

## EXPLORING THE INDIVIDUALIZED EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS IN A RESPONSIBILITY-BASED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

EXPLORANDO LAS EXPERIENCIAS INDIVIDUALIZADAS DE LOS PARTICIPANTES EN UN PROGRAMA DE DESARROLLO JUVENIL BASADO EN LA RESPONSABILIDAD.

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### ABSTRACT

Youth development programs are built upon the assumption that individual participants have a unique set of strengths, needs, and developmental opportunities. The same is true of the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model. Although TPSR calls for individualized curricula and differentiated instruction, these topics have not been sufficiently examined in the literature. The current study provides case studies of four purposefully selected African American adolescent males and their experience in a community-based TPSR program. Findings are used to evaluate the program in terms of providing meaningful experiences to individual participants and illuminating the importance of considering individual differences among participants even when they have many characteristics in common. Implications for teaching and research are discussed.

### RESUMEN

Los programas de desarrollo juvenil se basan en la suposición de que los individuos que participan tienen un conjunto de puntos fuertes, necesidades y oportunidades de desarrollo. Esto es aplicable también al modelo de Enseñanza de la Responsabilidad Personal y Social (TPSR). Aunque el TPSR requiere una individualización del curriculum y una instrucción diferenciada, dichos asuntos no han sido suficientemente estudiados. El presente escrito proporciona los estudios de caso de cuatro varones adolescentes afro-americanos, intencionalmente seleccionados, y su experiencia en un programa comunitario de TPSR. Los resultados se utilizan para evaluar si el programa proporciona experiencias significativas a los jóvenes y para destacar la importancia de considerar las diferencias individuales de

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los participantes, incluso cuando tienen muchas características en común. Se abordan también sus implicaciones para la enseñanza y la investigación.

**KEYWORDS.** Case study; program evaluation; underserved youth; martial arts.

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** Estudio de caso; evaluación de programas; jóvenes desfavorecidos; artes marciales.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

I think the leadership part is helping him. I think he is not the kind of kid that you can leave off to the side and just let him do. I think when you call on him and he has to come before everybody to lead, it causes him to be self-controlled; if that makes sense. And I think that is really good for him, because he's not one you just leave on - you have to put him in the center and let him do something. He likes the attention. I also think he's confident, but he has a problem with reading and stuff so I know he doesn't feel the best about that. Putting him out in front in the martial arts club, he actually knows this skill and it's kind of helping in that area. (Keisha, a youth worker, talking about Leon, an 11 year old boy)

As the quote above illustrates, what participants bring to and get out of youth programs is idiosyncratic. Based on their unique strengths, struggles, and interests, youth can have different experiences and derive different meaning from the same program. Scholars from various fields have given us frameworks to understand the individualized nature of learning (Dewey, 1938), motivation (Maslow, 1970), cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), and even moral development (Kohlberg, 1981). These assumptions are fundamental to the field of youth development including sport and physical activity programs. The current study evaluated one such program in terms of its ability to provide meaningful and beneficial experiences to individual youth participants.

### ***Youth Development through Sport and Physical Activity***

Humans develop through many stages in life. Arguably, the most important of these stages are childhood and adolescence, which, in combination, are referred to as youth development (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). Experiencing full, well-rounded development at a young age helps individuals lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life. Youth development programs allow young people to develop competencies that will help them as adults to earn a living, engage in civic activities, and care for others. Common principles of youth development include a focus on strengths rather than deficits and universality, or providing support for all youth to thrive that is tailored to their unique needs and capacities (Hamilton et al., 2004).

Sport and physical activity programming is one vehicle for youth development that is gaining attention in the academic literature (Hellison et al., 2000; Holt & Jones, 2008; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Such programs are recognized for their

potential to “build character”, but the number of programs that fully implement youth development principles is limited. According to Petitpas et al. (2005, p. 66):

Quite different from programs that have a primary focus on teaching sport skills or that strive to intervene with or prevent health endangering behaviors are those youth sport programs that are designed to make a direct connection between the skills and attitudes that can be learned through sport and academic, personal, or career development. These youth sport programs make an effort to teach sport skills and life skills concurrently and they contain clear expectations for achievement and learning.

