

T'ai chi taught at Nelson County Middle School event



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By [ERIN MCGRATH](#)

Published: March 02, 2011

Ballet flats and hard-soled work boots were replaced with sneakers and tennis shoes last week as 30 Nelson County Middle School students spent the morning learning t'ai chi, a form of martial arts used for meditation, exercise and self defense.

The program was part of the School Wide Read event, Melissa Powers, the school's librarian, said. The event was formed to help improve and promote literacy at the school and to prevent bullying, a subject that comes up often in "Schooled," by Gordan Korman, the book chosen for the event.

"Everyone in the school reads the same book for two weeks straight. Each morning, we didn't do any other classes. Everyone stopped and read," she said. "That included secretaries, custodians — everybody was given a book and asked to participate."

In "Schooled," the main character, Cap Anderson, practices t'ai chi regularly, which is why students learned the exercises as part of their reading program. Powers said the school set up interactive programs throughout the School Wide Read, like the t'ai chi instruction, to get students more involved and more connected to the book.

"The idea was to get everyone reading the same book to have the same experience and open up discussion about bullying. And this book is all about bullying," Powers said. "The main character in the book is new and moves to a new school. All the other characters pretty much torture him. They're just mean, middle school kids."

Five hundred copies of "Schooled" were purchased for the event through fundraising and a grant awarded to the middle school by the Nelson County Education Fund.

Hiromi Johnson, a t'ai chi instructor based in Charlottesville, volunteered her time to teach the students moves similar to those Cap practiced in the book last Thursday.

"Each movement has meaning," Johnson said. "T'ai chi is not meant for other people. You are doing this for your own body."

The school also held a tie-dyeing party earlier this month to celebrate the School Wide Read.

Powers said the students have enjoyed doing something new in school.