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To cite this article: Meredith A. Whitley, Cassandra Coble & Gem S. Jewell (2016) Evaluation of a sport-based youth development programme for refugees, *Leisure/Loisir*, 40:2, 175-199, DOI: [10.1080/14927713.2016.1219966](https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2016.1219966)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2016.1219966>



Published online: 23 Aug 2016.



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## Evaluation of a sport-based youth development programme for refugees

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### ABSTRACT

Various methods have been used to help vulnerable populations, including sport and physical recreation. This study was an initial evaluation of a sport and physical recreation programme for refugee youth based on the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) Model. The purpose was to assess the participants' perceptions and experiences in this programme, with the conceptual framework for acculturation serving as the theoretical background. Sixteen refugee youth participated in semi-structured interviews, with hierarchical content analysis and consensual validation procedures used for data analysis. The interviews demonstrated the participants' positive experiences in the programme, including general enjoyment, experiencing and learning new sports, and feeling a sense of belonging. The participants also described the TPSR concepts of respect, teamwork, and leadership, along with transference of these concepts into their everyday lives. This highlights the need for such programmes to aid in the resettlement and acculturation of young refugees into a new society.

### RÉSUMÉ

Diverses méthodes ont été testées pour aider les populations vulnérables, dont certaines incluant des activités physiques et sportives. Cette étude constituait une évaluation préliminaire d'un programme d'activités physiques et sportives pour les jeunes réfugiés basé sur le modèle d'enseignement des responsabilités personnelles et sociales (ERPS, TPSR en anglais). L'objectif était d'évaluer les perceptions et expériences des participants dans ce programme, en utilisant le cadre conceptuel de l'acculturation comme contexte théorique. Seize jeunes réfugiés ont participé à des entretiens semi-structurés. L'analyse des données a été effectuée par analyse du contenu hiérarchique et des procédures de validation consensuelle. Les entretiens ont révélé les expériences positives des participants à travers le

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 June 2015  
Accepted 10 February 2016

### KEYWORDS

TPSR; sport for development; refugee children; acculturation; physical recreation

### MOTS-CLÉS

ERPS; sport pour le développement; enfants réfugiés; activités physiques; acculturation

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In loving memory of two young refugee participants who will forever remain in our hearts.

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programme, y compris leur plaisir général à découvrir et à apprendre *de nouveaux* sports et leur sentiment d'appartenance. Les participants ont aussi décrit les concepts ERPS de respect, de travail d'équipe, de leadership et la transmission de ces concepts à leur vie quotidienne. Ceci souligne l'utilité de ces programmes pour aider à la réinstallation et à l'acclimatation des jeunes réfugiés dans une nouvelle société.

Sport and physical recreation have been identified as one method for helping vulnerable populations, including immigrant, indigenous, refugee, and underserved communities (Cairnduff, 2001; Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Nichols, 2004). These populations often have a shortage of personal services, economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers, low socioeconomic status, and additional individual and family-specific issues that negatively impact their lives (Collingwood, 1997; Flynn, 2008; Health Resources and Services Administration, 2011). Youth within these communities are much more likely to experience unhealthy developmental outcomes, such as learned irresponsibility, personal confusion and ambiguity with identity formation, loss of purpose, low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, life disappointment, depression, fear of failure, and destructive relationships (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Seat, 2000). Given these concerns, scholars and practitioners have begun highlighting the potential for sport and physical recreation to *do more* with these young people. Along with providing fun, safe, supportive environments for youth, sport and physical recreation can also contribute to positive youth development, which is a strength-based view of development with a focus on positive psychosocial growth and character development (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Damon, 2004). Consistent with social learning theory and structural development approaches, positive youth development stresses the acquisition and development of desired outcomes, instead of focusing solely on the prevention of undesirable actions (Pittman, 1991). Through participation in organized, community-based activities such as sport and physical recreation, researchers have suggested that youth can learn transferable life skills, as well as moral, social, emotional, and behavioural competencies (Damon, 2004; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Larson, 2000; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). A growing number of programmes have found success taking a positive youth development approach in sport and physical recreation settings, including The First Tee (Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013), Harlem RBI (Berlin, Dworkin, Eames, Menconi, & Perkins, 2007), and Street Soccer USA (Welty Peachey, Lyras, Borland, & Cohen, 2013). There are also several frameworks and models being used within this field to guide programme design, implementation, and evaluation, including the sport-for-development theory (Lyras

& Welty Peachey, 2011), the ripple effect model (Sugden, 2010), the sport-for-development framework (Schulenkorf, 2012), and the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) Model (Hellison, 2011).

The TPSR Model was selected as the guide for the design, implementation, and evaluation of the programme under study because of its focus on building relationships with peers and adults, personal empowerment, and transfer of life skills from sport and physical recreation settings into other domains. Originally conceptualized by Don Hellison in the 1970s (Hellison, 2011), the TPSR Model connects personal and social responsibility with values, which are represented by five developmental levels: (i) respect; (ii) effort; (iii) self-direction; (iv) leadership; and (v) transfer. Along with these levels, the TPSR Model is based on three central themes: integration, teacher–student relationships, and empowerment. In other words, the programme must seamlessly *integrate* the responsibility levels with sport and physical recreation, facilitate the development of meaningful *teacher–student relationships*, and *empower* the young participants (Hayden, Baltzell, Kilty, & McCarthy, 2012). Many scholars and practitioners believe that the TPSR Model is valuable for personal and social development in youth and can be used in a variety of settings with a range of populations (Bean, Forneris, & Halsall, 2014; Hellison & Walsh, 2002; Wright & Burton, 2008). One population that could benefit from the TPSR Model that has not yet been explored in much depth is the refugee population in North America. Not only is there a gap in the literature describing and evaluating the use of the TPSR Model with this underserved population, but there is a need for more information about refugee youth participating in sport and physical recreation programmes (Ha & Lyras, 2013).

