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# A Comparative Approach to Non-Formal Education: The Power of Sport for Female Youth

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A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: THE POWER OF  
SPORT FOR FEMALE YOUTH

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PIM 75

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## A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

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# A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

## **List of Abbreviations**

NFE: Non-Formal Education

SDP: Sports for Development and Peace

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

F2F: Face To Face

## ABSTRACT

Non-formal education plays a vital role in the lives of our female youth. From positive self-talk to team unity, the number of life skills that are promoted through value based curriculums are innumerable. Due to the growing popularity of such programming, it is important to understand the distinguishing characteristics of each organization. Therefore, this comparative study will analyze the power of sport as a form of non-formal education, and its impact on girls in India, Cameroon, and the United States. This will be accomplished through individual interviews that will attempt to answer the following question: *What distinguishes non-formal education from informal learning in relation to sports programs geared towards female youth?*

Once the results from the qualitative research were analyzed, the following four themes emerged as being representative of the data: (1) Customized Goals, (2) Gaining Positive Life Skills, (3) Community Membership, and (4) Applicability of Learning. No matter the language, country, or even sport, commonalities could be found in the distinguishing characteristics for non-formal education sports programs geared towards female youth.

The results of this study can be used by non-formal education sports organizations to better understand the learning outcomes and how to better design a successful non-formal education sports program. Additionally, donors and volunteers play a huge role in the success of these organizations, therefore the results could also be used to educate future benefactors about the impact that their efforts could have on female youth around the world.



### **Introduction**

As an American female, I was raised in a society that promoted sports to every child, regardless of the individual's gender, race, or economic background. These experiences helped shape who I was, as an eight-year-old white girl playing on a predominately black basketball team, and who I have become, as one of the only female coaches for my local community soccer organization. Each of these memories not only opened my eyes to the value that sport has for a community, but it also helped me realize the power that sport can have as an educational tool for female youth.

Non-formal education (NFE) has been an essential part of our society for several decades. These NFE programs are offered in several different forms, from 4-H clubs to experience-based sports curriculums, yet each one has an important component that aids in the development of life-long skills and tools which benefit the student for future endeavors. These NFE educational activities have a large impact on a child's learning, however there are often no set standards or guidelines to differentiate such programming from informal learning. At a time when extra-curricular activities are becoming more prevalent in young people's lives, it is critical to explore the distinguishing characteristics of NFE and informal learning.

Growing up in Minnesota, my NFE experiences spanned across several community-based sports teams. As a child, I was involved in just about every sport that my local park offered. These experiences taught me a plethora of life skills, but more importantly, it introduced me to one of my first role models. I still remember my first soccer coach. This woman not only taught me the importance of team work and problem-solving, but she also opened my eyes to a number of possibilities that women and girls have in organized sports. It was through this non-formal

education that I developed personal relationships and gained a new level of confidence that expanded into my scholastics.

Due to this impactful experience, I decided to become a youth coach for a community soccer club about five years ago. Although challenging at times, it is in this role that my players and I learn the most about ourselves. During last season, for example, my team did not win an entire game during an extremely hot and competitive tournament. Instead of feeling defeated, my team took the weekend as an opportunity to learn about what we needed to improve on for next time. I walked away from the tournament feeling accomplished and energized for the next opportunity. I could have easily stormed away from the tournament feeling upset and angry because they did not play the way I wanted. Instead, I took the higher road and used one of the foundational skills of a positive change agent, to lead by example no matter the external pressures or distractions.

The growing popularity of NFE athletic programs requires a deeper understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of each organization. Therefore, this paper will explore the different ways organized sports are used as a vehicle to implement NFE goals and how sport is used as a crucible for peacebuilding, empowerment, and education. Through a comparative approach, this paper will analyze the power of sport and its impact on girls in India, Cameroon, and the United States. This will be accomplished through individual interviews that will attempt to answer the following question: *What distinguishes non-formal education from informal learning in relation to sports programs geared towards female youth?*

### **Literature Review**

As the role of non-formal education sports programs continues to grow, studying its impact on the lives of adolescent youth has become even more essential. There is a significant

amount of research and literature around non-formal education, however most of this empirical data is focused around the macro level impact of these programs and not on the differentiating characteristics of each organization. It is important to note that currently a gap exists in the literature around the connection between non-formal education and organized sports programs. Therefore, the scope of the current research which aided in this study included: non-formal education, sports for development and peace, and the experiential learning theory.

### **Non-formal Education**

As Coombs and Ahmed explain, “nonformal education is any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (as cited in La Belle, 1982, p. 161). This reference was one of the first definitions of non-formal education and serves as an important reference when researching non-formal education models. These voluntary programs may take the form of afterschool programs for children, guided volunteer trips for adults, or sports programs with an educational focus.

The later model can be seen in the example of Football 4 Peace International (F4P), which is a communal based reconciliation initiative that uses soccer as a mode of non-formal education. “F4P aims to use values-based football coaching to build bridges between neighbouring Jewish and Arab towns and villages in Israel, and in doing so make a modest contribution to the peace process in the most troubled of regions” (Sugden, 2010, p. 265). This program works with the youth in the various regions to teach them the necessary skills to work with those who may have been raised in a very different cultural background. Although it can be a heavy topic at times, it is critical to reach the children of these war-stricken areas in an effort to breakdown the stereotypes that they may have been exposed to in their communities. As Sugden

(2010) states, “I learned that in relatively neutral settings, given a common cause and goal, a shared set of values, and a committed mentor, a sport team was an excellent crucible within which to nurture intimacy and mutuality” (p. 264).

