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An evaluation of the "white card" as a resource for promoting an educational sports competition

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ABSTRACT

Ortega, G., Franco, J., Giménez, J., Durán, J., Jiménez, C., Jiménez, P.J., & Lambert, J. (2016). An evaluation of the "white card" as a resource for promoting an educational sports competition. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.*, 11(1), 19-30. Competitive sport is one of the key contexts in the development of values through sport, given the very significant ambivalences and contradictions involved within sport. Since the 2008-09 season the Real Madrid Foundation has launched in its basketball schools an educational project of transmission of values called "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport", which has led to the development of different teaching materials including the "White Card" program, an educational resource that tries to encourage good sportsmanship and moral development of participants. The aim of this work is to analyze how useful the program is to both trainers and families. The program has been applied to 338, 356 and 334 players aged between 8 and 17, by 16, 15 and 18 teachers in 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 seasons respectively. The methodology used in intervention has been action research and the instruments used for data collection were group discussion, questionnaire, survey and our own white cards given to players in tournaments. The assessment of this resource has been very positive from the coaches, and a high percentage, of parents of the young athletes. **Key words:** VALUES, ETHICS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SPORT, BASKETBALL.



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INTRODUCTION

Physical activity and sports are a prime area for the transmission of values through the enormous popularity with the entire population, and especially among young people. Many professionals from the field have been interested in this subject resulting in numerous domestic publications (Cecchini, et al, 2008; Escartí et al, 2012; Fraile, 2010; Gimeno 2000, Gimeno et al 2007, Gutiérrez and Vivó, 2005; Jiménez, 2011; Jimenez and Durán, 2006; Sáenz et al 2012) and international publications (Arnold, 2001; Jones and McNamee, 2000; Kavussanu and Roberts, 2001; Lee and Martinek, 2012; Martinek and Lee, 2012; Russell, 2004).

There are also numerous specific programs that have been developed in this field with a focus on education (Bredemeier, 1994; Ennis et al, 1999; Gutierrez and Vivo, 2005; Hellison, 1995; Jiménez, 2008; Martinek et al 1999; Steffens and Gorin, 1999), social volunteerism (UNICEF, 2010); public administration (Commision for Fair Play, 1990, Madrid, 2005; C.S.D., 2004, Mace et al 2011); and even private enterprise (Brunelle et al 2005, F.A.D., 1999; F.E.B., 2007).

Competitive sport is one of the key resources in the development of values through sport, given the very significant ambivalences and contradictions involved with sport culture. The competition, on the one hand can be a potential route to excellence, it can motivate people to the maximum personal effort to make the best of oneself. It provides a framework of justice (two teams or players compete on equal terms) that allows you to learn as positive values in accepting victory, with modesty, and dealing with the frustration of defeat with humility. It teaches people to use mistakes as learning experiences that aid personal growth. Sport is an area of cooperation in which the contestants agree to accept rules that make possible the confrontation. On the other hand, it can also be a source of conflict, exclusion and violence when it accepted by those involved that the end justifies the means and if the focus is only on the top performers then it will lead to exclusion for many (Durán, 2013).

There are very different attitudes towards competitive sport with people of school age, from those who argue that you should always emphasize the educational and recreational nature of it, to those who seek to increase the importance of specialization and formal organized competition. To the first group, winning is regarded as an outcome without any unduly significant importance, whilst the second group regards winning as the main purpose of the game (Fraile, 2001, 2010).

The most important elements to include in a competition to develop values within a framework of ethical training are: a) respect for the rules and the people; b) promote health, fun and learning; and c) include strategies that support the transition from moral heteronomy to moral autonomy (Duran, 2013).

If it is agreed that the competitive framework traditionally has focused on ensuring respect for the rules of the game and defining a set of penalties for any actions that infringe those rules, then that could explain why there are so many interventions defined as promoting "Fair Play" (Cecchini et al 2007; Cruz et al 2001; Hassandra et al, 2007; Sparker , 2005; Vidoni and Ulman, 2012). It can be said that from the point of view of behavior modification theories applied to the promotion of values, priority has been given in many cases to behavioral and social learning models in that the end is that athletes assimilate and meet the standards established by the moral framework of sporting competition in their respective modality (Lumpkin, 2011; Minchew, 2002).

The issue is that the type of behavior modification within the competitive sport culture has been based on the criminalization of behaviors through all kinds of cards, ejection time, sin bins, etc., instead of praising and reinforce those positive behaviors you want the person to internalize and even set an example for by modeling them to the other participants. This is in accordance with behavioral and social learning theories.

