Creating and Confirming

A Positive Sporting Climate

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Positive moral socialization can occur through physical education (PE) and sport participation since both provide learning environments where participants have the opportunity to learn competition, cooperation, role-playing and discipline regarding rules, regulations and goals. In this sense sports can be seen as a laboratory of human experience and citizenship (Pennington, 2017). Students who develop prosocial competence during the years of their formative education are more likely to be successful throughout their lives (Hellison, 2011), promoting the belief that character and positive sporting behavior is what we are supposed to teach in educational athletics more than anything else (Engh, 1999). Furthermore, some scholars suggest that physical activities (such as PE or sporting events) provide cathartic benefits by releasing participants' restrained emotions (Baron & Richardson, 2004). This leads some to make the assertion that participation in sport and physical activity — under appropriate leadership and guidance — can help young people appreciate health, exercise and fitness; learn about themselves and how to handle adversity; and experience teamwork and prosocial attitudes in a safe environment (Giebink & McKenzie, 1985; Naylor &Yeager, 2013; Pennington, 2017).

For years a large number of young students and athletes have enrolled in one or more "moral reasoning in sport" courses aimed at improving their moral reasoning and positive sporting behaviors

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(Gehring, 2005; Hellison & Walsh, 2002; Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001; Raakman, 2006). During this period the behaviors of course participants have become more prosocial. Specifically, most PE participants and youth student-athletes stated that they saw the importance of prosocial behavior and developed social relationships outside of the sport realm. Unanimously, the participants stated that they now think before they act, especially when in group situations (Lyons & Turner, 2015). This leads some scholars to conclude that deliberately aiming to improve PE and sport participants' character and sporting behaviors is a worthwhile endeavor (Naylor &Yeager, 2013).

However, very limited research explains students' positive responses to specific motivational climates in sport, and many physical educators do little more than casually observe the sporting behaviors of students in their care. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to encourage physical educators and youth coaches to develop and maintain a task-mastery motivational climate and to provide physical educators and youth coaches a tool to assess the presence of positive sporting behaviors.

Task- versus Ego-oriented Climates

Having a positive competitive climate leads to greater enjoyment in PE and sport via perceived competence and intrinsic motivation (Gråstén, Jaakkola, Liukkonen, Watt, & Yli-Piipari, 2012; Hellison, 2011). Feeling emotionally "safe" is an important component of a positive competitive climate to encourage participation. Furthermore, positive character and moral expressions from classmates, teammates and opponents are important contributors to feeling emotionally "safe" and competent. Commonly pursued *social character* values include loyalty, good citizenship and teamwork, while positive *moral* values include fairness and honesty (Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011; Stoll & Beller, 2000). The accumulation of positive social and moral values contributes to fostering overall sporting behaviors, which is stated to progress in three stages: (1) restraint, (2) external toward teammates, and (3) external toward opponents (Hellison, 2011; see Table 1).

The climate of the play and competitive environment is established by the teacher or coach. The nature of the environment indicates to students what is expected and what is appropriate as they play and compete. For example, an environment where task-oriented goals can be set is preferable to an environment where ego-oriented goals are set (Nicholls, 1989). Task (or mastery) goals suggest the individual is interested in mastering a skill or task. By mastering certain skills of an activity or sport, the student or athlete feels competent in their ability to perform in the playing environment (Duda, Olson, & Templin, 1991). This indicates that they are also intrinsically motivated and evaluate their success by effort and improvement. Task-oriented goals are commonly concerned with high effort, doing your best, collaborating with teammates and classmates, and enjoying sport, competition and physical activity. For example, a participant with task-oriented goals would care less about beating their opponent and care more about im-

Table 1.
Stages of Positive Sporting Behaviors: A Progression of Levels

Stages	Focus	Positive Sporting Behaviors
Stage 1: Restraint	*Internal* – student looks inward	• Not arguing with officials • Not retaliating for fouls/physical contact
Stage 2: External toward teammates	*External* – student focuses on peers within their team	• High-fiving teammates • Saying "good job" after a goal is made
Stage 3: External toward opponents	*External* – student focuses on peers outside of their team	• Shaking hands with opponents • Acknowledging effort (e.g., "nice play")

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proving their own technical ability to participate in the sport or activity.

Ego (or performance) goals are set by the individual in comparison with similarly skilled individuals and base success on doing better than opponents (Duda et al., 1991). They measure success by not being the least skilled individual and put more emphasis on winning as opposed to developing skill. Ego-oriented individuals are extrinsically motivated. Ego-oriented goals are commonly concerned with being better than others, having the right equipment, luck, and possessing innate ability. For example, a participant with an ego orientation would care more about beating their opponent even if it meant they, themselves, did not perform particularly well.

