

Dadirri: Reflections on a Research Methodology
Used to Build Trust between a Non-Indigenous Researcher and
Indigenous Participants

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Abstract

This article reflects on a methodology employed in a PhD research project that set out to investigate sport career transition (SCT) experiences of elite Indigenous Australian sportsmen. The research was necessary as little is known about the transition of this cohort to a life after sport, or their experiences of retirement. A key problem within the SCT paradigm is a presumption that an end to elite sport requires a process of adjustment that is common to all sportspeople—a rather narrow perspective that fails to acknowledge the situational complexity and socio-cultural diversity of elite athletes. With such a range of personal circumstances, it is reasonable to suppose that athletes from different cultural groups will have different individual SCT needs. The researcher is non-Indigenous and mature aged: she encountered a number of challenges in her efforts to understand Indigenous culture and its important sensitivities, and to build trust with the Indigenous male participants she interviewed. An Indigenous methodology known as Dadirri, which emphasises deep and respectful listening, guided the development of the research design. Consistent with previous studies conducted by non-Indigenous researchers, an open-ended and conversational approach to interviewing Indigenous respondents was developed. The objective was for the voices of the athletes to be heard, allowing the collection of rich data based on the participants' perspectives about SCT. An overview of the findings is presented, illustrating that Indigenous athletes' experience SCT in complex and distinctive ways. The article provides a model for non-Indigenous researchers to conduct qualitative research with Indigenous people.

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Introduction

The thesis ‘Sport Career Transition: Stories of Elite Indigenous¹ Australian Sportsmen’ was started in 2008 by the first author (the researcher) at the University of Technology, Sydney (Stronach 2012). The research was necessary because international research into sport career transition (SCT) has consistently found that life after sport is fraught with uncertainty for elite athletes. This situation has never been more clearly demonstrated, than with the likes of swimming greats Ian Thorpe and Grant Hackett currently undergoing treatment for severe depression and drug addiction respectively (Balym 2014). Yet the predicament of elite athletes experiencing problems as they move out of the sporting limelight has been recognised and researched for some 40 years.

The thesis focused on a key problem within the SCT paradigm: it has been presumed that an end to elite sport requires a process of adjustment that is common to all players—a rather narrow perspective that fails to acknowledge the situational complexity and socio-cultural diversity of elite athletes. With such a range of personal circumstances, it is reasonable to suppose that athletes from different cultural groups would have different individual SCT needs (Stambulova & Alfermann 2009). In developing that argument, the thesis focused on an athlete group that does not fit ‘mainstream’ participation in elite sport, or the ‘conventional’ SCT policy milieu. The context was Australian sport, and the focus was with a small but significant number of Indigenous athletes who, despite substantial socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural obstacles, had all contributed significantly to elite-level Australian sport. While many Indigenous Australians have assumed high profile careers in sport, little is known about their transition to a life after sport, or their experiences of retirement. To address this research gap, the thesis explored the SCT experiences of 30 current and former male Indigenous athletes from three sports in which they have a proportional high representation: Australian Rules football (i.e., AFL), rugby league (i.e., NRL), as well as professional and amateur boxing.

The article proceeds with a background to the methodological challenges and cultural issues that required careful consideration during the research project. It introduces the methodology of *Dadirri* and discusses how it was deployed to assist the author to understand and manage a

¹ The term ‘Indigenous’ is used in this paper to refer generally to the two Indigenous populations of Australia—Australian Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders

range of cultural sensitivities. The approach to research is explained, along with methods that were consistent with previous studies conducted by non-Indigenous researchers with Indigenous participants. A précis of findings is presented, and then the paper concludes with a discussion of the value of *Dadirri* to this qualitative study.

