

# Youth Leadership in Sport and Physical Education

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*Tom Martinek and Don Hellison*

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YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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## Foreword

Young people today, particularly those from underserved communities, are faced with numerous personal, social, economic, and academic challenges that leave many extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors and school failures. With drug use, illegitimate births, violent crimes, and gang involvement among teenagers all on the rise, it is not surprising that youth development initiatives have become the major focus of many philanthropic organizations. What can be done? Well, one possibility is the widely held belief that positive sport experiences can help youth develop self-confidence and valuable life skills that enhance their capacity to handle the pressures and temptations that they face as teenagers today. Sport participation may also foster the leadership qualities that could enable young people to be active role models to others.

Nonetheless, based solely on the headlines of many sport pages today, one could easily ask the question, *does sport build character or does it create character disorders?* The easy answer to this complicated question is, *it depends*. So while most parents, recreation leaders, youth sport coaches, and physical educators espouse the value of sport and physical activity in teaching life skills to youth, research shows that none of the “lessons” learned on the playing field will transfer to the classroom or the boardroom unless youth are in the right context for growth.

For several decades, Tom Martinek and Don Hellison have modeled how to create the optimal context for fostering positive youth development. Imagine an environment that is fun, engaging, and challenging, but also one that has clear rules, requires personal responsibility, and demands that participants show respect for themselves and others. Imagine a process in which young people are treated with respect, empowered, and encouraged to excel. Imagine a learning strategy that is based on reflection and self-discovery. Now, imagine that all of this is happening with the support, encouragement, challenge that comes from having a quality relationship with caring adult mentors, and you begin to get a glimpse of why Tom and Don have been so instrumental in transforming the lives of countless, so called “at risk” youngsters.



On the basis of Don's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Model (TPSR), this book provides a wealth of information on how to develop and implement a leadership and life skills program for youth. You will not only learn the basics of TPSR, but you will also gain an understanding of how to overcome the various practical, logistical, and environmental challenges you are likely to face.

Beyond the knowledge and practical wisdom shared in this book, I hope that readers will be able to gain some insight into the humanism that characterizes Tom and Don, and their interactions with program participants. The new buzz word in positive youth development is *matter-tering*. The notion is that if young people believe that they matter, they will most likely invest the time and effort required to be successful in the selected activity and in life in general. Tom and Don help kids believe that they matter. People who are fortunate enough to interact with them undoubtedly walk away feeling understood, respected, and valued. Their positive and hopeful attitudes, and their genuine concern for the needs, well-being, and interests of their participants comes across in the quality of the relationships that they establish. After reading this book, I am confident that you will have a better understanding of how you can help young people believe that they really do *matter*.

AL PETITPAS  
Springfield College

## Preface: Youth Leadership through Sport and Physical Education

During our fifty years plus of working in school and community programs we have tried to better understand how character is shaped in children and youth who have been marginalized both socially and economically. Armed with a common set of responsibility values, we have used physical activity to help kids take responsibility for their own well being and the well-being of others. The genesis of our approach to leadership development originates from the second author's (Don) Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model (Hellison, 1995, 2003). TPSR through physical activity is based on strong instructor-participant relationships. These relationships are closely tied to a specific set of guidelines, eventual power-sharing, and individual and group reflection. The model provides a set of values that can be fostered through designed physical activity experiences. One of these values, *leading and helping others* (Hellison, 2003, pp. 33–34) provided a jumping off point for writing this book.

Our youth development work, which continues today, has given us ample moments of discovery about the capabilities and fallibilities of underserved youth (i.e., at-risk, troubled, drop-out bound kids). We have written, recalled, and shared with others the things we see, hear, and feel. From the very moment kids walk through the gym doorway we have tried to capture bits and pieces of evidence that help us do better work and improve it as we reflect on it. But what have really grabbed our attention are those moments, even the fleeting ones that unveil the capacity of adolescent youth to impact the lives of others.

For us, seeing kids lead and help others elevates resilience (i.e., the ability to bounce) to another level. The importance of all this is to recognize that youth leadership development furthers the acquisition of positive healthy and risk reducing behaviors. In other words, when young people serve as leaders—good things happen. Risk factors are reduced and protective factors such as social competence and confidence emerge.

