EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH IN A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WITH INTEGRATED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN COSTA RICA

by

Gemma J. Barreda, BSM

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Applied Health Sciences

Supervisor: Dr. Lisa Kikulis

Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Gemma Barreda © 2006
Exploring the Experiences of Youth in a Development Program with Integrated Physical Activity in Costa Rica

Abstract

National governments, the United Nations, and other organizations have deemed sport and other means of physical activity such as recreation, games and play for development a useful means for addressing a wide range of problems in communities and more specifically, providing youth with an opportunity to experience the benefits of physical activity. There is a need for research that furthers our understanding of how participants experience these programs. Specifically, the purpose of this study, was to better understand the lived experiences of the participants in a YMCA camp program that integrated physical activity and play for the specific development of poor youth street workers. A phenomenological approach informed by a critical perspective (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) was used. The study took place through the Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes de Costa Rica (ACJ) in Central America. The focus was on a camp program and the lived experiences of six purposefully chosen, youth street workers between the ages of 13-17. Their experiences were explored through semi-structured interviews. Other data that form the study include: field notes, observations, a reflexive journal and document analysis. The findings that emerged from the data include main themes of relationships, poverty, personal change and empowerment. For many youth, the ACJ is a relatively safe place to play, to “detach,” their minds, to “distract” and “disorient” themselves from their dysfunctional families, violent neighbourhood, the poverty they live in, and from the necessity of having to work in the street to supplement the family income. Although many studies have shown that programs that include physical activity, play and/or sport have a positive impact on youth with regard to
healthy development and improvements in well-being, there has been little work done to address the voices and experiences of the youth that participate in these programs. Using an interpretive-critical approach, this study focused on the participants' personal backgrounds, their experiences within the program and their critical reflections on the program. This study draws from a phenomenological philosophy and method to report findings from participants in an ACJ program in Costa Rica. This research shows how these youth were given the opportunity to use the program and the ACJ property as a relatively safe place to play, to behave like the youth they are, to establish and maintain their friendship networks, and develop empathy and conflict resolution skills. The findings from this study reveal how by participating in the ACJ program they each described a personal change, wherein they felt empowered to learn they could positively control themselves and as a result positively affect their own futures. These findings contribute knowledge surrounding the lived experiences of youth in developmental programs that use physical activity.
Acknowledgements

I was inspired to begin this work by the following verses to, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31: 8, 9). The following work is a reflection of my personal mission to “speak up” and “defend” those who have as much right to a dignified life as everyone else.

First, I acknowledge God Almighty to whom I believe all knowledge belongs. Second, I thank my dad and mom, my sister Lindsey, my brother John and my brother-in-law David because this work is as much theirs as it is mine after all the tireless support and encouragement they have given me. It has been a challenging journey that I could not have made on my own. I share this achievement with them. Next, I thank Cindy Rau for embodying the meaning of a true friend from the beginning of this endeavour and from even earlier on. I thank her for always saying the right thing, for her constant support and for not letting me give up.

I thank Dr. Lisa Kikulis for truly understanding how I work best, for trusting me to trust myself and for supporting all my research decisions, no matter how far I took her out of her comfort zone. This thesis project bears Lisa's trademark excellence and I am grateful for her experienced guidance. I owe Lisa a special debt of gratitude for her dedication despite a difficult year. I thank Dr. Craig Hyatt and Dr. Jan Ritchie for supporting me along the way on my thesis journey and for their invaluable advising. I thank Charlene MacLelland, Beverly Minor and Colleen Catling for their unending kindness, patience and helpful personal touch no matter how busy they are. I appreciate you so much.

To my mentors in life and academia: Dr. Andy Anderson, Dr. John Corlett and Dr. James Mandigo. Thank you all for welcoming me as part of CHDSPA and for engaging me as a contributor in all things Centre-related. Thank you for allowing me to engage in dialogue with you all at different times, providing me with valuable insights that I have applied and expanded upon in my study, increasing its significance greatly.

A su Excelencia Ana Vilma de Escobar, Vice Presidenta de El Salvador, aunque no sepa, por haberme de nuevo encendida la motivación para superar lo desagradable. Un agradecimiento de corazón para toda mi familia Tica: Doña Delia, Delia, Pablo, David, Keneth, Jennifer, Melissa, Antony, Jonathan, Sheyris y todos los demás. Sin ustedes yo no hubiera podido hacer este estudio ni entender lo que es verdaderamente la amistad y la esperanza a pesar de la cultura y el idioma. Que Dios les bendiga a todos.

I want to also thank Dr. Cheri Bradish, because without her influence and guidance, perhaps I would not have even begun this degree. Thanks to all the other wonderful SPMA professors who are like friends to me and for all their help in my academic journey.

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Andy Anderson, who has demonstrated that he is a true ambassador in body, mind and spirit for physical activity and healthy development. He is an inspiration to all who share his passion for health and education.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research Process</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Introduction for Interview Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Interview Guide 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Interview Guide 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Interview Guide 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Sample Analysis Chart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Definition of Unsatisfied Basic Necessities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Sport, play, recreation, and physical activity in general are recognized internationally in both developed and developing countries as indispensable tools for well-balanced human development. With regard to developing countries, the United Nations has deemed sport for development as an effective tool in achieving global poverty and development goals (Common Ground: Sport as an Innovative Tool for Development and Peace, Sport Recreation and Play, The United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2004). Non-governmental international organizations such as Right To Play also assert the significance of the developmental role that physical activity fulfills. Their mandate includes strengthening the right of children to play which enhances their healthy physical and psychosocial development and builds stronger communities (Right To Play, Media Centre, 2005).

The importance of physical activity and its developmental role in the lives of youth living in countries dominated by poverty and conflict was emphasized by Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations at the Olympic Aid Roundtable Forum, Salt Lake City Olympic Games 2002. He stated that “Sport can play a role in improving the lives of individuals, not only individuals, I might add, but whole communities ... sport can be included more systematically in the plans to help children, particularly those living in the midst of poverty, disease and conflict” (United Nations: Sport, Development and Peace, Homepage, 2002). These international institutional commitments from the United Nations and Right To Play, clearly support the thought process surrounding the role of
sport, and that sport is not simply an end in itself, but a means to an end. Sport can be a means to help eradicate poverty and to achieve peace and global development goals.

Physical activity and sport have been recognized as a tool for individual and community development in various capacities and they are used in different forms by many groups as effective ways to achieve global development goals (Lawson, 2005).

Whilst we have seen a growth in international interest in sport for development through various initiatives, what we lack is an understanding of how these programs that integrate physical activity and/or sport actually serve the needs of youth participants and, consequently, their communities. The following researchers have responded to this lack of understanding by stating that physical activity serves to improve individual and societal conditions for youth in many positive ways. Kidd and Donnelly (2000) found with regard to children's rights in sport that clear, succinct statements of rights, effectively communicated, can contribute significantly to raising the awareness of community responsibilities and obligations. As an example of how physical activity and sport serve to improve individual and societal conditions, Calloway (2004, p.36) states:

Youth sport serves many functions. It can develop character among its participants; it can build stronger, healthier nations and it can be a solace in times of war and peace ... youth sport can be any activity in which participants engage in either a structured or unstructured environment, guided by a process of voluntary participation that requires a level of skill that contributes to improved general health and well-being for both the individual and society.

In addition, Branta and Goodway (1996) reported that in a physical education setting a wide variety of skills may be developed such as motor skills and organizational skills. Even more importantly, children are introduced to ideas of personal space, control of
force and violence, and respect for others.

Further examples of studies with similar approaches include Boshoff (1997), Burnett (2001), and Frisby, Crawford and Dorer (1997), all of whom have emphasized the need for physical activity for development programs and have explored the need, development, and impact of these programs. However, Studies such as these indicate what researchers have found on behalf of the participants instead of what participants themselves have described, with the exception of Frisby et al’s participatory action research approach, the voice of the participants is minimal in this research. Frisby et al’s approach is clearly aimed at changing the status quo and empowering women who have been marginalized from participation in sport and leisure by having them actively engaged in the research process. It is this interest in integrated physical activity in development, the desire for giving voice to participants, and the aim of critically examining the status quo that underpins this study.

The strong international foundation established for sport for development programs would be strengthened with an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants in these programs. The voices of the participants are important not to merely hear but to increase understanding about the phenomenon of the integral nature of sport, play and physical activity as a means of development. Understanding the experiences that participant’s voice about the phenomenon of an integrated physical activity for development program enables one to critique society with regard to this phenomenon, raise consciousness about it and change the balance of power in favour of those less powerful (Patton, 2002). There is a need for research that furthers our understanding of
how participants experience these programs. Article 6 in the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s International Charter of Physical Education and Sport states that “research and evaluation are indispensable components of the development of physical education and sport” (1978). From the United Nations’ lofty political goals to the actual poverty-stricken program participant in a developing country, is the influence of the program providing the intended help? In developing countries such as Costa Rica, children, youth and families living in poverty are lacking in social, economic and educational development and although we cannot expect these programs to be a panacea for all of those problematic areas, nevertheless, these programs have great bearing on the lives of participants. Therefore the focus of this research is to critically explore the participants’ lived experiences of the program.

The Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of the participants in a YMCA camp program that integrated physical activity and play for the development of youth street workers and how their social context framed these experiences in Costa Rica. An interpretive-critical approach informed by a phenomenological philosophy and method was used to address the two main guiding research questions:

1. What are the participants’ descriptions of their experiences of being in the program that integrated physical activity as part of well balanced development?

2. How did the program influence the lives of the participants in the program that integrated physical activity as part of well balanced development?

The research for this thesis is presented in the following chapters. Chapter 2
provides the details about the research process. It is here where the methods are described and the rationale for these methods is provided in a review of the methodological arguments for an interpretive-critical phenomenological approach. Chapter 3 presents the findings according to three main emergent themes: relationships, poverty and empowerment. All three themes emerged from the data representing the participants’ lived experiences. Finally, Chapter 4 provides the conclusions and recommendations. In keeping with the tradition of the qualitative/interpretive approach (Creswell, 2003) the literature is incorporated in the findings chapter of the study where it is used to compare and contrast with the themes and categories that emerged from the study.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH PROCESS

This chapter will explain the research process that underpinned this study. Specifically, the research methods, methodology and research paradigm will be described in the following sections. Crotty (1998) argues that the framework for all research lies in answering four core questions, i) What methods have been used to gather and analyze the data?; ii) What methodology or strategy governed the choice and use of methods and informs the purpose of the study and the research questions?; iii) What research paradigm or philosophical stance lies behind the methodology and contextualizes the research process?; and iv) What epistemology informs the research paradigm and methodological choices? These questions will be addressed below in the Methods, Methodology and Research Paradigm section.

Methods

In this section the details about how data were gathered and analyzed will be discussed, including details about the research setting, sampling and participants, data collection, data analysis, ethics, trustworthiness, and the role of the researcher. The following section provides an overview of relevant social and demographic information for the country of Costa Rica.

Setting

*The country - Costa Rica*

The study took place in the Republic of Costa Rica which is the third smallest
country in Central America. According to CELADE (Centro Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Demografía; Chile, 2000: División de Población. Boletín Demográfico No. 66 de julio de 2000, cited in Centroamérica en Cifras) in the year 2000, Costa Rica was estimated to have a population of 4,023,000. The national language is Spanish and the nation gained its independence from Spain in 1821 (The World Factbook [CIA], 2001, Constitución Política de cada país, cited in Centroamérica en Cifras). With reference to the economic climate, CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, Panorama Social, Santiago de Chile, 2001) statistics showed the Gross Domestic Product in the year 2000 to be 15,884,700 United States dollars. The urban economically active population in the year 2000 was 835,000 and the rural economically active population in the same year was 778,000 (CEPAL, 2001).

With regard to education, the total adult literacy rate in Costa Rica in 2000 was 95% according to the official Costa Rican census (INEC, 2000). National health is the responsibility of all employers, who provide health care benefits for their employees. Workers pay approximately 42% in the form of taxes, employers pay approximately 49% and the government pays approximately 9%. This current system is apparently expensive and difficult for small businesses (Researcher field notes, July 29, 2005). Costa Rican health statistics indicated 1,181,000 inhabitants per medical doctor in 1999 (CEPAL, 2001). The total mortality rate in 2000 in Costa Rica was 14,944, the rate of general mortality in that same year was 3.8 for every 1000 inhabitants and the rate of infant mortality was 12.1 for each thousand children born alive (CEPAL, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, Boletín Demográfico No. 66, Santiago de Chile, 2000,
cited in Centroamérica en Cifras). As a comparison, the rate of infant mortality in Canada in 2000 was 5.3 and is calculated as the number of deaths of children less than one year of age per 1,000 live births. By contrast, in the territory of Nunavut the rate of infant mortality in the same year was 12.3 (Statistics Canada - Infant mortality rates, by province and territory). Infant mortality rates are an indicator of poverty and as such these comparisons show that Costa Rica’s infant mortality rate in 2000 was substantially higher than Canada—a developed nation. The comparison with Nunavut, a territory in Canada show that within developed nations there may be regional disparities; in this case, the Nunavut infant mortality rate comparison with that of Costa Rica’s represents a comparison between two developing areas.

According to CEPAL (1999) and cited in Centroamérica en Cifras statistics, 18.2% of homes in total were below the poverty line and in urban areas 15.7% of homes were below the poverty line. Statistics from the Information System of the Population Objective (SIPO), show that the population segment most affected by extreme poverty are boys, girls and adolescents, representing 63.1% of the total (Espeleta, León, Mora, Segura & Solórzano, 2002, p.15).

*The ACJ*

The Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes de Costa Rica (ACJ) is the Spanish translation for the YMCA and will be used when referring to the setting for this study. YMCA will be used when referring to the international non-government organization. The ACJ is an NGO characterized by its usage of volunteers and its non-profit work. Eddu (2001, p. 28) stated that, “development NGOs in general attempt to expand and
devise popular knowledge, enhance social control over science and education, and highlight public issues and the social transmission of power and accountability of the government to civil society.” The YMCA is characterized as a development NGO because it contributes to development locally, nationally and internationally.

