True Competition:
Mental Maps for Improved Performance, Ethics, and Enjoyment

David Light Shields, Ph.D. & Brenda Light Bredemeier, Ph.D.
University of Missouri-St. Louis

2011 AAHPERD National Convention
March 30, 2011
True Competition:
Mental Maps for Improved Performance, Ethics, and Enjoyment

David Light Shields, Ph.D. & Brenda Light Bredemeier, Ph.D.
University of Missouri-St. Louis

2011 AAHPERD National Convention
March 30, 2011

The Ethics to Excellence Approach

Building Champions through “True Competition”

In This Workshop
We will learn about “Contesting Theory” and how to use it to:
1: Maximize performance excellence
   - manage goals, focus, stress, and distractions
2: Increase enjoyment and satisfaction
   - tap sustainable motivation and positive emotion
3: Strengthen character and ethics
   - deepen commitment to moral norms of fairness and respect

Sport can be a dynamic and powerful vehicle to promote a commitment to excellence, positive values, and a dedication to ethics.

Competition can lead to a host of negative outcomes and, in fact...

Ethical Problems are Prevalent in Sports at All Levels

A Bit of Wisdom from Comedy...

Traditional Approaches to Explaining the Dynamics & Consequences of Competition:

- Realistic Conflict Theory
- Social Interdependence Theory

Why?
"Competition, by its very nature, damages relationship. Competitors’ interests are inherently opposed. I succeed if you fail, and vice versa. ...so the failure of others is devoutly to be wished.” — Alfie Kohn

The Good News

• In a study of 803 youth (age 9-15), 189 parents, and 61 coaches from West Coast, Midwest, and East Coast:
  98% of coaches agreed or strongly agreed that: “Teaching sportsmanship is a major part of a coach’s job.”
  97% agreed or strongly agreed that: “I can have a tremendous impact on the sportsmanship of my athletes.”


And Yet …

Youth:
  9% cheated
  15% tried to hurt an opponent
  31% argued with official

Parents:
  13% angrily criticized own child
  14% yelled at an official

Coaches:
  7% taught how to break a rule
  42% angrily yelled at an official
  36% angrily yelled at a player
  8% made fun of someone on team


Why do sportsmanship programs so often fail to achieve their stated goals?

Before I enter the ring, I have to change. I have to let the goodness out and bring all the bad in, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Larry Holmes on 60 Minutes
Interview with Ron Rivera:

Q: Can you describe your personality?
Ron: Most of the time, I’m pretty soft-spoken, considerate and friendly. …

Q: Do you have a different personality on the field?
Ron: I’m mean and nasty then. …I’m so rotten. I have a total disrespect for the guy I’m going to hit.

A 34% cut in sportsmanship should return us to winning.

A “Radical” Alternative to Sportsmanship Programs

Radical = Addressing the “root” of the problem

Ethical problems originate from a deep misunderstanding of what “competition” is.

What can Cognitive Science Tell Us?

Contesting Theory

There are two distinct ways to “see” a contest.

A Quick Detour into Cognitive Science:

Have you ever:
Invested time in a worthy project?
Wasted your time?
Found ways to save time?
Spent time on something important?
Made time for someone?
Budgeted time for a leisure activity?
We often make sense of abstract concepts through use of preconscious “deep” metaphors.

These “deep” metaphors (or what cognitive scientists call “conceptual metaphors”) arise from our physical, embodied experience.

For example
- Abstract concept: “Love”
- Is often interpreted through a concrete metaphor: “Journey”
  - “I think we’re at a crossroads.”
  - “We aren’t going anywhere.”
  - “Look how far we’ve come.”
  - “It’s been a long, bumpy road.”
- The “journey” metaphor provides a conceptual scaffolding for the experience of love.
- Everyday cognition is structured by dozens of such preconscious deep metaphors.

The Central Premise of Contesting Theory

People’s preconscious metaphors for contesting influence their interpretations and behaviors.

The Central Premise of Contesting Theory

People’s preconscious metaphors for contesting influence their interpretations and behaviors.

What We “SEE” Profoundly Impacts Our Motivations and Behaviors

What We “SEE” Profoundly Impacts Our Motivations and Behaviors

Here’s a shocker!
To tap the potential of competition . . .

We need to begin by refining our vocabulary!

What Does “Competition” Mean?

From the Latin: *Com-petere*  
-petere = “to strive” = “to seek”  
com- = “with”

*Competition* = to strive or seek with

Competition

- To strive or seek with opponents
- What is being “sought” is an enjoyable quest for excellence.
- The contest is interpreted as a form of partnership.

The Central Premise of Contesting Theory

People’s preconscious metaphors for contesting influence their interpretations and behaviors.
Two Ways to View a Contest

- "Contest-as-Partnership"
- "Contest-as-War"

Competition: "To strive with"

Decompetition: "To strive against"

Interpretation:
- Partnership
- Battle / War

Result:
- Competition
- Decompetition

External Structure:

- Holding a Contest
- May or May NOT Lead to Competition
- (Moving away)

Who am I contesting? What am I trying to achieve? What does success mean?

It depends on how the contest is interpreted.

"To call things by their right names is the beginning of wisdom."
- Chinese Proverb

De decomposition is not just "bad" competition, nor is it equivalent to poor sportsmanship.

Decompetition is a separate and distinct process from competition.