As the mentor for many of these programs, John Sugden assumed the position of the facilitator and assisted the players with identifying their learning needs through developed plans and active participation. These needs came in the form of a value based coaching style which encouraged participants to, “demonstrate appreciation of the basic qualities of good citizenship, namely: respect, trust, responsibility, equality and inclusivity” (Sugden, 2010, p. 265). Even though there is no formal evaluation or credentials given, the coaches at F4P would consider a student successful by demonstrating his or her learning in the community. This success could be determined through the observation of new behaviors such as, taking on more responsibilities, and forming new relationships. “As I coached and travelled with the teams to residential competitions I watched as friendships blossomed across the community divide, many of which are sustained to this day” (Sugden, 2010, p. 264). That is just one definition of success. Having two children from very different backgrounds come together and create a bond that is strong enough to withstand the toughest of tests.

An important distinction to make is the difference between non-formal education and informal education. As La Belle (1982) explains, “A major difference between these two processes rests with the deliberate instructional and programmatic emphases present in nonformal education but absent in informal education” (p. 162). In many instances, sports act as an informal method of education. However, in the context of non-formal education, the learning objectives are pre-determined and taught using youth sports as the vehicle through which the lessons will be

instructed. Therefore, it is critical to note that youth sports will be considered non-formal education if there is a deliberate lesson plan which emphasizes various athletic and life skills.

To fully understand the impact of NFE learning, it is essential to explore the benefits and purpose of offering NFE opportunities to students. As educator Louis Debono explains, “Non-formal learning is a key phrase in our approach to education today. After all, we know that different learners learn in different ways, and that different topics benefit from being taught in a variety of settings and methods” (as cited in Mifsud, 2016, para. 2). There are countless examples of topics that are difficult to cover in a formal education setting, which is why the latter part of this justification holds true in the aforementioned illustration. As La Belle (1982) explains, “nonformal education for children and youth focuses on the development of the individual child as a participant in society” (p. 165). This socialization is an important aspect of the curriculum design for NFE and helps bridge the gap between the knowledge gathered in formal education settings and the informal information that is learned in the home. Further, many students have a difficult time learning in formal education settings due to a variety of different behavioral and emotional disorders. Therefore, the out-of-the-classroom teaching style is something that attracts the students and keeps them engaged in the topic.

In addition to this, the needs of the community, student, or youth are taken into consideration every time a NFE coordinator puts together the curriculum for the season or practice. Even though a facilitator or coach may have a specific agenda for a training, the plan is flexible and can be adjusted based on the needs of each individual learner. Therefore, the education is malleable and can change based on each student’s specific learning style. As Novosadova et al. (n.d.) states, “By addressing all of the learning styles, non-formal education can keep more people interested and motivated than by just using one of the styles” (p. 16). This

approach is important because it allows each individual learner to not only be taught in their preferred style, but it also introduces other learning styles in a comfortable and relaxed environment.

Finally, although there is currently no universal definition of non-formal education (Romi & Schmida, 2009), the following UNESCO Institute for Statistics definition is a useful guide to frame this research,

The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development. (UIS, 2012, p. 11).

It is through this understanding of non-formal education that this paper will examine the educational objectives of various youth sports organizations.

### **Sport for Development and Peace**

As the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (2014) states, “sport has a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire” (para. 4). Therefore, it only makes sense that

there are countless examples of youth programs that use sports as a tool to teach their youth in a non-formal setting. For many organizations, these communal based programs have been classified into the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector. As Giulianotti (2011) states, “The SDP sector deploys sport as a socio-cultural tool to reduce social tensions and promote reconciliation and reconstruction, notably in post-conflict contexts” (p. 208). This non-formal education method is one that empowers our youth, provides peace for divided communities, and sheds light on the importance of working as a team. Due to the non-formal design of these programs, each program or community has the autonomy to choose which societal issues it will aim to address, and hopefully reconcile through its value based curriculum.

As previously mentioned, the SDP sector covers a myriad of issues, including gender inequality and education. Franz Gastler noticed the impact and power that sports can have in the lives of young women and launched Yuwa, an NGO that uses team sports for social development in rural India. As the co-founder of the organization, Franz presented at a Tedx Talk a few years ago and discussed the power of such programming for young girls in India. As he mentions in the video, the women who helped launch this program are, “leading a movement of girls in rural India who are fighting for and finding their freedom one football practice at a time” (TED, 2013). For many of these young women, the thought of going to school is completely out of the question. Instead, these girls spend months at a time with relatives or have decided that school is not important. However, Kusum Kamari gives a firsthand account of the impact that Yuwa had on her as a young child, “I learned that if I could get an education I could find different ways to find and make money and live better” (TED, 2013). Although the learning environment was informal, the sport of soccer was the vehicle which taught Kusum the importance of receiving an education. Not only that, but Kusum goes on to explain the impact this program had on her

personally, “Last Spring, Yuwa had a chance to send a team to Spain. I was chosen to go because my teammates ranked me highly in leadership values of, Positivity, honesty, caring, selflessness, and unity” (TED, 2013). These are the lessons in life that leave a lasting impression. For Kusum, and hundreds of other young women, this program helped them realize the value of going to school and receiving an education to become a powerful woman in Indian society. While some of the lessons taken from participating in Yuwa may be informal, it is critical to mention the organization’s commitment to planning weekly team meetings to discuss the learning goals and assesses progress. This latter obligation is a key factor in the NFE design of Yuwa, and highlights an important distinction between non-formal education and informal learning.

Finally, several SDP sector programs attempt to assist communities reconcile their differences in an effort to prevent further segregation. This was the case in apartheid South Africa, where sport became one of the most important avenues to reach their youth and young-adult populations. This trend has continued into post-apartheid South Africa and has assisted many regions work towards a better understanding of one another’s cultural backgrounds.

South African public figures frequently propose to increase racial respect and co-operation through sport. If the experience of playing on mixed-race teams changes players' evaluation of other races and cultures in a positive way, schools and other organizations have a simple, easily-accessed tool of great power: to manipulate team membership in order to decrease racism (Anderson, Bielert & Jones, 2004, p.49).