Background

According to Stambulova and Alfermann (2009), athletes' perceptions of their sport transitions, along with researchers' perceptions and interpretations of data, are infused by their cultures. Therefore, they argued, in order to understand both mono-cultural and cross-cultural studies and practice, researchers interested in studying athlete career transitions should consider cultures in more depth and treat them as discrete contexts with particular sets of characteristics (Stambulova & Alfermann 2009). This is because, they claimed, people internalise meanings from their cultural contexts, and it is impossible to separate their development and behaviour from these frameworks. Furthermore, these authors argue, researchers need to appreciate that cultural context is fairly rigid and cannot be readily changed by an individual (Stambulova & Alfermann 2009). Thus, if this thesis was to further deepen contemporary understanding of SCT for a discrete cultural group, it would be important to consider athletes in their own group contexts, using approaches that could deal with culturally specific differences. Therefore, an underlying assumption of the thesis was that an understanding of the SCT experiences of CALD groups would require a focus on underlying distinctive social, demographic, and ethno-cultural factors. Explicitly, the thesis explored the following question: *What are the retirement experiences of elite Indigenous Australian athletes?* To address the question two initial objectives were framed:

- to explore the experiences of elite Indigenous Australian athletes undergoing SCT or preparing to do so, and
- to identify any ethno-culturally distinctive SCT characteristics of Indigenous Australian athletes.

While the major focus of the study was to explore the nature of SCT for elite Indigenous Australian athletes, the dialogue with respondents was expected to help inform recommendations about culturally relevant SCT programs and support mechanisms. Therefore, the final objective of the research was:

- to evaluate SCT protocols offered by Australian Rules football, rugby league and boxing, to ascertain how (if at all) they cater to the needs of Indigenous Australian athletes, and (where appropriate) to suggest reforms to these protocols.

Cultural considerations

At the commencement of this study, it became apparent to the author—a non-Indigenous woman—that the ethics of working with Indigenous peoples would encompass far more than merely obtaining approval from the relevant university authorities. Three significant issues needed to be considered when developing the research design. These were:

- cultural sensitivities involved with conducting research with Indigenous peoples;
- potential power imbalances between researcher and participants, and
- the need to develop trust between the researcher and participants.

i) Cultural Sensitivities

The first challenge related to cultural sensitivities. The literature documents evidence of the capacity of researchers to oppress and marginalise, just as it maintains the potential to emancipate and empower. Research with Indigenous peoples in Australia, as elsewhere, has an inescapable political dimension, with investigators operating in the context of a history of previous scholarship that has variously been “inappropriate, irrelevant, and irreverent” (Tuhiwai-Smith 2003, p. 437). The effect of European settlement on Australian Indigenous peoples has been described as an “almost unrelieved tragedy”, with Indigenous peoples remaining victims of “entrenched prejudices” (Hallinan 1991, p. 71; Tatz 2010). Researchers such as Morton-Robinson (2000), Tuhiwai-Smith (2003) and Rigney (1999) have all illustrated how the legacy of some research involving Indigenous peoples has been one of disempowerment. In the past, Indigenous peoples were often treated patronisingly or paternalistically, as subjects to be ‘observed’. Within this paradigm, research became a tool and a condition of colonisation, with investigators constructing a power-knowledge nexus that served to marginalise local knowledge by controlling and defining it (Holcombe 2006). The worst of this practice led non-Indigenous researchers to enter a community and take knowledge out of it, with little long-term reciprocal engagement and knowledge exchange, and little or no consideration of local capability development (Porsanger 2004). Further, colonising research led to the view that in relation to Indigenous peoples, their entire existence seemed to be a problem or a question for researchers, often formulated as “The ...

(*insert name of Indigenous group*) problem” or: “The ... (*insert name of Indigenous group*) question” (Tuhiwai-Smith 2003, p. 35). Indeed, Tuhiwai-Smith argued that “problematizing the Indigenous is a Western obsession” (2003, p. 35). Finally, from an Aboriginal perspective, Australian scholar, Fejo-King (2006), insisted that, as a result of these processes, Indigenous peoples of the world have become the most researched population groups since the colonisation of their lands:

In the past most researchers in Australia privileged Western knowledge, research methods and methodologies in undertaking research with Australian Indigenous peoples. The impact of this ideology has rippled out and touched all aspects of the life of Australian Indigenous peoples and continues to have profound implications for individuals, families, communities, and Nations (Fejo-King 2006, p. 2).

