C·H·A·P·T·E·R

# 3

# Levels of Responsibility

No philosophy, theory, or theorist can possibly capture the idiosyncratic reality of your own experiences as a teacher.

—*S.D. Brookfield*

Although teaching certainly has a "technology," a "here's how" to teach physical activities, it also ought to possess a spirit—a moral compass, a sense of purpose, a passion. TPSR is an attempt to provide that kind of vision so that interested PE and PA professionals can help kids progress in a series of loose, zigzag quasi-sequential steps, or levels. Table 2.1 (see page 21) describes these sequential steps without depicting the zigs and zags.

The primary purpose of TPSR is to help kids take more personal and social responsibility by embedding TPSR ideas and strategies in physical activity programs. The five levels facilitate this process by giving both the program leader (i.e., PE or PA professional) and program participants a loose progression of specific goals to work toward. Because kids develop at their own pace—for example, while some struggle with respecting others, others begin to take on leadership roles quickly—the levels can be individualized by making brief personal plans for individual students as necessary.

TPSR encompasses more than observable behaviors; it also includes attitudes, beliefs, values, and intentions as mentioned earlier. The levels were formulated to

- reflect the core values of TPSR,
- be few in number,
- balance personal and social responsibility,
- indicate a progression (though not a strict one), and
- be provisional.

The term *provisional* in this context means that the values offered in TPSR are not etched in granite. Ultimately, students are free to accept, reject, or modify them. That's the way it must be if they are to take responsibility for themselves. Program leaders also have these options; rejecting a TPSR value simply means that they prefer to base their programs on other values. It does not mean that they have somehow gone astray.

# PROGRESSION OF LEVELS

Having some sense of what to do first, second, and so on, is helpful not only in program planning but also in teaching values to kids. Respect for the rights and feelings of others often is necessary before much else can be addressed. Participation and effort, along with cooperation, are obviously important in a physical activity–based program, so they too need to be addressed early on. Self-direction, which involves working independently and eventually making and achieving personal goals, comes next in the sequence because it is more difficult for many kids to do. Genuinely caring about and helping others is often even more difficult because it involves going beyond one's self-interest and becoming less egocentric. (However, some practitioners point out that helping others is sometimes easier for kids to carry out than self-direction.) Most difficult of all is transferring these values and skills outside the gym, where the environment is often less supportive.

Respect for the rights and feelings of others is perhaps the least each of us can do for others, just as putting effort into the tasks we take on is perhaps the least we can do for ourselves. Becoming self-directed is even more helpful to personal growth, and appropriately caring about and helping others is arguably the most we can do for others (and perhaps ourselves as well).

A less rigid way to present the levels is as a sequence of three categories: beginning, advanced, and most advanced (see table 3.1). The first two levels, respect and effort with cooperation, can be viewed as the beginning stage of responsibility development; both are essential to establishing a positive developmental environment. The next two, self-direction and helping, extend the learning environment by encouraging independent work and helping and leadership roles, thereby freeing the program leader to work with kids who need more help and, at the same time, contributing to a more positive experience for all students.

Transfer outside the gym is the most advanced stage and the primary goal of TPSR (at least in the originator's "grand plan"). It involves exploring the use of the previous four responsibilities in the classroom, at home, with friends, and so on to evaluate whether they work better than what students have been doing. Unfortunately, this goal is often excluded in TPSR programs.

The order of the levels attempts to take into account both a loose teaching–learning progression and a hierarchy of values. When Williamson and Georgiadis (1992) worked with kids from the notorious Cabrini Green Housing Project, they needed to spend the first few weeks exclusively on Level I to deal with issues of violence and abuse. Respect was a minimal value that required immediate attention and therefore needed to be the first step in their instructional plan.

**Table 3.1 Cumulative Levels**

| Category | Levels |
|---|---|
| Beginning | Level I—Respect<br>Level II—Effort |
| Advanced | Level III—Self-direction<br>Level IV—Helping |
| Most advanced | Level V—Outside the gym |

## KID QUOTES

"The levels were good. They let you know if you were acting like a fool or whatever."—High school student

"In your class you could always learn something . . . about how to deal and cope with everyday life and reality. Although your class was PE, I learned a great deal more . . . made me take pride in myself . . . and not be quick to judge other people. (PS If you can find time between push-ups and sit-ups, drop me a letter.)"—Letter from a former high school student

The progression, although loose, is open to question. For example, Shields and Bredemeier (1995) suggested moving caring to Level II and reconceptualizing Level III as group direction. Their aim was to de-emphasize what they perceived to be the egocentrism of the levels (see the next paragraph for a broader interpretation). The Saskatchewan, Canada, provincial curriculum guide inverted the levels so that what the committee thought was the most important level, caring about and helping others, came first.

The appropriate caveat is to use the progression in the way that makes the most sense in individual situations and with individual dispositions, and to be flexible. If it becomes a rigid, dogmatic structure into which all kids must fit, whether they really do or not, or if it is used as a weapon to punish kids when they don't conform, then the intention underlying the levels has been lost. If the levels language doesn't work very well, program leaders shouldn't use it. Some just refer to the levels as "your responsibilities."

Although a balance between personal and social–moral responsibility is reflected in the progression, the primary focus of the levels is on the individual rather than the group taking responsibility, as Shields and Bredemeier pointed out. However, the daily program format (see chapter 4) does address group interaction and decision making in the daily group meeting. This is an excellent example of how incomplete the levels are in fully representing TPSR.

## CUMULATIVE LEVELS

When I was in survival mode as a high school PE teacher in the early 1970s, I began to teach the levels as a cumulative progression, as shown in figure 3.1. Used this way, students learn that each level builds on and encompasses all lower levels. A new level, Level Zero, represents irresponsible attitudes and behaviors.

Level I becomes respect for others' rights and feelings without much participation in the lesson's activities (and without self-direction or caring about others). Students at Level I show minimal social responsibility by not being disruptive but little personal responsibility (assuming participation is a worthwhile and not contraindicated educational experience). Level II describes a participant who participates under supervision, is cooperative, and respects other kids' rights and feelings. Level III represents someone who is respectful, participates, and is

### Level IV, Caring

Students at Level IV, in addition to respecting others, participating, and being self-directed, are motivated to extend their sense of responsibility beyond themselves by cooperating, giving support, showing concern, and helping.

### Level III, Self-Direction

Students at Level III not only show respect and participation but also are able to work without direct supervision. They can identify their own needs and begin to plan and carry out their physical education programs.

### Level II, Participation

Students at Level II not only show at least minimal respect for others but also willingly play, accept challenges, practice motor skills, and train for fitness under the teacher's supervision.

### Level I, Respect

Students at Level I may not participate in daily activities or show much mastery or improvement, but they are able to control their behavior enough that they don't interfere with the other students' right to learn or the teacher's right to teach. They do this without much prompting by the teacher and without constant supervision.

### Level Zero, Irresponsibility

Students who operate at Level Zero make excuses, blame others for their behavior, and deny personal responsibility for what they do or fail to do.

**FIGURE 3.1** The levels presented as a cumulative progression.

Adapted, by permission, from D. Hellison, 1985, *Goals and strategies for teaching physical education* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics), 6-7.

self-directed. Level IV adds helping and leadership to the traits of Levels II and III, and Level V—when it is used—signifies that a student is practicing Levels II, III, and IV outside the gym.

The cumulative approach has the advantage of simplicity, especially with large classes, which is why, with 30 to 40 kids in the urban high schools I worked in, I created it. Students can quickly set goals for themselves, such as to achieve Level III or Level IV, and they can quickly evaluate themselves—for example, by saying, "I was mostly at Level II today." The disadvantage is that during the course of one lesson, students are often at several levels. They may call someone a name but then help someone later; they may be off task at one moment and self-directed the next.

