

Creating Responsible Youth through Physical Activity: The Don Hellison Story

My familiarity with Don Hellison's work started when I was a doctoral student at Boston University. I remember being assigned by my advisor to read a Prentice Hall publication entitled *Humanistic Physical Education*. The book was Don's first introduction in our field to the ways physical education can serve as an important vehicle for improving the human condition of young people. Its message resonated with me in such a profound way that it continues to guide my way of viewing and doing scholarly work to this very day. His approach toward "teaching and reaching" kids not only reinforced my belief that teaching sport is more than teaching skills but about enhancing their moral thinking. He unveiled the incredible opportunities that can emerge from values-based physical activity instruction. Since then, Don and I have been guided by a common understanding and a set of ideas on what is best for kids. He has been a true inspiration for me and many, many others who strive to help children and youth become positive contributors to their communities.

Don's work with kids spans over three decades. During that time he has always embraced the idea that if you work with kids in the real world, you have to be armed with a repertoire of ideas that helps them gain some control over their lives. While initially viewed as alternative and "foreign" to our field, his work has become the standard for values-based programming in physical education and sport. He has reminded all of us that when you set up programs for kids, especially those marginalized from the societal mainstream, you have to understand that they are kids and have lives and dreams, and struggles. The technical stuff, while important, becomes just a small part of the bigger picture where self-discovery and responsibility are realized in kids.

The scholarly products of his work have impacted our field in many ways—by helping kids navigate through the toxicity of their own environment, by igniting self-discovery, broadening their futures, and becoming leaders in their own way. His ability to place those products in the laps of practitioners, lay people, and researchers in ways that affect their professional and clinical practice has been amazing. Shaped by his personal experiences and his search for ideas, the personal and social responsibility model has evolved through the years. Through trial and error, theory, and the impulse to do the right thing, his model has become fine tuned enough to meet the needs of kids in diverse settings. It has truly become a national and international mainstay for youth development program leaders.

Today, Don continues to work with kids...the guy never rests. His commitment to transforming traditional views of practice in youth sport programs remains steadfast. Furthermore, the utilization of PSRM has been broadened by others who work in professional preparation programs. His past students and colleagues continue to nurture the spirit of PSRM through their own work at universities in Denver, Greensboro, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City. Internationally, his model is quickly becoming the curricular centerpiece for new initiatives that address the pressing issues associated with heavy migration flow and subsequent changes in student demographics.

It is gratifying to know that Don Hellison continues to influence so many others in so many ways. He has taught us the value of perseverance and that putting kids first must take precedent over everything else. Commitment, knowing who you are, and what you can and cannot do for kids have been the unambiguous lessons we have learned from him. Personally,

having him as a friend and colleague has made me a better teacher, scholar, and person. I am sure that others feel the same way.

In sum, Don has not wavered from his commitment to infuse a sense of personal and social responsibility in underserved youths. Because of this he has been unique to our field not only because of the work he has done with underserved kids, but because of his persistence and consistency. These two attributes serve as examples to anyone who wants to make a difference in the lives of young people. In a larger sense, these qualities remind us how we must continue to be engaged in a continual and mutual life-giving process of personal and social leadership in youth development. More importantly, we should be mindful of how lucky we are to have someone like Don Hellison, who has added depth, wisdom, and richness to our profession.

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