Bridging the Gap: A Workshop on Knowledge Mobilization Strategies for Youth Sport Development Research

K. David McCann, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Jeffrey Farr, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
John Kaczorowski, University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign
Kelsey LeFevre, University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign
Jules Woolf (Advisor), University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign

Sport Development - Sport Development (Youth Sport) virtual asynchronous
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop Session: Symposia/Workshops I

Abstract 2020-261

Despite the research-driven creation of athlete development models aimed at producing successful athletes and promoting sport across the lifespan (see ADM Kids, 2019; Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013), youth sport programming has continued its decades-long shift towards privatization and commercialization (Bowers, Chalip, & Green, 2010; Coakley, 2016). This is problematic because such programs often emphasize winning over personal skill development (Wiggins, 2013), which has led parents to push their children towards single-sport specialization and year-round participation in an attempt to earn college scholarships or professional contracts (Lumpkin, 2013). This is despite research linking these approaches to detrimental physical and psychological outcomes (Brenner, 2007), as well as suboptimal athlete development (Berry, Abernethy, & Côté, 2008).

The dissonance between athlete development research and practice is odd, given that all stakeholders ostensibly want the child to develop athletically and have a positive sport experience. Scholars have long known that policymakers and organizers do not always utilize academic research, but multiple strategies exist to facilitate knowledge adoption among practitioners (Weiss, 1979). These strategies – described as knowledge mobilization, exchange, or transfer – feature an emphasis on developing long-term reciprocal partnerships among researchers and practitioners (Sá, Li, & Faubert, 2011). However, the realities of academic life – including lack of time, resources, and connections – can hinder the formation and sustainability of such partnerships (Hargreaves, 1999; Smith 2010).

This 60-minute workshop will introduce participants to the knowledge mobilization literature before exploring the challenges of bridging the knowledge-practice gap within the youth sport development context. Following this introduction, strategies to overcome the inertia present in the professionalized and commercialized youth sport industrial complex will be discussed in groups and shared among the collective. The workshop will progress to a short presentation of the Illinois Sport Development Initiative (ISDI), which serves as an example of a current effort to promote the adoption of research-informed practices in youth sport development. The primary goal of the ISDI is to mobilize knowledge and inform practitioners, parents, and sport families about current best practices. The ISDI achieves this by building community partnerships and then translating and delivering current empirical research into accessible information packages.

The session will conclude with a discussion among attendees about how sport scholars can and should move forward in attempting to mobilize the knowledge generated from their research efforts. Topics of conversation in this discussion will include how attendees can implement knowledge mobilization practices at their institution along with best practices for forming and maintaining community partnerships. The prospect of inter-institution collaborations will be examined in an effort to coordinate knowledge mobilization initiatives targeted towards stakeholders in youth sport development. The goals of this workshop are threefold: 1) to provide participants with a greater understanding of the importance and challenges of knowledge mobilization; 2) to provide perspective on the critical role of partnerships in knowledge mobilization, and 3) to generate ideas and strategies for implementation within attendees’ organizations and research moving forward.