

Rationale of Self-defense Education in American Schools

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The purpose of this article is to examine the critical roles and benefits of self-defense and self-defense education for students in American middle and high schools. The article will analyze crime trends and the self-defense education status in America, and discuss rationale of self-defense and self-defense education from both the theoretical and practical perspectives. This article tried to provide a comprehensive view on theories and practice of self-defense education for American school students. Self-defense instructors can consider the ideas presented herein to persuade their school administrators to initiate or strengthen their self-defense education programs, convince parents of the need, and obtain their support and cooperation. Ideas we presented can also be useful in motivating students to learn self-defense while helping instructors develop a comprehensive understanding of self-defense education.

Keywords: self-defence education, American schools, theories of self-defence education

Introduction

Self-defense education in American schools is a new member of sport and physical education family. Although self-defense education does not lead to notable achievement such as gold medals and honors, it concerns the safety of millions of schools students and has a critical impact on millions of families for many generations now and in the future. Self-defense education has much more responsibility than most sports and exercise.

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from both the theoretical and practical perspectives. This article tries to provide a comprehensive view on theories and practice of self-defense education for American school students.

A. Life is the most important treasure

The most important treasure for every school student is the life. The life is the carrier of the whole life process that includes education, career, family and entertainment, wealth, and self-actualization. Figure 1 explains the critical role of physical life.



Figure 1. The meaning of a safe/healthy life

However, life can easily be transformed by three life-threatening factors. Figure 2 uses a metaphor to describe the relationship of students' life and three life-threatening factors. Students' lives are is much like a balloon in which the rubber skin is the physical life holding the air that represents all life components described in Figure 1. If the balloon is popped, nothing remains and life ceases. As an old saying puts, „if one is not breathing, nothing matters.“

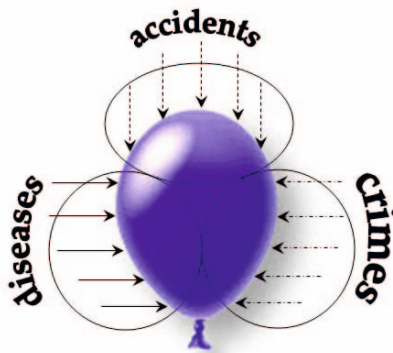


Figure 2. Three life-threatening factors

These three life-threatening factors create serious dangers to students if they do not take appropriate preventive steps. 1. *Crimes of violence* take about 16,000 lives away and result in one million physical injuries annually (Uniform Crime Report, 1988-2008). 2. *Disease* takes nearly 1.6 million people's lives away annually in the United States. 3. *Accidents and natural disasters* affect nearly 95,000 people who die from of various accidents and natural disasters in the United States.

Reducing students' chance of becoming victims of violent crimes and increasing their chances of survival when attacked are the ultimate goal of self-defense education. However, maintaining a safe and healthy life requires a holistic effort, and students have to learn how to deal with all three factors for maximum protection. Juggling these three factors requires awareness, good planning, proper education, and self initiated learning. Even though disease and accident prevention are not discussed in self-defense classes, self-defense instructors should remind students that they also need to learn how to prevent all three factors as all are equally important in a student's life.

B. The Needs for Self-defense Education

B-1. Facts about crime

1. Criminals exist, they always have, and probably always will, as a forever part of human being. Crimes are forever part of the society. Criminals have been part of life throughout history. Like ocean waves, new criminals continually replace the old. Despite society's best efforts, crime persists.

Based on the criminal statistics over last 20 years (Uniform Crime Report 1988-2008), the average annual numbers of violent crimes in the United States were 1.4 million in the United States. Included were approximately 16,000 murders, 90,000 rapes, 420,000 robberies, and 900,000 aggravated assaults. There were 14.9 millions of property related crimes. Included were 2.1 million burglaries, 7.0 millions thefts, 1.2 million auto thefts, and 3.2 millions workplace crimes.

We have to accept the fact that our children must live with criminals in our world, maybe even on our street. The potential for becoming a victim is a part of everyday life. There is no 100% safe place for them. Maslow's Hierarch of Human Needs (Figure 3) clearly described the need of self-defense for everybody including school children (Maslow, 1970), and his theory established a solid base for self-defense education in American schools.

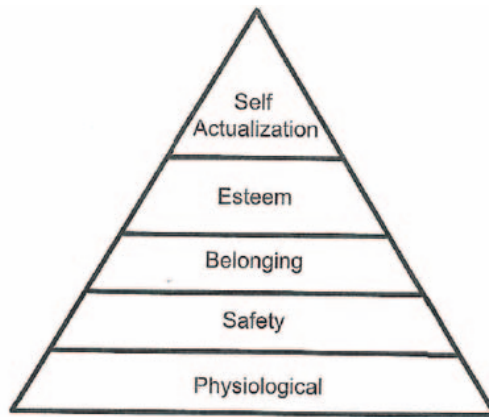


Figure 3.

2. Crimes are real and can happen to anybody, any time, and anywhere.

Criminals and crimes are far more than just data. Each crime is associated with one or more victim(s).

