

# Teaching the deaf Tai Chi

December 18, 2015

8:34 AM MST



Tai Chi performance on October 18, 2015 in Jiaozuo, Henan, China.

*Photo by ChinaFotoPress/Getty Images*

Gwen and I used to work for a telecommunications company and belonged to the same employee club to promote cultural diversity. Our early communications were done over email. I only realized that she had a [hearing impairment](#) when we had a meeting. Gwen is a capable, energetic professional and has done much volunteering work both inside and outside her career. She invited me to an annual fund raising event hosted by the deaf association. I attended it and donated a few free private [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) lessons for live auction.

Pam, who is deaf and never learned Tai Chi before, won a bid and brought her deaf friend Annette to attend the classes. Since I don't know American Sign Language, Pam hired an interpreter named Loretto to facilitate the classes. To make the teaching more effective, I prepared handouts containing information of Tai Chi principles, key elements of the form, detailed instructions of each movement, and links of the form demo so they could be prepared prior to the class. I also outlined essential points on a white board so I could easily point them out during the classes. Unlike other classes, I did not use music.

Share Image

Since I had no experience teaching Tai Chi to people affected by hearing loss I was a bit nervous. Loretto stood in the front with me to sign. She translated everything and sometimes imitated my movements and gestures. After explaining the Tai Chi principles, the key elements of the form, and [breathing](#) techniques, I started teaching the form movement-by-movement. Very soon, I noticed two things. First, both Pam and Annette were very busy at looking. They had to watch and follow me to execute the movements while looking Loretto's hand signals for explanation. Nevertheless, they were doing a better job than average students that I have taught – I have taught several hundred people. I modified my approach to accommodate them. I demonstrated each movement with explanation first, and then I stopped talking. I let them watch and follow me. Amazingly, they were doing a great job, which showed that they were very keen in observing. Tai Chi is difficult to execute correctly the first time. Sometimes people know what should be done but have a hard time to execute it physically. In Tai Chi lingo, it is called *Xin* (means conceptually in Chinese) *Ming* (means understanding in Chinese) but not *Ti* (means the body in Chinese) *Ming*. With their permission, I made hands-on adjustments for their posture especially how to shift the body weight without tilting the hips. They had a great attitude and absorbed the information quickly.

I praised them for their ability to comprehend and imitate. Pam said that as a deaf person, she has to pay extra attention to details by close observation. Annette and Loretto agreed that the people with hearing impairment are better observers.

## SUGGESTED LINKS

- [Drunk on Tai Chi](#)
- [A simple Tai Chi routine eases Arthritis pain](#)
- [Qigong Massage for Your Child with Autism](#)
- [Must Try: Tai Chi Ball](#)
- [Tai Chi and weight loss](#)



**Violet Li**

Tai Chi Examiner