

Learning Together: Sharing Insights In The Teaching And Coaching Of Girls' Football

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Article Info

Article History

Received:
May 15, 2021

Accepted:
August 29, 2021

Keywords :

Capital Football, Talent Identification, Women`S Football, Women`S Participation, Pedagogical Practices

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.5332104

Abstract

As a contribution to the flourishing of women's football in Jordan this research was an investigation of talent identification and development in women's football, and concentrate on the process of teaching and coaching football in Jordan and Australia (ACT). Objective: Sharing insights about how football might be taught in a sustainable way in schools and football clubs in Ar ramtha, discusses the teaching and coaching girls' football in Ar ramtha, Jordan, and Canberra, Australia. Methods: Qualitative methods used to explore the teaching football skills and game understanding in two cultural contexts. Results: It became evident that supporting teachers and coaches in their learning journeys was a priority. We consider the benefits of having different cultural experiences as a research team. Conclusions: We suggest that the insights we have gained raise some fascinating opportunities for how girls and women will engage in football in Jordan as part of the legacy of hosting FIFA's Under 17 Women's World Cup. We hope our insights can contribute to performance pathway conversations for players, teachers and coaches that are sensitive to cultural.

Introduction

This paper describes research undertaken in Jordan and Australia. Two cities provided the context for the research, Ar ramtha and Canberra. The researchers experience at first hand the governance of women's football in an Australian context and to undertake a participant observation study of the teaching and coaching of girls' football.

This paper is an investigation of talent identification and development in women's football, but during the fieldwork phase of the research, it became evident that supporting teachers and coaches in their learning journeys was a priority. We propose that the combination of our cultural experiences and sensitivity to gender issues has led to a rich description of pedagogical practices and the generation of guidelines for curriculum content within schools and extra-curricular content in sport clubs. We hope that our insights can contribute to performance pathway conversations for players, teachers and coaches that are sensitive to cultural contexts.

Background

This paper is an investigation into the possibilities for a systematic and sustainable approach to girls and women's participation in football in Jordan. The original motivation for the research was a desire to explore how the researcher's community in Ar ramtha might establish, support and sustain a talent identification and development pathway for those who want to play football. This desire to find a pathway that is sensitive to a specific cultural context is at the core of this paper. Such a pathway is enmeshed in other issues and contributes to other discussions.

This paper is a contribution to a literature that is providing more empirical insights into Arab girls' and women's experience of physical education and sport (Al-Hourani & Atoum, 2007; Memari, Kordi, Panahi, Niko okar, Abdollahi & Akbarnejad, 2011; Al-Hazaa, Al-Sobayel & Musaiger, 2011) and to a wider discussion about gendered experience of physical activity in Muslim societies (see, for example, Benn, Pfister & Jawad, 2011; Benn, Jawad & Yousra, 2013). It is a contribution to discussions about equity and empowerment. We hope too that it is a contribution to a sensitive discussion of personal experience that goes beyond a homogenous approach to Arab girls and women (Phillips, 2013). It is a modest attempt to explore "contested discourses and practices" (Benn, Pfister & Jawad, 2011) in a particular cultural context. It is an affirmation of the value of physical education, physical activity and sport in the lives of Arab women (Dagkas, Jahromi & Talbot, 2011).

Objectives

- Enhance the flourishing of Jordanian women's football, especially in the north of Jordan.

- Introduce an Australian inspired talent identification and development process in a Jordanian community.
- Propose long-term strategy used for athlete development in women`s football which can fit other collective sports in Jordan.

We discuss how these aims enabled us to consider how football might be taught in a sustainable way in schools and football clubs in Ar ramtha.

Putting girls and women in the foreground

Much of the existing literature on talent identification and development is based on male sport. There are comparatively few accounts of female sport and virtually nothing about women in Arabic sport cultures. Benn, Jawad and Youstra (2013), for example, have looked at the role of Islam in the lives of girls and women in physical education and sport. Azizi and Hassan (2014) have looked at the challenges facing Iranian women in sport. It is difficult to find any examples of scholarly accounts written in Arabic on this topic.