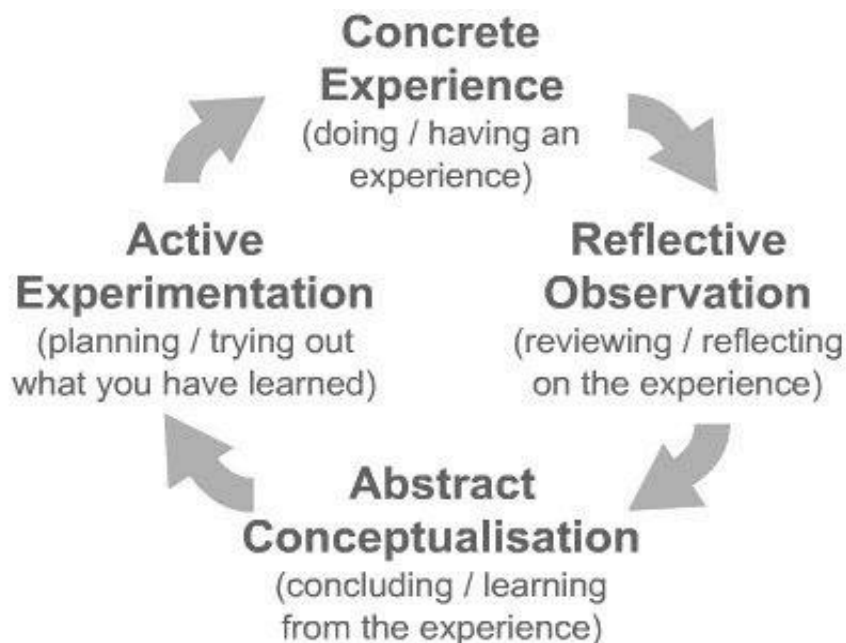
As the authors explain, the use of sport is a very powerful tool to educate and teach children from several different backgrounds. These teams have no set curriculum, nor do they have a strict set of rules. Instead, these athletes come together organically and learn from one



another through the sport they all have grown up playing. It is through these daily interactions with one another that they realize the value of working with athletes from other racial or cultural backgrounds. As Anderson, Bielert, and Jones (2004) explain, “Soccer is available to those Whites who seek such a voice as an ideal medium for demonstrating acceptance of Africans and repentance for apartheid” (p. 51). This athletic endeavor is just one form of racial reconciliation that has allowed many individuals from various backgrounds to move towards a new beginning of unity and equality.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

An appropriate lens to view non-formal education through is the experiential learning theory, as it directly correlates to the pedagogy of this form of education. A leader in intercultural communication, David Kolb created a theoretical approach to understand experiential learning. He explains the process as a circular development that can be started at any point. The four points in the process are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.



*Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle (McLeod, para. 2, 2013).*

As Mark Smith (2010) explains,

It is suggested that the learning process often begins with a person carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation.

Following this, the second step is to understand these effects in the particular instance so that if the same action was taken in the same circumstances it would be possible to anticipate what would follow from the action. In this pattern the third step would be understanding the general principle under which the particular instance falls... When the general principle is understood, the last step, according to David Kolb is its application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalization (para. 8).

Due to the out-of-the-classroom learning that takes place in a non-formal educational context, it is understandable as to why this theory directly correlates to NFE programming. As Olaniyi (2015) states, “Experiential learning, therefore, is particularly effective in adult education and non-formal education as it addresses the cognitive, emotional and the physical aspect of the learner” (p. 263). Often times, NFE organizations turn to Kolb’s Learning Cycle when designing the curriculum for its participants because it emphasizes the importance of taking all aspects of the learner into consideration. Kolb recognizes that the spatial demands of a learner are just as important as the cognitive functions, and they cannot work exclusive of one another. Therefore, by using this theoretical framework, sports organizations have the opportunity to put the learner in a situation that allows them to grow in a way that promotes curiosity and reflection. As Novosadova et al. (2008) states, “During each of these stages you are given a chance to acquire something special: you learn how to take any challenges and turn it

into knowledge, you get a chance to “see” what you really feel and how you deal with that” (p. 26). Consequently, Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle can be used as a theoretical framework that helps analyze the impetus for NFE sports organizations to offer such programming to female youth.

### **Research Design**

The research for this paper involved qualitative research methods. The following NFE organizations were represented in this study: Yuwa in India, Breaking Ground Football in Cameroon, and Girls on the Run in the United States. The first program, Yuwa, is an NGO that uses team sports as a vehicle for social development. The second organization, Breaking Ground Football, uses football as a social development tool to address issues faced by marginalized young women living in vulnerable communities. Finally, Girls on the Run inspires girls to be joyful, healthy and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates running. These organizations were chosen based on their positive contributions to NFE female youth sports programs.

In order to answer the research question, interviews were conducted and surveys were sent to administrators and coaches at Yuwa in India, Breaking Ground Football in Cameroon, and Girls on the Run in the United States. As previously mentioned, the following UNESCO Institute for Statistics definition was used to help frame this research,

The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-

intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development. (UIS, 2012, p. 11).

By using this description of non-formal education, it allowed for even more uniformity while conducting interviews with the stakeholders from each organization. This commonality not only connected the organizations, but it was also a driving force behind the types of questions that were used during the interviews and surveys (see Appendix A and B).

### **Data Collection**

During the data collection phase, I conducted two face-to-face (F2F) interviews, two Skype interviews, and had four different participants complete an open-ended qualitative survey via Survey Monkey. The tables in Appendix B show the breakdown of participants, which equated to eight total participants from the three different organizations.

As the tables show, the interviews were primarily conducted with administrators of their respective organizations. In some cases, the individual also had experience coaching for the organization in the past, however their current role is listed in Table #1 (Appendix B). Each interview lasted about 30-45 minutes and all interviews, with the exception of one, was recorded for transcription purposes. The interview that was not recorded was due to a lack of equipment the day of the interview. The two F2F interviews were conducted in Minnesota with two representatives from Girls on the Run. These interviews were held at a mutual location which

was agreed upon between the researcher and the participant. Both of the F2F interviews were held in the morning at an agreed upon time. The two Skype interviews were with representatives from Yuwa in Jharkhand, India and Breaking Grounds Football in Dschang, Cameroon because both of these organizations are based outside of the United States. The Skype interviews were scheduled about one-week in advance, and the interviewee was given the list of questions (see Appendix A) ahead of time.