These authors identify the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model as one of the few programs that does this effectively.

### **TPSR Model**

TPSR is an empowerment-based instructional model developed through extensive fieldwork, particularly with underserved youth living in urban environments (Hellison, 2011). TPSR teaches life skills related to the themes of personal and social responsibility using physical activity as the medium. The core program goals for youth are respect for the rights and feelings of others, self-motivation, self-direction, and caring. The fifth and ultimate program goal for youth is to transfer the other goals and related life skills to areas of their lives “outside the gym” (Hellison, 2011). Consistent with the assumptions of youth development, TPSR “treats kids as whole people, with emotional and social as well as physical needs and interests, and as individuals, not just members of a gender or race or other group” (Hellison et al., 2000, p. 35).

Although supporting individual development is fundamental to TPSR, this topic has not been sufficiently examined in the literature. Only a few studies have used case study methodology focused on individual participants and their experience in TPSR programs. This approach has been used to examine the relevance of programs for students with disabilities (Wright, White, & Gaebler-Spira, 2004) and stages of leadership development (Martinek, Schilling, & Hellison, 2006). More common are rich descriptions of programs that examine impact on youth participants in general (Schilling, Martinek, & Carson, 2007; Walsh, 2008; Wright & Burton, 2008; Wright, Li, Ding, & Pickering, 2010). These studies often include examples, observations, and quotes from individual students but they do not illuminate how the specific goals and teaching strategies of the model may be differentially applied to connect with individual youth. Therefore, the two-fold purpose of this study was a) to provide rich descriptions of several youths and their experience of a community-based TPSR program and b) to use the findings to evaluate the program's effectiveness in terms of providing meaningful experiences to individual youth participants.

### **Y-CAP Kung Fu Club**

The Y-CAP Kung Fu Club was an integrated part of a comprehensive prevention and early intervention program, the YMCA Community Action Program (Y-CAP), operated at a YMCA branch in Memphis, Tennessee. The Y-CAP program serves 10 to 15 year old

males identified as 'at risk' of dropping out of school usually due to behavioral and/or academic problems. Students are referred to Y-CAP from six different Memphis City Schools. Upon admission to the program, individual goals are developed for the students and most remain in the program from four to nine months. The Y-CAP program has an executive director, a program director, and two other full time staff assisted by various interns and volunteers.

The Y-CAP program operates for three hours after school three days per week during the academic year. Summer sessions are available each year to students who participate during the academic year. The program is comprised of several components, including academic tutoring, value lessons, art therapy, physical activity, and monthly family night events. The Y-CAP Kung Fu Club met once per week for a 45 to 60 minute long lesson for several consecutive academic semesters from 2008 to 2010. Occasional lessons were also taught each summer to maintain continuity. The content of the program was martial arts complimented with physical fitness training delivered using the TPSR model. A more comprehensive description of the Y-CAP Kung Fu Club's origins, development, and final structure can be found in a separate publication (Wright, 2012).

## 2. METHODS

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A case study design was employed to develop contextualized profiles of individual youth participants and their experience of the program (Creswell, 2007). The use of case study methodology is a recommended option for program evaluations when the focus is on individualized outcomes and personal experiences in a program (Patton, 2002).

### **Setting and Participants**

As noted above, the setting for this study was a YMCA branch in Memphis, Tennessee. The branch served a diverse clientele in terms of race and socio-economic background. All six schools attended by youth participants had a majority of African American students and a high proportion of students living in poverty. At the time of this study, 16 African American boys were enrolled in the Y-CAP program and all of them participated in the weekly Kung Fu Club. With input from the Y-CAP staff, the investigators used purposeful sampling to identify and recruit four case study participants who represented a range of personality types, developmental needs, engagement in the program, and reasons for referral. Once identified, potential participants were approached and gave verbal assent. Their parents/guardians provided written consent using procedures approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Memphis. All case study participants were African American boys ranging from 10 to 13 years old. In this manuscript, pseudonyms are used for youth participants and Y-CAP staff members.

