

# Research Basis for STAR Sportsmanship™

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## **I. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to provide the research basis for the design of STAR Sportsmanship. Under guidance and direction of Learning Through Sports, STAR Sportsmanship demonstrates sportsmanship qualities to users and presents decision-making activities that increase the likelihood of long-term integration. Its design is based on analysis of audience needs and aptitudes, research literature, and instructional content.

## **II. Analysis**

Review of current literature, discussion with the advisory committee provided guidance as to the direction and focus of STAR Sportsmanship. An extensive review was conducted of athletic organizations, sportsmanship books and manuals, web sites, and teacher comments. Organizations researched included both national (Character Counts!; Department of Education; Education World; Gatorade; Gatorade Sports Science Institute; NCAA) as well as community (Tiburon Peninsula Soccer League, CA; Wake County Public School System, NC). Unfortunately, most of the literature delved into sportsmanship merely at a general level. By general, we mean that only the basics were covered, instead of the much-needed specifics. Sportsmanship cannot be accomplished by merely knowing *what* to do – learners need to know *how* and *when* to do it. It's similar to telling a basketball player that she needs to shoot the ball without ever showing her how to shoot a jump shot, lay-up, or free throw or demonstrating *when* each type of shot is required!

Indicative of sportsmanship's diminishing importance in youth athletics, research of national and community sportsmanship publications and campaigns failed to allude to the name of a person or organization established as the leading sportsmanship authority. However, it did at least indicate that the sportsmanship policies of most leagues and organizations are aimed at improving the moral character of young athletes both on and off the field (Character Counts!, 2004).

Three approaches to teaching sportsmanship were the most often encountered – each to be addressed in further detail. The first was for organizations to post a general 'sportsmanship creed' or 'athlete's pledge'. The second method of conveying sportsmanship was that of publishing a list of behavioral traits for young athletes to exemplify. In other words, principles by which to live. Third, it was found that some organizations chose to address sportsmanship by classifying it into interactions with different groups, i.e., team, coaches, and officials.

STAR Sportsmanship is a hybrid version using these three approaches to teaching sportsmanship. The remainder of this document outlines the research in greater detail, and then describes the research-based design decisions.

## A. Sportsmanship by Athlete's Creed

A number of leagues and other organizations posted an athlete's sportsmanship creed on their web site, similar to the one shown below. While these can serve as suitable reminders to young athletes regarding appropriate attitude and respect, they fail to show or demonstrate exactly how to behave in specific situations. Although the following list is an example of *one* summary of foundational sportsmanship guidelines, note that there is an apparent lack of specifics regarding the achievement of certain levels of sportsmanship. In other words, the guidelines describe the basics of *what* to do but fail to specifically show *how* to do it. The following Sportsmanship Checklist for Kids has been abbreviated to aid reader convenience. It details the lack of specifics found in the majority of sportsmanship literature.

1. I abide by the rules of the game: Part of good sportsmanship is knowing the rules of the game and playing by them. If a player decides to play a given sport, it is the responsibility of that player to learn not only how to play but how to play according to the rules.
2. I try to avoid arguments: Part of good sportsmanship is anger management. Arguing with officials, coaches or opponents is often simply a misguided effort at "letting off steam" in the heat of competition.
3. I share in the responsibilities of the team: Good sportsmanship implies that the player on a team is a team player. In other words, the player understands that his or her behavior reflects on the team in general.
4. I give everyone a chance to play according to the rules: In youth recreational sports the more talented player, if they are good sports, will look out for and encourage the less talented player on the team.
5. I always play fair: Honesty and integrity should be an integral part of sports. A player with good sportsmanship does not want a hollow victory, which comes as a result of cheating.
6. I follow the directions of the coach: A player with good sportsmanship listens to and follows the directions of the coach, realizing that each player's decisions affect the rest of the team.
7. I respect the other team's effort: Whether the other team plays better or whether they play worse, the player with good sportsmanship does not put the other team down.
8. I offer encouragement to teammates: A sign of good sportsmanship is a player who praises teammates when they do well and who encourages them when they make mistakes.

