

JSFD in times of change: A reflection on milestones met and challenges ahead

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Back in March 2013, the *Journal of Sport for Development* (JSFD) published its first issue as an online, open-access academic journal explicitly dedicated to sport for development (SFD) research. JSFD's mission was to embark on a journey towards advancing, examining and disseminating best practice and evidence of effectiveness from programmes and interventions that use sport to promote international development in the seven thematic areas of: education, disability, gender, health, livelihoods, social cohesion, and peace.¹ Five years from its inauguration, it seems timely to look back and reflect on some of JSFD's organizational developments, key achievements, and future challenges.

Since its inception, JSFD has achieved a number of important milestones. Most importantly, the journal has established itself as a reputable scholarly outlet that is attractive and relevant to researchers, practitioners and policymakers from around the world. More specifically, JSFD has published a total of six volumes with two issues per year. This has included a special issue on disability published in 2016, and another special issue on SFD in Latin America published in 2018. The special issue focusing on Latin America is a particularly important achievement, as JSFD has always aimed to encourage contributions from academics and practitioners from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) across the globe, which are traditionally under-represented in scholarly research. Overall, over 150 submissions from scholars spanning 34 countries have been received to date, and 136 experts from different nations have been engaged in JSFD's double-blind peer-review process. Finally, JSFD's editorial board has grown to represent an internationally acclaimed group of academics and practitioners with largely diverse backgrounds and an equal gender balance. The JSFD editors and editorial board aim to "practice what we preach" with a strong focus on equity, access and diversity.

The ongoing growth of JSFD demands fresh ideas and energy from the diverse group of people that is leading the academic development of the sector. To that end, the co-editors of JSFD have collectively decided to step aside and warmly welcome a new team to lead the journal forward. The new co-editors - Kate Merrill, Per Svensson and Meredith Whitley - were recently appointed through a highly competitive open recruitment process. Kate has been invaluable to JSFD in her original role as managing editor, ensuring quality administration of the journal, and brings to this new role an exceptional level of expertise and enthusiasm. Her historical involvement with JSFD will also ensure the continuity of its core founding principles. This will be complimented by the addition of Per and Meredith, who have both been long-term supporters of JSFD as publishing scholars, reviewers and advocates in the field. They will bring novel perspectives to the journal and we look forward to benefiting from their combined knowledge and expertise.

The outgoing co-editors are confident that the journal will continue to flourish under the new leadership and are excited to see how JSFD evolves in the time ahead. We recognize that the new team of co-editors will develop their own agenda for the growth of the journal, but before we sign off we would like to exercise our editorial license one last time to issue them with a few challenges going forward...

1) Further diversification

Despite JSFD's success in engaging scholars from across the globe, we challenge the new editorial team to further diversify in regards to both geographical and cultural representation. We acknowledge that this diversification is a difficult process, given the relatively small number of academic positions in LMICs that are specifically relevant to SFD. However, more can and should be done in the future to engage with – and benefit from – scholars in LMICs across the globe who have expertise in sport-related development work.

2) Maintain and sustain

JSFD was founded and has always been run on a voluntary basis to ensure it could be sustained, despite a volatile SFD funding environment. The journal was built on the premise that knowledge that can improve the lives of others should be disseminated and accessed free of charge. We challenge the new editorial team to maintain this model of free information sharing, which is particularly pertinent in LMICs where scholars and practitioners contend with very limited access to academic journal subscriptions and resources.

3) Academic kudos

JSFD is a relatively young outlet for scholarly work and faces challenges in an academic environment where there is an increasing focus on journal rankings and impact factors. We challenge the new editorial team to solicit academic articles from leading scholars in the field and further build the reputation and citation profile of JSFD. The wheels have been set in motion for JSFD to be indexed in the Emerging Sources Citation Index. This development would provide JSFD with an important mark of quality and legitimacy; moreover, it promises to improve JSFD's visibility through direct affiliation with the Web of Science. We feel that this presents an immediate organizational priority for the new leadership team.

4) Relevance of output

JSFD has always focused on producing research outputs that are pertinent to policy and practice. The relevance of traditional academic outputs is being increasingly questioned and the way information is generated and consumed is rapidly evolving. We challenge the new editorial team to embrace innovative approaches to research and novel ways to communicate with JSFD's target audience. This includes publishing evaluations developed in partnership with industry and practitioner co-authors, and continuing to encourage research at the intersection between theory and practice.

5) Breadth and depth

The contributions to JSFD since its inaugural issue have been wide and varied. However, there have been areas of work relevant to JSFD that have not featured strongly in the journal. The lack of published research about livelihoods and gender equity within the SFD sector has previously been noted in a review of existing studies.² We challenge the new editorial team to further establish the evidence-base in these under-published areas and to continue to work with guest editors to develop special issues tackling novel areas of research.

In closing, we look back on when JSFD was conceived six years ago as an open-access, peer-reviewed academic journal managed by a dedicated group of inter-disciplinary scholars. A key goal was to publish high-quality SFD research that was attractive to fellow researchers, implementers and policymakers from around the world. We believe that with the groundwork firmly laid, the new leadership trio – with support from JSFD's incredible operations team – is well positioned to steer the journal to new heights.

The Outgoing Editors

References

¹ Richards J, Kaufman Z, Schulenkorf N, Wolff E, Gannett K, Siefken K, et al. Advancing the evidence base of sport for development: A new open-access, peer-reviewed journal. *Journal of Sport for Development*. 2013;1(1):1-3.

² Schulenkorf N, Sherry E, Rowe K. Sport-for-Development: An Integrated Literature Review. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2016;30(1):22-39.