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**Increasing Sportsmanship in Middle Childhood Sports**

Treya Soriano

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

### **Introduction**

This capstone project focuses on children's development of sportsmanship. Sportsmanship is the act of having a good attitude and playing fair. Good sportsmanship can be practiced by players, coaches, and spectators. The problem with sportsmanship in childhood sports is that there is a noticeable lack of sportsmanlike behaviors while participating in athletic competitions. This can include physical education class, a sports team, or just playing tag at recess. An estimation of 57.6% of youth in the United States participate in at least one sport (Bolter et al., 2018) and while they may not stick with it as they grow older, sports play an important role in the shaping of children's values and character. There is a need to promote good sportsmanship in childhood sports to strengthen character development, respect, inclusivity, and positive values while decreasing unsportsmanlike behavior. Sportsmanship can include showing respect, encouraging teammates, or helping an injured opponent (Bolter et al., 2018). A "good sport" is able to promote inclusivity, demonstrate respect to teammates and opponents alike, and overall make the game more enjoyable for their peers. Because of this need, I developed a set of three lessons on the skills necessary to be a good sport. The lessons will focus on defining sportsmanship, handling wins and losses gracefully, and treating teammates with respect. The lessons will be presented to an after school program in Stockton, California. The ages of the children range from five to eight.

### **Needs Statement**

There is a crucial need to address the poor sportsmanship in childhood sports in order to foster a positive environment for all participants. Poor sportsmanship in childhood sports not only compromises the positive environment of athletic participation, but also has an effect on children's mental well-being and development. In a study conducted by Bolter et al. (2018), it

was found that coaches believe it is important to teach good sportsmanship, but they were unable to specify which strategies they were using to incorporate it into their teams. Sportsmanship needs to be taught and reinforced because sports are beneficial for youth, everyone deserves a positive environment to foster growth and development, and good sportsmanship can extend outside of sports and into their daily lives. It is especially important to start teaching these values early, when children are first beginning to play sports, as early intervention can set the foundation for positive habits and attitudes. This project was developed to reach an audience of young children and discuss the importance of good sportsmanship during competitive sports.

Sportsmanship is the act of having a good attitude and playing fair (Eröz et al., 2024). Good sportsmanship can be practiced by players, coaches, and spectators. Qualities of good sportsmanship include respect, fairness, and kindness, both in victory and defeat. Sportsmanship involves showing respect for the opposing team, referees, teammates, and coaches. When everyone practices good sportsmanship, it is a positive and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

It is very important that while engaging in sports, children are provided with a safe environment that fosters growth and development. Safe environments include protecting the adolescents' physical well-being as well as their emotional wellbeing. Issues such as bullying, discrimination, and performance pressure need to be addressed to create a nurturing and inclusive community. Coaches and teammates can help create a positive environment by providing positive feedback and emphasizing the importance of teamwork. According to Bolter & Kipp (2018), "when youth perceive their coaches and teachers to engage in autonomy-supportive behaviors, create a mastery climate, and provide quality feedback and instruction, youth report greater self-perceptions, enjoyment, persistence, self-determined motivation, and

sportsmanlike behaviors.” When coaches create this safe environment for children, the children will thrive.

During middle childhood a child’s development is shaped and a foundation is built for them in the future. Middle childhood begins around the age of six and ends at twelve. During this stage, relationships with peers become more important to the children. It is very critical during this time for children to gain confidence in all aspects of their lives, including sports. According to the CDC, some emotional and social changes children may experience during this time are starting to focus on friendships, teamwork, and wanting to be liked by their peers. Strong social networks like sports teams are important during this stage because social acceptance strongly influences a child’s confidence.

There are many benefits of participating in sports during middle childhood. These benefits extend beyond the obvious benefits of increased physical activity and fitness. Additional benefits include a decrease in delinquency and an increase in positive mental health. According to a study conducted by Khouri-Kassabri and Schneider (2018), there was a significant decrease in delinquent behavior in children that participated in youth sports programs within six months of them beginning the program. Compared to their peers that do not participate in team sports, young athletes experience an increase in self-esteem, well-being, and social skills. According to Neely & Holt (2014), parents reported an increase in teamwork and cooperation after their young children participated in sports. On the contrary, there are certain circumstances when negative outcomes are more likely to occur. One of these circumstances is dealing with poor sportsmanship.