Any attempt to propose a sustainable participation and engagement pathway for girls and women in football in Jordan must be recognized, as Siraj (2012) suggests, that there are multiple expectations placed upon them including mode of dress. Harkness and Islam (2011), amongst others, note that stereotypical expectations of female behavior constrain participation. They observe:

At the same time as female athleticism is widely supported around the world, in the Middle East it was regarded as an insult to the Arabian traditional values. (2011:64)

Harkness (2012), in his study of Iraqi Kurdistan women footballers, provides an excellent example of what an enlightened approach to female participation might look like.

They came from socially modest families, where they support their daughters' to obtain higher education, play an active role in society & participate in sports activities, unlike the previous Kurdistan women, where situations were not favourable. Being Muslims, they discuss issues of religion in a tolerant manner that gives flexibility and ample room for the exchange of opinions and thoughts. (2012: 735)

He concludes (2012:735):

These female learn how to express themselves on the playing field, overcome hardships, relentlessly pursue their goals and fight for equality. These experiences are supposed to be taken to their daily lives, were they apply what they have learned in the field to social life that affects them positively. For these young women, football is much more than a sports competition, it represents a new generation better prepared to face the changing social, political and cultural tides in the Middle East.

Dixon, Warner and Bruening (2008) report on female participation in sport and note the role parental influence plays in enduring involvement. If there is to be a sustainable pathway for girls and women in Jordanian football then it will be essential to address, from a female perspective, how this parental influence can be energized to support players through a number of stages of their sporting career:

- Preparatory sampling
- Initiation
- Development and specialisation
- Perfection, mastery and investment
- Maintenance
- Discontinuation of competitive sport

We are hopeful that our research can contribute to the transformation of cultural expectations reported in Harkness' (2012) research in Iraqi Kurdistan. We are aware that this is not a straightforward undertaking.

One way to do this might be to explore football as a 'hobby' (Stewart, 2012). Her research explores how football as play creates a space "where Palestinian women can safely act outside the prescribed norms of Palestinian womanhood inside Israel" (2012:739).

Without the sociological sophistication evident in much of Jennifer Hargreaves' writings, our research is also an effort "to bring women's sports more centrally on to the agenda" (1994:1).

Methodology

Our research used a mixed methods approach to data collection (Camerino, Castañer & Anguera, 2012). These methods have enabled us to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Denscombe (2008), amongst others, has identified the potential of this "third paradigm" to "produce a more complete picture by combining information from complementary kinds of data or sources" (2008:272).

The researcher used English and Arabic texts to inform the research, communicated, conversed and interviewed participants in both languages too. The research reported here used qualitative methods to gather data from two communities, one in Australia (Canberra) and one in Jordan (Ar ramtha).

Gatekeepers to the research process were identified in both communities and developed a wide range of contacts were developed. We did cast our net wide (Crang and Cook, 2013) to create a purposive sample of participants (Patton, 1999). We chose participants who would maximize the possibilities of obtaining data.

The researcher was a participant observer in the research. In this approach “the observer participates in the daily life of people... observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time” (Becker & Geer, 1957:28). This approach has been used in a variety of sport settings including Maori girls’ experiences of physical education, sport and play (Palmer, 2000); the sporting experiences of refugee women in South Australia (Palmer, 2009); Maori women’s experience of sport leadership (Palmer & Masters, 2010); and women’s football (Pielichaty, 2015).

Fieldwork

The fieldwork included participation in an Asian Football Confederation and Football Federation Australia C Licence course; two extensive field trips to Ar ramtha; and participate observation in Canberra football (a role as volunteer coach in an Under 16 girls’ team).

In Canberra

The researcher invited a number of coaches and administrators, who agreed to take part in her study (n=6) were asked to consent to a semi-structured interview. Each interview was audio recorded with the participant’s permission. Participants received a copy of the questions to be addressed in advance: interviews were transcribed.

The interviews focused on Australian talent identification, development and performance pathways models. Permission was sought from participants to undertake further semi-structured interviews to explore any issues arising from the first interviews should there be a need so to do. These second interviews were for clarification.

