

## The evolution of Hellison's TPSR model in out-of-school contexts

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### **Abstract:**

Don Hellison fully realized that getting students to become positive contributors to their community meant that experiences that engender a greater sense of being a responsible person had to be provided. He leveraged the power of out-of-school time programming to implement his Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model and build relationships with variety of underserved youth. Don also understood that community partnerships were important in this effort. This article provides a glimpse at how Don was able to establish TPSR programs in a variety of out-of-school settings—all of which addressed the needs of underserved children and youth. A historical context is provided to illustrate the placement of TPSR in the broader movement of positive youth development. Don's programs that operated during out-of-school time and spanned the western region of the country to the urban sections of Chicago are described. Inconsistent partner support, scarcity of program space, and feelings of self-doubt are presented as challenges to the viability of TPSR programming. His commitment to making programs work despite these challenges is portrayed. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to illustrate how Don's work has made a significant contribution to the positive youth development movement within out-of-school time contexts.

**Keywords:** after- and before-school programs | extended learning programs | sport-based youth development

### **Article:**

Don Hellison's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model is well-known among scholars and practitioners who work in out-of-school time (OST) physical activity settings (see, Hellison, 2011). Although the model has a strong foundation in physical education curriculum, it is often used in a variety of settings outside of school hours. The evolution of TPSR to alternative settings was driven in part by Don's efforts to connect with youth who were alienated from traditional structures such as schools along with his feelings of being

marginalized in the multifaceted area of school physical education. As his initial publication of *Beyond Ball and Bats* (Hellison, 1978), Don has generated OST programs that focused on teaching life skills to youth. He also inspired other practitioners and scholars to build their own lines of work. These collective efforts have positioned TPSR as an exemplary practice for promoting positive youth development (PYD) through sport and physical activity (Holt, 2016) and a valuable resource for connecting with youth in OST settings (Ivy, Richards, Lawson, & Almadena-Lawson, 2018). The purpose of this article is to describe how Don Hellison's work has positioned TPSR at the center of the PYD movement within OST contexts.

## **TPSR and PYD**

Positive youth development as a field of study emerged from the positive psychology movement. As Seligman (2002) explained, "psychology is not just about illness or health; it is also about work, education, love, growth, and play" (p. 4). Therefore, PYD aims to build on strengths that youth possess that can help them navigate and overcome challenges in their lives (Damon, 2004). Similar to PYD, scholars have developed a unique theory of sport-based youth development (SBYD) driven by decades of research and practice that demonstrates the potential of youth to develop life skills in the context of physical activity and sport programs (Holt et al., 2016). SBYD represents a maturation of the research dating back to the early years of scholarship in physical education (Weiss, 2016). McCloy (1930) provides a seminal article on character development as an outcome of physical education. Though character development claims have always been assumed by many teachers, coaches, and even researchers, scholars have pointed to the lack of empirical evidence to support such claims. For example, Wandzilak (1985) lamented that "there is little conclusive evidence to demonstrate that values development can be attributed to physical education" (p. 176). In 1997, Rees made a similar critique against the notion that "sport builds character" (Rees, 1997 p. 199). Don also faced such critiques of his TPSR model. He and Dave Walsh explained in 2002 that "the development of this model has appeared to answer the question 'what's worth doing?' for a number of teachers and youth workers, but the question of 'is it working?' raised some concerns in the academic community" (Hellison & Walsh, 2002, p. 294).

As the evidence has become more clear on models of youth development, SBYD can be described as programming that is intentionally organized to promote the development of life skills. It is these skills that help youth navigate their lived experiences within and beyond SBYD programs (Holt, Deal, & Smyth, 2016). Drawing on a strengths-based approach (Damon, 2004), SBYD programs recognize that youth possess a wide range of developmental assets that can empower them to make positive contributions to their communities (Lerner & Benson, 2003). This works best when intentional efforts are made to instill a positive climate that nurtures healthy relationships along with efforts to integrate life skills with sport and physical activity experiences (Bean & Forneris, 2016; Martinek, Schilling, & Hellison, 2006). In most cases, SBYD professionals recognize the capacity of youth to have a voice in their programs through

leadership roles or other empowerment-based strategies (Ward & Parker, 2012). Hellison's TPSR model has been situated within the SBYD movement as an exemplary model (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005) with strong connections to physical education curriculum and its national standards (Parker & Hellison, 2013). Moreover, TPSR seems to be the only model in the SBYD movement with a sustained focus on youth who are described as marginalized or at risk (Holt, 2016).

