

[A community of practice to support the transition from doctoral student to faculty](#)

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Abstract:

Professional collaboration is an important aspect of any field. It allows for individuals to share ideas and to be part of a team. The TPSR Alliance has been a space for such professional collaborations where members have been able to both benefit from and contribute to it by sharing research and practices revolving around developing responsible behaviors in youth using the teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) model. They have had the opportunity to be a part of this community over the course of their doctoral education process and during their transition from graduate school to their current academic careers in higher education. During our graduate studies their involvement in the TPSR Alliance community of practice was integral to their socialization process so that they could become a part of a professional community that embodied shared beliefs. Gardner and Barnes discussed the importance of graduate students taking the initiative to become involved in opportunities that will help them in their future careers.

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Professional collaboration is an important aspect of any field. It allows for individuals to share ideas and to be part of a team. The TPSR Alliance has been a space for such professional collaborations where members have been able to both benefit from and contribute to it by sharing research and practices revolving around developing responsible behaviors in youth using the teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) model. We have had the opportunity to be a part of this community over the course of our doctoral education process and during our transition from graduate school to our current academic careers in higher education.

The TPSR Alliance was established to foster and sustain the work of individuals who have the common goal of developing unique youth-development programs. Programs are designed with the long-term plan of preparing young people for responsible citizenship. The TPSR Alliance became a professional-development forum for us as graduate students, and it sustains us through our current practice. The aim of this article is to discuss the assimilation of three distinct group members into this particular community of practice, which has offered a sense of belonging, unconditional professional and personal relationships, and empowerment through interactions and collaborations in both graduate school and subsequent careers in academia.

From Outsiders to Insiders

As members of the TPSR Alliance, the collective group has embodied a community of practice through our participation in annual meetings, conference proceedings and informal and formal interactions. The three authors of this article have had the opportunity to become members of this group without condition and with the support of more seasoned members, even though we felt like "outsiders" upon our initial entrance into the group. This feeling had nothing to do with the existing members, but we, individually, had formed our opinion based on our lack of experience and our apprehension of assimilating into a group, a pseudo family, whose relationships had already been established over the course of many years prior to developing a formal alliance group.

Nevertheless, we were drawn to the group for understanding and support. Each of us had limited or no experience with TPSR from a practical standpoint. We had read Don Hellison's book and journal articles on TPSR from those who either studied or collaborated with him, to gain knowledge on the approach to developing responsibility. But, we needed a more personal connection to confirm what we thought we knew about TPSR and move forward with our work. In particular, we felt that it was necessary to talk with and listen to Don and those who carried out his work in various settings - after-school programs, in-school physical education and universities - in order to ensure our understanding of the model.

After attending our first meeting with a combination of experienced and novice members, it became apparent that our feelings of being outsiders were unwarranted. In fact, we were able to hold discussions that offered fresh, creative questions and ideas for research and practice that had not been addressed at all or that had been addressed in a limited way. For instance, Robin Dunn used cooperative activities to address TPSR with early elementary students. At the time of the study (Dunn, 2012), there had been no empirical, data-based articles that addressed this population using cooperative activities. Furthermore, Michael Hemphill and Sylvie Beaudoin addressed TPSR with preservice teachers using collaborative models for professional development that complement the TPSR approach by empowering teachers and valuing their

voices in the research and professional development (Beaudoin, 2010; Hemphill, Templin, & Wright, 2015). Each of us has a personal story about our initial feelings upon entering the TPSR community and about how being a part of a specialized group has furthered our knowledge and practice of TPSR, as well as our sense of belonging, connectedness and confidence in our work.

Culminating Process

During our graduate studies our involvement in the TPSR Alliance community of practice was integral to our socialization process so that we could become a part of a professional community that embodied shared beliefs. Gardner and Barnes (2007) discussed the importance of graduate students taking the initiative to become involved in opportunities that will help them in their future careers. Specifically, the researchers found that graduate students who get involved in national organizations foster professional aspirations through making connections and collaborating with peers and colleagues (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Furthermore, during graduate students' transition into careers in academia, their identities as students evolve as they progress toward professional practice and toward becoming independent scholars (Baker & Pifer, 2014).

