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Towards a culturally relevant sport pedagogy: lessons learned from African Australian refugee-background coaches in grassroots football

This is the Accepted version of the following publication

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Towards a culturally relevant sport pedagogy: Lessons learned from African Australian refugee-background coaches in grassroots football

There is a body of research that indicates the need for community-driven and culturally responsive pedagogies in sport-based interventions. There is much to learn from the pedagogical approaches and experiences of African Australian refugee-background coaches who work with refugee-background young people toward acceptance and affirmation of their cultural and racial identities. This paper explores African Australian refugee-background coaches' pedagogies in working with African Australian refugee-background young people in a grassroots football program in Melbourne. Participants included an African Australian refugee-background young woman and four coaches. Data collection spanned a six-month period and included observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings were analysed using Ladson-Billings' (1995b, 2009, 2014) conceptualisation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. The study identified three main themes. First, the coaches considered themselves 'barrier breakers': they were able to connect the African Australian refugee-background young people to different resources in and outside of sports contexts to develop their success in football and in life. Second, the coaches considered the sport program 'a family' where they were willing to nurture and support cultural competence by sharing power with the participants and their community. Third, the coaches created spaces for young people to develop awareness that allowed them to critique some of the social inequities experienced. Future studies should continue to move beyond a focus on predominantly white and middle-class providers and coaches in sport-based interventions. By including and foregrounding the voices of coaches who have diverse experiences, more diverse cultural knowledges are validated, enabling the translation of this knowledge into more culturally responsive sport programs.

Keywords: sport coaching; refugee background; football; social justice; culturally relevant pedagogy; sport for development; youth development

Introduction

There is a body of research on the role of sport-based programs in the settlement of refugee-background young people (Spaaij et al., 2019; Middleton et al., 2020). Sport-based intervention programs have been designed to connect refugee-background young people, offering opportunities to assist with wellbeing and developing a sense of belonging (Nathan et al., 2013; Spaaij, 2015). This body of research has identified the need for culturally responsive pedagogies which recognise young people's strengths, capabilities, knowledge, and resources (Spaaij et al., 2019; Thorpe, 2020). The development of sport-based intervention programs would benefit from being community-driven and embedding culturally responsive pedagogies, instead of a process whereby refugee-and migrant-background young people need to fit in, or assimilate, by adopting core values implemented by providers (Baker-Lewton, Sonn, Vincent, & Curnow, 2017; Dukic, McDonald, & Spaaij, 2017; Nathan et al., 2013).

Community-driven sport programs potentially offer an alternative to the deficit model which positions young people as 'problems' to be fixed, overlooks their agency and/or associates refugee-background young people's difference and marginality with deficit and lack (Keddie, 2012; Thorpe, 2020). By centring young people through culturally responsive pedagogies, programs can create spaces to better address their needs and aspirations, focused on generating changes within local communities through empowering both coaches and young people and developing a critical awareness of their relationship with the world (Luguetti & McDonald, 2020). In this approach, programs are co-designed specific to the local context and the conditions in which young people live, amplifying their voices and respecting their knowledge as legitimate (Thorpe, 2020).

Although it has been argued that sport-based programs would benefit from being based on culturally responsive pedagogies, there is a shortage of research-based guidance in this area. The contemporary literature focuses on either the experiences of young people (Whitley et al., 2016) or the perspective of external providers; notably, coaches and managers without refugee backgrounds and/or not emanating from the community in which the program takes place. It appears that most coaches and managers in these programs are non-refugees, the main exception being some individual coaches or peer educators especially in programs in non-Western countries (see UNHCR et al., 2018, for some examples). Gibbs and Block's (2017) and Jeanes et al.'s (2015) studies are a case in point. They found that outsider providers had limited capacity to promote sustainable engagement and social inclusion for refugee-background young people. According to Jeanes et al. (2015), providers attempted to integrate young people into existing mainstream sport structures that may not meet their needs.