Some teachers have created rules for self-evaluation. For example, students who were at more than one level that class period must evaluate themselves at the lowest of these levels. Using that rule, any student displaying any Level Zero behavior should be self-evaluated as Level Zero for the lesson. Students in one of my programs invented a scoring system of their own to deal with this problem. Each student averaged the levels they perceived themselves to be on

that particular day and came up with a cumulative level (e.g., two and a half) to represent their various attitudes and behaviors for the day.

The cumulative approach has other disadvantages as well. Most cumulative level users completely ignore Level V. Its inclusion does raise issues—students need to provide evidence from outside the gym—but ignoring it minimizes the importance of life lessons in TPSR. The other disadvantage involves the temptation to use the cumulative levels to label students. It's almost too easy—one number will do the trick. But the point of empowerment is for kids to evaluate themselves. Our role is to raise questions when necessary and share our evaluations when appropriate but not to force our judgments on students. They are the only ones who can change themselves (Boyes-Watson, 2001).

# FIVE LEVELS

When I began to teach in small alternative schools with small classes that served "wayward" youth, teaching became less about management and more about building relationships. Later, in extended-day programs, again with small numbers, I was able to continue more relational and less managerial program leadership. In the process, I abandoned the cumulative levels. However, it remains a popular choice for many program leaders, especially PE teachers who have large classes and see many students each day, despite its shortcomings. By necessity, it becomes TPSR Lite.

As I dug deeper into each of the levels and began to appreciate their nuances, it seemed best, at least in my situation, to treat each separately within a loose progression. Some kids have great difficulty working on their own but are competent leaders. Others have major temper issues, but when they manage to be temporarily under control, they are model citizens. And so it goes.

An extended description of each level without the cumulative level structure follows. To minimize the chance of getting lost in these details, it may help to remember that the essence of Levels I and IV is human decency, just as the essence of Levels II and III is holistic self-development, two core values of TPSR.

## Level I

Level I, respect for the rights and feelings of others, is intended to provide a psychologically and physically safe place for students, to respect their right to participate without being hassled, and to confront those who need to deal with issues of self-control and respect. Major issues include the following:

- Verbal and physical abuse, such as name calling and making fun of others
- Intimidation, bullying, and hogging equipment or space
- Inability to control one's temper or to resolve conflicts peacefully
- Disrupting the work and play of others

Kids who struggle at Level I often deny personal responsibility and make excuses or blame others for their own abusive behaviors (e.g., the other guy is the problem). They sometimes acknowledge being abusive or manipulative but argue

## TPSR *in Action*

The power of TPSR hit me during my second semester in my doctoral program when I organized and ran an after-school Youth Sport Club for refugee boys. There were kids from various countries who had come to America at different ages, so I designed the club to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible. There was one young student who did not speak, so we adapted our program to incorporate skits, written words, and body language into the awareness talk, group meeting, and reflection time. I and two undergraduate interns believed that these adaptations could help the young refugees feel comfortable in the Youth Sport Club. During the group meeting in our ninth session, as we were pointing to our list of activities for the day to see what each student liked the best, our silent student suddenly blurted out, "Basketball!!" Instead of waiting for us to point to his favorite activity and nod, he found his voice in our circle. And judging by the shocked look on the interns' faces, they had truly grasped the impact they can have as mentors and the difference our program can make in these kids' lives.

***Meredith Whitley, Michigan State University***

that the behavior is justified in a survival-of-the-fittest world. Interestingly, both affluent and street kids use this kind of explanation on occasion. It is important to listen to students' explanations to better understand and to problem-solve, but it is also important to say, "That's not okay" when abusive attitudes and behaviors are involved, followed by, "What are you going to do to fix this?" (See chapter 6.) Because being adversarial is often a protective device for urban kids, being responsive to the context is an important skill, something called code-switching, when the setting shifts from the street to the school (or the reverse).

Level I has three related components (see table 2.1 on p. 21). The first, self-control, means controlling one's attitude and behavior in a way that respects the rights and feelings of others. I tell kids that it means controlling your temper and your mouth, two of their major problems in my programs. Moreover, the goal is for kids to control themselves without supervision (or policing). Self-control is an external behavior that may not be matched by the internal value of respecting others, a crucial but often overlooked distinction. To learn respect for others, students can start by trying to control selfish behaviors while they struggle to become internally more sensitive to others' feelings and needs, prompted by a climate that supports and expects kids to get along with others and eventually to demonstrate leadership qualities. The relational time, group meeting, and reflection time processes described in chapter 4 facilitate this process.

Self-control means not being controlled by what others say. It does not mean giving away one's rights—for example, as a response to bullying or intimidation. When someone's behavior does not deserve respect, the student may be able to confront the person without creating a scene or to walk away (which sometimes really takes self-control). Self-defense is the last resort in standing up for one's self, but most kids, especially those who are picked on, need basic training. If

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nothing else, training can elevate their confidence enough to help them avoid acting like victims. In many cases, the program leader will not have the training and either needs to enroll in a self-defense or martial arts program, or else be knowledgeable enough to refer individual students to a legitimate neighborhood martial arts program.

Walter Mosley's fictional detective Easy Rawlins offered this advice in the novel *White Butterfly:* "I want you to promise me that you won't never fight unless somebody hits you or tries to hit you. 'Cause you know that some man can control you if he can drive you to fight over some [garbage] he talks" (p. 181). I've seen students attempt to retaliate in the face of a verbal attack, only to be further humiliated. Retaliation encourages more retaliation. Where does it end? All too often these days, it ends in injury or even death.

The second component of Level I, the right to peaceful conflict resolution, encourages negotiation and recognizes that legitimate differences of opinion can sometimes make rights difficult to determine. This component helps students learn the value of resolving conflicts peacefully and democratically (see chapter 6).

The third component specifies that everyone has the right to be included. All participants deserve turns and playing time, whether or not they are skilled and regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference. On teams, they deserve to have the ball or puck passed to them. That, in turn, also requires at least minimal cooperation from everyone, an essential ingredient in group interaction as well as game play.

Like the other levels, Level I is not an either–or, yes–no proposition. A continuum exists between having no respect for others to having full, internalized respect. Students are present all along this continuum, and their attitudes may fluctuate from day to day. Socialization into either elitist or street values becomes a barrier to the development of Level I. In my experience, however, all kids (or almost all) can make progress on this continuum and improve their day-to-day consistency. If progress is not possible, the right to exit the program (or referral to a specialist in cases of genetic or behavioral disorders) should be available. A developmental perspective that views kids as works in progress makes these last-resort courses of action less likely.

Level I can be viewed as the least any of us can do for others, whereas Level IV, caring, can be seen as the most that we can do for others. Empathy, taking the perspective of another, begins at Level I and develops further at Level IV.

## Level II

Just as Level I attempts to counter socially destructive attitudes, values, and behaviors, Level II, effort and cooperation, is intended to help kids positively experience program content, which includes learning to get along with others, some of whom, as one high school student told me, "aren't so easy to get along with." Effort counters self-defeating attitudes and behaviors, such as the passivity of "cruisin' in neutral," learned helplessness (Martinek and Griffith, 1993), and attempts to discredit anything that appears to have meaning (Maddi, Kobasa, and Hoover, 1979). Level II is also intended to help students better understand the role of effort in improving themselves not only in physical activity but also in life (a dash of Level V).

The first component of Level II is self-motivation because the intention of Level II is to help students take responsibility for their own motivation. Embedding small student responsibilities in skill drills and fitness activities, such as moving to the next station on their own when they have finished a task, can assist in the development of self-motivation. Cooperation is also needed so that participants can be self-motivated. Being hassled, made fun of, or criticized by peers severely hampers self-motivation except in the most confident kids.