Since the 2008-09 season, the Real Madrid Foundation (FRM) has launched its Social-Sports Basketball Schools, an educational project of transmission of values called "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport " which has led to the development of different teaching materials (Student's Notebook, Teacher's Notebook, Drawing Values, Initiation into Basket Values, Players Assessment), training days and the "White Card" program (Ortega et al., 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

Although from the beginning of the creation of Social-Sports Basketball Schools in 2001 a competition model was designed for and adapted to the educational objectives of the FRM (integration of children in a fun and recreational context, empowering behaviors and promoting positive attitudes through basketball practice which are transferable to the rest of their lives) with a structure, goals and self-regulation, it has been since the 2010-2011 season that the " White Card " (TB) program was launched, which is based on giving a card to reward and publicly acknowledge the good behavior of the players.

TB is an educational resource whose main objective is to encourage participants to behave sportingly and genuinely internalize those fair play attitudes and behaviors to the point of habitually and spontaneously exhibiting them, and transferring this learning to their daily lives. It is a resource that also contributes to strengthening the already existing educational sensitivity in the teachers, motivating them to observe and discover merits and values in each and every one of the boys and girls that they coach. Card use is widespread in many sports from the perspective of reinforcement for penalizing rule infringements and behavior modification, although there as background in the use of this resource for positive reinforcement, the so-called "green card" that is used in Finland in soccer to reward the good behavior in sport (Galeano, 2001).

The aim of this work is to analyze the perceived of the usefulness of the "White Card" resource to coaches and families as an educational strategy that has been included in the Competition program offered by the Real Madrid Foundation in its Basketball Schools in Madrid in order to promote the moral development of its participants.

METHODS

The project "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport " and the design of intervention strategies and resources used within it are subjected to qualitative research enquiry which, fits into the action research category, and more particularly, to the cooperative action research (Bartolomé, 1994) involving a partnership of professionals from different institutions (faculty of the University of Huelva and Madrid Polytechnic with coordinators of FRM Basketball Schools). It is an open, participatory and democratic methodology, focused on educational practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1988) and oriented, in this case, to the improvement in the quality of educational intervention in teaching values of FRM Social-Sports Basketball Schools.

Starting from the existing reality of education in these schools and following the spiral process defined by Elliott (1993) of cycle of planning, action, collecting data on the outcome of the action and reflection, this project has involved the creation of self-critical focus groups and is committed to the improvement and

transformation of a particular reality and has followed a systemic ecological model involving a wide range of research subjects including not only technical project managers and a group of experts but also schoolteachers, the athletes and their families.

The "White Card" is an educational resource developed by a group of expert academics and practitioners and based on three psychological theories: the Operant Conditioning theory of B.F. Skinner (Skinner, 1974) and his behavior reinforcement program; the Social Learning theory of Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1987) and its incentive program to model behavior; and the Structural-Cognitive theory of Lawrence Kohlberg which reflects the moral development of the individual (Kohlberg, 2010; Kohlberg et al 2008). The White Card system was initiated in a sport competition called "Tournament of FRM Basketball School" in the 2010-2011 seasons. It works as follows: coaches have the ability to deliver a White Card to any player participant in the Tournament in recognition of certain specific fair play behaviors, or also for their overall record of good behavior in the FRM schools. After receiving the TB the player writes on the corresponding notice board located in the sports facility where the competition takes place, the detailed description of the behavior that has earned him this recognition.

In the first phase of the program the coaches were directly responsible for rewarding good behaviour, then from the 2011-2012 seasons the award criteria were modified to allow athletes from both teams themselves with an accompanying teachers to reflect together about who among them had been deserving of the award, stating the reasons. It was strongly considered that an award for sportsmanship and the positive values assumes more kudos if given by one's peers and team mates.

Participants

The participants involved in the "White Card" program are both students and their families and teachers. The sample of students with whom the "White Card" program for the 2010-11 season was implemented was 338 players divided into 51 teams, for the 2011-12 season 356 players divided into 51 teams, and in the 2012-13 season 334 players divided into 51 teams. The ages of these players are between 8 and 17 years, corresponding to the categories of U10, U12, U14 and U16. Regarding teachers, the total number of coaches who participated in the "White Card" program was 16 in season 2010-2011, 15 in 2011-2012 and 18 in the 2012-2013 season. Table 1 shows the detailed data on the number of days covered each season, the number of players and the teams per category and the number of teachers.