As members of the TPSR Alliance, we have assimilated well and effectively into this community of practice. We took it upon ourselves to become part of a team by discovering the opportunities and subsequently taking initiative to get involved. We feel that it is important to become a part of a community that fosters growth and development in a professional environment and that furthers the goals of the collective community. In our experience this team has not only become a place for professional collaborations and growth, it has also become a place for personal connections, like a second family. Every year our family grows a little larger as new members join the Alliance.

Interactions have started to happen more and more frequently with other members in between annual meetings, either by email, phone calls or social events at other conferences. We have always felt welcome to ask for any type of advice and have found a listening ear when seeking help. These informal and formal interactions have strongly affected our work, pushing us to go further with our initial ideas.

We look forward to the TPSR Alliance conference every year and to reuniting with our colleagues, friends and family. It is our favorite time of the year to connect with others, and it provides us a space for inspiration and a sense of renewed energy and focus to keep pushing forward in our work. The meetings remind us of the importance of the work that Don started so long ago that we continue to do as a community. It is work that is worth doing. As long as we continue to sustain our community, we will have a constant cycle of taking as much from the Alliance as we give to it.

Robin

When I began my doctoral program at The Ohio State University, I entered with the expectation of becoming a physical education teacher educator, in the hopes of instilling knowledge to a variety of physical education teachers, who would subsequently disseminate what I taught them. However, a little over a year into my program, I attended a doctoral seminar and found a more specific area of interest: youth development. I thought of the many interactions I have had with youth in teaching and in summer camp environments. In particular, I reflected on how young people spoke to each other and to me, not distinguishing between authority figures and peers. I wanted to learn more about this concept.

Therefore, I began doing some preliminary research, reading articles and books in areas of social work, sociology and youth development. I wanted to learn as much as possible about teaching personal and social responsibility and about youth who are at risk for not being socially adept to successfully navigate a changing society. I wanted to focus my dissertation on this area but had no idea how to move forward with my research. My dissertation started with the simple idea of teaching children how to speak respectfully to others (e.g., parents, peers, teachers) and become good citizens. I had no theoretical framework, but I was stuck on this idea. At this time I did not know of Don Hellison's work. I ended up having an opportunity to meet him at a professional conference in 2007. Through this conversation and my research I was encouraged to learn more about the notion of responsibility to frame my premature idea. Thus I attended the first TPSR Alliance conference in 2008. It was the first time I had the chance to meet other individuals with similar values and passions within a professional setting. I was able to have conversations about my potential dissertation, as well as gain perspective on Don's approach in both a theoretical and practical way. In my first two years with the Alliance, I used it as a resource to gain knowledge and support for my research ideas, as well as build relationships with other Alliance members.

As I gained knowledge through collaboration and research, I was able to not only benefit from my connections to the Alliance but also contribute to the Alliance by extending the research in the area of TPSR. My dissertation focused on using cooperative activities to develop personal and social responsibility in second- and thirdgraders. There was limited research in the area of cooperative activities and the use of TPSR with such a young group of children. After doing my research and completing my dissertation, I have presented at conferences, both national and international, sharing my work. The Alliance has been a resource, but it has also been a vehicle to propel my work, giving me the ability to have an impact on the Alliance similar to the impact it has had on me. Currently, I am developing two TPSR manuscripts and hope to have them completed in the fall of this year.

Michael

When I first joined the TPSR Alliance, I remember feeling nervous because it was obvious that the group were not only professional colleagues but also friends. Many had studied and worked together through their familiarity and experience with Don 's work in youth development. However, I was quickly welcomed and integrated into the community. At the same time the group seemed to seek out the ideas of "outsiders" who may have different perspectives on TPSR.