The surveys were sent out via email to participants who had been involved with one of the three organizations within the past five years, including current coaches, volunteers, or administrators. These chosen parameters resulted in the survey being sent to fifteen potential participants, however only four participants completed the survey. A reminder email was sent to the remaining eleven potential participants, two-days prior to closing the survey, but it did not yield any additional completed surveys. The reason for the low response rate is unknown, however some of the likely causes could have been: the short, two-week response period allowed; incorrect email addresses; or, lack of interest. Therefore, the survey participants included two representatives from Girls on the Run, one representative from Breaking Grounds Football, and one representative from Yuwa. This breakdown can also be viewed in Appendix B. In an effort to keep participants anonymous, the survey did not ask what role the individual played in the organization, nor did it ask for their name or gender.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

This section presents the findings of the study. After all of the interviews and surveys were completed and transcribed, the data was coded by common words and themes. The following narrative summary provides an overview of the responses from each of the questions

asked in all four interviews. Each paragraph is representative of the question answered, however the information is also portrayed in Table #3 (See Appendix D).

Prior to the first question being asked, the researcher read the aforementioned UNESCO definition of non-formal education (see Appendix A). After the definition was read, the following prompt was stated: Please explain how you see your organization fit into this definition of non-formal education. All four participants agreed that their organization fit the description of a non-formal education organization. The representative from Yuwa (Participant #1) stated that they require their girls to attend a once a week workshop that is focused on a topic. One of the interviewees from Girls on the Run (Participant #2) explained that running is the vehicle to send the message about empowerment and self-worth. Finally, the administrator from Breaking Grounds Football (Participant #3) declared that they are educating their girls on leadership and life skills. Using the UNESCO definition, it can be determined that these descriptions meet the established definition of NFE due to the deliberate programming and focus on the lifelong learning of individuals. This data resulted in several common words, including: empowerment, flexibility, leadership, lesson, and plan.

The subsequent question was in regards to the structure of the three organizations and the female youth who are being educated: Could you explain who the targeted participants are in your community? As expected, 100% of the interviewees stated that the targeted participants are girls. However, it was not anticipated that all four participants would report a similar marketing strategy for their organization. The transcribed data shows that 100% of interviewees explained the most successful way to reach the targeted girls in the community is through word of mouth and a strong sense of community. Therefore, this portion of the data provided the researcher with the following common words: community and girls.

The third question in the interview was designed in an effort to better understand the mission of the organizations. The question was as follows: What would you say are three goals of your organization? All four respondents reported a different set of goals, which was predictable due to the individualized nature of the question. With that being said, there was a significant amount of overlap between the four responses. The transcribed data provided the researcher with information to state that 100% of participants reported empowerment as one of their organization's goals. In addition, 75% of the interviewees stated leadership as one of their organization's goals. Due to this goal-oriented data, the following common words emerged: leadership, confidence, empowerment, support, attitude, and trust.

Similar to the previous inquiry, the fourth question was asked to better understand the motivations which inspire the female youth to be involved in the program. This question resulted in the most cohesive response throughout all of the interviews. This data provided the researcher with a better understanding of the motives behind female youth participating in NFE sports organizations. The common words associated with this question included: friends, fun, community, opportunity, and positive.

The final two questions (Q5 and Q6) were designed in an attempt to better understand how success is measured, or not measured, for NFE programs. The data that was collected from these two questions not only assisted the researcher in formulating a conclusion, but it also provided context for the NFE design of the three organizations. All four responses included a statement about learning goals or targeted lessons. More specifically, 100% of the interview participants reported the female youth having the ability to customize and define their learning goals. In addition, it was reported in 75% of interviews that the growth is measured based on self-evaluations that are completed at the beginning and end of the program. The last question

(Q6) resulted in anecdotal responses which could not be fully presented in this summary.

Therefore, the majority of these responses are included in the discussion section.

Following the initial coding of the interview data, the following themes emerged from the interviews: (1) Friendships, (2) Community, (3) Customized Goals, and (4) Confidence & Leadership. As the data shows in Table #3 (See Appendix D), all three organizations mentioned an idea, concept, or goal that correlated to one of the themes. This included a pattern of the following words: friend, team, support, community, empowerment, confidence, and flexibility. Due to the repetitious nature of these words, these initial themes developed. However, it is critical that the themes from the surveys are also taken into consideration. The following information is a narrative summary of the data collected from the survey responses. This data is also illustrated in Table #4 (See Appendix E).

Since the survey responses were anonymous, it was important for the researcher to know which organization the various data sets were representing. Therefore, the initial question asked participants to self-disclose the name of their organization or program. The survey did not ask for the participant's name nor did it ask what their role was at the organization, therefore the identity of the participants remained anonymous.

The data collected from the second question provided the researcher with more information about the goals and mission for each of the organizations. Even though this qualitative research data is unique to each of the programs, there was still some similarities in the words included in the missions and program goals. Therefore, this portion of the data provided the researcher with the following common words: education, teach, confidence, sport, challenges, and empower.



The third question was asked in an effort to confirm the voluntary nature of the program. This information was important to the researcher because it is linked to a key feature of NFE programming which is that participation is completely voluntary and is not required. Fortunately, 100% of participants reported that participation in their respective program is voluntary.

The consecutive question (Q4) was included to help the researcher better understand the learning process for a girl involved in one of the three organizations. The two participants from Girls on the Run were in agreement that girls participate for about three-months. The participant from Yuwa (Participant #5) reported that girls participate anywhere from a few months to a few years. Finally, the participant from Breaking Grounds Football (Participant #8) stated that girls participate in the program for eight years. Due to the different program designs, the length of involvement varied dramatically between the three organizations. However, this lack of consistency between the four responses does not have a negative or positive impact on the data. Instead, it is negligible information that provides the researcher with a better understanding of each program model.