While there is a growing body of literature revealing the role of sport-based programs in the settlement of refugee-background young people, there is a dearth of research examining coaches' pedagogies at the grassroots level. Hartmann's (2003) study of a grassroots coach provided some important insights into how we might better understand and operationalise sport-based interventions. He argued that sport can serve undesirable ends or reinforce problematic behaviours if implemented improperly, especially if interventions are underpinned by traditional, idealistic conceptions of sport as a site for self-discipline and character building (Hartmann, 2003). In that study, Hartmann (2003) investigated a white middle-class coach in a community-based sport, working with African American young people from socially vulnerable backgrounds.

Much less attention has been paid to the pedagogies of coaches with similar migrant or cultural backgrounds to the young people they work with. This is somewhat surprising because sport for development research has shown that there can be a stronger identification amongst participants with coaches or educators with similar backgrounds or experiences, which creates distinctive opportunities for engagement and relationship building (Crabbe, 2009; Nicholls, 2009). Baker-Lewton et al. (2017) narrated the biography of an African Australian coach, whose experiences exposed everyday racism and its effects, while also illuminating responses to racism in the context of sport in Australia. According to the authors, the coach's experiences highlighted challenges in negotiating belonging and racism in Australia that many people from refugee backgrounds face (Baker-Lewton et al., 2017).

This paper addresses the following question: what are African Australian refugee-background coaches' pedagogies in working with African Australian refugee-background young people in a grassroots football program in Melbourne? We believe that coaches' lived experiences and knowledge in working in their communities constitute vital resources for creating more culturally responsive, community-driven sport programs. This paper draws on Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995b, 2009, 2014) conceptualisation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as an analytical lens. This research reinforces the fact that a primary place to find out about pedagogy is the naturalistic setting and, specifically, the lived experiences of coaches. In the following section, we first discuss the theoretical lens employed within the study before a description of the broader methodological framework is provided.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Gloria Ladson-Billings is an African American feminist scholar who developed the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to challenge the paradigm that children who are not white and middle class are somehow defective and lacking certain qualities (Ladson-Billings, 1999). In the 1960s and 1970s in the United States (US), most educators examined what was termed 'culturally deprived' or 'culturally disadvantaged' children and youth. For Ladson-Billings (1999), 'if we begin with the notion that some children lack essential qualities deemed necessary for school success, how is it that schools can correct or compensate for those missing qualities?' (p. 217). In contrast to this deficit view, Ladson-Billings (1995b, 2009, 2014) has been engaged in research to examine the pedagogical expertise of those teachers who are successful teachers of African American students over the last four decades.

Grounded in Critical Race Theory[1], Ladson-Billings described the great inequities that exist between the schooling experiences of white middle-class students and those of poor African American and Latino students in the US. She suggested that these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialised society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalised (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings applied Critical Race Theory to education as a way to rethink traditional educational scholarship, moving from statistics that suggested African American students were not as successful as their white counterparts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

To develop CRP, Ladson-Billings engaged in research to examine teachers who are successful in working with African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b,

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[1] Critical Race Theory is the most prevalent theory in education used to explain race, racism and whiteness and the impact in society as it pertains to social justice. Hailing from legal studies, this theory is often credited to Derrick Bell, while it was popularised in education by Ladson-Billings.

2009, 2014). Ladson-Billings described the CRP as a theoretical framework that helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools and other institutions perpetuate (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Her study involved intensive classroom observations of eight experienced teachers (five African American and three white) over a two-and-a-half-year period. For her, CRP provides a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995b, 2009, 2014), CRP has three components. The first component is an ability to develop students' academic success – demonstrated by what they knew in writing, speaking, and a variety of exhibitions. The second component is a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence - environments where all students feel respected and well-grounded in their identity and culture, and where there is shared knowledge and experience of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014). These perspectives are examined alongside other perspectives so that students can see the various ways different groups make sense of the world. The third component is the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. For Ladson-Billings (1995b), not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must also help students to recognise, understand, and critique historical and current social inequities.

