

### ***Karate Youth – From an Acorn to the MightyOak.***

*“During the last week of February and the first week of March, Sensei John Turnbull of WJKA-USA conducted a two week long karate camp for students at the Ross School Upper School.”*

*“Last weekend, 17-19 November 2017, it was the first edition of the Young Sensei Seminars and again the 30th edition of the Open Roosendaal karate championships”.*

On the surface, these seem like fairly common headlines, but for someone like me who was looking for an international organization to affiliate with, they struck a chord.

*Students and Young Sensei* stand out to me, and in my opinion, they should be important to every Karate member and every Karate organization. If Karate is going to grow - if it is going to be effective - we need the students and we need the young Sensei.

Just a while back, I was speaking with a parent who wished there was something out there for their child that was more than sport, something that could teach respect, focus, and help their son get along better with others.

I looked at him and grinned: “Let’s talk about Karate.” I was more than eager to talk about the realistic benefits of Karate for young people.

Without the generations behind us coming into the Art, and without new Sensei being mentored and encouraged by today’s Sensei, Karate is like the Bonsai tree that isn’t attended to or propagated: in the end it loses its form and eventually no longer exists as it once was. Having said that, I am confident there are many organizations that are attracting and teaching youth, as well as recognizing the value in doing so.

I think though, we need to be diligent in letting youth know that they can strive to become leaders, that they can one day teach the Art they now practice. Additionally, we need to let them grow into positions of leadership. From running a warmup to asking them for their feedback and input on training, we have to engage them.

In the Dojo I currently train in, we have a Deshi program where junior students are given specific responsibilities as they mature, not the least of which is mentoring young students during training and gradings. I firmly believe we are not only adding to the roots of Karate, we are adding to the self-esteem and confidence of these young practitioners. In this same dojo, Senpai are asked to contribute to the lessons and oftentimes run particular portions of the training class, and are always engaged in team-building exercises outside the dojo.

There is a view that the young students will eventually be filling our shoes, and the more seasoned students are being grandfathered into the role of teacher or Sensei.

Granted, in our case, Sensei Power runs our dojo, but he does so with the assistance of those eager to help, and with a look ahead to shaping Karate and the strengthening of its roots.

So, to hear that Sensei Turnbull is teaching karate in the Schools, or that the WJKA is hosting Young Sensei seminars, is reassuring. Karate in schools isn’t simply teaching karate or self-defense or appeasing kids who want belts; it is helping shape confidence and camaraderie. It’s bringing kids out of their shells

and offering them a safe and healthy place to be part of a greater good. It's a break from social media and an exercise in face-to-face communications and teamwork.

And young Sensei seminars? The lineage and pedigree of any institution is based on how its methods, principles and philosophies are passed forward. Mentoring young Sensei in such an environment is mitigating problems faced by many unprepared teachers, I believe. Having masters of the Art pass on knowledge and wisdom in dedicated events like this is invaluable. William Arthur Ward said, *"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."*In my mind, having Sensei show up to seminars to impart their knowledge on leading a karate dojo is nothing less than inspiring. Passion grows out of passion.

None of this is new perhaps, but I have seen first-hand where failure to grow the youth of karate (for various reasons) has limited Karate's reach and restricted its potential. Investing in and inspiring youth takes time and a special kind of dedication, but having said that, there has never been a time more critical to doing just this. Kids and young adults are being pulled in many directions, with difficult choices and potential for hardship around any corner. If Karate – even for a few – can become a motivator or an outlet to find some mental clarity, then we do indeed need the seminars and Sensei in schools. Remember, the mighty Oak tree starts from an acorn.

So, to those of you still endeavoring to make a difference to youth through karate, and attempting to pass on the amazing history and multi-faceted benefits of the Art, I wholeheartedly applaud you.

Karate, perhaps, isn't all things to everyone, but in my opinion it is (and will continue to be) a life-compass to many...may we find our own motivation in that.

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