### **Researcher Roles**

Paul was the lead instructor in the Kung Fu Club and the lead researcher. Tennille was a graduate student working with Paul who served as an assistant instructor and research assistant. Ben was an outside observer and collaborator but did not teach in the program.

### **Data Collection**

**Tool for Assessing Responsibility-Based Education (TARE).** Two versions of the TARE were used in this study. One version uses direct observation and time sampling procedures (Wright & Craig, 2011) and the other is completed by the instructor as a post-teaching reflection (Hellison & Wright, 2011). The combination of these complimentary instruments to document and assess TPSR implementation has proven effective in previous studies (Coulson, Irwin, & Wright, 2012; Hemphill, 2011). Both versions are used to gather contextual information for a given lesson, such as location, time, and number of students, as well as the teacher's use of nine responsibility-based teaching strategies such as modeling respectful behavior, fostering social interaction, and providing leadership opportunities. Other sections are used to rate the teacher's overall effectiveness in enacting TPSR themes such as integrating responsibility roles in the lesson and the students' enactment of the TPSR responsibility goals like self-direction. The final section is for additional open comments on the lesson. Data from 20 lessons were analyzed in the current study. Paul completed a post-teaching reflection after each lesson. Ben observed six lessons using the TARE and debriefed on the lesson with Paul each time.

**Interviews.** Two interviews lasting 15-20 minutes were conducted by Tennille with each case study participant in the spring of 2009. The first round of interviews occurred in March and focused on the participants' perceptions of the Y-CAP program in general, their program goals, and the Y-CAP Kung Fu Club. The second round of interviews were conducted in May and June to clarify information from the first interview as well as other data sources and to probe for deeper understanding. One 90-minute group interview was conducted by Paul and Tennille with the full time Y-CAP staff members, Keisha, Maria, and Sharon. These three women worked closely with each other yet had different roles in the program and different types of experience with the youth participants. Keisha was a full time program assistant and Maria was the assistant director; they both worked directly with the youth on a daily basis. Sharon was the director of the program. She did work with the youth but also handled more administrative responsibility. Sharon was more likely to be in contact with the youth participants', parents, and teachers. Keisha and Maria were always present for the Y-CAP Kung Fu Club lessons, but Sharon only observed on occasion. It was assumed that through open discussion in a group interview their recollections and perceptions regarding each case would combine to yield a comprehensive and accurate understanding. All interviews were conducted at the YMCA location, guided by semi-structured interview protocols, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The youth interviews were conducted during Y-CAP program hours and the staff interview was conducted one morning while the youth participants were still in school.

**Field Notes.** Field notes provided additional contextual information from observations and informal conversations with youth participants, Y-CAP staff, and, in three of the four cases, parents of the participants. Tennille spent several hours observing the broader Y-CAP program prior to introduction of the Kung Fu Club. These observations included all program components as well as pick up and drop off before and after the program. When the club was initiated in October 2008, Tennille continued taking field notes each week on the TPSR lessons. She paid particular attention to TPSR implementation at this stage and key interactions between the Paul and the students. In the final weeks of the study, she increasingly focused on case study participants.

**Documentation.** Case files provided background information and explained the reason(s) each participant was referred to Y-CAP. These files contained a wealth of information including contract commitments from the parent(s) and participant detailing family household status and parental concerns of the participant; referral forms and recommendation letters from the participant's teacher or school counselor; the participant's self-evaluation; their Y-CAP action plan; as well as ongoing assessments and case notes. Documentation from the Kung Fu Club included lesson plans, student self-assessments, photographs, as well as audio- and video-tape recordings taken during lessons and family night demonstrations.

### **Data Analysis**

Once all data were collected and organized, we began developing the individual case studies drawing on all data sources listed above. We used both deductive (theory driven) and inductive (data driven) analysis strategies (Patton, 2002). For instance, *a priori* coding strategies were used to identify units of meaning connected to topics and themes we expected to see or wanted to explore such as respect and responsibility. Open coding was used to identify units of meaning that emerged from the data, i.e. physical development and confidence. After the individual cases were developed, we conducted cross-case comparisons (Creswell, 2007) to identify patterns of similarity and difference. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility we used the following strategies: triangulation of multiple data sources, peer-debriefing within our team, member check with youth participants and Y-CAP staff, and extended interaction in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **3. RESULTS**

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### **Andrew**

Andrew was an 11-year-old, 5<sup>th</sup> grader at the time of this study. He was a well behaved honor roll student who enjoyed playing games and sports. Andrew dreamed of attending college and becoming a professional basketball player. He was a hardworking student who reported that he loved to make good grades and help others with their schoolwork. At school he got along well with his classmates and rarely needed redirecting. However, occasionally he would “cop an attitude” and refuse to do his work in class because things did not go his way.

