

# MINI MERMAID RUNNING CLUB UK

(MMRCUK)

## IMPACT REPORT



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Further information:

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## 1) Executive Summary

**“Data from this research clearly demonstrated that MMRC UK is a transparent and responsive programme which produces a unique experience for girls.”**



Most girls lack the recommended levels of physical activity and also exhibit signs of low self-esteem and physical self confidence from as young as six. Mini Mermaid Running Club (MMRC), established in 2009 states that it:

**“...stands for self-worth, value and equity. We are changing the lives of girls and young women by shifting their internal experience and the way they interact with the world around them through innovative character-driven curriculum. MMRC participants train for a local 5km race through a structured program that meets bi-weekly for six weeks in small groups”.**

This initial pilot research on the programme aims to understand whether these goals are being met within a UK setting and to assess the impact that Mini Mermaid Running Club UK (MMRC UK) has on its participants' lives.

Qualitative research was carried out between January 2016 and July 2016. Data from this research clearly demonstrated that MMRC UK is a transparent and responsive programme which produces a unique experience for girls. There were a number of key findings from the research:

1. From a physical perspective, there was a marked difference observed in girls' physical endurance and physical self-efficacy. Crucially, MMRC UK gives girls a platform to be heard and from this, a core theme emerging from the research is the way the programme gives girls 'tools' to get to know themselves better.
2. There was also an apparent shift in girls' self-belief, particularly around the ability to understand goal-setting and what it meant to set a goal, work for it, and then achieve it.

3. One central factor in girls' lives is their unique attachment to one another. MMRC UK addresses the challenges girls face on a daily basis around peer relations, and teaches them how to negotiate and understand one another. This is perhaps one of the most valuable assets of MMRC UK - supplying girls with the tools they need to manage friendship politics.

**The conclusion of the research is that MMRC UK is a unique and valuable asset for schools with an effective curriculum.**

The research also looked at possible areas for improvement, and found that sustainability of the programme, parental involvement and scheduling are issues that will need to be addressed going forward.

The five key benefits that emerged for the girls as a result of engaging in the programme were:

- 1. Getting to know their inner self**
- 2. Developing resilience**
- 3. Managing peer relations**
- 4. Physical self-awareness**
- 5. A unique experience**

## 2) MMRC UK – introduction, background and development

**“In 2016/17... all six schools originally involved have committed to continuing the MMRC UK curriculum with different sets of girls.”**



This impact report details research conducted between January 2016 and July 2016. The purpose of this research was to reveal the impact that Mini Mermaid Running Club UK (MMRCUK) has on girls involved in the programme. The research covered the following elements:

- discussions with 30 girls who participated in MMRC UK
- discussions with three coaches
- discussions with teachers at schools involved in the programme
- participant observation in some sessions and observation of the girls' final 5km run

The data collected reveals key themes which demonstrate the positive influence and impact that MMRC UK has on the lives of its participants.

### **MMRC UK: Background and Development:**

MMRC UK was established in October 2015 and aims to increase physical activity in girls between seven and 11 years. It also seeks to enhance girls' confidence and self-belief. This is a twice-weekly after-school club lasting six weeks. It uses an

innovative blend of journal work (on a curriculum) alongside 30 minutes of physical activity. Each programme involves ten girls and utilises two coaches.

MMRC UK has so far successfully been implemented into around six schools in the Leeds area. In the 2016/17 academic year, all six schools originally involved have committed to continuing the MMRC UK curriculum with different sets of girls. MMRC UK will also work with girls who have already experienced the programme using *Curriculum 2* (the next level of programming).

MMRC UK also plans to work with five additional schools within the academic year 2016/17. The programme focuses on:

- **resilience**
- **goal-setting**
- **listening to your inner voice**
- **confidence building**

These key areas are embedded within both the journal work as well as the 30 minutes of physical activity that girls engage in twice-weekly. At the end of the six-week programme, participants take part in a 5km run. This is often incorporated into a 'parkrun' ([www.parkrun.org.uk](http://www.parkrun.org.uk)) but it can also be a stand-alone event within the school. An emphasis in this final challenge or step in the programme is about movement and 'moving with a purpose'. Girls are encouraged to skip, walk or run.

### 3) Physical inactivity, self-esteem and mental health – girls in contemporary society

**“...the gender divide continues to disadvantage girls especially – girls’ activity levels are distinctly lower than boys, and girls in areas of socio-economic deprivation even more so.”**



The role of physical activity in health is undisputed and, increasingly, evidence shows the strong link between inactivity alone and a number of fatal and chronic contemporary diseases (Booth et al, 2012). Inactivity has been shown to cause twice as many deaths as obesity (Ekelund et al, 2014).

Across Europe inactivity results in over 500,000 deaths per year which could have been prevented through being physically active. Annual costs to the National Health Service in the UK are estimated to be between £1 billion and £1.8 billion (Mackett and Brown, 2011).



If we include the association between inactivity and obesity then we would add between £6.6 billion and £7.4 billion each year – and this does not even include disability costs due to inactivity.

By just increasing walking and cycling alone we could, in 20 years, save roughly £17 billion (in 2010 prices) for the NHS in England and Wales (Jarret et al, 2012). It is therefore crucial for government and health services that the population becomes more active.

Adults are recommended to take part in around 30 minutes of physical activity on five days of the week, whilst children over the age of five should engage in 60 minutes of vigorous physical activity every day (Department of Health, 2011).

In reality, these guidelines are not being met. Statistics vary due to problems with measurement but a recent Health Survey for England (HSE) publication (2008) suggests that only 6% of men and 4% of women meet the Government's desired levels of weekly activity.

**The messages about increasing activity and the global campaigns are not impacting sufficiently on the general public.**

When we analyse the statistics concerning children's inactivity we see that the gender divide continues to disadvantage girls especially – girls' activity levels are distinctly lower than boys (Townsend et al, 2015) and girls in areas of socio-economic deprivation even more so.

**The recent 'Women in Sport' report (2015) noted that 1.9 million fewer women than men play sport every week.**

From a mental health perspective, the Department of Health recognises that, "...*physical activity has an important role to play in mental health and wellbeing*", and it is well-documented that participating in regular activity can help to offset anxiety and depression (Carron et al 2003).

