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# Historic Traditions and Future Directions of Research on Teaching and Teacher Education in Physical Education

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## Research on the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Model: Is It Really in the Margins?

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### INTRODUCTION

In these proceedings, readers can find a paper entitled "Living in the Margins of Our Field," in which Don Hellison and Tom Martinek share stories of using physical activity as a vehicle to teach life skills, promote responsibility, and make a difference in the lives of underserved youth. Both describe a conflict between narrow conceptions of research and their personal/professional convictions. For these reasons, Don and Tom have grown accustomed to "living in the margins" of kinesiology/physical education. Both have found it necessary to disengage from traditional, mainstream scholarship to blaze their own trails. Don admits he has spent his entire career in the margins, while Tom describes making a conscious mid-career choice to venture into the hinterlands of academia. Readers should refer to Don and Tom's paper to get these stories first hand. My purpose in the current paper is to discuss the "margins" themselves. I argue that the margins Don and Tom refer to are not fixed in time, but dynamic and shifting. In many ways I believe the margins have been shifting to create a more hospitable climate to continue the work Don and Tom have begun.

The work I refer to relates to the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model Don started developing three decades ago. It is an empowerment-based instructional model that has been developed and refined through extensive ongoing fieldwork. The model promotes personal and social responsibility and life skills that participants can practice in the program and hopefully transfer to other settings. Specific TPSR responsibilities include respect for the rights and feelings of others, effort and participation, self-direction, caring, and leadership. (For a more thorough description of the model, see Hellison, 2003, and Hellison & Martinek, 2006.) Tom has collaborated with Don in this work for more than ten years and has made unique contributions to the model. One major contribution was the addition of a mentoring component to augment the TPSR after-school programs he runs in North Carolina. Tom has also contributed to our understanding of how youth leadership is developed in TPSR programs.

For many years TPSR was considered alternative in its approach to physical education and marginal in its approach to scholarship. However, the model has not just endured but thrived. The model is implemented by countless practitioners throughout the United States and

many other countries (Hollison, 2003). It is used in school-based physical education, extended day programs, and sport camps (Hollison et al., 2000). TPSR has been identified as an exemplary physical education curriculum model and is reviewed in numerous texts written by the top scholars in the field.

Although Don and Tom consider themselves in the margins, they have received some of the highest honors and awards the field has to offer. Currently, these two and their collaborators at a number of universities across the country (including myself) are implementing and studying programs based in TPSR. This network of scholars has published articles on TPSR in peer-reviewed journals such as *Research Quarterly in Exercise and Sport*, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *Quest*, and the *Urban Review*. For each of the past several years, multiple refereed presentations related to TPSR have been delivered through AAHPERD's Research Consortium and AERA's Special Interest Group on physical education. How has all this success come from the humble and much maligned beginnings described by Don and Tom in their paper? It seems to me, TPSR and the scholarship connected to it are not that far out in the margins. I posit TPSR's status inside this field has been enhanced by broader trends from the outside.

### SHIFTING MARGINS

Over the past several decades, the range of methodologies and epistemological stances employed in the social sciences has expanded dramatically. Research methods and alternative forms of scholarship that were on the margins just decades ago are now in the mainstream and routinely published in peer-reviewed journals. These margins continue to be pushed, pulled, and challenged. Against this ever-expanding landscape, the role of the professoriate and institutions of higher learning have also been re-examined. The call for academics to step down from the "ivory tower" and do research that is engaged and socially relevant has grown stronger. Within physical education, the core content and instructional methods have also been reframed. The following sections describe some of these trends and illustrate linkages to the evolution of TPSR research.

#### *Expanding Horizon of Research Methods*

To give readers some historical context, when Don began his work at The Ohio State University the paradigm wars were in full swing. Heated debates were being waged around the value of qualitative methodologies and their place in the social sciences. As Don began working directly with troubled youth, the dominant paradigm of theory-driven, quantitative, positivistic research was not of much use to him. As the paradigm wars were waging, he kept himself busy in the trenches of practice. Elsewhere in these proceedings he comments, "Every step of the way I had to depend on my values, a broad academic background, and a heavy dose of trial and error. . . . In short, I had to make it up." Tom was more comfortable for many years working within the dominant paradigm. It was only after his convictions steered him in another direction that he became dissatisfied with the research skills and tools that had served him so well earlier in his career.