Refugees are described by the United Nations Refugee Agency (1951) as individuals who are outside of their country of nationality or usual residence and who are unable or unwilling to return to that country due to a fear of being persecuted. The refugee experience is often quite traumatic, as it is ‘characterized by persecution, displacement, loss, grief, and forced separation from family, home, and belongings’ (Olliff, 2008, p. 53). For young people, the refugee experience can be even more difficult, as they are at a higher risk for rape, abduction, and trafficking (Boyden, De Berry, Feeny, & Hart, 2002). Given these experiences for refugee youth, the process of resettling in a new society can prove to be quite harrowing, with the process of acculturation occurring as part of this resettlement experience (Berry, 1990). During the acculturation process, refugees’ behaviours, attitudes, and values change due to their contact with the new host society, with acculturation occurring at both the group level and the individual level (Graves, 1967).

Despite larger numbers of refugees relocating to North America (e.g. almost 70,000 resettling to the United States in 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015), there has not been much research surrounding the use of sport and physical recreation as tools for helping this

population resettle in a new society (Ha & Lyras, 2013). In fact, ‘despite its obvious influence on refugee youth, no prior studies have explored the relationship between the construct of acculturation and sport within the SFDP [sport for development and peace] movement’ (Ha & Lyras, 2013, p. 125). There has been a larger research focus on the experiences of immigrant youth, with scholars seeing sport and physical recreation as non-formal education opportunities for recent immigrant youth to engage in positive identity formation, social inclusion, multicultural dialogue, development of language skills, and resettlement in a new culture (Amara, Aquilina, & Henry, 2004; Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). However, most of these studies have focused on immigrants rather than refugees. Doherty and Taylor (2007) included both recent immigrants and refugees in their sample, but the data was not separated by these groupings. This is a concern, as the refugee experience of resettlement in a new country is markedly different from that of an immigrant (Omidvar, 2002). Immigrants are those who have chosen to enter a new country to settle, while refugees are forced to resettle in a new country because they are unable or unwilling to return to their home country (United Nations Refugee Agency, 1951). ‘The immigrant . . . is mostly looking for a better future for him/herself, the promise of a well-funded public education system, and accessible health care. The refugee, in comparison, is seeking protection and safety’ (Omidvar, 2002, p. 8). When examining the process of acculturation, which is part of resettlement in a new society, refugees experience greater educational, psychological, and financial issues when compared with immigrants (Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988; Lustig et al., 2004; Rong & Preissle, 1998). Since the refugee experience of resettlement in a new country is so different, the experience of this population needs to be studied separately in order to better understand and serve refugee youth. In one of the few studies exploring the experiences of refugee youth, Spaaij (2015) examined the role of community sport as a site where young refugees negotiate belonging, with different forms and levels of belonging experienced by Somali Australian youth. This study provided valuable information about the role of community sport in the lives of refugee youth when resettling in a new society, although more research is needed, including a focus on the role of organized sport.

Over the past two decades, some sport and physical recreation programmes for refugee youth have emerged, with SportWorks using sport to teach values and life skills (e.g. communication, respect, fair play, self-confidence) to refugee populations, former child soldiers, and youth orphaned by HIV/AIDS (Amara et al., 2004). However, most of these programmes serve refugee youth still living in refugee camps, such as Right To Play’s *Building Resilience Through Sport and Play* programme in refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, and Lebanon. While these programmes in refugee camps are needed, there is also a

need to understand the potential for sport and physical recreation to help young refugees through the acculturation process in a new culture and setting (Ha & Lyras, 2013). Sport is recognized by some refugee communities as ‘a vehicle for integration and a means of dealing with the stresses of the refugees’ everyday experience’ (Amara et al., 2004, p. 89), and Spaaij (2015) suggested that sport could be ‘perceived by new arrivals [as] a way to “make it” in a new country, especially in host societies where sport is a key site of cultural production and social prestige’ (p. 303). However, the question is how sport and physical recreation can best be used for these processes, as there is also the potential for sport to differentiate and exclude through alienation, marginalization, racism, and/or cultural resistance (Spaaij, 2015). Given the heightened interest of governments and advocacy groups in using sport as a tool to create pathways to success for refugees (e.g. Amara et al., 2004; Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA], 2010), there is a need to understand how sport and physical recreation can aid in the acculturation process. This may be best studied through the conceptual framework for acculturation developed by Ha and Lyras (2013) for research and practice in the sport for development and peace movement, with specific recommendations for refugee youth in a host society. In this conceptual framework, the authors cite challenges faced by refugee youth in a host country (e.g. life experiences in native country, psychological stresses in acculturation process), factors affecting acculturation (e.g. individual factors, society of origin, society of settlement), and recommendations for sport-based programmes serving refugee youth (e.g. using the four acculturation strategies, fostering an inclusive environment).

### **Purpose**

There is a paucity of research surrounding refugee youth experiences in sport and physical recreation in North America, and there is also very little published about the TPSR Model with this population. Thus, sport and physical recreation programmes, including those based on the TPSR Model, need to be studied. Additionally, it is important for the experiences and voices of the programme participants to be heard, especially when these participants are part of an underrepresented and underserved population such as the refugee population. Populations such as these often find their voices minimized or even silenced, so it is critical for researchers to prioritize their knowledge and voices, especially when they have different social and cultural backgrounds that may result in more nuanced, detailed, culturally competent understandings of these programmes and their experiences (Coakley, 2003; Levermore, 2011). Therefore, this study was an initial exploratory evaluation of a sport-based youth development programme for refugees. The purpose of this exploratory evaluation was to assess the participants’ perceptions and

experiences in a sport and physical recreation programme that was based on the TPSR Model, with the conceptual framework for acculturation developed by Ha and Lyras (2013) serving as the theoretical background for this study.