9. I accept the judgment calls of the game officials: Part of the human condition is making mistakes. Arguing with an official over a judgment call simply wastes energy.
10. I end the game smoothly: When the game is over, pouting, threatening, cajoling has no place in the life of the players with good sportsmanship. (Printable Checklists, 2004)

## **B. Sportsmanship by Character Trait**

It was found that various organizations attempted to teach sportsmanship as a sum total of moral character traits (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990). Some character traits cited with the greatest frequency included humility, teamwork, courtesy, respect, and diligence. Because sportsmanship can be applied to actions both on and off the playing field, we examined the possibility of designing the instruction by character trait, but later abandoned that strategy. This decision was made because an attempt to effectively teach sportsmanship (a principle) as a reflection of courtesy, respect or diligence (also principles) would have been impossible under time constraints. Principle-centered instruction requires the implementation of guidelines (Clark, 1999, p. 143), and teaching more than one principle would have watered down the potency of the original purpose of the instruction – sportsmanship.

## **C. Sportsmanship by Social Interaction**

A third approach cited in the review of the literature was the teaching of sportsmanship as it applies to social interactions with three main groups: teammates, opponents and officials. Presenting the instruction within the framework of these three categories was another closely examined approach, some of which was adopted into the design. This way, the instruction could be naturally divided into scenarios that demonstrate *how to* show sportsmanship when interacting with people from these three categories. The issue however, was the fact that *how to* still does not provide enough directions if there are no specific guidelines to follow.

### **III. Design**

#### **A. Instructional Content – Teaching Sportsmanship as a Principle**

Because sportsmanship is an attitudinal and behavioral area that requires instant, dynamic decision-making, we determined it best to implement a *how to* design that employed principle-driven guidelines. This was accomplished by teaching sportsmanship as a single, overriding principle centered on four global guidelines. This way, learners could apply appropriate attitudes and behaviors to a variety of situations, independent of any sport or other social context. This approach is backed by Clark (1999) who states that when teaching principles, the student needs to translate guidelines “into the steps that best fit a given work situation, which will vary each time” (p. 143). In addition, Merrill (1994) affirms that “a statement of a principle represents the general law that applies to the many specific situations to which that general law is applicable” (p. 121).

One of the earlier considerations for the project was that the subject be taught solely in the context of social interactions with three groups: teammates, opponents and officials. The advantage to this approach is that learners are visually shown how they should act toward people in these different groups. The disadvantage however is that the various situations don’t provide any guidelines for far transfer to future situations. As a result, we chose to teach sportsmanship as a principle but based the context of the instruction on young athlete’s interactions with team, opponents and officials. That way, oft-encountered sports scenarios could be used as “a series of varied context examples...which illustrate how the guidelines can be applied in diverse circumstances” (p. 154). Gibbons and Fairweather (1998) also back the decision to use real world sports examples to teach sportsmanship as a principle.

As the application of a principle is either demonstrated or practiced, the designer must ensure that the full range of possible applications is presented there in appropriate proportion. Problem sets have subtle effects on misconceptions in students, and the designer must be sure to show the student a balanced variety of problem settings during both presentation and practice. (p. 270)

As is common when teaching principles, a formal definition must first be established (p. 145). Keeping the wording appropriate for the audience, we defined sportsmanship as *being friendly to others in all you do and say during sports*. The STAR Player guidelines were then formulated – a simple acronym that ties into the sports metaphor of being an all-star. Although it’s not mentioned in the instruction, the STAR metaphor can also be extended to the embodiment of the North Star. While the stars in our solar system change

position during the earth's rotation, the North Star stays firmly in place under any circumstance. This metaphor holds true with sportsmanship; situations will vary, yet the athlete must be firmly grounded in ethical attitudes and decisions. The STAR Player guidelines are:

1. Stop when it's time to make a sportsmanship decision,
2. Think how your actions could affect you, your team and your opponents,
3. Act right away to show good sportsmanship,
4. Replay your actions in your mind and decide if you showed good sportsmanship.

Because social situations are constantly in flux, guidelines such as these assist learners in making decisions based on ethical steps that are dynamic enough to mold to any social interaction. Psychological research backs the use of such guidelines.

According to Rest (1983, 1984), in each moral action at least four major processes are implicated, and all four are necessary for producing moral behavior. The four processes are: (a) interpreting the situation by recognizing possible courses of action and how each would influence the welfare of all parties involved; (b) forming a judgment about what ought to be done in that situation; (c) deciding what one actually intends to do by selecting among competing values; (d) implementing the actual behavior. (Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001, p. 39)

Once we developed a *how to* strategy for teaching sportsmanship, we finalized a list of sports scenarios most applicable to the target audience. These scenarios served as a foundation of examples from which to draw on during the presentation of the STAR Player guidelines. Because these scenarios are relevant to situations that young athletes will often encounter, the instruction is much more applicable, thus enhancing the likelihood of long-term retention.

