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Tom Martinek & Don Hellison

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THE TPSR ALLIANCE AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility: Past, Present and Future

TOM MARTINEK
DON HELLISON

During the past decade the field of youth development has grown by leaps and bounds. Numerous initiatives addressing the challenges that many youth face in their community — especially those who are underserved — have emerged with this growth. These initiatives have been guided by a variety of curricular models. Individuals who work in youth programs adopt models that let them hang onto their passion and values, which are what motivates them to work with kids. Teachers who are guided by national, state and local standards often try to include responsibility-based experiences in their programs (see SHAPE America National Standard 4; Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014). Unlike teachers, after-school and summer program leaders have fewer restrictions and enjoy the flexibility of filling the intermediary space between school physical education programming and free play (Harrison, 1995/2011). Being afforded the freedom from formal curriculum requirements significantly increases the ability of a teacher, coach, physical activity or after-school leader to “create” and follow their passion. Consequently, the questions of “What’s worth doing?” and “What’s best for kids?” become crucial guideposts for those practitioners who enjoy the flexibility of planning and implementing their own programs.

Guided by these two questions, a groundswell of teachers, community program leaders, professors and even coaches have responded by embracing a model that guides them in using physical activity and sport to teach important life skills to kids. That is, they have directed their efforts toward addressing some of

the less technical elements of youth development — especially those that are connected to teaching kids to be personally and socially responsible. This *JOPERD* feature centers on the community of practice that is grounded in the work of Don Hellison and his teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) model. This model guides practitioners in using physical activity to help kids take more responsibility for their well-being and be more sensitive and responsive to the well-being of others (see Table 1). The model is reflected by a diverse collection of professionals who have, in their own way, provided programs that have exposed kids to experiences formed by a common set of core values. Fostering a sense of human decency, putting kids first, believing in holistic development, and embracing a way of being (Nick Forsberg) are the values that underlie the work of these individuals.

In a sense, these individuals form what Lave and Wenger call a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The centerpiece for all their programs is the TPSR model, which addresses two sets of responsibility values: one that focuses on personal well-being (effort and self-direction) and the other on social well-being (respect for others’ rights and feelings, and caring for and helping others). The model serves as the foundation for these programs so that the

Tom Martinek (martinek@uncg.edu) is a professor in the School of Health and Human Science at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in Greensboro, NC. Don Hellison is a professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago in Chicago, IL.

Table 1.
TPSR Model

Levels (Goals) of TPSR

Level I: Respecting the rights and feelings of others
Level II: Effort and cooperation
Level III: Self-direction
Level IV: Helping others and leadership
Level V: Transfer outside the gym

TPSR Core Values

- Putting kids first
- Human decency
- Holistic self-development
- A way of being

Strategies

- Gradual empowerment
- Self-reflection
- Integration of levels into physical activities
- Transfer
- Being relational with kids

Source: Hellison (2011), pp. 18 & 21.

core values come alive through various forms of physical activity and professional-development learning experiences.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the TPSR model and how it evolved. It describes its birthplace — a gym — where ideas were tested and learning took place about what worked and what did not work. Much of what has happened since its beginning has been a function of how teachers, youth workers, program directors and youth sport coaches have applied TPSR in their professional practice — each with their own particular way of working with kids.

The article will also examine the present-day applications of the TPSR model and its use by a variety of professionals and practitioners who work with kids in numerous settings (and ways) or who provide professional development opportunities through college preparation. The collection of articles in this special issue portrays some of the ways that TPSR has been used and how it has influenced the way practitioners (teachers and professors alike) approach their work. This feature also profiles individuals who share a common spirit — one that embraces the belief of doing what is best for kids. Indeed, they represent a community of practice.

This article will conclude with an assessment of the TPSR model and its future role in youth development programming. It will include a portrayal of school- and community-based programs — their future missions, support and ideological underpinnings. The problems that society faces, especially in segments of the underserved, will not go away. The focus here will be on the role of sport and physical activity and its ability to remain a viable way to help kids be more responsible. Preparing for the future onslaught of challenges that youth will face requires practitioners to view youth as contributors to their community and not as problems. Such a commitment will interface well with the spirit of TPSR and will certainly be a response to the questions, “What’s worth doing?” and “What’s best for kids?”