## Methods

### *Refugee Sport Club*

The Refugee Sport Club (RSC) was a sport-based youth development programme that was grounded in the structure, values, and themes of the TPSR Model. The RSC was held at a non-profit organization that served refugees. There were two programmes each semester, with the clubs divided by age: participants between the ages of 8 and 12 and participants between the ages of 13 and 18. These clubs met separately for one hour each week, with the traditional format of the TPSR Model guiding the programme structure: Relational Time, Awareness Talk, Sports Activities, Group Meeting, Reflection Time, and a final Relational Time (Hellison, 2011). The RSC goals focused on the potential for physical, psychological, and socio-emotional development, beginning with the participants having fun, experiencing and learning different sports, feeling valued as members of a team, and developing strong relationships with adults. These programme goals were developed after an initial assessment of the challenges faced by refugee youth in a host country and the factors affecting acculturation for these participants, including the individual factors (see Table 1), the societies of origin (largely Tanzania), the society of settlement (the U.S.), cultural distance between the native and host countries, and socializing agents (Ha & Lyras, 2013). This enabled the programme leaders to design and implement the RSC in a way that embraced the individual differences of the participants as well as determine which acculturation strategies were being exhibited (as recommended in the conceptual

**Table 1.** Participant pool demographics.

Participant	Age	Gender	Native country	Time in U.S.	Current school grade
P1	12	Male	Tanzania	2 years	7 <sup>th</sup>
P2	11	Male	Tanzania	2 years	6 <sup>th</sup>
P3	15	Male	Tanzania	2 years	9 <sup>th</sup>
P4	15	Male	Tanzania	2.5 years	9 <sup>th</sup>
P5	10	Male	Tanzania	3 years	5 <sup>th</sup>
P6	12	Male	Eritrea	8 months	7 <sup>th</sup>
P7	18	Male	Tanzania	2 years	10 <sup>th</sup>
P8	13	Male	Tanzania	2 years	8 <sup>th</sup>
P9	17	Male	Tanzania	2 years	11 <sup>th</sup>
P10	13	Male	Tanzania	3 years	7 <sup>th</sup>
P11	10	Male	Tanzania	2.5 years	5 <sup>th</sup>
P12	16	Male	Tanzania	2 years	10 <sup>th</sup>
P13	15	Male	Tanzania	2.5 years	10 <sup>th</sup>
P14	11	Male	Burundi	10 years	5 <sup>th</sup>
P15	11	Male	Tanzania	2 years	5 <sup>th</sup>
P16	13	Male	Tanzania	2.5 years	7 <sup>th</sup>



framework for acculturation; 2013). The programme goals also included a focus on four of the five developmental levels of the TPSR Model: helping the participants become more respectful (Level I), learning about teamwork (Level II), learning how to be strong leaders (Level IV), and transferring these skills to their everyday lives (Level V). The RSC leadership team decided to focus on teamwork instead of effort (typically Level II of the TPSR Model), following a suggestion by Hellison and colleagues (2000) that participants in extended-day programmes like the RSC tend to be highly motivated to participate but have much to learn about teamwork. For a deeper understanding of the RSC design and implementation, readers are invited to review the manuscript published in the *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* (Whitley & Gould, 2010).

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited from two RSCs during a single semester. Criteria required for inclusion in the study were attendance in at least two-thirds of the RSC sessions, the ability to speak and understand conversational English, an interest in participating in the study, and the ability to obtain informed consent from a parent or guardian. The demographics for the final sample can be viewed in Table 1. While the RSC sometimes had female participants in the programme, there were no female participants during the semester under study.

### **Procedure**

Upon institutional review board approval, participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study were provided with consent forms translated into both English and Swahili. Once consent was obtained, interviews were scheduled. The interviews were held in a private room at the non-profit organization, which was chosen due to the familiarity and ease of access for the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted by the first author, who had extensive training and experience in qualitative research, including previous data collection experiences with individuals from different countries and cultures (e.g. Whitley, Bean, & Gould, 2011; Whitley, Hayden, & Gould, 2013). This person also designed the RSC and oversaw its implementation from its inception, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the TPSR Model and the RSC. While the interviewer's role as a leader in the RSC created the potential for social desirability in the interviews, there was the more pressing concern that the young refugees would be hesitant to answer questions from unfamiliar adults, especially those from a different culture (Miller, 2004). Youth may also be more honest with those they know and trust (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009), with youth participants' familiarity with interviewers eliminating the 'need to build rapport with them prior to data



collection, reduc[ing] the likelihood of their feeling uncomfortable ... being interviewed, and enhanc[ing] the quality of the data obtained' (Cutforth & Puckett, 1999, p. 156). Additionally, given the participants' familiarity with the RSC format, which asked for honest feedback from the participants on a weekly basis (e.g. What did you dislike about the programme today and why?; What do you want changed for next week's programme session?), the participants were used to providing open criticism and sharing their honest opinions with the first author. Therefore, the decision was made for the first author to conduct all of the interviews.

### ***Interview guide***

A semi-structured interview guide was used in this study. The interview guide was constructed with an in-depth review of previous literature on the TPSR Model (e.g. Hellison, 2011; Hellison & Walsh, 2002), along with the field of positive youth development and life skills development (Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). The major components of the interview guide included (a) participant background and demographic information, including the exploration of challenges faced by the participants in the U.S. and the factors affecting their acculturation (e.g. Where did you live before coming to [this area]?; Was there anything hard about coming to [this area]?; Is there anything that is still hard for you?); (b) RSC programme information (e.g. What do you like the best about the RSC? How do you feel when you come into the gym for the RSC?); (c) RSC adult information (e.g. How would you describe the adults in the RSC? How do the adults in the RSC treat you?); and (d) character and life skills development in the RSC (e.g. What are some of the things you've learned in the RSC? Can you use anything you learned at the RSC at school or at home?).

