people around. Don't curse them out and pick with people for no reason. Be quiet while the person is talking.

Follow the rules and try not to mess up”. Justin suggested for responsibility, “Don’t lose your stuff. You have to be responsible for your action like if you hit someone you got to apologize. Be careful, step back if you doing a kick or punch so you won’t hit no one.” Justin then explains leadership as “taking the lead role to show and tell what to do. Being up to the front of them and doing one of our exercises. Helping someone with they work that’s having trouble. If I got the hang of what we are doing and someone having problems, I just go over and show them how to do it ‘til they get the hang of it”.

When he mastered the moves, Justin would start on time and his form would be perfect. Justin claims, “My kicks got more strength and my punches too. I feel stronger”. Dr. Paul confirmed seeing skill improvement with Justin, for example, in his ability to strike a target with greater focus and force. Every now and then Justin would build up enough courage to lead the bow or demonstrate a warm-up exercise. He was also actively involved in the YKF club demonstration for parent night, showing off a punch, kick combination on target pads. He executed the skills well on a target pad held by a classmate and beamed with an enormous smile as he returned to his seat.

After completing the YKF martial arts program, Justin’s mom pointed out that he has, “learned self-control”. At the end of the year Justin made all B’s for the 6<sup>th</sup> six-weeks on his report card. His mom said, “Justin struggled, he got too relaxed, but he says he tried his best and that’s all I can ask of him”.

Justin was looked upon by his peers as the shy guy who was uncoordinated and needed his hand held every step of the way in the program. But in the one-on-one interview, he really voiced his opinion about the program and what he was learning. The researcher sensed that Justin was being bullied amongst his peers outside of the program

by the way he answered certain questions. He mentioned being surrounded in a fight and being able to defend his self because of what he learned in the program. Throughout the course of the program, Justin built confidence, learned to trust in his peers, and gained physical strength. Socially, he developed leadership skills, courage to stand up for his self and to cooperate with others. Justin showed maturity and age appropriate behavior in the program.

### **Case 3**

At the time of this study, Leon was an 11-year-old 5<sup>th</sup> grader who attended Harding Elementary. On first impression, he could appear quiet and soft spoken, but was actually very loquacious on subjects that were of interest to him. Leon enjoyed basketball and playing video games. He did not like to play outside too much; he preferred to stay inside and watch wrestling on TV. He appeared to be a fairly typical 11-year-old boy, but sometimes had trouble with respecting adults.

Leon lived with his grandmother, who was his legal guardian and his mother. He was his mother's only child, but his father has children with another woman in a different household. His grandmother said that "Leon is a good kid at home and plays by himself because he has no siblings to play with. Leon rarely did anything to get punished, but would get a bad attitude when things do not work in his favor." He was respectful, but seemed to respect his grandmother more than his mom. For example, it was stated in his file that grandmother would only have to give instructions once, but mom may have to repeat herself several times before Leon would obey. Leon was referred to the Y-CAP program by his 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Hanley, at the end of the school year. She referred him because of academics, social skills and character development. Ms. Hanley knew

that the Y-CAP program provided tutoring, help with homework and taught value lessons that could build Leon's character for the next school year.

Leon began the Y-CAP program on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008. In the program, he was often observed making silly noises behind the staff member's backs. They would know that it was him making the noise and when the staff would tell him to stop; he would say "that wasn't me" and get an attitude. As an observer, it was difficult for the researcher to remain a "non-participant observing Leon. There were times when the observer would make eye contact with Leon and feel compelled to send glances or nods directing him to get back on task and continue working like everyone else. He would sometimes disrupt the other boys while they were trying to do homework or pay attention to the value lesson activity causing them to lose focus.

Leon is a lanky, baby-faced kid with braids, who would always talk in a strong powerful male voice. Almost like a wrestler. When the announcement was made about Dr. Paul coming to teach martial arts Leon was very excited. Leon was enthused about learning karate and while in YKF club he would always want to make the different sounds when striking targets. He loved to say "E-yah" and other things with every move.