CRP is distinguishable by three broad propositions or theoretical underpinnings (see Table 1). Teachers who practice CRP demonstrate a commitment to conceptions of self and others. Such teachers can also be identified by how they structure their social interactions. For example, their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. Finally, such teachers are identified by their notions that

knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed, and must be viewed critically.

[Insert Table 1]

Applications of CRP in physical education and sport pedagogy

While CRP has deep roots in educational research, its presence has been scant in physical education (PE) and sport pedagogy literature (Ennis, 1999; Hastie et al., 2006; Marttinen et al., 2014). In PE, previous studies critique the multi-activity, sport-based PE curriculum that often leaves students disengaged and excluded. They argue that academic success, cultural competence, socio-political consciousness, empowerment, and collaboration and respect should be at the centre of PE (Marttinen et al., 2014). CRP has been utilised to analyse the effectiveness of curricular innovations such as 'Sport for Peace', Sport Education, Personal and Social Responsibility, and Body as Curriculum (Ennis, 1999; Marttinen et al., 2014), and to develop culturally relevant physical education programs (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011; Hastie et al., 2006). This body of research emphasises that the successful adoption of CRP requires teachers to become self-reflexive about their positionality as members of the dominant group.

There is an absence of studies in the field of sport for development that apply CRP as an analytical lens. However, culturally relevant pedagogies have been illuminated in previous studies that discuss critical pedagogy to co-create social change *with* young people (e.g., Luguetti & McDonald, 2020; Nols et al., 2018; Spaaij et al., 2016; Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013). These studies discuss a culturally responsive pedagogy based on dialogue and problem posing. In this pedagogy, coaches create a democratic safe space to ask critical questions of the world (questions of material realities

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experienced on a day-to-day basis), and critically reflect on what action they may take to change their material conditions. In this way of working, coaches and young people co-create the program around the themes and conditions of young people's lives.

Although CRP offers a suitable framework for rethinking pedagogies with refugee-background young people in sport contexts, most of the existing studies were conducted within the specific context of physical education. This paper addresses this research gap by analysing pedagogical practices within a sport-based program through a CRP lens. Sport contexts present unique needs and opportunities to practice cultural responsiveness as a relatively informal environment where everyone can be an active participant in social transformation.

Methods

This paper is part of a larger participatory action research project developed with an African Australian refugee-background football program in Melbourne. The project was conducted over a six-month period. This paper distinguishes itself from this larger project by focusing specifically on the coaches' pedagogical practices in the program.

Context and Participants

Victoria typically has the largest refugee intake in Australia. Around 4,000 refugees settle in Victoria each year through the Humanitarian Program. Melbourne's West has a high proportion of newly arrived migrants and refugees who are strongly under-represented in sport and physical activity. This study took place in a charity organisation's football program called Football Empowerment. The Football Empowerment program accommodates approximately 250 children and young people in three groups: Group 1 (under 14-year-old boys), Group 2 (young men aged 16-21), and Group 3 (young women aged 14-25).

Participants included an African Australian refugee-background young woman (second author) and four African Australian refugee-background coaches. Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to the woman and the coaches. The second author (Loy) was a 23-year-old Law student with three years of experience in the football program. Loy was employed as a research assistant on this project, which was a collaboration between refugee-background young people and external researchers (first and third authors). Loy welcomed Carla (first author) from the beginning of this project when Carla spent three months playing football. Loy had three one-hour collaborative meetings with Carla to re-write the interview questions and analyse the data. Loy's participation was crucial in establishing the trust between Carla and the participants. This perspective was invaluable in accessing, understanding, and dialoguing about possible interpretations and solutions (Gilhooly & Lee, 2017).

The coaches were all male, identified as African Australian from refugee backgrounds, and had played football at different levels. Eban (male) was a 22-year-old coach from Burundi who played football for two decades. He had been a coach in this football program since 2017 with the main responsibility of coaching the women's team. He was a full-time medical student and casually employed. Tad (male), the program's founder, was a 28-year-old coach who came to Australia in 1995 from a refugee camp. He was a coach and the coordinator of the program at the time of the study. Abbe (male) was a 27-year-old coach who arrived in Australia in 1998. He was responsible for the partnerships between the Football Empowerment program and schools around the community. He was also a youth worker. He was the founder of the Football Empowerment program. Fahim (male) was a 24-year-old coach from Ethiopia who had a strong interest in playing football in Australia. He was a coach of under 14-year-old boys.