Like a task-mastery orientation, ego-oriented demonstrations can be observed in settings outside of sport and physical competition (e.g., academics, the arts, work and professional environments, and other social performances). Many common strategies designed to establish an appropriate task-oriented environment have been suggested (Ames, 1992; Pennington, McEntyre, Susnera, Jones, & Dennis, 2017; Sinelnikov & Hastie, 2010), such as the TARGET (task, authority, recognition, grouping, timing) approach (see Table 2). But how can teachers and coaches assess whether their environment is more task- or ego-oriented, or whether students are developing positive sporting behaviors and attitudes?

Table 2.
TARGET: Establishing an Appropriate Task-oriented Environment

TARGET	Definition
Task	Activity or event students will encounter during instruction. Tasks can accommodate to students' skill levels.
Authority	Way in which decisions are made throughout a lesson (teacher-led vs. student-led; direct instruction vs. student-centered)
Recognition	Variety of ways in which teachers can provide students with feedback
Grouping	How students are divided and categorized into groups
Timing	Amount of time scheduled within a lesson for practice, planning, evaluation, etc.

TARGET	Mastery/Task-oriented	Performance/Ego-oriented
Task	• Evaluation based on effort and process • Emphasis on mastery	• Evaluation based on outcome and product • Emphasis on winning
Authority	• Students included in leadership roles and/or decision-making • Opportunities to give input for establishing priorities in task completion and method/pace of learning	• Teacher makes all the decisions for the class • Decisions are aimed at achieving winning rather than improvement
Recognition	• Private recognition and feedback • Recognition based on effort	• Public recognition, declaration of winners/losers • Recognition based on achievement
Grouping	• Small groups • Groups of mixed-ability students	• Teams chosen by ability • Uneven ability between teams
Timing	• Flexibility in timing of practice, planning, and evaluation	• Inflexible time to practice, plan or evaluate

Sources: Ames (1992); Sinelnikov & Hastie (2010); Pennington, McEntyre, Susnera, Jones & Dennis (2017)

Instrument to Assess Positive Sporting Behaviors: THOMAS

The hierarchical observation method for analyzing sportsmanship (THOMAS; McKenzie & Giebink, 1989) is designed to study competitive gameplay situations. Observations can be extended to an entire PE class, activity, lesson or competition. Observers using THOMAS code *positive* and *negative* sporting behaviors, and they further classify those interactions as *verbal*, *nonverbal* or *physical* (see Table 3). Examples of positive verbal sporting behaviors include praising teammates or opponents, offering to equalize competition, and congratulating others. Examples of positive nonverbal sporting behaviors include clapping and giving a "thumbs-up." Examples of positive physical sporting behaviors include helping up a player, carrying equipment for a player, and giving high-fives. Examples of negative verbal behaviors include using profanity or arguing with an official. Examples of negative nonverbal behaviors include faking an injury, using an obscene gesture, or deliberately delaying play. Examples of negative physical behaviors include shoving or kicking players and grabbing away equipment.

This systematic observation technique uses event recording in which the observer indicates the frequency of behavior occurrences for each participant or team during an activity or game, usually to make comparisons, track behavior improvement, or to gauge the competitive climate of their play environment. One could use this instrument in conjunction with positive sporting behavior objectives, to incorporate new technologies into the classroom, as an assessment tool, and to facilitate student involvement.

An observer may make behavior recordings live, or film gameplay events and analyze it in a separate session. When any behavior related to social sporting behaviors is observed during an observation period, both the type (positive and negative) and category (verbal = V, nonverbal = N, or physical = P) can be coded on a separate sheet per individual or team (McKenzie & Giebink, 1989). Or a blank code sheet per individual or team (Figure 1) can be filled out using hanging-gate tallies. Then the total volume of behaviors is calculated to give the recorder an illustration of positive sporting behaviors that occur during game play. From there, based on the duration of the lesson, the observer can calculate the rate per minute of the sporting behaviors.

Baseline values of behaviors across all sports, activities and ages are complex and challenging to standardize. Therefore, results of coding are somewhat interpretive but can be enhanced by contextualizing the setting from which they were derived. For example, the rate per minute of total behaviors observed will be affected by the nature of the sport or activity, as some sports provide more opportunity for social behaviors than others (e.g., in basketball, there is a higher likelihood of players interacting than in golf, largely due to more frequent physical contact and closer proximity of many players competing at the same time in a smaller space). Administrators of THOMAS are encouraged to use the instrument for multiple observations of the same or simi-

Table 3.
THOMAS — The Hierarchical Observation Method for Analyzing Sportspersonship

Description

THOMAS measures the physical, verbal and nonverbal responses of students associated with sportspersonship.

- THOMAS is designed to study competitive gameplay situations; observations can be extended to an entire physical education class/activity/lesson or gameplay session.
- Observers code for two categories: positive sporting behaviors and negative behaviors.
- One could use this instrument in conjunction with prosocial objectives of lessons, to incorporate new technologies into the classroom, as an assessment tool, and to facilitate student involvement.