### ***Data analysis***

Audio-recordings of the 16 interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The three investigators of the study were the same RSC leadership team who implemented the RSC during the semester under study. Using the hierarchical content analysis procedures recommended by Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993), the data were analysed in two phases: data organization and data interpretation. The first stage was data organization, whereby two investigators independently coded the participants' responses into meaning units, which are pieces of text that hold meaning. These meaning units were then organized into content categories based on the main questions in the interview guide. The second phase of analysis consisted of data interpretation, where the investigators searched for commonality across the interviews, ultimately grouping common features into themes. At each stage of the

analysis, consensual validation procedures were used to minimize the influence of potential investigator bias (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Specifically, two investigators worked independently during each stage of the analysis, with consensus between the two investigators being reached in each stage (Kvale, 1996). Once this was attained, a third investigator was brought in for triangular consensus, conducting a reliability check on the data organization and data interpretation.

## Results and specific discussion

The purpose of this exploratory evaluation was to assess the participants' perceptions and experiences in a sport and physical recreation programme that was based on the TPSR Model. In the design and implementation of the RSC, there were eight goals specified, with some of these goals directly related to the refugee experience: (a) having fun, (b) experiencing and learning different sports, (c) feeling valued as members of a team, and (d) developing strong relationships with adults. These goals were developed after the initial assessment of the challenges faced by refugee youth in a host country and the individual factors affecting the participants' acculturation process (e.g. age, gender, native country; see Table 1; Ha & Lyras, 2013). This assessment helped the programme leaders design and implement the RSC in a way that embraced the individual differences of the participants (as recommended in the conceptual framework for acculturation; Ha & Lyras, 2013). Given that the programme was guided by the TPSR Model, there were also goals related to this model: (a) learning about respect (Level I), (b) learning about teamwork (Level II), (c) learning how to be strong leaders (Level IV), and (d) transferring these skills to their everyday lives (Level V). All of these goals are explored in the following section, with a focus on the participants' perceptions and experiences as they relate to these goals.

### *Having fun*

Upon relocation to their host country, refugee youth often undergo a difficult transition as they adjust to an unfamiliar culture, a new education system, and a new language (Olliff, 2008). There is also the possibility that these young people are mourning the loss of their homeland and separation from family and friends, leading to feelings of confusion, helplessness, and vulnerability (Coventry, Guerra, Mackenzie, & Pinkney, 2002; Igoa, 1995; Lubben, 1996; Yau, 1996). Ha and Lyras (2013) also highlight the potential that young refugees are still affected by the traumatic life experiences they may have had in their native countries, along with a history of minimal financial resources, food, medical assistance, and educational opportunities. When combined with psychological stresses that occur throughout the acculturation

process, the RSC may have been one of the few settings where the refugee youth could relax and enjoy themselves. Therefore, the RSC focused on helping the participants *have fun* each and every week. In the present study, 14 of the 16 participants discussed how much they enjoyed the RSC, with six of the participants sharing that ‘having fun’ was one of the main reasons they joined the RSC. According to Participant 1 (P1), he came to the RSC every week so he could ‘have fun and play.’ As for P11, when he walked into the gym at the start of the RSC each week, he ‘feel[s] happy ... and sometimes, I just feel that it’s going to be fun.’ P14 echoed these sentiments, describing how he felt ‘great, happy, because I come here to have fun.’ These findings support previous research demonstrating the potential for sport and recreation to lead to fun experiences for immigrant youth (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). With these findings, it can be concluded that the RSC achieved one of the fundamental goals of the programme, as the participants felt they had fun, matching findings from other programmes guided by the TPSR Model (Kallusky, 2000; Schilling, 2001). Given that the acculturation experience often results in stress due to adult issues (e.g. housing, employment) and the ‘loss of familiar ways of doing things’ (Ha & Lyras, 2013, p. 129), participants could still cherish the moments of simplicity in the RSC where the focus was on enjoyable activities designed specifically for them.

### ***Experiencing and learning sports***

While many of the participants were familiar with soccer, there are many sports (e.g. basketball, volleyball) that are common activities in North America but unknown to the refugees. Previous researchers have demonstrated how unfamiliarity with mainstream sports can lead to feelings of social exclusion for youth, with calls for sport and physical recreation activities that can enable these young people to learn mainstream sports and physical recreation in a positive and supportive environment (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). The RSC provided this opportunity to experience and learn new sports, which could aid in their resettlement in a new culture, minimize their feelings of social exclusion, and help them feel more comfortable in future physical education classes, take part in after school pick-up games, or even join athletic teams. Additionally, by learning a new sport and playing at the RSC each week, the participants may experience increasing feelings of competence, which researchers have suggested can be instrumental for those who have experienced past traumatic events (Ayalon, 1983; Yule & Williams, 1990). In the conceptual framework for acculturation (Ha & Lyras, 2013), the four acculturation strategies exhibited by individual refugees are highlighted (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization; Berry, 1990, 1997), with a recommendation for programmes to offer different sport and physical recreation activities to match these acculturation strategies. For example, Ha and

Lyras suggest that refugee youth with an integration strategy may benefit from a sport that has connections to both their native and host countries, while those with an assimilation strategy may prefer a sport that reflects their host society and those with a separation strategy may favour a sport they played in their native societies. Given the different ages of the participants, the wide range of years living in the U.S. (8 months to 10 years), and other factors impacting their acculturation strategies, the programme leaders understood that the participants were likely exhibiting a variety of acculturation strategies. Therefore, the RSC was designed to offer a range of sports in terms of their familiarity, experience, and preference.

