

The Intrinsic Value of Children's Aikido Classes to Aikido as a Whole

Part II

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Aikido is described as not merely “the concrete instrument of defense” (Westbrook and Ratti 113), but rather a “process of self-discovery” (Brawdy 22). Students of Aikido are required to reflect further on the experience and upon the overall objective of Aikido practice. His Holiness, The Dalai Lama states that “generating a wholesome mental attitude is not a simple task” (42), which extends to society only being able to move forward and grow through the education of its children. Developing strong, selfless, trustworthy, accommodating, yet powerful leaders of tomorrow with a positive sense of self can be facilitated through the study of Aikido. Society passes down customs, values, and ideals so as to make community habitable for all. Regular participation in an Aikido class can contribute to societal goals as it better prepares children to be healthy, active members of a global community.

Strong individuals help move society forward in a positive direction and are not so through muscle and physical prowess alone. Truly strong individuals “appreciate the faults of self-centeredness and the advantages of cherishing others” (Dalai Lama 105). It is in this “cherishing of others” that students of Aikido begin to learn who they are and to better understand the practitioners around them. “Teachers of Aikido use technique as a means of teaching their students how to let go of such attachments [those of the ego] and appreciate the common humanity they share with others” (Brawdy 22). In an interview with Andrea Siegel, Cyndy Hayashi-Clark quotes Frank Doran as saying, “Take what you want from each teacher, but always retain who you are” (126). This statement extends particularly well to children as they are still discovering who they are. They are part themselves, part their parents, and part their experiences. “Aikido is an intuitive study of human life” (Gleason 23) and is thus a tool for

children to learn to become strong individuals capable of influencing humanity in a positive manner. “If we train our minds to be virtuous and positive, our conduct will automatically become more pleasant and wholesome” (Dalai Lama 42).

In addition to focusing on their own growth as individuals, the practice of Aikido allows children to develop their overall understanding of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness of others’ physical abilities, limits, and innate characteristics develops as regular practice “requires that the student[s] respect the “natural” integrity of [their partners’] anatomy” (Westbrook and Ratti 49). The postures of Aikido “[create] a physical pathway between [the] body and the ground by utilizing the body’s skeletal framework and just enough muscle strength for proper posture” (Meyer and Reeder 41), yet without the willingness of a partner to practice with, the finer nuances of a particular technique cannot be studied. It is this “give and take relationship” that is required to evolve as a mature practitioner of Aikido. The Dalai Lama states that “a selfish attitude creates fear and insecurity, which in turn create distrust (xv). It is this distrust of others that seems so prevalent among children today. As Koretoshi Maruyama states, “One single thought can create tremendous power” (19). The power of trust cannot be underestimated and leads to truly trusting and understanding one’s own nature. It is the “blending with the other in Aikido [that] develops through self-knowledge” (Brawdy 3). Andrea Siegel quotes Cyndy Hayashi-Clark as stating, “strong means having a good sense of self” (118), which extends to a “good sense of self” will allow children to learn to trust those around them as they progress in their practice of Aikido.

Andrew Edelman’s studies on children and Aikido noted “the students exuded a quiet confidence” (37). As confidence evolves through trusting others and oneself, it becomes calmness in the face of adversity. “Calmness is power” (Maruyama 24). This power is fostered

“through the repetition of attacks and throws” (Meyer and Reeder 35). As children who study Aikido demonstrate that “it is actually possible to become relaxed enough to study a particular attack and the effectiveness of the response” (Meyer and Reeder 35), they will begin to understand that to lead, you “must be smooth and continuous and never in direct opposition to the force” (Westbrook and Ratti 87). Just as Aikido requires students to lead, it also requires students to follow. “If you think about helping other sentient beings and take on their suffering, whatever hardships you encounter will make your practice more effective” (Dalai Lama 137). It is through this human to human evolution of thought and movement that Aikido can help educate the children of today to become the robust, unselfish, trustworthy, adaptable leaders of tomorrow.

## Works Cited

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