Positive Behaviors

1. Physical: Involves physical contact with teammate or opponent
   - Handshake, pat on the back, high-five
   - Assisting an injured player, spotting
2. Verbal: Oral communication with teammate or opponent
   - "Good job!" "Way to go!"
   - Consoling an injured player
3. Non-verbal: Physical movement but no contact with teammate or opponent
   - Thumbs up, clapping hands, fist pump

Negative Behaviors

1. Physical: Involves physical contact with teammate or opponent
   - Pushing, hitting, kicking
   - Non-strategic fouling, grabbing away equipment
2. Verbal: Oral communication with teammate or opponent
   - Arguing with officials, teammates, opponents
   - Name-calling
3. Non-verbal: Physical movement but no contact with teammate or opponent
   - Obscene gestures, taunting, refusing to participate
   - Faking an injury, deliberately delaying a game, spitting

Figure 1.
Sample hanging-gate THOMAS code sheet

Student/Team:

Observer:

Date:

Activity:

Lesson Type:

Start Time:

Stop Time:

Duration (minuets):

Positive Sporting Behaviors	Physical	Verbal	Non-verbal	**Total**	**Rate per minute**
Occurrences					
Negative Sporting Behaviors	Physical	Verbal	Non-verbal	**Total**	**Rate per minute**
Occurrences					

lar activities to evaluate if participant behaviors evolve as a result of more instruction regarding sporting behaviors. By recording multiple sessions of similar activities, teachers can establish a baseline of behaviors in each activity for which they will code using THOMAS, and then make comparisons across a larger unit and across a variety of sports and activities. This may serve to inform them as to which activities may more naturally draw more aggressive behaviors out of participants, and whether participants may require more guidance and instruction for monitoring their sporting behavior during those activities.

Based on the expectations and sporting behavior standards set by the teacher, the teacher may choose to share the results of certain sessions coded with THOMAS to set new goals for future lessons and sessions (e.g., to reduce the number of all negative interactions by 50% or to increase the number of positive verbal interactions to occur at a rate of at least one per minute).

While game play tends to be the most authentic form of sport, as it provides the time in which participants are met with more challenging sporting scenarios, observers and coders may consider using this instrument at any point during a regular lesson, practice or

pre/post-game activity to assess their sporting climate. Because the coach or teacher will want to emphasize specific sporting behaviors they would like to see improved or eliminated, they may consider using THOMAS at multiple points during a unit to verify that participants are making adjustment to their sporting attitudes and behaviors. Coaches and physical educators may also consider allowing a rotation of players and students to record sporting behavior data as a way to engage them with the concept of social attitudes and behaviors in sport from the unique perspective of the observer.

Conclusion

The literature suggests that the volume of prosocial behaviors is linked to the task or ego climate created by the instructor. Hence, the instructor or coach plays a big role in the intended socialization of their students. It is recommended that instructors bear this in mind when establishing the culture of their class and the climate of their sporting environment. Cooperation-based activities may be preferred over competition-based activities if the development of positive sporting attitudes and behaviors is a main objective.

It is hypothesized that coding with THOMAS in a variety of sports would yield a variety of results, as each sport embodies distinct cultures and values. This includes individual versus team sports, and sports with high levels of physical contact versus low levels of physical contact. Aggression and negative sporting behaviors have been found to be directly associated with the type of athletic event; high body-contact sports (e.g., wrestling, football) tend to inspire the greatest aggression and negative behaviors, while individualized, non-contact sports (e.g., track, golf) inspire the least (Bryan & Horton, 1976). This is not to suggest that sports with high levels of contact should be avoided, but teachers and coaches should be aware of the elevated intensity typically associated with these sports and should make further attempts to create a safe and positive sporting climate for all participants in contact sports.

Because previous research has focused on small sample sizes and mostly male participants, a future application of THOMAS may place more focus on female participants and use larger samples. It is suggested that young women often feel less optimistic about achieving competitive-related goals compared to their male counterparts (Puskar et al., 2010). As self-esteem in young males is greater than in females during adolescence, decreasing the influence of anxiety in young women by using less competitive activities in a task-oriented environment could potentially correct this gender imbalance and improve participation outcomes (Brunet, Sabiston, Dorsch, McCreary, 2010). Physical educators and coaches should not seek to disallow young women to participate in highly competitive or ego-oriented climates, but instead consider how fostering an ego-oriented climate may be discouraging and alienating a number of participants who are less enthusiastic about ultra-competitive activities in ego-oriented environments.

The physical educator or coach has the opportunity to create situations that will enhance the social and character development of the individuals under their care, as well as advocate for participation in sport, physical activity, and positive social relationships (Pennington & Sinelnikov, 2018). While developing a prosocial environment can be challenging, intentionally designing programs and fostering task-oriented climates can make a difference. To examine the motivational climate of their environment and to verify the positive sporting tendencies of individuals under their supervision, physical educators and coaches may consider observing and coding with THOMAS.

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