The actual design strategy (or the method by which the instruction is presented to the learner) is founded on Merrill's (2000) First Principles of Instruction. These principles consist of:

1. Instruction centered on a real world problem (the need for sportsmanship athletic competition),
2. Activation of prior knowledge and experience (questions, scenarios and analogies familiar and relevant to the target audience),

3. Demonstration of instructional content (case examples relevant to solving the real world problem),
4. Application of knowledge and skills (assessment activities that gauge the learning taking place),
5. Integration of newly acquired knowledge and skills (additional activities that challenge the learner's long-term retention of the content).

## **B. Presenting the Instruction**

Learning Through Sports prides itself on employing research-based design strategies, but presentation of the instruction is also vital. Presenting the message correctly is paramount if learners are to learn. Thus, we adhere to recommendations prescribed by Clark and Mayer (2003) which includes following these e-learning development principles:

1. **Multimedia:**
  - Graphics are relevant rather than decorative,
  - Animations are used to illustrate principles,
  - Both text and graphics are used to present instructional content,
2. **Contiguity**
  - Explanatory text is adjacent to the graphic it describes,
  - Feedback appears on the same screen as the question,
3. **Modality**
  - Audio narration is used to explain onscreen graphics or animations,
  - Audio narration is not used to recite identical onscreen text thus confusing the auditory and visual channels,
4. **Redundancy**
  - The use of graphics, text and audio at the same time is avoided,
  - Graphics are described by words presented in the form of audio narration, not by narration and text,
5. **Coherence**
  - Lessons don't contain extraneous sounds in the form of background music or unrelated environmental sounds,
  - Lessons use only the graphics or video clips that are essential to the knowledge and skills to be learned,
6. **Personalization**
  - Content is presented in conversational tone using "you," "your," "I," "our," and "we,"
  - Coaching is provided via conversational narration from onscreen characters,
  - Characters are visual,
  - Vocal quality and script are natural and conversational,
  - Characters serve a valid instructional purpose. (2003)

### **C. Dramatic Treatment**

The dramatic treatment varies based on the age-appropriate version (Elementary, Middle School, High School, Coaches/Parents) of the instruction is centered in real-world settings. Each program utilizes high-end visual display to show the learner examples and non-examples of how to be a good sport.

Showing examples and non-examples of sportsmanship interactions is a research proven method. Learners become easily intimidated if they see their peers (other same-grade students, other coaches, or other parents) are more competent at the behavior in question. As such, it's recommended that peers in the instruction model effective and less-effective behaviors from a skill level similar to that of the learner. This peer-modeling strategy is backed by Driscoll (2000) who states that learners in a research study "gained confidence and were more likely to improve their performance when they observed models who initially showed the same fears but who gradually reached a mastery performance" (p. 314).

### **D. Assessment Activities**

The assessment activities were designed and strategically placed so learners encounter them at vital stages of the instruction. Clark and Mayer (2003) support this approach stating that "practice is more effective when it is distributed throughout the lesson rather than placed in one location" (p. 164). Distributed practice throughout the lesson also results in long-term retention of learning. Clark and Mayer (2003) cite the National Research Council:

The so-called spacing effect – that practice sessions spaced in time are superior to massed practices in terms of long-term retention – is one of the most reliable phenomena in human experimental psychology. The effect is robust and appears to hold for verbal materials of all types as well as for motor skills. (p. 164)

Activities are augmented by audio feedback (which helps learners evaluate their progress) during every stage of the instruction. Gibbons and Fairweather (1998) state that "feedback is an instructional message which follows and is in some way conditioned by the actions of a student...Failure to provide feedback has the same effect on a learner as failing to answer during a conversation" (p. 315).

## **IV. Conclusion**

STAR Sportsmanship exemplifies the powerful impact of delivering audience-engaging software combined with pedagogically sound instruction. Research-based design methodologies enhance educational value while content-relevant activities gauge learner progress.

Today's digital native learner demands and requires an engaging, interactive digital based learning experience. STAR is an example of how technology assists educators in solving many new issues in today's education environment.

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