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Darla Castelli & Hans van der Mars

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Moving Forward: A Research Agenda for SHAPE America

Darla Castelli ¹ and Hans van der Mars ²

¹University of Texas at Austin; ²Arizona State University

The research arm of SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators (and before that the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance [AAHPERD]) has a long history within our national society. Scientific inquiry in physical education, which evolved into kinesiology starting in the 1960s, has historically been a presence at the annual national conventions. Alongside the more professionally focused associations within the AAHPERD, the Research Consortium (now called the Research Council) has been and continued to be a mainstay. Each year, the Research Council prepares a research program at the national convention that caters to scholars in the various subdisciplines and includes both the dissemination of new research and professional development for new and experienced research scholars. For example, the most recent national convention in Nashville included close to 400 refereed research presentations across multiple disciplinary areas, such as teaching and learning.

In 2015, SHAPE America unveiled the 50 Million Strong™ by 2029 goal, which reflects the society's commitment to put all children on the path to health and physical literacy through effective health and physical education programs. The society has also committed to determining and reporting on the progress toward meeting the 50 Million Strong™ by 2029 goal. The Research Council saw this initiative as an opportunity to be more centrally situated within the society. Consequently, it has multiple ongoing initiatives. One initiative targets the development of a national-level mechanism that allows for assessment of K–12 students' motor competence as well as the development of a research agenda. Another initiative is the development of a research agenda that can guide scholars within and beyond the association in their research efforts. To our knowledge, in its entire history, the Research Council has never before sought to develop a focused research agenda that can both strengthen the existing evidence base across the various disciplines and fill in gaps in our knowledge. Moreover, it is timely as

such a research agenda can help move SHAPE America toward meeting the 50 Million Strong™ target and help guide researchers to conduct socially significant research that supports professional practice, especially in the context of ever-increasing calls for professional practice to be evidence-based. Moreover, SHAPE America's research fellows and other scholars within the society constitute an essential resource to help develop this forward-looking research agenda. The plan is to publish the five research agenda papers in *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport (RQES)* starting in this issue.

How does having a research agenda add value to SHAPE America?

Although there is no single definition of the research agenda, it is widely accepted that it is a means of communicating the purpose of conducting research that lends structure to the organization. Conveying what SHAPE America is interested in and what the organization knows presents a singular focus and helps others outside the organization better understand our mission. Further, a research agenda guides decision making, as it offers comprehensive evidence that can be used to assess the cost-to-benefit ratio of an issue. Finally, a clearly crafted and articulated research agenda assists leadership within the organization in identifying and aligning funding opportunities, developing strategic partnerships, securing funding for projects, and strengthening its advocacy efforts.

Broadly, the process for determining a research agenda should include a full complement of research approaches that will ultimately solve problems, yield new knowledge, and foster advanced pedagogical strategies. Gaps in the literature or known public health issues should constitute the foundation of a research agenda, while theories should outlay the relationship and interactions between the variables prioritized for further study. Ecological models can easily integrate multiple theories.

CONTACT Hans van der Mars  hans.vandermars@asu.edu  Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, 7271 E. Sonoran Arroyo Mall, Santa Catalina Hall, Rm. 330-S, Mesa, AZ 85212.

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Who benefits from a research agenda and why?

When research findings are disseminated through a variety of platforms and media, a systematized approach to research can benefit youth, teachers, teacher educators, researchers, parents, and community members. Scholars can expand their network and collaborate to create global data collection, repositories, and consistent methodology for interpretation and analysis. For example, the research initiative titled Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (see <http://www.nih.gov/echo>) will gather data from 50,000 children across 30 different research teams. Real-time dashboards serve to share research findings in consumable ways for community members and parent groups, as a means of influencing the home environment. Within schools, the data-driven decisions are already being made based on standardized achievement and school performance data. Because healthier children learn better (Basch, 2011), perhaps it is time that decisions regarding school policies, daily schedules, and instructional approaches consider a health-first perspective. With a coherent research agenda and corresponding evidence, school leaders will be armed with evidence to promote changes such as physical activity across the school day and healthy eating for all as embedded portions of the educational experience.

The development of a coherent research agenda

The impact of a research agenda can only be seen in the future, if/when it has (a) made appreciable contributions to further improve our understanding of phenomena in the teaching-learning settings where the goal is to promote active and healthy living among school-aged youth (as well as adults and older adults), and (b) has improved professional practices. As noted in Figure 1, which includes the schematic used to build the proposed research agenda, the goal was to identify critical questions (based on remaining gaps in the existing literature) and categorize these questions. Within these categories, the authors were asked to prioritize the questions and reduce them to a manageable set of research directions.

Based in part on the expertise within the SHAPE America membership, five research areas were targeted in which a well-developed research agenda could guide future research efforts. The five research areas include physical education, health education, physical activity, motor development, and sport pedagogy. Scholars within SHAPE America were invited to serve on a writing team for each of these five areas. Their task was to assess the existing research literature in the assigned research area and to use it as the basis for mapping future research directions.