Just like the interview structure, the following two survey questions (Q5 and Q6) were also designed in an attempt to better understand how success is measured, or not measured, for NFE programs. The fifth question asked participants the following: Are there standards or benchmarks that your athletes **must meet** during the program? If yes, skip to question 7. If no, please answer question 6. The words *must meet* were bolded to add extra emphasis to the focus of the question. The answers to this question were scattered. The participant from Yuwa answered no, one participant from Girls on the Run answered yes, the other participant from Girls on the Run answered yes and no, and the participant from Breaking Grounds Football decided not to answer the question. Due to the survey design, participants were given the option

to skip questions which is why Q5 did not result in four complete answers. Since the subsequent question (Q6) was only required if participants answered *No* to Q5, there were only two responses to the following question: If you do not have any defined standards, how do you measure success in your program? The participant from Yuwa (Participant #5) explained that achievement is measured by behavior in practices and workshops. The other participant who answered Q6 was from Girls on the Run (Participant #6) and said success is measured by growth and how girls respond to conflict. These questions (Q5 and Q6) provided the researcher with the following repetitive words: behavior, growth, and applicability.

The next survey question (Q7) mirrored the fourth interview question, which was created in an effort to better understand the motivations which inspire the female youth to be involved in the program. Similar to the interview responses, there was a significant amount of overlap in the responses between the four survey participants. The data included several different motives, including: fun, friendship, avoiding negative threats, confidence, and empowerment. More specifically, it was discovered that 100% of respondents stated that friends or fun was the primary driving force behind the girls being involved in their program. Due to the uniform nature of responses, this data helps the researcher understand the catalyst behind the girls getting involved in NFE programs.

Finally, the concluding survey question (Q8) asked participants if they witness their athletes learning skills that are not relevant to the focus of the program. The responses were unanimous; 100% of the participants answered *Yes* to the question and 75% of the participants included an example of how students are applying the learning outside of their learning space. This question resulted in the common words: applicability, confidence, and positive.

The same coding process was followed after the survey response were analyzed and the following themes emerged: (1) Friendships and Fun, (2) Continued Learning, and (3) Behavior. Similar to the data analysis for the interviews, several words appeared multiple times when reading through the survey response. Some of the words included: positive, escape, play, avoid, friendship, and empower. In addition to this, all participants answered the last question, Q8, with a positive response which was also a catalyst for the Continued Learning theme.

### **Discussion**

Once the findings from the qualitative research were combined and reviewed, the following four themes emerged as being representative of the data: (1) Customized Goals, (2) Gaining Positive Life Skills, (3) Community Membership, and (4) Applicability of Learning. The following discussion will take each of these themes a step further in an effort to answer the following question: *What distinguishes non-formal education from informal learning in relation to sports programs geared towards female youth?*

#### **Customized Goals**

All of the participants throughout the data collection phase mentioned the importance of girls having the power to create a goal that was customized to her own aspirations. This is a critical aspect of NFE because it empowers each girl to focus on her individual dreams. Since there are no set standards or required athletic abilities, every girl is given the power to succeed. The only physical requirement for the Girls on the Run program is the completion of the 5K at the end of the 10-week program. However, this non-competitive event is tailored to each individual girl. As a coach from Girls on the Run explains, “The other message is you can skip, you can hop, you can do cartwheels, just move forward, that is the only thing that we ask of them” (Participant 2, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Beyond the final 5K event, the

coaches are also educating the girls on a variety of different topics ranging from positive self-talk to empowerment. Due to the NFE design of the program, there are no exams to see how well the girls understand the topics, nor are credentials given. Instead, a coach explains, “We introduce the topic, split them into groups or sections and an activity is revolved around that topic. We’ll do another physical activity, running to a cone, picking it up, answering a question, and the message is threaded throughout” (Participant 2, personal communication, March 6, 2017). This activity directly correlates with the four stages of Kolb’s experiential learning theory. First, the girls have the concrete experience of doing an activity which is deliberately designed for a specific topic. Once the activity is over, the girls have time to get water and go through the reflective observation stage by reflecting on their behavior. Next, as the coach is explaining the second activity, the girls have the chance to go through the abstract conceptualization stage and conclude how they will alter their behavior to achieve the skill for that day. Finally, when the girls are participating in the second activity, they are actively experimenting the newly acquired skills and knowledge.

The topic of instructional design was also discussed during the interview with an administrator from Yuwa who mentioned,

Girls are always taught they need to think about others and not themselves and then for a girl to come to Yuwa that whole message is flipped on its head and we’re saying that this is your space and you and your team get to make the rules and create this identity together (Participant 1, personal communication, February 20, 2017).

Not only is Yuwa providing a safe space for the girls in its community, but it is also empowering the girls to embrace their individuality. This self-designed achievement is one that

cannot be measured against other girls, because it is unique to each individual. Instead, simply making the step to get involved with a sports program is considered a great achievement and any learning that takes place thereafter is a bonus. Finally, at Breaking Grounds Football this theme can be seen in the curriculum design that is customized based on the needs of the region. As an administrator explains,

In each region we have a problem, we have something in each assessment to see what life skills is a challenge in the community, for example there is a problem of early pregnancies, there is a problem of girl abuse, sexuality, which is taboo, so many taboos around girls in life (Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

Since there are no required topics the organization must teach, each team and region has the liberty to create a curriculum that is based on the needs of the community. This is not only beneficial to the girls who are involved in the program, but it is also favorable for the region since many of these girls will take the skills learned from the program and benefit society in a positive way.

### **Gaining Positive Life Skills**

After looking at the research, there was a common vein that existed in all organizations. This universal theme focused around the idea that success, in a NFE environment, could be measured by the development of positive behavior throughout the course of the program. Since this intangible growth is subjective it is critical that the progress is measured on an individual level. At Yuwa, each girl has the opportunity to have a one-on-one meeting with her coach to assess what skills she would like to focus on during the program. “We have more definite benchmarks for values such as positivity, kindness, honesty, and team unity. Teams participate in

peer values ranking, and we have individual meetings with players to help them understand their strengths and areas that might need improvement” (Participant 5, personal communication, February 27, 2017). A key quality of this measure is the guidance and wisdom that is provided by the coach or administrators of the program. As Participant 5 mentions above, it is critical to make the connection between their behavior on the field and how these positive skills translate to the classroom and life outside of sports. At Girls on the Run, this relationship can be seen through an example of using imagery to explain positive self-talk during one of the practices.

