

## MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH THROUGH AIKIDO

Martin SNOPEK

### **Abstract**

*The objective of the presented study was to prove the suitability of the martial art of aikido, as means of personal and social education for the formation of moral and ethical values and attitudes of an individual at school age. The research was conducted on a sample of disciples aged 8-15 years from the school of martial arts "Ronin Dojo". Diagnostic methods: for one month, observations were made on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to monitor participant's activities and behavior towards the authority of the instructor and among themselves. After the period of observation, the self - designed questionnaire, divided in two parts: „Questionnaire for children“, and „Questionnaire for parents“, was applied. Statistical analysis was performed in a qualitative manner, based on frequency analysis. The results elucidates the benefit of aikido to the creation of moral and ethical values and attitudes in the participants. By comparing the results of observation of an influence of the martial art aikido on the children who engage in the activity and their parents, i.e. those who in most cases led them to this activity, we point out the importance of both of these views and their interconnectedness. At the same time, the results demonstrate the connection and harmony of the club's cooperation with the family and thus a positive impact on children's development. The synergistic effect, which is evident from the cooperation, has a much greater positive benefit on the child than its individual components, i.e. than the very influence of the family or the very influence of the club.*

### **Keywords**

*Aikido; ethics; moral development; personal and social education.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Moral education is a complex discipline, important especially in children age. It is important mean of forming advanced individual to be a proper member of society. Nowadays we are exposed to constantly changing environment in which children are teased and influenced by various impulses. Primal initiator of value scale is family although it might not be successful due to rushed live style filled with stress, pushes and challenges. However, the responsibility for education is sometimes shifted by family members to other educational institutions - a school where the family expects the professional approach of an expert, who should ideally correct the mistakes made by the family through their education (Kraus, 2008, p. 82-83).

Responsibility for education is shared and requires the cooperation of parents and teachers, their mutual trust and unity

in ideas about the value ladder. In practice, however, we come across several variables that undermine the ideal of shared responsibility for education: Fragmentation of education. Uncertainty of parents in education and their efforts to get rid of this burden. Overloading schools with educational tasks that are not core to them. Different interests of parents and teachers and insufficient willingness to cooperate (Soják, 2017). In case that family as primary education unit fails scholar system takes part and free-time activities and hobbies which give to their member's direction and boundaries to their moral development.

Martial arts are globally seen as an effective tool to form individual's personality. Nevertheless it is important to have in mind that most of western world expectations from oriental martial arts are inspired by action movies which does not

have much in common with traditional conception of martial arts as philosophy and long-term practice. Nowadays most people want instant outcome and especially with children and adolescents the situation is more visible. That is why most of those who attend class of traditional martial as aikido, leave classes disappointed and finish membership earlier than any progress or effect could be seen.

### 1.1 Moral and ethics

Moral is a problematic term for most of people which leads to doubts when somebody is questioned about morality or better said what is and what not moral behavior is. Moral questions were disputed ever before and many philosophers tried to find answers (Heidbrink, 1997, p. 17). There are many perspectives of what is and what is not moral. Difference between moral and ethics does not have to be obvious at first sight and it could overlap from time to time. Because of this it is not easy to separate those two terms. Globally we can say that it is about point of view of an individual or compact group to their own behavior and actions which are critically judged by members within their own group whether the individual's behavior is consistent with principles, values or terms of the group behavior. Subsequently group members compare whether the behavior of an individual or another group is acceptable or not.

Nowadays, these values scales are tested even more, due to the general well-being, especially in "Western" society, the spread of information technology and the instant connection of people across all over the world, information sharing regardless of content or distance. There are different groups - religious, cultural, ethnic, confronted with the customs and values of other groups. These groups try, either publicly through traditional media TV or radio broadcast or through internet and social networks, to influence the opinion of others in order to promote their own

views and attitudes and thus the moral and ethical values that they themselves profess. It is easy to get lost in today's overloaded information environment, and especially for less mentally advanced individuals as children, it can be difficult to find out what is and what is not moral and ethical, or what is considered moral and ethical and what is not.