That's why leadership development should be an important consideration of any program or organization that is serving adolescents.

*Youth Leadership in Sport and Physical Education* is for adult leaders who want to pursue similar goals in youth development programming. The term "adult leaders" refers to individuals who work with youths in recreation programs, YMCAs, YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, church programs, and various after-school enrichment programs. Adult leaders also include teachers and/or coaches in school physical education or athletic programs, and university faculty. We recognize that the contexts in which adult leaders work are quite different from one another. Consequently, we present our ideas about youth leadership development in ways that can be used in a variety of settings. We also wanted the words and ideas of this book to relate directly to you. In other words, we want you to be in the same room with us. To do this we use the "the first person" (e.g., "you" and "we") throughout most of the book.

Although we will address you the reader as if you are interested in starting a sport-based leadership program, we realize that people may pick up this book for a variety of reasons, not all of which involve professional development. Some of you may be teachers, coaches, or youth workers, but others may be university professors interested in sharing this information with your students and still others may just be interested in learning more about using sport to teach leadership. So if you are not directly involved with kids who may gain from having a leadership program, don't stop reading because our writing style assumes that you are. Just ignore the "in your program" wording and read on.

More importantly, this is a book for those who view *all* kids as potential leaders and helpers. It is a book for those who see leadership as a way of promoting positive attitudes and respect as it is about achieving success. And, it is a book for those who envision leadership as a way of *serv-ing* the needs of others, *changing* the setting where leadership is prioritized, and *making a moral difference* in the lives of others.

Our years of work with underserved kids and professionals who serve them have given us ideas about what works best with most kids. These ideas are just *ideas* . . . nothing more. They are presented for you in a still-evolving developmental framework. The framework is designed to help stimulate action for program development as well as continual self-reflection and evaluation.

At the same time, we are aware of the multitude of legitimate ways of understanding and teaching youth leadership. More specifically, various leaders design different programs using different models and pedagogies. For example, there is Charlie Tribe's (2008) youth leadership program, *Sports 37*, where training for Chicago's inner-city youths is provided so they can teach and coach younger kids in the Park District's summer sport

programs. Kids also get certified to, for example, referee youth soccer games or be a lifeguard which turn into paid positions during the summer.

In New Zealand, Murray Turner (2007), has developed a specialized leadership program in his high school physical education classes. A leadership project is assigned to each student so they can independently experience what its like to *develop and lead* a specific program for kids.

Another leadership program headed by Aaron Dworkin (Berlin et al., 2007) is called the Hoops and Leader Basketball Camp. By leveraging the game of basketball, New York City's urban youth are taught leadership skills through careful mentoring and exposed to different educational and career opportunities. Finally, there is the Project Coach Program (Intracator & Siegel, 2008) that utilizes the resources of a college and four core youth development concepts to provide a cross-age leadership sports program for underserved kids.

While the above examples illustrate a variety of ways by which youth leadership programs function, two important qualities need to be present for any program to take hold (Klau, Boyd, & Luckow, 2006). First, the program plan must be clear about the model of leadership (set of values) it holds at its core. Adult leaders often speak of leadership as a program outcome, but do not have a conceptualization of leadership nor a process for this to occur.

Second, adult leaders must insure that the core model of leadership is aligned with the pedagogies used to teach it. In other words, the teaching strategies and values of the model must be integrated rather than taught separately.

We provide real life examples to clarify the various ideas for starting and maintaining a youth leadership program. The book is divided into four main parts. The first part, *What's Worth Doing*, includes three chapters. The first chapter emphasizes the importance of having adolescents viewed as leaders. We describe our view of leadership including basic assumptions that underlie leadership development. Our own personal histories of youth development are also profiled so you will get a sense of where our ideas and values come from.

The second chapter describes the field of youth development and its relationship to professional development, sport, and youth leadership. The emergence of youth development as a close affiliate of professional practice is underscored in this chapter. Thus, sport activities for developing leadership skills in youth become especially relevant.