In Ar ramtha

Interviews focused on existing practice in Jordan and the exploration of the researcher’s Australian experience. Interviewees included officials from the Ministry of Education and the Ar ramtha Education Directorate as well as the administrators and coaches. The interviews in Jordan were in Arabic and transcribed in Arabic. Fieldwork also took place in two Ar ramtha schools.

Fieldwork in Ar ramtha gave the researcher an opportunity to meet with a range of people who were committed to the flourishing of football. Here we report one aspect of the fieldwork, namely the development of a project in two schools to support teachers responsible for teaching football to girls.

The purpose was to explore how a curriculum might support teachers with a range of experience in playing and teaching football. Interviews with coaches and administrators has emphasized the role female teachers must play in the development of football for girls within the school timetable. Our research looked at embedding football skill acquisition within The King Abdullah II Award for Fitness.

The aim of the project was for teachers to introduce basic football skills to two age groups, 5-8 years and 9-13 years within the context of the Award for Fitness.

Three female teachers were involved in the introductory program. The researcher prepared a coaching plan for each teacher based upon her experiences of football. Each teacher worked with approximately 35 girls in each class.

Ar ramtha schools had some football equipment. All lessons were conducted in the school playground rather than on the grass surfaces in Canberra.

The modifications of the curriculum recommended to the teachers were designed to enable them to teach some football skills and facilitate game play. The curriculum provided guidelines for the teachers that gave them some confidence to teach football.

The introductory project comprised two training phases (Discovery and Skill Acquisition) for pupils aged 5 to 13 years. It took place over twelve weeks in the second semester of the 2013-2014 school year and ran at the same time as the King Abdullah II Award Program for Physical Fitness. The pupils aged 5 to 8 years took part in an eight-week ‘Discovery’ program. The 9-13-year-old followed the ‘Discovery’ course and had an additional four weeks of a Skill Acquisition component.

Three football skills were tested before and after the program: dribbling with the ball between two cones for a distance of 6 metres; dribbling the ball 3 metres and shooting into a goal; a penalty kick from 6 metres into a goal.

The essence of the Discovery phase was to encourage teachers and pupils to enjoy opportunities to play football. In Australia, the Football Federation Australia (FFA) emphasizes trial and improvement in this phase as a way to facilitate game playing. The FFA curriculum encourages fun through organized exercises. The researcher’s support for the teachers drew upon these ideas for lesson plans that included game playing and the teaching of kicking, running with the ball, and shooting. I suggested the teachers use the FFA’s lesson format of beginning (activation), middle (training activities), and end (small-sided games).

The Skill Acquisition phase provided an opportunity for teachers to focus on the three technical skills (kicking, running with the ball, and shooting). I encouraged the teachers to see these as foundation skills for game playing. The FFA recommends that this phase offer a more structured approach to the lessons. I used their three-

part approach to support the teachers in their lesson formats and delivery. This approach has an introduction of a foundation skill then moves to the training of that skill and concludes by using that skill in the context of a small-sided game. I encouraged teachers to end their lessons with a summary of the lesson's aims and objectives in preparation for the next time the children came to play football. In some of the lessons this led to conversations between teachers and pupils about dribbling the ball as well as running with the ball. Teachers were able to explain and, in some cases, demonstrate how to control the ball when there were other players nearby.

The teachers in the project knew each other. It helped having two teachers in one school. All the teachers grew in confidence by being connected and sharing a pedagogical process.

Results & discussion:

Insights from research in Canberra

Fieldwork in Canberra raised some fundamental issues for development of sustainable girls' and women's football in Jordan.

The integration of Capital Football, the organization for football in Canberra, as a dynamic federation within a national sporting organization has encouraged us to think carefully about governance models for football at a local, regional (territory) and national level. The leadership offered by Canberra Football's CEO at the time of the research, Heather Reidis, we believe, exemplary. Through her leadership a number of exceptional female coaches have been able to connect with young girls to provide role models for females coaching females.