The next component of Level II is exploring effort and trying out new tasks. This could be called "Try it, you might like it!" Simply going through the motions of participation is a first step past nonparticipation. Gradually, the concepts of training and practice can be introduced, leading to development in such things as motor skills and game play as well as physical health, physical appearance, and strength. Tom Martinek explains effort at Level II by saying, "Try your best and don't give up."

Exploration at Level II also needs to include introduction to a variety of personal definitions of success. By being exposed to the concept that success can have a variety of definitions, students can eventually develop internal self-standards that work for them. Competitive achievement is initially the most popular definition of success as well as the most discouraging for some, but improvement, achievement of personal goals, or even effort can define success. John Nicholls' (1989) theory of task versus ego involvement sheds light on this component of Level II. A task-involved person defines success in terms of participation, improvement, and mastery in a specific task, whereas an ego-involved person defines success as being superior to others. With task involvement, success depends primarily on one's own effort (although there are other factors such as ability and task difficulty), whereas in ego involvement, success depends on how others do. One is under the individual's control; the other is not. Kids need to understand their options and be able to put them into practice.

## Level III

Level III, self-direction, is intended to help students go beyond the lessons of Level II as they learn to take more responsibility for their well-being. Level III celebrates the diversity of student talents, needs, and interests by encouraging reflective choice. Level III promotes a "complementarity of excellences" (Norton, 1976) by treating all responsible, self-direction goals as equal rather than favoring culturally popular activities, one gender over another, or the motor elite. Alternative school PE teacher Mike Reeder reminded me that I had written about this a long time ago (Hellison, 1978). That book, based on a year with a class of high-school kids, described the Level III question I posed to my students: Who can I be? They were given a little homemade booklet of personal options: health (e.g., cardiovascular, weight control), physical safety (e.g., learn to swim, self-defense), appearance (e.g., muscular development, weight control), and achievement (e.g., being competitive, improving skills and performance).

The first step at Level III is to move from the more teacher-directed confines of Level II to on-task independence, such as by working at a station without supervision. The next step is to begin a goal-setting progression that will depend on age, self-motivation, and understanding of the goal-setting process.

## TPSR in Action

"On belay." "Belay's on." "Climbing." "Climb on." These calls can be heard echoing off canyon walls at any rock climbing mecca as skilled climbers make their way up sheer rock faces. But this is not a climbing mecca and these are not skilled climbers. They are 12 year olds (1/4 of whom sport ankle bracelets) from an alternative middle school at an indoor climbing wall. This is the Climbing Club!

Our charge: develop a physical education program for these students. After a few dismal failures we decided to choose content that was "risky" (in their eyes), leveled the playing field (no previous experience), brought them into a new environment (the university), and allowed us to teach more than skill. Indoor climbing was it! The youth practiced responsibility while learning to climb. To make the "levels" more meaningful and relevant to climbing we translated into climbing terms. Level I was the same—respecting the rights and feelings of others. They "tied in" (Level II) by doing such things as persevering through challenging parts of a climb. Such things as properly tying their own knots and climbing with good technique without prompting comprised Level III, "climbing." Level IV, "on belay," included assisting others with knots and harnesses and belaying with a back-up. "Leading out," Level V, meant being able to belay another climber without assistance; thus taking someone's life into their hands.

The year always ended with a day trip to a real climbing mecca where their voices were heard echoing across the rock face.

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Goal-setting principles are a staple of sport psychology (Weinberg and Gould, 1999) and include helping kids set goals that are realistic and under their control. They should also record their progress. One way to start (unless it is too elementary) is by asking them what a goal is and whether they have any personal goals. Some goals might be suggested until they grasp the idea. I've had success asking students at the beginning of class if anyone has either a personal (e.g., attitude, behavior) or sport or fitness goal for the day and then following up in reflection time by asking if anyone actually practiced his or her goal (assuming that at least a few kids chose goals). Eventually, they should be able to make and carry out personal physical activity plans. However, to set, achieve, and evaluate personal goals require self-knowledge (What do I need to improve?) and conceptual knowledge (such as the role of feedback in motor skill improvement). These needs can be integrated into the program using examples and one-liners. Once again, one of my most systematic efforts to implement goal setting was back in 1978 (Hellison, 1978), but I had to employ behavior modification to make it work, which reduced its appeal for me. As I've worked with goal setting over time, my approach has loosened up, making adjustments a lot easier.

Level III also involves working toward an understanding of one's needs, not just one's interests. Setting goals and self-standards and developing one's uniqueness

(e.g., by developing a physical activity specialty) are aspects of this process. Of course, having fun, being with friends, celebrating, and even managing stress are important too. Although most kids are oriented to the present, learning to choose and stay with activities that meet both long- and short-term interests and needs in some balance is one of the hallmarks of mature self-direction.

To accomplish the kind of independence required for true self-direction, kids must develop the courage to look inside themselves. Some of this is sensitive work, especially for adolescents. If they can be convinced to bring perceived weaknesses out into the open, at least to themselves, they can address the need to look good or seek approval by making personal plans to strengthen those weak points. Many students would feel better about themselves if they confronted their issues and made a plan to resolve them. One way to address these issues is self-acceptance—accepting limitations that make them less popular or less part of the mainstream while emphasizing being themselves and developing their unique talents. Another way is self-image actualizing (Lyon, 1971), which involves making and carrying out a plan to improve skills, game play, strength, endurance, appearance, or whatever is necessary to feel better about themselves.

Among the most difficult aspects of striving against external forces (deCharms, 1976) is being able to stand up for personal rights. Creating a truly personal plan derived from one's own needs and interests is no easy task for kids who need peer approval. The importance of making a plan that is truly one's own can be addressed in awareness talks, group meetings, or relational time. Having identified their needs as something distinct from the opinions of others, students also need to learn how to stand up for their independence and protect themselves. A plan to do so may take the form of learning how to be appropriately assertive and practicing such assertiveness in the physical activity setting (Banks and Smith-Fee, 1989) or even learning self-defense skills as suggested earlier. Outward Bound creator Kurt Hahn often talked about making the brave gentle and the gentle brave (Richards, 1982). From an empowerment perspective, the goal would not be to "make" kids anything but instead to assist them in taking charge of these goals to the extent that they are perceived to be relevant (unless their actions threaten to harm others). The levels attempt to meet these needs, especially Levels I, III, and IV.

Questions have been raised about whether Level III is relevant for children. My experience with primary and elementary school teachers is that although some of the ideas described here are advanced, children can often do more than we expect. Such things as goal setting may be relevant if adjusted for age—for example, by introducing the idea or giving some choices with reflection afterward. However, program leaders who work with young kids have a better idea than I do of what they can handle. My only suggestion is to experiment a bit before dismissing this level.

## Level IV

Level IV, like Level III (and all levels), needs to be adjusted for age. Mature Level IV students possess the interpersonal skills of sensitivity and responsiveness to act out of caring and compassion for others (a process started at Level I), con-

tribute to their community, and do so without expectations of extrinsic rewards. Working at Level IV is easier said than done. It requires the following:

- Interpersonal relations skills of listening and responding without being judgmental or dogmatic
- An ability to help without being arrogant
- An understanding of the importance of helping only when the other person wants the help
- Not becoming a rescuer
- An ability to help others resolve differences peacefully and democratically

Students at Level IV recognize that others have needs and feelings just as they do, and they learn to see and feel things from the viewpoints of others. This is a very tall order for those of us who do this work, let alone for kids! A first step that reflects the spirit of Level IV might be to ask them to contribute however they can to everyone having a positive experience during the program. The complexity of helping others and taking on leadership roles convinced Tom Martinek (Martinek and Hellison, 2009) to develop and employ a four-stage youth leadership development process, beginning with learning to take responsibility and progressing to leadership awareness, cross-age leadership, and self-actualized leadership beyond the gym.

