

THE TPSR ALLIANCE AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



Introduction

SARAH DOOLITTLE, EDITOR

Among the most important contributions of sport, physical activity and physical education is the personal and social development of children and youth (SHAPE America National Standard 4; Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014) that can result when teachers, coaches, activity leaders and organizations commit to such goals as a priority. For several decades Don Hellison's seminal approach, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) through sport and physical activity (Hellison, 2011), has inspired a wide variety of professionals who share similar values to work toward a set of common goals. This mission encompasses practice and theory, research and development — all based on down-to-earth work with children and youth of many different backgrounds in schools, camps, out-of-school sport and activity programs, and community development programs. After nearly 40 years as an informal network, people interested in the TPSR approach and personal and social development through sport and physical activity have formed a *community of practice*, the TPSR Alliance.

A community of practice is a special form of professional affiliation and development that involves members who share self-defined common learning, professional practice and goals. Members engage in an informal social process of learning, sometimes over the course of many years. Members share values and goals, and they find places and times for frequent discourse that is social and action-oriented (Lave & Wenger, 1991; MacPhail, Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2014; Wenger, 1999).

The TPSR Alliance began in 2008 and was established to sustain the work of members who are teaching children and youth personal and social responsibility through sport and physical activity. It functions as a collaboration among a variety of professionals to share their commitment to a set of common values, and to find colleagues, locate information, solve problems, and share ideas for both practice and scholarship.

Communities of practice such as the TPSR Alliance may become increasingly important as professionals in physical education, sport, physical activity, youth development and public health overlap to build new 21st-century interprofessional opportunities and programs. With traditional teacher or researcher organizations now relying on efficient but often impersonal websites and online communication, meaningful social interaction among professionals with shared interests and values is sometimes overlooked. Communities of practice, in contrast, are deliberately designed as smaller groups of people who combine face-to-face social interaction, professional discourse, problem solving, new ideas and personal support whenever possible. Communities of practice also offer opportunities for informal gatherings based on the premise that professional learning is social and comes from our day-to-day working experiences in particular situations. When members of

Sarah Doolittle (doolittle@adelpi.edu) is a professor in the Department of Exercise Science, Health Studies, Physical Education and Sport Management at Adelphi University in Garden City, NY.

these communities get together, conversations take priority over formal presentations where people can

audit the perspectives of others, understand the located-ness of their rationales and practices, build a set of practical theories of teaching and learning, build a knowledge base, develop leadership and mentoring capacities, and anticipate future possibilities for their profession. (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

Collective situated learning is a result when members interact. The relationships are typically sustained over a long period of time, but new members are also drawn as other members move on to new or different challenges. The community continues as long as the members focus on practical issues, share values and discuss issues that matter to them. As a supplement to larger professional organizations, establishing communities of practice on particular topics or interests may serve to meet the felt needs of diverse professionals who work together to address complex challenges.

The articles in this feature will describe how different kinds of professionals — teachers, researchers, teacher educators, sport psychologists, youth and community workers, sport specialists, administrators, coaches and other physical activity professionals — collaborate through the TPSR Alliance. This feature is not intended to explain the TPSR model itself, or to discuss specific research and development related to the model (for a comprehensive bibliography of TPSR publications, see the Alliance web site: www.TPSR_Alliance.org). Instead, the purpose of this feature is to provide examples of the TPSR work that is being done, and to illustrate the efficacy of a community of practice as a vehicle for ongoing professional development for physical activity specialists who work on youth and community development in schools and universities, as well as in schools and community agencies.

Seven articles make up this feature. First, Tom Martinek and Don Hellison provide an overview of the evolution of TPSR and its current use in a variety of program settings. They also discuss the role of such programs in helping youth, through sport and physical activity, to be more aware of their strengths, to become more responsible, and to consider how they can contribute to their communities. Gloria Balague goes on to describe how the TPSR community of practice came about and how it works. Her article also describes how the TPSR Alliance functions differently from traditional associations, conventions and professional development events and reflects characteristics of a community of practice. Amy and Rob Castañeda run a nonprofit youth and community development organization utilizing TPSR, and Jennifer M. Jacobs is a doctoral student working with them. Their article explains the evolution of

their work and the essential connections with the TPSR approach and the Alliance. John McCarthy, Fritz I. Ettl and Val Altieri have developed a high school program based on TPSR principles. They looked for help to solve problems and to develop new strategies. Their article explains how the TPSR Alliance provided needed support. Robin J. Dunn, Michael A. Hemphill and Sylvie Beaudoin are teacher educators who conducted their dissertations on TPSR, and they joined the TPSR Alliance as they transitioned to university positions in physical education teacher education. In their article, they describe both the assistance they received as their research and teaching careers developed, and their contributions to the Alliance. Angela Beale worked with Srecko Mavrek and Sheldon Sucre in underserved schools and the American Red Cross's Learn-to-Swim and lifeguard training programs. The story she tells shows how TPSR provides a structure linking personal and social responsibility with occupational skills as an outgrowth of physical education and school-based aquatic programs. Last, David S. Walsh and Paul M. Wright, university professors who trained directly with Don Hellison, provide several examples of how interactions with TPSR Alliance members help drive research and the development of PE and sport-based youth development programs.

For *JOPERD* readers, this feature addresses the ongoing work of personal and social development through sport and activity from the perspectives of different kinds of physical education professionals, and it provides an in-depth look from multiple perspectives at how a community of practice, the TPSR Alliance, assists and inspires the work of each professional. Understanding how the TPSR Alliance works may encourage readers to consider the potential of communities of practice for personal and social development through physical activity or other shared values that inspire their work.

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