### 1.2 Martial art as a wellness procedure

Aikido went through a transformation from a period when its techniques were tough and uncompromising, to the stage where, by simply deflection and turning aside, the attacker is taken to the ground without being harmed or his health ruined. It should be kept in mind that Ueshiba himself went through this transformation and that in order to fully understand and master the core essence of the aikido system, it is not enough to study only one aspect of it, but to explore all of its paths and study aikido as a whole (Ueshiba, Stevens, 2016 p. 12-36).

The behavior of aikido students in the dojo is permeated by deep respect for the place, for all the people present and for the very purpose of the building itself. This behavior mimics the generally accepted standards of decency. However, the moment when students enter the tatami they follow certain specific - the method of the opening ceremony, which was inherited from the war customs of Japan is usually followed to this day (Westbrook, Ratti, 1970 p. 42).

Nowadays "wellness" is described according to the "wellness" definition of WHO (2000) as: Wellness is the optimal state of health of individuals and groups. There are two focal concerns: the realization of the fullest potential of an individual physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually and economically, and the fulfilment of one's role in the family, community, place of worship, workplace and other settings in humane sense" (Krejčí, 2013). As a basic figure these four elements fit into the mandala template (Seaward, 2003 p. 50).

The mandala symbolism is also noticeable in the philosophy of aikido, when the aikido master Morihei Ueshiba described the nature essence of aikido by drawing a triangle, circle and square - the connection

of heaven, humanity and earth, which are also depicted in the symbolism of mandalas (Stevens, 2001 p. 77-79).

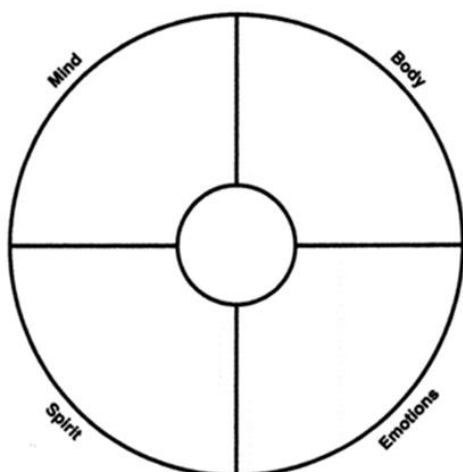


Figure 1 Wellness Mandala  
(Source: Seaward, 2003 p. 51)

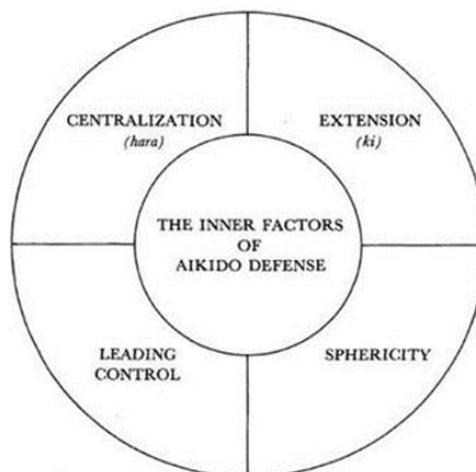


Figure 2 Inner Aikido Factors  
(Source: Westbrook, Ratti, 1970, p. 68)

The similarity of the figures shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 and graphically illustrating the above also refer for the possibility of using aikido as a wellness procedure. If we transfer combat functionality of aikido principles to our own behavior and as an opponent we understand a difficult life situation or a problem, we can achieve success by applying the aikido principles. These principles can also help us in our efforts to achieve our inner goal, whatever it may be. After all, achieving well-being, self-awareness and harmony with others, nature and the universe in general, is just as the main idea of aikido as wellness.

## 2 OBJECTIVE, HYPOTHESES

The objective of the presented study is to confirm claims that aikido is valuable means in forming of the participant's personal development, and moral - ethic values. Based on the objective, two hypotheses were established:

H1: More than 75% participants practicing

aikido are positively affected in area of ethic - moral personal development.  
H2: At least 75% of parents perceive aikido as suitable means of personal and social education to form ethic - moral values and stands of their children.

