

Teaching Physical and Social Responsibility Through Physical Activity

Don Hellison



Don Hellison has worked with some tough kids in hard inner city schools. This former US Marine is a tough man with a big heart. Hellison has travelled extensively across the United States and across the world teaching as a professor and a lecturer helping educators to learn his unique physical education philosophy. Hellison has written six books including *Teaching Physical and Social Responsibility* (which will be referred to as TPSR). Don Hellison is the winner of the Gulick Medal and the International Olympic Committee's President Prize.

Just What is TPSR Anyway?

TPSR believe that in teaching physical education we can teach life skills as well. *Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility* is about using physical education as a means to teach a code or a discipline to students. It is the intention that this code becomes integrated and internalized by the students and gives them structure for their lives, values, inner-discipline and that these skills are not only seen in the gym but are transferred to other aspects of their lives.

TPSR as counselor Virginia Satir might say, is about ``*people making*`` and for Don Hellison, just as valuable as PE instruction, is making his students better people. Hellison shares in his book many comments and anecdotes of students who have discovered strengths and values through participating in his program.



Quotable Quotes: "You gotta have a system" -
Eddie Robinson—football coach.



Just What is the System?

Don Hellison's idea was to create a program that encouraged children to adopt higher values through a series of steps or levels. It has dismayed him that often educators sometimes see the levels as ends in themselves—something like achievement goals rather than as a dynamic, living and breathing “way of life”. Educators have found that once the TPSR system has been successfully taught and demonstrated, that classes ran more smoothly and that there is less need for classroom man-

agement work on their part—the students internalized their own management!

The overall movement of values is from egocentricity and immaturity to a community orientation and maturity.

The hope is that eventually these values and goals become integrated seamlessly into the student's world view.

Hellison believes that educators should always be asking themselves if their outlook and teach-

ing method is worth doing—and more importantly, is what we are doing working? The question *what more is possible* should also be an important question. TPSR is worth doing.



Level Zero—“Nothing Can Come Out of Nothing” - King Lear

When we talk about TPSR, we are usually focusing on Levels 1-4. But many students start at level zero.

Level Zero is when a student focuses mostly on their own wants, demands and desires—and on their time schedule!

Level Zero kids are focused exclusively on themselves—and when they perform in sports it's about their own achieve-

ments rather than that of the team. Level Zero kids are difficult because of their attitudes and other kids generally resent having them around to play sports with. In fact, Level zero students often make PE a miserable experience for other students and they

Quotable Quotes: “The levels were good—they let you know if you were acting like a fool...”
High School Student

unpredictable and hostile.

Level Zero looks like shoving, insulting behavior and aggressive play. It sounds like putdowns and whiny complaining. “It's all about me” could

be the slogan for Level Zero. Hellison wants to move kids quickly from this level to a higher plane!

Being Level Headed

The Levels at a Glance

- Level 0** **Egocentric**, lack of self-control, non-team player.
- Level 1** **Respecting the Rights & Feelings of Others** Self-control and peaceful conflict solving.
- Level 2** **Effort and Cooperation:** Getting along, being self-starter, trying new tasks.
- Level 3** **Self-Direction:** Being on-task, setting and sticking to personal goals and resisting peer pressure.
- Level 4** **Helping Others and Leadership:** Showing caring, sensitivity and concern for others in the class.
- Level 5** **Taking TPSR Outside the Gym:** Integrating TPSR values into other areas of life—being role models.

Level One— Respecting the Rights & Feelings of Others

TPSR begins at Level One—where a student realizes that they live in a community—and that their needs and desires are not always (and often aren't) paramount. This means that (at least) they do not do anything to hinder the others in the class such as using put downs or aggression. Everyone has a place in the circle in this level—including themselves.

Level One kids know that violence is not an answer to disputes nor an appropriate way to

respond to disagreements or aggression. It can simply mean walking away from a conflict rather than getting involved.

Level One philosophy is a “let and let live” perspective. It does not mean that one is a punching bag but it does mean looking for other solutions other than violence.

