
FOOTBALL CHANGES LIVES: FROM LEARNED HELPLESSNESS TO SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS

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Abstract

1. AIM OF ABSTRACT: This professional abstract outlines the global non-profit organisation Coaches Across Continents (CAC) and its framework for self-directed learning, a framework which facilitates youth in developing communities to move from chance of enculturation to the capacity for meaningful choice.

2. PRACTICE DESCRIPTION: CAC uses a Hat Trick Initiative to work alongside developing communities globally. Their “chance to choice” curriculum is used to guide local community coaches, teachers and leaders from learned helplessness through self organized learning and towards self-directed learning within a three-year time frame.

‘Chance to choice’ describes a process many young people go through in their educational development. From the ‘chance’ of their country of birth, resulting in inherited cultural beliefs and traditions, young people move through ‘conformity’ of childhood, ‘conflict’ of adolescence and arrive at the ‘certainty’ of young adulthood. It is at this stage that cultural norms are unquestioningly accepted. As alternative perspectives are glimpsed, ‘contradictions’ emerge, previously taken for granted norms are ‘challenged’ and finally young people can develop the capacity to make ‘choices’, choices to be liberated from their past and to choose their future.

The ‘chance to choice’ process is integral to becoming a self-directed learner. Self directed learners possess attitudes such as independence of mind, confidence in their own judgement, a sense of self esteem leading to self actualization and the ability to cooperate and collaborate with others. They are independent thinkers who can define and solve problems, reason logically, engage in the imaginative projection of their own ideas and set goals and strategies to achieve them. They reflect upon experience and learn from it.

Self-directed learning is essential for people to question and problem solve, thus developing the skills needed to change their lives and their communities. Traditional education methods stifle problem solving skills and lead to learned helplessness, which is oppressive, perpetuates the poverty cycle and erects a ceiling on individual and community development. CAC educates according to an overarching philosophy, namely “Mans’avocation is to be a subject who acts upon his world” (Paulo Freire).

3. CONTEXT DESCRIPTION: CAC’ Hat Trick Initiative uses sport to guide community partners through stages of learning. Program participants learn applicable life skills in parallel to football skills on the field. They become self- directed learners with a growing ability to challenge the existing order and thus to change their lives, their communities and their countries.

Initially many program participants demonstrate learned helplessness. Although possessing fundamental skills, the majority lack understanding of how sport can be used for social impact. During year one they participate in soccer curriculum games designed to teach soccer skills alongside life skills. They also gain basic teaching and coaching skills.

Year two focuses on challenging program participants to become self-organized learners. They are encouraged to cooperate and collaborate with each other to “solve the problems” posed through the soccer games.

Year three of the Hat Trick Initiative focuses on program participants becoming independent learners with the skills to identify and clarify their own problems, collaboratively consider alternative options and subsequently implement solutions. Program participants reach a level of professional proficiency where they are able to educate others in their community using the Chance to Choice curriculum. Thus the cycle continues.

Local coaches are the people who have insight into their community, understand local needs and problems and can determine and implement proposed solutions. CAC are therefore enabling, through the development of coaches with Self-Directed Learning skills, a sustainable approach by which communities are able to solve their present and future problems from a locally-relevant perspective.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND LEARNING: Sport for development is a young but wide-ranging field. Models and frameworks have not yet had the chance to be developed and tested on a global basis. Without effective adaptable models which have proven to be successful the field will not be able to sustain and become accepted as a true key development tool. This self-directed learning framework, used by CAC, can be applied to

communities globally and provide role models everywhere with the capacity to create sustainable social change locally. Five years of self-directed learning in practice has proven to have a positive impact on coaches and communities and led to the teaching of significant social issues to youth through the global communicator of football. Educational models such as these should be promoted and used to underline the transformational impact of sport.

References

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