Fejo-King maintained that the term ‘research’ as heard, seen, and experienced by Indigenous peoples, had become not just a dirty word, but a major tool by which the disempowerment of Indigenous peoples continues today (examples of such research are discussed in Briskman 2003; Porsanger 2004; Turnbull 2003). Given this background and legacy, it became clear that there were major challenges and particular sensitivities associated with research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that would impact the study under discussion here.

ii) Power Relationships and Trust

The second issue in the development of the research design was coming to terms with a potential power imbalance. Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of habitus, capital and field helped to provide structural insights into social and racial inequities. In Bourdieusian terms, cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed, inherited, and valued by privileged social groups in society. Therefore, the researcher, a well-educated, highly literate, mature-aged, non-Indigenous woman from a middle-class background, would be rich in cultural capital and, as such, be part of the dominant (non-Indigenous) group within Australian society (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). White, middle-class society has assumed a standard of cultural dominance, with a tendency for other groups to be deemed deficient when compared to this ‘norm’ (Yosso 2005).

A major challenge, therefore, was for the researcher to earn the respect and trust of the Indigenous research participants. There were significant differences between the researcher

and participants, including age, gender, cultural capital, and the researcher's status as a non-Indigenous person. There was a significant risk that these differences could hamper attempts to build communication, understanding and trust between the researcher and participants.

Dealing with the Challenges

i) Dadirri

The decision to conduct research with “one of the most researched populations in the world” (Fejo-King, 2006, p. 4) was of immediate concern. As a result, the researcher undertook a review of Indigenous research, while at the same time seeking a culturally appropriate pathway into engaging authentically with the world of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It was found that researchers and writers (particularly those who come from non-Indigenous backgrounds) have at times drawn on Indigenous philosophies, images, metaphors and methodologies in an effort to better comprehend and clarify Indigenous cultures, values and beliefs. Examples of some of these are shown in Table 1 below.²

The word *Dadirri* belongs to the language of the Ngangikurungkurr people of the Daly River area of the Northern Territory and means ‘listening to one another’, but listening in contemplative/reciprocal relationships. *Dadirri* has been called “the Aboriginal gift” (Ungunmerr, 1993, cited in Atkinson 2000, p. 16). It is described as:

another special quality of my people that I believe is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language, this quality is called *Dadirri*. This is the gift that Australians are thirsting for [...] It is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness—something like what you call contemplation (Ungunmerr 1990, p. 34).

The use of *Dadirri* as a research methodology was articulated by Professor Judy Atkinson, herself an Aboriginal woman. Working with a group of Indigenous females of Central Queensland in the 1990s, Atkinson was able to define and delineate a philosophical stance and an overarching set of principles for research practice. As Atkinson (2000) explained:

² It is significant to note the similarities that exist between some such concepts that reflect the diversity found in Australian Indigenous communities. For example, *Deep listening* is a principle of inter-personal relations central to the cultures of Aboriginal nations across the Australian continent, and is found under a variety of names, such as *Dadirri*, *Garma*, *Winangargurri*, *Yimbanyiara* and *Ngara*.

[*Dadirri brings*] a knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community; ways of relating and acting within community; a non-intrusive observation, or quietly aware watching; a deep listening and hearing with more than the ears; a reflective non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard; and, having learnt from the listening, a purposeful plan to act, with actions informed by learning wisdom and the informed responsibility that comes with knowledge (Atkinson 2000, p. 16).

