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APRIL 3, 2008 ★ A PIONEER PRESS PUBLICATION ★ \$1.00

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SPARRING PARTNERS

Immanuel Walters (left) and Emma Gailey practice during a session of Lincoln Elementary School's tae kwon do club. **PAGE 21** PHOTO BY ALLISON WILLIAMS/PIONEER PRESS

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Life preparation

Tae kwon do classes strive to instill higher principles — not combat-readiness

By **KAREN BERKOWITZ**
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Some children sign up for tae kwon do classes with scenes from the movies swirling in their heads.

They imagine themselves cast as the physical underdog. They visualize

jaws dropping in disbelief when they spring forth with a fast-flying kick to the chin, stunning the brawny bully caught completely off guard.

But the youngsters who participate in after-school tae kwon do classes at schools in Evanston quickly discover they are

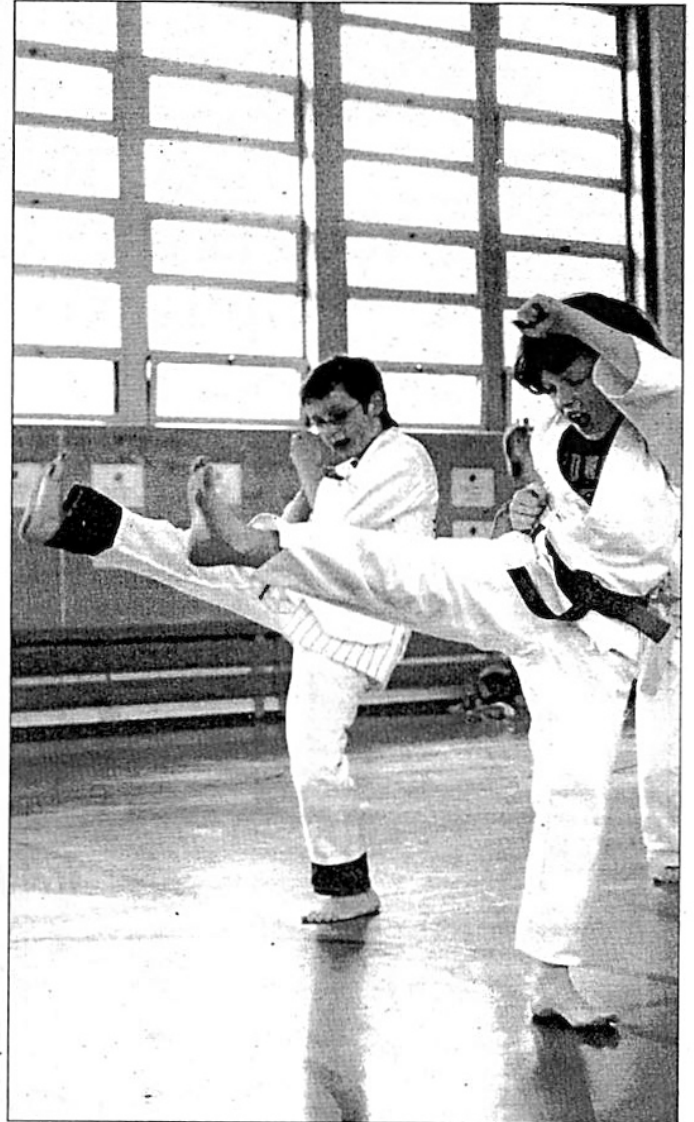
preparing not for competition or combat, but for living a principled life.

Instructors from Connelly's Academy, which runs the clubs, stress tae kwon do's tenets: Courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit.

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At the instruction of teacher Anne Mason, students take a bow at the end of their tae kwon do class at Lincoln Elementary School.



PHOTOS BY ALLISON WILLIAMS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fourth-grader Eli Cohen (left) and third-grader Andy Soglin practice a kicking exercise during an after-school tae kwon do session at Lincoln Elementary School. Similar classes meet at Kingsley, Lincolnwood, Orrington, Walker, Washington and Willard schools as well as the King Lab and Bessie Rhodes magnet schools. Programs also are offered at the McGaw YMCA and the city's Levy Center, and new programs are forming at Haven Middle School and Evanston Township High School.

LEFT: Morgan Kaplan (left), a third-grader at Lincoln Elementary School, helps black belt student Emma Gailey fold an American flag properly after their tae kwon do class.



ALLISON WILLIAMS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

After completing a series of punches, Andy Soglin mentally prepares for the next taekwon do exercise.

Classes

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Competing from within

"The only person a child competes with is himself," said Anne Mason, the instructor who works with the after-school club at Lincoln, in southeast Evanston.

"What we teach is a traditional martial art with its community values. In a martial sport, they are really gearing kids for competitive events."

Emma Gailey, a Nichols Middle School seventh-grader who assists at Lincoln, has been sold on taekwon do since kindergarten, when it helped her overcome a problem concentrating.

"I just couldn't focus," said Gailey, recalling that she'd set out to perform a task and veer onto something else. "Taekwon do got me to concentrate."

Gailey also finds that it helps her relieve anger.

"This has been a place where I could relax and forget about what I had on my mind that was stressing me out," she said.

School communities

Connelly's Academy runs similar classes at Kingsley, Lincolnwood,

Orrington, Walker, Washington and Willard schools as well as the King Lab and Bessie Rhodes magnet schools. Programs also are offered at the McGaw YMCA and the city's Levy Center, and new programs are forming at Haven Middle School and Evanston Township High School.

"One of the goals of the school program is to create a community within each school where junior and senior kids help each other and create a peaceful community," said Joe Connelly, a taekwon do master who started his first District 65 program in 1991 after a social worker saw applications with at-risk students.

"We expect them to behave honorably, in class and out," Connelly said. "If they don't behave responsibly, or misuse the martial arts, we hold them accountable; they can't train with us."

What they do matters

Connelly said many at-risk youngsters lack a sense of "agency," that is, a feeling that what they do, or don't do, matters. In their view, "things just happen" — a mindset he strives to change.

"There are things they

can do in their lives right here, right now, that can effect positive outcomes."

When a first-grade boy announced before class one day that his parents forgot his uniform, Connelly took the boy aside and said, "You know? Your parents have a lot to remember. It's your uniform. You earned it." Connelly told the boy he would be the one practicing the principles out in the world.

Taking responsibility

The next time the boy's father realized, "Oh, we forgot the uniform," during the drive to school, his son corrected him.

"No, Dad, I forgot the uniform," the lad said. They immediately drove back home and retrieved it.

A 13-week class series costs \$78, or \$6 per session, but half and full scholarships are available.

Said Connelly, "Our goal is that if a kid starts with us, that he or she is able to do that all the way up through high school regardless of financial means."

For more information about the classes, visit connellysacademy.com on the Web.