### **TPSR and OST Programs**

Interest in OST activities for youth has become a growing area of research and program evaluation along with the rise in SBYD research. These activities have been found to be good for all kids but especially for those who are underperforming academically and may be socially disconnected from school (Miller, 2003). The OST movement has presented itself in many forms, including summer learning programs, extended learning day programs, and programs situated within communities. Research suggests OST programs can help students develop literacy that may help close academic achievement gaps for underperforming students (Broh, 2002). Perhaps more importantly, the OST space provides enrichment opportunities that align with the interest of youth (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). However, the value of OST programs is often limited by the inability of underserved populations to access quality programs. National datasets have shown that disadvantaged youth are less likely to have access to OST programs, and ethnic minority groups were also underrepresented in OST programs (Bouffard et al., 2006).

Don's work, and those inspired by his work, has often been driven by a sense of community engagement, described by him and his colleagues as service-bonded inquiry (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). They explained that "the concept of the community-engaged professoriate also suggests that educators immerse themselves in places where sweaty kids reside" (Martinek, Hellison, & Walsh, 2004, p. 399). Don's dedication to running programs in these contexts is indicated in Jacobs and Templin's article of this issue. The following section will outline a history of Don's service-bonded inquiry in OST contexts to help illustrate the evolution of TPSR as an exemplary model for SBYD.

### **History of Don's OST Programming**

Don was fully aware that physical activity-based school programs (i.e., intramurals, interscholastic sports, physical education) and many community-based programs offer kids the opportunity to participate in some form of physical activity. And yet, many of these programs failed to incorporate a PYD or intentional approach to fostering developmental outcomes. Often long-term commitment to quality programming was ignored. Don firmly believed, however, that positive experiences for all kids could be possible if the intent was strong and purposeful.

The principles of PYD interface well with Don's vision of how the physical activity experience can be a great vehicle for kids to explore and discover their personal and social

qualities. As his work predated the attention given to PYD, he was considered to be a pioneer in values-based sport and physical activity programming. Don felt that the very nature of TPSR programs—that is, the integration of TPSR values into sport activities, helps to nurture a stronger sense of personal and social values in youth participants. He also saw how important it was to connect his work and the spirit of the TPSR model to various youth-serving agencies.

Don's work and the TPSR model actually began in an alternative school in Portland, Oregon where he taught kids who had “failed” physical education (for more on the evolution of the TPSR model, see article by Jacobs and Templin (2020) in this special issue). He had to figure out how to manage the kids so that they could point themselves in the right direction and he could survive. The alternative school provided the flexibility to try things out. Having the “freedom” to figure out ways to get the kids on track became a key factor in forming a framework for getting them to be responsible both socially and personally.

Refining his approach in working with kids led him to other alternative settings which took on different forms and expectations. Although resources, the nature of kids, and personal support would be unique to each setting, Don was vigilant in getting kids to be responsible people. He discovered that doors were open enough in nontraditional school settings to provide developmentally sound and empowering experiences for kids. This was done regardless of the limitations that were often found in alternative settings.

### **Working in Bozeman**

His first exposure to an out-of-school setting was when he took a year off from his work in Portland to accept an invitation from an old friend to teach a university class in Bozeman, Montana. Little did he know this experience would draw him into work with troubled kids from across the state living in a group home. This alternative setting was certainly outside the boundaries of a traditional school setting and presented Don an opportunity to teach self-responsibility to these kids. Seven boys made up the group and all had their own special challenges. The directors of the home gave Don “full reign” to work with the boys. This allowed him to try things out and refine his TPSR approach. So Don, along with Montana State University students, ran the program at the university gym twice a week after-school hours for the entire year. Despite some challenging times with kids (e.g., contentious behavior, docile engagement, making fun of others), Don persevered and the program eventually showed positive results (Debusk & Hellison, 1989).

The success of the program grew with increased interest. This resulted in a demand for more programming coming from other's kids. Soon a second and third program started, all after school, and taught by Don, a physical education teacher (i.e., Mike Debusk), and two counseling graduate students. All three of these programs were guided by the TPSR model. Adjustments were made to ensure the needs of the youth were met. Changes were sometimes made on the spot (e.g., trying a different activity, negotiating options with kids), and sometimes from thoughtful reflection after the program and kids had left. (e.g., How could I have done to better job in

connecting with the kids?) As a result, the kids stayed engaged and advocated for the program to continue even after Don had to return to Portland. In total, Don saw the opportunity and potential of out-of-school settings as beneficial contexts. He observed that such contexts can be open and flexible, and can help instill the values of personal and social responsibility into kids.

Witt and Caldwell (2018) further suggest that there is special relevancy that out-of-school programs have for kids who face problems connected to their particular community setting. The outcomes that youth development programming produce such as higher self-efficacy and personal capacity were evident for Don and the Bozeman experience.