Despite the emphasis on sensitivity and compassion in Level IV, interpreting it as being soft would be a mistake. Level IV requires inner strength—the courage to resist peer pressure and an egocentric agenda, to step up as a leader, to represent what's right for the group. Leadership requires not only the skills and qualities mentioned earlier but also the ability to give to others without losing sight of one's own individual needs and interests. It requires confidence but not arrogance as well as the ability to strive against external forces (deCharms, 1976) when necessary, including the strength to stand up for TPSR leadership principles without being defensive or overbearing.

Interpersonal skills aside, Level IV may be a difficult achievement for young people these days. Thanks to the electronic media, celebrities have kids' attention more than ever before. One teacher who includes a hero unit in her curriculum has said that it is becoming harder to teach the unit because kids can't distinguish between a hero and a celebrity (Lickona, 1991). From a Level IV perspective, a hero is someone who shows extraordinary courage and compassion in contributing to society. Perhaps the late Kirby Puckett, who played for the Minnesota Twins (in a subpar indoor stadium) his entire career, declined offers of more money from other teams, and acknowledged that winning the Branch Rickey Award for community service meant more to him than anything he had done in baseball, clarifies the difference between celebrity and hero. Many other well-known athletes have contributed to society not by their physical performance but by doing genuinely good deeds. The work of Drew Brees in New Orleans is a more up-to-date example of a hero who also happens to be a great football player. (I have a file stuffed with such examples from *Sports Illustrated* and other sources.)

Whether Level IV really extends beyond self-interest in its broadest sense is a matter of debate. Not at issue, however, is the importance of being a contributing member of the community and society. William James argued that kids need to find

"a moral equivalent to war" as their sense of purpose (Richards, 1982, p. 24). Kurt Hahn (Richards, 1982) and others (notably, Berman, 1990) have suggested offering students opportunities to make social contributions as this moral equivalent.

Level I and Level IV attempt to counter ego- and ethnocentrism, the me-first and us-first orientation that inspires all the "isms"—racism, sexism, motor elitism, handicappism, and ageism (Siedentop, 1980). Level I teaches doing no harm and being at least minimally cooperative; Level IV teaches making a positive contribution. The emphasis of Level IV on contributing to the well-being of others balances the self-centered goals often chosen in Level III (although some kids do choose social goals).

## Level V

Level V refers to exploring the application of the four other levels outside the program—on the playground, in the classroom, at home, on the street. A wall chart of cumulative levels developed by Michigan elementary PE teacher Linda Masser (1990) addressed the transfer issue by showing students how the cumulative levels might apply to various settings in their lives (see figure 3.2).

If kids are to become responsible for their own well-being as well as that of others, they need to be the ones to decide whether and in what situations to use the levels. This is the provisional caveat introduced in chapter 2. Level V makes students aware of the possibility of transfer and encourages them to discuss and experiment with it. For example, Gene Washington, a basketball player who assisted me in an inner-city program, told the kids that self-direction helps improve both their individual basketball skills and their schoolwork.

Level V is the place to discuss the reality of life outside the gym. Within the program, the levels contribute to a climate of respect, effort, autonomy, and community, but these qualities are not often valued on the street and sometimes not at home or in school (especially in the halls, in the lunchroom, and on the playground). It is one thing to work on TPSR principles in a safe setting where everyone is respected and has a say, but what if the group is not respectful or is downright out of control? What if the adult leader or leaders (e.g., teachers, coaches) do not support making decisions or are abusive adults (or just one adult who has authority)? What if peers ridicule someone's efforts because others are more skilled or because the group doesn't value doing homework, or just because someone doesn't go along with the crowd?

Level V can't solve these problems, but strategies suggested in Levels I and III can help. Level I can, for example, provide skills and guidance so that weaker kids can stand up for their rights on the playground. However, to address Level V, program leaders can facilitate brief discussions of these issues during awareness talks, group meetings, and relational time, thereby giving kids a chance to think about the relevance of the levels for their lives outside the gym. What small steps would it take to begin to put them into practice? Is it worth the effort? The students can also volunteer examples, perhaps about how they took responsibility in specific situations.

Level V ultimately means being a role model for others. This, in fact, is the essence of Level V! Charles Barkley caused quite a stir several years ago when he said that professional athletes are not role models. Sorry, Sir Charles, but they

## What's Your Level?

### Level 0: Irresponsibility

**Home:** Blaming brothers or sisters for problems
**Playground:** Calling other students names
**Classroom:** Talking to friends when teacher is giving instructions
**Physical education:** Pushing and shoving others when selecting equipment

### Level 1: Self-Control

**Home:** Keeping self from hitting brother even though really mad at him
**Playground:** Standing and watching others play
**Classroom:** Waiting until appropriate time to talk with friends
**Physical education:** Practicing but not all the time

### Level 2: Involvement

**Home:** Helping to clean up supper dishes
**Playground:** Playing with others
**Classroom:** Listening and doing class work
**Physical education:** Trying new things without complaining and saying I can't

### Level 3: Self-Responsibility

**Home:** Cleaning room without being asked
**Playground:** Returning equipment during recess
**Classroom:** Doing a science project not as part of an assignment
**Physical education:** Undertaking to learn a new skill through resources outside the physical education class

### Level 4: Caring

**Home:** Helping take care of a pet or younger child
**Playground:** Asking others (not just friends) to join in play
**Classroom:** Helping another student with a math problem
**Physical education:** Willingly working with anyone in the class

**FIGURE 3.2** Linda Masser's application of the four cumulative levels.

Adapted, by permission, from L. Masser, 1990, "Teaching for affective learning in physical education," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance* 61: 19.

are widely admired and looked up to by kids, whether you think they should be or not. And some are exemplary role models—like David Robinson for his good works in building a unique school, which he refused to allow being called the David Robinson Academy (ho hum, just another humble athlete!), and former NBA all-star Dave Bing for taking on the exceedingly difficult job of being Detroit's mayor. Better yet, program leaders can tell kids that rather than looking for role models, they should be role models themselves. TPSR is one way to give them the tools to do that.

## LEVEL MODIFICATIONS

The five levels—respect, participation, self-direction, caring, and transfer outside the program—can be represented in a variety of ways. Missy Parker's fourth-grade Navajo students called Level II "work and try" and Level III "just do it." In a team sport program, the following cumulative level substitutions were used (Hellison and Georgiadis, 1992):

- 0 = Cut from the team
- I = On the bench (no problems but not participating)
- II = Player (under supervision)
- III = Self-coach
- IV = Coach
- V = Outside the gym

Levels can be deleted, rearranged, split apart, or supplemented. Darin Kennedy, a primary school PE teacher in Falconer, New York, uses color-coded levels including yellow for following the Golden Rule and red for having "heart." Curt Hinson (1997; 2001) used three levels in adapting TPSR for recess and playground (see p. 142 in chapter 9).

The Saskatchewan provincial curriculum inverted the levels so that caring and helping was Level I. In basketball I changed Level II, effort, to teamwork, because the kids already showed effort but weren't interested in passing the ball or otherwise cooperating.

Whether other approaches similar to the TPSR levels or based on other values are useful tools in PE and PA professionals' bag of tricks are judgments that need to be based on individual experiences, values, and beliefs. That's what it means to be a professional. John Hichwa's wonderful book on middle school physical education, *Right Fielders Are People Too* (1998), described his three Rs for teaching prosocial behavior:

1. Respect (e.g., consideration of others)
2. Responsibility (e.g., obligation and accountability)
3. Resourcefulness (e.g., having the inner strength to accomplish something)

Hichwa posts the three Rs and discusses them every day. In addition, they are an integral part of his daily lesson plan. For example, two small groups of students play games by themselves, taking responsibility for working independently, calling their own fouls, and including everyone. This frees John up to work more relationally with a third small group, "giving individualized instruction and adding variation to the activity" (p. 41). Such small-group interaction allows him to personalize his teaching, be more relational, and motivate his students. John doesn't use the levels and, in my opinion, shouldn't. What he does works for him and his students and reflects the core values of TPSR (see chapter 2).