The Beginning of TPSR

Most people believe that a model used by so many was developed by someone who studied the problem and carefully mapped out a coherent solution to helping kids become responsible people. Although this may be partially true, the TPSR model was created while working with youth. Working with low-income youth who are growing up in neighborhoods plagued by crime, drug trafficking, political and economic isolation, and gangs brings a sense of humility to one’s work. Uncertainty and disappointment all too often creep into the process of planning a way to reach kids. There is a realization that teachers cannot reach all kids — some will thrive from participating in the program, and some will continue to struggle in life. Coming up with a plan to touch the lives of young people requires both energy and ingenuity. It also involves a beginning with no end in sight. Connectedness must eventually prevail, along with a sense of trying to make things work within a framework that engenders purpose and positive development. The genesis of the TPSR framework began with Don Hellison’s passion for making a difference in the lives of youth and, at the same time, engaging in the professional preparation of university students. Here is Don’s personal story:

Early in my career, I began to ask myself, “What is worth doing?” My college experience did not improve my sense of purpose, so I joined the Marine Corps. My platoon included men from low-income urban neighborhoods who were sometimes court referred. I created a sport program for them where they could simply try things out and, at the same time, have opportunities for guided decision-making. I found the answer to my question: This was worth doing.

When I left the Marine Corps I wanted to continue my work with low-income kids. I returned to college to get a teaching degree. After getting my teaching degree I took a position at Portland State University and a part-time job at an urban high school. I arrived at Portland State University as a new faculty member in the summer of 1970, and I was excited about my new position.

During my first few years at Portland State I introduced what became TPSR. This title is perhaps the worst effort ever to create a jazzy title, foisted on unsuspecting students. I had just written a book called Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility through Physical Activity (1995), and having given no thought to a shorter title, the name stuck, and it is still being used today.

I worked for three years at an urban high school with the help of a smart, strong, no-nonsense teacher and coach named Bill White. Bill did not have much patience for guys like me, who had a somewhat looser approach toward working with kids. I thought that it would be a long year, if I could even survive it. As it turned out, I must have passed some test, because not only did Bill help me, he adopted a few of my ideas. All of this unfolded slowly during that year, and in the subsequent years I learned much more from Bill.

Then I took a position at an alternative high school. This was a school with small classes to serve students who were either expelled or suspended from public school. Most of the students would not graduate from high school. Initially, I agreed to help a teacher there learn how to use TPSR. Unfortunately, the teacher lasted only two or three weeks, leaving me with a class of high school dropouts. What began as a short-term assignment became a nine-year commitment. Fortunately, for me it was a wonderful experience thanks

in large part to the other teachers at the alternative school. I finally felt that this was my home. It was here that I was able to fully implement TPSR.

Life was good, but I wondered whether I could be successful in my hometown of Chicago, which at that time had a reputation of violence and corruption (and too many kids were falling through the cracks). There was one way to find out, so I accepted a position at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) right in middle of all the action. I came to Chicago uncertain of my ability to be successful with the kids. As it turned out, my work with the students was much easier than working with the faculty. At first, I just tried to find some kids to work with, and I did manage to find two groups of high school students — one was in a residential setting for kids with various problems, and the other a YMCA after-school recreational program, open to everyone living within the community.

Despite the support of the dean, it took a few years before I felt that my programs were doing some good. The dean was very surprised that I got two programs off the ground and running, in two economically disadvantaged communities. Whether my work was valid was another issue. Some faculty members questioned the validity of my work, because I had not provided data to support my argument that my program did help kids. The conflict between data and values surfaces from time to time. I am much more interested in values and ideas than data, but I acknowledge that data can play a significant role in a student's development. The TPSR model is heavily weighted toward ideas, and what can be versus what is. Now as an emeritus faculty member at UIC, after 40 years of working with kids and university students, I stay involved in many ways promoting TPSR, including through an annual conference that we started several years ago.

Throughout the years the youth development movement has incorporated life-skills teaching and physical activity as a key part of program agendas. Since its inception over 40 years ago, the TPSR model has served as a key component of this movement. Don's story brings to the forefront not only how a model of practice evolved, but also the passion and commitment needed to make it work. It also shows that great achievements are typically the result of engaging in an activity for an extended period of time, often with the guidance of a teacher or coach (i.e., Bill White) and often with periods of trial and error. Don's story also illustrates how ideas are often challenged and even dismissed by youth (and others). However, his persistence in the face of failure becomes an important lesson here: that along with inspiration, perspiration is an important ally for producing great things.

As we journey into the 21st century the experiences of youth who are thriving through their engagement in TPSR-based programs reassure teachers that students can develop knowledge, skills and values that promote success across various aspects of their lives. Program leaders who have embraced the spirit of TPSR programming truly believe in the transformative power of kids experiencing success and becoming self-sufficient. Through sustained, intense and meaningful activity and bound by a common set of values, TPSR professionals and practitioners form a unique group that has essentially continued on Don's journey of finding what is best for kids. Their contributions to positive youth development vary in many ways, yet their work is buoyed by the same set of TPSR core values — making these practitioners a true community of practice.