### **Chicago and Cabrini Green**

Don's experiences in Bozeman pushed him to seek other pathways for pursuing his work with kids. The experiences at the group home and alternative school programs assured him one important thing—contributing to kids' lives was worth doing. Yearning for working in a more urban setting, Don accepted a position in his hometown at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). He was hired in UIC's Department of Kinesiology, which meant that he would now face the challenge of finding a place for his work in the city. One of the challenges was UIC's pressure to do and publish traditional research. How Don met that challenge is discussed in Wright, Fuerniss, and Cutforth's (2020) article in this special issue.

Schools were there but getting into them would take some persistence. His search for finding a place to run his program eventually led him to public housing communities—communities that were a large part of Chicago's landscape. Children living in these communities, commonly known as housing projects, confront the danger of drug trafficking, violence, and isolation on a daily basis. Abandoned buildings, lack of law and order, and gangs who declared areas of ownership were all too common features of these communities (Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992). Many of these issues were life threatening (e.g., gun violence). These conditions take a huge toll on kids and their perceptions of capability.

One of these housing projects was Cabrini Green located near downtown Chicago. The children who lived there were at risk, as they would not only have to face the problems within their community but also struggle with their education. Schools which served children from this community were also a problem. Teachers often had low expectations for these students who were expected to follow rules that often overshadowed their perception of personal capability (Kozol, 2005).

Given this setting, Don and one of his graduate students, Nikos Georgiadis, saw this as a great opportunity to work with the kids from Cabrini using the TPSR model (Williamson & Georgiadis, 1992). Working in the basement of an old hall in Cabrini, Nikos started a basketball program which included three fifth-grade students and eight ninth-grade students (all boys). The idea was to help the kids make better choices and decisions in their lives. Such a setting was replete with challenges. Improvising due to space, access to equipment, and behavior of kids were constant challenges. Because of the setting and the way kids were socialized into

maintaining a “be tough” attitude, the goals of working together, being respectful, and not giving up when challenged, were remote values for the kids to grasp. Don always lamented that working with kids in these types of situations is always messy (Hellison, 2011). For Don and Nikos, it posed a unique challenge to counteract and rewrite the goals of the program with more useful experiences for the kids. Giving ownership to the kids by providing chances to lead and guide others in game experiences, and offering alternative ways to compete and support one another were some of the experiences that seemed to work. The program also gave Don and Nikos the opportunity to establish a positive presence in the Cabrini community and get kids to engage in something positive during their after-school hours. For UIC, it was a way to reach out to one of the city’s struggling communities.

### **Chicago and The Coaching Club**

Don’s interest in making some connection to Chicago schools brought him to Chicago’s far south side and a neighborhood known for its gang and drug activity and high homicide rate. The principal wanted to have something positive to do for certain kids who were having academic and social challenges in the school. Fifteen third through eighth-grade students were selected by the principal and vice principal. The kids were asked if they would like to be in a basketball program. The opportunity to play basketball was a great attractor for the kids and participation was voluntary. With a school physical education program well in place, Don decided to have the program before school and call it a “Coaching Club.” Don always wanted kids in his programs to have a sense of ownership in it. Calling it a “club” made the kids feel it was something they chose to be a part of. It also communicated to parents, administrators, and other teachers that it was something different from a regular sport program. The coaching club emphasized learning how to help others and become a leader (coach)—something that they could do in other settings (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, recreation programs) as they got older. Although Don initially thought the before school hours at 8:00 a.m. would discourage the kids from coming, it did not. It was a time to play, have fun, and be part of something special! For these kids, who all lived in the neighborhood, it was a time to learn how to coach others and themselves. The program ran for nine consecutive years with basketball being the main activity during that time (Hellison & Wright, 2003).

As with other programs, there were several advantages to having the coaching club during nonschool hours. One of these was space. Gym availability and nonrestrictive policies gave freedom to Don to run a program his way—where school rules may not apply. Modification of the school schedule for gym space was not required. Again, he felt that having small numbers always was best for working with responsibility challenged kids. Because the numbers were small and coming to the program was optional, Don was able to take daily attendance. By taking attendance, he got some small indication of whether the program was working and if he was getting it right. Finally, the coaching club also provided an opportunity for Don’s university

undergraduate and graduate students to work in the program. They experienced values-based work with inner city kids and got a sense of how responsibility-based teaching works.