Instruments

The instruments used for data collection were group discussion, questionnaires, a satisfaction survey aimed at families and conducted by an external audit company and our own white cards given to players in tournaments.

Two group discussions were conducted in the format of semi-structured interviews with faculty of Basketball Schools in March 2011 and 2013. In the first, involving 14 of the 17 coaches-teachers of the FRM Basketball Schools, aimed to analyze the evaluation this educational strategy, the best way to introduce it into the competition (who should give the TB, at what point should be delivered, etc.) and the criteria for receiving a "White Card" by the player. All coaches-teachers who participated in the discussion group received by mail the final report so that they might revise it, refine ideas or even correct specific phrases. The second discussion was attended by 12 coaches-teachers and they were asked their overall opinion about the development of this resource in the three seasons of operation, in particular the degree of agreement between the TB delivered by the athletes themselves and the opinions of coaches, the effect of having the highest number of TB delivered and how to transform this behavior reinforcement from extrinsic

to intrinsic motivation. The discussions were recorded, transcribed in full and analyzed through content analysis.

In the final evaluation questionnaire that was passed to the coaches involved in the program in the 2012-2013 season it was decided to incorporate three questions regarding the White Card: what is the percentage score of this strategy in terms of usefulness, their satisfaction with the resource and the acceptance of it by the students. The questionnaire was presented in the first week of June 2013 and responded to by a total of 15 coaches out of 18.

Finally, with respect to the satisfaction survey from the 2010-2011 season, the FRM conducted through an internal audit, a satisfaction survey via email to the families to measure their degree of satisfaction with the program that their children received in which 31 questions were included. Two of them have a specific relationship with the basketball tournament: asking whether they agree or not about whether the White Card program favors the transmission of values and whether it meets the intended objectives in the development of the competition.

Table 1. Data on the number of participants and teams by category who participated in the FRM Tournament in the 2010-2013 seasons.

	Seasons		
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Number of days	13	13	15
Players U10	95	86	79
Teams U10	15	14	14
Players U12	99	96	121
Teams U12	17	15	20
Players U14	84	92	72
Teams U14	11	12	11
Players U16	60	82	62
Teams U16	8	10	6
Total number of players	338	356	334
Total number of teams	51	51	51
Total number of coaches	16	15	18

RESULTS

The total number of White Cards delivered in the 2010-11 season was 75; in the 2011-12 season it was 308 and in the 2012-2013 season it was 438. The degree of efficacy that both coaches and families attributed to the "White Card" resource as a positive element of the moral development of the participants was analyzed in different ways listed below.

Group Discussions

In the first group discussion, the general assessment of the TB was very positive from all coaches who found, in some cases, significant improvements in the attitudes of boys and girls in both matches and in the training.

The majority opinion pointed to the need to agree consistent criteria and objectives for all coaches-teachers in implementing the TB system and granting the TB because not everyone applied the same criteria. They agreed on the following: 1. Be as generous as possible with younger players in order to promote their self-esteem and motivation and as they get older to restrict the awarding of cards to increasingly exceptional fair play; 2. A large consensus of coaches thought it desirable that the older (U14 and U16 categories) players had a major influence in who should be granted a White Card and that choice was adopted. 3. Unless somebody was worthy of instant recognition for their behaviour, the card would be shown at the end so as not to break the game dynamics. Finally, it should be noted that it was not considered appropriate for the white cards issued to be reflected in the score of matches as there is a danger of positive behaviors being superficially "forced" just to move up the rankings.

With respect to the instances of behaviour that are rewarded, they are as follows: (a) Motivation and personal effort (eg. good behavior during the week in training: attendance, effort, motivation, care of equipment, etc.); (b) Respect for one's own teammates eg. encourage own teammates when they fail, help a teammate who has problems scoring, stop the game even in an advantageous situation to attend to an injured teammate from the opposite team; (c) Respect rivals (apologising to rivals after committing any foul or giving them a helping hand to rise, stop the game even in an advantageous position to assist an injured opponent, offer to play for the other team if they are lacking a player, correct any tactical or technical mistake from a rival to improve their game, cheering a good play of the opposing team, avoiding over-zealous celebrations after scoring or winning a match; (d) Respect the rules (habitual recognition of your own rule infringements during the match, recognizing and accepting that he had committed a fault even when the referee does not spot it.).