This study was conducted on the property of the ACJ in Costa Rica. The ACJ facility is located in the neighbourhood of Purral, the “canton” or district of Goicoechea and in the province of San José. This charitable, non-profit, non-governmental organization offers many programs to the community such as: a camp for Nicaraguan refugees and migrants; a development program for indigenous peoples of the area; programs through the Ann Frank Centre for Child Development; and programs for youth working on the street\(^1\), among many other social community development programs. This setting was purposefully selected because I had a connection with the former Director of International Development at the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington due to my previous work experience at that particular YMCA. The former Director of International Development at that YMCA had worked previously with the ACJ of Costa Rica through a partnership program that involved both YMCAs. My previous connection to the Canadian YMCA organization enabled me to have access to the program that integrated physical activity for development through the ACJ of Costa Rica.

The ACJ has several objectives however; the objective relevant to this study was:

\(^{1}\) The term “street child” covers different realities, including those who work in the street and go home periodically (the most numerous), along with runaways and children who live in the street, together they total over 100 million and almost half of them can be found in Latin America (Vega, 1997).
To collaborate in the creation of favourable options for the establishment of improved general life conditions, taking into consideration the social, economic, political and religious context in which, their actions are displayed and preferably directing them towards the accompaniment and solidarity with the poorest, with special emphasis on boys, girls, adolescents and youths. (ACJ de Costa Rica - Misión)

The ACJ describes the camp program in this study as a method which, is a “valuable tool for informal education” used by the ACJ since its beginning that “fundamentally favours boys, girls and adolescents with scarce economic resources” and “as part of community development, provides recreation camps for kids” (ACJ de Costa Rica - Proyectos). The camp programs developed diverse activities that include: Camps for Indigenous Youth, Youth from the Street and Forums and Workshops about the Rights of Youth among other activities (ACJ de Costa Rica - Proyectos). This study focused on the camp program specifically for youth from the street.

The “Youth from the Street” camp program was an appropriate program to focus upon for the purpose of this research because the ACJ program used integrated physical activity as part of informal education which contributes to the healthy development of youth.

The campsite and the physical location, “Campamento Oikumene” is the site for all the camp programs that the ACJ hosts and is approximately 45 minutes by bus from the ACJ facility in Purral. The youth participants are transported to the campsite location by bus, provided by the ACJ. The site is in a semi-rural area, outside of San José and is an ideal place for recreation and outdoor games. The land on which the camp is located is very lush with trees and green spaces, a stark contrast from the corrugated steel, cement,
and filth that characterize the neighbourhood in which these youth live. The camp property is large with open playing fields, a large cement basketball court, outdoor play equipment such as a swing set and other areas for accommodation such as tents and cabins. A large pavilion in the center of the property with floor to ceiling windows and a large, octagon-shaped main room served as the classroom, dining room and main meeting room. The activities of the camp are described below as observed during July 29 and 30, 2005, providing the background of the program that was the phenomenon being explored.

The first day of the two-day camp for youth from the street commenced with the collective identification of camp rules. The youths themselves suggested the rules that would serve all camp attendees. The schedule for the first day of the camp program included a discussion of their “Proyecto de Vida” (Life Project), various team building activities such as forming groups and making a flag for their group, informal play outside with a group of American youth visiting from New York, a handicraft activity, and an informal discussion with a representative from DNI (Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional Sección Costa Rica). The DNI is recognized for its International Movement of International Child Defence as a national section with local, national and regional programs as well as international impact (DNI Sección Costa Rica - Movimiento Internacional de Defensa de Niñas y Niños).

Marta, from the ACJ, started the “charla de Proyecto de Vida” (chat about the Life Project). The youth were grouped together with a youth volunteer in each group to discuss each of the following topics;

- Group 1 - Personal life - problem, 1) family problems, 2) the environment within
which they live, 3) drug addicts, 4) desire to leave the neighborhood, 5) they have to have a plan to study, in order to get a good job
- Group 2 - Family environment - Family of today in 2005, divorce, mistreatment, street vendors, mistreatment and lack of education
- Group 3 - In order to get ahead one must study, but when there are problems in the house distractions are constant

After each of the groups discussed the topics amongst themselves with their assigned volunteer the entire assembly came back together. Two representatives from each group addressed the entire assembly with their team’s findings about the topic that had been discussed. After the Life Project discussion, the participants were given an evaluation questionnaire\(^2\) to fill out and to bring back regarding the camp program. It was designed to ascertain if and how it was meeting their individual needs amongst other questions such as asking them for their suggestions on how to improve their camp experience. The youth were also given an agenda to help them plan out their Life Projects on a more short term basis.

Free play time was part of the first camp day schedule and most of the boys opted to play football (i.e. soccer) while the girls either played on the swing set or jumped rope. The scheduled talent show consisted of the youth performing short skits they had created themselves, singing songs, telling jokes and dancing choreographed dances they had created themselves. Following the show, outdoor games similar to “tag” were played, as were other all-inclusive games that involved running around. Near the end of the first night a scary story and skit were performed by the volunteers and the kids gathered around the fire pit and the “fogata” (bonfire) was lit.

\(^2\) This questionnaire was not part of the data collection process for this thesis.
The next morning the kids participated in the main event, the "rally" (an obstacle course), with different outdoor stations scattered over the large ACJ property. In teams of five to six kids they had to run from station to station completing the activities, being careful not to burst the balloons they were carrying with them. They had to complete the activities together as a group and they competed against other groups for the fastest time. The activities at each station included: swinging from a rope from one area to another, bobbing for apples, climbing up a greased pole to reach paper flags at the top, eating a chunk of bread covered in jam hanging from a string without using their hands, a balancing game, sliding down a soap-covered slide, covering the holes on a large plastic tube that was perforated with holes with their fingers and noses until it was filled to the top with water and shimmying under a rope grid over a mud pit without bursting any of their balloons. The group was not considered finished until every member of the team had crossed the finish line. The team with the fastest time and the most intact balloons won. The group that won was awarded a small bag of candy each which they shared with their friends. After the rally the youth showered and packed up to head back to the city on the bus.

The selected activities and games that were planned and organized for the participants by the program administrators were implemented according to their own development strategy which was not specifically disclosed to me.
Participants

The CEO of the ACJ of Costa Rica was the gatekeeper for this study and was instrumental in referring me to the Program Director. The Program Director subsequently assisted me in purposefully sampling the participants, who were chosen because of their previous and current experience in the ACJ program that integrated physical activity for the purpose of development.

The participants in this study were six adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 all of whom were participants in the program that integrate physical activity for the purpose of development offered by the ACJ of Costa Rica. Of the six participants three were females aged 13, 15 and 15, and 3 were males aged 15, 15 and 17. Aptekar (1994) noted that street children are known to embellish stories about themselves and the dangers of life on the street in order to evoke attention and empathy from the listener. For that reason, the methods used were triangulated (explained more in-depth in the Observations and field notes section) and the comparison of various accounts by the researcher were used to improve the quality of the research results (Denzin, 1989).

Data collection

Interviews

Data were collected in August, 2005. Patton (2002) stated that the phenomenological approach focuses on how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have 'lived experience' as opposed
to second hand experience (Patton, 2002). Interviews were collected over an 18 day period from August 1 to 18. These included three interviews with each participant; each interview session was approximately 30 minutes long and took place in a vacant classroom within the ACJ facility. I was able to establish a good rapport with the participants due to my involvement in the camp. Engaging in the camp activities was deemed important for establishing rapport for a couple of reasons. First, I was able to get to know the camp participants which helped the purposeful sampling process. It was particularly important that I be able to understand the Spanish used by the participants and that they were comfortable and outgoing so that one-on-one conversations would flow easily. Second, rapport building through the camp helped establish trust between myself and the participants. Children may provide false information in order to protect themselves if there is a lack of a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participant, which could compromise the quality of the data (Smith, 1983).

I believed that different probing questions for each participant and differing trajectories of "conversation" evoked unique meanings and interpretations for each individual participant even in regard to how they interpreted the question, thus their responses were different from other participants. The phenomenological approach was appropriate for the data collection of this study, considering the focus of the study was on understanding and exploring the lived experiences of participants in a program that integrated physical activity as part of well-balanced development.

The interviews were all conducted in Spanish, the language that felt most comfortable for both the participant and the interviewer (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The
interviews with each participant were conducted in three separate sessions. Participants were assured on issues of anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study without consequences at any time (see Appendix A).

Initially, I used open-ended questions and a loosely structured interview process which then evolved into a more structured interview guide focusing on the camp. This shift in approach occurred because I was informed that for my own protection and the protection of the participants it would be advisable to avoid discussing emergent topics about lifestyle that may have caused conflict between me and other participants and/or between the participants and other participants, program administrators and/or their parents. Following the phenomenological tradition, the semi-structured interview guide still allowed me to explore and probe the experiences of the participants. A semi-structured interview process was used by Seidman (1998) who advocated a series of three long, iterative interviews, each with a specific purpose:

- The first interview inquires into the participant’s history and life story (e.g. Can you describe for me what brought you to the ACJ for the first time? See Appendix B.)
- The second interview orients both the researcher and the participant to the specific experience of interest (e.g. Can you explain for me how your experience in the program has influenced your life? See Appendix C.)
- The third interview draws these together in a reflective dialogue about the meaning of the participant’s experience in light of her history (e.g. Can you give me some of your reasons why you think the sport for development programs offered at the ACJ are/were effective/not effective for you? See Appendix D.)
As found by Marshall and Rossman (1989, p.82), in “qualitative research the participant’s perspective on the social phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it.” For that reason, during the interviews not only were certain structured questions posed, but also, follow-up and more individually specific probing questions were asked in order to achieve as clear an understanding of the description as possible as told by the participant. An example of a question would be the following, “What is the best thing about the camp program? The worst? Why? Can you give me some examples?” I allowed the participant to divulge as much thick, rich description of their experience of the phenomenon as possible.

Observations and field notes

As part of the triangulation of methods, additional data in the form of observations and field notes were taken during activities, events and social interactions which involved study participants. As well, daily journal documentation was made of the researcher’s personal reflections. These multiple sources of data taken at multiple points in time, combined to form a variety of methods that were used to build the picture that I was investigating. I observed the surroundings, the interactions between all those involved with the program and the sights and sounds of the program. This helped ensure that I had not studied just a fraction of the complexity that I sought to understand (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

Data analysis

Schatzman and Strauss (1973) claim that qualitative data analysis principally entails classifying things, people and events and the properties that characterize them.
Qualitative researchers look to identify and describe patterns and emerging themes. Having mentioned this, the data analysis section of the study used the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method to analyze the data, and critical theory was used to help interpret the experiences of the participant for the reader. This study adapted the IPA method drawn from Smith (2003, p.51) and is "concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side." Several steps in the data analysis are consistent with a phenomenological approach. Smith (2003) suggests a detailed IPA analysis can also involve asking critical questions of the texts from participants such as the following: Do I have a sense of something going on here that perhaps the participants themselves are less aware of? Is the program truly addressing the needs of the participants? Do the participants feel they are able to voice their own needs adequately?

Smith also argued that IPA emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process. An inductive process is what underpins the IPA; lived experiences of the participants to the general lived experiences of the phenomenon. Smith (2003, p.52) maintained that as it is generally the case with qualitative research, "there is no single definitive way to do IPA." Therefore as conducted in this study, "there was no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather the aim was to explore, flexibly and in detail the area of concern" (Smith, 2003, p.53).

The following iterative process was used:

1. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim (in Spanish).
2. The transcripts were translated from Spanish into English by the researcher.

3. The transcripts were each read several times to get a sense of the whole and several categories emerged which were representative of the participants' lived experiences overall. The categories generally reflected the nature of the semi-structured interview guides used by the researcher.

4. The transcripts were coded using different coloured markers according to the representative categories. Notes were made in the margins where there were commonalities and differences across the accounts.

5. Analysis charts were then formed for each of the coded categories with three columns; original Spanish, English translation and notes that cumulated and indicated overarching themes. The categories were as follows:
   - family and friends
   - work
   - violence, danger and negative influences from the streets
   - play, games and football
   - ACJ experiences

It is important to note that the analysis was iterative in the sense that the researcher was constantly going between the categories and the data to find the most appropriate codes and categories in which to represent the meaning, concerns and experiences of the participants.

6. The study findings emerged in two parts, i) relationships and poverty and, ii) empowerment. See Appendix E which includes an example of interview sections in both
Spanish and English, showing the reader how the data was translated (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

**Ethics**

The ethics approval was granted in July 2005 by the Brock Research Ethics Board and the study was given the file number 04-438. A general letter of invitation was delivered to the CEO of the ACJ of Costa Rica. The CEO referred me to the Program Director, who also assisted in contacting the participants’ parents in order to request their signed consent for their children to participate in the study. All written and verbal communication took place in Spanish. Interviews did not commence without me having within my possession the signed informed consent form from each participants’ parent(s).

I conducted interviews myself in an unoccupied classroom within the ACJ facility with the door closed for confidentiality and also to minimize disruptions and background noise. All participants gave their permission for the interviews to be audio recorded. Following the completion of all three interviews, the participants received a letter of appreciation. Participants also indicated in written form whether or not they wished to receive a copy of the Executive Summary.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness can be understood as one dimension of perceived methodological rigor (Lincoln & Guba 1986; Glesne 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested that there be an emphasis by the researcher on trustworthiness and authenticity by he or she being balanced, fair and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests and multiple realities. The aspects for establishing trustworthiness
addressed in this study were: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are terms for conventional internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credible findings and interpretations were ensured by the quality and quantity of the data collected, which were appropriate. The quality of the data consisted of ‘rich’, ‘thick’ descriptions from the participants and were included to provide meaningful insight into their lived experiences through the ACJ program. The quantity of the data was also appropriate considering each youth participated in three interviews, yielding 180 pages of detailed data about their experiences. Dependability is examining the process of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to address the dependability of the study, the process of the inquiry included the triangulation of data sources and comparisons with other research were made. Triangulation of the participant interviews with academic literature, scholarly Costa Rican census documents and researcher field notes all combined to enhance the dependability and trustworthiness of the findings.

Confirmability is when the findings, interpretations, and recommendations are support by data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This confirming data was supplied in the form of a reflexive journal kept by the researcher. Reflexivity was demonstrated by the transparency of my role as researcher. Events, meetings, interviews and general daily observations were carefully documented to further contribute to the understanding of my background, how it was shaped and continued to be shaped whilst I was working in the field. The utilization of journals and field notes allowed for my personal biases and reflections to be made known during the research process (Creswell, 2003; Rossman &
Transferability provides the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether a transfer can be considered a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was addressed through careful consideration in the quality of the write up of this study. The setting and the findings depicted in this study will allow the reader to make his or her own assessments as to the applicability of the research to other settings (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis 2003). The thick, rich descriptions of the setting and of the youths' experiences ensured findings that are sufficient for the reader to transfer to other settings.