Table 1: Indigenous Philosophies

Theme	People/region	Meaning
Alcheringa	Central Australia	A religious philosophy, embracing mythic ancestral heroes, their pastimes and everything associated with them. In the English language the philosophy is known as 'The Dreaming'.
Totemic groups	Central Australia	Special or sacred places which mark the resting place or activity of the supreme beings. The concept connects Aboriginal people inextricably to the land and all of creation and into a set of obligations and cultural practices. All Aboriginal people are related to the species and to the landscape as kin, through the process of being born from a totemic site. In the English language the closest meaning is the word 'kindredness'.
Ganma	Arnhem Land	A powerful metaphor relating to the meeting and mixing of two streams, a stream of salt water from the sea and a stream of fresh water from the land. The metaphor has meanings at surface and deep levels, and inside and outside meanings.
Yerin	Gurrunggai	As Ganma.
Garma	Yolngu	Garma happens when people with different ideas and values come together and negotiate knowledge in a respectful learning environment.
Tjibari	Balgo	A women's healing song, seen in stories, dance and artworks, which points out the responsibility of the women in Aboriginal culture to raise and educate the children, in particular to teach The Dreaming, in the face of commercial culture taking over as 'knowledge' of identity.
Ngara	Eora	The word of the people of the Eora nation for 'listening'.
Kulini or Pulgkara kulin tjugku	Pitjantjatjara	Really deep listening, and wanting to listen.
Gan'na	Bundjalung	Hearing, listening, feeling, thinking, and understanding.
Winangargurri	Gamilaraay	Deep listening (similar to <i>Dadirri</i>).
Yimbanyiara	Central Queensland	Listening to elders (similar meanings and responsibilities to <i>Dadirri</i>).
Dadirri	Ngangikurungkurr	Deep listening and learning more than just 'listening by the ear', but 'listening from the heart'. Listening that happens in contemplative-reciprocal relationships.

In recent years, *Dadirri* has been consulted and deployed in research with Indigenous people, particularly where complex cultural and personal issues have needed investigation (for

examples, see Atkinson 2000; Burrows 2004; Gabb & McDermott 2007; Tanner, Agius & Darbyshire 2004). The researcher believed that *Dadirri* could also inform her research project, and serve as an authentic pathway to try to appreciate how and why Indigenous people function in their own cultures and environments.

Dadirri is not a research methodology in the Western scientific tradition, yet it proceeds inductively by gathering information through quiet observation and deep listening, building knowledge through sensitivity and awareness, and developing understanding by contemplation and reflection (Atkinson 2000). *Dadirri* may operate at many levels, including at the deepest of levels, where there is a search for profound understanding. At that level, *Dadirri* is “more than just listening by the ear, but listening from the heart” (Atkinson 2000, p. 19), suggesting a depth of critical thinking and intensity of feeling. *Dadirri*'s approach to research has the following associations with Western methods and methodologies:

- Consciousness-raising: where a raised consciousness between the researcher and the researched gives value to community processes.
- Participatory action: recognition of the valuable contribution people make in their activities of relating, defining, and narrating their life experiences.
- Reciprocity: ethical research from within an Indigenous worldview and critical pedagogy must be embedded with reciprocity—receiving something and giving something.
- Phenomenology: utilising a narrative approach enables the understanding between the inner world of an individual and the outer world (Atkinson 2000).

Embracing the concept of *Dadirri* was a critical step in this research, resulting in a raised awareness of factors that eventually proved vital—reciprocity and participatory action. Ultimately, *Dadirri* became an instrumental part of the author's learning experience as a researcher.

ii) Other Approaches to Research

Other strategies were drawn upon to address cultural sensitivities and help to develop trust with participants. It was planned that the initial connection with participants would be made via a key contact, such as another athlete, a respected coach, or an Indigenous program manager. The follow-up would be by telephone conversations, during which the terms of research would be discussed and negotiated in a friendly and transparent manner. Following

that, it was hoped that a snowball effect (Goodman 1961) would occur amongst potential participants (a snowball effect occurs where people encourage each other to be involved: if a few key people contact others, involvement gathers speed and size like a snowball rolling down a hill).

The final step in the process of ensuring cultural sensitivity was to link with Indigenous people who would be in a position to counsel the lead researcher and provide guidance. Three respected members of Tasmania's Aboriginal community agreed to participate in the research project and formed an Advisory Committee. The group met with the researcher regularly throughout the four-year study, providing advice and support, discussing the structure and methodology of the study, and eventually helping to identify emerging themes from the findings. In this way, the viewpoints of the Indigenous Advisory Committee were an integral part of the lead author's learning, research and interpretive process.