But why is this particularly important for girls? A recent report (Jacobs Foundation, 2015) has noted that children from England are one of the least satisfied with their lives. Girls, in particular, aged between ten and 12 years of age struggle more with their bodies, looks and health than most other countries in the world.

Poor body image has been shown to have a significant causal effect on cases of depression and low self-esteem among girls (Office of National Statistics, 2015). Research by Dove (DSEF 2008) also suggests that one in four girls has low self-esteem, often relating to their appearance, even from an early age. Whilst self-esteem is a complex area within academic research, there is an overall

understanding that low self-esteem is specifically associated with negative outcomes (Rosenberg and Owen 2001).

**Ultimately, the key question is: *how can we effectively increase participation in girls' physical activity and how can we integrate physical activity within a programme that enhances the mental health and wellbeing of girls?***

Increased physical activity is an obvious part of the MMRC UK programme, but the integral part of the programme is based around helping girls to find an authentic voice, and to negotiate the contemporary world through increased self-confidence and self-belief.

**MMRC UK provides an innovative programme which has the potential to address the key issue - helping girls incorporate physical activity as an enjoyable part of their daily lives whilst enhancing their self-belief and self-confidence.**

#### 4) The research process and methodology

**“...Observational data was collected across all school sites as well as during the final 5km run or movement.”**



**Data collection: Focus groups**

A total of nine focus groups were carried out between January 2016 and July 2016 in three different schools. The schools were situated in varied socio-demographic areas. One school was in an area of high socio-economic deprivation, one school in a more affluent area and the third school economically mixed and multi-cultural.

Focus groups were conducted pre, mid and post-programme. Therefore, the girls were interviewed before they started the programme, around the fourth week of the programme and then after they had finished the programme and completed their 5km run or movement.

Three informal interviews were also carried out with three coaches working within these school settings. Observational data was collected across all school sites as well as during the final 5km run or movement. Teachers based at the schools running the programme also communicated thoughts about the programme to the researcher on an informal basis.

### **The process**

1. The researcher first used data immersion by reading and re-reading all transcripts from the focus groups, interviews and informal conversations.
2. Comments and notes were made on transcripts as exploratory coding or initial descriptions.
3. From these exploratory words all transcripts were re-read and phrases or early themes began to emerge.
4. These early themes were then reviewed.
5. A thematic map was ultimately developed and higher order themes established with corresponding sub categories and quotes enabling the reader to understand the categories and themes in greater depth.

## 5) Analysis and findings

“...Using qualitative data, a thematic analysis was established, allowing the rich detail of the data to be retained while organising and interpreting what had been said.”



All conversations were transcribed in full and a content analysis carried out (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Using qualitative data, a thematic analysis was established, allowing the rich detail of the data to be retained while organising and interpreting what had been said.

The following five tables represent key themes which emerged from the data. These represent the most prominent areas that emerged as a result of the girls engaging with MMRC UK.

The five themes shown directly below (higher order themes) have sub-categories beneath them (lower order themes) which unpack and explain the themes in more detail. Listed underneath the themes and sub-categories are direct quotes from girls or coaches to illustrate and justify the sub-categories and themes.

## 1. Getting to know their inner-self

Understanding and ignoring their inner critic/Feeling confident and proud of who they are/A space for being heard

## 2. Developing resilience

Goal-setting/Preventing 'fear of failure'/Increased assertion

## 3. Managing peer relations

Negotiating conflict/Embracing difference/Being a better friend/Unpacking popularity

## 4. Physical self-awareness

Increased confidence in physical abilities/Understanding their physical capabilities/Understanding what it means to be physically active