When the participants were asked about their experiences in the RSC, three participants explained how learning new sports was one of the main reasons they joined the RSC, while eight participants shared how they learned how to play new sports and six participants discussed the specific sport skills they learned through the RSC. This topic was especially important to P11, who described the following experience at school: ‘When I go to school and see other children playing sports, [I want to learn these sports] so I can play with them. When I came here [to the U.S.], I couldn’t play basketball.’ During the programme, he ‘learned lots of sports,’ which made him feel much happier. P7 shared a similar story, explaining how ‘in the Tanzania, nobody was not play basketball. I was not play basketball. I would rarely see someone play basketball.’ He then shared how he had learned this sport at the RSC, suggesting that the RSC was effective in helping its participants experience and learn new sports. This may also be seen as a way of becoming culturally competent in the language of sports or even simply becoming oriented to the mainstream culture, which is one factor that has been identified as critical for successful resettlement in a new culture (Seat, 2000). These RSC findings match previous results demonstrating the power of sport and recreation leading to recent immigrants’ positive feelings of orientation to the mainstream culture (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). These findings provide further support for using the TPSR Model with this population, matching the existing TPSR literature highlighting the need for different sport and physical recreation activities to maintain interest and engagement, provide new experiences, teach new skills, and enhance commitment to the programme (Bean et al., 2014; Kallusky, 2000; Schilling, 2001).

### ***Being members of a team***

Upon relocation to their new host countries, refugee youth often struggle with feelings of isolation, marginality, and exclusion from both their old homeland and their new host country (Coventry et al., 2002; Igoa, 1995; Luben, 1996; Yau, 1996). These feelings often combine with separation from family and friends, leading to young refugees feeling as if they do not have a place.

Therefore, one of the central goals of the RSC was for the participants to feel like valued members of the team, which may be one of the few times each week when they feel as if they ‘belong.’ This was achieved by fostering an inclusive, collaborative environment among the participants, as recommended by the conceptual framework for acculturation (Ha & Lyras, 2013). When the RSC participants were asked to describe their experience in the programme, all 16 participants discussed how they felt a sense of belonging in the RSC. In particular, 15 participants shared how they liked being part of the team, and there were also discussions centred on how they liked making new friends in the RSC and enjoyed playing with their teammates. According to P8, ‘it’s fun to have a team.’ P3 and P9 even discussed how important it was for the team members to be with people of similar backgrounds, with P9 explaining how he wants to ‘play with the other people, like me’ and P3 identifying how the RSC participants ‘were from the same country.’ These two participants felt that the RSC experience was more comfortable and enjoyable because the team members were fellow refugees, allowing them to feel like they were part of the RSC team. These team members were also serving as socializing agents, which is one factor affecting acculturation within Ha and Lyras’ (2013) conceptual framework. While previous researchers have voiced concern over the potential for young newcomers to feel excluded in sport and physical recreation because of their language difficulties (Doherty & Taylor, 2007), these findings suggest that the positive and supportive RSC environment minimized potential feelings of exclusion due to language difficulties. While playing ‘with the other people, like me’ and playing with those ‘from the same country’ may seem to counteract the wider programme aims of integration within the host society, there are times when acculturative stresses can be heightened due to feelings of difference and/or discrimination by peers from the host country and peers from different native countries (Ha & Lyras, 2013). Therefore, perhaps there are benefits to programmes which offer refugee youth the opportunity to interact and build relationships with peers from their own host countries as well as those with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, similar to the approach taken in the RSC. The feelings of belonging, friendship, and team membership achieved through the RSC mirror previous research findings about participation in sport and physical recreation leading to feelings of social inclusion for immigrant youth (Amara et al., 2004; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Tirone, Livingston, Miller, & Smith, 2010). Similar to Spaaij’s (2012) findings that Somali Australians viewed ‘sport, and football in particular, as a forum for social connectedness and community engagement’ (p. 1526) within a team setting, the RSC participants felt connected with one another, creating opportunities for “meaningful, purposeful, and pleasurable socialization experiences.” (p. 1535) These findings match the TPSR literature, where programmes help youth feel a sense of belonging, connect with peers, build strong friendships, and learn how to be

on a team and treat teammates (Kallusky, 2000; Lee & Martinek, 2012; Schilling, 2001). Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Doney (2015) indicate that social capital development, including bonding, bridging, and linking, are important for refugee resettlement efforts. Walseth (2008) also found that sport provides an opportunity for immigrants to develop bonding and bridging social capital. The RSC findings indicate that this also occurs for refugee youth through their relationships with adult programme leaders, refugee youth from the same native country, and refugee youth from different native countries.