The guiding principles for using the levels or some other approach effectively are to make sure that they make sense in the setting in which they are used and that they reflect the program leader's purpose and vision for kids.

# LEVELS AND EMPOWERMENT

The levels provide specific targets for student empowerment. Levels II and III are aimed at having students gradually take responsibility for their own well-being, whereas Levels I and IV focus on their contributions to the well-being of others. Level V addresses exploring and making decisions about transfer.

The levels will remain words on a wall chart unless relationships with kids conducive to teaching responsibility are developed. If kids feel that their strengths as well as what needs work are recognized, if they are treated as individuals, and if they are empowered to share their views and make decisions in line with the responsibility they are willing to take, a number of things begin to happen. They are introduced to Level I by being treated with respect and to Level IV by being treated with care, sensitivity, and responsiveness. When program leaders recognize kids' potential for empowerment and hold them accountable, most kids, some perhaps reluctantly, begin to accept the idea of taking responsibility. And by honoring their strengths and individuality, program leaders lay the foundation for Levels II and III.

## TAKE-AWAYS

Here are some key points from this chapter that you might consider taking with you:

- The levels provide students with specific targets for taking responsibility.
- The levels are intended as a loose progression, both for planning the program and for progressive steps the kids can take.
- Cumulative levels can be helpful to those with large groups because they simplify a complex process. They often omit transfer, however, an especially serious flaw for an approach that aspires to teach life skills and values.
- Empowerment must be linked to the levels so that students evaluate themselves and begin to take responsibility for their own well-being and for contributing to the well-being of others.
- As difficult as this is, the levels should not be reduced to behaviors. They also represent the students' inside selves—their values, intentions, motives, and attitudes.
- The levels are social constructions, which simply means that they can be modified in all kinds of ways as long as the underlying principles of TPSR are honored, including the concept that less is more.

C·H·A·P·T·E·R

# 4

# Daily Program Format

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

*—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Day-to-day consistency in the use of the program leader's responsibilities (i.e., program themes) and levels of responsibility is an essential feature of the TPSR framework. Consistency is crucial, because kids' understanding and exploration of these ideas grows slowly and unevenly, often with considerable backsliding.

One way to achieve some consistency in using TPSR is to adopt the TPSR daily program format introduced in chapter 2, although as Emerson's quote suggests, this format is not the only way. The format facilitates the integration of TPSR by providing a generic plan, with specifics to be filled in by the program leader, including the age and maturity level of the kids (while keeping in mind that children can often do more than we expect).

Initially, I created the daily program format to hold myself accountable for putting my then-new ideas into practice. Before adopting this format, putting TPSR into practice was a hit-and-miss affair. The format consists of five parts:

- **Relational time** either before or after the lesson or whenever possible
- An **awareness talk** to formally open the session and ensure that the participants understand the true purpose of the program (i.e., taking responsibility)
- The **physical activity plan** with TPSR woven into the physical activities
- A **group meeting** near the end of class so that students can express their opinions about the day's activities and processes and how to make improvements
- A **self-reflection time** to close the class so that students can evaluate how personally and socially responsible they were that day

The daily program format addresses the five program leader responsibilities (i.e., program themes) described in chapter 2:

- To empower kids (or share power with them)
- To help kids self-reflect (e.g., How did you spend your time in the program today? Did you help anyone? Hurt anyone? Waste the time you had?)

- To embed TPSR principles in the physical activities (Did you learn anything about yourself while practicing and playing volleyball?)
- To help kids understand that what they are learning in the gym can transfer to other parts of their lives
- To prioritize relationships with the kids in all aspects of the program

Empowerment is encouraged by having students actively participate in the awareness talk, especially by leading the discussion. Empowerment is also addressed in the physical activity plan whenever students are able to make choices or provide some form of leadership such as coaching a team. Empowerment is also central to participation in the group meeting and reflection time, because kids are asked to share their own evaluations of both the program (group meeting) and themselves (reflection time).

Self-reflection is built into self-reflection time, whereas the group meeting involves group reflection. Embedding TPSR with the activities is a major purpose of the activity plan (or lesson).

Relational time sets aside a specific time for developing relationships and having brief meetings with kids, although a relational culture needs to be nurtured so that relational moments occur across the program.

Transfer from the program to life needs to be built into relational time, the group meeting, and reflection time in a gradual step-by-step process as relationships with the kids develop and they grasp a broader understanding of taking responsibility (i.e., that it includes life outside the program). Relational time should eventually include questions about kids' lives outside of physical activity involvement (e.g., their work in school). Reflection time should evolve to the point that kids can be asked specific outside-the-gym questions such as how their respect for others was in school or at home since the last meeting. Goals can be set as well—for example, giving them the option to choose a personal (nonsport) goal such as, in my kids' case, self-control (a huge issue) or a physical activity goal.

## RELATIONAL TIME

Because the relationship with kids is crucial to making TPSR work, connecting one on one is essential. The challenge for those with large classes or groups is doing so with little time. However, regardless of the group size, the effort must be made to convey to each student that he or she

- has strengths as well as things that need work,
- is a unique individual,
- has a voice that matters, and
- has the capacity to make decisions.

The daily program format itself helps to reinforce these qualities—for example, when kids are given opportunities to conduct awareness talks, express opinions in group meetings, and evaluate themselves in reflection time—but nothing substitutes for a quality one-on-one exchange with a caring adult, even if it is brief.

## TPSR in Action

Dayson never said anything. Even when I asked his closest peers about it, they just said, "Don't worry about it, Coach. He don't talk to no one." What Dayson did was show up. For two years in a twice-a-week program he showed the most consistent attendance of over 100 kids. He worked harder than most but at times seemed disinterested and was very difficult to engage in a group or one on one.

The Team Support advisory program at the Boston English High School uses a somewhat typical TPSR format in which after the activity we sit in a circle and reflect. But during what we call the cool-down in this particular group we adopted something like a Quaker meeting approach in which each person in the circle is afforded a space to say something he is moved by. On the last day Dayson stunned everyone. He opened up about how the program leaders had helped him, what his teammates meant to him, and he even talked about some of his plans for the future!

This episode helped it hit home that the nature of this sort of work is long term. And it reminded us how exhilarating it was to witness a young person beginning to find his voice, especially since we still have another year to work with him before he graduates.

***John McCarthy, Institute for Athletic Coach Education, Boston University***

Before or after class, a quick sentence or exchange can begin to communicate these things. Raths, Harmin, and Simon (1966) called this a one-legged conference, meaning a quick exchange in passing—"Hey, Deborah, got a new 'do'?" or "Jeremy, remember to pass the ball today, okay?" Conducting relational time after class permits immediate follow-up on individual successes and problems that day.

It is often convenient to conduct relational time when the kids first come in the gym. Some may be playing with equipment that has been set out while others mill around or carry on conversations. This can also be a time to take roll if that is necessary. Elementary school PE teachers often have little time available before or after class, so they need to make brief one-on-one connections at other times, such as during class, at lunchtime, in the halls, or on the playground. Relational time can also be conducted during a scheduled Level III time for all students, when they are working independently at stations, playing games, or working on their personal goals and plans. Even if only five of these contacts are made in a day, not counting kids chronically in trouble, they mount up and make a difference.

In large classes or groups, program leaders should try to keep track of whom they've already talked with so that, in the long run, no one is left out. One year when I took attendance by memory, I found that I never remembered whether this one kid was there or not. So I tried some relational time with him, and, no surprise, he saw right through my feeble effort and walked away in disgust—it was too little too late.

