

# CAUSE OF DEATH: PHYSICAL EDUCATION— A SEQUEL

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In April of 1986, an article entitled "Cause of Death: Physical Education" appeared in the *Journal*. It described my struggle to implement self-responsibility goals and strategies (see boxes) in an alternative school during a sabbatical leave. Last year, I had an opportunity to once again try to implement these goals and strategies in three

alternative programs. The following is a description of my experiences.

It seemed like the right thing to do. Getting away from Portland (OR) for a while, that is. I was just finishing one of my toughest years, teaching physical education once again at an alternative school but this time with four seriously emo-

tionally handicapped (or behaviorally disordered or . . .) teenagers, mixed in with a bunch of other kids in trouble in all of my classes. An old friend had invited me to spend the following year at Montana State University as a visiting professor. At first, I wasn't too enthusiastic—after all, snow up to my waist from October to June was not my idea of a dream vacation. But by spring I was ready for a break so off I went, with my newly purchased felt-pacs (snow boots) for a year away from kids, away from the city, away from the rain.

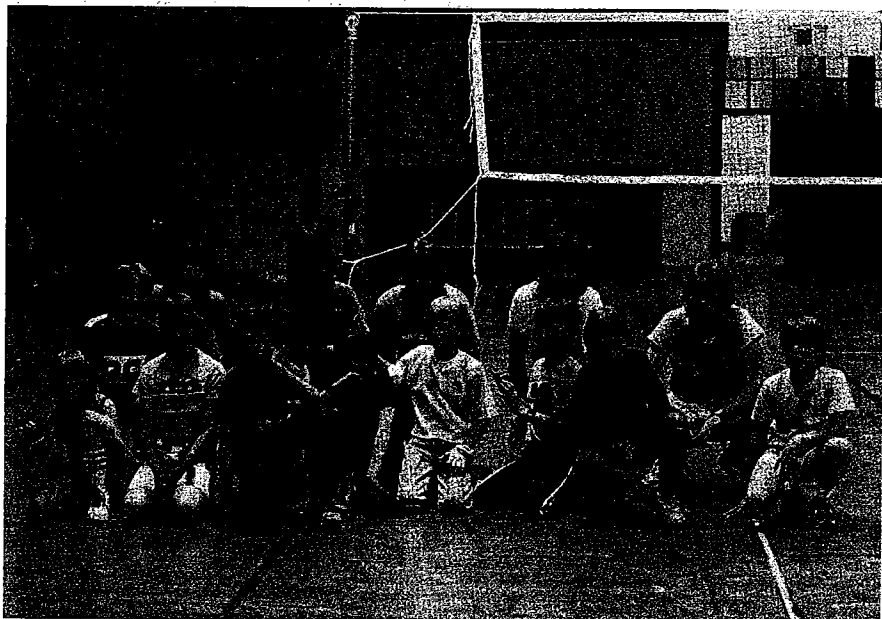
I couldn't have done a worse job of anticipating what this year would hold for me. I think I used my costly felt-pacs twice in what everyone described as the mildest winter in Bozeman's history. (The rumor of hard, long winters must be part of a conspiracy to keep people from discovering Montana!) I fell in love with the town, the university, and the students, despite my loudly proclaimed "city boy" mentality, the white middle-class nonradical character of the school, and the ubiquitous pickups with gun racks. But most surprising of all, and the

subject of this essay is the ground up directing through high-risk youth in Montana State University staff members. Holy death!

High-risk youth in Bozeman had heard about a group on the edge of town where teenage boys in trouble roved the state, and, well, of getting restless after I from kids for the summer with the director and he couple of times to try to my credibility (something hadn't been required to number of years). They know my background and experiences with high-risk kids wanted to be sure that I quit after the first couple things (as others had done) find out what kind of job I had in mind. By early October seven group-home Bozeman MSU student volunteers elementary methods course were meeting in one of Montana State University gymnasium in the evenings in Bozeman based on the self-responsibility goals and strategies. They lasted the rest of the academic year, about eight and six other MSU students onto the staff at one

We pulled off which the great racquetball for Mike's fourth volleyball with but only after

another. None of the students quit, despite some times, and all worked with for at least three months. In January, a second opportunity presented itself, th



Group photo of cross-age teaching group.

subject of this essay is the fact that I found up directing three projects for high-risk youth involving 18 Montana State University students and staff members. Holy cause-of-death!

High-risk youth in Bozeman? I had heard about a group home at the edge of town which served teenage boys in trouble from all over the state, and, well, I was sort of getting restless after being away from kids for the summer. I met with the director and houseparent a couple of times to try to establish my credibility (something that I hadn't been required to do for a number of years). They wanted to know my background and experiences with high-risk kids. They wanted to be sure that I wouldn't quit after the first couple of meetings (as others had done), and to find out what kind of program I had in mind. By early October, the seven group-home boys, three MSU student volunteers from my elementary methods course, and I were meeting in one of the Montana State University gyms twice a week in the evenings in a program based on the self-responsibility goals and strategies. That program lasted the rest of the 1986-87 academic year, about eight months, and six other MSU students rotated onto the staff at one time or

We pulled off a cross-age teaching night in which the group-home kids taught racquetball, fitness, and martial arts to Mike's fourth graders and then played volleyball with them. It was a huge success but only after a lengthy struggle.

another. None of the staff members quit, despite some tough times, and all worked with the kids for at least three months.

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To help physical education goals make sense, they are presented as developmental levels. This simply means that the goals have been organized into a step-by-step progression of attitudes and behaviors. This progression is not fixed, since students are human and don't follow any strictly prescribed progression. However, the levels do provide a framework for planning, responding to and evaluating specific incidents, as well as providing a vocabulary for doing so.

**Level 0. Irresponsibility:** describes students who are unmotivated and undisciplined. Their behavior includes discrediting or making fun of other students, as well as interrupting, intimidating, manipulating, and verbally or physically abusing other students or the physical education teacher.

**Level 1. Self-Control:** describes students who may not participate in the day's activity or show much mastery or improvement, but they are able to control their behavior enough so that they don't interfere with another student's right to learn or with the teacher's right to teach.

**Level 2. Involvement:** describes students who not only show self-control, but are involved in the subject matter.

**Level 3. Self-direction:** describes students who learn to take more responsibility for their choices and for linking these choices to their own identities. These students are able to work without direct supervision, eventually taking responsibility for their intentions and actions.

**Level 4. Caring:** describes students who are motivated to extend their sense of responsibility by cooperating, giving support, showing concern, and helping.

\*Excerpted from Hellison, 1985, pp. 5-7.

Figure 1. Self-responsibility Goals\*

the bulky (no-fat bulk) form of former football player and cowboy Mike DeBusk, a graduate student who was teaching elementary physical education in Bozeman. Mike reported having some discipline problems with several fourth graders. He was also looking for a thesis

hour. Two MSU students from my class volunteered to assist Mike in the program development, implementation, and data gathering. The program was so successful that when it ended the kids decided to continue it *After School*. Mike was joined this time by three other MSU students and, from time to time, by me: I was finding working with little guys fun for a change.

By early spring the word had somehow gotten around that these programs were under way, because I got a visit from two counseling graduate students who wanted to learn how to work with kids in trouble, using physical activities instead of talk therapy. So we developed and they implemented a third self-responsibility program, this time with junior high students who were on probation. Two more MSU students were pressed into service as assistants. This program was conducted twice a week in the evenings and lasted until the end of the academic year, about three months.

All three programs were based

topic so, presto, we put the two problems together and came up with one big problem: a special class for ten fourth grade boys which was to meet three times a week for six weeks during the noon