### ***Developing relationships with adults***

Another goal of the RSC was for the refugee youth to develop close, meaningful relationships with the adult leaders, as Olliff (2008) has shown the positive impact of these relationships on the emotional, psychological, and social development of young refugees. One area in particular that can be addressed through these youth–adult relationships is repairing the refugees’ ability to trust, as this is often damaged through the victimization and persecution that occurs during the refugee experience (Coventry et al., 2002; Daniel & Knudsen, 1995). Through the RSC, the young refugees came into regular contact with the adult leaders in an inclusive, collaborative environment (Ha & Lyras, 2013), presenting a prime opportunity for the adults to build trusting relationships with the young participants. When the participants were asked about the adults in the present study, they described the adults as friends, coaches, and teachers. All in all, they felt as if the adults treated them very well, with five participants focusing on the adults’ kindness. In particular, P15 explained how the adults ‘be nice to you’ and P11 shared how the adults were ‘nice and helpful.’ There was also a focus on how the adults were respectful and made the participants feel good. According to P4, the adults ‘make me feel nice’ and P9 discussed how the adults ‘make me feel good.’ Through these quotations, it is clear that the participants were able to describe their interactions with the adults and how the adults made them feel, but the participants were unable to critically evaluate the relationships they had with the adults. This gap in the findings could be due to the age of the participants, the participants’ familiarity with the English language, or their discomfort with critiquing the adults when the interviewer was a programme leader herself (although the rationale for this data collection procedure is explained earlier in the ‘Methods’ section). However, regardless of the cause for these descriptive results, this RSC goal can only be partially explored in this study. The data make it clear that the participants enjoyed their time with the adult leaders and felt as if their relationships with the leaders were positive, but the extent of these relationships is unclear. More comprehensive results from other programmes using the

TPSR Model indicate the importance of youth building strong relationships with caring adults and engaging in frequent interactions with caring adults (Kallusky, 2000; Lee & Martinek, 2012; Schilling, 2001). This corresponds with research highlighting the need for structured programmes like the RSC where youth have the opportunity to interact with caring non-familial adults during after-school hours (Armour, Sandford, & Duncombe, 2013; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003).

### ***Learning about respect***

The RSC also focused on four of the developmental levels of the TPSR Model: respect, teamwork, leadership, and transfer. Beginning with the first developmental level of respect, the RSC was designed and implemented in a way that respected the individual differences of refugee youth, as recommended in the conceptual framework for acculturation (Ha & Lyras, 2013), but it was also designed to teach the young participants about self-respect and respecting the rights and feelings of others. When the concept of respect was brought up in the interviews, some of the participants shared how they liked the discussions about respect in the RSC. According to P9, his 'favourite part is to learn how to respect other people,' and P3 shared how he 'like that talk about respect.' When the participants were asked to define respect in their own words, seven participants described respect as being a good teammate and being nice to one another. For example, P11 explained how he 'learned that you should respect your teammate.' In addition, three participants defined respect as following directions, while two others talked about how they must listen to those around them. Along with this focus on what should be done, the participants also discussed what did not constitute respectful behaviour, with five participants defining respect as not behaving poorly. P3 shared how the adults 'teach us how to respect somebody and no fightin'.' P14 described his understanding of respect in a variety of ways: 'follow directions and stop hit each other and don't make a fun of everyone and ... don't push someone on the wall and don't make someone fall down and don't hit someone and don't fight with someone.' These findings indicate that the RSC was effectively teaching the concept of respect to the participants, as nine participants said that they were learning about respect in the RSC when asked 'what they learned from the RSC' and even more participants were able to share their understanding of respect and what respectful behaviour meant to them. This matches Kallusky's (2000) findings with his in-school TPSR programme, where the high school students learned how to respect themselves, respect their teammates, and maintain a respectful environment. Returning to a focus on the construct of acculturation, Berry (1990, 1997) outlines four possible acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization), with integration and assimilation including knowledge of and, for assimilation, acceptance of



the host culture's values and identity. Respect can be seen as a core value within the U.S., with 39% of the 100 largest U.S. corporations using the word 'respect' in their value statements (Anderson & Jamison, 2015). Therefore, learning about the concept of respect may have aided in the acculturation process for RSC participants, as they were able to learn and practice this value within a safe and welcoming environment before transferring their understanding and use of respect to other domains.

### ***Learning about teamwork***

Teamwork was the second developmental level of the TSPR Model that was taught during the RSC, although teamwork was introduced several weeks after the concept of respect was covered. Teaching the concepts of teamwork within the programme assisted in the creation of the inclusive, collaborative environment that Ha and Lyras (2013) recommended for sport-based programmes for refugee youth. When the participants were asked to define teamwork in the interviews, 11 participants explained how teamwork was playing with everyone on their team, with eight of these participants defining teamwork as passing the ball to their teammates. According to P11, 'you should pass to everybody, even when the person that doesn't even know how to play. You should pass to him.' Additionally, three participants defined teamwork as being supportive and helpful to others on their team, with P10 explaining how you need to 'help each other.' P14 even described the following situation: 'when someone fell down, if you saw him, you got to take his hand and pull him up. So he can play.' Finally, there was also a focus on how teamwork could be defined as communicating with others, with three participants focusing on this aspect of teamwork. P11 combined some of these definitions of teamwork with this explanation: 'How to say a proper things to each other. Help someone out when they did, he does something wrong. Don't just argue, just help him out.' While these discussions about the definition of teamwork do not confirm that the participants were actually following through with this behaviour, it does confirm that the participants understood the concept of teamwork. Previous evaluations of TPSR-based programmes provide evidence that participants improved in their teamwork, cooperation, and communication, including their ability to encourage their teammates and support one another (Cutforth, 1997; Kallusky, 2000; Wright, 2001). Additionally, similar to respect, teamwork can be seen as a core value within the U.S., with 34% of U.S. corporations using either 'team' or 'teamwork' in their value statements (Anderson & Jamison, 2015). Therefore, a focused exploration of this espoused value within U.S. society may have aided in the acculturation process as the participants were able to understand and practice teamwork within the RSC before transferring it to other domains.