Whereas the young women and the coaches were insiders in this study, the first and third author of this paper are considered in-betweeners (Anzaldúa, 2007). The first author was a middle-class Brazilian woman living in Australia in her late thirties. Although the first author considers herself middle-class in this study, she grew up in a community of low socioeconomic status during her childhood and adolescence playing recreational football. On the one hand, the first author's race, age, and social class positioned her as an outsider; on the other hand, the first author's gender, migrant status, football knowledge and understanding of forms of oppression in socially vulnerable communities positioned her as an in-betweener. The third author was a middle-class white Dutch man in his early forties. Although his race, age, and social class positioned him as an outsider, his migrant status and experience as a football player and coach positioned him as an in-betweener. It is acknowledged that the first and third authors' migrant status differs from Loy's refugee background. Although their migrant status helped the process of building relationships and trust with the participants, it is recognised the unique complexities of forced migration such as having experienced persecution and dangerous physical journeys (Spaaij et al., 2019). In addition, it is acknowledged the power differentials between the first and third authors and Loy, an employed research assistant and refugee-background young person. In order to negotiate and interrogate power and privilege in the research (Block et al., 2013), the first author had three one-hour collaborative meetings with Loy. Loy worked with the researchers to re-write the interview questions and to analyse the data. In those meetings, they discussed their positionalities and tried to create a trusting, mutually respectful and reciprocal relationship between the researchers and Loy (Halilovich, 2013).

Data Collection/Sources/ and Analysis

Data collection spanned a six-month period and included observations and semi-structured interviews. The first author wrote field notes/observations after each training session (23 observations in total) on the coaches' pedagogies. In the first three months, the lead author observed and played in a mixed futsal team delivered by three coaches (Tad, Abbe and Eban). In the following months, the first author observed the young women's football sessions in an outside space delivered by Eban.

Semi-structured interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to one hour. The interviewer (Loy) had three 60-minute meetings with the first author to discuss the interview questions and procedures. In the interviews, the data were elicited through questions regarding coaches' backgrounds, experiences with football, and their pedagogies in the football program. Questions concerning the coaches' pedagogies included: (a) Can you tell me a little about the Football Empowerment program?; (b) What are the main objectives or main goals of the Football Empowerment program?; (c) What would you say are the benefits of playing or coaching at the Football Empowerment program?; (d) What impact do you think the Football Empowerment program has on the community?; (e) And what would you say makes the Football Empowerment program different from other, similar organisations?; All the interviews were digitally recorded for verbatim transcription, producing a total of 43 transcribed pages.

Data analysis involved four steps that embraced both inductive and deductive processes. The inductive process was applied first in the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, the lead author and the last authors separately read all data and engaged in the process of coding aimed at capturing the coaches' pedagogies in the football program. Through this inductive analysis, statements and ideas were developed as data was read and re-read. The second step included Loy (second author). Loy engaged in a

process of checking the interpretations. The fourth and final step involved 'thinking with' Ladson-Billings' (1995b, 2009, 2014) conceptualisation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to explore African Australian refugee-background coaches' pedagogies in working with African Australian refugee-background young people in a grassroots football program. The study identified three main themes. First, the coaches considered themselves 'barrier breakers': they were able to connect the African Australian refugee-background young people to different resources in and outside of sports contexts to develop their success in football and in life. Second, the coaches considered the program 'a family' where they could nurture and support cultural competence by sharing power with the participants and their community. Third, the coaches created spaces for young people to develop awareness that allowed them to critique some of the social inequities they experienced.

