

## The Effect of Sportpersonship Instruction on the Behaviors Of Second Grade Physical Education Students

Charmaine DeFrancesco & Christian Gonzales  
Florida International University, USA

**Abstract:** The effect of sportpersonship instruction on the behaviors of second grade physical education students was examined. Instruction consisted of defining sportpersonship focus words, modifying the words into target behaviors, modeling the behaviors, and reinforcing the behaviors. Results revealed that students from two intact classes improved their behaviors.

Over the past decade, the written and unwritten rules of sport and the personal attributes of sport and physical activity participants and coaches have changed dramatically. There are more females participating in sport and physical activities than ever before and as a result, sport terminology has appropriately been modified to include members of both sexes (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). A *first baseman* is now referred to as a *first baseperson*, *man-to-man defense* is called *person-to-person defense*, and *sportsmanship behaviors* are discussed as *sportpersonship behaviors*.

Today, there are more opportunities for children and adolescents to participate in sport and physical activity programs. It is estimated that 20-35 million children participate in after school programs in the United States (Ewing, Seefeldt & Brown, 1996). Many children begin their sport involvement prior to their seventh birthday and continue participating well through their adolescence and into adulthood. Regardless of their age, however, most sport and physical activity participants are involved because it is fun and it provides them with many opportunities for social interactions (Cote & Hay, 2002).

Historically, educators and parents have argued that sports, physical activities and physical education classes have positively enhanced the holistic development of children, particularly in the areas of social and character development (Smoll & Smith, 1996). Sportpersonship behaviors have typically developed out of participating in competitive and cooperative activities in sport and physical education classes. Recently however, many observations of inappropriate and dangerous behaviors have been witnessed on the playing fields, within the gymnasiums, and in the stands. Some researchers (e.g., Nixon & Frey, 1996) have suggested that displays of social and sport-related deviance have erupted in parallel with the changing values of society, while others (e.g., Smoll & Smith, 1996) contend that the unparalleled growth in opportunities for individuals to participate in sport and coeducational physical education classes has resulted in a shortage of qualified coaches and teachers. Regardless of the argument, formal instruction in sportpersonship is needed in sport and physical education environments.

There are several theoretical methods and practical strategies that can be used to teach or modify behaviors. Weinberg and Gould (1999) have suggested that three of these approaches may be specifically applied in sport and physical education settings. The first approach is a social learning approach. Social learning theory suggests that attitudes and behaviors are learned through modeling, reinforcement and social comparison (Bandura, 1977). Children observe and try to imitate the behaviors of role models and significant others through play or within structured environments such as a youth sport setting. The children are reinforced by others, directly or indirectly to maintain their behaviors.

The next method of examining and teaching sportpersonship behaviors is called the structural-developmental approach. The structural-developmental approach proposes that moral reasoning and behaviors (i.e., sportpersonship behaviors) are conditionally based on the cognitive level of the individual (Weiss & Bredemeier, 1991). As a consequence, younger children or less developed individuals may have more difficulty independently determining appropriate behaviors than older children or adults.

The third approach used to examine sportpersonship is termed the social psychological approach. This approach considers the developmental level of the participant, social learning theory, the type of sport being played, and the skill level of the participant (Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, Briere, & Pelletier, 1997). The social psychological approach suggests that sportpersonship behaviors must be defined specifically by the activity and with regard to the characteristics of the participants. This becomes a complicated task for physical education teachers and youth sport coaches in urban, multicultural environments because appropriate social and sport behaviors differ between cultures.

Sportpersonship and sport-appropriate behaviors vary between sport and physical activities. That is, behaviors deemed "within the behavioral rules" in one sport might be viewed as "deviant" or unsportperson-like in another. Moreover, it is debatable whether young children have the capacity to understand the differences and appropriateness between sport behaviors in the professional or "big leagues" and sport behaviors in the "little leagues." These behavior issues are complicated even more when the coaches and teachers of children and youth do not know or understand the differences.