Poor sportsmanship can have many negative effects on children when displayed constantly. One impact can be on the team dynamic. Poor sportsmanship can impact the

cohesiveness of a team and cause conflicts within the team. In a study conducted by Shields and Bredmeier (2005), it was found that 13% of youth admitted to making fun of a lesser skilled teammate. Another effect is lessened enjoyment of the game. When a person displays poor sportsmanship, it can reduce the enjoyment of the game for everyone involved, including players, coaches, officials, and spectators. Poor sportsmanship can also impact a child's personal development and mental health. Engaging in poor sportsmanship can hinder a child's development. It will reinforce negative attitudes, lessen empathy and respect for others. Poor sportsmanship can contribute to a toxic sports environment, which can negatively impact a child's mental health.

Good sportsmanship can extend outside of sports to be implemented in young athletes' daily lives. The principles of sportsmanship can be applied to different situations. Children can develop vital character traits while playing on a team. The Josephson Institute Center for Sports Ethics promotes six necessary character traits: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship (Lumpkin, 2011). Through generalizing these traits, athletes are more equipped to deal with social relationships, conflicts, and future careers.

In conclusion, addressing poor sportsmanship in early childhood sports is crucial for fostering a positive environment that supports the well-being and development of young participants. It is important to teach good sportsmanship early, as it not only creates a positive experience for the children, but also contributes to mental health and social development. Middle childhood, a pivotal stage in a child's growth, emphasizes the significance of confidence-building through positive social interactions, such as those found in sports teams. Participation in sports during this developmental stage offers many benefits, including decreased delinquency and improved mental health. However, the negative impact of poor sportsmanship cannot be

overlooked. Furthermore, the principles of sportsmanship extend beyond the field, helping young athletes build important traits to use off the field. By emphasizing respect, fairness, and kindness, we can nurture not just skilled athletes, but also well-rounded individuals ready to navigate the complexities of society with integrity and empathy. My capstone project addressed this need by promoting sportsmanship through lessons and activities.

### **Theory**

My capstone project is informed by Lev Vygotsky's most commonly known theory, the sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interactions and culture in a child's development (Scott & Palinscar, 2013). Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist that founded this theory shortly after the Russian Revolution in 1917. According to Scott and Palinscar, a key part of Vygotsky's theory is the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the range of things that a child cannot do by themselves, but can accomplish with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). An MKO can be a parent, teacher, coach, or peer. This concept highlights the importance of scaffolding to strengthen a child's development.

This theory can be applied to my capstone project if we think of sportsmanship as a skill that has to be taught. Sportsmanship is not something that a person is born with, children can learn good sportsmanship skills through watching others portray these characteristics. Vygotsky's theory highlights the role of adults, such as parents, coaches, and teachers, in a child's life. These adults in a child's life can model positive sportsmanship and reward appropriate behaviors which can help children develop good sportsmanship skills.. Children at this age are starting to care more about their social lives than before. They are able to understand essential components of sportsmanship such as empathy and fairness, but they may struggle with regulating their

emotions during competition which makes it harder for them to exhibit these skills. Adults can offer guidance in children's learning to regulate their emotions during competition. In conclusion, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a framework for understanding the developmental needs of children during middle childhood and how we can use this understanding to implement interventions to promote good sportsmanship skills.

To apply Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to my capstone project, I incorporated social interactions into the workshop. Children discussed sportsmanship and also played a team game with each other to practice their sportsmanship skills. These interactions provided a way for the participants to learn from each other and for MKOs, such as older participants and myself, to demonstrate good sportsmanship.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My capstone project focuses on children during their middle childhood years. Middle childhood begins around the age of six and ends at age twelve. According to Biehl et al. (2002), there are approximately 25.6 million children in the middle childhood range in the United States, representing about 8% of our population. The middle childhood population is increasingly becoming more diverse. At Flora Arca Mata Elementary School, where my capstone project was conducted at, there are a total of 508 students. The school is very diverse with 53.3% of those students are Hispanic/Latino, while 17.3% of students are African American (CDE, 2022). Most of the students at the school (74%) qualify for free or reduced lunch, which you typically have to be low income or getting government assistance to qualify for.