Andrew joined Y-CAP in November 2008. His school counselor, Mr. Green, referred Andrew to get him into a positive environment after school. He wanted Andrew to stay away from negative influences at school and in the community. Case notes stated that Mr. Green felt Andrew was a good kid, but easily influenced by his peers to “do the wrong thing” which caused him to get into trouble. At the time of the study, Andrew lived with his mother, step-father, and three younger brothers. The case file noted that his parents both worked full-time, entry level jobs and received government assistance. Andrew’s mother said, “He is very helpful around the house with his brothers, doing chores and fixing minor things, but sometimes he would forget his place as a child”. According to his parents, sometimes Andrew seemed to “know too much about things kids have no business knowing about at such a young age”. They commented that when adults would talk, he would often listen to their conversation and ask questions about what he had heard to make sure he understood everything being discussed.

Tennille observed Andrew on his first day in Y-CAP. It was art therapy day and the boys were working in groups on a project. Andrew jumped right in, making suggestions and interacting comfortably with his peers. On the following Wednesday, Andrew participated in the Kung Fu Club for the first time. He had already heard about it from his peers and appeared eager to start. From that first lesson on, Andrew engaged in the club with focus and a positive attitude.

The staff agreed Andrew did well in Y-CAP, but Sharon noted that “a couple of times he was caught talking during value lesson and lost points for being disrespectful”. Maria commented that, “Andrew is a high achiever who is overly confident. He is a smart kid that needs a little bit of encouragement to keep doing better”. On the Kung Fu Club, Keisha stated:

He learns valuable lessons in it and it helps him and continues to let him know that he needs to be confident and that he can be a leader, but at the same time he has to, at some point, let someone else lead. It lets him step back and I think that as far as the over confidence, it’s helping him in that area and not let the spotlight be on him all the time.

Because Andrew needed little or no feedback on fundamental responsibilities like respect and effort, Paul was able to focus on building up his confidence as a leader and a decision maker. Andrew was usually fully involved in the group discussions and comfortable expressing his voice. It was hoped such experience would foster resilience in him, and any of the boys for that matter, against negative influences out in the community. Andrew was positive about the club and studying martial arts. He explained:

We get taught a lot of things about martial arts. The first thing I learned was the horse riding stance. Second thing I learned was the bow and then we started getting into all the kicking and punches. But with the kick, we got to make it 1-2-3, not just a whole one and the punch you got to make it smooth.

When asked how martial arts connected to the broader goals of the program, Andrew said he learned, “Not to go out to pick on people, but I learn to defend myself”.

Regarding life skills, it was clear Andrew had been paying attention. He was able to give numerous examples of life skills that had been introduced in the club, such as...

"Respect is treating someone how you would like to be treated. Not just interrupting people, you got to raise your hand and ask them can you speak".

"Responsibility is taking care of things that someone let you borrow or your mom buys".

"Like if you pair up with someone [in the martial arts club] and keeping your temperature low; not yelling and not playing, but doing what you are supposed to do".

"Leadership is being loud, but not too loud. Helping people, but not taking over. When you go up there to lead, you got to speak loud, and say an exercise".

Andrew graduated from Y-CAP at the end of the school year. He had shown great confidence and strong leadership skills in the Kung Fu Club. Just before his graduation, at a Y-CAP family night event, Paul and the students put on a presentation for the families. Andrew introduced the club and explained what it was all about. True to form, he was articulate, focused, and confident. After that event, Tennille spoke with Andrew's mom who stated, "He learned a lot of valuable lessons, to be non-violent and to use martial arts at appropriate times". She also said that he gained "more confidence" because he was "always willing to lead and teach others what he'd learned." In her opinion, Y-CAP and the Kung Fu Club were good for him but did not have a dramatic impact on his school performance because she believed, "Andrew is not a problem child; he just loves to be doing something".