In this study the issue of translation is important to address. It is imperative to understand the limits of my language background. My Spanish language history extends as far as having achieved a minor in Spanish as part of an undergraduate degree and having lived, worked, and studied for over a year in Mexico. My travels include several other Hispanic nations. However, Spanish is not my first language, nor do I pretend to understand all of the culturally-born idioms or colloquialisms native to the specific continent, country, city, and neighbourhood where the interview participants were from. My Spanish to English and vice-versa translation skills are university-level, however those skills do not necessarily allow me to precisely convey every word, emotion, nuance, and implication, verbal or non-verbal, in English from Spanish, perhaps as accurately as the participant had intended.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is critical and integral to
qualitative studies therefore it is necessary for the researchers to identify their personal values, assumptions and biases from the commencement of the study. The investigator's contribution to the research setting can be useful and positive rather than detrimental (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987). To ensure the validity of the study the stance of the researcher needs to be explicit (Shank, 2002). My curiosity comes from an interest in international sport, intercultural communication and international humanitarian development. My perceptions of the above mentioned themes have always been a source of curiosity to me in part due to my multicultural identity. My perceptions have also been shaped by my experiences whilst working at the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington in various service and leadership capacities. My interest in the Spanish language comes from my personal heritage. My personal experiences and involvement with sport and international non-governmental organizations have mostly been within the context of international/multicultural humanitarian development and I believe they have offered me awareness and understanding of the power of influence these elements have separately and cohesively.

As a result of working with visible minority populations, I brought certain biases to this study. These biases undoubtedly shaped the way I viewed, collected, and understood the data, as well as the way the experiences were described and/or interpreted. This study commenced with the view that extreme inequalities exist in socio-economic terms as well as in cultural and political terms, and that there is an immense divide between the rich and poor countries. I was and still am in agreement with many international humanitarian non-governmental organizations that are trying to improve the
living condition for millions of people living in poverty and I questioned how the lives of those being helped were changed and/or influenced by that intervention.

My feelings and predilections were disclosed in an emergent style. More specifically, as information was collected and I became more familiar with the information and the experiences of the participants, my reflections and biases as well as commentaries were recorded. I adopted a reflective on-going, note-taking format, as already mentioned in the previous section to keep the study as transferable as possible.

In the next section the use of qualitative research and the emergent nature of its design will be briefly reviewed. Following that, the epistemological position and the theoretical perspective that shaped the methodology will be revealed in detail. The use of the interpretive-critical approach in this study will be explained in depth and how it was accomplished using a phenomenological philosophy and method.

**Methodology and Research Paradigm**

The intent of qualitative researchers is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group or interaction (Locke et al., 1987). Qualitative research is unique due to two features: a) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and b) the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that this entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study; the researcher enters the informants’ world and through ongoing interaction, seeks the informants’ perspectives and meanings. In its most basic terms, qualitative research is a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning (Shank, 2002). Qualitative research focuses on the process that is occurring as well as the product
or outcome. Qualitative research has an emergent design through which meanings and interpretations are, in a sense negotiated with human data sources because it is the participants’ realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). The focus of this systematic empirical inquiry is on participants’ perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives (Locke et al., 1987 & Merriam, 1988). The attempt is therefore to understand not one, but multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This social research study is framed by a subjective epistemological position and the philosophical stance that shaped the methodology was through an interpretivist approach. This interpretive approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (Crotty, 1998). Specifically, this was accomplished in this research study by using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology emerged from the field of philosophy, with the main contributions coming from Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Moustakas, (1994) stated that understanding “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method. Crotty (1996a) described phenomenology by suggesting that as researchers lay aside the prevailing understandings of the phenomena and revisit the immediate experiences of them, possibilities of new meaning emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning.

“The programme of reflecting upon all knowledge and experience, with the ideal of the ‘self-givenness’ in experience of what is meant, may well have an emancipating effect” (Farber, 1991, p. 234). “Reflecting” and “self-givenness” in phenomenological
research are the responsibility of the researcher. Those involved in phenomenological research concentrate in depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience concerning a phenomenon, assuming that the archetypal meaning of the experience will be revealed through dialogue and reflection (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The process of engaging in dialogue and reflection with and about the experiences of the participants was one that required the participation of the researcher also. Throughout this process, I engaged in critical self-reflection about the topic and the process itself (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The resulting tale of the field (Van Manen, 1988) was, ultimately, my story about the stories people have told me (Geertz, 1983).

This study engages a constructionist assumption with regard to meaning making. It assumes that we were taught directly and indirectly through a process of enculturation and as a result of this process of being born into certain cultures and sub-cultures we assign meaning to our involvement with objects as it is provided to us. Our thinking and behaviour are shaped by these complex processes (Crotty, 1998). "Phenomenology asks us not to take our received notions for granted but ... to call into question our whole culture, our manner of seeing the world and being in the world in the way we have learned it growing up" (Wolff, 1984, p.192). The meaning participants made of their experiences in the ACJ program were approached in this manner.

An interpretive-critical approach is a natural fit with historical roots for this study's phenomenological philosophy and method. This critical spirit within phenomenology emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and the phenomenological movement founded and headed by Husserl and Heidegger declared itself a philosophy of
radical criticism from the start (Crotty, 1998, p.61). Therefore, in this study, the experiences of the participants were valued and deeper critique was sought hence, “The value of phenomenology from a critical point of view is evident.”

There were two reasons for adopting an interpretive-critical approach. First, I do not believe it is enough to describe or narrate the findings of the study. The findings have revealed profound reasons for involvement that the participants have expressed in their own manner according to their lived experiences through the development program. Their voices illustrate and illuminate their perceived reality of their experiences. Second, national governments and the United Nations are attempting to address the global issue of poverty. They have espoused goals, written documents and developed programs to address the problem. The United Nations, various governments of developed countries, non-governmental organizations and academia all agree that integrated physical activity development programs are indeed a means of development. For that reason, it was important to further the youths’ experiences by asking them whether or not these goals and programs are actually a means of development for them.

Adopting an interpretive-critical perspective means that whilst I hold an interpretive view of reality, it is socially constructed and that there are multiple perspectives that are equally valid. I also hold the view that the meanings individuals give to their reality needs to be considered in light of “social processes that deprive individuals … of important satisfactions” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 43). Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 46) stated “interpretive research typically tries to understand the social world as it is from the perspective of individual experience.” An interpretive-critical approach to
the meaning participants’ made from their experiences in the program allows for a deeper understanding of how they truly view the program. The purpose was to understand the experiences of participants who were participating or who had already participated in the physical activity integrated development program at the ACJ of Costa Rica and how each participant’s personal background shaped the meaning they brought to that experience. This uncovered the importance of the integrated physical activity development experience in the lives of the participants providing important knowledge on how to make these experiences more meaningful.

The voice of the program participant must be heard to understand the full power and influence of a phenomenon such as physical activity within development. Therefore, in light of integrated physical activity development programs being held in obvious high regard for their power to achieve international humanitarian goals, it was not enough to merely ask “What is the meaning of these physical activity integrated development programs for the participants?” Or “What meaning do participants in the program make of their experiences?” Frisby (2005, p. 9) hoped to see more of a critical approach integrated into research, teaching and practice in the field of sport management, to be able to facilitate healthy debate and critique. She asked the question:

How can we go wrong if we envision a world of sport where profits are reinvested in the community; where concerns over the environment and equality take precedence over development and profit making; where athletes, citizens and employees are empowered; and where marginalized groups have the opportunity to achieve the many benefits of sport and recreation participation?

Creswell (2003) found that the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences
concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Moustakas (1994) outlined the procedure which involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning.

There are limitations to this study and despite my critical self-reflection and self-awareness, the fact remains that I was an outsider from the participants' point of view. The limitations within this study include the fact that I am an adult Canadian woman, from a middle-class multicultural background. There were limits to how much I could truly immerse myself into their world but the best efforts were made in order to see the world from their perspective. The data collected and documented were selected and filtered through myself as the researcher; it was interpreted by me and for that reason it is important to understand who I am in order to follow my logic of interpretation. The role of the researcher is important because of both the influence researchers bring to their research at every stage, and the influence they have on their relationships with the participants. Researchers need to move back and forth between their sources and their insights to make sure they are in synch (Shank, 2002).
CHAPTER 3
FINDINGS
To understand the experiences of youth in the sport for development program it is important to place this experience within their broader life history and experiences. This chapter explores the commonalities in the participants' experiences, however there were several important differences in the experiences of the participants and consequently, where appropriate, these diverse accounts are provided. The three themes that emerged from the analysis were supported by my reflexive field journal and are presented below using emergent categories from the data. Relationships, poverty and empowerment were the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. The themes were the phrases or sentences that described the more subtle and tacit processes within the categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This chapter describes and interprets the relationships theme by considering the emergent categories of family and friends; poverty is described using four categories: barrio, work, studies and play; and the theme of empowerment is described using three categories: ACJ program experiences, personal change and the participants' voices.

Theme One: Relationships
The six participants will be referred to by pseudonyms José (age 15), Liliana (age 15), Sandra (age 13), José María (age 15), Maricela (age 15), and Cristiano (age 17). For these youth participants, the most important things to them in life are their family and friends. They highly value the relationships they share with their family members and friends and they described their complex relationships with these specific social groups in both
similar and different ways.

**Family**

A few characteristics that the participants identified within their families were shared by all. Others were mentioned only by some. All six of the participants lived with their biological mothers and out of the five households, represented by the six participants, two included their biological father. Two of the participants interviewed were brothers. Three of the participants lived with a step father and all of the participants described also having a step family, a family their biological father had with a woman other than their biological mother. All of the participants except for one live with five siblings or more, not including half-siblings. Only one participant has just three siblings.

Ennew (1994) described most families of street children as single-parent families headed by mothers, living below the poverty line. Fathers are more likely to be alcoholics and addicts; and there is no healthy interaction between family members as described to be the case for some of the youth in this study. The youths' descriptions of their family structures supported by Ennew (1994), are further supported by Costa Rican documents which found that the variations of the family structure have generated a growth in the presence of “uniparental” (a single parent with a child[ren]) households, principally with women as heads of the family ... a third of poor households and half of urban households in extreme poverty are “uniparental” households (Espeleta, et. al, 2002, p.16). This research supports the accounts the youth gave in reference to their family structures.

Three of the participants described their fathers and one described her oldest brother, to be alcoholics with “drinking problems,” and how they have, “done us some
damage.” Those same three participants described either their biological father or an older brother to be physically violent and abusive to family members. One participant described how his biological father’s violence also reached outside the home where, “he used to assault people.” Although technically, these youth are children who work in the street, and none of them actually live in the street, their family structure is similar to that of street children.

Despite all this, five of the six participants clearly indicated that in their lives family was the “most important thing.” Cristiano’s description was fairly typical across the five accounts:

It (family) is the most special thing in life. Because the family supports you in everything. Well, my siblings, once in a while we fight but we love each other very much, that doesn’t matter, yes, my mom and my dad they love me very much, that’s what makes us strong. (Cristiano)

By contrast, Liliana’s experience was distinct in that, she was the only one of the six participants interviewed that did not describe family as the most important thing to her:

We are very united but we’re not very united because there are some that do get along and others that don’t and they fight for any little thing, we always present ourselves as a family. (Liliana)

Love and support appear to be common features to a certain extent in the participants’ family experiences. The youth also described violence, fighting, unreliable parents, the incorporation of step parents into the home, and many siblings. It is evident that there is fragmentation in their family structures:

My dad left. He used to live with us but ... there were many problems between him and my mom. There were many problems between them and they were his
fault and we, as well, we are guilty. It’s been almost five years since he left and in the first year we saw him but after the first year we never found out anything about him. (Maricela)

The importance and love of family is placed alongside a family structure that is often fragmented; often fathers are absent from the lives of these youth. Duyan (2005) found that street children with high levels of hopelessness came from structurally disadvantaged families and suffered from psychological, social and economic problems within the family or immediate environment; from being the victim of family disruption and physical and/or sexual and/or emotional abuse; and from being unable to utilize the family as a source of social support. Although the youth in this study work in the street but do not actually live in the street, they suffer from the same types of problems that lead to hopelessness similar to street children.

These youth may describe their families as the “best” thing in life to them but their actual experiences reflect otherwise and they are unable to utilize the family as a consistent source of social support. Of all the participants, only Liliana acknowledged that she had a significant role within the family. She has taken on a parental role and consequentially, taken on the stresses and workload of an adult parent. The following extract illustrates the extent to which in this specific case, familial roles were confused:

We all wanted a baby, my youngest sister is like my own child, my baby, I take care of her as if she were my own baby. The baby is now 2 years old and her name is Jessica. Jessica calls me “mom”, and my mom feels jealous about this, she gets mad with me and tells me that Jessica has to know who the actual mother is. I have another little brother, Miguelito, and he and Jessica stick very close to me. I give them everything they need, they cried so much when I went to the camp. I can’t go anywhere without the kids asking me where I’m going and with whom. (Liliana)
Liliana is seen by her younger siblings as a "mother" figure, and she herself may feel like a mother figure:

The thing is, that I have lots of siblings...I take care of the little ones ... but in my house they're not going to pay me because they are my siblings, but it is a job for me...I have to take care of them, and it is a trauma for me because it is hard for me to be studying and to be there taking care of them, cooking for them, and everything, it is hard for me. So then it makes me like a person who is not involved with parties or things like that because I am a homebody, nothing else. (Liliana)

The confusion of the "mother" role in Liliana's family structure has caused her to miss out at times on her own youth experiences and at 15 years old she is becoming confused as to what her family roles as daughter and sister really are.

While all but one of the participants described their families in positive ways such as, "without family I couldn't live," "I would describe them as very good with me," and "family supports you in everything," the reality is that living in poverty and having so many children in the family means that either the parents or the older children are out on the streets working to provide some type of income. Most of the children would be at home by themselves while their parents were either out working or doing some other activity. Subsequently, the parents are not at home to watch the children and Liliana's experience is frequently a result, where an older sibling becomes the main caretaker. Blanc-Szanton (1994) and Manimekalai and Kunjammal, (1999) found in Bombay, India that street children tend to reside in large, poor families where both parents work to provide for their family's immediate needs.