## 5. Disrupting 'normal'

Competing and completing an event/Creating memories/Encouraging/Unique

Table 1: Getting to know their inner-self

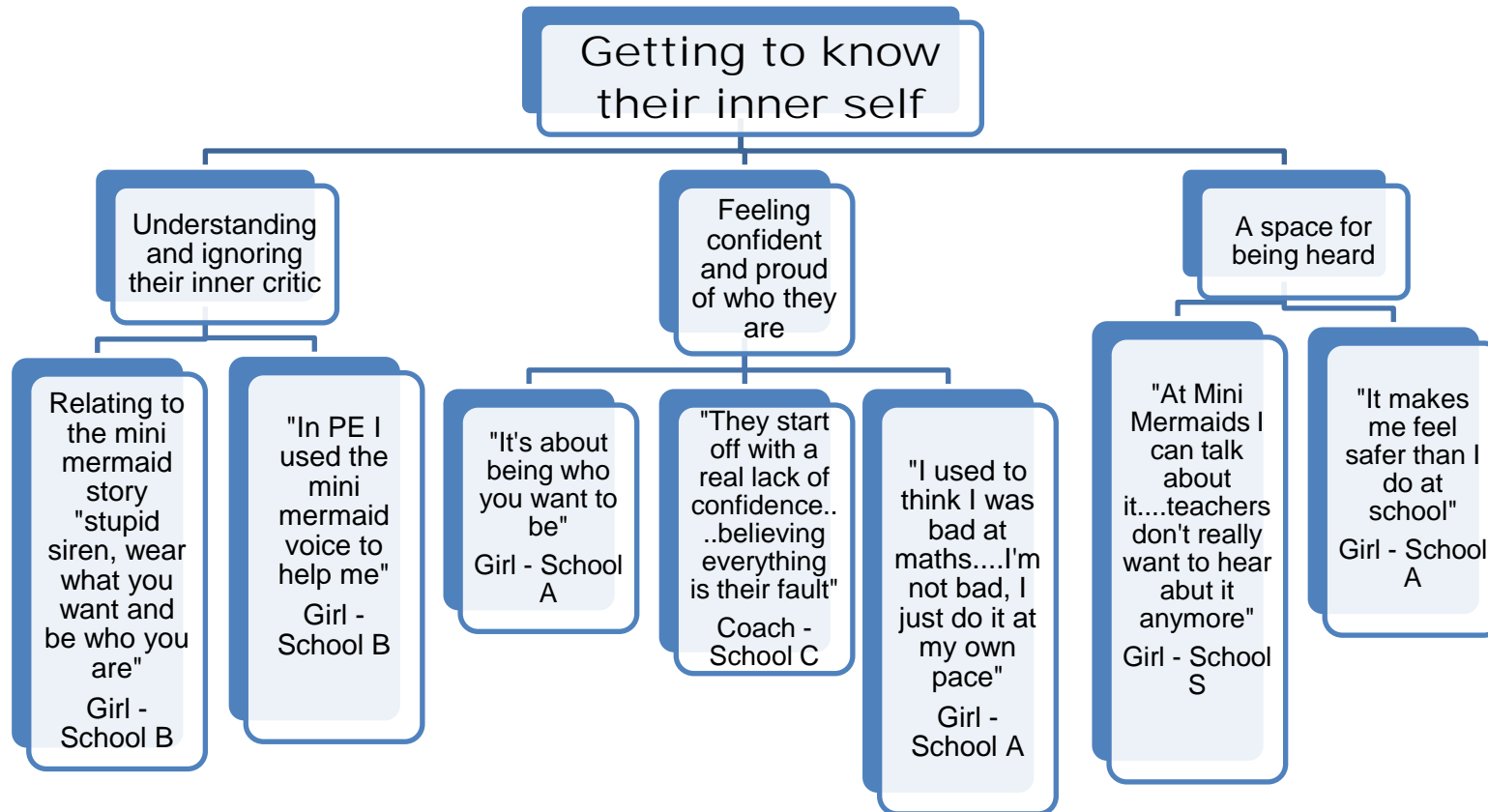


Table 2: Developing Resilience

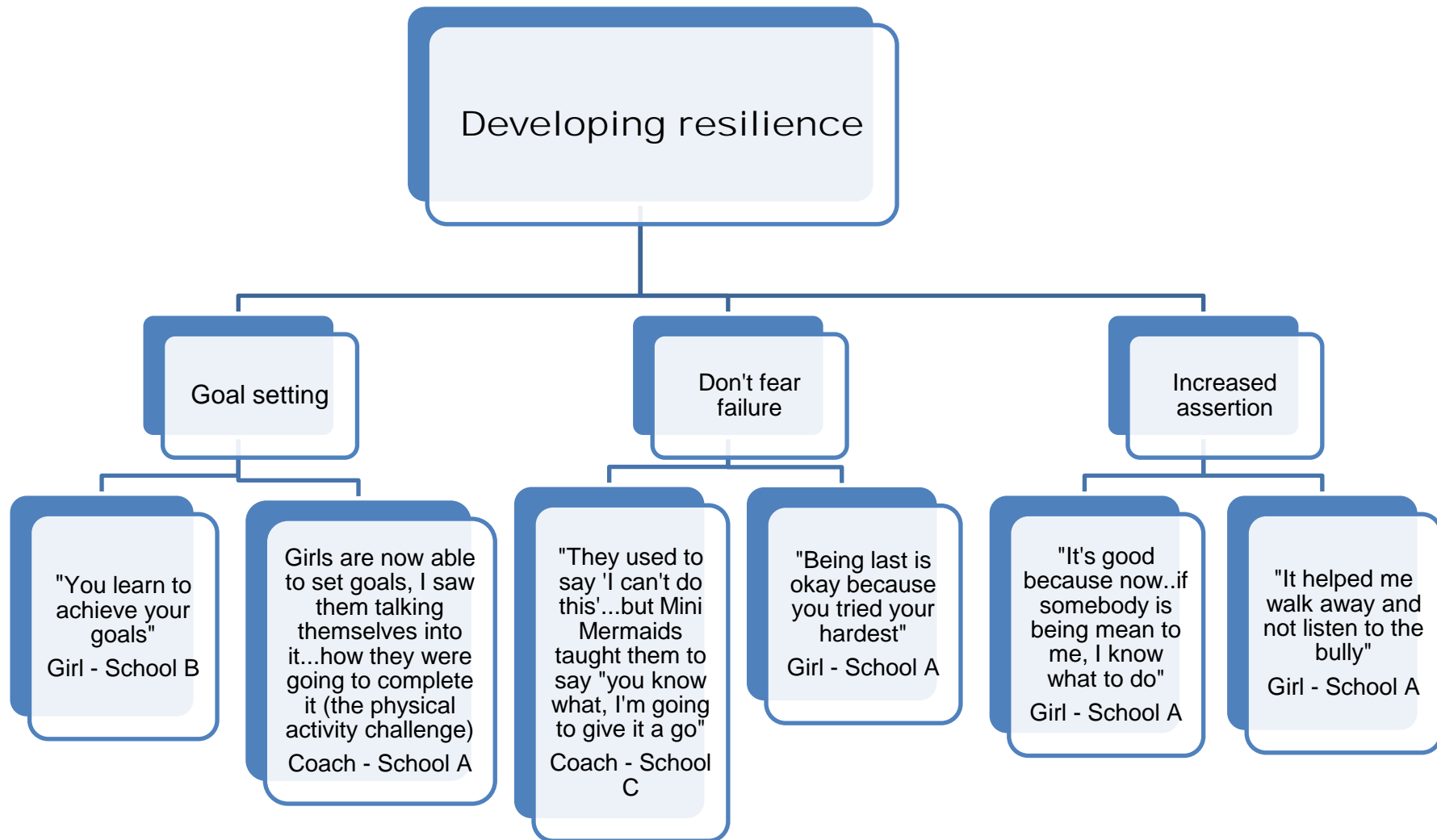


Table 3: Managing peer relations

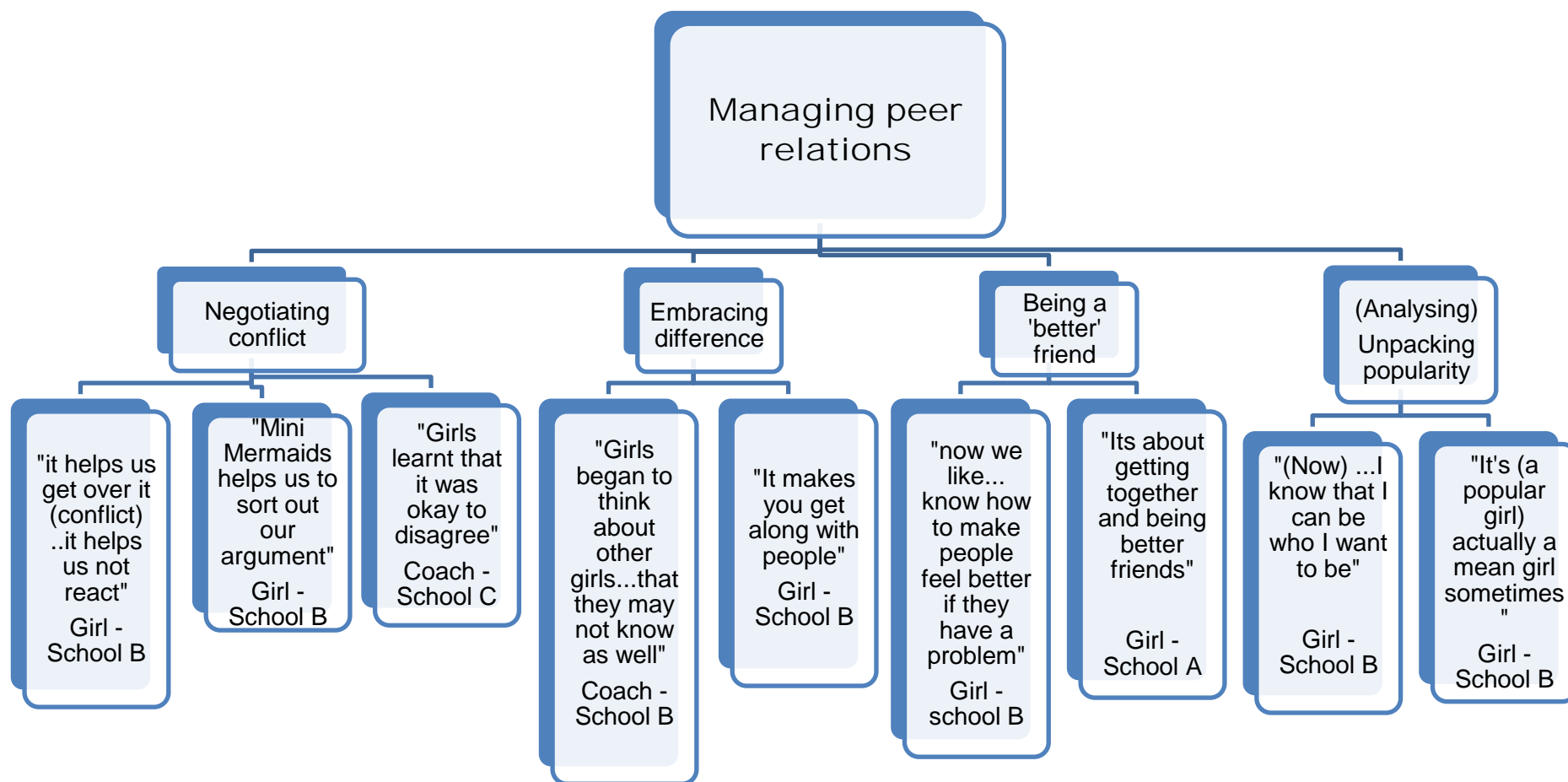




Table 4: Enhancing their physical self/increasing physical self –awareness

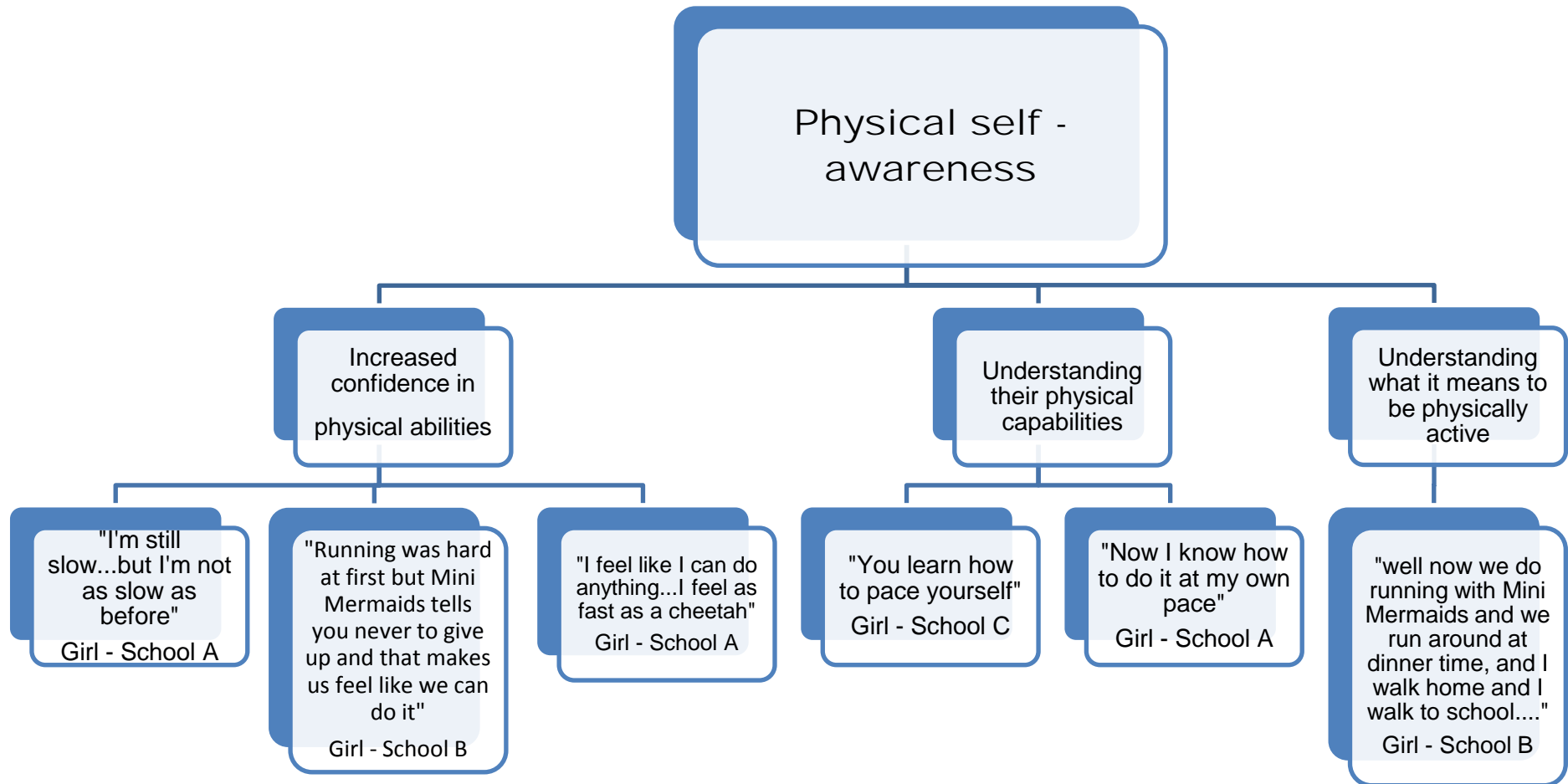
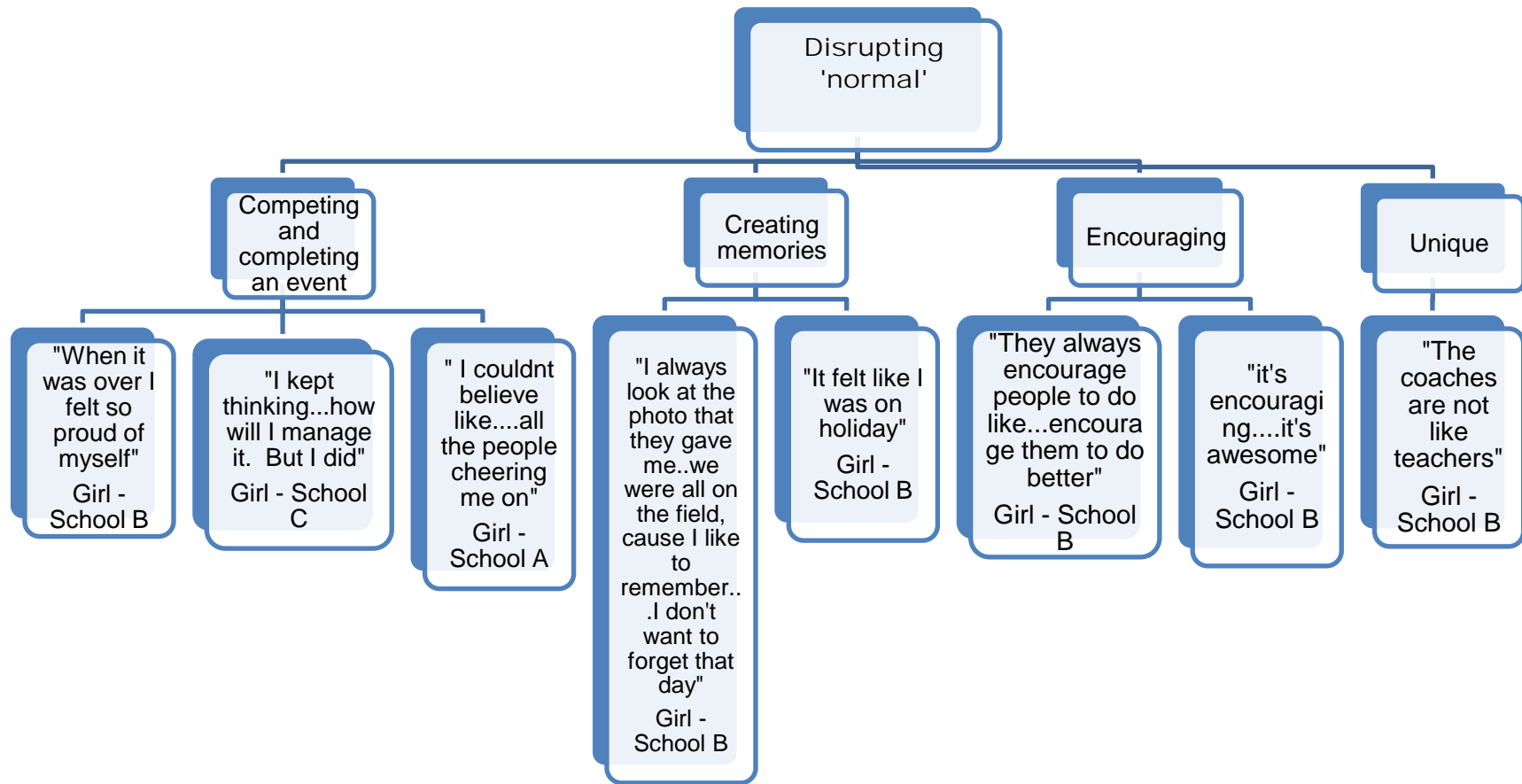


Table 5: Disrupting normal



## 6) Discussion

“...As girls progressed through the programme they noted that, ‘...we need to follow the positive, not the negative’. They were aware that the programme itself, through the curriculum was helping them to do this.”



### **Theme 1 - Getting to know their inner self**

The pluralisation of society has offered adolescents and children a myriad of choices and challenges. With the search for identity in our current society no longer upheld by a strong religious or familial identity, young people have become the “producers of their own biographies” (Brettschneider and Heim 1998).

For many adolescents today the body and consumerism appear to be strongholds upon which society invests energy and builds identity (Brettshneider and Heim, 1998, Brumberg, 1997). For pre-teen girls this is not only inappropriate but also unhealthy. MMRC UK appears to offer girls an opportunity to think about themselves as agents for change, as individuals who can do things differently, or do things that are right for them.

#### **Sub-theme: Understanding and ignoring their inner critic**

Early on in the discussions, participants inferred that they knew they should be true to themselves, to dance to their own tune - yet they found this virtually impossible to do.

Girls frequently talked in the initial focus groups about consumerism and the fat/thin dichotomy. They discussed, at length, ‘iPhones’, things they have and where they would go on holiday (arguably ‘adult’ topics for girls aged 7-9 years).

