What's the Problem? Building an Interdisciplinary Research Program on Youth Sport Concussion Management

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60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop  2:10 PM
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This extended session will “workshop” the early stages of building an interdisciplinary research program. Panel members represent a range of disciplines and perspectives – community sport development, regulation and governance, medicine, sport culture, and sport psychology – that may inform the development and design of systematic inquiry focused on the effective management of youth sport concussion.

Sport concussion, particularly among children and youth, is a recognized societal challenge (e.g., Government of Canada, 2016). The incidence of this phenomenon, and its impact on individuals’ short- and long-term wellbeing, has prompted research to understand its mechanisms and management (cf. McCrory et al., 2017) and the development of policies and protocols to guide safe practices (e.g., Fremont, Bradley, Tator, Skinner, & Fischer, 2015; Parachute, 2017). Some of this consideration has been taken up within the field of sport management specifically (Heinze & Lu, 2017; Osborne & Ammon, 2012; Quatman-Yates, Sartore-Baldwin, Fields, & Comstock, 2013). However, youth sport concussion is an incredibly complex— even “messy” or “wicked” (Brown et al., 2010)— problem, and one that becomes more multi-faceted as new issues and questions come to light (McCrory et al., 2017). For instance, the most recent Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport from the 2016 Berlin conference (McCrory et al., 2017) acknowledges, albeit briefly, that sport concussion is not just a clinical problem—it is also a sport (management) problem, a societal (public health) problem, an individual problem, and a cultural problem. Complex issues such as this warrant multiple perspectives that highlight different, and sometimes contradictory, understandings, and which may be effectively integrated within an interdisciplinary research approach (Doherty, 2012; Hoeber et al., 2016). Unfortunately, most sport concussion research, and advisory body efforts, align with a biomedical model, with the bulk of related policy and practice focused on detecting and managing the physical injury aspects. Research that relies on one or a very few fields may generate only “partial understandings” (Mair, 2006, p. 199) and knowledge that is based on “incomplete models of human experience [that constrain us from] knowing what to do next” (Spence, 2012, p. 122). This may be particularly the case with the complex issue of youth sport concussion management, and thus an interdisciplinary research approach is advocated for and presented in this session.

Interdisciplinary research (IDR) involves several scholars (and stakeholders) from different disciplines working closely together in a collaborative process of “relating, integrating, and relocating disciplinary thinking [as the group arrives] at a mututally-determined research program that represents new ways of conceptualizing [a phenomenon]” (Doherty, 2012, p. 1). The fundamental IDR steps of relating and integrating different disciplinary perspectives “is a purposeful challenge to old ideas to create new understandings” (Mair, 2006, p. 198). Mair further notes that “having [many and different] lenses brought together with an integrated focus holds the potential to develop better social theory… and real avenues for more effective social change” (p. 201).

The moderated workshop panel will work through an early phase of IDR that “sets the stage” (Repko, 2012, p. 76) by identifying critical issues and knowledge gaps, and ultimately research questions to address those (Kessel, Rosenfield, & Anderson, 2008; König, Diehl, Tschering, & Helming, 2013). Panel members will be asked to reflect on:

1. What is known about youth sport concussion, from your disciplinary perspective? And how is it known?
(2) What is not known? What are (still) problems and issues around youth sport concussion management, from your perspective?
(3) What insights from other disciplinary perspectives could inform the knowledge gap you have identified?

Panelists include a scholar in community sport development, the context of most youth sport participation; a legal practitioner with a particular interest in the governance and regulation of sport related concussion; a sport psychology scholar with expertise in psychosocial aspects of sport and athletic performance; a physician specializing in adolescent neurology and particularly minor traumatic brain injury; a youth hockey coach; and a scholar in Canadian sport culture. The moderator will ask the panelists to address the three questions in consecutive rounds, ensuring that each perspective is considered. Discussion will then be more interactive, and welcoming of delegate participation, as the session moves to begin framing an interdisciplinary research program that translates and integrates biomedical, social sciences, and humanities perspectives on youth sport concussion management into relevant research questions that will enhance understanding of this phenomenon. Ways to address those questions will also be discussed.

This unique session brings together scholars from very different disciplines to reflect on a complex problem and begin to shape a direction for interdisciplinary investigation that can ultimately contribute knowledge that is meaningful and impactful to policy and strategy around youth sport concussion management (cf. Amis & Silk, 2005). Session attendees will observe and share in the IDR experience of identifying a problem through different disciplinary lenses, and relating and ultimately integrating those perspectives within an IDR framework. The session will be appealing to scholars interested in interdisciplinary research, and those interested in youth sport concussion and its management.