Self-control is the hall mark to

this level— Hellison tells his students it means “Controlling your temper and your mouth”.

If level one had a song it would be r-e-s-p-e-c-t . As one kid in the eighth grade said “When someone messes up, I don't get mad now. I just tell them they

Oh, and by the way, kids don't plunk up the levels—they sometimes go up and down depending on maturity, family and other circumstances.



Level Two— Effort and Cooperation

Level Two is when a student has enough inner resources to motivate themselves to do their best. It is when they are able to be self-starters and to try whatever task is at hand.

Level Two kids know that if what they are faced with isn't their cup of tea, then something more their lik-

ing will come up soon. Unlike Level Zero, they will explore new activities with a good attitude. They will also try to get along well with everyone even if they do not particularly like them or are friends

Quotable Quotes: “Try your best and don't give up...” Dr. Tom Martinek

with them, there is a sense of being on a team that is bigger than anything else. Being at Level Two means rejecting learned helplessness and passive behavior.

Level Three— Self-Direction and Being On Task

It is a great achievement for children at this level to be able to maintain focus and keep on task. Level Three students are able to set goals for their own fitness and to keep on target with them. This includes even simple goals such as staying with a fitness station even though it means working alone and at repetitive tasks.

Level Three can be difficult especially when peer pressure is involved—it means having personal maturity to persist at the task on hand rather than moving on to something more interesting or goofing off (or whatever the gang wants to do). It is difficult to be going against the stream. This level also means working teacher supervision and working at their fitness goals and practicing at home as well.

Perhaps this level can be imaged well by an archery metaphor—to keep the target within sight and to strive at hitting it and not be distracted by the crowd.



Level Four— Helping Others and Leadership

In Level Four, students are concerned with the whole community—PE has to be a good experience for *all* the class. In this level, no one is expendable—whether in picking teams or picking partners.

Compassion for others is exhibited in this level and this takes a lot of inner strength especially in our society that values the Alpha dog. Boys are more expected to conform to this ethos and Level Four behaviour may be harder for them to show and may take more maturity.

Quotable Quotes:
“The Kids really showed me the important aspects of what it means to be not only a teacher, but also a mentor friend and teammate.”

Showing compassion (particularly on the part of boys) is a tall order. A lot of work must be put into place before this level can be considered achieved and solid. When students show comradeship and compassion voluntarily, then it has been internalized and integrated.

Level Five: Beyond the Gym

This is the hardest level to implement—but it may manifest itself in changes in attitude such as in dress, punctuality, conflict resolutions, attention to school work and chores at home, and in taking on the task of mentoring younger children. Ideally, other teachers can adopt the TPSR schema into their instruction and evaluations.



``Time for Some Strategy!`` - Bugs Bunny—Rabbit.

Level Zero: Teach by invitation—“When you’re wanting to play and ready to participate you can join in—but until then you sit out.”

Level One: Respecting Others. Compliment self-control—“You did a fine job of keeping out of trouble in this game (class, or day).” This gives the student a reputation they may want to keep. For tough inner-city kids, Hellison gave the “5 Clean Days” rule.

Level Two: Effort and Cooperation: Grandma’s Law— for children who are not wanting to be motivated at a boring task Hellison challenged: “Put in 5 good minutes (or 4 sets or whatever) and Grandma lets you go to a new station.” It’s a deal making strategy—and it works.

Level Three: Self-Direction & Being on Task. Here, students learn about keeping on task towards their goals. This is hard and help may be needed—a check list is a great motivator where a partner checks off the number of crunches required or sets to be done. They are great assessment tools for the teacher to have in their file and can be used to track progress over time.

Level Four: Helping Others and Leadership. This level can be supported through using more cooperative games rather than invasive games or elimination sports. This level can be supported through peer decisions over infractions in games such as having a ‘Sport Court’ where penalties are dealt with or through more inclusive game strategies such as “everyone must touch the ball” before shooting a basket.

Level Five: Beyond the Gym: Ask other teachers and parents to provide feedback as to behaviour changes that they note and to implement in their classes using a TPSR model.