**KID QUOTES**

"The program teaches you the main points about life."—Eighth-grader

"I know I have responsibility as a person and you helped me find it."—Seventh-grader

## Four Goals of Brief Relational Encounters

In such brief encounters, what can be accomplished? If relational time is to truly reflect TPSR and its core values, it must be about putting kids first—not only what they do (both good and not so good) but also how they feel and their attitudes toward others, including the program leader, as well as toward the program, school, perhaps the police, and other aspects of their lives. Of course, it is possible to get only a glimpse of a few of these things with a few kids in one brief relational encounter, but these snapshots add up and help to guide the relational process. This is a multifaceted undertaking, but the four "recognize and respect" relational goals (recognizing strengths, individuality, voice, and decision-making ability) provide more specific guidance.

### *Recognizing Strengths*

Program leaders can recognize and show respect for students' strengths; mention their talents (especially if these are not generally acknowledged); or comment on recent efforts, improvements, or achievements. Recognizing kids who help to make the gym a more positive place and demonstrate leadership can be especially important. Program leaders should pay attention to outside-the-gym improvements, such as academic progress, positive reports from teachers or parents, or (for kids who tend to get into trouble with the authorities) not getting suspended from school recently.

### *Recognizing Individuality*

Program leaders can recognize and show respect for individuality by paying attention to individual kids in some positive way—for example, by checking in and commenting on a facial expression (smile or grimace) or a new item of clothing. Of course, commenting on their individual strengths, efforts, improvements, and achievements as suggested earlier also recognizes individuality.

### *Recognizing Voice*

To recognize and show respect for students' voice, program leaders can ask authentic open-ended questions (not questions that require a certain answer) and show genuine interest in their answers, comments, and questions. They may have a solution to a problem that has come up in the group meeting or during activity time, whether or not they are involved in the problem (thereby promoting leadership). Students may have thoughts about how to help certain kids manage their anger, how to stop arguments in games, how to improve the

group's motivation, or how to get leaders to step up. If a student appears to be abusing or causing problems with others (Level I) or is slacking off (Level II), the program leader can identify the issue but allow the student to tell his or her side of the story and, more important, suggest ways to improve or fix the problem (e.g., a genuine apology sometimes works wonders). Adults too often jump in right away and try to solve the problem for the kids before they have a chance to share their ideas. (I plead guilty, especially in my early years.)

### *Recognizing Decision-Making Ability*

Recognizing and showing respect for students' capacity to make decisions can be done by noticing choices they have made and roles they've taken on, such as player-coach or group leader, and asking them how these choices and roles worked for them. Some may have helpful opinions about solving class problems, as suggested earlier, and those who seem ready can be invited to take on a Level III or IV task that day or in the near future.

## Counseling

In previous editions of this book, the relational component of the daily program format was called counseling time, which suggested that we might be therapists in disguise. A TV interviewer once accused me of being a PE shrink trying to get inside kids' heads. I replied that I was just trying to get kids inside their own heads. I like Noddings' (1992) claim that all decent adults should be prepared to educate kids morally, that it is a human responsibility. Alan Tom agreed when he described teaching as a moral craft (1984). I also like this dictum from Quincy Howe (1991): "Social workers can address part of the job, but a teacher can address the entire job" (p. 3). Of course, this responsibility holds true only to a point; professional help must sometimes be sought. If a student's problem runs deep or seems to require specialized skills, a referral is the appropriate choice. So with the support of these expert opinions and a caveat or two, counseling time continues to be an aspect of TPSR, albeit with a "softer" name.

# AWARENESS TALK

Relational time formally opens the program, although a shoot-around, icebreaker, or other fun activity might set a positive tone prior to holding a brief awareness talk. The students can stand or sit, whatever works best, as they are reminded that this program is based on taking responsibility. Gradually, the levels of responsibility can be taught, although with older kids (and in some cases with all kids) just informing them of their responsibilities without using the concept of levels works better. In most situations this needs to be done very gradually, starting with respect or respect and effort, and eventually adding self-direction and helping, and even later including transfer outside the gym. The key modifier is *gradually,* a guideline often ignored.

The awareness talk must be brief. A couple of quality minutes of talk are worth far more than blabbering on and on. Program leaders who are long-winded, a characteristic common among rookies, often obscure their message in a torrent

of words. Early in my career, I got a wake-up call from one of my students, who wrote, "You talk too much" on an anonymous evaluation form. When students start rolling their eyes or are not paying attention, the awareness talk is over! In professional preparation, I've sometimes invoked the 10-word rule (which I made up), meaning, you've got 10 words to explain the levels. Of course, it may take more than 10 words, but the rule makes the point about brevity.

Another good rule of thumb for the awareness talk (as well as relational time and the group meeting) is to monitor the questions-to-answers ratio. Both rookies and veteran program leaders too often tell rather than ask. Telling is important sometimes, but without genuine questions (versus answers thinly disguised as questions), such interactions are disempowering.

Following the initial talk, the awareness talk is an opportunity to remind kids about their responsibilities that day. The most important part of the awareness talk, however, is to have students volunteer to tell everyone what the levels (or responsibilities) are in their own words, or, said more simply, what this program is about. If allowed to improvise, a participant might offer something like "We all gotta get along" or "Don't act the fool." My response to these kinds of comments might be, "Good idea for when we start the activity, which is right now!" (Less is more! And getting to the activity quickly is important.) As this example shows, students need not describe the levels or mimic the program leader, but whatever they say should indicate a grasp of what TPSR is about in at least a general way. Kids do come up with some doozies. One third-grader said this, without his program leader having ever uttered these words: "This class is about making the world a better place to be!" An inner-city seventh-grader surprised his teacher even more by saying, "It's having a philosophy!" Who knew?

Increasing awareness was the first strategy I used to put the levels into practice. I quickly learned that, in most cases, awareness was insufficient to promote action, but it did provide a rationale for taking responsibility, especially when I curtailed my long-windedness. These simple suggestions came out of my experience:

- Post the levels on the gym wall for easy reference. This is the all-too-familiar wall chart, but it does help.
- Relate their responsibilities to current experiences in the program.
- Follow up, follow up, follow up!
- Develop one-liners (or two-liners) to explain the essence of the levels. Here are some examples of awareness talk one-liners:
  - "The only person you really get to change is yourself" (Boyes-Watson, 2001, p. 18; relevant for all levels, especially Level I).
  - "If one person is out of balance, so too is the community" (Boyes-Watson, 2001, p. 19; Levels I and IV).
  - "If people can get to you with their talk, they can control you" (Level I).
  - "To get better, you have to pay the price" (Level II).
  - "You're about to spend 40 (or whatever) minutes of your life in here; what are you going to do (or what did you do) with that time?" (Levels II and III).
  - "It's your body and your life" (Levels II and III).

- "You can choose what your friends are doing or make up your own mind" (Level III).
- "Good idea, but can you say it more positively?" (Level IV).
- "Let's see if we can help everybody walk out of here today feeling that they had a positive experience" (Level IV).
- To kids whose lives revolve around basketball and dreams of the NBA: "When the air goes out of the ball, what are you going to do?" (Level V).
- "How could you use the levels in your classrooms? At home? On the playground?" (Level V).

Bill White, a Portland, Oregon, high school teacher who, in the early 1970s, was the first professional to try to implement TPSR (and his work is still one of the best!), encouraged Level V awareness in his program by means of a piece of paper taped to the wall. On the paper he had drawn a line with a zero at one end and a 70 at the other, representing ages in the life span. He drew an X on the line to represent the approximate age of his students (about 14), and on the bottom Bill had printed: "It's your trip." Bill referred to this drawing often in his awareness talks to remind his students that they had not gone far in their life trip and that the levels might serve as handy guides from this point onward.