The results of the second group discussion coaches were noted as: (a) the existence of a generalized exemplary sportsmanship by athletes and a possible internalizing of sportsmanship behaviors by participants; (b) a high level of respect given to those identified by the athletes and targeted by the coaches as deserving of TBs ; and (c) some concern about the impact of the high number of TBs delivered and the necessity that as participants' age increased the TBs would be restricted only to those players who exhibited exceptionally good behaviours. Taking into account the possible problems identified in the previous discussion about giving more value to the TB in the competition by including them in the score, it was decided that from the 2012-2013 season the following rule be included as standard in the competition: "In case of a tie in points final stage of the competition, the tie will take into account the number of white cards received by the team."

Questionnaire

The results of the question asked to the coaches about the percentage usefulness that they considered the educational resources that are included in the program "For a REAL Education Sport and Values"(including the educational resource "White Card") to have is reflected in Table 2.

The resources are ranked in numerical order according to their percentage level of importance (number 1 is the resource that received the highest percentage of importance). The educational resource White Card ranks second, ahead of several other program resources such as player assessment, student's and teacher's notebook and the cartoon book "Drawing Values".

Table 2. Ranking in importance of the educational resources within the program "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport" as perceived by coaches from FRM Basketball Schools. Season 2012-2013. (C denotes each coach surveyed).

Resources	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15	Total	Ranking
Initiation into Basket values	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17	1°
White Card	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	3	1	25	2°
Player Assessment	2	1	1	2	4	2	3	3	2	1	2	2	3	2	2	32	3°
Student's Notebook	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	-	3	3	3	-	3	33	4°
Teacher's Notebook	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	-		40	5°
Drawing Values	3	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	-	-	4	3	-	5	44	6°

Regarding the question where the coaches were asked to score on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest satisfaction) their degree of satisfaction with the educational resources provided by the project "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport" and the degree of acceptance that the students showed towards the "White Card", the "Student's notebook " and the cartoons book "Drawing Values", the results are reflected in Tables 3 and 4.

Ranking the resources in numerical order according to the importance attached to each resource (point 1 as the resource that has received the highest percentage of importance), it was found that the educational resource White Card also ranks second in the degree of satisfaction that the coaches showed towards it, and ranks first in the degree of student satisfaction.

Table 3. Hierarchical level of satisfaction with the educational resources of the program "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport" as perceived by coaches of the FRM Basketball Schools. Season 2012-2013. (C denotes each coach surveyed).

Resources	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15	Mean	Ranking
Initiation into Basketvalues	9	10	9	10	9	9	10	10	9	10	9	10	9	10	9	9.4	1°
White Card	7	10	9	10	10	9	9	10	9	10	9	10	9	7	10	9.2	2°
Player Assessment	7	10	8	10	10	8	6	8	10	10	8	9	6	9	9	8.5	3°
Student's Notebook	7	8	8	9	7	4	8	-	8	-	6	7	8	-	6	7.1	4°
Teacher's Notebook	7	8	7	6	-	5	8	9	6	8	8	2	7	-	3	6.4	5°
Drawing Values	-	6	7	-	-	1	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.0	6°

Table 4. Relative level of acceptance shown by students to educational resources program "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport" as perceived by the coaches of the FRM basketball schools. Season 2012-2013 (C denotes each coach surveyed).

Resources	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15	Mean	Ranking
White Card	8	8	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	8	8	10	9.3	1°
Student's Notebook	6	8	7	6	4	4	9	-	7	-	7	3	5	-	3	5.7	2°
Drawing Values	-	6	8	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	5.2	3°

Satisfaction Surveys

The number of families who answered the satisfaction surveys was 149 (out of 360 surveyed) in the 2010-2011 season; 100 (out of 441 surveyed) in the 2011-2012 season; and 112 (out of 475 surveyed) in the 2012-2013 season. The results regarding their degree of agreement on whether "White Card" program contributes to the promotion of positive values to their children, for the 2010-2011 season was a 71.9 % who agreed versus 28.10% who did not; for the 2011-2012 season that percentage evolved from 89.1 % agreed to 10.9 % who did not concur; and in the 2012-2013 season 92% in favour to 8% against.

The responses to the question that asked parents to nominate what objectives should be pursued within the tournament are reflected by seasons in Table 5:

Table 5. Percentage importance of the objectives which parents associated with the FRM Basketball Schools Tournament analyzed according to the seasons.