Following the programme, whilst conformity and peer-aligned identity still featured heavily in their life experience, they were able to shift the balance significantly. Girls became able to consider doing things that were right for them, rather than following others. As girls progressed through the programme they noted that, “...we need to

follow the positive, not the negative” (Girl – School B). They were aware that the programme itself, through the curriculum was helping them to do this.

**“It’s about being who you want to be.”** (Girl – school A).

**“It teach(es) us who we are.”** (Girls – School A)

**“Siren might say, ‘you’re ugly and stuff....and you can never do the 5km because you’re too lazy’, but you listen to Mini Mermaid and then that says you can do it.”** (Girl – School B)

In one of the final focus groups it was apparent that the Mini Mermaid programme was responsible for introducing girls to the idea that they need to be true to themselves, and that girls could now articulate how and why this could emerge.

**“It’s about...it doesn’t matter how big you are, how tall you are, how small you are, but you’re...people shouldn’t ask you...you’ve got to get taller, you’ve got to die your hair brown to fit into our group....it shouldn’t be like that”.**  
(Girl – School A)

#### **Sub-theme: Feeling confident and proud of who they are**

Initially, girls were inclined to use very negative descriptors of themselves. Words such as ‘mean’, ‘spiteful’ and ‘bossy’ were used in some of the pre-programme focus groups. “Never to wear good stuff...like belly tops...just give it to the models”, was how one girl spoke about how she would select her attire (in the initial focus group).

However, there was a sense that girls began to become cognitively aware of how to think differently about themselves, even if it was difficult for them to put into practice at first.

In the final focus group one girl (School A) said: “I learnt that I shouldn’t be like trying to be a hero...(I should )...be yourself”. In the mid programme and final focus groups, girls began to articulate more positively about themselves. They talked, for example, about what they were most proud of (this had been a specific exercise they had completed as part of the programme) and about feeling better about themselves.

“First (my confidence) was zero....and now its 20. Mine was like five and now it’s like 100” (Girls – School A). Whilst girls did not suddenly start describing themselves in a completely different way to the early negative descriptors, they started to talk about ‘being yourself’ and not having to be a ‘super-hero’.

Importantly, the MMRC UK programme appears to enhance girls’ ability to believe and recognise their own strengths as opposed to comparison with others.

**“It (MMRC UK) is teaching us self-confidence...to believe in ourselves.”**  
(Girl – School A)

**“I used to think I was bad at maths...I’m not bad, I just do it at my own pace.”**

(Girl – School A)

### **Sub-theme: A space for being heard:**

**“We give girls a platform to speak...it’s a bit like opening a can of worms!”**

(Coach – School A)

Girls appreciate the female-only space with supportive female coaches as an opportunity to talk. “It makes me feel safer than I do at school” (Girl – School A). “I can talk about it (at Mini Mermaids)...teachers don’t really want to hear about it anymore”.

Both within the curriculum and within the physical activities and games girls are encouraged to speak without fear of being judged. “Girls just felt able to talk about things more” (Coach – School C).

“At school you want to act like pretty but then in Mini Mermaids you can say...just like be free to say anything” (Girl – School A). This space for talk alongside the curriculum work enables girls to reflect on things that crop up around the programme itself, as well as question, for example, the way they think about things, including themselves (see above).

As an outcome girls seemed to consider how they see the world in relation to many of the important themes and sub-categories listed in these data findings.

The ability to feel ‘free’ during Mini Mermaids also contributed to girls feeling ‘safe’.

**“It makes me feel safer than I do at school.”** (Girl – School A)

### **Theme 2 - Developing resilience**

Classified as ‘resilience’ - the ability to cope with stress and adversity has been a central part of developmental psychology since the 1980s. It is well documented that certain children are more resilient than others. In an increasingly chaotic and pressured society resilience is a crucial life skill for children, particularly girls, in order to navigate social media and cultural influences.

With research by the World Health Organisation illustrating the rise in depression and mental health disorders (WHO 2016) it is critical that schools and programmes working with children enhance their ability to cope with pressure and their problem-solving capacity. MMRC UK journal work incorporates tasks which address these skills.

### **Sub-theme - Goal setting**

“I felt really nervous because my legs were getting tired and I thought I was just going to give up but then I was saying in my mind...I was listening to the Mini Mermaid voice because like...even though I hear siren I just want to listen to Mini Mermaid...so I carried on running” (Girl – School B).

The Siren versus Mini Mermaid story is one that clearly resonates very strongly with the girls. This story, used as a focal point within the Mini Mermaid curriculum illustrates the character driven curriculum of MMRC which is borne out of research around self-development and character association.

(<http://www.learningandthebrain.com/blog/fictional-characters>)

The characters emerge within several key themes of the curriculum. As well as Theme 1 (getting to know themselves better) it also emerges in the theme of building resilience. Girls comprehend the story and can relate to it, making it a very successful feature of the programme. Coaches use the story to help girls understand and then ignore the inner critic that exists within all of us.

### **Sub-theme - Don't fear failure**

Girls show a shift in their attitude towards trying difficult things. They express a growth in how they perceive failure.

**“Being last is okay...because you tried your hardest.”** (Girl – School A – final focus group)

**“You learn to never give up.”** (Girl – School B)

Girls are able to express anxiety around the challenge (for example of the 5k) but still commit to trying to do it.

### **Sub-theme - Increased assertion**

Girls expressed that as a result of the programme, “you learn how to stand up for yourself” (Girl – School A). “It helped me to walk away and not listen to the bully” (Girl – School A).

**“Now...if somebody is being mean to me I know what to do.”** (Girl – School A)

Girls suggests that the journal work has in some way supplied them with tools to manage challenging situations and episodes of ‘bullying’.

## **Theme 3 - Managing peer relations**

**“If I fall out with my friends I get depressed.”** (Girl – School B)

**“With friendship you can do anything.”** (Girls School A)

The impact that friendship groups have on the lives of girls has been well documented. This often taken for granted cultural phenomenon (Hey 1997) is one of the few areas of social development that is lacking in established and systematic research.