One way to deepen students' awareness of Level I is to ask them to help devise respect rules for the class. How do they want to be treated? How should everyone be treated? Does name calling matter? Should everyone on a team have to be involved during a game? Should mean faces be allowed during a conflict? How would you like to be treated? Students can brainstorm about these issues and perhaps come up with some respect rules they can all agree on. The point is to have them think about the respect issue and give their input. To reduce the hassle of separate respect rules for different classes, Lickona (1991) suggested one set of respect rules for all programs developed from students' input in each of the classes.

Nick Compagnone (1995) extended the awareness talk into the lesson by using finger signals. When one or more students started to show disrespect, he held up one finger as a reminder to get under control. Extending this approach, one could use two fingers to signal being off task, three fingers to remind students to use their independent time more wisely, and four fingers to remind them to be more positive when helping someone.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PLAN

Except on special occasions or during emergencies, the majority of program time is spent on the physical activity plan. The purpose of the physical activity plan is to make TPSR ideas come alive by embedding them in the physical activity content. Integration of TPSR with specific physical activities often means changing long-standing patterns of teaching physical activities. Integrating the kids' responsibilities into the lesson will probably make teaching more difficult at first, but when they start to work independently and provide leadership for other students, it frees the program leader to step back, give support, and deal with kids who haven't understood or bought into TPSR yet.

Awareness talk reminders can also be woven into the activity lesson. Bill White was a master at this. He once asked a student to demonstrate the bench press, and when the student had difficulty executing a repetition, several boys laughed. One, however, quietly went over and moved the pin so the demonstrator could complete a repetition. Without missing a beat, Bill asked his students what cumulative level the laughers were at. "Zero," they mumbled. And at what level was the boy who moved the pin? "Four," several said in unison.

Although empowerment is a fundamental theme of TPSR, direct instruction can be useful, particularly while students are still learning to take on some responsibilities in the program. For example, respect for the rights of others involves, among other things, including everyone in the activities. Because the kids with better skills generally get the ball or puck more in team sports, thereby strengthening their skills while ignoring the less skilled, a temporary rule in basketball might be that everyone must handle the basketball on offense before a shot can be taken, or in volleyball that at least two people need to touch the ball before it is sent over the net. The number can be negotiated and will vary with different sports and skill levels. These tactics teach kids not only to include others but also to play as a team, such as getting open to receive a pass or bump-set-hit.

Individual empowerment can be integrated into the lessons in many ways, some simple and some more complex. In all cases kids need to be empowered gradually while applying the accordion principle as needed to enlarge or reduce the extent of choice in relation to their interests and ability to handle it. For example, students can be asked to do as many push-ups as they can instead of performing a set number, a traditional task that does not recognize an individual's developmental needs.

Group empowerment can be included in the activity by calling timeouts during a breakdown in team play or a dispute of some sort to help the group deal with the problem. Lost activity time can be recouped once students begin to put these lessons into practice themselves. For example, they can be taught to call timeouts during games for brief team huddles to deal with problems.

These and many more awareness, direct instruction, individual empowerment, and group empowerment strategies that program leaders have used are described in more detail in chapter 5.

## GROUP MEETING

As Clark Power (2002) observed, "We have little experience deliberating in common about the rules and policies that affect our daily lives, and often less experience deliberating about the common good" (p. 134). The group meeting gives students practice in these democratic values and skills.

Near the end of the period, a group meeting is held. The purpose of the group meeting is to give kids the opportunity to express their views about the day's lesson, how their peers as a whole did, and perhaps even how effective the adult leadership was. They can also raise issues and suggest solutions, or the program leader can suggest a solution and ask for advice. Problems that students have with one another can be addressed during relational time or, if handled carefully, during group meetings. I emphasize repeatedly that blaming others is not appropriate for group meetings or in the program, that instead kids need to

express how they felt and how what others did affected them. Then the issue can be discussed, and a separate conversation with those implicated can be held. Sometimes humor works. In response to a complaint from a boy about two girls trying to play basketball with him, Nikos Georgiadis responded: "I don't see two girls; I see two basketball players."

If time is limited, it may not be possible to squeeze in many of these group meeting strategies. One possibility is to ask for one or two volunteers to say what they liked or disliked about the class that day, followed by a show of hands of those who agree. In that way at least all students have a chance to share their points of view, and the program leader gets some feedback from the group.

## Meeting Purpose

An important purpose of group meetings is to give students practice in the group decision-making process and opportunities to experience the feeling that they can make a difference through a group process. Decision-making abilities improve gradually with practice, so students become more competent at making group decisions, evaluating the program, and coming up with ideas for improvement. When I first asked students how I could improve, they didn't understand the question! But one time I actually got a compliment, and a special one at that: "You don't need to improve because you're improved enough!"

All group meeting strategies could be new to the kids, depending on how adults in their lives treat them. But they probably have the least experience in formally evaluating adults in their lives, especially if the person they are evaluating is requesting the evaluation. As students learn that their input is wanted and that their comments won't be judged as right or wrong, trust will gradually build, and they will feel more comfortable in sharing their true feelings and opinions.

Group meeting strategies primarily focus on Levels I and IV—Level I because the problems addressed usually involve Level I respect issues, such as disruption, conflict, and abuse; and Level IV because the whole process can be viewed as a contribution or service to the group, the program, and the program leader. As one self-centered student complained, "Why do I have to do this? It's not my problem." The process demands a caring perspective, caring about the program and about others in the program. But it is also self-serving, and this point is not lost on kids. If they want things their way, they need to lobby for their interests. This process, often contentious, can lead to their seeing someone else's side of an issue and becoming more empathic, even if only slightly.

## Meeting Guidelines

It often helps to have guidelines for participating in group meetings. Although other responsibilities are involved, guidelines are mostly based on respect issues:

- No disrespect in the group—for example, no ganging up on (Meadows, 1992) or blaming others
- Inclusion of everyone in the discussion
- Peaceful resolution of conflicts

After experiencing TPSR for a while, participants ought to have the opportunity to comment on the levels—to suggest modifications, additions, and subtractions. Remember, TPSR ideas are provisional; program leaders as well as kids need to be empowered to think about their validity and applicability and whether having more people who believe in these ideas could influence systemic change in schools and the community, if only by planting seeds. Of course, tradition and experience often intrude when students analyze the levels, which is why these discussions and students' evaluations should come after they have had some experience in TPSR.

For example, one time a group of students decided they wanted to play trash-talk, in-your-face basketball. This decision ignored respecting others' rights and feelings, but we talked about it and voted. Trash talk won by a couple of votes. I agreed that during the next lesson they could split into groups and play basketball their way, but by the end of the session, the groups had called timeout on their own and decided to reinstate Level I. Such a happy conclusion was by no means assured. If they had not made that decision, I would have had to go back to the drawing board. When students are given the opportunity to make decisions that matter, the decisions they make may not support TPSR. This possibility is part of the process. The progression to full decision making, including conflicts between program goals and student goals, is a rocky road full of potholes and barriers and, it must be said, often not achieved. I typically struggle with how much I can push without losing my students (the "what can I get away with" question).

## Other Meeting Options

Although Level V, transfer of behaviors outside the gym, is mostly the province of reflection time and relational time, sometimes things come up in the group meeting. The "big picture" questions will be infrequent unless they are raised by an adult, but more immediate issues often pop up, such as an upcoming exam that has a strong bearing on whether students will move on to the next grade (in these test-oriented times), a new dress code, a squabble in the lunchroom, or in-school suspensions. These things are often big deals to kids and need to be acknowledged.

In some programs, teachers use workbooks or journals to give students the opportunity to evaluate the class as well as themselves. Writing in private sometimes elicits opinions that students are reluctant to express with their peers. In our martial arts programs, participants comment on the class, evaluate their responsibilities, and keep track of their fitness and skill progress in a workbook. One classroom teacher has her charges keep journals about class, but if they don't want her to read a particular entry, they can staple the page shut.