### **Chicago and Martial Arts Clubs**

Two other after-school programs that Don and his graduate students led were Martial Arts Clubs located at two elementary schools on the west side of Chicago. As with the Coaching Club, the neighborhood of these schools was plagued with gangs and drugs. Both clubs served third through eighth-grade students and met once a week after school. The students (all boys) were referred to Don by school personnel based on their classroom behavior. Lack of space was a problem for one of these programs. Don decided to hold the club session on a stage located in the school's auditorium. Don made the space work and was able to conduct the program with a small number of eight to 10 kids. A similar after-school program was started at another location in a school gym and directed by two of Don's graduate students, Paul Wright and Dave Walsh. Having martial arts as the content of the clubs sparked the interest of the students—they thought they could learn how to fight better! For Don, Dave, and Paul this meant readjusting the students' thinking about what the clubs were really all about. This was done by continually reminding the students that the program's focus was on all the TPSR values especially with "being on task," as most of the activities included individual and partner tasks. The fourth value was termed "leader," and "true martial artist" was the fifth value (Hellison & Cutforth, 2000). Many of the kids viewed martial arts as a way of fighting Karate style, so the emphasis on respect and self-control was the main points of each lesson. Don always stressed nonviolence and promoted peaceful conflict resolution. He reminded the kids that it was their responsibility to use good judgment and how and when to use their martial arts skills. Like the Coaching Club, the kids viewed the club as something special to belong to.

### **Chicago and Apprentice Teaching Program**

Don felt that it was important to extend his school year Coaching Club program to summer hours. This would help guarantee sustainability of the program's impact and would give the kids something to do and learn during the summer time. A second purpose was to elevate the leadership qualities of his kids by providing opportunities for them to plan and teach younger kids values-based sport activities. He created an "Apprentice Teacher Program." This seemed like a logical step for the club members because they were used to teaching each other during the club sessions.

The program which ran for seven summers included 14-year-old coaching club members who taught basketball to younger children and were attending a National Youth Sport summer program (Cutforth & Puckett, 1999). Beyond being responsible for planning and delivering lessons to the younger children, these apprentice teachers were also responsible for traveling to the university from the south side of the city. They all traveled by bus (by themselves), and Don

provided bus tokens to cover the transportation cost. Getting to the program was an important aspect of being responsible—one that significantly challenged their commitment to the program and to Don. Having worked with the club members during the school year, he had grown close to them and was hoping that having them in the summer program would allow them to remain in contact with each other.

Forty younger children showed up each day for 3 weeks. Most of the apprentice teachers showed up with some being there more than others. Being reliable and getting to the program as well as planning the lessons were always challenges for the apprentice teachers. After all, this was a much different experience than that of the Coaching Club where they taught each other. Undergraduate and graduate students of Don's at UIC helped Don in planning, although the initial planning was left up to the apprentices. When needed, however, planning and pedagogy challenges were addressed between the apprentice teachers and graduate students and Don. Evaluation took place (see Cutforth & Puckett, 1999) with a focus on how the experience would influence the apprentice teachers' thoughts about being a future teacher or coach. Unfortunately, the program experience fell short of attracting the apprentices to think about a vocation in teaching or coaching. (They really wanted to be a doctor or lawyer—more money!) However, their immersion in the university environment generated a vision of their possible futures. Given that the apprentice teachers' past school experiences were fraught with challenges, Don felt that this experience proved to be not only positive for them, but also ignited a spark of hope and a concern for others. They all felt that they could make contributions toward helping others—an outcome worth celebrating.

### **Challenges With Out-of-School Programming**

Out-of-school time programming was not without challenges. Don readily acknowledged these challenges and sought to figure how to make things work. He managed them with optimism and realism. An important fact that he held onto was that challenges needed to be minimal. That is, programming needed to be workable and would be supported at a reasonable level of efficiency. This meant, collaboration with site personnel was critical. Don always sought to establish a positive working relationship (Walsh, 2002, 2006). Besides this, giving kids an uplifting positive experience was always at the forefront of putting a program in place. When support was shallow and unpredictable, Don would not hesitate to look for new sites. Fostering an authentic partnership was a central part of starting any program (Walsh, 2006). This required an understanding of each other's expectations and goals for the program and each other's role. It was "commitment" that was so important to Don in maintaining a partnership with a community agency.

Another issue for after- and before-school programs for Don was administrative support. Although his clubs operated outside of the school hours, Don always sought to keep school personal informed about what he was doing with the students. In essence, he did not want his program to operate in isolation. Having an advocate within the school family (e.g., principal,

vice, principal, counselor) helped to send a broader message to school staff about the values being taught in his clubs.

Space was often a challenge. After-school interscholastic sport, intramurals may require gym space. Don was able to find alternative spaces such as a classroom, auditorium stage, or even a hallway. For university-based programs gym space needed to be negotiated with other summer program directors. He worked around schedules or merged with ongoing programs (like the Apprentice Teacher Program) to secure space.