Tournament objectives	Seasons		
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Personal development of children and transmission of positive values	33,43%	32%	31%
Recreation and spend free time	27,90%	29%	29%
Improving learning through competition	20,44%	20%	19%
Meet other children (social)	13,26%	12%	15%
Develop a career in the high performance sport	03,59%	05%	3%
Others	01,38%	01%	3%

As can be seen in Table 5, the families surveyed gave more importance to the targets relating to the integral development of children and the transmission of positive values than the rest.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that the use of a resource such as the White Card can increase the educational value of a sport competition and can become a means to promote social and personal values. However, in agreement with the work of Saenz et al. (2011), for this to be possible it is very important to get the involvement and participation of both coaches and families.

Group discussions and questionnaires to past coaches show that the utility and satisfaction they feel with the "White Card" program is clear. The research indicates that a new paradigm for interpretation of competition by accepting that educational values can and should be encouraged through the use of tangible coaching strategies within the competition.

Likewise, satisfaction surveys make clear the parent satisfaction with the TB program and its vision of the tournament as a means for the education of their children in terms of teaching values, providing fun and recreation and socialization into the culture of the "For a REAL Education: Values and Sport" project . These results confirm that a comprehensive approach as the one presented in this work could also get a positive change in parents without intervening directly with them as in other programs (Gimeno, 2000, 2003; Gimeno et al. 2007).

The different coaching strategies that have been used are underpinned by behavioral reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1974) and its extension to the theory of social incentives (Bandura, 1987). The use of "cards" is common in a great number of sports (for example, football, hockey, and handball). However, this resource

has been traditionally aimed at penalizing negative behaviors with a close relationship to the notion of punishment. This paper advocates the use of the "card" in a radically different way, and endorses the White Card to promote social and personal values through competition (Ortega et al., 2012c).

The only precedent that has been located for using cards as an educational strategy within a competition to reinforce positive behaviors is the "green card" used by referees in youth soccer in Finland as a reward for prosocial behaviors such as helping the injured opponent, recognizing their own fouls by raising the arm, or even draw attention to the referee of his error when they have unjustly benefited from his decision (Galeano, 2001).

With regard to developments in the implementation of the White Card program, coaches have provided important insights as follows:

- a) The older players (U14 and U16 categories) are delegated responsibility for the decision as to who should be granted a White Card. That innovation was agreed by a majority after much discussion.. The choice has become a real moral dilemma rather than previous reflections on hypothetical dilemmas presented by Hersch et al. (1984).
- b) The importance of the work with the youngest (U10 and U12) in reasoning with them about White Card decisions is recognized. In this regard the work of the coaches-teachers should be more active at this stage in helping them remember and evaluate plays, and identify where positive attitudes have been shown during matches, thus promoting the values to be developed in these stages (Lee et al. 2000). Undoubtedly opportunities for reasoned thought and reflection at the end of matches between players from both teams on behaviors of sportsmanship and fair play has led to exceptional growth and moral development of the players. When the players, not the coaches, are empowered to choose the best fair play conduct a genuine process of evolution from moral heteronomy to autonomy takes place (Gutiérrez and Vivo, 2005).
- c) That the TB does not have an influence on the "score" in the competition. The reason given was that there was a concern that positive behaviors would be exhibited in a false way in order to improve their position in the competition. Another interesting argument for not doing so was to avoid some athletes losing their competitive instinct to win in favour of emphasizing fair behavior (Buceta, 2005).

As the use of the White Card through the seasons was consolidated and its use analyzed, what came out from the second group discussion was that it was found by the coaches that good sportsmanship had become a norm for the existence of a generalized athletes. As in other similar interventions (Borrás, 2008), it was interpreted as a success of the program, showing that good behavior and sportsmanship has been gradually internalized by the players.

Finally, it was decided that statistical analysis would be used to analyze and improve the method of rating sports behaviors deserving of the White Card (by categories and reasons for the award).

CONCLUSIONS

The "White Card" as an educational resource to promote social and personal values and moral development during competition in basketball is a tool valued very positively by the coaches and a high percentage of the parents of young athletes, particularly in the early years of sports participation.

The implementation of White Card in the competition program of the FRM Basketball Schools is promoting a significant improvement in the performance of boys and girls participating in the tournament, and an increase in individual and collective reflective processes of young participants in relation to the importance of fair play in the competition.

However, further work is needed in the development of the implementation of this resource in order to categorize and make more objective the behaviors worthy of a White Card so that a statistical analysis can be possible.

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