'We are barrier breakers': supporting the development of young people's success in football and in life

The coaches considered themselves 'barrier breakers.' They were able to connect the African Australian refugee-background young people to different areas (e.g., work, education, and sport) in order to support their success in football and in life. They described breaking financial barriers and structural barriers through job-seeking and educational opportunities as well as through pathway to a football professional career. These barriers were identified through ongoing dialogue with the young people and through the coaches' own lived experience as African Australians. The Football

Empowerment program was a space to offer young people a range of opportunities in and outside of football:

> For a very long time we didn't have anything in the West that really, people thought they could do, without pay. Because football in Australia, anywhere really, without finance, it's very difficult to participate in it and so we wanted to make sure that we had a platform for people who couldn't otherwise afford to participate at a club level […] Secondly, we want to offer, again, those who can't otherwise go into a community club, or an elite club, a pathway into those clubs without the burden of finance, so that's what our elite program is all about, but also we want to focus on giving back to the community in general, as a platform for not just football, because we use football as a base to bring people together, so we want to use it as a barrier breaker, we use the programs we run as barrier breakers (Eban).

Being a charity organisation's football program and offering cost-free participation were the main ways in which the coaches saw themselves as 'barrier breakers.' Eban mentioned how young people otherwise would not afford to participate at a club level. The coaches also described how diversified the Football Empowerment program was. They had programs at different levels such as pick-up indoor football for recreational purposes and systematic training sessions to compete at a higher level. The coaches also expressed that they tried to break barriers regarding parents' involvement, which was experienced as a challenge in the Football Empowerment program. They stated that if they educated parents regarding the free cost and educational benefits of the programs, they might become more involved. According to the coaches, most of the parents did not value or engage with the football program. However, while it was clear

that financial barriers were being addressed in this program, we did not find conclusive evidence regarding parental barriers.

It is important to highlight that the coaches did not push football to be the only pathway for success. Football was considered the space to offer young people a range of opportunities in football and outside in order to support young people's life skills development. According to Eban, football was a portal for interaction, something to do in the community. At the same time, it could be a pathway to an elite club without the financial cost that is typically associated with such a pathway. The coaches sought to connect the young people with different places to support their success. For example, they helped connect some of the participants with employment opportunities, education, and mentoring:

> Some of the barriers I guess are just like their whole understanding of the services out there for them, as the assistance that you need in life and how to connect with these services. Understanding that you might have the skills and stuff but this is for the elite player and someone that's in the elite program that they might have the skills and stuff but they just don't have the right network so that's one of the barriers that we try to break is provide them with connections that can take them to the next stage of life. I guess their professional life as well in some of the other areas are like employment or understanding like, some don't want to be professional football players, some just want to be coaches or want to be referees, just providing them that training that they need to get to where they want to go (Abbe).

The coaches identified the program's importance in breaking barriers regarding education and job opportunities as well as accessing football career pathways (to

become professional players, referees or coaches). The development of young people's life skills was considered paramount for their success in and outside the program:

> The main objective is they develop good people... life skills through football, you know. Football is an engagement tool, a vehicle to bring the young people in, and then develop them. Cause for us a lot of people at the Football Empowerment program that works in football, and volunteer you use football as our skill, we've developed so much through sport [...] it's a very friendly and safe environment for the young people to come and to interact with people they know (Tad).

The coaches described how they believe that life skills learned in the Football Empowerment program would be transferred to other parts of the young people's lives. For example, they mentioned how friendships they made in the program could be translated to schools and the community. By having the coaches as 'barrier breakers', the Football Empowerment program was considered the space to offer young people a range of opportunities for success in football and outside.

This theme is related to the first CRP component: the ability to develop students' academic success (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Although Ladson-Billings' CRP is drawn from extensive research within a school setting (pedagogies and teachers) regarding academic success, her concept of academic success is much broader than academic scores. For Ladson-Billings (2009), academic success is related to the belief that students can demonstrate knowledge in writing, speaking, and a variety of exhibitions; knowledge is continuously co-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students.