## 3 METHODS, PROCEDURE

The original intention was to realize research on persons in age of 6-16 years, practicing aikido in the school of martial arts "Ronin Dojo". The "Ronin Dojo" was founded in Prague in 2011. From the beginning of this school the target group for the organizations activities were children from the age of 5 years old. From 2011 to December 2020, 131 children aged 5-13 and 63 adolescents and adults aged 14-53 passed through the gates of this organization.

### 3.1 Diagnostics

For one month, observations were made on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to monitor children's activities and behavior not only towards the authority of the

instructor but also among themselves, especially in relation to the time of their attendance. The research included observations of "Ronin Dojo" disciples, focusing on their motivation to exercise, behavior during training to each other and to other people who do not participate in the training unit and their understanding, perception and application of moral and ethical values.

After the period of observation, the self - designed questionnaire was applied. The self - designed questionnaire was divided in two parts: „Questionnaire for children“, and „Questionnaire for parents“. The „Questionnaire for children“ consisted of seventeen questions, of which the first five concern personal data while the other nine questions, were about personal experiences, attitudes and opinions on the trainings, by circling the numbers on a scale of 1-5 according to the degree of agreement (1 = agree; 5 = disagree). In the following two questions the respondent ranks the values according to his/her importance, question No. 15 copies the value ranking of the Bushido Code, and question No. 16 copies the value ranking of the concepts of generally accepted moral values. Question No. 17 was voluntary and was formulated in such a way that the respondent freely describes any personal experience in applying the principles of aikido in his/her life.

The „Questionnaire for parents“ consisted of four questions, the first of which was an open question in which the respondent's parent described the personal motivation to enlist the child in an aikido course. Furthermore, two questions were chosen in which the respondent's parent chooses a numerical value on a scale of 1-5 (1 = agree; 5 = disagree) according to the degree of agreement on the given sub-question concerning child's personal development and the benefits of the martial art of aikido at the level of personal and social education.

The questionnaires were sent to parents of all registered children, i.e. 93 e-

mail addresses. The „Questionnaire for children“ was answered by 24 respondents in the age range 8 - 15 years, despite the fact that the email was sent to all 93 members of "Ronin Dojo" and their parents. 21 parents participated in the research and answered to the „Questionnaire for parents“.

### 3.2 Statistics

Statistical analysis was performed in a qualitative manner, based on frequency analysis.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By observation it was found that children older than 11 years with attendance of aikido longer than 1 year, who went to classes voluntarily, feel to be part of "Ronin Dojo" school, they adopt patterns of instructors' behavior, they think about their actions and their identity bears marks of martial training. The disciples who wear "gi" are more self-confident and younger students by age are, thanks to the traditional suit, probably so motivated that significant effort to improve technique, behavior, attention, „zanshin“ is more evident. Similarly, Kornatovská and Moučková (2020) declare about yoga, that it represents a system of systematic training in daily life to health keeping and health prevention within the history of thousands years until nowadays. That is also why it is possible to transfer the techniques of physical, breathing and concentration exercises, relatively easily into applications in the practice of health education.

Children who have been enlisted for trainings by their parents due to behavioral problems feel good at training with proper leadership of an instructor and their behavior gets into acceptable boundaries as they see pattern as their instructor acts. Person of instructor then replaces the moral authority and a confidant. After reaching a certain skill level and with long-term and regular attendance, there is evident change not



only in behavior but also in approach to other children and a critical view of their own behavior. Behavior of these children changes due to acceptance of values and patterns of behavior required during training and it is observable that those patterns are applied into normal life of an individual. About such potential of well concentration and control due provided controlled physical activities of children, which brought moral and social benefits reported Rehor, Kornatovská (2013). This setup of mind and others beneficial changes of behavior decreases proportionally for a child who do not visit training of their own free will, but only because their parents want it, or with irregular attendance.

Evaluation of the "Questionnaire are for children" proved, that H1 was verified. In seven of the nine examined questions, the values in the range of 75% - 92% of all answers were affirmative. For the two remaining questions, the value of the positive agreement were 33% and 37.5%. The percentage of individual positive opinions on the given question were averaged to the total value of 72.33%. Therefore  $77.33 > 65\%$  we state then the hypotheses H1: "More than 65% of participants practicing aikido are positively affected in area of ethic - moral personal development" is verified.