Occasionally, when something happens that requires the immediate attention of the whole class, a group meeting can be held on the spot. In most cases, however, holding a group meeting just before reflection time at the end of class is better for sharing perceptions of the class that day.

# REFLECTION TIME

Refection time follows the group meeting, usually as a continuation of the group meeting but with the emphasis shifted from program evaluation to self-evaluation. Whereas the group meeting empowers students to evaluate the program, reflec-

tion time is designed so that the kids can reflect on and evaluate themselves—that is, how well they respected others' rights and feelings and cooperated with others, the extent of their effort and self-motivation in class activities, their self-direction if they were given the opportunity, their contribution to others and to making the class a positive experience for everyone, and whether they put some of these things into practice outside the program.

## Self-Evaluation Methods

A variety of self-evaluation methods are available. The simplest one, if the levels are treated separately instead of cumulatively, is to have students point their thumbs up, down, or sideways for each level. For example, in response to the question, Who didn't make a problem for anybody else since you came into the gym? kids can point their thumbs upward (I didn't cause anyone a problem), sideways (I caused some minor problems), or down (I need to work on this). Before going on to Level II, the program leader should look around to be sure everyone is pointing their thumbs and to get an idea of how the class in general saw themselves that day in relation to that level.

Using hands to indicate yes or no is an even simpler evaluation system, although it is less accurate because the only choices are "good" and "not yet." Brief journal entries permit students to keep their self-evaluations and explanations private (see figure 4.1). To validate the process, however, it is necessary to read their comments and write something back or at least initial their entry, and this takes time. Some PE teachers overloaded with classes have only one class each day write in journals, thereby reducing what they have to read every day yet offering their students the opportunity to express themselves privately once in a while. Checklists provide a written shortcut to journals. Workbooks, which include other self-evaluations such as fitness and skill development, are an effective way of doing reflection time, but again, these require reading students' entries and making comments. Karyn Hartinger in elementary school PE and Jeff Walsh in middle school have used this approach, and so have I. Nick Cutforth and Missy Parker (1996) wrote a useful article on journal writing in physical education, arguing that it doesn't need to take much time and can be beneficial to both teachers and students.

## Level III and V Self-Reflection Questions

Level III involves goal setting and requires follow-up to be effective. For example, in the awareness talk, kids can be asked if they have a personal–social goal or a sport–fitness goal that they want to work on that day. Then, in reflection time, those that had a goal could be asked whether they worked on it, and if so, whether they made any progress. Using thumbs, thumbs-up would mean that they worked on their goal, thumbs-sideways that they had a goal but didn't work on it during the program, and thumbs-down that they had no goal. Thumbs-down can be skipped if goal setting is a choice.

Level V, in which students transfer values outside the gym, calls for a slightly different question: Did you do any of the levels outside of class since we met last? If so, how did it work? I've found that the application of the levels outside

## Self-Evaluation Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

### *Self-Control*

☐ ☐ ☐ How well did you control your temper and mouth today?

### *Effort*

☐ ☐ ☐ How hard did you try today?

### *Self-Coaching*

☐ ☐ ☐ Did you have a self-improvement or basketball goal and work on it today?

### *Coaching*

☐ ☐ ☐ Did you help others, do some positive coaching, or help make this a good experience for everyone today?

### *Outside the Gym*

☐ ☐ ☐ Self-control?

☐ ☐ ☐ Effort?

☐ ☐ ☐ Goal setting?

### *One Comment About Yourself Today?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

**FIGURE 4.1** A simple self-evaluation form.

From D. Hellison, 2011, *Teaching personal and social responsibility through physical activity, 3rd edition* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics). Courtesy of Tom Martinek.

the gym is often too general for kids to grasp. A better approach is to ask them to volunteer examples of how they have used one or more of the levels in their lives outside PE. One of my students recently answered, "Yeah, I'm not getting suspended so much!" Another way is to ask a specific question, such as one of the following:

- How was your self-control in the classroom so far today?
- How was your self-motivation in doing your homework last night?
- How self-directed were you after school yesterday?
- Did you help anybody to learn something after school yesterday or in school today?

Kids may have difficulty understanding how to transfer the levels to other areas of their lives. After all, the climate in many settings does not approach that of a TPSR gym. As one student exclaimed, "Do this stuff on the street? You've got to be kidding!" So we talked in specifics about whether they could do anything related to the levels anywhere outside the program and to what extent.

For self-reflection to work, students need to be reasonably honest in their responses, which requires trust. If they had a bad day, they need to be able to admit it without being penalized, but they also need to understand that self-reflection includes self-analysis of their excuses, especially when they blame others for things that they did or did not do. They need to examine the reasons for, and consequences of, their attitudes and behaviors. One way to focus their attention on the consequences of their attitudes and actions is to ask, Did what you did today work for you and why or why not? As with the group meeting, such honesty and introspection don't usually happen unless students feel trusted and supported.

## Using the Cumulative Levels in Self-Reflection Time

The cumulative levels discussed in chapter 3 provide a simple and convenient self-evaluation system for reflection time. Students choose the cumulative level that most closely represents their attitudes and behaviors for that class period. For example, if a student views herself as having been respectful of others as well as a participant in the activities during the lesson, she would give herself a Level II. If she participated but was verbally abusive to another player, she would not have met the criteria for Level I and so would rate herself at Level Zero. Students can call out their level numbers while sitting in a circle at the end of the lesson or on their way out of the gym. Or they can hold up fingers to show their levels. Another method is to ask them to make journal entries in which they write cumulative levels for the day along with explanations.

Pete Hockett, a PE teacher at an elementary school outside Madison, Wisconsin, painted the levels vertically on his gym wall next to the door. His students simply touched whichever level they had as their goal for that day as they came into the gym and whichever level they achieved during class when they left the gym. Pete only talked with those who, upon entering the gym, touched Levels Zero or I, because that told him that they were having a bad day. He also spoke with those whose self-evaluations at the end of the day didn't quite match his observations; in such a case, he might say, "I didn't notice you helping anyone; what did you do?"

Kit Cody, a PE teacher outside Portland, Oregon, modified Hockett's strategy by displaying the levels in a target. When the target fell off the wall one day, his kids were so used to the routine of "touching in and touching out" that they continued touching the blank wall space where the target used to be!

Tim Kramer created a tag board with pockets for his Reedville, Oregon, elementary school students. He assigned a color to each cumulative level. At the end of class kids put a colored card in their pockets to represent their cumulative level for that day. By looking at the tag board, Kramer could quickly check any discrepancy between the levels students chose and what he observed. He would then discuss this difference of opinion with the students.

## Self-Reflection on Demand

Ordinarily, reflection time occurs at the completion of a lesson so that students can evaluate their responsibility for the entire session. Sometimes, however, reflection time is useful during the program when students need to reflect on a particular choice they have made or a particular event that has just occurred. For example, it's easy for kids to make choices but far more difficult to make good choices. Questions such as, Did that choice work for you? and, Would you choose that again? can help students think more deeply about making wise choices.

All this group and self-reflection may be perceived as conflicting with the joy and spontaneity of physical activity, but my experience is that kids still have a lot of fun in TPSR programs, especially if the program leader brings a playful spirit into the culture of the gym (see chapter 7). Moreover, most kids probably need more reflection in their lives, not less, and these two daily bouts of reflection are just a drop in the bucket.

### TAKE-AWAYS

Here are some key points from this chapter that you might consider taking with you:

- The five-part sequential daily program format provides day-to-day consistency in students' exposure to, and experiences in, taking responsibility.
- Relational time offers a chance for one-on-one interactions.
- The awareness talk sets the stage, and the physical activity plan puts responsibility into practice.
- The lesson closes with a group meeting, which provides opportunities for kids to share their ideas and thoughts, and a reflection time devoted to self-evaluations of the levels of responsibility they achieved that day.