In this study, we introduced the concept of academic success to spaces outside school context (e.g., football success and life success). There is a body of research that highlights institutional racism and cultural misrecognition of young people from

(African) refugee backgrounds in the Australian educational system (Baak, 2019; Matthews, 2019; Uptin et al., 2013). Current struggles to support refugee students in Australian schools can be associated with their positioning within dominant or established discourses that silence and exclude their educational needs (Keddie, 2012; Matthews, 2019). These discourses tend to individualise and pathologise student behaviour rather than focusing on how broader factors – such as school and teacher practice - can reproduce student disadvantage by leading to a degraded form of pedagogy based on low expectations and low demandingness (Keddie, 2012).

The coaches in this study described breaking financial barriers to club access, and structural barriers through employment and educational opportunities as well as through football career pathways (e.g., to become professional players, referees, coaches). The ability to develop young people's success encompassed both the program itself and other societal domains, with a particular emphasis on transferable life skills and social bonds, such as relationships that transcended the program to the local community.

'We are a family': a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence

The coaches considered the Football Empowerment program a 'family' where they were willing to nurture and support cultural competence by sharing power with the participants and their community. Previous research has recommended that bicultural workers and volunteers from within migrant and refugee communities be actively engaged in sport-based programs (Olliff, 2008). Football Empowerment, which was founded by African Australians from refugee backgrounds, goes one step further: the participants experience a sense of being part of the dominant group, if only temporarily. Originally starting out as an informal 'kick around the park', their engagement in the

program was a way for the coaches to give back to 'their' community or 'family'. Their motivation to give back to the 'family' was informed by the lived experiences and struggles the coaches faced as African Australian refugee-background young people and former football players. This sense of family is evidenced by, for example, the duty of care and sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that are felt in the program:

> At the end of the training session, Eban gave me a ride to the train station and I was observing how they organised to drive everybody back home. I saw five cars from three coaches and two older boys, and all kids were in the cars. One of the cars fitted seven kids. […] Eban said he has five sisters and two brothers and all of them play in the Football Empowerment program […] I think by listening to Eban's lived experience, I understood why he is leading this project. He wants to give back to his community. He wants to be close with his seven brothers and sisters. Actually, I think all of them here are brothers and sisters (lead author field note, July 2019).

From the outset, the sense of family cultivated in the program was deliberately broad and inclusive. The coaches and participants had diverse African backgrounds such as Burundi and Ethiopian. They understood as their 'family' or community all people from African backgrounds:

> The Football Empowerment program brings the community together, you can see like, friends, we just brought all Africans, we haven't had an event like that where it brings all people from Africa together and it's all about football […] it was just the passion they had, to be as one as a community. I feel like other organisations try to see Africans as different, providing separation between each other […] it's the government thing because obviously it's the whole Sudanese and stuff, it's the whole trouble making in the news and stuff and they're trying

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to focus on that but then they, and in a way they're building like a disconnection between all Africans. I guess that's what we try not to do, it's an open program for all Africans (Abbe).

The coaches recognised the diverse African cultures in the Football Empowerment program. They viewed football as a space to create a community with diverse African cultures. The coaches and young people spoke predominantly English, but also diverse dialects. To create a community-driven approach, the coaches mentioned that they shared power with the participants and community as well as were open to learning with the community and listening to young people's voices:

I think every day I learn something new through […] I have learned a lot, and you become more accepting, more grateful, and you just accept people for who they are, you don't ... and I feel like that's very important, not only in the community but in the world as well (Fahim).

We just have an open conversation with them, and just say, highlight the fact this is just a community thing, this is, we're all there for the same reason, and just we never ... it's been good, we've had good... we never have any real problems, touch wood, but we never had any problems, everything is really smooth. [...] we all friends at the end of the day, and we all connect, we all know each other, and we all ... we'll support each other (Tad).

The coaches acknowledged learning most of the time with the young people and the whole community or 'family'. They also tried to solve conflicts by creating a space where they can listen to each other. The coaches considered the Football Empowerment program 'a family' where they tried to share power with the participants and their community. The coaches' willingness to nurture and support cultural competence (the second CRP component) was informed by their lived experiences of struggles they

faced as African Australian refugee-background young people and former football players. The coaches wanted young people to appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2014). The coaches' willingness to nurture and support cultural competence through pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) happened where they were role models for young people with similar migrant or cultural backgrounds. The coaches' similar background promoted bonding capital (connections with individuals 'like themselves'), providing a way for refugee-background young people to construct a social and collective identity within their new community and preserve aspects of their cultural heritage (Spaaij, 2015).