Finders (1997) suggests that choices for girls are not free but constrained by the power structures of their peer group. The chasm between friendship groups exists so that girls are able to construct their own identity. They ‘other’ different sets of girls to create the ideal position for themselves (Hey, 1997, Manson, 2004).

Ultimately children come to learn about themselves and who they are through their peers; their aim is to succeed within their peer group (Harris, 1998). She highlights the way children are differentiated within each peer group.

The relationship between girls is addressed by MMRC UK curriculum. MMRC is one of only a few global programmes that unpacks friendship and relationships between girls. As such, this provides girls with a successful tool to manage change and difference as they go through their daily lives.

### **Sub-theme - Negotiating conflict**

**“If you have an argument....it helped us get over it...it helped us not react.”**  
(Girls – School B)

Girls described how the MMRC UK journey makes you get along with people. “Now we don’t fall out” (Girl – School B). One coach described how the Mini Mermaids curriculum helped girls to understand disagreement, to respect that it was okay to disagree.

### **Sub-theme - Embracing difference**

One coach described how she felt girls learnt to embrace one another’s differences, how they were learning to accept others. She noted that girls were beginning to think about the other girls that they might not know as well.

One girl stated: “It makes you get along with people” (School B), suggesting the understanding that the journal work is based around managing conflict and respecting difference. Girls spoke about being a good friend, “even if you are different” (Girl – School A). Girls were encouraged in one session to ‘say nice things about one another’ which they recounted in the focus group.

### **Sub-theme - Being a better friend**

“Now we don’t fall out so much”, one girl told me (School B). There is no meanness...(at MMRC UK)..or anything like that”. (Girl – school A).

Mini Mermaids helps us too “sort out arguments” (Girl – School B). “I’ve got better like...I was like – used to be awful moody but when I started Mini Mermaids I like... have become a better person” (Girl – School A).

**“At Mini Mermaids we learn how to “make people feel better if they have a problem.”** (Girl – School A)

Girls learn to express themselves in ways that will be received more positively. The journal work that girls do seems to help them to understand the consequences of being moody or mean. It is not the case that they will not have these emotions, but the girls seem to appreciate that expressing these will have an impact on others.

### **Sub-theme - Analysing (unpacking) popularity**

*What* is popular and *who* is popular featured as a key discussion point with all girls during focus groups and observation. Early discussions involved girls listing names of who was popular and physical and personality descriptors, regarding what a popular person ‘was’.

The (almost) political landscape of popularity and hierarchy that was illustrated animatedly through conversation was a priority topic for all girls. However, in the final focus groups, following the programme, there was a shift as girls began to unpack and critique what popularity was. It appeared that features of MMRC UK - for example the focus and curriculum work around being a good friend and recognising and appreciating their inner voice - allowed girls to challenge their pre-conceived views and beliefs around being ‘popular’.

Initial conversations involved girls describing to me what popularity was “...it’s about like something where like all the boys like you and like you’re really pretty...and you know everybody everywhere” (Girls – School B).

As the girls went through the MMRC UK programme some of their narratives changed. “Like nobody should be treated differently from anybody else.”

**“I have learnt that I shouldn’t be trying to be like...a hero. It’s about...about you...act like you normally do.”** (Girl – School B)

### **Theme 4 - Enhancing their physical self/increasing physical self-awareness**

Research has shown how girls struggle to discuss physical activity. That they show an indifference and apathy towards physical activity which means they are unable to cognitively relate to it (Manson, 2004, Oliver and Lalik, 2001). How can we bring physical activity into the discourse, into the sphere of the contemporary and relevant for girls today? How can physical activity occupy the same conversational position as celebrity, friendships and television?



Until this starts to be addressed the gender gap in activity levels will remain. MMRC UK goes some way to addressing this by encouraging girls to consider what being physically active means and encouraging them to relate to how they feel when they are being active.

### **Sub-theme - Increased confidence in physical abilities**

**“I thought to myself I’m going to do it and then when it was all over I felt better....and I felt really proud because I’d done it”** (Girl – School B).

**“Their fitness increased from nothing...like literally unable to stand on one leg and red faced walking...to jogging 5 laps of the playground”** (Coach – School C).

**“Girls learnt that physical activity is not just about their body...but about their mind”** (Coach – School C).

### **Sub-theme - Understanding their physical capabilities**

“Not racing but just going at my own pace”, is how one girl (School A) described her approach to the final 5k run. The growth in knowledge around pacing and how to approach physical movement is demonstrated as girls talk about how they will approach their final run “you learn to pace yourself” (Girl – School C).

### **Sub-theme - Understanding what it means to be physically active**

Girls spoke with more cognition about what being physically active meant. Early focus groups saw girls talk about a ‘running club’ but the final focus groups revealed girls speaking with more understanding of the process and benefits of ‘moving’.

**“We are running around at Mini Mermaids, and then at dinner time...then I walk home and back to school to school and back.”** (Girl – School A)

**“I do a lot of movement...”** (Girl – School A)

## **Theme 5 - Disrupting ‘normal’**

The final theme reflects the passionate way in which girls spoke about their experience with MMRC UK, in general. In an evocative way they described something which was not normal, which was adjunct to their normal lives.

This created a special experience which will have helped to encourage some shifts in behaviour and attitude. For most girls on the programme travelling to a park to compete in a running event formed a significant moment in their life. Girls on the programme who were not traditionally exposed to ‘different’ settings or experiences

found the programme memorable and meaningful because of the unique experiences it created.

### **Sub-theme - Competing and completing an event**

Girls were all surprised and proud on finishing the 5k race. The experience of running in a race (in some cases with other adults) created anxiety, excitement and pride.

**“I thought to myself...I’m going to do it, and then when it was all over and I felt better...I felt really proud of myself because I’d done it.”** (Girl – School C)

Girls on the day itself spoke about how nervous they were: “I felt scared. I hid”, but then during the race and on completion were exposed to a new level of emotions: “When it was over, I felt so proud of myself” (Girl – School B). “I couldn’t believe like...all the people there cheering me on” (Girl – School B).

### **Sub-theme - Creating memories**

**“It felt like I was on holiday.”** (Girl – School A)

This quote speaks volumes about how different the girl found the day of the race, in comparison to her normal life.