TPSR Approaches and Programming

In essence, helping youth become responsible people depends largely on a program's ability to cultivate the necessary values in the heart and soul of its participants. The importance of commitment to this mission has been underscored, as well as the fact that each program has its own way of reaching such a goal. There are different approaches that professionals have used to promote responsible behavior in their own way, all guided by the TPSR model and all within the context of the TPSR Alliance.

One of these has been a *community-based* approach, where programmers enter a neighborhood with the intent of bringing forth positive change and new opportunities for engagement and relationship building. Amy and Rob Castañeda and their program Beyond the Ball provide a great example of this type of approach. This husband-and-wife team took on the responsibility of reconstituting a largely Mexican community on the west side of Chicago. Through positive role modeling and guided by the spirit of TPSR, youth were learning how to be responsible contributors in their community. The Beyond the Ball program became a bona fide ally of the community and its families.

A second way that TPSR programs function is by *assisting schools* where students struggle socially and academically. Typically, these are programs that operate either before, during or after school and that focus on helping students get "on track" in their classroom. One of these during-school programs is Get Ready, which is directed by John McCarthy at Boston University. With a strong background in coaching and a solid grasp of the TPSR model, John, along with his graduate students, deliver sport activities once a week to low-income students at a big-city high school. The program's mission is to empower students to develop physical and social confidence and leadership skills through TPSR-based physical activity experiences. A major goal of the program is to foster transferable life skills for students' everyday lives. The students voluntarily participate and remain in the program as long as they want. Get Ready has been operating for eight years and has become an important cog in the school's efforts to elevate the character and social capacity of all its students.

Another example of a university-school partnership is Paul Wright and Jenn Jacobs's school-based program that addresses the gap in after-school programming at a local school in northern Illinois. The program, called Project Leadership, delivers sport experiences based on the TPSR model to a selected group of students and provides various opportunities for kids to do various service projects.

Tom Martinek's Youth Leader Corps program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) is a final example of a school-assisted TPSR program. Selected high school students are given opportunities to become leaders of their own sport program. Personal and social responsibility, with a particular focus on caring and compassion leadership for others, are the cornerstones of the Youth Leader Corps program. The youth leaders are from an alternative high school located on UNCG's campus. They create lessons that incorporate both sport skills and the responsibility goals, and they teach them to elementary-age children from various segments of the local community (e.g., a Boys and Girls Club, an elementary school, three refugee community centers). The experience focuses on developing key leadership attributes such as strategic thinking, problem solving, communication, emotional control and conflict resolution. All the leaders receive previous training through a year-long physical education class that is based on the TPSR model.



A student from the UNC Greensboro Youth Leader Corps program directs kids during a physical activity learning experience in the program.

Besides school and youth programming, TPSR has been a central part of university-based *professional development* programs. The mission of these programs is to prepare individuals to work and to lead in various types of youth-serving agencies. They also attempt to enrich the professional know-how of those individuals who are already working in youth programs. School and non-school programs, such as those offered through Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, municipal recreation departments and independent youth-serving agencies require well-prepared physical activity professionals to provide leadership, innovation and dedication to enhance the lives of youth. They also require an understanding of how responsibility values can be instilled in youth. Professional development programs, especially those in kinesiology departments, are well positioned to do this. One such program operates out of the University of Regina in Canada and is directed by Nick Forsberg. All of Nick's professional development courses engage students in TPSR-based learning experiences — a preparation that produces teachers with a sense of knowing what is best for kids. Nick also requires his students to examine their own values system and how it matches the spirit of the TPSR model. In another teacher education program at San Francisco State University, Dave

Walsh has focused on the affective domain in the professional preparation of preservice teachers. To do this, he has integrated the TPSR model into an activity-based course for preservice physical education teachers.

There are also those individuals who have created professional development programs, framed by the TPSR model, for practitioners in youth-serving agencies. Meredith Whitley at Adelphi University directs one such program. Through the master's degree program in physical education or sport management, a specialization in sport-based youth development is offered to those individuals seeking additional training in youth programming. There is a good dose of TPSR learning incorporated into the graduate course experience. This ensures that community program directors, coaches and perhaps some teachers will advance their knowledge of how to incorporate values into physical activity experiences.

At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, a master's degree in community youth sport development (CYSD) is offered for those practitioners seeking advanced study in youth and community development. Tom Martinek directs this program, which is heavily tied to experiential learning. The TPSR model is central to most of the learning experiences in the CYSD courses.