The similarities between the youth in this study and street children in the literature are alarming. The problems they face at home could easily make living in the street their
only alternative. Part of the result of large, poor families in Costa Rica, has rendered the child population the most intensely impacted by poverty. In a formal proposal prepared by the University of Costa Rica to the government of the country, Espeleta, et. al, 2002, p. 15, found that:

The greatest amount of poor households sustain a large quantity of children. This large amount of children limits the possibilities of labor entry for mothers, increasing the burden on the household income generators. The child population suffers the lash of poverty in a great measure, being that almost a third of them are members of poor households. They are at their most vulnerable time (as children) in a poverty situation and they tend to reproduce poverty within their generations. Malnutrition and the greatest risk of becoming ill limits their physical development and their capacity for learning. Together these, with a great pressure to generate income, could implicate a lesser use of and a premature exit from the education system, which is then translated into a disadvantageous insertion into the work force and the subsequent formation of a new poor household.

As seen in the experiences of the youth in this study, only one of the youth’s families had three children and the remaining others all had five siblings or more. The above quote relates directly to the youth in this study and supports their accounts. In order for the youth participants in this study to avoid reproducing poverty within their generation and to exit the poverty cycle, a myriad of social, economic and political factors must be considered and improved. Although not a panacea, the ACJ community development programs were found to be essential in the lives of these youth.

These youth described family as a source of love and support and as one of the most important things in their lives. However, their experiences reveal that there is a great deal of violence and unhealthy interaction present in their family structures. These youth and their families live in poverty and as a result they face many struggles. In effect,
their parents are unable to adequately support them emotionally or economically. Parents and/or the children go to work earning inadequate amounts to support family necessities and from there the problems compound. Problems include early exit from school, confused familial roles, substance abuse and other types of abuse which affect the entire family.

Friends

If parents are not available or are not able to support the youth emotionally or economically, it makes sense that the importance of friendship was emphasized across four of the participants’ interviews. Essential to these youths’ well-being is the concept of support. The youths’ friendship network, of which all six of the participants were a part, replaces or supplements parental support, advice, understanding and empathy. Research by Kombarakaran (2004) on street children also supports this finding with regard to the friendship network in that children of the street replace their original families with their peers and other families on the street as their principal agents of socialization. Social support for them comes in the form of healthy interaction which they receive from their friendship network and inconsistently from their families.

José, José María, Sandra and Cristiano all say that after family, the best thing in their lives is “my friends.” This is illustrated by an extract from José’s interview in which he explained this importance:

Yes, I like my friends, they’re also really good to me. Sebastián, Saúl, they’re my best friends, Fernando...the friends, the people who actually care about me...yes, my friends, yes, yes. What’s more is that if one has a problem with something, we organize to help, if it is something important for that person or if somebody wants something, well then it is up to the friends, so then for me that is fine, the goal is
...well what he/she wants or give advice, if it is a dangerous thing or if it is good for him/her then the most important thing for me is my friendship with my friends. (José)

Where the youth described their families to be important and loving, it is interesting to note that when practical problem solving was needed, the youth turned to their friends for actual support. These youth are emphasizing the importance of support they receive from their friends and to a lesser extent from their families when they talk about family. Whether these youth are parental figures to their families like Liliana, or they are one of the younger siblings in the family, friends hold just as much importance in their lives as family, if not more so. Friendship for these youth includes organizing themselves to help each other in whatever the case may be, whether it is a problem, or advice or “a dangerous thing” as José put it. The friends are there as a support network for them; they are their own kind of “family.”

However, the friend network has its limits and the preceding extract illustrated the extent to which Cristiano experienced these limits:

Well the bad things are that there are many people or like, friends who have become involved in drugs and that is bad because for me, because maybe it was because of the mom or because of something like that, because of some kind of family problem, so then my friends they get lost in the drugs. My friends lose themselves in the drugs. Yes and a person can’t do anything. (Cristiano)

Cristiano described this feeling of helplessness as one of the worst things in his life. If youth are not involved in this supportive friend network as a means to be able to cope with their family problems, then they will seek relief or comfort elsewhere, most likely a self-destructive type of relief as Cristiano described. The essential nature of this friendship network and the support it offers the youth is an integral part of their
socialization because many of them come from homes where they are the victims of neglect or abuse, they are inadequately cared for and there are usually drug or alcohol problems within the family. Considering these youths’ problems at home and their emotional dependence on their friendship network, they will consequently spend more time with their friends in the street, avoiding conflict at home. Trussell (1999) found that it is possible that the original family may be fragmented further due to the influence of the street environment and the more children work in the street, it is less likely families will be able to control them.

Although the youth love and want their families to occupy the highest priority in their social and emotional lives, the reality for them is that fragmented family structures and relationships force them to seek functional support from their friends. Family and friends are the most important things in life to these youth, the latter group being more consistent, supportive and reliable than the former.

**Theme two: Poverty**

The effect of poverty has already been seen in the youths’ relationships with family and friends in the previous section and it is a phenomenon that touches every area of the participants’ lives. In this section the theme of poverty will be elaborated on in order to provide a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. The following defines child poverty which also serves as a definition to adequately represent the participants in this study:

> Child poverty is where children grow up in households with inadequate resources to provide for their material needs, where families and communities are unable to nurture and protect them and are unable to develop their full
potential, and are, for example, uneducated or ill (Save the Children UK, 2000). The poverty theme that provides a foundation to understanding the backgrounds of the participants is described by four emergent categories: barrio, work, studies and play. First however, it is important to understand the profile of poverty in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican census showed that in the year 2002, out of a total of 959,144 households there were 346,092 households with a deficiency of at least one unsatisfied basic necessity and 113,722 households with two or more unsatisfied basic necessities (Datos Censales Basicas Necesidades Insatisfechas, 2002, CR p. 41). More specifically, the Costa Rican Information System of the Population Objective (SIPO) showed that the population segment most affected by extreme poverty is constituted by boys, girls and adolescents, representing 63.1% of the total (Espeleta, et. al, 2002, pp.15 & 52). The youth in this study are defined as poor in that the program of study was designed specifically for and expressly admitted children who come from their specific neighbourhood, they work in the street and they come from families with scarce economic resources. The area in which the youth live and in which the ACJ is situated is called Goicoechea, where 6,684 out of approximately 30,726 total households, have a deficiency of at least one unsatisfied basic necessity and 1,369 households with two or more unsatisfied basic necessities (Datos Censales Basicas Necesidades Insatisfechas, 2002, CR p. 43) (See Appendix F). Therefore, the finding by Harpham, Huong, Long and Tuan, (2005), is particularly representative of the participants in this study in that poor children are perceived by themselves to lack basic needs such as food, clothes and safe shelter. Poor children respond that they receive inadequate attention from their parents, must go to
work and do not have access to a safe place to play (Harpham et al., 2005).

**Barrio**

For the participants in this study, their neighbourhood, or “barrio” is a socioeconomically depressed urban area. Few people have jobs to be able to afford the basic necessities of life. Most of the jobs that are available are those that form part of the “informal economy,” such as selling drugs and weapons, prostitution and other illegal activities. The desperation and illegal activity is exacerbated by the influence of drugs which leads to tensions and violence in the streets. There is very little if any regard for the sanitation of the barrio. In this case, it resembled a garbage dump, with small, crumbling houses and shacks. The impoverished barrio these youth live in is directly connected to their lived experiences. There were repeated references to the “filth” of their barrio by all of the participants. José provided a good illustration which reflected all of the participants’ experiences:

My neighborhood is very filthy. Because of the garbage they leave in streets, because of the holes, and there, the people don’t get together to clean the neighborhood. I don’t know it’s like they feel ashamed of the dirtiness. We have to organize ourselves, all of us to clean out the cars, fill up the holes in the street with rocks and then after with cement and close the parts and kick out the people who sell drugs. Yes, and it’s dangerous.

It is not just the filthiness of the place itself, but also the fact that many problems arise on a daily basis, especially the problems with “the people who sell drugs.” All of the participants described how “problematic” their barrio was, using words like, “conflict” and “dangerous” on many occasions when referring to the area they live in. More than anything, the participants strongly expressed that the negative and illegal activities they
witnessed in the barrio were negative experiences for them. José summarized these negative experiences as, "A person doesn't know if they are going to fall into drugs or not." All of the youth without exception had witnessed drug deals gone bad with their own eyes:

Yes, yes in the house under my house, there lives a woman, she used to sell drugs and almost every night there were problems, shots in the night, and one day when I was sleeping, they were shooting and everything, yes and after, no, after it was like in January of this year or last year, I don't remember, since they shot off a guy's testicle, they shot off one of his testicles and he was almost, because he was dying, dying in the street. He was purple, purple, purple and then he didn't have any colour at all, but you should have seen, I think that my neighborhood is very terrible and problematic and I'm so sorry, it's so hard. It's just too much, so much, yes, it's because of so many really bad people. (Maricela)

These participants felt that the longer they were exposed to the negative influences of drugs, violence and danger they were more likely to fall into one of those "vices." This fear went so far that one of the participants did not like to even leave her house. Sandra described the logic in this by saying, "there is so much drug addiction and that teaches us bad things." The participants try to avoid becoming involved with the negative influences outside their front door but José revealed that, "The drugs aren't very expensive, there are some little rocks that cost 500 colones ... and then there's marijuana," and another participant revealed how if you were to ask any of the small children of two or three years old running around the streets they could tell a person how to get to their parents' house (the parents were drug dealers) and how much a quantity of drugs would cost. The fears of the participants regarding their barrio ranged from violence in the street, to being taught bad things by seeing what goes on in the barrio, to the ever-present temptation or
presence of drugs which could be bought almost anywhere for almost nothing.

The youth make an unmistakable connection between the ACJ program and their neighborhood. The participants see the ACJ program as a medium that allows them an opportunity to distract themselves from the constantly violent and negative environment. As Cristiano said:

My neighborhood is very ugly, yes, lots of delinquents. Lots of drug addiction, lots of poverty, yes. I would say that those guys (his friends) they go (to the ACJ camp program) to distract themselves because in a neighborhood like the one here there is a lot of drug addiction so then thanks to them (at the ACJ) we go, we enjoy in other places and we are not here always seeing the same things as usual. (Cristiano)

Being able to distract oneself from the barrio while at the ACJ does not eliminate their preoccupation with the negative influences that emerge from there. The barrio and the ACJ program are inextricably intertwined in the participants’ experiences. When José María, was asked what changes he would make if he were the Program Director of the ACJ program, his thoughts immediately turned to the inevitable theme of the violence and danger of the barrio. His concern was for the actual hours of the Tuesday meetings, “About the meetings, I believe I would change the schedule because we begin really late right, like at half past 5 and then we end at half past 7 at night, because a person could be assaulted.” He believed that the youth were in danger by being out on the street after nightfall, while they were coming back from the ACJ program meetings.

Whilst the youth want to “distract” themselves from the dangers of their barrio that they constantly see so that they do not fall into the same behaviour, they are always aware of the dangers that await them upon their return to their barrio while
simultaneously participating in the program at the ACJ facility. The youth distract themselves temporarily from the dangers of the barrio at the ACJ. Once there, participants learn valuable conflict resolution skills amongst other skills through games, activities and physical activity. Duquin and Schroeder-Braun (1996) supported this finding in that sports can be a natural medium for teaching and reinforcing conflict resolution skills that could lead to less antisocial behaviors and an increase in responsibility and empathy. The promotion of conflict resolution skills and less antisocial behavior helps those who live in constant fear, possibly due to the unstable political, economic or cultural situation that is a reality in Costa Rica. In this case, the participants are learning conflict resolution skills directly or indirectly while participating at the ACJ in the programs that use recreation, play, sport, and physical activity. While learning these skills at the ACJ does not protect them from the dangers in their barrio, it is in part addressing their fears.

Work

The program of study run by the ACJ specifically targets children who work in the street. It was not clear whether or not the participants in this study lived full-time at home with their families. This is understandable considering that the term “street child” which covers different realities, including those who work in the street and go home periodically (the most numerous), along with runaways and children who live in the street. Together they total over 100 million and almost half of them can be found in Latin America (Vega, 1997). Five out of the six participants implicitly expressed a constant conflict between themselves and their families regarding the issue of working versus
school. The participants' accounts varied widely in the way they actually defined work. The participants described their work experiences almost reluctantly and the accounts ranged from denial of current work, to denying that what they did was actually work. "I don't work. Before, yes," with admittance to past work, "I used to sell key chains, pencils and love cards" (José). From complete denial of ever having worked in the past, "No. I've never worked," then with reluctance, admittance to past work, "okay I have worked but picking up scrap metal like copper, aluminum, metal cans all that ..."(José María), as if collecting scrap metal to sell did not classify as work. Finally, to denying an activity as work in the past completely, "I don't work. When I was little, but I used to work in a bakery, there in the neighborhood to clean the pans and help there like that, but it was just in front of my house but since then," she was quick to add, "I don't work anymore doing that" (Maricela). There was hesitancy in admitting they worked in the past and want to make it clear that they do not work currently. For them, working in the street has a negative connotation which may be a result of negative past work experiences.

Out of the five participants who said they did not work currently, one expressed two different negative feelings from her work experiences. The first negative feeling was humiliation:

When I was very young and I used to sell key chains in the street, the people humiliated me and my family, it felt very bad and I still remember it now. I remember, yes very ugly, it's something that I'm never going to forget or the people who humiliated me. (Liliana)

The second negative feeling was that she was receiving no compensation for her work. She views her role in her family as unpaid work, "I take care of the little ones but in my
house they're not going to pay me because they are my siblings, but it is a job for me.”

Both work experiences were negative and the second one included a sense of difficulty, unpleasantness and isolation. Sandra in contrast, illustrated her current working status as a positive experience, “I don’t work but my only work would be to study. And I do it better because I study with a lot of enthusiasm,” indicating that her “work” is enjoyable and that she does it better than any other kind of work because she does it with a lot of enthusiasm. The manner in which each participant defined his or her work was very personal. Picking up scrap metal in the street, cleaning pans in a bakery, selling pencils in the park, babysitting and being a student are all ways the participants described their work experiences and in doing so they defined what work was to them in their experience.