We noted the impact a national curriculum for football can have on a community. We observed Capital Football's commitment to this curriculum and the explicit investment made in supporting skill development and skill acquisition. Registrations in football clubs are blossoming in the city. The researcher's fieldwork took place in a community football club with 1350 active members (female and male).

The fieldwork in Canberra has encouraged us to think much more carefully about playful, fun activities as the introduction to football for young girls. Conversations with coaches have prompted us to think about how teachers and coaches who have not played football can contribute to early years' participation. The researcher's enrolment in coaching courses encouraged her to think in detail about pedagogy in Jordan.

Many young girls in Jordan have their first experience of football through physical education lessons taught by female teachers. We have taken from the researcher's Canberra experience the importance of these teachers feeling confident about what they are doing in their lessons.

The size of the football community in Canberra is much bigger than in Ar ramtha. Both cities have similar population sizes although Ar ramtha continues to grow with refugee intake. The researcher's experiences in Canberra have alerted her to the possibilities for a gender-sensitive governance structure that gives a community a powerful sporting experience. Capital Football has shown us what is possible, and we are hopeful that despite some cultural constraints, what can be achieved in Ar ramtha is a scalable version of Canberra.

Insights from research in Ar ramtha

By the end of the project, there was evidence that teachers were becoming more confident in teaching football. There was evidence too that the pupils were improving their skills. The results of the project are encouraging but do require more rigor in the design and measurement of appropriate tests. This would include, for example, careful consideration of how to support the teachers in their scoring of pupil performance. It might lead to some substantial in-service teacher training about systematic observation, data capture and analysis. This could encourage further conversations about how to align such testing with the King Abdullah II Award for Fitness. We do understand that this project is a very small first step in developing culturally sensitive football programs. We see enormous opportunities to explore how to contribute to sustainable football programs in schools and clubs in Jordan.

Sustainability

We are keen to contribute to the discussion of and practice in 'sustainability' in football. We see opportunities for a process that links the sampling of a game as play with the possibility of becoming more involved in organized sport structures. Our hope is that young girls who are introduced to sport in schools can have a lifelong interest in football.

We are clear that any application of an Australian model in Jordan must take into account the governance of the game in Jordan locally and nationally. Like Spaaij (2009), we are interested in the social capital possibilities of adopting an inclusive approach to sport involvement. In Ar ramtha at present, and in the foreseeable future, sport will have a very important role to play in connecting communities. We understand from Spaaij's (2009) investigations of a rural community in Australia that opportunities for linking social capital in and through sport are limited. This potential must not be overstated for Ar ramtha too. However, we are keen to explore the place of voluntary organizations "as vital community hubs fostering social cohesion, identity, and a shared focus and outlet" (Spaaij, 2009:18).

The simplicity of football makes it an excellent game form through which to contemplate the sustainability of sport opportunities. We are aware, as Vail (2007) has suggested, that sustainable sport-based development

requires a community's readiness; champions to support the process; stakeholder partnerships; and processes to develop the community.

Conclusion

The research shared here is the start of a journey in supporting teachers, coaches and players. We have written this paper to outline how two people from different cultural contexts can come together to explore sustainable activity for girls and women in Jordan. This approach has used a very basic curriculum as a starting point within King Abdullah II Award Program for Physical Fitness.

Sustainability means that girls can move from sampling football as an activity within their physical education lessons in school to a community based club network that supports football becoming a central life interest. For those girls who show a particular talent in football, there should be a pathway that takes them from the playground to the national stadium. There is evidence that this pathway is emerging in Jordan. We believe hosting the FIFA Under 17 World Cup offers a very special moment in Jordan's football history. That Jordanian and other players may wear a hijab in football games is a very important moment in the development of football in Jordan. It addresses directly one of the multiple expectations of Muslim girls (Siraj, 2012).

We understand that the researcher has an important role to play in the development of football at a local level in Ar ramtha.

Recommendations

1. Long term athlete development strategy in women's football is prior for enhancing women's participation.
2. Football coaching curriculum (for coaches and teachers at schools) is needed to teach some football skills and facilitate game play

Acknowledgments: We thank all participants for cooperation and their support and contribution in this study.

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