The choice of activity for the club was another consideration for Don's programs. For inner city kids, basketball was very popular. Don's skill in the sport was pretty good—so he could keep up with the kids. However, for other sports such as skate boarding and gymnastics, Don relied on other kids with an expertise in the sport to help teach other club members. This was a great way to promote the Level 4 of the TPSR model.

It was not unusual for kids who decided to join one of Don's programs to come in with an expectation that it would be a "traditional" sport experience. After all, most had previous sport experiences either in other programs or in their physical education class that embrace the traditional approach to sports. So the challenge for Don was to have kids realize the nature and purpose of the TPSR approach—to guide them in making good decisions and respecting others. The kids soon found that they could participate in a physically and psychologically safe environment, be a member of a small community, explore and develop new capabilities, and enjoy a way of learning important life skills and values.

A final challenge that Don had to conquer was his feelings of self-doubt. Whether in programs were in schools or outside, this particular challenge was always there. Accepting one's vulnerability was always at the forefront of Don's work with kids—especially when working kids who were responsibility challenged. Getting through those down periods was bolstered by seeing or hearing something that showed that a "small victory" took place. A youngster stepping up to help another kid who has fallen, or a kid who was reticent about engaging with others suddenly volunteers to lead the group, or a child who simply proclaims that "I know I can do this" highlight small but significant victories that can occur. It is those "little victories" that helped to energize Don's work with kids. He was always aware that his focus on what needed to be done would be coupled with an understanding and sharing of kids' insights and perceptions of their learning experiences. In a certain way, any transformation of kids with whom he worked was often coupled with his own grasp of what he could do and not do.

## **Final Thoughts**

As school administrators attempt to meet academic standards and elevate test scores they also struggle to provide the necessary scaffolding for fostering social and emotional health of their students. While school physical education programs are most often viewed as the most logical delivery system of TPSR values, teachers are often shaped by a set curriculum, large class sizes, and a set of rigid rules. Given these limitations, Don recognized the advantages of providing

physical activity programs outside of the school schedule. Unlike in-school physical education, out-of-school programming allows more opportunity to develop one's own curriculum. For Don, his approach to "trying things out" and getting kids to be personally and socially responsible required program flexibility for adjusting physical activity experiences, rule setting, and attendance and time requirements. This flexibility also allowed him to maintain small numbers in the program. Don always proclaimed that "less is more." Instilling the responsibility values was best accomplished when kids could personally experience and reflect on those experiences that nudged them closer to making better decisions and realizing personal capacity. Along with keeping the numbers small, he strongly embraced the idea that long-term participation be encouraged, thus creating a sense of belonging and membership.

His work has been followed by others who also saw the advantages of forming TPSR programs during OST. Many of these programs have operated within community-based settings, unattached to a specific school's mission. They are found in neighborhoods, youth-serving agencies, churches, and nonprofit organizations and served a wide range of social and economic populations of youth. For example, Amy and Rob Casteneda's "Beyond the Ball" program (Jacobs, Casteneda, & Casteneda, 2016) takes TPSR into one of Chicago's underserved neighborhood to use sport to bring young and old groups together. By creating leadership skills with the young people, they take on the role of community building in their neighborhood. Prolonged relationships are established with youth while stakeholders are part of the community.

And there is Angela Beale's Project Guard program (Beale, 2016), which enables inner city kids to build relationships and acquire technical and employment skills through a swimming experience. By integrating the values of TPSR with traditional swimming, aquatic fitness, and lifeguard training the students learn to transfer the skills learned to other parts of their lives (Beale, 2016).

Tom's Project Effort program provides underserved children and youth an opportunity to participate in an after-school values-based physical activity program (Martinek, 2016). During its 26 years of operating, it has served to address the needs of the surrounding schools. The centerpiece for this program is the TPSR model with a special focus on developing leadership skills for veteran program participants.

These types of programs continue to be expanded with the intent of applying Don's ideas and exploring TPSR experiences in ways that aligned with the challenges and resources of their setting. All have the advantage of operating during OST and make them a vital part of the promising strategies for expanding the learning and opportunities for youth. Don's work and allied programs will continue to leverage the power of quality after-school and summer programming. Richly varied and diverse community partnerships will surely accompany these initiatives.

Don saw his role and those of others as enriching the minds, values, and capabilities of youth for all backgrounds. Challenging them to reach their full potential was a mainstay in all he did. The spirit engendered by him and the TPSR model will continue to help all those who work

with youth both inside and outside of school hours and enriches the lives of our youth—everywhere and anytime.

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