When asked about the useful things he learned in martial arts Leon mentioned "self-control", explaining, "It teach us how to defend ourselves and control our anger and to become a better leader", then adding, "You don't just beat up anybody you just want to. Be respectful", and "Respect somebody, don't just curse them out". He also stated it is important to "Do stuff for people if you want them to do stuff for you." On the topic of responsibility inside and outside the YKF club, Leon gave these examples, "By minding my own business and doing what I'm supposed to do"; "Doing what you were asked to

do”; “When he (Dr. Paul) tell me to do some I do it and don’t get mad”. Leon thought leadership meant, “Standing up for what you want, and leading, and also, “Showing somebody else who’s new how to do skills”. Leon’s goal was “to not get real mad at people”. His favorite part of the club “is when we learn a new technique”; his least favorite is “nothing, I like everything”. He wanted to improve by “stop talking a lot”.

When the end of the school year approached for Leon, he still needed to work on self-control, because he would get too excited during program activities. Y-CAP staff members would sit and observe the YKF club and reported that, “Leon plays a lot, he talks a lot, he doesn’t always fully participate, and he doesn’t always fully listen”. One staff member said, “I think he enjoys it, but how much he actually takes or what he could take form it I don’t know if he doing that. I think he enjoys it from what I see.”

Regarding his participation in the Y-CAP program overall, a staff member explained, “He hasn’t made enough improvement to stay, but not enough to graduate and then he’ll go backwards”. Therefore, Leon was unsuccessfully released from the program when school ended that year.

The researcher sensed inconsistent behavior with Leon throughout the program and concluded that it may be one of the reasons he did not graduate from the Y-CAP program. One minute he was this great charming kid and the next he was causing conflict and disturbing others. Then, he would completely shut down at times when things did not go according to his satisfaction. Leon’s interview segments were cut and dry. One-on-one, he barely spoke and it was a struggle to articulate what he was saying. When others were present he could be one of the loudest among the crowd. Leon was asked to leave the YKF club a couple of times because of disruption and attitude. With a



little more time in the Y-CAP program and maturity on Leon's behalf, he could become a strong leader in class and in the community, experiencing more success academically and socially within and outside of the program.

#### **Case 4**

At the time of this study, Danny was a 13-year-old, 7<sup>th</sup> grader who attended Shillings Middle School. He was not the most well behaved kid, but he was the type that many other kids wished they were like. His peers thought Danny was cool. He wore all the latest trends of clothing and shoes and he often boasted about the many things that he owned. When asked what he wanted to be when he grows up, he said he wanted to go "pro" in basketball or football. Danny loved to draw, listen to music and rap. He talked about his favorite rapper (Lil' Wayne) all the time.

Danny became a Y-CAP member on May 28, 2008 along with Leon. He was referred to the program to work on respecting authority, aggressive behavior and to learn how to follow rules. He had been suspended numerous times for fighting and insubordination. His mother had concerns with Danny's reading skills, staying focused and on task, and being responsible. She also mentioned that Danny has been allowed to get his way a lot at home and that this could be the cause of him being hard to handle outside the home, because no consequences are put in place for his misbehavior. His mother mentioned that Danny had been diagnosed with Attention –Deficit- Hyperactive-Disorder (ADHD) and did not act out as much when medicated properly.

Danny lived at home with his mother and "stepfather" (his mother's long time boyfriend). His biological father was incarcerated and had been in prison ever since Danny was born. Danny knows his biological father's situation and he consider his

mother's boyfriend his "real daddy." His mother dropped out of school in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but was completing her GED at the time of the study. Both parents worked full-time, minimum wage jobs and received some government assistance.

Danny Action Plan in Y-CAP was to read books frequently and improve conduct. It was also emphasized in the plan that if Danny was punished at school, Y-CAP, or home, all of these partners should coordinate their efforts and follow through with the punishment rather than giving him second chances or succumbing to his charm. Y-CAP staff described Danny's progression in the program as "Slow; it's hard to see his progress. He takes two steps forward, one step back." Danny stated that sometimes he hated coming to the program because it was "boring and lame."

Danny had some specific thoughts to share about the YKF club and the benefits of martial arts. "We learn moves, and learn how to get yo (your) balance right. Wax on, wax off, and basic kicks, jab-jab-cross-kick." Danny gave a broad meaning and example of respect and said it with confidence. "Respect means you treat somebody kind, compliment them, treat that person right and get your own (respect). Coaching is an example of respect, and consists of somebody that doesn't know it and you help them learn that move". He says responsibility was "Being responsible, doing what needs to be done, and grow up. Start listening more". Danny believes that leadership was the "same as coaching." His YKF club example of showing leadership was to: "Get everybody to listen to me and tell Mr. Paul I got a new skill and tell them and make sure they get it right and all that." Danny mentioned that being in the YKF club helped him improve his martial arts skill because, "I kick higher and punch harder now."