An important distinction to make is that out of the six participants, Cristiano is the only youth able to have a relatively balanced work and study commitment in his life where he attends school and also works part time. Cristiano admitted freely:

I like to work. My work is easy, it’s very easy. The only thing I do for work is at the market and I pull boxes and help people carry the sacks and nothing to it, yes, the work is very easy. It’s at the market where they sell vegetables here in Guadalupe. (Cristiano)

As a 17-year old young man, Cristiano feels content that he is able to provide for his family by working and at the same time he is able to study.

These examples of working in the street or unpaid work generally resulted in a negative emotional response from the participants, which reinforced the conflict between the family and youth’s desire to attend school versus the reality of work to provide an
income.

Parents of most of the youth participants may have wanted a more prosperous life for their children and consequently convinced their children to stop working. Whaba (2001) supports this with research on intergenerational transmission of poverty in Egypt where it was found that the children whose parents had been child labourers were twice as likely than those whose parents were not to become child labourers themselves. All of the youth except for José María described how their parents, at some point urged them to stop working and go to school:

I had to study. My dad told us that he didn’t want us going about selling and that we had to go study. I used to work since I was 8 years old. We used to go to work with my dad until we were 12 years old. We used to collect paper, bottles, batteries everything, and from 12 years old to 14 years old it was when my dad wanted us to go to school. (José)

Moreover, the messages the youth ultimately receive are contradictory because the income that the youth could potentially bring into the family is usually necessary for family survival. A study in Turkey showed that not unlike Costa Rica, with specific regard to migration from rural to urban areas and the problems of earning an adequate income, resulted in that children had no alternative option other than to go to work to supplement the family income (Acar, 2000). It is interesting to note that five out of the six participants did not admit to working currently, however, Sandra gave an example of the reality of the necessity of supplementing the family income:

I used to go with my uncle and my mom and we used to go to sell pencils and key chains. (I was) about 10 years old. When I was, it would be less, like when I was 8. It was when I was 8 years old until 9 and then when I was 9, I stopped because my mom told me that no, its better that no, because she worries a lot about us and she says that she doesn’t like that we keep on working. No, I used to work but
only in my free time I never left my studies. Yes. It was because the situation was very bad and we needed money. (Sandra)

The reality for these youth is that if families are financially desperate, they may be obligated to work, regardless if it means leaving school for a time. Therefore, the objectives of the ACJ program may go against the impoverished realities of the youth in that they encourage them to stay in school, Hecht (1998), maintained that “discouraging poor urban children in Brazil from working in the street, far from protecting them, will likely weaken their ties to the home.” Domestic violence may ensue if poor children refuse to contribute to their family’s support by way of working. According to the National Household Survey (2000) in Costa Rica it was found that, education is inversely related to poverty. More specifically, a person with a high education level or with some type of instruction would unlikely be poor; a person with a low education level or without any type of instruction most probably is poor. Therefore, the contradiction the participants face on whether to stay in school or to go to work is directly related to the level of poverty their family experiences. Favorino and Prior (1994) pointed out that parents play a pivotal role in bolstering school achievement, therefore if the family’s survival is threatened; school will not be a priority regardless. Therefore, the participants face a constant struggle within themselves and contradictory messages from their parents regarding whether or not to go to school or to go to work. The reality for these youth is that the economic situation of their family will dictate their necessity to work regardless of whether they themselves or their parents want them to attend school or not.
If these youth are able to attend school another range of challenges awaits them. If their families are more or less surviving without the necessity of sending these participants to work and they are able to attend school they describe how difficult it is to actually become educated. These youth definitely have a right to become educated as stated in the United Nations World Declaration on Education adopted in 1990: “Basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults... The poor, street and working children should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities” (cited in Boukari, 1997, p. 4). However, the participants in this study are not receiving adequate basic education according to their descriptions of their school experiences.

The commonalities that emerged from all of the participants except José María, were that they all expressed a desire to study even though there were variations in the barriers that they faced on a regular basis that could easily deter even the most enthusiastic student. Trying to attend school for some of the participants meant that they must literally risk their lives because gangs control many of the schools with violence and guns, and claim the school building and grounds as a drug selling area. Then, even if these participants are able to arrive at school, they may find the classrooms already full or overcrowded. Liliana’s account counters the argument of why night school might be an option:

There are classes, but they are night classes and they are very dangerous for me, because there are (bad) people and at night it scares me. There are many gangs there in the schools and they will assault a person and so if I’m alone there they could do anything to me even more dangerous that its one person alone... at night not many people pass by or anything and if they’re going to assault me
there isn’t anyone who is going to help me. (Liliana)

Liliana wants to attend the school in her neighbourhood but she cannot because the classrooms are already at capacity and the only other option is night school which could literally cost her her life because of the surrounding danger of the barrio, even if she wanted to attend.

Inside the schools, the participants faced a lack of teachers, a lack of communication between the students and the teachers, inadequate school facilities and a general lack of capacity. According to CEPAL estimations, youth in Costa Rica require 13-14 years of education (more formal education than high school completed) in order to have a good probability of not falling into poverty (Espeleta, et. al, 2002). These youth require at least 13-14 years of formal education if they are to escape poverty however, most of these youths’ educations are incomplete and of poor quality making it unlikely they will escape poverty. According to Costa Rican statistics, “... in the year 2000, a total of 17% of youth between 7 and 17 years of age did not attend any type of education center” and “... a third of those that do not attend is because they leave to work, the majority live in the metropolitan area and in the central region ... 93% of those that do not attend [school] are not handicapped ...” (Brignoli, 2000). Clearly, these youth will not escape poverty if they do not become educated and they are aware of this but they are simply not provided with access to quality education.

In José María’s case, he was the exception to the six participants in that he did not express a desire to study: “I don’t study right now but when I used to be studying I didn’t like it. It bored me.” This was in stark contrast to Liliana who wanted to study
desperately. However, due to a lack of capacity at the school, she taught herself to read, bought a science textbook from the school and studied at home when she could. However, Liliana’s enthusiastic effort to continue studying on her own is clearly insufficient to educate her properly and will not allow her to escape poverty. In Costa Rica, the probability of being extremely poor is much greater among those that do not have any formal instruction unlike those who have completed high school (INEC, 2000). Both José and Cristiano attended the “open classroom” program at their school which, “is considered to be something that gives the opportunity for ... those who couldn’t study because they were working (and) they weren’t able to study” (José). Amongst all the participants there was a general feeling of gratefulness for being able to study, especially after having lost time due to working in the street, “Thank God, we are able to study because with the age that we are, we wouldn’t be able to enroll in school so then a person has the possibility to still achieve it, thank God” (Cristiano).

It is interesting to note that all of the participants experienced the conflict of working versus studying. However, in relatively economically stable times they were strongly encouraged by their parents to go back to school, to continue in school or the parents were trying to find them a place in a school. Despite the fact that José María did not explicitly say that he liked or wanted to study, he expressed a feeling of exclusion when he provided an illustration of his school situation:

I have already been in school, I’ve already passed (the year), it makes me mad that my mom didn’t want me to. I don’t know ... my mom didn’t want me to. She didn’t want me to go to school. Look, my mom didn’t want me to go to school but, she’s going to give me another opportunity but in a year the high school term will be over ... the school was very nice but at times ugly because
there were kids that used to sell drugs and guns in the school and they used to fight each other and everything. (José María)

The fact that José María described how his mother did not want him to go to school four times reflects that he understood how strongly she felt about him attending school. This may have been in part because his mother needed him to work and also because of the danger she perceived for him at school. José María’s mother’s reaction to him attending school contrasted with other participants’ parents where she explicitly disallowed him to attend school because she feared for his safety instead of encouraging him to attend.

Devaney and Milstein Piscatelli, (1998) found that it is important that the school be viewed by the community as a friendly and positive place where all are welcomed and valued. Instead, according to the findings in this study, school for these youth is a dangerous, overcrowded and inadequate facility with very little to offer them in any aspect of facilitating their development as youth. By combining social interaction, academic training, and parent skills training, the school can promote positive community relationships (Devaney and Milstein Piscatelli, 1998). This seems almost unattainable in the case of this study’s findings, where these youth have to contend with the lack of basic necessities. Even at school, “there was like one month of no taking classes for the reason that there weren’t like covers for where the sewer water comes out, so then they couldn’t teach classes,” (Maricela). According to the accounts of the participants, the schools that they attend are extremely deficient in almost all areas and in no way do they presently promote positive community relationships.

Both the participants’ parents and the participants themselves understand that to
improve their poverty situation, one must attend school in order to find a better paying job. However, their experiences suggest that attending school is overall, a negative experience that grossly insufficiently prepares them to be able to contribute to their families’ friends’ or community’s improvement. “My school isn’t that good, I know ...” (Sandra). The participants currently do not have a way to exit the cycle of poverty if they are not provided with safe access to adequately equipped schools.

Play

Relationships and poverty are the main themes interwoven through the essential structures of the participants’ lives. The participants have described the phenomena of deficiency in their family, barrio, and school as a direct result of poverty including the complication of working in the street. As one of the few common truly positive experiences it was found that all of the participants gave enthusiastic accounts of how play or any kind of physical activity made them feel (e.g. happy; good; better; relaxed; distracted; disoriented; improved self-esteem; proud of one’s accomplishments). In contrast, the “rudeness” of physical activity or physical injury, was referred to specifically by three of the youth, José referred to this injury as “Someone kicks someone else or breaks something or pulls something ...” and Sandra, “... but I don’t like it when I fall.” José María provided an account unique to the previous two in that he himself was responsible for physically injuring another youth:

Yes, when I was playing with a team from the Liga youth (professional team’s youth division), about three years ago, I was 10 years old when I started. Yes. I went to play and they sent me off because I broke (injured another kid by breaking one of his bones) a little kid. I felt really bad because it was the final and I couldn’t go to play, I was feeling really bad and everything, my mom got
me in trouble and everything.
(José María)

The three who mentioned physical injury experienced a feeling of exclusion and unhappiness as a result. The commonality to all participants was being able to enjoy physical activity as a true joy in their lives. Being excluded from the fun was undesirable to all of the youth. Inability to participate due either to their own physical injury or if they had inflicted the injury on another participant, meant exclusion. Being excluded for these youth meant that consequently they were not able to share with others. Every participant used the term, “sharing” when they described their play experiences. Engaging in any type of physical activity, sport or recreation was an opportunity for them to share with each other. In order to explore how play allows the participants to share it is important to understand the meaning of play for them.

The participants’ play experiences were distinct according to gender. The females did not engage in any organized sport, instead they participated in various types of recreation. All three of the male participants are involved in an organized neighbourhood sport league. The males were engaged with the community through sport by traveling to neighbouring towns for tournaments, whereas the females remained close to home and were involved with their family and friends through recreation and play. Comparing these diverse forms of physical activity, the males learn competition, physical discipline and skills, whereas the female youth learn care taking and social skills as opposed to disciplined physical skills. Regardless of the format of play they engage in, both genders agree that play allows them to share with others. Out of the three female participants,
three different types of recreation are seen. One participant preferred to play only in her house, another participant described how she used to play in the barrio but did not currently and the third female participant described her form of play as exercise. All of the males described their play as “football.”

All of the youths’ play experiences were affected by the poverty they live in. For example, Liliana, who was the only participant who expressed a strong fear of being out in the barrio feels, “like I don’t have any freedom,” but she feels more, “relaxed” when she plays “Nintendo” and does aerobics to music with her mother and siblings inside her house. She feels, “all queasy and dizzy from the smell of the people smoking drugs” outside, as well as hearing “shots being fired,” and seeing people driving recklessly makes her feel that, “it’s better we stay in the house.” Sandra used to jump rope with her cousins but now she is “older and very busy so then we don’t play jump rope” even though she “would like to do it again.” Work is a part of Sandra’s life even if only on weekends, and the little money she receives from her father is used to buy “personal things that I need,” therefore, buying a skipping rope for play in spare time is “not a priority.”

Maricela, contrary to Liliana, chose to become involved in the barrio by walking around and she confronts “what happens in the street” to the extent that the people of the barrio have given her the nickname of “the reporter” because “I am like a reporter going about there watching.” Maricela feels she is in a way monitoring the streets and “can warn another person, yes, an example, if someone grabs a little girl.” Although Maricela enjoys walking around, her play is influenced by the volatile nature of her neighbourhood
as is every other area of her life and she understood that, "you can become involved ... there are bad people, and they want to harm you, harm, as in a rape. At times, if I walk alone I get scared yes, but I like to walk with someone." Poverty dictates the form of the participants' play regardless of the format. However, the benefits of any type of physical activity are almost always positive. These findings were supported by a study on low-income women and physical activity by Frisby, Crawford and Dorer (1997), who found that women benefited in several ways. There was a perceived increase in the benefits of physical activity, an improvement in some of the physical and mental health indicators, and an increase in skill development for those who took on leadership and research roles. Most of the women interviewed revealed their feelings of social isolation were also reduced. Similarly, the female participants in this study benefited from physical activity as well as enjoyed social interaction with those involved in their forms of recreation and play.

The type of play male participants' engaged in was also affected by poverty in that at times they described the need to contend with other violent males - often times gang members - who occupy the neighbourhood soccer pitch and the ACJ ball court to play football. A common feature amongst all of the male youths' play experiences was that it signified opportunity, not just organized sport. Opportunity for José María meant to have "fun," for "everyone to celebrate" when a goal is scored, and to meet people from "a different place." José described football for himself as, "something good, fun, happy, it's something that for me is in everything." Moreover, football for José was an opportunity to be "not thinking," which, to him was a necessary skill while playing
football and that if mastered, could lead to the opportunity of reaching his goal. He illustrated this with an emergent story of a professional Costa Rican player who had too many burdens on his mind and as a result committed suicide:

Football is a passion, the passion for many, it's a sport actually that a person can't play if they don't have the head (for it), for me there are things that happen in life maybe because of many burdens. There was a player in Costa Rica who was the best player, he died from a gunshot, yes, because he had some money problems, because he separated from his wife so then he didn't have any other choice, like, to kill himself right, because of the problems that he had with his family so then he decided to kill himself... when a person plays football he can go places and if he has the capability in himself and if he gets to the first, second division then, later on he can play for the national team of each country, that is something very big for a person... there are other guys, who are ready and they can go to whichever country. Yes. That is one of my goals. The goal. (José)

Football in most nations is an integral part of the culture and it is no different in Costa Rica. Armstrong (2004) has shown how football in itself can be a powerful tool for young males to learn physical discipline, sport specific skills and other developmental and interpersonal skills. He recounted the history of the inception of a football club in Liberia which promoted reconciliation through sport in times of civil conflict. Sean Devereux was a physical education teacher working and living in Liberia in 1988. He established two football teams and promoted football tournaments, which saw the combatants lay down their arms for the duration of the games. Based on the philosophy that sport might provide an alternative career to the militia ... in a society of displaced people, the (football) squad was both a surrogate family and a resource network. A central aim of this program was also to re-unify and reconcile the children with the families that had abandoned them. In extreme cases of political unrest in developing countries, many times children are forced to join armies. Many times they are forced to
kill and carry guns. In this case, sport had been used to allow them to lay down their guns and play, allowing them even if for a short time, to be children. Armstrong’s (2004) research supports the findings in this particular study wherein the sport of football was used as a tool which offered the opportunity to bring participants together with members of the community for peaceful, non-conflictive, organized play. The game provided participants with a type of family or team network and despite the challenges they face with regard to poverty, they were allowed to play and to be youth for a short time.