One girl spoke poignantly about how she kept looking at a photo from her time at MMRC UK: “I always look at the photo that they gave me...when we were all on the field ‘cause I like to remember, I don’t want to forget that day” (Girl – School B).

Girls speak with vivid recollection of the day itself. They talk about the people cheering for them, how difficult they found it, how proud they felt when they finished. Girls talked about the different stages of the race in detail.

Observation from the parkrun itself revealed how parents were not aware that this event existed. Using parkrun as the final goal in the programme also acts in some way as a sustainable pathway. Girls and parents are exposed to a nearby weekly running event that the whole family can take part in.

### **Sub-theme - Encouraging**

Girls appeared surprised by the level of encouragement they received from the coaches and their running partners on the day of the 5km. This level of encouragement and belief in the girls helped to raise their own expectations.

**“They always encourage people to do like...encourage them to do better”** (Girl – School B).

**“The coaches are not like teachers!”** One girl exclaimed (School B).

This suggests that the use of staff not from the school is a motivating and appealing factor for girls. Perhaps because pre-conceived identities of pupils and relationships with teachers are non-existent in the MMRC UK programme setting. This may be why girls feel “safer” than at school.

### **Sub-theme - Unique**

“On a Tuesday morning I say...oh yeah, it’s Mini Mermaids and that makes me feel good” (Girl – School B). “Coming to Mini Mermaids...is my proudest moment” (Girl-School B).

Mini Mermaids presents a supportive and exciting opportunity to work with other girls twice a week. This, in itself, is a unique experience for girls that helps to cement the learning and discovery that takes places on a bi-weekly basis.

**“It’s keeping me healthy...I probably feel more happy.”** (Girl – School A)

Girls expressed their enjoyment of an all-female environment: “Boys are always pushing and always faster...boys can hit” (Girl – School C). “The boys just shout out...they’re very noisy” (Girl – School B).

## 7) Conclusion, limitations and future recommendations

“...There are no bad things about it (MMRC UK)...the only bad thing is that it is going to stop.” (Girl – School A)



### Conclusion

Fundamentally the programme has been shown to evoke the following areas of behaviour change and experience:

- **Getting to know themselves better**
- **Developing resilience**
- **Managing Peer Relations**
- **Increasing physical self-awareness/enhancing their physical self**
- **A unique experience**

This qualitative research report reveals the way that Mini Mermaid Running Club UK creates a unique and supportive space for girls to learn skills to navigate contemporary culture.

In addition, girls increase their physical fitness and their perception of physical activity. MMRC UK is recommended for use by primary schools as a programme which will enhance the health of girls, increase their resilience and produce a supportive environment to manage relationships.

Further research should focus on a clearer analysis of the interplay between engaging in the MMRC UK programme and self-esteem, physical self-concept and resilience. Longitudinal data considering girls at three, six and nine months after completing the programme would also help to understand the impact of the programme going forward.

### **Limitations to the programme and future recommendations**

Four key limitations to the MMRC UK programme were identified during the course of the research:

1. Sustainability
2. Exclusivity
3. Scheduling
4. Parental involvement

#### **1.Sustainability**

All participants expressed sadness that the programme was finishing. They voiced a sense of loss and that they had formed a 'team' that would no longer be coming together. How can schools and MMRC UK form a sustainable pathway for girls to:

- a) continue to develop the friendship group that has been formed; and
- b) continue to pursue the increased levels of physical activity that the girls have benefitted from.

"I don't want it to stop" and, "I feel sad that it is ending," were quotes voiced several times by different girls throughout the post programme focus groups.

Arguably six weeks is a very short period of time to embed new ideas and thought processes. The programme could also work effectively if the curriculum was worked through more slowly and the whole programme spanned a period of ten or 12 weeks rather than six.

Coaches expressed a feeling of 'rushing' through the journal work. Extending the programme duration slightly would enable more time to be spent on the journals.

The use of parkrun as a final goal is appropriate and enhances sustainability. Links could be strengthened to encourage girls to continue to participate in either parkrun or a nearby running club following the programme. It is recommended that future research considers whether there should be continued use of parkrun by the girls and their families and if not then why not?

Longitudinal research could also explore how girls felt three or six months after the programme and whether the physical and behavioural changes that emerged after the programme, were sustained.

*NB. From September 2016 the registration for the parkrun event is going to change. The families will now register their child (rather than the lead coach) therefore giving them a sense of ownership and introducing them to parkrun before the girls do their event. They then receive the newsletters and data on a weekly basis which will engage the whole family.*

## **2. Exclusivity**

**“My sister, when I first started with it was a bit jealous of me....so now with her friends they have started 30 laps around the playground.”**

(Girl – School C).

Whilst this quote could be considered inspirational we also need to be sensitive to the fact that other girls (in the school) will feel excluded from the programme. How can this be resolved? One answer could be to deliver the programme to a whole class of girls during a PSHE (Personal and Social Health Education) spell out acronym) class (with additional coaches to maintain small group work). This would also solve the problem of girls concern over missing lessons as well as the difficulty faced with MMRC UK as an after school club (due to conflicting after school clubs and other after school commitments).

## **3. Scheduling**

As noted above both coaches and girls expressed concern across various elements of programmes. Scheduling MMRC UK is problematic. ‘After school’ means that it competes with a number of other clubs that girls may already attend or may conflict with the collecting of siblings.

‘In school time’ means girls express concern that they will miss lessons. Running the programme in school time also creates greater disparity between girls who are and aren’t taking part, causing an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality. One solution going forward may be to trial MMRC UK with a whole class (of girls) during PSHE sessions with a number of coaches working in small groups with different girls. The Young Tritons (male) programme could also be rolled out at the same time?

## **4. Parental Involvement**

**Involving parents and carers more effectively should be a priority for MMRC UK.** Research discussions have shown that coaches, girls and the schools themselves talk about the role of the parents. Sustainability and greater impact can only be achieved working more holistically with the families.

Ideally a scoping exercise could be done with a sample of parents to find out limits and expectations. Then parents and carers could be incorporated prior to, throughout and after the six-week programme has ended.



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And finally...

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Dr Nicola Eccles, 2016