Program development, evaluation and mentoring are mainstays of the program of study, along with other courses from allied disciplines (e.g., social work, psychology, sociology). The experiences include the alignment of students' values with TPSR, physical and philosophical boundaries of program sites, and the positioning of a youth development program within a competitive sport culture.

In all of the above examples (and there are plenty of others) there is a shared sense of commitment to values-based learning. The TPSR model and its core values offer a foundation for expanding the role of programs beyond the enhancement of physical development. Rather, they ensure that a range of learning experiences can be created in a way that will result in a more holistic approach to youth programming. Opportunities for learning about oneself and the world, for problem solving, and social support all become part of the programming agenda. This will ensure that the multiple needs of youth will be addressed in a purposeful way and that long-term effects on their lives will be realized.

TPSR and Its Future

The future of TPSR will not only depend on how youth development leaders, university faculty and teachers embrace the basic spirit of the model; it will also require active participation and sharing of ideas among all. By generating new ideas through a "community" endeavor, the use of TPSR will become more universal in its application in a number of settings. Ideas can be the seeds that spawn successful programs. At the same time we must acknowledge the wide range of settings in which the context will influence how the ideas and the core values are implemented. Borrowing from others or even creating one's own ideas for a particular setting increases the probability of a successful beginning. Settings may include after-school sport clubs, school physical education classes, Boys and Girls Clubs, church programs, YMCAs, neighborhood initiatives or recreational programs. All have their own nuances defined by the available resources, staffing, space, student demographics and neighborhood locations. In all cases flexibility and autonomy will be important determinants of how program leaders can try things out, and the amount of latitude given within each setting will vary considerably. In the end, creating learning experiences for kids will present challenges for both the program leader and the kids. Commitment to and a belief in the core values of TPSR will be essential in overcoming these challenges and possible setbacks.

Working with ideas will also challenge practitioners to discover new ways to evaluate TPSR program outcomes — especially those that have to do with relationships and other social dynamics that take place during participation. A good starting place for evaluating these would be to simply describe what the ideas look like — that is, what is the program doing, and is it doing what it is intended to do? We would argue as McLaughlin (2000) did that the lifetime of any program will depend more on knowing what goes on rather than looking at what was fixed (e.g., school suspension, lousy grades, drug use). Although this can be done in a variety of ways (e.g., formal and informal observation, interviews, journaling), evaluation serves as a common method of confirming TPSR program fidelity and impact on participants. Evaluation results will also offer specific ideas that can be applied to other programs.

An important point in all this is that no matter where youth-development programming takes place, it will remain a constant in addressing the challenges that youth face now and in the future.

How society responds to these problems will depend on how leaders and teachers form interconnections among themselves, with the youth, and with the larger world (Intrator & Siegel, 2014). It has always been heartening to see those youth and community leaders guided by TPSR values who produce ways of transforming neighborhoods, attack school problems through in-school and after-school programs, and create more holistic ways of educating future professionals. These all begin with the teaching and sharing of context-specific knowledge and then embracing the qualities that enhance the lives of youth.

A final concept that recently reappeared is relational learning. It has been facilitated in part by a recent article in the *Phi Delta Kappan*. For a long time relational learning was on the back burner, but with renewed interest it is now seen as another useful tool. Roger Weissberg, a University of Illinois at Chicago psychologist, and Jason Cascarino, vice president of external affairs at Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2013), have urged policy makers to make relational learning a top priority in schools. Thus, students' learning experiences become pathways for getting them and their teachers to connect, and to constructively relate to one another. While such an emphasis goes against the academic grain of current educational reform, the inclusion of relational learning offers promise for a more encompassing approach to schooling. Given that a main building block for TPSR programming centers on healthy connections among kids and staff, it would appear that it is well positioned to play a role in such policy initiatives. For the authors of this article, and the other members of the TPSR community of practice, relationship building is tantamount to getting kids to manage their emotions, to feel and show empathy, and to establish and maintain relationships.

The end message is this: Idea creation and sharing, along with a solid commitment to doing what is best for kids, ensures that teachers and youth program leaders will successfully apply the virtues of TPSR. The collective contribution that users of TPSR can make to youth development programming, and in particular to kids' lives, will be determined by what can be done well in a smorgasbord of program settings. One size does not fit all, and designing the ideal program for all to try will simply not work in a real-world setting. Instead, drawing on personal strengths and available resources and augmenting interpersonal processes between youth and staff will be essential for increasing the prospects of successful implementation of TPSR programs over time.

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