The coaches' insider positionality was deeply meaningful in engaging and connecting with young people to nurture and support their cultural competence. The grassroots community-driven sport program was also a space to enact what is defined in CRP as cultural congruence (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009, 2014). This notion of cultural congruence means the ways in which the teachers/coaches altered their speech patterns, communication styles, and participation structures to resemble more closely those of the young people's own culture. That the sport program was created by two of the coaches to give back to the 'family' or community highlights how it challenged the dominant white culture, including other aspects of young people's culture.

'We are more than what the newspaper or the media portrays': Creating spaces for young people develop awareness that allowed them to critique social inequities

The coaches created a space to young people develop awareness that allowed them to critique some of the social inequities they experienced in their daily lives. This practice is consistent with the problem-posing that applications of culturally responsive

pedagogies in sport-based programs have highlighted (Spaaij et al., 2016; Nols et al., 2018). The program was informed by the lived experiences of struggles the coaches faced as African Australian refugee-background young people and former football players. The kicking around three years ago became a more organised community program that incorporated the struggles that they faced:

> The Football Empowerment program came about in early 2016 […] we just were having dinner and we were just talking about so much disengaged young kids, back from early 2016 about all the African gangs, the media portraying start trouble, and so on […] People, what people portray of, say especially like young Africans, through sport we can show a different image of us, you know, we're successful, being normal in the community […] And becoming the role model in the community saying, and then regardless of where you've come from, whether you become a professional or not, you're just becoming a role model and you're showing that we're not all criminals. And now there's a lot more to us than what the newspaper or the media portrays (Tad).

> Abbe arrived in the training session wearing a suit. I saw all kids commenting about it. He arrived and didn't change his clothes. He delivered the whole training session wearing a suit. Why was he wearing a suit? I asked Tad about it. Tad mentioned that Abbe became a lawyer recently and the whole community is proud of it. He mentioned that he was wearing a suit to show to the kids his professional achievement. The kids seemed proud of him (lead author field note, June 2019).

The coaches expressed that the Football Empowerment program could be a vehicle for disrupting harmful public and media discourses on African Australian refugee-background young people. They considered themselves role models in the

community or what they called 'family', by showing that 'the community is a lot more than what the newspaper or the media portrays'. They themselves had experienced the complexities of forced migration, resettlement and racism. For example, Tad reported that he started the program to engage disaffected young people and to demonstrate they were more than what the media portrays. Given the systemic nature of this portrayal (discussed below), the program should be understood as but one modest part of a broader, multisectoral approach to addressing the othering of refugee-background people in Australia, by offering young people a space to speak and to be heard. The empirical evidence suggests that the power imbalance between media outlets and African Australian communities was not addressed explicitly in the Football Empowerment program. For example, the coaches did not use explicit pedagogical strategies to name, critique and negotiate harmful media discourses. This raises questions about how coach-player relationships can contribute to developing capacities and resources in order to achieve improved forms of representation and voice in society (cf. Marjoribanks et al., 2013).

These findings should be viewed within the context of Australia's complex colonial and racialised history (Baak, 2019; Hage, 1998). For example, immigration to Australia has been shaped by the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (the 'White Australia' policy) which was formally ended in 1973. This policy and its remnants have resulted in the continued construction of a particular 'Australian identity' in which belonging continues to be racialised (Baak, 2019; Matthews, 2019). African Australians are socially constructed as different, deviant, and a danger to the 'White Australia' (Baak, 2019; Due & Riggs, 2009). Media commentary commonly represents African Australians as threatening Australian national harmony and cultural identity due to

perceived 'criminal mobility', their experiences of violence and aggression, and their susceptibility to terrorism (Matthews, 2019).