I contend that while Don and Tom moved out to the fringe and kept their heads down, the margins were already shifting. For example, over twenty years ago individuals like Lincoln and Guba (1985) were establishing the place of qualitative research methods in the social sciences. Although their arguments for the rigor and unique contributions of naturalistic forms of inquiry pushed the margins at that time, their stance seems conservative compared to many current approaches. For instance, Denzin and Lincoln (2006) recently edited the third edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* that makes room for such wide-ranging epistemologies as post-modernism, queer theory, feminism, and critical theory. Another indication of how much the margins have shifted is the widespread use and acceptance of mixed methods research (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

Don's approach to scholarship has been criticized for lacking objectivity, comparison groups, discrete measures, and dependent variables. He quips in these proceedings, "Now in my twentieth year in Chicago, I am still teased by colleagues in the field about the dearth of data in my work." It could be argued individuals making such comments are using a dated yardstick to assess what counts as data and what sort of data counts. Although Don has been missing data collection opportunities in the eyes of his critics, support has grown for action research, teacher as researcher, reflective practice, and autoethnography (for examples, see Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Schoen, 1987, 1991). At the same time, colonizing traditions of research have been forced to make room for emancipatory and participatory forms of inquiry that involve participants as co-researchers, activists, and change agents (see Fine et al., 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Sabo Flores, 2008). If effectively framed, scholarship that was considered sloppy in the not-so-distant past can now be touted as cutting edge.

Against this expanding horizon of methodologies and epistemological stances, TPSR research has flourished. As the network of TPSR scholars has expanded, so has the number of questions being asked and the range of methodologies employed. Readers can look to the TPSR literature to find examples of ethnographic (Cutforth & Puckett, 1999), case study (Wright et al., 2004), qualitative interview (Schilling, 2001), correlational (Li et al., 2008), and mixed-method (DeBusk & Hellison, 1989; Hellison & Wright, 2002; Walsh, 2007; Wright et al., 2007) designs.

### *Theory vs. Practice.*

The tension between theory and practice is ongoing in academia. Although practice is fighting uphill, it commands more respect than it did when Don started working directly with troubled youth. Mostly because of outside pressures, many universities have increased their emphasis on outreach, service, and engaged scholarship to demonstrate their social and practical relevance. Consider for example the emergence of designations such as Great Cities Institutions and the current Carnegie Foundation classification for Community Engagement. (For more detail on the engaged scholarship movement, including resources and standards for quality, see [www.scholarshipofengagement.com](http://www.scholarshipofengagement.com).) Although many universities embrace such a mission in theory, it should be noted that until internal reward systems around promotion and tenure are adjusted to support such efforts, many individual faculty members will

be cautious about putting these commitments into practice. With this caveat, it is safe to say the climate in academia is more open in this regard than in the past.

Although scholarship that balances theory and practice is on the rise, the concept is not new. For example, Joseph Schwab (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) developed a framework called practical inquiry in reaction to the theory-driven forms of inquiry he felt were too far removed from practice. The aim of practical inquiry is to gain situational insight and use reflective inquiry, as well as extant knowledge, to improve practice in support of the moral good. In his doctoral dissertation, Nikos Giorgiadis (1992) convincingly applied the practical inquiry framework to describe Don's process of curriculum development, and I subsequently used it in my own TPSR related dissertation (Wright, 2001). Taking a more proactive approach, Don and Tom have proposed a new framework called service-bonded inquiry to describe their particular brand of scholarship (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Martinek, Hellison, & Walsh, 2004).

A trend toward greater respect for program evaluation research has also dovetailed nicely with the evolution of TPSR research. The expanding margins around research methods and the perceived need for academia to address practical and pragmatic issues have elevated the status of program evaluation research. The growing emphasis on evidence-based practice and continuous improvement models in many segments of our society has also provided some boost. Now, academic journals, books, and national organizations are devoted exclusively to the exploration and development of this branch of research methodology. (As a starting point, see [www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org).) Within program evaluation research, one can find a range of purposes, genres, and models (Greene, 2000; Patton, 2002). The usefulness of program evaluation methods in TPSR research has been highlighted in chapters written by Tom (Hellison et al., 2000) and Don (Hellison, 2003) and both have developed courses on the topic in their graduate programs. A growing number of TPSR studies demonstrate the utility of program evaluation designs in addressing some of the questions being asked by TPSR scholars (for examples see Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001; Wright & Burton, 2008; Wright et al., 2007).

### *Changes in Physical Education.*

Since Don and Tom began working in this field, there have been significant shifts in the ways physical education is defined, delivered, and researched. Through much of their careers, the primary emphasis has been the psychomotor learning domain. When Don was exploring the humanistic side of physical education (see Hellison, 1973 and 1978), most physical education teachers were focused primarily (if not exclusively) on promoting physical fitness and sport-related skill development. Beginning in the 1980s the field of physical education made a concerted effort to follow the core academic subject matter disciplines by establishing national standards (NASPE, 2004). These standards address a number of outcomes that balance the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective learning domains. The most recent iteration of the national standards state that a physically educated person "exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings" (NASPE, 2004). Nearly four decades after Don began exploring these elusive concepts in physical education,

the academic and professional leaders in the field have deemed them part of the core content of the discipline. The extent to which these standards are embraced and enacted by rank and file teachers is another issue altogether, but the goals of TPSR clearly have direct relevance to the field at the present time.