Toward the closing of the Y-CAP program for the school year, the Y-CAP staff shared their thoughts about Danny and his progression. They mentioned, “We have seen a reduced number of suspensions in a while. We haven’t heard of any fights he’s been in, so he may even be one where the aggression level has come down a notch, decreased as he has gained more skills and more tools to deal with tough situations.” Dr. Paul says, “Physical is a comfort zone (for Danny) as opposed to academics or that an area where he, like, can thrive and be confident.” A staff member added, “I will say that I think he enjoys it, but I think what he could get out of it I don’t think he is because he does do a lot of playing, like back in the back and kind of watching more so and laughing at who’s not doing it right and not paying attention to himself.” Another said, “He’s one where the paying attention issue and the distraction in the back that he’s apart of might have to do with his ADHD. He has a lot of issues with distraction, and gets distracted real easily. Just like Leon, Danny will be released from the Y-CAP program and not graduate.

Danny’s mom spoke really well on behalf of her son and the values of the program. She reported, “Martial arts taught him discipline and to have respect for others”. She also voiced that she, “Like the concept of the class and it was a good idea to incorporate into Y-CAP.” Danny’s mom did not recognize any academic, or behavior changes, but she could tell he learned a lot from the martial arts experience.

Danny personally has a lot going on that hinders him from being goal oriented and successful in achieving excellence. He is disrespectful, unmotivated, and imbalanced. Danny is not being held accountable for his actions at home or school. But here in the Y-CAP program, the staff is on one accord and are consistent with consequences and discipline. This causes Danny to get frustrated and struggle for ways to get the staff off

their game. Danny is not the most academically inclined student, but he could become that student if he would take responsibility and try harder to excel. He gives up too easily. Danny was getting help with his science homework and got upset because he had to read and think critically to find the answer, so he pitched a fit to keep from finishing his homework. So after homework free time started and he thought he could get on the computer or play a game. Well, due to his behavior and not completing his homework, he lost his free time. That made him really angry, but there was not anything he could do but to do his homework. When the main reason this behavior started is because Danny is not a fluent reader and he struggles with “big words.”

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This case study examined the experiences and perspectives of martial arts club members against the backdrop of several relevant lines of research. These research areas included: 1) Underserved Youth; 2) Youth Development through Sport; 3) TPSR Model; 4) Student Perspectives; and 5) Martial Arts and Youth Development. Results brought into view four diverse cases that proved relevant and informative to the literature used to frame the study. This discussion focuses on reviewing, comparing and contrasting cases and connecting the case results to the reviewed research literature.

For these cases, the leading research questions were: What is the objective of the martial arts club? What knowledge is the participants gaining from their martial arts experience? Does the martial arts club promote core values for at-risk youth? Does the martial arts club experience promote physical skill and technique development? From the research questions, themes derived while investigating the case studies and they were: benefits of the martial arts club which fall under the objective of the club. The relevance of martial arts to life is knowledge gained from the experience and how the cases transfer that knowledge to everyday living. Character development express core values for at-risk youth, where the cases communicate their understanding and insight on these values. Respect, responsibility, and leadership are taught to the participants to build up a quality personality and to encourage them to care for self and others. In promoting physical skill and technique development, the theme of skill and technique improvement occurred to gain the participants' competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform martial arts.

Based on the results, promoting youth development through martial arts in a community-based program for adolescent boys is fitting and has the potential to benefit, build and improve the program and population it serves. It was essential to view each child as an individual case, and to assess particular needs of the child and to interact with him on addressing the primary issues that he faced.

Literature states that inner-city adolescents face several challenges that include poverty, violence, criminal activity, lack of physical activity resources, unsafe environments, and lack of support, school dropouts, drug abuse, and prostitution (CDC, 2009, MacKay & Duran, 2007). In researching these cases most of the issues were present in each one, some being more severe than others. Case 1 lives in an impoverished community with unsafe environments. He was a pretty good kid, but not being challenged to reach his full potential. Because he was often bored with his daily routine, he would run into trouble to keep occupied. Case 2 lived in poverty even with two parents, but lacked physical activity resources and social skills. He was an awkward, sheltered homebody that had no real social life, especially related to social interaction with peers. On the other hand case 3 was quite loquacious and he struggled academically, socially and lacks family support. He would try really hard at times, but could be really stubborn and rebellious. Case 4 had quite a few issues going on. He lived in an impoverished neighborhood, consisted of violence and criminal acts. His father was incarcerated for selling drugs, and his mother was a school dropout; but wanted a better life for her son. Just because these kids come from situations that are not the best, does not mean that they are inadequate or are to be ignored. Creating a safe learning environment is essential for student success (Timken, 2005). Moreover, only by viewing

each child as an individual with their own strengths and struggles can a youth development program began to meet their needs (Hellison, 2003; Hellison et al., 2000).