For Cristiano, the opportunity came in the form of being something to keep him from being bored: “When one is bored they just become lazy, idle, so then they go look for trouble like the rest of them...” Within the challenges and opportunities that play represents for the participants, they all used the words “distract” and “disorient” when they make reference to play in their lives. Play for them is not merely free time to run about; all the participants indicate three purposes that specifically describe the role of play in their lives. First, play promotes “not thinking,” where if one has a problem in their life at a given time they are being disoriented by being physically active and having fun and their thoughts are not focused on their problem:

> The best, the best is ... one disorients himself when he is (playing) if something has him down or if he is thinking about something and well, one disorients himself and they don’t want other things. One doesn’t think about what it is that he is actually thinking about or if he has a worry well like that, one disorients himself and doesn’t think about those things then he is proud, happy about what it is that he is doing I believe that (happens to me) a lot and I disorient myself.

(José)

Second, play promotes distraction, by “passing the time.” When the youth play as a way to pass the time they are engaging in a positive physical activity instead of being bored.
They are distracted by play from the easily accessible negative activities around them. When the youth become bored, it is easy for them to fall into becoming involved in negative and often times illegal activities in the barrio, “one exercises themselves ... walking is good for the body and for one to distract themselves ...” (Maricela). Third, play allows them to forget what negative things they may have been exposed to in the barrio. Liliana illustrated that play, “is something that makes me forget the bad things.”

Play experiences are varied. Participants give meaning to play using a range of descriptions such as; “freedom,” “not a priority,” “a vehicle to a better life,” “something to occupy them,” “a physical thing to do,” “a way to meet others,” “a way to disorient oneself” and “a distraction.” Play is also simultaneously a conscious involvement in the violent barrio, a way to “share” with others and to prevent one from “thinking.” Whether the youth choose to integrate themselves into the violent and dangerous barrio they live in or, they choose to avoid conflict in their homes, to them, play means having the opportunity to share a positive experience with their friends and family.

The thread of poverty winds its way completely through the backgrounds of the youth in this study. Their barrio, work, studies and play are all affected by poverty in a negative way. Poverty impedes their quality of life by shadowing them with violence, imposing the unfair necessity of having to work in the street as a child, denying them the right to receive an adequate education despite an enthusiasm for learning and by denying them the right to play in their own neighbourhoods. Play is something the youth find ways to enjoy despite the poverty they live in because it is a way for them to disentangle themselves from it temporarily. Play frees their minds, allows them to share and receive
freely with their friends and grants them the pure enjoyment of participating in something positive, fun and distracting.

**Theme Three: Empowerment**

This theme of empowerment will focus on the three emergent categories of the youths’ lived experiences participating in the ACJ program, on their experiences of personal change through the program and on giving voice to the participants on their thoughts about the program. In the previous section, a background was given on the participants’ lives and how they are affected by poverty in almost every aspect of life. The following sections will discuss respectively, the three categories of the ACJ program experiences, personal change and the participants’ voices.

*ACJ Program Experiences*

In the previous section, common to all the experiences was the belief that through play, the participants were given the opportunity to distract and disorient themselves from life problems, being bored, and the negative things in their lives. Play offers a positive experience in the youths’ lives. They described the program in one commonly repeated word: “beautiful.” The word was used by all the participants to describe everything relating to the camp in general and more specifically; the food, the bonfire, the organization of the camp, activities, handicrafts, the lesson on qualities (values), the people, and their friends. Also, they described singing, games, passing the time, and being able to ask for advice from trusted advisors as beautiful parts of their camp experience.

- “The food was so good, and that one could sing or pass the time, oh and so beautiful
the bonfire as well!” (Maricela),

- “The thing about the camp is that it is very beautiful and everything is really well organized, it didn’t have anything, nothing bad,” (Sandra), and
- “Everything is really beautiful. Never, never had anything happened to me that I didn’t like, I like everything at the camp,” (Liliana).

There is a stark contrast between the youths’ overall negative descriptions of their barrio, work and studies and their repetitive use of the word, “beautiful” as an all encompassing term to describe almost all of the experiences they have enjoyed through the ACJ program. From the repeated use of the word beautiful, it is clear they generally view the program positively.

The ACJ program format for child street workers that consisted of weekly meetings and several camps per year was addressed directly by only two of the participants. The participants had their own ideas for why the format of the program delivery was the way it was. One of that participants felt that the program format consisted of weekly meetings which, prepared them for the camps and it was made clear by the program administrators that if they consistently attended the meetings, as a result, they would be able to go to the camps. Another of the participants felt that the camps were preparation for the meetings. With regard to the program structure, the participants gave accounts that illustrated their generally, “good” and “bad” experiences through the program. Accounts from the three female participants showed how they felt the “bad” experiences of the program pertained to issues of freedom and trust. Within both the meetings and the camps, three participants experienced feelings of being watched too
closely as well as wanting more freedom:

The good thing, but at the same time the bad thing, that they would give us more freedom, that they wouldn’t watch us so much ... but at the same time its good because they have to take care of us but I would like it if they were to give us a little bit more freedom. (Maricela)

Sandra, like Maricela’s account did not experience the feeling of being closely watched as entirely negative either, although she felt the program providers lacked trust in the participants, “That they don’t watch us so much, I would say that they should have more trust in us.” Here, the experience of being watched too closely was something that some of participants struggled with. They wanted to be cared for however, they simultaneously wanted to feel that the program providers also trusted them to be responsible enough to handle themselves. Out of the six participants, only one told of a seriously negative experience through the program. According to his experience, when he went back to play on the property outside of the program hours the experience was a negative one where he and his friends were denied water unlike during program times. He found the ACJ at that time to be an unwelcoming and unsafe place when he was forced to leave running with his friends because they felt their lives were threatened by the guard:

The bad thing is the guards here. Because here, the last time we were asking for water, the guard, he was crazy with us and he took out his gun on us... He said to us, “no, no, I can’t give water”, but you can’t deny people water so I went back and he came out and took out his gun, we all left running. He didn’t fire shots at us but it was something that I didn’t like. (José)

José associated the ACJ with the only relatively safe place to play in his barrio. It is a place he feels is safe, and provides him with instruction, attention and social interaction during the weekly program hour. The ACJ then, in José’s experience represents a safe
place only during program hours but outside of the specific program hours, similar to the barrio, it is not to be trusted.

According to the generally "good" and "bad" experiences as described by the participants with specific reference to the program the most important thing to note is that the overwhelmingly common description the youth use is that everything they see and experience whilst participating is beautiful as has already been discussed previously. Research by Sport, Exercise and Physical Education (SEPE) professionals acknowledges that empowering people and improving their health and sense of well-being helps them to do away with feeling terrorized and become happy and free (Lawson, 2005). Their experience whilst participating in the program is completely contrary to what they experience in their daily lives which they describe in many ways, using descriptors opposite to the word "beautiful" such as "filthy," "dangerous," and "violent." Lawson (2005) further argues that when these individuals achieve a sense of empowered-oriented freedom they have freedom not only from terror, oppression and poverty, but also they have the freedom of choice, beginning with what to do, play and create. The ACJ programs, facility and property are not a complete escape for the participants. However, they are temporarily freed from their impoverished realities by detaching and disorienting themselves through the program and the physical activities they enjoy there allow them to participate in something positive. Empowerment-oriented community development and sustainable development depend on this dual freedom (Boshoff, 1997; Burnett, 2001; Burnett & Hollander, 1999; Lawson, 2005; Pettavin & Brenner, 1999). Boshoff (1997) further supports these findings through similar research which was directed by local and
national government policies. The South African government (which sponsored the majority of elite and sport-for-all programs) saw sport as playing a key role in the empowerment of disenfranchised and relatively impoverished communities.

The physical activities that the youth enjoy at the ACJ program empower them. They realize that they have the right to speak out on issues that affect them, and that they have a choice to participate in a positive program that disorients them from the negative things they experience daily. This positive choice is important for their development.

**Personal change**

Throughout their interviews all of the participants talked about “change.” They were referring to a change in a person’s behaviour and way of presenting themselves. All participants except one made reference to themselves as “being different,” which was either the way they had always seen themselves, as different from others or, their desired result following “change.” The ways they considered themselves to be different was reflected in their experiences of being unlike others around them in the barrio. José distinguished himself from his friends in the barrio as being one who had not yet tried drugs:

There are some yes that say I’m going to try, one friend of mine that smokes marijuana says that I’m going to try that and he tried it and he felt like he was up in the clouds, smoking, well, everything. Yes, they get into houses to take everything that they can steal. I, I never stole like that because I, I see myself as different ... I don’t smoke and I don’t drink ... (José)

Liliana experienced the feeling that she was different from others who worked in the street: “Since I was a little girl I used to think I, with that feeling that I want to be something more ...” Sandra believed she was different from other badly behaved kids
because her parents taught her how to “respect” others. Out of the six, José María was the exception to describing himself as different instead; he provided a deeper description of this phenomenon of “change” referred to by all participants. José María described his personal experience of this change as it emerged as a story linked to the good experiences he had enjoyed as a result of the camp program:

The good thing in the camp, I met new people like those guys from New York and we had fun together, (it was good) to meet (people) from far away and to be changing... yes, one’s way of being, their vocabulary and behaviour and everything. I was very bad mannered. “Malcriado” is when I don’t respect you and I use bad words and everything. Maybe because I didn’t like things and stuff like that. I, when before I wasn’t a part of this program I used to play before (on the ACJ property), okay, but before when I wasn’t here (part of the program), Don Fernando used to tell me no, that I shouldn’t be looking for fights and everything and I started to say bad words to him and to manipulate him and everything. Yes, I was very bad-mannered and used to start to throw rocks at him and everything. I gave him an explanation when some people from New York came. We talked to each other and they painted the ACJ and I was helping them and everything. (José María)

José María described how he used to be “malcriado,” and he defined that word using his own words which, included a lack of respectful behaviour. This particular participant valued and was proud of his transformation or change which allowed him to be included in the program. Another word, “detach” here is introduced in José María’s account that is synonymous with, “distract” and, “disorient” from the previous sections. In this context, the meaning of “detach” was to help him forget about negative aspects in his life. José María described his experience of changing as a result of being able to be included in the program that allowed him to “detach” the negative things in his life from his mind and have fun. Wanting to be involved when he saw others having fun, prompted him to apologize to the program director, and ask to join. By participating and having fun he was
able to "detach" his mind and begin to change his behaviour. This "change" that the youth experienced was a positive, desired result of being a program participant which gave them a sense of identity and a desire to help others achieve this change: "I know what is myself, I can do it, I can teach it to other people" (Sandra).

The participants describe their lived experiences in this program that uses physical activity as part of development and informal education as wanting to be included in a program that will initiate positive personal change in their lives. The participants associate negative experiences in physical activity with exclusion. Through the ACJ program they have the opportunity to be included in strengthening their friendship network. They are also able to distract, disorient and detach themselves mentally from the negative influences of their barrio and the conflicting messages they receive regarding the necessity for them to work in the street.

The Participants’ Voices

The youth’s lived experiences in the program also include their critical descriptions of their participation in the program. By giving voice to the youth, it is possible to see how they were empowered by speaking out and reflecting upon their own experiences. They were given the opportunity to judge their own circumstances for themselves according to their own worldview. The participants gave accounts about how the program met their needs and how they could be better served. They essentially evaluated the program, policies and program providers, by questioning and reflecting upon their situation. The participants described their beliefs in the areas of decision making, fairness, setting program objectives and their own involvement, within those
areas.

Not only did the participants experience the phenomena of behaviour change to
the extent that they felt they were different from other badly-behaved persons, but they
also believe that this change is an essential process, integral to having an opportunity for
a better life. This was supported by Nichols’ (1997) research where several links between
active participation in sport and leisure and reduced criminal behavior were uncovered
such as: direct diversion from offending; meeting a need for excitement; personal fitness
leading to improved mental health; increased self esteem and sense of control over one’s
life; the development of cognitive competences; positive role models; and enhanced
chances of employment. In addition, Hellison, Martinek and Cutforth (1996) and Taylor
(1996) have shown how sport has been used specifically for violence prevention in sports
programs designed to teach values, conflict resolution skills and empowerment to
children in vulnerable communities. These researchers found that community centers
both in urban and suburban areas are critical for idle youth as outlets within which to
spend their free time; to develop positive personality, physical, social and moral
attributes; and to counter disruptive violent and criminal behavior. Outcomes from
programs such as these can be exceptionally positive in developing empathy and fairness
in youth (Shields & Bredemeier, 1996). One of the participants felt so strongly about this
positive personal change that she felt that the main objective of the program was to
initiate positive change in the participants:

I believe that the objective is that each one of the participants that are there in the
camp will change how they are ... that they change their vocabulary, that they
don’t become drug addicts or like that. (Maricela)
Since all of the participants felt that a behaviour change within the program’s participants should be one of the main objectives of the program, the participants felt their needs were met in part. The participants felt that the program facilitated positive change within themselves. Two participants gave examples of how other participants’ needs were being met by illustrating experiences other than their own of positive behaviour change. Changes in others included, “children who seemed mute at first” and then became, “more creative since they got themselves involved in the things” (Sandra) and “before (this person) was intolerable and now, he doesn’t have the same character as before” (Maricela). As far as the camp program in general, all of the youth participants wanted to be involved in the meetings and camps as much as they could. There is a huge attraction for them to go to a camp to play and have fun instead of going to work in the street as they normally would. José described this attraction for youth as, “They are going to go running like, if you talk about a camp they are going to be thinking, how great, I don't have to go to work.”