The third chapter illustrates how the spirit of social justice and citizenship become intertwined in responsibility-based youth leadership programming. The use of TPSR values is foundational in upholding the right of young people to experience and apply the concepts of power sharing, inclusion, fairness, and other basic human rights. Examples of how youth

have been advocates for social justice and active participants in small and large types of social reform are cited in this chapter.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 make up the second part of the book: *Stages of Youth Leadership*. An overview of developmental stages of leadership is presented in the fourth chapter. The stages of leadership development are introduced as a way of viewing and assessing progression. They are: Stage One: Learning to Take Responsibility, Stage Two: Leadership Awareness, Stage Three: Cross-age Leadership, and Stage Four: Self-actualized Leadership. Basic requirements called “themes” are also offered. The themes are the ingredients for insuring the adolescent’s advancement through the stages of development. The themes, *power-sharing*, *self-reflection*, *relationships*, *transfer*, and *integration* help to maintain consistency across the leadership experiences.<sup>1</sup> That is, they should be threaded through your leadership program. The specific stages of leadership development are then described in each of the following four chapters. Strategies for enhancing leadership within each stage are described with examples of how they work.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 make up the third part, *Making Leadership Work*. Developing relationships between you and the youth leaders is essential to all that you attempt within each stage of development. Of the five themes earlier listed, the relationship one is the most important. That is why we devote an entire chapter to it (chapter 9). No matter what the intent of your leadership programming is, failing to connect to the leaders and all those with whom you work will render your program mediocre at best!

Our chapter 10 describes ways to problem solve through the challenges that lie ahead in programming planning and implementation. These challenges vary according to context, support, and feelings of uncertainty. Consequently, knowing how to address each one given your circumstance will be vital for success.

The eleventh chapter broadens the context in which youth leadership programs can take place. This chapter specifically focuses on in-school leadership programs. Both national and international school programs are described. Issues facing physical education programs in promoting youth leadership qualities are presented. School size and program goals, that is, TPSR values, are also considered in school-based programming.

Chapters 12, 13, 14, and epilogue make up the last part of the book: *Is It Working?* In chapter 12 we give examples of ways to assess your leadership programs. We have found that there is no single approach to evaluating the dynamics of leadership development. Some ways work better than others and both of us are fully aware that evaluating youth leader programs will be done with “cautious” interpretation.

Chapter 13 explores the studies that have examined various aspects of TPSR sport and leadership programs. Multiple data sources and methods are described with each serving its own purpose for examining nuances and impact of leadership programming.

The fourteenth chapter and epilogue will help you get started and help you reflect on your readiness to begin your own leadership program. Both will provide thoughts about the personal requirements needed to organize and implement the type of leadership program we have talked about throughout the book.

Our hope is that this book will further heighten your interest and will to help youth become key players to community enrichment and goodwill. Whether you are a teacher, coach, counselor, and someone who works in youth agencies, you will acquire a sense of purpose from reading this book. That purpose is to help youth discover the wonderful legacies they can leave at the doorstep of their families, school, and communities. Our intent is to equip you with a set of ideas that will help you guide young people through this journey of discovery. In the end helping them develop their leadership potential helps us all.

TOM & DON

## Note

1. Four of the five themes have been borrowed from Hellison's *Teaching responsibility through physical activity*. They are both appropriate and useful in helping to architect strategies for moving adolescents along the three stages of leadership development.

## Acknowledgments

A nice thing about writing this book is that it reminds us of the many individuals who have given us ideas, support, guidance, and inspiration for doing this work. We are incredibly grateful to all of them for not only being a huge part of this book, but of our lives.

We begin by giving thanks to all the kids with whom we have worked, sweated, cried, and rejoiced over the past years. When anyone asks us “What truly inspires you to do this work?” our response has always been “because it is the right thing to do.” There is irony to all this. By helping them gain purpose and meaning in their lives, we have benefitted the same way in ours. We will always be grateful for that gift.

We also want to give thanks to past principal and vice principal, Penny Kerr and Paul Butler of Chicago’s Bond School and the Deborah Jones principal of Greensboro’s Hampton Elementary School. If it were not for them our programs would never have been launched. Equally important, is the wonderful work of past graduate students, *Nick Cutforth*, *Nikos Georgiadis*, *Dave Walsh*, *Dennis Johnson*, *Dan McLaughlin*, *Tammy Schilling*, and *Paul Wright*. All of them are now at other universities creating their own programs, helping kids, or simply, carrying the torch.