As a new member of the Alliance, I became valuable by offering new ideas from a different perspective. For example, my dissertation advisor was interested in professional development. This topic had not been explored in depth in relation to the TPSR model. I was able to integrate the outsider perspectives of my committee members with the insider perspectives in the TPSR Alliance to develop an idea for a dissertation study (Hemphill, 2011). Paul Wright played an integral role in the dissertation study and continues to be a partner in my scholarship today.

The TPSR Alliance has continued to be a place for me to develop ideas and help advance my career. Through my experience with TPSR-based professional development, I was able to partner with nonprofit programs in Charleston, SC to implement the TPSR model in youth-development programs related to urban gardening and the sport of squash. Each year I talked formally and informally at the TPSR Alliance about these projects, which then led me to refine my ideas. Perhaps the most important contribution to my own work has been the emphasis on program fidelity. Alliance members emphasize adhering to the principles of the model. This had such an effect on my work that I now implement assessment procedures to assess the level of fidelity in programs. I had grown to understand TPSR as primarily a values-based model with suggestions for practice that could be adapted to fit a particular context. However, there were certain aspects of TPSR that had to exist, such as students being empowered to make choices, in order for an acceptable level of fidelity to exist. This notion continues to guide my work with youth.

While the Alliance has been extremely helpful in advancing my career, the most beneficial part of the Alliance is the opportunity to listen to the wide array of applications of the TPSR model. For example, seeing a science teacher attend the conference a few years ago reminded me that this model could be used in alternative settings. The structure of the Alliance focuses on the exchange of ideas through discussion and does not include formal presentations. This idea exchange creates safe and accessible spaces for constructive idea development and partnerships. This special JOPERD feature is just one example of collaborative efforts that have formed informally through the TPSR Alliance. Other examples include the TPSR Symposium in New Zealand and periodic discussions among members throughout the year.

Sylvie

I attended my first TPSR conference in 2009, the only year it was held in Springfield, MA. This location was only a couple of hours from my home (Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada), and I remember driving there all by myself just because I felt I needed to be there. I was doing my doctoral dissertation on TPSR at the time, and the only training I had received was through reading everything that had been written on the subject, either scientific or practical. I felt that I needed to talk with and listen to TPSR "creators" and actual practitioners to make sure I understood the approach the way it was supposed to be understood. I felt it was the only way to ensure I was applying the ideas of TPSR with a high level of fidelity.

My first visit as an "outsider" was a milestone in my professional career. Not only did I find extremely kind and open-minded people, but I almost instantly felt like a part of this community by aiming for the same goals as them. I had found people who shared similar values on education. Many members asked me questions about my work, and it made me feel like my contribution was valued and important. I was seeking approval from the "founding fathers" of the model. Instead, the TPSR community provided me with a sense of belonging and made me feel like I had to keep working on my research in order to share my experiences with the Alliance. My work helped the seasoned members of the Alliance grow as well. It gave me the much-needed confidence and strength to continue the work I was doing.

Since then, I have participated in most annual TPSR conferences, missing only two because of my children's birth. I find it extremely stimulating to share ideas with fellow members of the Alliance. I always come back home with tons of new ideas for current and future projects. Without a doubt, the Alliance helps me sustain and nourish my interest in working on the TPSR model.

In addition to the recurring invitation to present my work at the annual TPSR Alliance conference, I have contributed to this Alliance in various ways. For instance, I have presented at an international physical education conference in Auckland, New Zealand, authored a peer-reviewed journal article, and invited an Alliance member to the University of Sherbrooke to share information on the TPSR model to increase awareness and understanding of the model. As a member of the Alliance, I feel compelled and encouraged to circulate information about TPSR. Moreover, I make sure to bring my graduate students to regional conferences to help disperse and communicate further understanding of the model. I am also working on sharing the TPSR model knowledge with French-speaking attendees through several presentations in France, Switzerland and Canada. As of now, two TPSR French-written publications are in the works. I hope it will be a significant contribution to the international aspect of the TPSR model.

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