Almost all the participants agreed that their needs could be served better through the program by having as much opportunity to share with each other as possible. The “sharing time” or “chat time” at Cristiano described it, was a time for bonding and empathetic understanding amongst their friendship network. It was also a chance for the participants to understand and be updated as to what was going on in each other’s lives. Although many of the participants in the program were related to each other and lived in the same barrio, they did not feel close to each other. They felt they did not know each
other as well as they would like to. They were looking to deepen their relationships with one another. Cristiano described how if he could change anything about the camp program, it would be to:

First of all have a meeting. A chat time and to look for people who would support a person in order to do that because a person without support like they used to give the program before, it’s not an easy thing. So then between a few friends we all come to an agreement and that’s it, I don’t know to share with people is more needed you could say, yes. (Cristiano)

He stated clearly that they needed to share with people on a more regular basis. For these youth, sharing leads to empathy and support. Empathetic support built through sharing is a way for them to cope with the problems in their lives. Maricela’s account represented the participants’ feelings on the importance of, “team members getting to know each other in-depth” that there be opportunities to, “share” to participate in “recreational things, games, camps and really fun games.” All participants conceded that they did have the opportunity to enjoy certain essential parts of their programming needs such as playing, sharing and having chat times. Having their needs met is directly linked to the evaluation of the program, policies and providers by allowing the participants to question and reflect upon the service that they are offered.

The “change” in behaviour was common to all participants as something they experienced themselves and as something they believe to be an essential step for others to take in the process of achieving a better life for oneself. José María was the only participant who responded by describing where he felt he would be without having undergone the behaviour change through the ACJ program. He would describe himself as, “smoking” and, “going about like the bad people making fights and everything,” that
the program was successful in his case, "The camp has done us a great favour, they help a person behave himself well."

Although participants may not know of any alternative that surpasses the ACJ program experience in their lives, they perceive a twofold evaluation process. First, as participants being evaluated on their learning retention of values and other informal education, "we meet at the meetings in order to practice what we learned in the camp ... they observe us to see if we learned what they taught us at the camp" (Liliana). Second, the participants perceive they are part of the evaluation process of the program as Liliana illustrated “They gave us the paper so that we could put down everything that we would like to do there and they will prepare to do it the next time we go ...” She also stated that, “In the meeting they are going to ask us what we don't like at the camp.” The youth reflected that they have a responsibility to assimilate what they are being taught at the camp and in turn, they are given a chance to give feedback on what they are being offered as a means to teach them. The next section will elaborate on this idea.

The ACJ facility is for all of the participants, apart from their homes, the safest place in their neighborhood for them to play. Even this safe place has its problems and two of the participants reflected on how they could make the ACJ a safer place. Both Cristiano and José María separately stated that if each were the Program Director at the ACJ the first thing he would do would be to, “close everything well, the entire property, put lighting around the court” (Cristiano). “That would help so that the people who come to smoke here don’t get in as well. Yes, here, out there, yes they cause fights and everything” (José María). The participants questioned the program providers also, on
issues of personal safety and security. These youth realized that two things were necessary for their safety; a safe facility and program leaders who provided safe programs. Most of the participants except for José felt safe following the programs prepared by the providers. He claimed the worst part of the camp was when he was instructed to participate in games that he felt were dangerous and as a result he did not want to participate:

The worst is when they don’t pay attention when there is an activity ... they actually made a game in a river, I didn’t want to go there because it was really dangerous. It was to jump on the rocks and a person could break something or get a bad blow on the head and (it wasn’t good for me) because I was telling them that I didn’t want to participate in that part there, only the other part and they gave me a (chance) because what they did was to move the rocks so that nobody would slide and that way the game was played because that way the rocks were less loose and no slipping, it was the worst. (José)

Although José was the exception and illustrated a dangerous game that he felt exemplified poor judgment on the part of the providers, he did describe how the game was altered to accommodate his concerns. He felt he was “given a chance” which he was grateful for however, the game remained as the “worst” in his mind.

All of the participants believed without exception the following, as expressed by José that if “one was going to give their opinion about something I believe they would respect him” (José), as already seen in the previous example. Not only did they feel that they would be respected, but also that they would be, “paid attention to” as three of the six participants described it. Four out of the six feel that despite not having offered a complaint in the past, that if a complaint or a suggestion did arise, they would be well received by the program providers. With regard to decision making within the program
and the role of participants, three of the participants explained that they felt their opinions and suggestions were being applied to the content of the program and they gave specific examples of activities they had asked for and received such as the bed of mud (mud pit as part of the obstacle course in the rally activity), the handicrafts and the bonfire.

One of the youths distinctly perceived an injustice with the rules of the program and he described what he would change if he were the program director:

What I would change is the rules. Because many, they don’t fulfill them. They say that if the rule is not followed then they don’t get to go on the trip. No, it is not fair...And others they don’t come (to the meetings) yes, they go. I don’t know it’s a load of crap. It’s not fair. (José)

José learned from his experience through the program that the rules state that those who want to go to the camps must attend every Tuesday meeting, without absences until the camp. José has seen where the rules have been broken or not applied in certain cases for certain people and conversely, maintained regardless of the situation for others. José was the exception amongst his fellow participants speaking out against how unfair he believes the rules are. To him, following the rules does not necessarily lead to the promised reward.

The participants themselves realize that the program directly affects their lives. Two of the participants similarly responded that the objectives of the program should be, “that they teach us to respect others.” The participants understand that learning values and how to behave and interact with others is the key to being involved in activities and to having and maintaining friends. Other participants agreed and stated that it was important that all who attended the program fully participated in all activities to achieve
the maximum benefit for themselves and for others.

The participants were given the opportunity to consider the appropriateness of the program for themselves. Provided there was a safe place for them to gather, all of the participants felt they received a great deal of benefit and satisfaction through having fun with their friends and consequently, "distracting," "disorienting" or "detaching" themselves from their daily lives in a nurturing place. Liliana's voice represented the sentiments of the participants:

The good thing about the programs is that we learn to share, to get along with people or we would be like embittered ... I wouldn't have known how to value people. They have taught us, I believe, to respect people, and I like that I learn everything about sexuality, sport, family and education, and that it is important to study. (Liliana)

The participants feel that the program as it stands is appropriate for meeting their needs. However, one of the youths in particular gave insight as to the long-term benefits of participation and she went further to explain what she felt was an ideal program:

If there was yes, like to have that program (for) all the kids from the street they could go to the program and they could like always help them and they could continue moving forward but among them and to have something like that its like for them to have something that is their own, that there are people there that are going to support them in everything, and that they are always going to be by their side, always. (Maricela)

For so many of these impoverished youth who work in the street, they have been abandoned, disappointed and exploited by structures that do not fully support them such as their families and schools. Maricela voiced how this void would ideally be filled for them by feeling consistently supported by the program, having something they can call their own, and being able to rely on something that will not abandon them.
The youth themselves have voiced their need to share their experiences with each other and to be instructed and cared for by people who can empathize with their lives. They need support, especially in the form of the friendship network, and a safe place that will “distract,” “disorient” and/or “detach” their thoughts from the negative influences they see, live and breathe literally everyday. The time they are able to “detach” their thoughts from work and negative experiences allows them to have fun, be kids, feel hopeful and be happy. Simultaneously, they value and desire to be educated on values such as respect, the rights they have as children or youth, and the importance of studying. The participants expect positive behaviour change in individuals will be facilitated as a result. This developed and improved behaviour will change the way in which they interact with their family, socially, and it will lead them to make and maintain healthier choices in life, such as refusing to take drugs, refusing to join a gang and refusing to quit school. They will be empowered to go back to their families and friends in the barrio and influence them and from there the barrio can be influenced:

In the future, if I could be someone right, someone important, I can help. I would do it, and help those people. And those people that don’t have anything I would help them, and it could be that one could make a program for those people to get them moving on ahead. (Maricela)

All of the participants aspire to be “someone important” like Maricela in one way or another and by being empowered through the positive experience facilitated by the ACJ program, the future looks bright, whether they want to be a “professional football player,” an “actress or a singer,” go to “the University of Hawaii,” or “to have a good job.”

Through awareness of their rights as youth and by being able to have influence in
the programming they are offered at the ACJ, they become empowered to feel like they have some control over their lives. This allows them to feel hopeful towards the future despite where they live and the daily problems they encounter there.

This theme of empowerment describes overall the sense that the participants receive of having ownership of their own lives. They have been empowered through the program by learning how to make healthy and safe life choices. They understand that they have choices that they are and can be different from others who decide to settle with what they are presented with in the barrio.

**Summary**

This chapter describes the lived experiences of these youth framed by their backgrounds. The youth live with their families but their main emotional support comes from their friends. The poverty they live in affects every area of their lives and play is the only positive outlet that they have to help them cope with the negativity that surrounds them. They have learned through the ACJ program that uses integrated physical activity that they have rights as youth and that they have voices which they can use to speak up for the concerns that most affect them, their families and friends. This chapter gives voice to these youth to talk about the program that has literally changed their lives. These youth were made aware through the program (although not flawless) that there is hope for them to improve their quality of life as long as they are willing to continue to make healthy choices.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Within this study, the use of physical activity has been identified as a means to develop individuals. The ACJ in the case of this study is an essential link in community development for those in developing countries such as Costa Rica where the extremely poor are not able to participate in and enjoy the full benefits from schools, government programs and the economic market. The extremely poor such as in the case of these youth who live without some of the basic necessities of life, are caught within the vicious cycle of poverty.

This study engaged the youth participants to critically describe their lived experiences of their families, friends, neighbourhood, work, studies and ACJ experiences. The main themes of relationships and poverty emerged from the participants’ critical descriptions of their historical backgrounds. This is essential for understanding how the youths’ frame their ACJ program experiences. It was found that their family units are fragmented and at times familial roles are confused. As such, their family structures are comparable to that of street kids where their principal socialization structure is through their network of friends. Conflict in the home caused by the constant stress of the poverty they live in manifests in many forms and leads them to turn to their friendship network for practical and emotional support. Friends are the most important things in their lives alongside family. The youth in this study according to their descriptions of their backgrounds and lived experiences are destined to reproduce poverty within their
generation. Economic and political factors beyond their control perpetuate the poverty they live in. The opportunity the ACJ program represents within their community is a way for the youth to “distract” themselves from the destructive vices that they could easily fall into such as consuming or selling drugs, gang violence, and working full-time in the street among other negative and destructive behaviours. The physical activity that is offered as part of the ACJ development program needs to be connected to education and social services in order to make an impact. Physical activity is only one of many tools that must be used in collaboration with other tools in order for the combined effort to lead to healthier individuals and healthier communities.

The ACJ succeeds in informally educating the youth as intended in their objectives. Physical activity is a means to a healthier community. However, in this study the impact of the program within the community is not known. The youth describe this informal education in part as change. The participants told me they felt a change within them, in that they are educated through their experiences. The personal change they experienced described improved interpersonal and communication skills, an understanding of the importance of formal education and the right they have to attend school as opposed to working in the street. As youth are empowered by obtaining knowledge about their rights on work and play they become educated on the choices they have. They also described the joy they experienced of being included in a community of other youth where they enjoy physical activity together in a beautiful place. Through their participation they are able to share and as a result develop empathy, problem solving and conflict resolution skills.
Change is a good thing but the focus should be on whether or not the impact of this change is lost when they go back into the community. The program is becoming routine for the current participants, many of whom have participated for years in the same weekly meetings and two-day camp excursions and the problem this presents is that the program becomes more ceremonial rather than having an impact on their lives. A program such as this has the potential to make a difference in youths’ lives, and if it becomes a routine with the same unaltered activities offered to them time after time, the impact will be minimal.

Of course the ACJ camp program is beautiful to the youth in contrast to how they live, however they would not know this contrast existed without the program. The program offers them the opportunity to evaluate whether or not their needs are being met, something they do not experience in other areas of their lives. This unique experience of having the opportunity to make suggestions and/or comments regarding their needs empowers them to feel like they are able to positively affect their own futures. As a result, the youth feel like they have bright futures and they have hope for a better life.

Certainly, there is a dark side of sport where children and youth may engage or be forced into in negative experiences. If sport or any other type of physical activity harms children or youth in any way it is not beneficial to their healthy development by any means and I, as a researcher acknowledge this fact plainly. In this study, the reality for these youth was such that physical activity was useful and life-changing in a positive manner for them. They did have a few negative experiences such as being watched too closely by the program providers, or being chased by the facility guards during a non-
program time. However, on the whole the main finding was that these youths' lives were changed positively as a result of taking part in this ACJ program.

The purpose statement for this study was to understand the lived experiences of the participants in a YMCA camp program that integrated physical activity and play for the development of youth street workers and how their social context framed these experiences in Costa Rica, Central America. The qualitative nature of the study, followed by a subjective epistemology allowed for the multiple realities of the participants to be explored and examined. Phenomenology, as the chosen research paradigm granted the study a sound underpinning by bringing the philosophical and methodological "lived experiences" method by which to understand the phenomenon of the youth program that integrated physical activity and play for development. The constructionist assumption was particularly appropriate for this study in that it was assumed that participants would assign meaning to their experiences by their own personal historical process of enculturation, both directly and indirectly. This made the participants' social context especially relevant whilst understanding and interpreting their experiences through the program. It was important to understand where and what the participants came from in order to understand how they would experience and assign meaning to their program experiences. For that reason it was equally important to allow them to interpret them critically. The interpretive-critical analysis of the study was essential in order for participants to reflect and critique their experiences and to truly give their concerns a voice.

The key assumption that physical activity used in a program as part of healthy
development for youth is that by virtue of moving, feeling, and being mentally and physically engaged in a physical activity or game, youth are learning positive skills and abilities. Positive skills and abilities manifest themselves in compelling the youth to make healthy choices. If a youth cares about himself or herself, about his or her friends and family, and they are introduced to ways that will permit them to continue to contribute to their own happiness and to those they love, the choice is an easy one. Choosing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is the choice these youth are making as a result of their participation in the ACJ program that integrates physical activity as part of healthy development.

Understanding the social context that these youth come from is critical in order to be able to address their needs. For the ACJ program to continue having a positive effect on their lives it is important to understand where they are coming from to understand how we can make the program better. There are benefits to these types of programs however, the voices of the participants must be heard to affect positive change for them directly.