A Retrospect from the Researcher: The Author's Personal Experiences of Completing this Research

As a non-Indigenous researcher this study was sometimes hard to undertake and involved me developing and improving my qualitative research skills. It took time to gain confidence in my ability to attain understanding in this area. As a researcher I had carefully planned my project to obtain as much relevant data as possible and to ensure the ethical guidelines were appropriately met. But at times I felt a great deal of personal limitation when dealing with the cultural differences between myself and participants. To a certain extent, some previous work experiences assisted me. Firstly, while working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Indigenous health in North Queensland, I had developed a deep appreciation of the cultural diversities of these people. Secondly, I had worked for many years as a sports coach, and had developed communication skills and empathy to be able to work effectively and closely with athletes—often from younger age groups—who had diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Yet another challenge was that my supervisors were also non-Indigenous. Therefore, I had to look outside of my research team for answers to cultural questions. In this regard, the contribution of the Advisory Committee was invaluable. Finally, the issue of developing trust with participants was confronted, and I believe overcome, as I embraced the values and

philosophies of *Dadirri*. I strongly believe that committing to the essential practices of *Dadirri* helped to reduce potential barriers to effective interactions and communication.

Methodology

Dadirri advocates an interpretive qualitative approach to research that links with traditional phenomenology; this allows investigators to understand and describe the ways in which individuals reflect on and experience their *lifeworld* (Langdrige 2008, emphasis in original). In this study, qualitative methodology offered the researcher a greater insight into an individual's understanding, meaning and experiences, this providing for the building of a story around the studied topic of SCT (Berglund 2001; Ward & Holman 2001). This is important, because qualitative research provides a platform for 'discovering novel or unanticipated findings' (Bryman 1984, pp. 77-78), thereby allowing for 'information rich cases' to gain better understanding of the research area (Price 2007).

Phenomenology has been adopted by different disciplines as an effective way of exploring research questions that lead to different ways of knowledge being constructed. However, the aim of the current study was to do more with the data than just "describe things in their appearing" (Langdrige 2008, p. 1135), as this seemed to offer little potential for critique or possibility for re-conceptualising the phenomenon being studied (Habermas 1971). As already explained, the intention to appraise the *status quo* and suggest reforms was a key research objective. Thus a critical 'lens' for viewing and interpreting the thoughts and situations of the athletes was adopted. Such an approach is described by Langdrige (2008) as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). The methodology has clear synergies with *Dadirri's* principles of listening, learning and thinking about what people are saying in a given context, and then acting on that knowledge to bring about change.

The use of IPA in this study was ideal as it enabled detailed examination of the life-worlds of Indigenous athletes. An aim of the research was to explore very personal experiences from the point of view of Indigenous athletes, by focusing on the individual's personal perceptions or accounts of their athletic retirement. This was quite different, for example, from an attempt to produce a generalised overview about the impact of SCT for Indigenous athletes. Using IPA as a methodological approach, the research exercise became a dynamic process, with an active role for the researcher within that process. The researcher wished to get close to the

participants' personal world, to take an 'insider's perspective', but could hardly do this directly or completely (Tuhiwai-Smith 2003). The participants were trying to make sense of their world; the researcher was trying to make sense of the participants' attempts to make sense of this world. Using IPA, the words of the participants in this study were viewed with both critical empathy and critical inquiry (Langdrige, 2008).

i) Methods

The athlete participants were 30 Indigenous Australian athletes who had retired from their sport (AFL, NRL or boxing) within the past 20 years, or who were currently at elite levels. All of the participants were high performance competitors in their chosen sport. They volunteered to contribute to the research either through a sport organisation or by personal approaches using email or social media. After initial contact, a snowball sampling process ensued, with participants providing contact details of other Indigenous athletes who might be interested in taking part. The participant group consisted of:

- Australian Rules Football (10)
- Boxing (14: 7 amateur, 7 professional)
- National Rugby League (6).