Because there is not a universally accepted definition of sportpersonship (Weinberg & Gould, 1999), appropriate behaviors must be specifically identified, modeled and reinforced for each activity so that the participants know what behaviors are appropriate and expected. To create safe environments and facilitate the enjoyment among the participants, educators and coaches must define and teach children appropriate sport and social behaviors. The purpose of this investigation was to determine the effects of sportpersonship instruction on the social and sport behaviors of second grade physical education students.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

Participants consisted of 53 second graders from two intact classes in an urban, multicultural elementary school. Many of these students had behavior and learning disabilities.

### *Procedure*

Focus words relating to sportpersonship and deemed appropriate for second graders based on their cognitive and motor skill levels and selected program activities were identified and then modified into target behaviors. The focus words included sportpersonship, honesty, communication, teamwork and compromise. The instructor collected baseline behavior data for each student for two weeks prior to sportpersonship instruction using a behavioral checklist. The checklist was developed using suggestions from Tenoschok (2001) and considered the developmental level of the students and the activities the teacher deemed appropriate for instruction in sportpersonship. This checklist is located in the Appendix.

After baseline data collection was completed, the instructor provided sportpersonship instruction for three weeks. Each class met for 30 minutes three times a week. The instruction included a variety of methods including short lectures, discussions and demonstrations, role-playing, modeling, and viewing visual aids.

When students demonstrated positive targeted behaviors, verbal and nonverbal positive social reinforcements were provided by the instructor. Additionally, color coded stickers related to the target behaviors were placed next to the names of the students on a publicly-displayed chart and the classroom teacher was notified and additional verbal reinforcement was given to the student or the class as a whole.

When students demonstrated negative social or sport behaviors the instructor immediately intervened with a verbal reprimand and in some instances, the student was removed from participation. In all instances, appropriate behavior was modeled by either the instructor or a peer. A color-coded sticker with a black circle around it was placed on the chart next to the name of the student. At the end of the third week of instruction, data were analyzed.

### Results and Discussion

Students from both classes gradually improved their behaviors during the three-week instructional period. One class demonstrated a slight decrease in negative behaviors and an increase in positive behaviors. Figure 1 illustrates this data. Results from the second class revealed a more noticeable drop in negative behaviors and a consistent rise in positive behaviors over the instructional period. Figure 2 illustrates these results.

Figure 1: Behavior Changes for Class One.

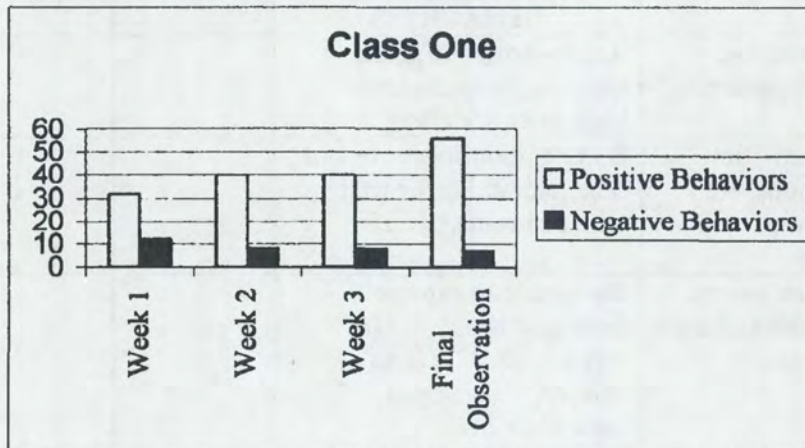
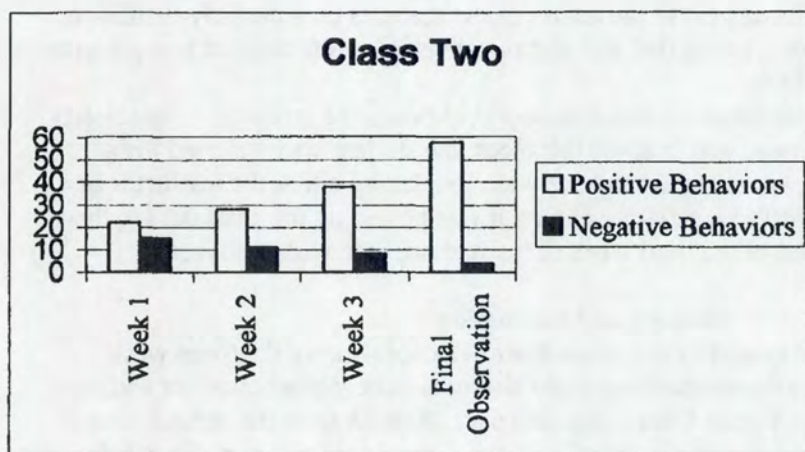


Figure 2: Behavior Changes for Class Two.