Based on the crime report and cases in everyday life, violent crimes may happen to anyone, anywhere, at anytime, and in any form. School students are not exceptions.

Crimes cause severe consequences. Crimes of violence have severe consequences. Millions of victims or their family and friends suffer from loss of life or property. The costs of violent crime are too high to be ignored. *Physically*, crimes cause death, physical injury, pain, and/or permanent disability. *Emotionally and psychologically*, crimes invoke the fear of becoming a victim and cause prolonged anxiety and restlessness after someone becomes a victim. Crimes also cause stress and psychological pressure and have a negative influence on everyday life. *Financially*, a victim will lose \$2,940,000 per murder case, \$9,350 per aggravated assault, \$86,500 per rape, \$19,000 per robbery, and \$1,100 per burglary (Conklin 1999). Crimes also have a negative influence on youth. Youth who have been affected by crime often show more mistrust of strangers, have lower self-esteem and confidence, hostility toward other children, a greater tendency to carry weapons, a distorted sense of time, thoughts, or perception, nightmares, and get in more fights. Many of these effects can last a lifetime (Conklin 1999).

3. The law enforcement system cannot protect everybody every minute. The law enforcement system cannot protect each individual's life or property every minute due to the following reasons. While the police is not around, it is the potential victims' responsibility protect their life, their families and property against crimes.

- Although the law forbidden any crimes, criminals practically can do anything to attack victims if they choose not following the law. Then the law on the paper cannot help much on the site when criminals attack victims.
- There are not enough police officers to watch everybody. Uniform Crime Report indicates that there are only three police for every one thousand citizens in the nation.
- Police officers are NOT bodyguards.
- Police officers often cannot show up on time to stop the crimes and save the victims due to many factors. For example, police do not know what is happening, the victim cannot communicate with police, police need time to be there, etc.
- Polices cannot catch all criminals. Only 44.5% of attackers who committed violent crimes and 16.5% of criminals property crimes were caught (Uniform Crime Report 2007). Most of criminals are still at large.
- The court cannot put all criminals in jail for lifetime.

B-2. What is the chance of becoming victims?

School students have a high percentage of becoming victims of violent crimes. In 2006, among students ages 12–18, there were about 767,000 violent crimes. About 46% of males and 26% of females reported they had been in physical fights. Over two-thirds (67%) of all victims of sexual assault were under the age of 18 (33% were ages 12 through 17 and 34% were under age 12). Fifty percent of kids were bullied and 10% are victims on a regular basis. In 2004, 5,292 students ages 10 to 24 were murdered, averaging 15 each day (Statistics, 2009).

B-3. School students vs criminals: an unfair war

Our society is at war with criminals. The war between students and criminals is an unfair war favoring the hardened criminals. Students certainly are at great

disadvantage. Criminals outsmart and out-power students in this war. Take a look at the following comparison in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between criminals and school students

Criminals	Middle and high school students
Specialized in committing crimes	Study math and English
Experienced in crimes	No experience in handling crimes
Cold-blooded	Are taught to be nice and accepting
Can do anything beyond the law	Follow laws and want to be good citizens
Use tricks to get victims	Never think/learn to deal with the criminals
Study victims everyday	Study for school everyday
Have many chances to win	Have little chance to win if not prepared
Are physically stronger	Mentally and physically vulnerable
Frequently plot to attack	Think about friends, family, and school
Carry weapons	Are unarmed
Attack anytime, anywhere, anyone	Unaware when, where and how attacks come
Execute well-planned attacks	Attacks unknown and unpredictable

Crimes happen so frequently and often threaten students' lives. However, students are not well prepared to deal with crimes and their preparation to prevent and deal with crimes is far below the preparation for good grades and good colleges. They don't understand that straight "A"s and admission to Harvard or Stanford does not help them when they are attacked by criminals at crime scenes. They don't know dealing with violent crimes is another war they have to face in their life, and this war is more crucial and bloody than anything in their life. They don't know that their mental and physical ability are not enough to deal with criminals before they have a high quality self-defense education, and they have little chance to win the war without proper self-defense education.

They always feel crime is something that happens to others. Often, one realizes the importance of self-defense only after it is too late

B-4. Are our students prepared to deal with these criminals?

The following statistics further indicated that our school students are not prepared to deal with violent crimes. Only 10.1% of high school students and 14.9% of elementary students indicated that they took short self-defense classes (Chen, 1999 summer; Chen, 1999 Fall). Only 17.8% of people surveyed learned some self-defense related training, including martial arts, safety education, rape prevention (Williams, 1994). Even female college students who are older, usually wiser, and more mature than middle and high school students, demonstrated low self-confidence on preventing and handling crimes (Chen, 2004). More than 50% of physical educators in California schools have not included self-defense activities in their physical education curriculum (Young 2008), while other students in other 50% of schools have not received formal self-defense education yet.

B-5. Serious questions for school, teachers, parents, and students

1. Criminals are ready to attack. Are students ready to defend themselves? If they are not ready, what are we waiting for? Are you waiting for crimes to happen before being active, or wish students lucky enough to always avoid becoming victims?