Community-based program with a physical activity setting like the Y-CAP's program is caring and has a strong curriculum set up to assist in preparing the community it serves for life. It has been demonstrated that positive youth development in physical activity settings that integrates a caring environment optimizes the experiences of youth in the program (Newton et al., 2007). Y-CAP gives the kids a second chance, another opportunity to improve academics, behavior or social skills that were missed at home and/or school for success. Hamilton et al. (2004), states that adolescents can have a taste of a healthy, satisfying and productive life through the experience of a well-rounded youth development program. Resources and programs are available for kids who are less fortunate, they encourage kids to strive for excellence and these programs are designed to help youth in areas of need. These programs make adolescent years fun and enjoyable, but at the same time a positive learning experience (McLaughlin et al., 1994).

The TPSR model is an effective way of reaching the students on all levels of learning, whether in a school or community setting (Hellison, 2003). Combined with martial arts, TPSR provides a relationship between learning valuable lessons discussed in the Y-CAP program with lessons learned in YKF club. Both are ways of teaching to become more responsible for self and others in the students life and whomever they come into contact with socially. These four cases are aware of the values respect, responsibility and leadership and how to show them towards others. They are taught respect and responsibility in both the Y-CAP program as well as the YKF club, but leadership was taught in YKF club only. By introducing the value of leadership to the Y-CAP staff

through martial arts, they are willing to try incorporating leadership opportunities in the future planning of their curriculum to better serve their participants. Teaching martial arts encourage the cases to commit to following rules, procedures and it gave them social interactions individually and in a group setting.

Student perspectives are important because kids get the opportunity to express themselves and give their opinion to better serve them in learning. They like to feel their point of view is important to the curriculum and their voices are heard to gain an understanding of who they are. Dyson (2006) stated that explored student voice research can be time-consuming and difficult. The researcher agrees because it was challenging to set up interviews with the cases, parents and staff. The Y-CAP program is tightly organized and it was hard to squeeze in the case interviews without taking them away from an important activity within the time-frame. While in the YKF club some cases mentioned in their interviews that they huddled up to talk about their week and making decisions about respect, responsibility and leadership. By the case study participants being able to express and socially interact with their peers was important to some, because it gave them an opportunity to witness the feelings of others and discover similarities amongst the group and to also learn things about one another.

In conclusion, promoting youth development through martial arts in a community-based program is an effective way of gaining the experience and perspective of students to incorporate their voice as part of educating them. In doing so, cases were designed and themes were developed to explore the benefits of martial arts, relevance of martial arts on life, character, skill and technique improvement needed for youth to become the incredible people they can be in their communities. The staff developed unique



interventions for at risk youth to keep them from participating in negative activity and narrowed academic progression. Y-CAP uses counseling, structured curriculum, and family support to practice making good decisions and coping with complex issues for their kids to live a positive and healthy life and hope for the future. It was clear that a TPSR-based martial arts club was an appropriate and beneficial addition to this program that furthered the Y-CAP mission and contribution to the unique needs and goals of individual participants.

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## Appendix B

### Y-CAP Program Value Curriculum

#### Table of Contents: 20 Topics

- 1. Anger Management**
  - Lesson 1 Dealing with Anger
  - Lesson 2 Recognizing Anger and Dealing with Someone Else's Anger
  - Lesson 3 Aggressive Behavior: Positive and Negative
  - Lesson 4 Anger Management: Out of Control
  
- 2. Goal Setting**
  - Lesson 1 Short Term Goal Setting
  - Lesson 2 Long Term Goal Setting
  - Lesson 3 Inside of Me
  
- 3. Peer Pressure**
  - Lesson 1 Chairs (persuasion)
  - Lesson 2 Standing UP to Peer Pressure
  - Lesson 3 Decision Making Skills
  