### **Justin**

Justin was a 10-year-old 5<sup>th</sup> grader at the time of the study. He was a quiet and reserved boy who earned good grades, had excellent conduct and perfect attendance at school. It was noted by his parents that he dreamed of one day being President of the United States. However, they also described Justin as being timid around other people and afraid of new experiences. According to Justin's case files, he was sheltered by his parents and picked on by his peers at school. He was described as shy, socially awkward, and clumsy.

Justin is the youngest of 11 siblings; with some of them being old enough to be his parents. Both of Justin's parents are over 50 years-old, unemployed, and living on a fixed income. They reported that Justin "never plays with kids in the neighborhood and watches a lot of cartoon programs on television". Justin's parents said he "behaves like a younger child and needs to mature and act his age". In November 2008, Justin joined Y-CAP. The school counselor, Mr. Green, referred him so Justin would have a safe space to develop social skills and improve his physical development. More specifically, he felt Justin needed "to build his self-esteem and develop hand-eye coordination".

We observed Justin's timid behavior in Y-CAP, especially in his first weeks. During one Y-CAP lesson, the boys were called upon to read from an activity sheet they were working on related to conflict resolution. When it was Justin's turn, he was clearly intimidated and took an uncomfortably long time to build the courage to speak. When he began, it was clear he was a good reader, but he sounded like a younger child



compared to his peers. Some of the other students laughed under their breath or made fun of the way he talked, mocking his soft voice. Soon after he returned to his seat he dropped his head and cast his glance downward, looking embarrassed.

In his first Kung Fu Club lessons, Justin seemed confused by the movement requirements. He struggled with instructions that specified movements with the right or left side or a combination of the two sides. For example, if directed to punch with the right and then kick with the left foot, he would awkwardly attempt to kick and punch at the same time and on the same side. When the group would perform techniques in unison, Justin's timing was usually off, i.e. starting slightly before or after the others. It was apparent to Paul that Justin needed additional support and individualized strategies for skill development. Over the next several months, Paul encouraged Justin to take turns leading exercises and skills like his peers but made sure Justin led less complex skills so he could feel confident and successful. Also, Paul gave supportive, specific, and constructive skill feedback to Justin as often as possible without drawing attention to it or making comparisons to others. When students were paired up for partner work or peer-teaching, Paul was selective about who partnered with Justin to ensure the experience was challenging yet positive.

When asked about the club, Justin stated, "Personally, I learned how to kick better and punch better". He also indicated the club helped him with "being respectful to others, knowing how to defend myself if I get in a fight, and listen to the person who's talking". When asked about the TPSR goals and life skills, he provided what sounded like a list of rules similar to Andrew's: "Respect is to not push people around. Don't curse them out and pick with people for no reason. Be quiet while the person is talking. Follow the rules and try not to mess up". Regarding leadership, Justin explained it as "taking the lead role to show and tell what to do, being up to the front of them and doing one of our exercises, and helping someone with they work that's having trouble. If I got the hang of what we are doing and someone is having problems, I just go over and show them how to do it 'til they get the hang of it".

By the end of the year, we and the Y-CAP staff had seen improvements in Justin's physical coordination and self-confidence. Regarding his martial art skills, Justin stated, "My kicks got more strength and my punches too; I feel stronger". Paul had also noted "definite improvements in skill and overall coordination" for Justin as well as increases "in his ability to strike a target with greater focus and force". For Justin, the increases in physical and social development went hand in hand. With time he became more comfortable working with peers, leading exercises, and demonstrating techniques. Toward the end of the study Justin was fully engaged in the planning, practice, and delivery of the family night demonstration mentioned before. He was eager to be part of the presentation and demonstrate a punch-kick combination on a target pad in front of a group of approximately 40 people. He was eager as he stepped up to the front, confident as he executed his techniques, and he beamed with pride and an enormous smile as he returned to his seat.