Contesting Theory

- There are two distinct modes of contesting rooted in two different conceptual metaphors.
- Everyone "sees" the contest through one or the other metaphor.
- Most often, the choice of metaphor is "preconscious" and does not depend on specific language use.
- There are profound consequences (for performance, enjoyment/satisfaction, ethical behavior) associated with each metaphor.

Decompetition

- Or = reverse of
- To strive against
- What is being sought is the thrill of conquest, dominance, and/or the extrinsic rewards of victory.
- The contest is interpreted through a metaphor of battle or war.

Two "Mental Maps" for Contesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True Competition (striving with)</th>
<th>Decompetition (striving against)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process / Outcome</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Score</td>
<td>Final Score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Good news. The test results show it's a metaphor."
Performance Advantages (Partial List)

- Conflicting Goals
  - Performance
  - Excellence
  - Ethical Behavior
  - Sustained Enjoyment

Mental Map of Competition

- Performance Breakdown
  - Performance Slowdown
  - Ethical Violations
  - Lack of Sustained Enjoyment

The Mental Map of Decompetition

Why Promote True Competition?

Each Element Triggers Every Other Element

Mental Map of Competition

Ethical Advantages (Partial List)

- Perfect Competition
  - Performance
  - Excelling
  - Ethical Behavior
  - Sustained Enjoyment

Mental Map of Decompetition

- Performance Breakdown
  - Performance Slowdown
  - Ethical Violations
  - Lack of Sustained Enjoyment

Decompetition

True Competition

On the other hand...

- Performance Slowdown
- Ethical Violations
- Lack of Sustained Enjoyment
True Competition is a Balancing Act: It Can Be Challenging to Sustain

To Avoid Falling Into Decompetition, Contestants Need Both Knowledge and Practice

Chariots of Fire (1981)
A Look at Motivation Within Decompetition

Setting
Cambridge track star, Harold Abrams, competed against his rival, Eric Liddell, in the Olympic trials. After losing the race, Harold replays the defeat in his mind as his girlfriend tries to help him gain perspective.

Ten Commandments for Coaches & Athletes
(Or … A Quick & Dirty Guide to Avoiding Decompetition)

1. Thou shalt not speak of sport as war.
2. Thou shalt not think ill of opponents.
3. Thou shalt not question the integrity of officials.
4. Thou shalt not equate success with winning.
5. Thou shalt not define losing as failure.
6. Thou shalt not tap anger for motivation.
7. Thou shalt not seek unfair advantage.
8. Thou shalt not promote self-esteem at the expense of others.
9. Thou shalt not hope opponents screw up.
10. Thou shalt not encourage or seek retaliation.
11. Thou shalt not sacrifice play on the altar of seriousness.

Three Goals / Nine Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COACHING GOAL</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEVELOP CHARACTER</td>
<td>1. Promote a Values-Based Team Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENHANCE Enjoyment</td>
<td>4. Support Intrinsic Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMOTE Excellence</td>
<td>7. Focus Attention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For More Information

- Visit: www.truecompetition.org
- Email: dshields@truecompetition.org
- Phone: 314.348.0955

David Shields
University of Missouri-St. Louis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True Competition (Striving With)</th>
<th>Decompetition (Striving Against)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deep Metaphor</strong></td>
<td>-Partnership</td>
<td>-Battle or War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Domination / Conquest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Pursuit of Superiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Use of the Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Thrill (at opponents’ expense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opponents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Enemy / Obstacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rules</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Rules = Partially Tolerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Restraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Officials</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Officials are Opponents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process / Outcome</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Focus is on Outcome (winning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Tone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Negative Emotions Predominate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Seriousness Displaces Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whose Interests</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-The Victor’s Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Individual Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideal Contest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Dominated Contest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Certainty of Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Map of Decompetition</td>
<td>What Knocks Competition Off Balance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Metaphor = War / Battle</td>
<td>Recognizing the Threats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Orientation = Dominance / Superiority</td>
<td>-The Contest Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation = Extrinsic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents = Enemy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules = Maximum Requirement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials = Part of Opposition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process / Outcome = Focus is on Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Tone = Negative Emotions Dominant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Served = Individual (Team) Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Contest = Blowout (little suspense)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For More Information

- Visit:  www.truecompetition.org
- Email:  dshields@truecompetition.org
- Phone:  314.348.0955

Also:
David Shields
University of Missouri-St. Louis
CONTESTING THEORY IN ACTION

Where do you see evidence of “decompetition” in your program? What does it look like? How is it expressed?

How do you see decompetition interfering with: (a) optimal performance? (b) enjoyment/satisfaction? (c) ethical behavior?

What are some of the triggers for decompetition in your setting? ...Are they different for different individuals or groups?

How can the “mental map” of true competition guide your efforts to enhance your students’ or athletes’ competitive experience?

How can the “mental map” of true competition guide you in building a positive and productive culture in your program?

What are three take-aways from today’s workshop that you can implement with your program?

Contesting theory addresses:
- how preconscious interpretations of contests are shaped by “deep” metaphors
- the “mental map” of competition (goals, motivations, view of opponents, rules, etc.)
- the “mental map” of decompetition (goals, motivations, view of opponents, rules, etc.)
- likely performance, enjoyment/satisfaction, and ethical outcomes associated with each of the two mental maps
- likely environmental and personal “triggers” for decompetition.