- 4. Consequences**
  - Lesson 1 Accepting Consequences
  - Lesson 2 Behavioral Management (contract)
  - Lesson 3 Understanding Consequences of Criminal Behavior
  
- 5. Conflict Resolution**
  - Lesson 1 Rules for Fighting Fair
  - Lesson 2 Dealing with Conflict
  - Lesson 3 Listen to Me
  
- 6. Diversity**
  - Lesson 1 Accepting Diversity
  - Lesson 2 I Am the Color
  - Lesson 3 Showing Empathy
  - Lesson 4 Accepting Different People: The Anti-Teasing Game
  
- 7. Caring**
  - Lesson 1 Serving Others
  - Lesson 2 Caring: How to Express Affection and Caring
  - Lesson 3 Ten Seconds of Caring
  
- 8. Honesty**
  - Lesson 1 Dishonesty
  - Lesson 2 Are you Worthy of Trust?

Lesson 3 Should I Tell the Truth?  
Lesson 4 Honesty: The Legacy of Living

**9. Respect**

Lesson 1 Understanding, It's an Inside Job  
Lesson 2 To Be or Not To Be Respectful  
Lesson 3 Words are Powerful  
Lesson 4 Respectful Role Plays

**10. Responsibility**

Lesson 1 Responsibility  
Lesson 2 Cop Out Statements  
Lesson 3 Responsibility: Rules  
Lesson 4 Character Bingo (Four Core Values)

**11. Restraint**

Lesson 1 Dealing with Dating  
Lesson 2 Dating Violence and Healthy Relationships  
Lesson 3 True Love Waits: Let's Talk About Sex  
Lesson 4 Drugs and Alcohol: Making Healthy Choices

**12. Expressing Emotions**

Lesson 1 Expressing Emotions: Finger Painting  
Lesson 2 Knowing and Expressing My Feelings  
Lesson 3 Dealing with Fear  
Lesson 4 Assets and Limitation Survey  
Lesson 5 Handling Your Emotion  
Lesson 6 Guess the Feeling

**13. Teamwork**

Lesson 1 Paper Tower  
Lesson 2 Cup Stack  
Lesson 3 Candy Reach  
Lesson 4 Sentence Swap

**14. Problem Solving**

Lesson 1 Matching Problems with Solutions  
Lesson 2 Solve Problems Successfully  
Lesson 3 Letter Opener

**15. Communication Skills**

***Communication Assertively***

Lesson 1 Communication Styles  
Lesson 2 "I" Message

***Listening and Following Directions***

Lesson 3 Following Verbal Directions

Lesson 4 Following Specific Instructions  
Lesson 5 Listening/Story- Story  
Lesson 6 Come Follow Me  
Lesson 7 Communication Cues

**16. Self-Control**

Lesson 1 It isn't Funny  
Lesson 2 Using Self-Control  
Lesson 3 Using Appropriate Language  
Lesson 4 Avoiding Trouble with Others

**17. Gratitude**

Lesson 1 Saying Thank You  
Lesson 2 Gratitude: Being Polite/Manners  
Lesson 3 Gratitude/Starting a Conversation

**18. Bullying**

Lesson 1 Bullying/ I Can Do It  
Lesson 2 Dealing with Teasing  
Lesson 3 The Pie of Intimidation

**19. Self-Discovery**

Lesson 1 Who Am I?  
Lesson 2 Personal GPA  
Lesson 3 Building My House  
Lesson 4 Body Beautiful  
Lesson 5 Advertising ME

**20. Family and Nutrition/Exercise**

Lesson 1 Family: The Story of Me  
Lesson 2 Nutrition  
Lesson 3 Smart Exercising

**21. Decision Making**

## **Appendix C**

### **TPSR Levels**

**Level One-** *Respect for the Rights and Feelings of Others.* This includes: self-control, doing no harm, the right to be included, and the right to peaceful conflict resolution.

**Level Two-** *Self-Motivation.* This includes: effort, participating, staying on task, trying new or difficult things.

**Level Three-** *Self-Direction.* This includes: self-coaching, setting and working towards goals, and being independent.

**Level Four-** *Caring.* This includes: putting group welfare ahead of personal desires, coaching or teaching others, setting a good example, supporting others, and providing leadership.

**Level Five-** *Outside the Gym.* This includes the previous four levels and challenges the students to apply them in other settings such as; home, school or the community.