I took into account the socioeconomic status of the students, as the majority (74%) qualify for free or reduced lunch. This awareness guided me to create a free workshop, ensuring



that all students could participate fully without financial barriers. Gender inclusivity was another important consideration in my project. To make the lessons appealing and meaningful to both boys and girls, I selected topics and activities that were gender-neutral and encouraged participation from all students. By addressing these diversity characteristics, I aimed to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that respected and valued the unique backgrounds and experiences of each student.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The focus of this project was to increase sportsmanship in children ages five to eight. Therefore, I designed a workshop on sportsmanship for a group of school-aged children that focused on the following learning outcomes:

1. Children will be able to identify two benefits of sports participation for their development and well-being.
2. Children will be able to identify two ways to handle wins and losses gracefully.
3. Children will be able to identify one way to treat their teammates with respect.

### **Methods**

#### **Participants and Location**

The project on increasing sportsmanship was conducted at Flora Arca Mata Elementary School in Stockton, California. The project had a total of seven participants. The children were between the ages of five and eight and were a part of the after school program at the school. There was one five year old, three six year olds, two seven year olds, and one eight year old. The participants were five boys and two girls. Four participants were Hispanic/Latino and three participants were African American. All participants spoke English.

**Procedures and Materials**

In the first lesson of the project, I introduced myself and the topic to the participants. The topic was the benefits of sports participation for their development and well-being. I explained to them that I would ask them a question or two at the end of each lesson, but that the score they got would not affect them in any way. I also explained that they could have a piece of candy for each time they participated in the discussion when I asked questions. I began with an icebreaker question where I asked them what their favorite team sport is. I then discussed four benefits of participating in a team sport which included practice and making friends. I ended the lesson with a short quiz on lined paper where the only question was, “What are two good reasons to play a team sport?”

In the second lesson, I focused on the topic of winning and losing as a team. I explained what winning and losing are, then I told them two ways that they can win graciously and two ways they can lose gracefully. I ended the lesson with an emphasis to have fun regardless of the outcome of the game. To reinforce the topic of sportsmanship, I presented a three-minute video featuring a child named Peter, who recounted an incident during a soccer game where an opponent mocked him for missing a game-tying shot. Peter responded by affirming that he did his best, which prompted his coach's praise and ultimately led to the opponent's apology. After the video, I presented the kids with another quiz on lined paper. I asked them two questions, “What is one way to win a game nicely?” and “What is one way to lose a game nicely?”

The topic of the third lesson was treating teammates with respect. In the third lesson of the project, I began the lesson with a movement break. I asked the children if they would like to play either cops and robbers or freeze tag. The kids chose the freeze tag game. We went outside and played two rounds of freeze tag. After the game, we came back in and began the final lesson

on treating teammates with respect. I taught them what respect means and provided three examples of showing respect to their teammates. After the lesson, I gave them the final quiz with the question, “What is one way to show respect to your teammate?”

### **Results**

The first learning outcome was “school-aged children will be able to identify two benefits of sports participation.” The quiz took place immediately following the lesson. Each participant was provided with a lined piece of paper and a writing utensil. The question was vocally stated in an age appropriate manner: “What are two good reasons for playing a sport?”. The highest possible score was two out of two. I reviewed all of the participants’ answers on the quiz. One out of seven participants (14%) provided two benefits of sports participation for their development and well-being and therefore passed the first learning outcome. Four out of seven participants (57%) only provided one sufficient answer to the question and therefore did not pass the first assessment . Finally, the last two participants (29%) did not name any benefits of participating in a sport and therefore did not pass the first learning outcome. The learning outcome was partially met because five out of seven participants (71%) were able to name at least one benefit.

The second learning outcome was “school-aged children will be able to identify two ways to handle wins and losses gracefully.” The quiz took place immediately following the second lesson. Each participant was provided with a lined piece of paper and a writing utensil once again. The learning outcome was broken up into two separate age appropriate questions: “What is one way to win a game and be nice?” and “What is one way to lose a game and be nice?” The highest possible score was two out of two. I reviewed all of the participants’ answers on the quiz. Five out of seven participants (71%) provided two ways to handle wins and losses

gracefully and therefore passed the assessment . One out of seven participants (14%) only provided one sufficient answer to the question and therefore did not pass the assessment . Finally, the last participant (14%) did not name any graceful ways to win or lose and therefore did not pass the assessment . The second learning outcome was fully met.