We do a lot of visualization; positive self-talk versus negative self-talk. Think about this cord that plugs into your body and its full of muck and dirt and muddy and negative. Then you switch that to positive, what does that cord look like?

And, all the girls are saying its pink, its purple, its glittery (Participant 2, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

This example directly correlates to the abstract conceptualization stage of Kolb’s cycle. First, the girls had the concrete experience of negative self-talk. Next, through reflective observation, they were able to think about how that experience made them feel, which gave them the capacity to go through the abstract conceptualization stage and learn how to handle a similar situation the next time. By using mental images, it was easier for the girls to understand the differences between negative and positive self-talk. Due to the power of their imagination, the female youth involved in Girls on the Run have the ability to understand the polarity between the two practices. This acknowledgement leads to more positive self-talk and eventually leads to an increase in confidence. This growth would not be possible without the assistance of the coaches and administrators, especially when they are helping connect the dots for their athletes.

This trust and empowerment is a crucial aspect of all NFE programs. No matter the program, it is important that there is a high level of respect between the coach and participants. It is essential that the coaches of NFE sports programs are less concerned with the results of the athletic endeavor, and instead, are more concerned with the learning a player takes away. These facilitators are there to provide support and guidance, while the female youth are participating in something they enjoy and learning life skills along the way. However, this latter learning is one that is not always explicitly known. That is when the coaches shine. At Breaking Grounds Football, various coaches and administrators strive to help girls develop the capacity to be leaders on their team, in school, or within their community.

When we have for example, leadership. When girl are on the field and when we start the program, they can be shy and not want to speak, or speak out. Okay, it is your own time to explain the game. The coaches or program are encouraging the girls to speak out, to have voice, and to explain it herself and to gain confidence among their peers (Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

The encouragement that is provided during the program plays a huge role in the girls realizing their goals are attainable. Without this support, some girls may continue to be shy and not want to speak because society is telling them to remain quiet. Therefore, it is increasingly important for leaders to provide a safe space for learners to test out these new skills and develop to the full extent of her abilities.

Finally, it was discovered that the longevity of the program does not necessarily correlate to a higher level of development. As Participant 7 states, “In only 3 short months, the young girls’ personalities open up. They better their communication skills. Their confidence skyrockets” (personal communication, March 14, 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that no

matter the length of a program, girls have the capacity to increase their positive life skills. This new perspective not only allows the girls to understand their true potential, but it empowers them with the confidence they may need to realize their self-worth.

### **Community Membership**

All three of the organizations, and all eight participants, mentioned that one of the main driving forces for girls to get involved in their program was due to word of mouth, their friends, and fun. This sense of community is one that not only attracts girls to the program, but it is also a main reason why girls continue to participate year after year. In 100% of the surveys, the word friend or fun was mentioned in response to Q7 which asked, “What drives your athletes to participate in the program?” This motivation helps build friendships and ultimately creates a positive environment for the girls to have fun. The achievement that can be attained when students and players are having fun is multitudinous, and without the support of NFE sports organizations, those accomplishments may not be possible. This was noted in an interview with Breaking Grounds Football,

They want to be involved, to go out and meet other girls, the possibility to play with other girls, for others it is a little bit, particularly in North Cameroon where it is primarily Muslim community, girls do not have the opportunity to go out so it is a way to get out of the house and be out and see what is going on with soccer (Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

In this example, it is evident that Breaking Grounds Football has designed an organization that uses sport as a vehicle to encourage girls to break the stereotypes and play. Once girls are part of a NFE sports organization, not only do they achieve a new level of life



skills but they are able to use these life skills with their new friends. This could be seen at a 5K Community Run with Girls on the Run,

When the last girl crosses the finish line everyone is there, no one leaves, and we tell them we stay until our last friend finishes. They take it from there and make a big long line and we never tell them any of that, support is huge (Participant 2, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

A similar sentiment about the 5K Community Run was also made by Participant 7, “Completing the 5K as a group is a fun way to celebrate the physical, mental, and emotional accomplishments of the program” (personal communication, March 14, 2017). As this latter example explains, the 5K Community Run is a lot more than a simple race. Instead, it is providing the girls with an opportunity to celebrate their individual achievements in an environment that inspires girls to be the best version of themselves.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being part of a team, or a member of an organization, is the bond of friendship and the support that comes with being part of a group. This community driven encouragement is two-fold; it motivates the girls to achieve their goals, but it also holds them accountable for being involved and staying present. At Yuwa, for example,

There are goals that they can work towards here and then a strong community that keeps them coming back and notices when they are gone. If they don't come, everyone knows and asks about them. A girl will go to another girl's house and say why weren't you here today? What is going on? There is accountability that is created through the team (Participant 1, personal communication, February 20, 2017).

The remarkable thing about this commitment to attendance is that the staff and administration at Yuwa do not require the girls to go out and find their teammates. Instead, the girls at Yuwa have a strong interest in seeing one another thrive and they know that attendance is a key element to achieving the different things they might want. Therefore, each girl will go to great lengths to make sure her teammate is present.

It was evident throughout the data collection phase that girls involved in NFE sports programs have a strong interest in seeing their teammates and friends succeed. This communal mission is one that has the potential to transcend into the girls' future and prepares them to become successful community members in their society, and beyond.