There have also been shifts in physical education's instructional methods. There was a time when direct instruction was virtually the only instruction in physical education. Now there exists a wide range of instructional models in physical education with unique goals, assumptions, and instructional strategies (Metzler, 2005). Several of these models are student-centered and align with the current "hol" learning theories such as social constructivism and situated learning (Dyson, Griffin, & Hastie, 2004). Although TPSR predates the application of these theories in physical education pedagogy, it has been identified as an exemplary way of putting them into practice (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998).

### WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

Looking at the evolution of TPSR research against this historical backdrop I see a number of successes, some gaps and ongoing challenges, but mostly opportunity. Regarding successes, I think research on TPSR has been in step with, if not ahead of, the times in many ways. This body of work has been question-driven as opposed to method-driven from its beginnings. Because of this, TPSR research has embraced methodological plurality. As time has passed and the number of TPSR scholars has grown, the range of methods used has increased. New methods are not viewed as supplanting or improving upon others, simply adding to the number of available tools at hand. Although it has been more challenging in the past, this line of research is becoming successful in balancing academic rigor with social (and personal) relevance. TPSR scholars have also been effective in balancing theory and practice.

Working from the foundation that has been laid and using the successful strategies identified above, I recommend the next steps be considered as this body of research moves forward. TPSR researchers would do well to address the notion of fidelity in their work. I think many of our studies would be strengthened if we dealt more explicitly with this notion by developing tools and procedures for addressing it. This will become more important as the number of TPSR scholars grows and their direct connection to the model developer tends to decrease. Especially in studies designed to assess change or improvement associated with participation in TPSR programs, our claims would be strengthened if we made a case for effective implementation with a high degree of fidelity to the model. Following Pettipas et al. (2005), I think TPSR scholars should consider developing and working from a comprehensive framework or logic model to guide this growing body of research. For example, while we have a number of studies that focus on process and immediate impact, we have done relatively little exploration around issues such as site selection or training and support. Such issues will become more important as this work expands.

TPSR scholars have used a wide range of methodologies to date, but there are some questions and research designs yet to be explored. For example, although participatory and community-based research would align beautifully with the intent of TPSR, these approaches

have not been formally utilized. I think TPSR scholars who wish to push the notion of transfer and empowerment in their programs could use these strategies to enhance their practice and generate legitimate scholarship. On the other end of the spectrum, there are quantitative tools and designs that have not been employed but might be helpful in addressing important questions. We have begun developing tools to assess impact and effective implementation and should continue to do so (see Li et al., 2008).

Given TPSR's emphasis on transfer, we could make use of randomized trials to assess impact on discrete variables related to academic, behavioral, and health outcomes. Although such designs would certainly be appealing to funders and department chairs, they could present a slippery slope in terms of maintaining fidelity and the spirit/intent of the model. Such designs are not superior to reflective, practical, and qualitative approaches, but they are well suited to answer relevant questions and should be considered as options. TPSR research generally does not use methods because they are in the mainstream; I believe it is equally important that we do not discount options because they are.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have identified several broad trends impacting the margins Don and Tom reference in their paper. I have demonstrated linkages between these trends and the evolution of TPSR research. However, I do not want to be accused of telling revisionist history or "convenient lies." I have drawn these connections with the benefit of hindsight. Don and Tom were knee-deep in practice as these trends were unfolding. They were not jumping on bandwagons or trying to change the field, just creating and following their own paths one step at a time. Still, they seem to have been adept at recognizing and tapping into momentum from movements outside their home discipline. Perhaps kinesiology/physical education has been making some of the same adjustments, simply at a slower pace. To the extent this is true, one could argue that Don, Tom, and TPSR have not been moving toward the center, but rather are being embraced by margins that are finally moving out to reach them.

In this paper I have also described the present state of TPSR research and shared my opinions about how it might proceed. TPSR scholars are now in a unique position to move this body of research forward. The synergistic effect of the trends identified here and the solid foundation already established present us with great opportunity. I do not expect that we will be walking through a series of open doors, but we should be able to do our work with fewer restrictions and obstacles. However, to take full advantage of this moment, we need to first be aware of it and sensitive to the ongoing changes and shifting margins around us. If we can continue to use existing methodologies and conceptual frameworks when appropriate and stake out our own when necessary, there is no reason we cannot continue doing work that is personally and socially relevant, asking our own questions, and thriving professionally.

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