The third learning outcome was “school-aged children will be able to identify one way to treat their teammates with respect.” The quiz took place immediately following the final lesson. Each participant was provided with a lined piece of paper and a writing utensil once again. The learning outcome was simplified into an age appropriate question: “What is one way to be nice to your teammate?” The highest possible score was one out of one. I reviewed all of the participants’ answers on the quiz. Six out of seven participants (85%) provided one way to treat their teammates with respect and therefore passed the third assessment . The last participant (14%) did not name any way to treat their teammates and therefore did not pass the third learning outcome. The final learning outcome was fully met.

### **Discussion**

The focus of this capstone project was to increase sportsmanship in school-aged children. The project was successful in many ways. Out of three learning outcomes, two were fully met. The second and third learning outcomes were fully met. I believe these were successful because the children were fully engaged in the workshop and the questions were phrased in age-appropriate ways. The children were eager to participate throughout most of the workshop due to incentives. Throughout the presentation, there were simple questions focused on the topic of the slide that the children could answer for a piece of candy. Every time a question was asked, many hands would shoot up to answer the question. The children also applied parts of the lesson

plan to their lives soon after it was introduced to them. After the movement break portion of the lesson where the kids played freeze tag, I called the children in for snack time. The children were saying good game to each other and shaking hands. The children were even complimenting each other on how fast they were. Overall, the project worked well with most of the participants' developmental stages.

The project also had some limitations and challenges as well. For one, the workshop was conducted in one day. This was a lot of information for the participants considering their ages. By the last 15 minutes of the workshop, the children were not as eager to participate as they were in the beginning. While the children did good focusing on the workshop, they were a bit rambunctious at times. The incentives provided great participation, but also made them really upset when they were not chosen to answer the questions. It would cause the children to loudly express their disappointments with not being chosen. My final challenge was the wide age range. The participants' ages ranged from five to eight years old. The single five year old in the group of participants failed every single learning outcome. He would take the longest to finish the quiz and his answers would not make sense. During freeze tag, he got aggressive when another kid tagged him and started crying at the end of the game. The first learning outcome was only partially met. Many of the participants only gave one benefit of sports participation for their development and well-being. I believe that this happened because of the way I phrased the question. I believe that many of the participants forgot to give a second benefit after they wrote the first one.

To make the project more effective for school-aged children in the future, I could change the assessment type into one that is doable for all children. A verbal assessment or one that is more interactive for children may have been more beneficial for the five year old. I would also

break up the workshop into different days so the participants are not given too much information in one day. I would come back multiple times a week and spend more time on each learning outcome. A future continuation of the project can be expanded to coaches and P.E. teachers so that they can learn good sportsmanship practices to include in their curriculum. Even though my project was only partially successful, I believe that it makes great effort in the cause of increasing sportsmanship in school-aged children. In the future, I hope that all children can have a positive environment where they can practice their sportsmanship skills.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A

### Sportsmanship Presentation

### Playing sports with friends!



### Playing sports with friends!

Playing sports with friends is called **team sports**. Team sports are games like basketball and football where you work together to win the game. It's important that everyone works together, supports each other, and has fun. Can you think of any other team sports?



### What is your favorite team sport?



### Helps you stay healthy!



Team sports help us stay active and healthy! They get our bodies moving, build strong muscles and bones, and improve our coordination and balance. Plus, they're so much fun, you won't even realize you're getting exercise!

### Make friends!

When we play team sports, we get to make lots of new friends! We laugh, play, and cheer each other on. Our teammates become like family, and we have the best time together!



### Practice makes perfect!



Team sports teach us how to get better at things we love! This is called **practice**. We learn how to practice with our teammates, and become even more awesome at playing our favorite sports!

### You can play for a long time!

If you really like playing sports with your friends then you can play as long as you want! Even as a grown up! Do you know any grown ups that play team sports?




### Quiz Time!

What did you learn?



### Winning and losing as a team



### Winning games!

Winning means that your team scored more points or goals than the other team. Winning is super fun, but it's also important to remember how we treat the other team when we win. Can you remember a time when you lost? How did you feel?



### Teamwork makes the dream work!

To win as a team, we need to work together! We pass the ball, help each other out, and encourage our teammates. When we play as a team, we can do amazing things!



### It's okay to lose sometimes!

Losing means that the other team scored more points or goals than your team. It's okay to feel sad or disappointed when we lose, but it's also important to not be mean to others.



### Being a good sport!



When we lose, we show good sportsmanship. We shake hands with the other team, say "good game," and cheer for them. It's important to be kind and respectful, even when we're feeling sad.