## Leon

At the time of this study, Leon was an 11-year-old 5<sup>th</sup> grader. In our initial interactions, he appeared quiet and soft spoken. However, we soon saw how loquacious he was when it came to topics that interested him. Leon enjoyed basketball and playing video games. He reportedly did not like to play outside much, but preferred to stay inside and watch wrestling on television.

Leon lived with his grandmother and his mother. He is his mother's only child, but his father has children with another woman in a different household. His grandmother, who is actually his legal guardian, said "Leon is a good kid at home and plays by himself because he has no siblings to play with". She also commented that Leon rarely did anything to get punished, but would "get a bad attitude when things do not work in his favor". During the intake interview for Y-CAP, it was stated that he seemed to respect his grandmother more than his mother. For example, it was noted that his grandmother would only have to give instructions to Leon once, whereas his mother would have to repeat herself several times. Leon was referred to the Y-CAP program by his 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Hanley, at the end of the school year. She referred him for help with "academics, social skills and character development". Ms. Hanley knew that Y-CAP provided tutoring, homework help, and value lessons that could "build Leon's character".

Leon began Y-CAP in May 2008. He was often observed making silly noises behind the staff members' backs. They usually knew it was him but when they would tell him to stop he would say, "that wasn't me" and take offense at the accusation. He would sometimes distract the other boys while they were doing homework or paying attention to an activity. Tennille admitted in her field notes, that "it was difficult to remain a non-participant when observing Leon". She explained there were many times she would make eye contact with Leon and feel compelled to send glances or nods directing him to get back on task and continue working like everyone else.

Leon would often talk in a loud booming voice, seemingly in imitation of the wrestlers he enjoyed watching on television. He was very excited when he heard a martial arts class was going to be added to Y-CAP. This enthusiasm for the martial arts content never waned. Throughout the study, he was excited in the classes and loved making exaggerated sounds like yelling "ki-ai" when striking target pads or just practicing techniques in the air.

Regarding what he learned in the club, Leon explained, "It teaches us how to defend ourselves and control our anger and to become a better leader". He then added, "You don't just beat up anybody you just want to". Regarding his behavior, Leon openly discussed some of his issues. He noted that for him, responsibility meant, "minding my own business and doing what I'm supposed to do". Among his goals, Leon said he was trying "to not get real mad at people" and to "stop talking a lot".

His excitement about martial arts, the relaxed climate, and the physical nature of the Kung Fu Club challenged Leon's self-control. Regarding his behavior in the club, Sharon commented, "Leon plays a lot, he talks a lot, he doesn't always fully participate, and

he doesn't always fully listen". Maria added, "I think he enjoys it, but how much he actually takes or what he could take from it I don't know if he doing that". As Keisha stated in the opening vignette, Leon appeared comfortable and confident in the club because it highlighted his strengths in terms of physical skills. Although he struggled with self-control, giving Leon leadership roles seemed to be an effective strategy used by Paul to keep him engaged and focused. Regarding his participation in Y-CAP overall, Sharon explained, "He has made enough improvement to stay, but not enough to graduate...and then he'll go backwards". Leon was unsuccessfully released from the program when school ended that year.

### **Danny**

At the time of this study, Danny was a 13 year old 7<sup>th</sup> grader. Danny struggled with behavior and academic achievement, but not his image. He was handsome, outgoing, and charming. He wore the popular trends in clothing and shoes and often boasted about the cool things he owned. He reported that when he grows up, he wants to "go pro" in either basketball or football. Danny loves to draw, listen to music and rap. He talked about his favorite rapper, Lil' Wayne, frequently.

Danny joined Y-CAP in May 2008. Danny was referred for issues with respecting authority, behaving aggressively, and refusing to follow rules. He had been suspended from school numerous times for fighting and "insubordination". According to his file, his mother noted concerns about Danny's "reading ability, focus, and respecting authority". She admitted Danny usually got his way at home and was rarely punished. She felt this contributed to his behavior issues at school. Danny's file indicated he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and had fewer problems when properly medicated.