Consistent with previous studies conducted by non-Indigenous researchers (see for examples Atkinson 2000; dé Ishtar 2005; Kingsley et al. 2010) an open-ended and conversational approach to interviewing Indigenous respondents was developed. The objective was for the voices of the athletes to be heard, allowing the collection of rich data based on the participants' perspectives about athletic retirement (Veal 2006). The interview guides were fluid, but drew specifically from the issues raised in the literature review—both in terms of SCT research and in respect of Indigenous athletes. This allowed key themes to emerge, such as social support resources, Indigenous sport programs, athlete career and education programs, and recommendations for future Indigenous sport programs.

In seeking further explanation for the experiences of the athletes, other individuals were approached and interviewed. These 25 key stakeholders were current or retired coaches, managers, and officials from the clubs or associations where the athletes had been located. Generally, they had direct involvement with Indigenous player recruitment and/or welfare (development) programs. At the point of data collection, each participant was coded with a

pseudonym, their sport, current status and year of retirement. Formal approval for the research was granted from the UTS Human Ethics Research Committee.

Following data collection, the researcher embarked upon a process of coding the information to allow for critical interpretation, analysis and understanding. Interviews were initially transcribed, checked for coherence, and then returned to participants; this was not simply about fact-checking, this was part of the collaborative process of creating knowledge. Feedback and follow up points were welcomed from participants. Transcripts were then coded using the constant comparative analysis of data approach, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Constant comparison can be undertaken deductively (i.e., codes are identified prior to analysis then looked for in the data), or inductively (i.e., codes emerge from the data) (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2007). In this study, codes were developed using both methods of analysis. Identifying themes and sub-themes deductively was done by referring to the literature. An example of *deductive* analysis is the four phases of the retirement experience. These were described by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) as (a) Exiting Sport, (b) Nowhere Land, (c) New Beginnings and (d) Moving On. A theme that emerged *inductively* was called *Engaging Indigeneity*. It was an obvious major theme that was identified by the occurrence and repetition of relevant topics. Table 2 illustrates the themes that emerged from the data, and which formed the basis for analysis.

Table 2: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes

Major Theme	Sub-theme
Engaging Indigeneity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal identity 2. Indigenous heritage and culture 3. 'Natural athletes' 4. Family cohesion and connectedness
Athletic retirement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exiting sport 2. 'Nowhere Land' 3. New beginnings 4. Moving on
Athlete career and education programs	
Career choices and stereotyping	
Support during and after sport	

To ensure reliability of the coding process, a strategy recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) was followed. This involved a series of meetings between the Advisory Committee members and the researcher. Blank copies of the transcripts were re-coded. Pleasingly, comparisons with the original coded transcripts demonstrated very high levels of code-recode reliabilities.

Findings

i) Dadirri in Action: Norman's Story

To illustrate the deeply personal nature of the data collected in this project, the following is an excerpt from the interview with 'Norman' (retired AFL player).

Norman: probably in my last four years I wanted to walk away from it and hang up the boots, but I just stuck at it. I had my doubts for the last 4 years. So when I did retire – I mean my body couldn't handle it, the level of the game, it was a very scary moment, a very very scary moment, because, um, my whole life was football. I didn't know what to do. Life after football – I didn't know what I wanted to be, I didn't know how to operate a computer, and a fax or a form, I didn't know how to pay a bill, 'cause everything was done for me through the club, and the bills were paid for. I went through a transition after football – I went back to [home town - a regional Australian city]. It was probably the best for me, now, when I think back now, probably the best move I ever made. Eerr I lot of people don't realise how I felt, this is a very scary time and I didn't know where I wanted to go in life at the age of 32. I was comfortable financially. But I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I ended up going to [home town] to pay football and to be with family. I went through a funny phase where I grew my hair long, and I went into a hermit crab shell. I just went through a funny phase for a year...

Researcher: What do you think you were looking for?

Norman: Well, I was looking ... I knew I was [Norman] the footballer, but I didn't know who I was gonna be after football. And that was the confusion. I grew my hair down like as if was a drug lord or something. I had my hair right down to my shoulder, and had it in a ponytail. I did things that I normally wouldn't do. I would just walk around; pack a bottle of water and my mobile phone. I wasn't working. I'd just walk along the beach. And it was time that I just thought [about] what I wanted to do. Like I said, I just had to find out who I was. And I spent a lot of money, drinking, going out a lot, partying, and spent a lot of money with a lot of mates, because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do.