**Recommendations**

I present two sets of recommendations. The first section outlines a practical problem that the ACJ is currently facing and offers a practical recommendation. The second section lists recommendations for further scholarly research in the area of developmental programs that integrate physical activity.

The participants themselves have voiced many times their concern for safety. They are concerned about safety for themselves and their loved ones being out in the street, and even at times being on the ACJ property outside of program times. The
communities that surround the ACJ facility are called Purral and Alemania Unida. Both communities face serious gang problems. The ACJ is currently facing an ironic problem where the only relatively safe place to play for the youth participants in this study is on the property of the ACJ where, it is in fact, dangerous because of its accessibility to all. This current accessibility to all includes gang members, drug dealers and consumers and other people looking for trouble.

The problem this presents to ACJ program administrators is that the property must be enclosed in order to protect those inside from those outside. For example, with regard to access and a safe place to play for the youth of the community, the existing basketball/soccer court on the ACJ property is difficult to access. Every time staff attempts to utilize the space for an ACJ program or purpose, they must confront and fight with gang members and others from the community, who occupy the space and do not understand that it is private property. This lack of understanding is due in part to the absence of a proper fence that encloses the ACJ property, giving the perception that the area is public. Many people smoke marijuana, consume other types of drugs and engage in dishonest acts within an area they consider public and belonging to the municipality. When these people are asked to leave, to smoke or consume their drugs in another place, ACJ staff are often met with abusive language, vulgarities or no response at all. The property of the ACJ in its current open state serves the community as a type of short-cut, allowing a way to cut through the property on the way to and from the neighbourhoods surrounding the facility.

A recommendation towards solving this problem would be to put up a solid
cinder-block wall around the property perimeter to protect and enclose the ACJ grounds. However, lack of funds prevents this from being a simple solution. It would cost approximately five million colones, (roughly about $12,630.00 CAD), as well as the cost of employing five security guards in total to patrol 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with one guard at the main gate to limit access to those who show ACJ identification. The guards would also serve to protect the fence because currently, there is an existing chain-link fence in place, but the people from the neighborhood, believing it to be their right, have cut through it more than once with wire cutters to gain access to what they believe is public property.

The irony of making an inclusive environment an exclusive one for the purpose of safe community development may seem contradictory. However to enclose the existing ACJ property would allow the only community area that is currently relatively safe to become safer. Moreover, the participants in this study will be able to enjoy the full extent of the programs without having to be afraid for their personal safety at least while they are at the ACJ facility. Since one of the main findings in this study was that the youth use play and physical activity in the program to “distract,” “disorient” and “detach” themselves, having a safe place to do this is very important in order for them to achieve this. A further recommendation would be to directly address this problem and to present the findings of this study to non-governmental organizations such as the “Rotary Club,” “Lions Club” or a North American YMCA. Based on the positive findings in this study they may want to either contribute funds towards building a fence or they may offer to build it completely.
The main rationale for this study was to investigate the youths' lived experiences of the development program that integrated physical activity in order to understand if their needs were in fact being met. If these participants attend the program week after week, and year after year, it remains to be seen whether or not their lives will continually change. The findings in this study indicate that their lives have indeed, changed however, the program must be more than just an escape for participants. The ACJ program and facility does allow the participants to get away from their bleak realities but in order to make a true difference in the lives of these youth, larger issues and concerns must be addressed. The youth are happy with the program. They are happy that they have a voice and when they give suggestions for program improvement they are heard. The ACJ needs to build on their existing successful programming base and continue educating their administrators, program providers and volunteers in order to continue the learning process for the youth. By educating their staff on the most updated physical and health issues, conflict resolution skills and practical life skills they could impart this knowledge to the youth to supplement what they are learning in schools or are trying to learn on their own. As part of their informal education mission, the ACJ could partner with other local, national and international profit and non-profit organizations to involve these youth in exchanges, workshops and other learning opportunities to expose them to diverse and new ways of thinking.

As these youth continue to grow and develop physically and socially, they will face many different types of challenges and they will continue to turn to their friends and the ACJ for guidance. For that reason, the ACJ must also be concerned with the futures of
these youth and not just what the next camp excursion will offer them.

Facilitating leadership development in these youth will empower them further to make healthy and positive choices. Consequently, the youth will motivate and encourage their families and neighbourhood to also make healthy choices.

This section lists recommendations for further scholarly research in the area of developmental programs that integrate physical activity. Whilst this research provides only an exploratory understanding of the lived experiences of youth participants in a development program that integrates physical activity, it is necessary for more research to be done focusing on the voices of development program participants for three important reasons, i) it will benefit the program administrators by demonstrating the extent to which the program is achieving its objectives, ii) it will benefit research by creating a more in depth understanding of the phenomena of development programs that integrate physical activity and iii) it will empower youth for them to be aware that their experiences and opinions are valuable in the planning and implementation of programs for community development. Recommendations include more research in the program evaluation area of development programs that use physical activity, organized sport and recreational activities. More research is needed especially in the areas of child and youth gender equality in developing countries, for example as found in this study the youth were separated by gender on the types of play and recreation they were involved in. A needs assessment study conducted for females to better understand what types of play, recreation and sport would specifically serve their needs would be appropriate. As seen in the findings chapter of this study all of the males participated in organized football.
Football is the most appropriate sport that could be further developed and organized for the males in the community as part of their well-balanced development. Although there were no physically challenged children or youth involved in the program studied, there is a need to look at the developmental programs that integrate physical activity (or lack of) for children or youth with physical or mental challenges in developing countries. In developing Central and South American countries youth gangs are a serious and growing problem and research on how developmental programs that integrate physical activity and sport are able to develop and rehabilitate these youth would be invaluable. A longitudinal study that followed youths' participation in the program from their adolescent years to adulthood would greatly serve program administrators and educators on the long-term benefits of integrated physical activity in a well-balanced development program.

In all of the recommended research, it is the voices of the participants that are most important. It is important to understand the lived experiences of participants in these programs to provide a more complete understanding on how they can be served or better served in order to help them live happier and more productive lives within their families, communities and countries.
References


York: Longman.


Bass.


International Charter of Physical Education and Sport.


Appendix A

Introduction before beginning interview process:

• An overview and the purpose of the study were given to the participant.

• Status of written informed consent from their parent(s) was confirmed to be present.

• Participant was reminded that the interview was being tape recorded.

• Participant was reminded that only the researcher would have access to the interview data (all forms, tapes, notes etc.).

• Participant was reminded that he/she could stop and/or withdraw whenever they wished with no penalties whatsoever.

• Participants were advised of what they could expect for each interview, (e.g., length of interview 30 - 45 minutes and that they would be asked questions about the ACJ program).

• Participants were reminded that they could ask questions if they were unclear on a question or if they wished for further explanation of the topic.

• Participants were reminded that their name would be replaced with a pseudonym in the data so that their individual identities would not be revealed by anyone who read the final document describing their experiences.

Summary and closure after each interview process:

• Participants were asked if they had any further questions for the researcher.

• Participants were reminded that if at any time they wanted to withdraw from the interview process or study, they needed only advise the researcher (they all knew the address) and any and all documents that pertained to them would be withdrawn from the study.
• Participants were thanked and the subsequent interview meeting time was confirmed.
Appendix B
Interview Guide 1

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. How would you describe your family?
3. How would you describe your neighbourhood?
4. How would you describe your work?
5. How would you describe your studies?
6. Which are the best things about your life?
7. Which are the worst things about your life?
8. How did you find out about the ACJ and its programs?
9. In which ACJ programs do you participate currently? Do you like them/not like them? Why? Can you give some examples?
10. Which other games, sports or activities do you like to do apart from the ACJ?
Appendix C

Interview Guide 2

1. What is your opinion about games, recreation and sports and their role in your life?
2. What do games, recreation and sports do for you in a positive way? Negative?
3. What do you believe is good about the campamento or the program? Bad? Why?
4. If you could change anything about the campamento or program what would you do?
5. What do you think should be the main objective of the campamento or program?
6. What would be your idea of an ideal campamento or program that the ACJ could offer to kids who work in the street?
7. Has any leader at the ACJ ever asked you for your ideas or suggestions about the campamento or the programs within which you participate?
8. If you had something to comment on about the campamento or the program would those who work or volunteer at the ACJ pay attention to you?
9. Do you believe that those at the ACJ would pay attention to you if you were to make any kind of suggestion or complaint, with the intention to improve the campamento or program?
10. What is the best thing about the campamento or program? The worst? Why? Examples?
11. Okay, I understand that you have gone many times to the campamento, but if you weren't to go, what would you miss the most?
Appendix D

Interview Guide 3

1. If you were the director of programs at the ACJ how would you design the camp for people such as yourself and your teammates?

2. The volunteers and Wendy and Don Luis as well as other people think that the camp is doing something for you at the ACJ. What is your opinion on that? Are they right? Are they wrong? How? Can you explain to me in what way?

3. At other ACJs around the world most of them use games, recreation and sports a lot in all their programs, also they have beautiful buildings, lots of equipment to do sports and swimming pools. At the ACJ of Purral there is a lack of those things. What do you think about that?

4. In what way have you been affected by your participation in ACJ programs? How will your future be affected as a result of your participation in ACJ programs?
Appendix E

Analysis Chart

Theme: Relationships, poverty, personal change and empowerment.
Category: Play, games and football.
Participant: José.
Coded data excerpt from interviews 1, 2 and 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>Todo el día libre para jugar fútbol o lo que quiera y vengo aquí a jugar fútbol</td>
<td>All weekdays and after that I have all day free. To play football or whatever I want. <strong>After school I come here to play football.</strong> I don't know, <strong>sport is something about health, its something fun that well, at times it has its rudeness.</strong> Someone kicks someone else or breaks something or pulls something or something like that’s okay also. Football for me is something good, fun, happy, its something that has already for me in everything, and it helps one a lot because its something so that a person isn’t thinking, just about football. A relief, yes, hehehe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>De no se deporte es algo sobre la salud es algo divertido, que bueno a veces .......... sus groserías Uno se patea a uno o se quebró o se flexiona o algo así pero eso es bueno también si es bueno jejeje si Yo no tiro o sea el fútbol para mi es algo bueno, divertido, alegre es una cosa que ya me en todo a uno lo ayuda mucho porque ..........que es algo para fuera que uno no esta pensando en el fútbol entonces un alivio si jejeje</td>
<td>sport has its bad things, physical injuries, good, stops one from thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El fútbol es una pasión para muchos, es un deporte realmente que uno no puede practicar si uno no tiene la cabeza por mi son cosas que pasan en la vida tal vez como por muchos cargos hubo un jugador en Costa Rica que era el mejor jugador, el se murió de un balazo si porque, tenía unos problemas de plata porque se separó la mujer entonces el no tuvo otro remedio o sea que matarse verdad, por los problemas que tuvo con la familia entonces decidió matarse y .........Sí, puede también un, el hombre no, o sea, no quiso seguir jugando fútbol sino porque también en esta época estuvo o tuvo pago entonces tenía muchas .........Sí entonces luego no pudo buscar otro remedio, y era mucho dinero lo que debía entonces quería matarse Es la negativa, matarse es ..... no jejeje Sí porque si uno juega fútbol puede irse ..... y la capacidad de uno mismo y si uno llega a primera segunda división, entonces ya más adelante puede jugar hasta la selección de cada país eso es algo muy grande para uno después hay ..... otros tipos que no vea y ..... a uno pues ya con voluntad que uno se va para allá para cualquier país Sí Esa es una La meta Sí</td>
<td>Football is a passion, the passion for many, its a sport actually that a person can't play if they don't have the head (for it), for me there are things that happen in life maybe its like for many burdens. There was a player in Costa Rica who was the best player, he died from a gunshot, yes because he had some money problems because he separated from his wife so then he didn't have any other choice, or like, to kill himself right, because of the problems that he had with his family so then he decided to kill himself. Yes, because when a person plays football he can go places and if he has the capability in himself and if he gets to the first, second division then, later on he can play for the national team of each country, that is something very big for a person. After there are other guys well who are ready and so they can go to whichever country. Yes. That is one of my goals. The goal.</td>
<td>football is a passion, emergent story of CR pro player who killed himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo mejor lo mejor? Es ..... las actividades porque uno se despierta uno cuando ..... tiene mal y si uno esta pensando en algo y ya pues uno se despieste, y no quieren otras cosas Sí a uno se dice se despierta Uno ..... no piensa en lo que realmente esta pensando o si tiene una preocupación pues así uno se despierta y no piensa en esas cosas entonces es orgulloso, alegre en lo que esta haciendo yo creo que ..... mucho y me despistaste</td>
<td>The best, the best is the activities because one disorients himself when he is (participating) if something has him down or if he is thinking about something and well, one disorients himself and they don't want other things. One doesn't think about what it is that he is actually thinking about or if he has a worry well like that, one disorients himself and doesn't think about those things then he is proud, happy about what it is that he is doing I believe that (happens to me) a lot and I disorient myself.</td>
<td>his life goal to be a pro player and go places</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a person disorients himself and doesn't worry or think about things, proud, happy
No sé si harían grupos para organizar los otros programas, si que tengan mejor apoyo y personas, se que estaban apoyando al ACI muchas organizaciones pero si que buscar otras ayudas que... como el ACI busca...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Lo peor es cuando no hacen caso cuando hay una actividad y porque en muchos casos dan un ejemplo pero cuando hicieron una ...... dentro de un río ...... para allí porque realmente fue ...... en una piedra se piedra se puede quebrar o un mal golpe en la cabeza y .... que ...... porque yo decía a ellos que no quería participar esa parte allí solo la otra y .... me pusieron a ...... porque lo que hicieron fue ... las piedras para que no patinar a nadie así que ...... porque ya ...... las piedras estaban menos lisas y no patinar era la peor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The worst is when they don't pay attention, when there is an activity and because in many cases they give an example but when they made a game actually in a river, I didn't want to go there because actually it was dangerous. It was to jump on the rocks and a person could break something or get a bad blow on the head and (it wasn't good for me) because I was telling them that I didn't want to participate in that part there, only the other part and they gave me a (chance) because what they did was to move the rocks so that nobody would slide and that way the game was played because that way the rocks were less loose and no slipping, it was the worst (game). Yes. No, no its bad but at the beginning yes... the rocks were very slippery, then what I did was I went to scrape and scratch them because our sneakers or whatever they were wearing they were going to skate on the rocks, and that is how I participated, there (should be) less danger.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>worst is when they don't pay attention, emergent story of an unsafe activity that he didn't want to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>