The lived experiences of autistic adults as novice martial artists: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

This study questions what it is to be an autistic adult as a novice martial artist in the practice of Aikido. It responds to a gap in the literature on martial arts as an intervention in autism and investigates the impact of martial practice on the affective domain. Four participants met with two inclusion criteria: firstly, to be between 18 and 65 and secondly, to hold a clinical diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (DSM-5). The research was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The sample engaged in an adapted Aikido course taught by officially registered black belt instructors within a formal dojo setting. Video and photo elicitation were used in the semi-structured interviews and the participants logged their experiences. Two phases of interviews followed the 12-class course. Phase II followed between four and six months after Phase I to register any longitudinal changes. The researcher personally transcribed all interviews. IPA was selected because it combined the rigor of hermeneutics, ideography and phenomenology. Phase I revealed superordinate themes across the four transcripts revealing issues of fear, bullying, threat, protection, anxiety and safety. Phase II revealed a significant longitudinal impact on the daily lives of the participants, ranging from a newly acquired life-world structure to an increase in peace of mind. The study contributes to the current wave of advocacy for the autistic nation and should encourage and support further research. On a pragmatic level, it may offer inspiration to martial art instructors teaching autistic adults in their classes.

Biography

Brian McCann is a Doctoral candidate at the University of Dundee. He has been teaching English language and Literature for over 25 years and has taught at Dublin City University, Dublin Business School, King Fahd University, Saudi Arabia, Aoyama Business School, Tokyo and is now a Special Education Teacher at the Newpark Comprehensive School, Dublin. He has completed his MPhil in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College, Dublin, an MBA in Educational Management from the University of Leicester and 4th degree Black Belt in Aikido from World Headquarters, Tokyo. He regularly teaches Samurai weaponry to autistic students.

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