### **Applicability of Learning**

As seen in Kolb's experiential learning cycle, the final stage is active experimentation or application through action. Therefore, it only makes sense that this practice also exists in NFE sports programs. While organizing the data it quickly became apparent that a fourth, and final, theme was applicability of learning. This was examined in 100% of the organizations interviewed and can be seen in the following example at Breaking Grounds Football,

Maybe we have to train girls to never give up. We play a game, we start and say: okay, maybe one team has 5 players and the other team has 3 and after we stop and ask, what lesson you learn? And they say, oh, yea, we were down numbers and we took advantage, and we score more than them. So, the lesson would be okay in society maybe say okay girls do not have the right to go to school, so when you have the opportunity to go to school try to bring back the best marks because you have the capacity to deal with that (Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

In this lesson, the girls are being taught grit and perseverance. As female youth, it is important to develop these skills at an early age because in Cameroonian society girls are not always allowed to have a voice. Therefore, by teaching girls about confidence and determination through sport, girls are being prepared for the challenges they will inevitably face in society.

Due to balancing the demand of being involved in an extracurricular activity, like each of these organizations, several of the research participants mentioned the importance of time management. This skill is one that is very applicable in a work setting, however not every society or employer values this expertise. At Yuwa, for example, “They’ve developed time management which is something that is not valued much in this area, but they are able to lead groups, and learn leadership skills which are very valuable for any employee to have” (Participant 1, personal communication, February 20, 2017). This lack of recognition is not only frustrating for the girls who are gaining this skill, but it is equally discouraging for the leaders and coaches at Yuwa. During the interview with Participant 1, it was revealed that girls have so much potential in Jharkhand, India however they do not have the academic foundation to get the jobs they deserve. This disconnect is a huge motivator for the administrators and coaches at the organizations as well because they want to see the girls they coach succeed. At Girls on the Run, the possibility for achievement is what inspires one of the coaches to continue the program at the school where she teaches.

I do notice that many of our athletes are taking these skills and applying them in the school setting. They are uplifting one another, exuding confidence, and being just a more well-rounded person. The results alone have pushed us to continue this program at our school (Participant 6, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

As previously mentioned, each of these skills are not only preparing female youth to become well-rounded students but it is also empowering them with the knowledge needed to be a change agent. Through this out-of-classroom wisdom, which is applicable to life outside of sports, girls are being empowered to take life into their hands with the potential to make their dreams become reality. These achievements can be made possible through NFE opportunities like: Yuwa, Girls on the Run, and Breaking Grounds Football, which use an experiential learning lens when designing the learning objectives for its female youth.

Based on the findings of this research, it was discovered that no matter the language, country, or even sport, commonalities could be found in the distinguishing characteristics for non-formal education sports programs geared towards female youth.

### **Limitations**

The researcher has been involved with NFE sports programs for the majority of her life, which causes a personal bias that may act as a limitation for this study. The researcher was aware of her personal bias throughout each interview, however it is nearly unavoidable to stay neutral during the structured interviews. Therefore, it was critical for the researcher to take the time after each interview to think about what questions were more difficult to remain impartial and reflect on ways to change her approach prior to the next interview.

Although the researcher defined NFE to all participants, there were several instances when the interviewees had a difficult time distinguishing aspects of NFE from informal learning. While it was concluded that all organizations exemplify characteristics of NFE, it is important to highlight that all three programs also expressed examples of informal learning, as well. The existence of both NFE and informal learning appears to be a hallmark of each organization. This is likely a result of each organization's approach to educating, where their primary concern is

teaching the desired skills, rather than structuring their curriculum in a strictly NFE or informal manner. Instead, each organization has adopted methods that are best suited to teaching female youth.

Due to the small sample size of participants, it is important to note that the data collected and the concluding arguments are not representative of all NFE sports programs, but instead is unique to the three organizations studied. However, the findings may also be relevant to other NFE organizations.

Another limitation was the lack of a recording device during the second interview (Participant 4) with Girls on the Run. This resulted in fewer details from that interview, and ultimately a lack of data from the administrative point of view from Girls on the Run. Fortunately, the other interview with Participant 2 and the two surveys (Participant 6 & 7) supplemented this lack of transcription.

Finally, two of the interviews were conducted via Skype which presented a few technological challenges which may have affected the results. In addition, the survey link was only sent to a select number of people which may have affected the responses and data provided.

### **Practical Applicability**

The results of this research can be used by NFE organizations in an effort to better understand the learning outcomes and how NFE differs from informal learning. Due to the comparative approach that was taken, the findings of this study can be used internationally and could provide organizations all around the world with the information they may need to develop curriculum or design learning outcomes for its learners.

Additionally, this study can provide parents or guardians with the knowledge they may need to better understand the importance of NFE organizations. During this study, it became

apparent that some guardians express resistance towards allowing their daughters to participate in a NFE program because it was seen as taboo by society or because their daughters may not seem to be interested in athletic endeavors. This study will provide context around the non-athletic achievements that are gained during the course of each program.

Finally, it was mentioned on several occasions that the future of NFE organizations depends on the support from volunteers and donations. Therefore, the information provided in this study can help prospective volunteers or donors realize the impact that their efforts could have on female youth around the world. This knowledge will not only provide them with insight, but it may also motivate them to spread the word to other potential volunteers.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study could be expanded in many different ways, if time was not a variable. For starters, this research only examined three NFE sports organizations in three different countries. There are countless other examples of NFE sports focused programs around the globe which could have been studied in an effort to answer the proposed research questions. In addition, the organizations that were chosen for this study were self-selected by the researcher which could have confused the organizations or made them question why they were being chosen. Therefore, the results may be altered if the participating organizations for this study were selected based on a more voluntary basis. That way, the participants may be more open and transparent with their answers if they feel as though they volunteered versus being asked.

Another recommendation would be to further explore the correlation between NFE and David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, and how this pedagogical design benefits the learners in a positive way. This connection was only briefly mentioned throughout the paper, but there is

a lot more research that could be done to determine the different ways that Kolb's learning approach can be utilized in NFE sports programs.