Danny lived at home with his mother and her long time boyfriend. Danny's biological father had been in prison since Danny was born. Danny knew this and considered his mother's boyfriend his "real daddy". His mother dropped out of school in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but was completing an equivalent certification, the General Education Development (GED), at the time of this study. The mother and her boyfriend both worked full-time at minimum wage jobs and received some government assistance.

Danny's action plan in Y-CAP focused on doing more independent reading and improving his conduct. It was also emphasized in the plan that if Danny was given a consequence at school, Y-CAP, or home, all of these partners should coordinate their efforts and follow through with the consequence rather than giving him second chances or succumbing to his charm. Maria described Danny's progress in Y-CAP as slow, adding, "It's hard to see his progress; he takes two steps forward and then one step back". Reflecting frustration in his interview, Danny said sometimes he "hated" coming to the Y-CAP program because it was "boring and lame". It was clear from observation that he had many positive experiences in the program however, he did not enjoy being held accountable for his behavior.

Regarding the Kung Fu Club, Danny explained, "We learn moves and learn how to get yo' balance right...and basic kicks, jab-jab-cross-kick". He believed that being in the

club helped him improve his martial arts skill because, "I kick higher and punch harder now." Discussing the TPSR goals and life skills, he said with confidence, "Respect means you treat somebody kind, compliment them, treat that person right and get your own [respect]". He went on to say, "Coaching is an example of respect and consists of somebody that doesn't know it and you help them learn that move". His interpretation of responsibility as it applied to his case included, "Being responsible, doing what needs to be done, and grow up - start listening more". Respect was a core issue with Danny, especially when it came to authority figures. Modeling respectful behavior and treating Danny with unconditional positive regard probably helped Paul make some inroads with Danny and avoid the type of power struggle he often fell into with adults in traditional authority roles.

On Danny's progress in Y-CAP, Maria mentioned, "We have seen a reduced number of suspensions and we haven't heard of any fights he's been in, so he may even be one where the aggression level has come down a notch, decreased as he has gained more skills and more tools to deal with tough situations". Paul commented, "The physical domain is a comfort zone for him as opposed to academics; an area where he can thrive and be confident". Sharon added, "I will say that I think he enjoys it, but I think what he could get out of it I don't think he is because he does do a lot of playing, like back in the back and kind of watching more so and laughing at who's not doing it right and not paying attention to himself". Keisha said, "He's one where the paying attention issue and the distraction in the back that he's a part of might have to do with his ADHD". As with Leon, Danny was released from Y-CAP at the end of the year but did not "graduate". Nonetheless, Danny's mom was positive about Y-CAP and the Kung Fu Club. She opined, "Martial arts taught him discipline and to have respect for others".

#### 4. DISCUSSION

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In this study, we set out to provide rich descriptions of several youths and their experience in a community-based TPSR program. Also, we intended to use those findings to evaluate the program's effectiveness in terms of providing meaningful experiences to individual youth participants. Through purposeful sampling, we identified four boys that on the surface could be grouped together. All four were African American males from low income backgrounds. All were young adolescents attending public schools in the same city and had been referred to the same program for at-risk youth. In many studies, the description of participants ends with this level of detail. However, as our findings illustrate, even youth who fit in many of the same categories have their own stories. Each came to the program with unique strengths, struggles, and opportunities for development.

Subtle differences are what determined the relevance and potential benefits of the Kung Fu Club for each participant. For instance, two of the students, Andrew and Justin, did quite well academically and did not have serious behavior problems. Still, they needed different things. In the safe and positive environment of the club, Andrew seemed to thrive and benefit from the leadership opportunities he was clearly ready

for. Justin, more than his peers, needed to develop social and physical skills. The content and climate of the club combined to allow him to grow in both of these areas simultaneously. In fact, this combination seemed to benefit Justin as it did children with developmental delays in a previous study on the application of TPSR in an adapted martial arts program (Wright et al., 2004).