### ***Learning about leadership***

Although there was less of a focus on leadership, as this was the final concept taught during the RSC (following a focus on respect and then teamwork), leadership was still one of the goals of the RSC, with the programme designed to teach the concept of leadership and to provide leadership opportunities for the young refugees. In the interviews, there were a range of definitions that the participants provided for leadership, with nine participants focusing on how leadership is based on communication. This included listening to others as well as telling others what to do, with P16 explaining how leaders ‘tell your teammates what to do.’ Three participants also defined leadership as being nice and helping others, while four participants explained how leadership was based on respect, both being respectful to oneself and getting respect from others. According to P4, leadership meant ‘respect and be nice and no cussing and help people get in their positions. And listen to the other teammates.’ Similarly, P16 described leadership in the following way: ‘you be nice to people and then pass the ball and then respect your team. Listen to your team.’ These results suggest that the RSC was effective in teaching the concept of leadership, although the participants’ ability to be strong leaders cannot be determined through this exploratory investigation. However, past research on programmes guided by the TPSR Model have demonstrated the efficacy of this framework in promoting leadership development (Bean et al., 2014; Martinek, Schilling, & Hellison, 2006; Wright & Burton, 2008). This has been achieved through intentional programming similar to the RSC where youth have opportunities to lead meaningful tasks, activities, and games, with guided preparation and reflection before and after these leadership opportunities in order to maximize learning. Similar to the concepts of respect and teamwork discussed above, leadership could also be seen as a core value in the U.S., with 10% of corporations using the term ‘lead’ or ‘leadership’ in their value statements (Anderson & Jamison, 2015). Therefore, learning about this concept may have aided in the RSC participants’ acculturation process, especially if they were moving towards an integration or assimilation acculturation strategy (Berry, 1990, 1997).

### ***Transfer***

The final developmental level of the TPSR Model is transferring the skills the participants are learning in the programme (e.g. respect, teamwork, leadership) to their everyday lives. The idea of transferring these skills outside of the gym was the focus of the RSC each and every week, as this could be a meaningful way that this sport-based programme could assist in the acculturation process for the refugee youth (as discussed earlier related to values within U.S. society). Throughout the programme, the participants were

consistently asked in the RSC sessions to consider ways they could use the skills in school, at home, or even with their friends. Intentionality is critical when helping youth learn how to transfer the life skills learned within a sport and physical recreation setting to other parts of their lives, as many participants do not realize the potential for these skills to apply in other domains (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Effective strategies identified in past research that were used in the RSC to promote the transfer of life skills included raising awareness of the potential for using life skills learned within the RSC to other domains, providing opportunities for practice within the sport setting, encouraging personal reflection on the use of life skills within and outside of the sport setting, and providing meaningful feedback about participants' use of life skills (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Jones, Lavalley, & Tod, 2011; Lee & Martinek, 2012; Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000; Wright & Burton, 2008). Given that respect was the developmental level that was covered the most in the RSC, it is not surprising that nine participants shared how they transferred their knowledge of respect outside the gym. P4 explained how the RSC 'helped me respect others. It's help me respect my mom, my brothers.' Similarly, P7 described the following experience: 'I learned when I was in the gym, when I was learnin' to respect. When I go outside and I want to respect my friend. Then, when I go home, I respect always my family.' P11 also shared a situation that occurred on the school bus: 'A person pushed me. I didn't tell. I didn't fight with him. I just learned to stop.' These reports of transferring respect to other domains matches other research findings from TPSR-based programmes, with self-respect and self-control transferring to the classroom (Cutforth, 1997; Lee & Martinek, 2012) and respecting the rights and feelings of others transferring to the classroom and to social situations (Walsh, Ozaeta, & Wright, 2010; Wright & Burton, 2008). As for the participants transferring teamwork to other domains, five participants said they did this. According to P4, learning teamwork in the RSC 'help me like work together, with other people ... like when I'm playing soccer for [my high school].' Additionally, P13 described how he used teamwork to help other refugees in school who did not understand the English language: 'We like to help ourselves ... like when someone doesn't speak English very well, and teacher says something, some words they don't know, I'm just gonna translate to him so he can understand. Like when he speaks my language, just gotta tell him in my language so he can understand what she mean.' Similar to these RSC findings, participants' willingness to work together was also demonstrated in the TPSR-based Coaching Club (Walsh et al., 2010). Only one participant said that he transferred leadership outside the gym, which may be due to the fact that leadership was only discussed in the RSC for the last few sessions, unlike the developmental levels of respect and teamwork. However, participants' leadership skills developed through other programmes guided by the TPSR Model have demonstrated effective transfer to non-sport domains (Walsh et al., 2010;

Wright & Burton, 2008). Given that Gould and Carson (2008) have argued that life skill development does not happen within sport and physical recreation settings unless the participants are able to successfully transfer these skills into other domains, these results from the RSC related to transfer are encouraging. This suggests that the positive youth development outcomes within the RSC may aid in the participants' resettlement and acculturation in the U.S.

### **Practical implications**

The findings from this study address a gap in the body of knowledge surrounding refugee youth experiences in sport and physical recreation within North America, along with the efficacy of the TPSR Model with this population. The refugee youth responded positively to the RSC and the TPSR Model, specifically identifying how this sport-based youth development programme was one avenue that helped smooth their transition into the U.S., enhanced their feelings of happiness and belonging, and allowed them to learn specific skills and concepts that transferred to their everyday lives. These findings also provided an opportunity for the voices of refugee youth to be heard, as Western researchers may overlook the experiences and realities of people from different social and cultural backgrounds, especially when they are part of an underrepresented and underserved population (Coakley, 2003). Overall, the voices of the refugee youth participants suggest that the TPSR Model was effective with this population and in this setting, with the participants responding positively to the TPSR structure, values, and themes. This is the first step towards demonstrating the value of the TPSR Model as a meaningful experience for refugee youth. This suggests a need for the proliferation of sport and recreation programmes (including those based on the TPSR Model) to aid in the resettlement and acculturation of young refugees in a new society, which will lead to an even better understanding of the use of sport and physical recreation and the TPSR Model as tools for helping this population. Therefore, practitioners are encouraged to incorporate these findings into their programming efforts with refugee youth.