**Remember to have fun!**

Whether we win or lose, the most important thing is that we have fun playing together as a team!



**Quiz Time!**

What did you learn?



**Break Time!**

What should we play?

Freeze Tag **OR**  
Cops & Robbers?



**Treating teammates with respect!**



**What does respect mean?**

Respect means being kind, caring, and thoughtful towards others. When we respect our teammates, we treat them the way we want to be treated. What are some ways you want to be treated?



**Use listening ears!**

Listening is a big part of respect! When our teammates are talking, we listen with our ears and our hearts. Everyone's ideas and feelings are important, and we show respect by listening to each other. Can you show me your listening ears?



**Cheer for them!**

We can show respect by encouraging and cheering for our teammates! When someone makes a great play or tries their best, we give them a high-five, clap, or say, "Good job!"



**Remember to have fun!**

Whether we win or lose, the most important thing is that we have fun playing together as a team!



**Treat others the way you want to be treated**

*Respecting our teammates also means being fair to everyone. We treat each teammate with kindness and respect, no matter who they are. Everyone deserves to be treated equally!*



**Quiz Time!**

What did you learn?



**Thanks for listening!**




## Appendix B

### Capstone Festival Presentation

**Increasing Sportsmanship in School-Aged Children**

Presented by: **Treya Soriano**  
Human Development & Family Science



**Introduction**

Sportsmanship is treating others fairly and respectfully while playing a game

Why sportsmanship?

**Needs Statement**

- 50% of parents and coaches believe that there has been a decrease in good sportsmanship.
- In a 2018 study, it was found that coaches believe it is important to teach good sportsmanship, but were unable to specify which strategies they were using to incorporate it into their teams (Balter et al. 2018).
- There is a critical need to address the poor sportsmanship in middle childhood sports in order to foster a positive environment for all participants.

**Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory**

- Suggests that a child's development heavily depends on their social interactions and culture.
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the difference between what children can and cannot do themselves.

**How does this relate to sportsmanship?**

- Sportsmanship is a skill that can be taught by a more knowledgeable other (MKO)
- Interactions with teammates, opposing teams, and coaches can help a child develop sportsmanship skills

**The Project Learning Outcomes**

I designed a workshop on sportsmanship for a group of school-aged children. It focused on the following learning outcomes:

**Learning Outcome #1**

School-aged children will be able to identify two benefits of sports participation for their development and well-being.

**Learning Outcome #3**


School-aged children will be able to identify one way to treat their teammates with respect.

**Learning Outcome #2**

School-aged children will be able to identify two ways to handle wins and losses gracefully.

**Methods**

- Flora Arca Mata Elementary School in Stockton, CA
  - 70% of students are African American or Hispanic or Latino
  - 74% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch
- Seven participants
  - Ages 5 to 8
  - Five boys, two girls



### Methods



Playing sports with friends!

Episode

Movement Break

**Interactive Presentation**

**Video**

**Movement Break**

### Assessment Results for LO#1

School-aged children will be able to identify two benefits of sports participation for their development and well-being.

Assessment: Quiz

One participant (14.28%) scored 2 out of 2  
 Four participants (57.14%) scored 1 out of 2  
 Two participants (28.57%) scored 0 out of 2

Learning Outcome was partially met.

### Assessment Results for LO#2

School-aged children will be able to identify two ways to handle wins and losses gracefully.

Assessment: Quiz

Five participants (71.43%) scored 2 out of 2  
 One participant (14.28%) scored 1 out of 2  
 One participant (14.28%) scored 0 out of 2

Learning Outcome was fully met.

### Assessment Results for LO#3

School-aged children will be able to identify one way to treat their teammates with respect.

Assessment: Quiz

Six participants scored (85.71%) 1 out of 1  
 One participant scored (14.28%) 0 out of 1

Learning Outcome was fully met.

### Discussion

Focus: Increasing Sportsmanship in School-Aged Sports

**Successes**


- 2 out of 3 LOs were fully met
- Seeing the children implement the lesson into their lives
- Eager participation with incentives



### Discussion

**Challenges & Limitations**

- LO #1 partially met
- A lot of information in one day
- Wide age range



### Discussion

**If I could do it again...**

- More age appropriate assessments
- Break up the days

**In the future...**

- Workshop for coaches and PE teacher
- More age groups



# Thank you!