2. How much time did students spend on learning self-defense? Do students have any experience or confidence on preventing and dealing with murders, aggravated assault, robberies and rapes? Do students know how to escape from kicks, punches, chokes, or holds? Do students have any chance to win if they are attacked now?

3. Did they ever think about the consequence of loss of students' life in a crime? How much do we really care about public safety for students?

4. Who dares to say students won't become victims? Who wants to bet their life and future on ignoring crimes? Who wants to risk not learning self-defense? Who wants to suffer the consequences of being a victim?

5. What is more important to students: perfect grade, good college, or preventing life? What subject is more important than protecting students' lives? Which class is more important than self-defense class?

C. The benefits of self-defense and critical role of self-defense education

Self-defense education has many benefits for school students. These benefits include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Protecting students' lives: Protecting students' lives is the ultimate goal of self-defense classes. Self-defense class (usually offered through physical education programs) is the only place where students can learn how to protect their life.

2. Establishing awareness: Students will be aware of the need to learn self-defense for their life, and take greater personal responsibility.

3. Developing mental strategies: Students will develop mental strategies to prevent and deal with potential criminals. These strategies include prevention and handling of sexual harassment/rape, arguments, bullies, robbery, kidnapping, gang crimes, sudden violence, burglary, family violence, crimes in dating, carjacking, crimes on the road, crimes in workplace, crimes in entertainment, and murder.

4. Developing a strong self-discipline: Students will develop very strong self-discipline through self-defense classes. They will have better respect to instructors and classmates, and they have better collaborative work in classes. Students who took self-defense classes demonstrate less violence than those who did not take the class.

5. Developing physical skills and hands-on experience: Students will learn many physical skills in self-defense classes. Examples include dealing with kicks, punches, grabs, throws, arm-holds, hair-pulls, chokes, bear-hugs, floor holds, gun attacks, knife attacks, stick attacks, and multiple-attackers (Chen, 2010b).

6. Improving ability to fight-back: Students can develop tremendous hands-on experience through learning and applying physical self-defense skills through self-defense classes. This training improves students' ability to deal with different attacks in lab situation. Female college students improved their ability to deal different attacks through one semester learning. They improved 39.5%, dealing with kicks and punches, 53.3% on keeping their balance when attackers tried to throw them, 81.3% on releasing from different holds, 66.4% on floor releasing, and 46.8% countering knife attacks (Chen, 2010a).

7. Establishing self-confidence: Students can develop their self-confidence through learning mental strategies and physical skills. After 30 one-hour classes

in one semester's learning, students improved their self-confidence from 2.9 to 8.4 on a 10-point scale on preventing violent crimes, 2.3-8.2 on mentally handling different violent crimes, and 1.-7.9 on dealing with different physical attacks (Chen, 2010).

8. Developing real life skills: Brewer (1994) reported that victims indicated that self-defense helped them on all crimes of violence (59.6%), rape (63.3%), and assault (60.5%). Ferguson (1994) indicated that 40% rape victims avoided injury or further injury, 38% managed to escape, and 22% scared off the attackers.

9. Improving fitness: Besides developing mental strategies and physical skills, students also enhance their physical fitness through self-defense classes. The heart rate of students when practicing self-defense skills (including kicks, punches, and knee strikes) can remain at 110-137 per minutes during these practices.

10. Meeting the requirements of physical education standards: Self-defense is a major subject for high school students in the National Standards for Physical Education by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education published. High school students should develop proper mental strategies and physical skills in self-defense (NASPE 2004).

Combative activity is a major part of middle and high school curriculum at 7th and 10 grades in California as required by the new California Physical Education Standard (California 2005). Self-defense is considered the most comprehensive format of combative since it covers all combative forms (martial arts), and it is much more practical and useful for students than single combative activity (such as one martial art). Students can use self-defense to protect themselves.

D. Summary

D-1. Rationale of self-defense

Crime is the most serious challenge they have to be ready to face. Students have no choice but stand up and protect themselves to reduce the chance of becoming victims.

Crimes have happened and are happening everyday to school students, and they have no bodyguard. Students must learn from other people's previous experience, and use self-defense strategies to prevent crimes before happening to them. It is better to be well prepared than hopeless and helpless.

Self-defense is the main skill that provides safety for students. Students will not be safe without it. Self-defense is the most important and critical part of the life of middle and high school students. All students need self-defense if they want to reduce their chance of becoming victims and increase their chance to successfully escape from attacks. Self-defense is a critical lifetime skill and no other subjects can replace it.

D-2. Rationale of high quality self-defense education

Crimes happen daily while students remain uninformed regarding prevention and handling. We all worry about students' safety and talk about the importance of self-defense. Now it is the time to take action to implement and improve self-defense education. We cannot let students learn self-defense by themselves. Self-defense is not self-learning subject, it is a science and need qualified teachers and high quality classes.

It is our schools' responsibility to provide high quality self-defense classes for students. It is self-defense instructors' responsibility to teach students self-defense. It is parents' responsibility to take actions with their children. It is students' responsibility to learn self-defense and take actions.

Self-defense class is the main class that teaches students how to protect their life.

Self-defense class is a critical part of school education. Self-defense class should be one of the most important curricula in middle and high schools.

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