Finally, it may be beneficial to expand this research to include the female youth in an effort to get a first-hand understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of NFE sports programs. While the coaches and administrators are able to provide a fantastic overview of their interactions and observations, there is even more potential data that is available. Even though this type of research would require a more intensive IRB process, the results could provide more insight into the differentiating aspects of NFE from informal learning in relation to sports programs geared towards female youth.

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## Appendix A

### *Interview Questions*

The following **definition** was read to participants prior to the interview starting:

The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development. (UIS, 2012, p. 11).

- (1) Please explain how you see your organization fit into this definition of non-formal education.
- (2) Could you explain who the targeted participants are in your community?
- (3) What would you say are three goals of your organization?
- (4) What drives your athletes to participate in this program?
- (5) How do you ensure that participants are achieving the program goals mentioned earlier?
- (6) Could you describe a situation when one of your athletes reached her goal? What empowered her to reach this goal?

## Appendix B

### *Survey Questions*

- (1) What is the name of your program or organization?
- (2) In your own words, describe the mission or goals of your organization.
- (3) Is participation voluntary? (Yes/No)
- (4) How long do athletes stay involved with your program?
- (5) Are there standards or benchmarks that your athletes **must meet** during the program? If yes, skip to question 7. If no, please answer question 6.
- (6) If you do not have any defined standards, how do you measure success in your program?
- (7) Do you witness athletes learning skills that are not relevant to the focus of your program?

### Appendix C

*Table #1 – Interview Participant Information*

Participant #1	Yuwa	Administrator	Skype
Participant #2	Girls on the Run	Coach	F2F
Participant #3	Breaking Grounds Football	Administrator	Skype
Participant #4	Girls on the Run	Administrator	F2F

*Table #2 – Survey Participant Information*

Participant #5	Yuwa
Participant #6	Girls on the Run
Participant #7	Girls on the Run
Participant #8	Breaking Grounds Football

## Appendix D

Table #3 – Interview Responses

	<b>Girls on the Run</b>	<b>Breaking Grounds Football</b>	<b>Yuwa</b>
<b>Q1. How does the organization fit into the definition of NFE?</b>	(1) Running is the vehicle to send the message about empowerment and self-worth (2) It is a great supplement and its right after their school day	(1) Training for leadership and life skills (2) Early pregnancies, girl abuse, and early marriage addressed (3) Talk about challenges in the community	(1) No set standards (2) Benchmarks are for personal values (3) Once a week workshop that is focused on a topic – (i.e. - health, team building, and leadership)
<b>Q2. Who are the targeted participants?</b>	(1) 3 <sup>rd</sup> through 5 <sup>th</sup> grade (GOTR) and 6 <sup>th</sup> through 8 <sup>th</sup> grade (Heart & Sole) (2) Age group and just for girls	(1) Soccer league to raise awareness to other girls (2) Tell their friends and neighbors about soccer opportunity (3) Working with girls, out of school	(1) Girls hear something really cool is going on [at Yuwa] (2) Coaches who are making a new team go out [into the community] and tell girls what's going on
<b>Q3. Three goals of organization.</b>	(1) Self-empowerment (2) Confidence (3) Support	(1) Build capacity (2) Leadership (3) Encourage change	(1) Empower girls to take their lives into their own hand (2) Leadership (3) Team building (4) Attendance (5) Attitude
<b>Q4. What drives your athletes to participate?</b>	(1) Friends (2) Fun (3) Girl power (4) Energy awards	(1) Possibility to play with other girls (2) Meet other girls (3) Primarily Muslim community and girls do not usually have the opportunity	(1) Community (2) Positive peer pressure (3) Girls recruit each other (4) Word of mouth

<p><b>Q5. How is achievement measured?</b></p>	<p>(1) Self-defined goals (2) Finishing the 5K</p>	<p>(1) Games (2) Targeted lessons (3) On-the-field opportunities</p>	<p>(1) Leaders // coaches complete workshop evaluations (2) Effort levels (3) Growth in critical thinking skills</p>
<p><b>Q6. Describe an example of a girl achieving her goal.</b></p>	<p>(1) She was totally accomplished (2) Felt safe in the environment (3) Pushed herself to do something</p>	<p>(1) A girl [who is now] in the university is in charge of an association at the university (2) Developed the capacity in secondary school</p>	<p>(1) They've developed time management (2) Able to lead groups (3) Gain leadership skills that are valuable for an employee to have</p>

## Appendix E

Table #4 – Survey Responses

	<b>Participant #5</b>	<b>Participant #6</b>	<b>Participant #7</b>	<b>Participant #8</b>
<b>Q1. Name of organization.</b>	Yuwa	Girls on the Run	Girls on the Run	Breaking Ground
<b>Q2. Describe the mission or goals</b>	Yuwa uses sport and education to put girls' futures in their own hands	Teach girls how to be confident and healthy through running	Empowering young girls to find joy, strength, confidence, and friendships in running	Address the self-identified [challenges] of their communities
<b>Q3. Is participation voluntary?</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Q4. How long do athletes stay involved?</b>	It varies – a few months to years	Ten weeks	3 months long	8 years
<b>Q5. Are there standards or benchmarks?</b>	No	Yes; Completing a 5K race	Yes and no; the big benchmark is completing the 5K as a group	<i>Did not answer</i>
<b>Q6. How do you measure success?</b>	Participants' behavior in practices and workshops	(1) Growth we see in their interactions with one another (2) How they respond to conflicts in a classroom setting	<i>Did not answer</i>	<i>Did not answer</i>
<b>Q7. What drives your athletes to participate?</b>	(1) Fun (2) Avoid child marriage (3) Make a different future for themselves	Many of our athletes participate because their friends are enrolled	(1) Parents can be the driving force (2) To increase self-esteem and confidence (3) Friendships	They want to meet other girls, to play, to escape restrictions

<b>Q8. Do you witness athletes learning skills that are not relevant to the focus of the program?</b>	Yes, all the time	Many athletes are taking the skills and applying them in the school setting	Absolutely. In 3 months, the girls' personalities open up and their confidence skyrockets	Yes; they use their learned skills to combat the great risk of community perception and judgement is
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