Interpretation of the „Questionnaire for parents“ verified the hypotheses H2: "At least 75% of parents perceive aikido as suitable means of personal and social education to form ethic - moral values and stands of their children". Positive effect in physical development, ethic, confidence, concentration, behavior and self-awareness in general, consider in average 85.1% of parents. Therefore  $85.1\% > 75\%$  we state that „At least 75% of parents perceive the martial art of aikido as suitable means of personal and social education to form moral and ethical values and stands of children.“

In past years a number of studies have been realized to confirm the positive

impact of martial arts on an individual physical, social and personal development. Vertonghen and theeboom (2010) offer a summary and comparison of studies from 1978 to 2009 across martial arts in Journal of Sports Science and Medicine. The authors agree that there are many common factors influencing the socio-psychological benefits of martial arts: Social and economic status of a martial student, age, type of martial arts, instructors personality, personal characteristics of the student, level of self-confidence, aggressiveness etc. Researches targeting children and adolescents prove the positive effect especially in the areas of self-regulation or self-awareness, increased mental well-being and reduced levels of violence among participants.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Non-violent conception and a holistic and individual approach to the student make aikido a tool for shaping an individual's personality. Martial art expects a certain level of physical activity. By repeating the movements to the dominant and non-dominant side, there is a practice and improvement of locomotor skills and awareness of ones' own body. Breathing exercises, meditation included, in addition to the physical side also affect mental condition and spiritual side of an individual. All aspect of the individual are affected in the way to fulfill its full potential through continuous of practicing and long-term attendance. We can therefore state that aikido is suitable activity for the personal and social development and education in the wellness point of view.

## 6 REFERENCES

- Heidbrink, H. (1997). *Psychologie morálního vývoje*. [Psychology of moral development] Portál.
- Kraus, B. (2008). *Základy sociální pedagogiky*. [Foundations of social pedagogy] Portál.
- Kornatovská, Z., Moučková, P. (2020).

- Ethicotherapy and health education. *Acta Salus Vitae*, 8, 2: 47-55.
- Krejčí, M. (2013). Self-transformation process in wellness and health education. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 3 (2):706–718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.272>.
- Seaward, B. L. (2003). *Health and wellness: Journal Workbook*. 2. USA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
- Rehor, P., Kornatovská, Z. (2013). Measuring of health - related benefits of physical activity in high school students. *Acta Salus Vitae*, 1 (2). 151 - 160.
- Soják, P. (2017). *Osobnostní a sociální rozvoj, aneb, strom, mozaika a vzducholod'*. [Personal and social development, or, the tree, mosaic and airship] Grada.
- Stevens, John. (2001). *Tajemství aikido*. [Secret of aikido] Fighters Publications.
- Ueshiba, M., Stevens, J. (2016). *Umění míru*. [Art of the peace] B4U Publishing.
- Vertonghen, J., Theeboom, M. (2010). The social-psychological outcomes of martial arts practice among youth: A review. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 9(4): 528–537. Available from: <https://www.jssm.org/volume09/iss4/cap/jssm-09-528.pdf>
- Westbrook, A., Ratti, O. (2020). *Aikido and the dynamic sphere: An illustrated introduction* [online]. Vermont: Tuttle Publishing. [cit. 2020-10-19] ISBN 9781462907540. Available from: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/aikido-and-the-dynamic-sphere-an-illustrated-introduction-e159327652.html>
- WHO (2000). *The world health report 2000. Health Systems: Improving Performance*. WHO: Geneva. - [http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/about/HPRGlossary\\_NewTerms.pdf](http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/about/HPRGlossary_NewTerms.pdf).

## 7 CONTACT

Martin SNOPEK, B.A.

Ronin Dojo z.s. Prague, Czech Republic,

E-mail: [jan.pupik@seznam.cz](mailto:jan.pupik@seznam.cz)