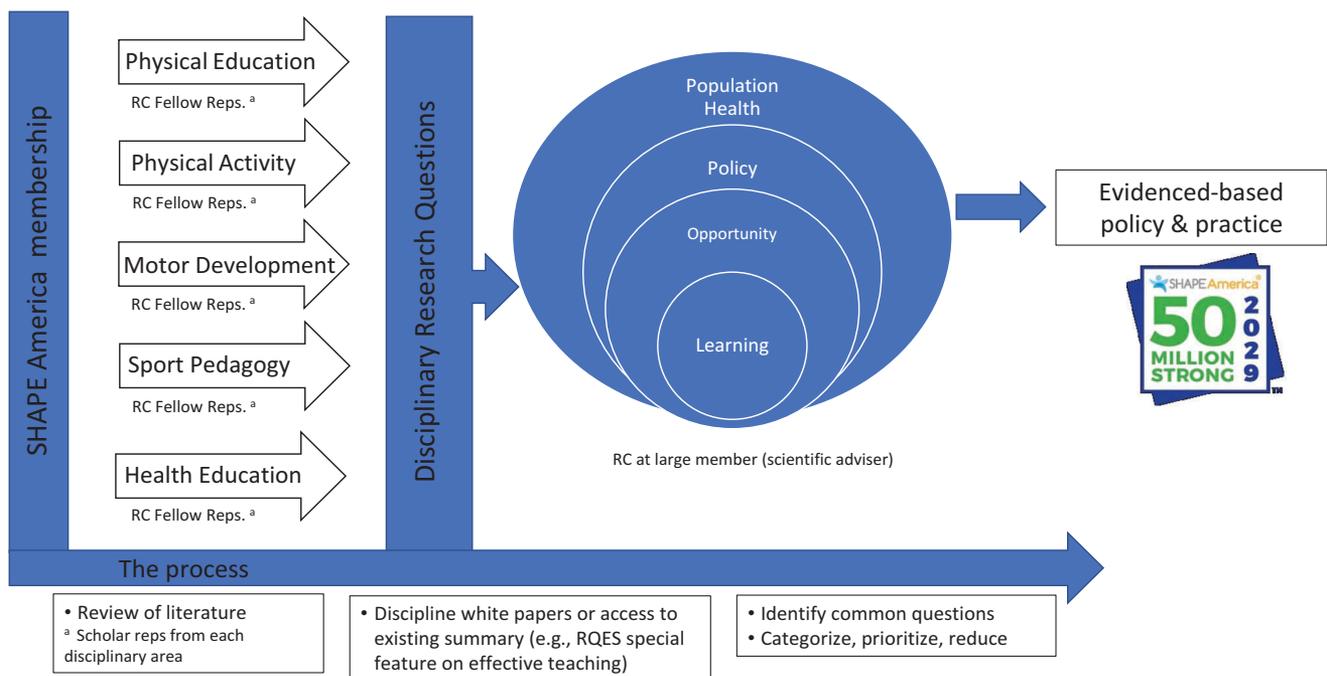


Figure 1. Establishing a research agenda.

As part of plotting future research, the writing teams were asked to use an adaptation of the social-ecological framework as a lens through which to look when developing the research agenda. The social-ecological framework has its roots in Bronfenbrenner's (1989) work on the bioecological systems theory of human development, as well as in Stokols's (1992) social-ecological theory of health promotion. Stokols (1996; along with Lox, Martin Ginis, & Petruzzello, 2010) also noted that historical interventions had focused almost entirely on modifying the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and motivation of individuals while ignoring the potential impact of social, environmental, and policy variables on the behavior of the individuals. As a consequence, results on socially significant and sustained change were limited.

Within the social-ecological framework, there is a recognition that multilayered environmental variables impact the behavior of individuals from micro-, meso-, and macro-perspectives. For our purposes, school-aged students are at the center of the framework. The research agenda to be presented in the five target areas was organized into contemporary research foci. At the micro-level or individual level of the model, learning opportunities for children and youth to develop motor competence, be physically active, and adopt other healthy behaviors (i.e., healthy eating habits) are influenced by environmental factors such as access to physical education, recess, and programs before, during, and after school (e.g., intramural vs. interscholastic sport programs). Schools remain a prime setting for providing all school-aged youth with the opportunity to learn about active and healthy living strategies (e.g., Institute of Medicine, 2013; Kahn et al., 2002; McKenzie & van der Mars, 2015; Pate et al., 2006) in that schools generally have the needed facilities and equipment for this purpose. Moreover, most school-aged youth attend school, and although many other individuals and programs in the community may have similar goals, the licensed physical educator is the person best positioned to deliver effective physical education programming.

Beyond the school campus, one's proximity to open-access parks and the cost associated with community sport and recreation programs are also potential environmental variables that affect the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge that support active living. From the meso- and macro-levels, policy-related variables constitute another layer of influences on students' opportunity to learn and be physically active. Specifically, having state or school district policies that require 150 min of physical education each week, = significantly increased the likelihood that children

would participate in physical activity (Slater, Nicholson, Chriqui, Turner, & Chaloupka, 2012). And ultimately, future research in our field must consider how it can impact population health.

The research agenda for the five targeted areas, developed by the respective writing teams, will be introduced in *RQES* over the next few issues. The writing teams for each article represent a blend of early-career, mid-career, and late-career scholars. In this issue, the focus is on critical research questions related to physical activity.

It is the SHAPE America Research Council's hope that its research fellows as well as other scholars in the various research disciplines will view the suggested research directions as ones to which they can contribute and that can help move our profession toward the point where conditions are created for teachers to employ evidence-based practices and improve the odds of students actually developing the needed skills, knowledge, and disposition for active and healthy living as they move into adulthood. Happy reading!

ORCID

Darla Castelli  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8862-578X>

Hans van der Mars  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9514-4784>

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