Abbe's decision to wear a suit at football practice exemplifies how Abbe navigated Australia's normalising of Whiteness. Abbe mentioned that he was wearing a suit to show the young people his professional achievement. The act of wearing a suit highlighted a counter-narrative of African Australians as 'trouble' or 'criminals'. The above body of research recognises the difficulty of changing public perceptions. However, in a refugee-specific sport program, as opposed to mainstream sport club, those conversations emerged in the coaches' pedagogies.

The fact that the coaches had personally experienced the complexities of forced migration and resettlement created opportunities for the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness (the third CRP component). The coaches revealed that the program could be a vehicle of disrupting harmful public and media discourse around African Australian refugee-background young people. The counter-narrative presented in the program enabled participants to develop a critique of cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009, 2014). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) critiqued multicultural education in schools which is often limited to trivial examples and artefacts of cultures such as particular foods, dress, music or dance, as opposed to pursuits of fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge or quests for social justice (Knijnik & Spaaij, 2017). The coaches brought in issues of race and racism that had been muted and marginalised in the dominant multicultural discourse. This approach was aligned with the historical and sociocultural reality of the material conditions of African people (Ladson-Billings, 1996), particularly African Australians.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore African Australian refugee-background coaches' pedagogies in working with African Australian refugee-background young people in a community-driven football program. CRP provided a distinctive framework for culturally responsive pedagogies that recognise refugee-background young people's strengths, capabilities, knowledge, resources, and experiences of injustice. By considering the three CRP components (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009, 2014), we learned that: (a) coaches were able to connect young people to different resources in and outside of sports contexts to develop their success in football and in life (first component); (b) coaches were willing to nurture and support cultural competence by sharing power with the participants and their community (second component); and (c) coaches created spaces for young people develop awareness that allowed them to critique some of the social inequities (third component). This study strengthens the body of knowledge on CRP in physical education and sport pedagogy (Ennis, 1999; Hastie et al., 2006; Marttinen et al., 2014) by focusing on discussions of race and racism that continue to be muted and marginalised; positions those constructed as 'non-whites' as 'Others' (Ladson-Billings, 1996). Particularly, African Australian refugee-background young people that have been racially constructed through everyday discourses as 'Others' in a white Australia (Baak, 2019; Hage, 1998).

Although CRP provided a distinctive framework for culturally responsive pedagogies, we acknowledge the limitations of this approach. The extensive critique of the concept 'cultural competence', particularly in the field of health and social work is particularly noteworthy in this regard (Curtis et al., 2019; Furlong & Wight, 2011; Pon, 2009). The main critiques of this concept are its disregard of the fluidity of cultures and power relations, the lack of reflexive practices, and consequently its 'othering' of non-white communities. In practice, cultural competence is often used to focus thought and

action on acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes through which teachers become more 'competent' in the cultures of others (Curtis et al., 2019). While Gloria Ladson-Billings uses this term, her interpretation of it positions power relations and reflexive practices as central concerns in CRP. Ladson-Billings applied Critical Race Theory to name, critique and negotiate inequities that exist in the educational experiences of African American and Latino students in the US. For her, the examination of race and racism begins with our understanding of whiteness as a central construct that positions those constructed as 'non-whites' as Others (Ladson-Billings, 1996). We recognise the significant limitations of the notion of cultural competence, but we also acknowledge that its conceptualisation in CRP, as developed by Ladson-Billings, considers power relations and reflexive practices.

In this paper, using CRP as a conceptual tool highlighted how the community-driven sport program offered meaningful opportunities to practice cultural responsiveness. As an informal educational program, it provided a collective environment where, in principle, everyone could be an active participant in social transformation, by identifying and negotiating barriers that hinder social justice outcomes for these young people. The fact that this was a refugee-specific sport program facilitated the creation of a meaningful space for young people to accept and affirm their cultural identities while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities. Refugee-specific sport programs of this nature provide microcosms in which young people can negotiate a sense of belonging, where harmful forms of Othering may be minimised, and where there is potential for social connectedness to spill over into broader communities.

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