Researcher's Notes from Project Journal: Language is much more than verbal and, during the interview, Norman's non-verbal communication was almost more powerful than his words. He sank back into his seat, hunched his shoulders, and

crossed his arms over his chest. From time to time he rubbed one hand over his cheek, and averted his eyes downwards. The tone of his voice was measured and deep and he appeared to be immersed in thought; brooding, dreaming, and wistful. Clearly his story was intricate, intensely personal, and still difficult for him to share. Nevertheless, he was keen to communicate something he felt to be of great significance both to him and to the research project. This required a huge mental effort and, for him at times, the ‘telling’ was draining.

ii) *A Précis of Participants’ Recommendations*

The final phrase in *Dadirri* advises that having ‘learnt from the listening’ one should then construct:

[...] a purposeful plan to act, with actions informed by learning wisdom and the informed responsibility that comes with knowledge (Atkinson 2000:16).

The following reflections, suggestions, and recommendations for future practice were all contributed by the participant group in this study. *They* believed that a process was needed whereby Indigenous athletes can negotiate an improved athletic retirement experience, and *they* suggested the following tactics, some or all of which may assist towards such an outcome:

- Recognising and accepting the deep variations that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people’s beliefs and values.
- Providing culturally-appropriate support during sport careers and during their transition to the post-sport career from other Indigenous people. The footballers believed that, ideally, each club required the full-time services of one Indigenous staff member, while the boxers believed that there should be an Indigenous support staff member closely linked with all programs set up to foster Indigenous boxers.
- Mapping the retirement environment in advance, including pre-empting the specific potential difficulties and challenges relevant to Indigenous athletes.
- Empowering Indigenous athletes to take on leadership and decision-making opportunities.
- Providing vocational training that takes into consideration the cultural needs, aspirations, and obligations of Indigenous people that is relevant to their unique situations.
- Providing ongoing cultural awareness training for sport officials, managers, and coaches.

The objective in this research was for the voices of the athletes to be heard, thereby allowing the collection of rich data based on the participants’ perspectives about SCT. These recommendations listed above would not have been possible without the influence of *Dadirri*

in the interview process. Participants developed trust in the researcher, and felt empowered to share their intensely personal reflections.

In producing this list of needs and strategies, the athletes were calling for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin 2003; Yunkaporta 2009) both during sport and beyond. The tactics reflect many of the challenges that are present in Australia, both within sport and in society more generally. These approaches are not intended to diminish the role and contributions of career and education programs already available for retiring athletes. Rather, the athletes recognised that in addition to mainstream programs, they needed learning and support to complement their Indigenous world views. This is consistent with the concept of *Dadirri* as a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

Conclusion

This article provides a model for conducting and improving qualitative research for non-Indigenous researchers who want to engage with Indigenous people in a research setting. The approach of *Dadirri* can help non-Indigenous researchers to deal with cultural sensitivities and build trust with Indigenous participants. The research project was a journey not only for the researcher, but also for the participants involved, and by consulting and adhering to the methodological stance of *Dadirri*, the study allowed the voices of the athletes to be heard. Indeed, the way forward, or the “purposeful plan to act”, came from the athletes themselves. This knowledge had not been acquired prior to this research project, and consequently, the participants and the researcher reciprocally benefited during the research period. By conducting and embracing *Dadirri* and thereby developing trust with participants, the research was able to provide an understanding of SCT for Indigenous male athletes. The athletes were not sceptical or doubtful of the researcher’s intentions, and were happy to discuss personal and complex issues, and relate their life experiences. Ultimately, the thesis gave the participants an opportunity to demonstrate that Indigenous athletes experience SCT in complex and unique ways.

As the researcher, *Dadirri* opened my eyes, ears and heart. I learned deep listening and culturally respectful conversation. Thus I was privileged to speak with some outstanding men who were going through—or had experienced—a time of intense change in their lives.

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