

## What's Your Level?

### Level 0: Irresponsibility

**PE:** Pushing and shoving when selecting equipment  
Laughing at others  
Talking to friends when the teacher is giving directions  
**Home:** Blaming others for problems  
Lying to your parent(s)



### Level 1: Self-Control

**PE:** Not getting angry at others because they did something to upset you  
Having control over yourself and not letting behavior of others bother you  
**Home:** Keeping self from hitting your brother even though you're really mad at him

### Level 2: Involvement

**PE:** Trying new things without complaining or saying "I can't"  
Participating even when you may dislike an activity  
**Home:** Helping clean up after supper

### Level 3: Self-Responsibility

**PE:** Practicing a new skill learned in PE without being told  
Being a good person-- following directions  
**Home:** Cleaning your room without being asked



### Level 4: Caring

**PE:** Willing to work with anyone in the class  
Helping someone who is having difficulty  
**Home:** Helping take care of a younger child or pet  
Understanding that other people really matter

Levels of responsibility adapted from Masser, L. (1990).

# Teaching Responsibility to Rural Elementary Youth: Going Beyond the Urban At-Risk Boundaries

*An experienced teacher describes seven strategies he uses to develop self-responsibility in his students.*

**NICK COMPAGNONE**

Imagine your elementary students working at fitness stations during a lesson focused on target heart rate and goal setting. Four of your students are simply having a good time and have no idea what target heart rate means. Furthermore, they really do not care. On another day you have demonstrated a volleyball skill, and those same students are trying to slam dunk their beach volleyballs in between a 7' chin-up bar and the wall.

Few teachers would argue that this is neither a conducive environment in which to learn nor to teach. And not many would feel that these are the actions of responsible students. It seems to be the trend in our world today to be less responsible for one's actions. As physical educators, we have an opportunity to teach students to learn, practice, and adopt responsible behaviors which, in turn, will enhance their total life performances (Morris, 1993).

The four students described (all boys) were in my fifth grade class during the past school year. They are going to be our adults of tomorrow. As they get older, their abilities to

make responsible decisions may dwindle. With increasing age comes the possibility that their irresponsible behavior may lead to instances of crime and violence. For example, a local newspaper recently ran a series of articles depicting teen violence. One 15-year-old student was quoted as saying, "I had a long-nose .38 on me. I'd a shot the dude if I'd seen him....[A] weapon means respect. That's why people carry [weapons]" (Swofford, 1993, p. A7). A sixth grade student stated, "You knock somebody out and they're not going to mess with you anymore" (With, 1993).

Do these appear to be statements from responsible students? Can our educational system allow these trends to continue when it is apparent that individuals who intend to commit such crimes are not getting the guidance they need at home or school? Many of today's youth are being reared in a society that has created a "guidance gap." Children are thrust into a more pluralistic society in which fewer traditional institutions provide guidance for today's youth (Hellison, 1991).

Don Hellison, professor of teacher education in physical education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has worked extensively with urban at-risk children and has developed a model that promotes personal and social responsibility (PSRM) through physical activities (1978, 1985). Hellison suggests using physical education as a medium by which to empower students to make responsible decisions within the serendipitous nature of the gym (Hellison, 1987) as well as events which govern students in their personal lives. The PSRM is a humanistic approach to teaching physical education which comprises five levels of student awareness (table 1).

As students progress from one level to the next, they are empowered with an identity that allows them to make responsible decisions. When operating within the context of the various levels, students can make choices about their behaviors. Ultimately, student choices lead to empowerment in the program, which enables change in the environment.

Because much of the work by those who have used Hellison's model has been in "special programs" with at-risk students, I decided to use the PSRM in a regular school setting in rural North Carolina. I was observing much of the same type of behavior problems and much of the same social deprivation as those found in urban America. Therefore, I implemented a modified version of Hellison's Personal and Social Responsibility Model to determine its effects on a fifth grade class and used the strategies Hellison (1985) suggested (table 2).

When implementing the strategies, teachers must know that each teaching situation lends itself to different problems. Therefore, "to effectively execute these strategies requires considerable teacher artistry. Both self-reflection and intuition [guessing correctly from clues] are necessary in order to gain sufficient insight to know when to do what and to whom" (Hellison, 1990, p. 39). For my project, I wanted to deter-

mine if the behavior of four target students could be improved as a result of PSRM implementation.

#### **Implementing the Levels— Sources of Information**

My six-week project examined the application effects of Hellison's model on specific behaviors of a fifth grade class. The classroom teacher, the principal, and myself determined

that four target students—all boys—could benefit as a result of PSRM implementation. We also believed that because of the model, the learning environment would be changed for the better. The fifth grade class was videotaped three times before the program was initiated and three times immediately after the six weeks had ended. The on-task behaviors of the four target students were measured

**Table 1. Hellison's Five Developmental Levels\***

- Level 0: Irresponsibility**—students who are unmotivated and undisciplined. Their behavior includes discrediting or making fun of other students' involvement as well as interrupting, intimidating, manipulating, and verbally or physically abusing other students and perhaps the physical education teacher.
- Level I: Self-Control**—students who may not participate in the day's activity or show much mastery or improvement, but are able to control their behavior enough so that they do not interfere with other students' right to learn and the teacher's right to teach.
- Level II: Involvement**—students who not only show self-control, but are involved in the subject matter.
- Level III: Self-Responsibility**—students who learn to take more responsibility for their choices and for linking these choices to their own identities. They are able to work without direct supervision, eventually taking responsibility for their intentions and actions.
- Level IV: Caring**—students who are motivated to extend their sense of responsibility by cooperating, giving support, showing concern, and helping.

\*Adapted from *Goals and Strategies for Teaching Physical Education* (pp. 6-7) by D.R. Hellison, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers. Copyright 1985 by Donald R. Hellison. Adapted by permission.

**Table 2. Hellison's Strategies for a PSRM Program\***

- 1. Teacher Talk**—what the teacher says to students. Used during the introduction or closure of a lesson. Teacher may refer to the levels when a spontaneous act of self-responsibility or caring occurs, or conversely, during uncontrolled behavior.
- 2. Modeling**—what the teacher does in the presence of students. It is his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behavior as conveyed to the students.
- 3. Reinforcement**—any act by the teacher that strengthens a level-related attitude or behavior of an individual student. This can be in the form of verbal and nonverbal feedback, rewards and awards, or any reinforcer that enhances student interaction with the levels.
- 4. Reflection**—time students spend thinking about their attitudes and behavior associated with the specific levels.
- 5. Student Sharing**—occurs when students are asked to give their opinions about some aspect of the program. The value of each student's opinion is emphasized. Students have an opportunity to talk to the teacher about how to best encourage self-control, involvement, self-responsibility, and caring. Students can make suggestions on how to modify the program if necessary.
- 6. Specific Strategies**—refers to strategies that increase interaction with a specific level. For example, reciprocal teaching may help students work more effectively at level four.

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