

## Examining Implicit/Explicit Approaches to Life Skills Development on the Quality of Youth Golf Programming

Sara Kramers<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Martin Camiré<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Corliss Bean<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

<sup>2</sup>The University of British Columbia–Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

**Purpose:** When appropriately structured, youth sport programs have been shown to promote enjoyment, engagement, as well as opportunities to develop life skills. Life skills (e.g., respect, goal-setting) are defined as assets that enable individuals to succeed in various life domains (e.g., home, school, and community; Danish et al., 2004). The development of life skills in sport can occur through either implicit or explicit instruction. The implicit approach refers to programs that focus on developing sport-specific skills (e.g., putting, chipping), without specific attention being placed on the learning of life skills (Turnnidge et al., 2014). Conversely, the explicit approach refers to programs that deliberately target the learning of life skills (Turnnidge et al., 2014). Preliminary research (Bean & Forneris, 2016) indicates that coaches who explicitly coach life skills may foster more positive developmental outcomes than those who do not deliberately coach life skills. However, more research is needed to understand how implicit/explicit coaching processes are associated with positive developmental outcomes. Acknowledging the contextual and developmental successes from The First Tee youth golf program within the United States (e.g., Weiss et al., 2016; Weiss et al., 2013), Golf Canada recently partnered with researchers from the University of Ottawa to integrate a life skills curriculum in their national youth development program, Learn to Play (Kendellen et al., 2017). Aligned with the long-term player development guide for golf, the Learn to Play program is a four-stage developmental program that provides youth with the fundamentals of golf in order to continue playing and competing in the future. Over 200 golf courses across Canada deliver Learn to Play programming each year; however, as the new curriculum was just launched in 2016 it has yet to be adopted and implemented by every golf course in Canada. Such a scenario presented an opportunity to assess program quality by evaluating and comparing (a) coaches using the old Learn to Play curriculum, with no integrated life skills (implicit approach) with (b) coaches using the new Learn to Play curriculum, with integrated life skills (explicit approach). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the associations between coaches' implicit and explicit life skills development processes and the quality of their delivery of Learn to Play programming.

**Methods:** Fourteen coaches (Mage = 40; 12 males) were recruited for this study: five coaches within the implicit group, and nine coaches within the explicit group. Data were collected throughout the summer 2017 golf season and included (a) three observation sessions of Learn to Play lessons and (b) one questionnaire. The observations were systematically scored using the Program Quality Assessment in Youth Sport (PQAYS) measure (Bean et al., in press). This measure has yielded valid and reliable results and is made up of 51 items scored on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) in order to compare the two groups of coaches on the quality of their golf programming. After the third observation was completed, the coaches were asked to assess the quality of their programming by completing the self-report version of the PQAYS.

**Results:** The data were subjected to statistical analyzes using SPSS 24.0. The coaches in the explicit group scored higher in program quality across all 10 subscales within the observational measure. When comparing researchers' observation scores to coaches' self-report scores on program quality, significant discrepancies were identified, with coaches rating themselves much higher than researchers.

**Discussion:** Results support the preliminary research of Bean and Forneris (2016) demonstrating that explicit coaching approaches may further facilitate positive developmental outcomes in youth participants than implicit coaching approaches. Variability trends of coaches' observed and self-reported program quality across the golf season will be discussed. Moving forward, it is important to continue conducting research in this area to better understand how coaches can maximize youth development through the sport of golf (Toms, 2017).

**Practical Application:** The present project represents the first of its kind to empirically examine how implicit and explicit life skills development processes are associated with program quality, using a valid and reliable sport-specific systematic observation tool. The empirical evaluation provides Golf Canada

with tangible evidence as to the quality of the delivery of its Learn to Play program and the extent to which explicit developmental processes contribute to program quality. The findings are also of significance to golf organizations beyond Golf Canada as they can inform policy decisions on how to implement explicit developmental processes in their youth programming.

## References

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