Leon and Danny had more in common with each other and probably fit a more typical profile for youth who are labeled 'at risk'. Both struggled more with academics and behavior. Although they struggled with focus and self-control, they both enjoyed their experience in the club and responded well to it. Because it challenged their ability to focus and control their impulses, the club allowed them to practice these skills. Findings indicated these two young men may have especially enjoyed the content of the club because the martial arts connected to their interests and highlighted the psychomotor learning domain in which they felt confident and successful. This finding highlights one of the unique benefits of using physical activity and sport as a vehicle to promote youth development (Hellison et al., 2000). Even between Leon and Danny, the two who did not graduate successfully from Y-CAP, there were differences. Danny for example, was the only one of the four students who had consistent problems with aggression and fighting. Also, he was the only one who had a diagnosed disability, ADHD, for which he was medicated. It should be noted that there did not appear to be any issue with the program increasing aggressive behavior. This finding is consistent with other evaluations of TPSR martial arts clubs (Wright, 2002; Wright et al., 2010).

Unique aspects of the experience were relevant to each of the individual students. These connections were as varied as Justin's need to develop his physical coordination, Andrew's readiness to develop his leadership potential, Leon's need to develop his focus, and Danny's need to control his anger. At the same time, some aspects of the experience proved salient across the cases. All four enjoyed the club and responded well to the combination of physical activity content and the responsibility-based teaching strategies of TPSR. It also appeared this experience boosted each student's confidence. These benefits have emerged in numerous TPSR evaluations (Hellison & Martinek, 2006; Hellison & Walsh, 2002). All four participants clearly understood the responsibility goals and life skills taught in the club, however, their interpretations were often simplistic and framed as a series of behavioral rules and guidelines. As acknowledged by Hellison (2011), getting youth, especially younger adolescents, to perceive deeper meaning is an ongoing challenge for TPSR program leaders.

This study highlights the importance of connecting with individual student's interests and developmental needs. While this is fundamental to the assumptions of youth development and TPSR (Hamilton, Hamilton et al., 2004; Hellison, 2011), teachers must remain committed to enacting these principles in their lessons and in the way they form pedagogical relationships with their students. Results reported here reflect well on the effectiveness of TPSR in terms of providing meaningful experiences to individual youth participants. As advised by Hellison (2011), recognizing students as individuals, keeping a holistic focus, providing students with a voice in the program, and discussing transfer are hallmarks of TPSR that were implemented in this program and likely contributed to

each participant's ability to find relevance. We also recommend the use of other responsibility-based teaching strategies used in this program and outlined in the TARE (Wright & Craig, 2011). For instance, modeling respectful behavior, providing opportunities for success, setting clear expectations, and fostering positive social interactions were strategies used in this program that may have contributed to the consistent perceptions of increased confidence. Also, leadership and peer-coaching experiences appeared to have been salient for all participants in the current study. TPSR provides an excellent framework for developing compassionate and caring leadership among adolescents that distinguishes it from many other physical education and sport pedagogy models (Martinek et al., 2006). A focus on leadership is a necessary element for a robust implementation of the TPSR model.

In terms of TPSR research, this study highlights the importance of examining individual participants' personalities, life histories, as well as their individualized outcomes. Limitations of the current study relate to the depth of interview data. In the end, two brief interviews with each case study participant proved sufficient, but more frequent interviews throughout the semester may have increased their comfort and allowed us to gain more insights and better represent their perspectives. Also, the informal interviews with some parents were a valuable addition to the data set. Longer formal interviews with a parent/guardian in each case, audio-recorded and transcribed, would have fleshed out their perspectives more and added to the rigor of the analysis.

Future studies may more closely examine the connection between differentiated instruction and student outcomes. Although funding agencies and the current educational environment put pressure on researchers to demonstrate impact on discrete variables, not all youth who come to TPSR programs have the same problems or need the same things (Wright, 2009). As noted by Petitpas et al. (2005), some youth sport programs focus on intervention and prevention. It makes sense for these programs to determine their effectiveness against well-defined outcomes such as reduced aggression or drop-out prevention. However, if a program truly has a developmental intent and is delivered accordingly, there can be as many outcomes as there are participants. Therefore, case study methods and other approaches that allow for a more nuanced and granular approach to assessing impact will continue to have an important role to play in this body of research (Wright, 2009). Along these lines, there is also a need to conduct follow up studies of participants from TPSR programs to assess how their interpretations of the program and the lessons learned may change over time and the extent to which it has impacted their lives.

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