Specifically, practitioners should design programmes that consider the individual differences of their participants, including those that influence the acculturation process. As highlighted by Ha and Lyras (2013) in their conceptual framework for acculturation, an assessment of the native country, host country, cultural distance between native and host countries, socializing agents, and individual factors (e.g. age, education, length of residence) provide knowledge that should guide the programme development. This includes the programme goals, translation of outreach materials, interaction with programme leaders, and sport selection, which is especially important as it relates to the acculturation strategies exhibited by the refugee youth. If the programme leaders are aware of the participants' acculturation strategies,

different sport and physical recreation activities can be designed and implemented to match their strategies. For example, refugee youth with an assimilation strategy may want to play sports from their host country, while those with a separation strategy may prefer playing a sport from their native country. There can also be a focus on integrating sports from refugee youths' native and host countries with non-traditional sport and physical recreation activities (Ha & Lyras, 2013; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), which may be welcomed by those exhibiting an integration strategy while also creating an environment where all programme participants learn together. Additionally, this addresses Ha and Lyras' (2013) call for variety in sporting activities with refugee youth. An example of this approach in the RSC was redesigning the sport of soccer by creating a life-size version of foosball, which combined a sport from the participants' native countries with a non-traditional physical recreation activity (foosball) popular in their host country. Another programming strategy to consider is slowly introducing host country sports, allowing time for the refugee youth to build comfort with the programme and programme leaders before introducing new sport and physical recreation activities. Programme providers could also consider empowering refugee youth to design their own sport and physical recreation activities that are not connected to a specific country or culture, but that they create together, thereby enhancing feelings of belonging through the creation of programme-specific sport and physical recreation activities.

The cultivation of a mastery-oriented climate enables refugee youth to focus on their own skill development, creating the opportunity for enhanced feelings of competence and confidence (Halliburton & Weiss, 2002; Theeboom, De Knop, & Weiss, 1995). Given that researchers believe this can serve an important role for those who have experienced past traumatic events (Ayalon, 1983; Yule & Williams, 1990), programmes serving refugee youth should be structured to prioritize personal improvement in sport and physical recreation activities rather than social comparison. In the RSC, this included opportunities for the refugee youth to practice their skills in a welcoming environment where the programme leaders focused on providing individual feedback to each participant and helping participants set personal goals for improvement. Practitioners should also consider addressing the enrichment of programmes through cultural activities (Ha & Lyras, 2013; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), which was beneficial for both participants and programme leaders in the RSC. By integrating role playing into sport timeouts to help participants process the sport and life skill information being taught, a unique experience was created for the participants and the programme leaders were able to determine the participants' current understanding of these concepts. Another strategy to consider from the conceptual framework for acculturation is welcoming bilingual and bicultural instructors

to minimize acculturative stresses, reduce language barriers, and enhance feelings of trust (Ha & Lyras, 2013).

Additionally, practitioners should consider the importance of empowerment and the promotion of empathy through intentional design (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), created when tasks are designed to challenge participants at various skill levels. For instance, participants who excel within a particular sport can serve as leaders for preparation or implementation of programming, allowing for advancement to Level IV (leadership) of the TPSR Model (Hellison, 2011). Finally, practitioners should focus on the importance of the transfer of skills, Level V in the TPSR Model and an aspect of sport-for-development theory (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), along with the need to be intentional when helping participants transfer these skills into other domains (Whitley, Hayden, & Gould, 2015). Intentionally drawing the connection between skills learned and experiences outside the programme can be achieved through pre-, during, and post-programme individual and group discussions, role-playing, drawings, and modelling from programme leaders and programme participants. There should also be opportunities to practice these skills in other domains, with the programme leaders helping the participants reflect on their use of these skills as well as providing helpful feedback and support (Brunelle et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2011; Whitley et al., 2015).

By following the fundamental aspects of personal and social development outlined in the TPSR Model and integrating it with concepts connected to acculturation and sport for development, practitioners can develop and design programmes that reach the needs of this growing underserved population of refugee youth. This responds to Seat's (2000) call for 'more sensitive solutions and interventions that will promote and ensure growth, happiness, satisfaction, resiliency, etc. in newcomer immigrant and refugee youth' (p. 5). Seat recognized the difficulty in working with refugee youth and the need for sensitive, culturally competent approaches like sport and physical recreation and the TPSR Model, with the conceptual framework for acculturation serving as the theoretical background (Ha & Lyras, 2013).

### **Limitations and future directions**

There were several limitations in this study, beginning with the participants' ability to speak and understand English. While all of the participants seemed to understand the interview questions and were able to communicate with the interviewer, it is possible that some participants' newfound ability to express themselves in the English language may have limited the topics that they chose to address in the interviews. While this limitation comes with studying the refugee population, it still must be acknowledged. Given that the interviewer was a programme leader, there was also the potential for social desirability to bias the results, although there was a strong rationale for taking this approach (as explained in the 'Methods' section). It should also be noted that this study

focused solely on the participants, without the participation of other individuals or direct observation of the RSC programming. In the future, it would be advantageous to speak with the adult leaders as well as individuals outside of the programme (e.g. parents, teachers) who could comment on the actual transference, along with observations of the actual programming.

As for future research directions, there is still much that needs to be examined given the exploratory nature of this investigation. In particular, longitudinal studies of sport-based youth development programmes with refugees are needed (both males and females), along with direct observation of programming and the use of multiple data sources (e.g. parents, coaches, teachers). It would also be beneficial for future programme evaluators to include an assessment of the participants' knowledge of the skills to be evaluated prior to the start of programming.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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