Sportspersonship Checklist

| FOCUS WORD/SKILL                    | ACTIVITIES   | TARGET BEHAVIORS   | (+) | (-) |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|-----|-----|
| <i>Teamwork</i><br>(red)            | Relay, modified kick-ball, parachute                                 | Achieving group goals, cheering for teammates, high-fives, for effort  |     |     |
| <i>Honesty</i><br>(blue)            | Fitness activities (laps, sit-ups, etc.)<br>Self-directed activities | Being responsible to record score, admitting the truth with confronted, etc.   |     |     |
| <i>Communication</i><br>(yellow)    | Verbal and written group goals and team assignments                  | Being able to express feelings: "happy," "sad," "mad," "glad." Using "please," "thank you," "I need some help," participating in group discussions, etc. |     |     |
| <i>Compromise</i><br>(green)        | Small group activities with limited equipment (team jump-rope)       | Taking turns, being equal to all team members  |     |     |
| <b>Sportspersonship</b><br>(silver) | Tag, ball-wrestling, tug games                                       | Trying hard, playing to have fun, not mentioning winning or losing   |     |     |
| <b>Totals</b>                       |  |  |     |     |

The increase in positive behaviors and decline in negative behaviors were promising changes for the physical education teacher to observe. However, behavior change takes time. The three-week instructional period should have been lengthened. Perhaps embedding sportpersonship instruction into the regular curriculum throughout the school year may improve and stabilize the positive behavior changes in young students. Based on the literature regarding cognitive development and appropriate behaviors (i.e., Wiess & Bredemeier, 1991) it is questionable whether similar sportpersonship instruction would result across grade levels. The most important aspect of this instructional process was that the teacher made certain that the students understood what was expected of them behaviorally. Teachers and coaches must not take for granted that students and young athletes know the difference between those behaviors that are appropriate and those that are not.

Cooperation and collaboration with the classroom teachers could have been improved throughout the duration of this study. Parallel strategies used in the classroom would have augmented the reinforcements given to the students about their behaviors throughout the day. This, in turn, may have increased positive behavior changes in the students. Likewise, parental involvement and support may have enhanced the outcome of this study. Reinforcing appropriate social behaviors outside of the educational environment may have helped the students realize that appropriate social and sportpersonship behaviors may be transferred across social and educational contexts.

#### References

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Cote, J., & Hay, J. (2002). Children's involvement in Sport: A developmental perspective. In J. M. Silva & D. E. Stevens (Eds.), *Psychological foundations of sport* ( pp. 484-502). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ewing, M.E., Seefeldt, V. D., & Brown, T.T. (1996). Role of organized sport in the Education and health of American children and youth. *Background report on the role of sports in youth development*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Nixon, H.L., & Frey, J.H. (1996). *A sociology of sport*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Smoll, F.L. & Smith, R.E. (1996). *Children and youth in sport: A biopsychosocial perspective*. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.
- Tenoschok, M. (2001). Middle school physical education. Good sport checklist. *Teaching Elementary Physical Education*, 12(3), 36.
- Vallerand, R. J., Deshaies, P., Cuerrier, J.P., Briere, N., & Pelletier, L.C. (1996). Toward a multidimensional definition of sportsmanship. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 8, 89-101.
- Weinberg, R. S., & Gould, D. (1999). *Foundations of sport and exercise psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Weiss, M.R. & Bredemeire, B. J. (1991). Moral development in sport. In K.B. Pandolf & J.O. Holloszy (Eds.), *Exercise and Sport Science Review*, 18, 331-378.