Meaning of Occupation-Based Groups for Low-Income Urban Youths Attending After-School Care

Susan Bazyk and John Bazyk

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the meaning of occupational therapy groups focusing on occupational engagement, group process, and social–emotional learning for a purposeful sample of low-income urban youths attending after-school care. Interviews and participant observation were used to study how the children made sense of their experience. Qualitative data analysis resulted in two thematic descriptions of the experience. First, the groups were fun because of engagement in novel and challenging leisure occupations within a supportive group context. Participation in creative activities that allowed choice transformed mood—children experienced happiness and wanted more of these experiences. Second, the participants valued being able to talk about feelings and learn strategies for dealing with anger. Findings provide a glimpse into the possibilities of enhancing occupational balance by engaging children in occupations they find to be fun.

Susan Bazyk, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, is Associate Professor, Occupational Therapy Program, Department of Health Sciences, Health Sciences Building, Room 120, Cleveland State University, 2121 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115; s.bazyk@csuohio.edu

John Bazyk, MS, OTR/L, is Chairperson, Department of Health Sciences, Cleveland State University.

O*ccupational science* is an academic discipline that focuses on the human need for occupations, the ability to participate in occupations, and the orchestration of daily occupations throughout the lifespan (Johnson & Yerxa, 1989; Zemke & Clark, 1996). Recent international changes in how health is viewed (World Health Organization, 2002) and advances in occupational science have brought about new ways of conceptualizing the provision of services to address today's public health concerns (Crepeau, Cohn, & Boyt Schell, 2003). As an example, Wilcock's (1993, 2000, 2006) research on the relationship between occupation and health has inspired a shift in occupational therapy's traditional focus on clinical medicine to an expanded pursuit of occupational health for all people and communities. Closely related to the broader concept of social justice, which emphasizes equality in social relations and conditions of living, occupational justice focuses on occupational equity (Wilcock, 2006). All humans need opportunities to engage in a range of occupations to create balance among physical, mental, social, and relaxation needs. By adopting an occupational perspective, therapists and assistants are called to actively work toward creating occupationally just societies by uncovering and addressing occupational injustices in new practice arenas (Whiteford, 2000).

Sociocultural changes may lure people to select and engage in an array of occupations that are not conducive to health (Wilcock, 1993). Factors such as poverty, lack of resources, or inequality of access to needed resources may lead to *occupational deprivation*—the inability to express one's occupational nature (Wilcock, 1998). Numerous problems can be attributed to these risk factors, including boredom, depression, disease, obesity, and alcoholism (Whiteford, 2000). In particular, impoverished children may not have the social or financial resources needed to be exposed to and engage in a variety of structured leisure occupations. Without regular opportunities to participate in health-promoting leisure occupations, involvement

in nonlegitimate occupations such as vandalism and gang activity may become attractive alternatives to meet social, physical, and relaxation needs (Snyder, Clark, Masunaka-Noriega, & Young, 1998). In the spirit of occupational justice, the Occupational Therapy Groups for HOPE (*H*ealthy *O*ccupations for *P*ositive *E*motions) were developed by Susan Bazyk to meet the occupation-based and social–emotional needs of low-income urban youths attending after-school care. A brief summary of the needs of low-income urban youths is followed by a description of the HOPE groups. The findings of a qualitative study exploring the meaning of participation in the HOPE groups from the children's perspective are presented along with a discussion of implications for practice.

Unique Needs of Low-Income Urban Youths

Children need to engage in a balance of occupations to achieve optimal development and to experience health and well-being. In particular, participation in a wide range of structured leisure occupations is associated with academic achievement and enhanced development in several areas, including personal identity, initiative, emotional self-regulation, social interaction, and team work (Durlak, Weissberg, & Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2007; Dworkin, 2003; Passmore, 1998). Exposure to a range of potential leisure occupations and the availability of resources to support engagement are critical factors linked with the likelihood that children will develop and maintain healthy leisure interests. Young people from families with higher socioeconomic status have the financial resources to pursue and gain satisfaction from a large range of leisure occupations such as music, dance, and organized sports (Bouffard et al., 2006; Duffett & Johnson, 2004; Passmore, 1998). Highly structured leisure occupations are associated with regular participation schedules, direction by one or more adult leaders, rule-guided interaction, an emphasis on skill development, and performance that requires sustained attention and the provision of feedback (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). When people learn to enjoy complex occupations that provide challenges corresponding to their skills, they are more likely to develop innate abilities, experience positive self-esteem, and show happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993).

In contrast, youths living in poverty or fragmented families generally have fewer opportunities to explore and participate in structured leisure occupations (Bouffard et al., 2006; Duffett & Johnson, 2004; Farnworth, 1999). If only passive opportunities (e.g., hanging out) or aggressive opportunities for action (e.g., gang activity, violent computer games) are available, children will miss opportunities to seek out and experience health-promoting challenges. Passive forms of leisure usually lack complexity, provide little or no challenge, and require no skills. As a result, feelings of boredom may lead people to seek stimulation from any activity (even illegal) that is interesting or challenging to reach an optimal level of arousal (Farnworth, 1998).

Participation in structured leisure occupations is particularly important during after-school hours. Research has found that participation in high-quality after-school programs reduces the likelihood of involvement in risky behaviors (e.g., drinking, smoking, sexual activity) and promotes improvements in social and behavioral skills (e.g., peer friendships, conflict resolution; Hall, Israel, & Shortt, 2004; National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2007; Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001). High-quality after-school programs are thought to reduce negative behaviors in low-income children by providing (1) supervised, constructive activities that enhance the development of critical skills; (2) a safe environment during peak hours for juvenile crime; and (3) a structured program for enhancing academic, social, and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2007; Posner & Vandell, 1999).

In addition to participation in meaningful activities during after-school hours, children need opportunities to develop social–emotional skills and close connections with caring adults. According to Elias, Zins, et al. (1997), a primary goal of educational programs is to help children become knowledgeable, responsible, and caring individuals by providing thoughtful, sustained, and systematic attention to social and emotional learning. This goal requires relevant adults (e.g., teachers, daycare staff) to allow feelings to be used constructively in education, out-of-school activities, and family life (Elias, Zins, et al., 1997). Although it is important to foster emotional intelligence in all children as a means of preventing social and emotional difficulties, low-income urban youths may have a heightened need for such programming, given the inherent risks associated with their living situation. Poverty affects children directly by limiting material resources available to them and indirectly by the psychological distress it causes parents, which can negatively influence parental behavior (McLoyd, 1990). Programs that foster emotional intelligence help children recognize feelings, control impulses, and acquire important social skills for developing and maintaining healthy relationships in life (Goleman, 1995).

Finally, children need opportunities to develop close attachments to people. A significant body of scientific evidence demonstrated that humans are biologically hardwired "for close attachments to other people, beginning with our mothers, fathers, extended family, and then moving out to the broader community" (Institute for American Values,

2003, p. 14). Meeting a child's need for human connectedness and moral meaning is essential for health and development.

Preventive Occupation-Based Groups

On the basis of children's inherent needs for structured leisure occupations, social–emotional learning, and close human connections, preventive occupation-based groups for low-income urban youths attending after-school care—the Occupational Therapy Groups for HOPE—was developed and conducted. This 9-week program, embedded in a faith-based after-school setting in a large Midwestern city, has been offered yearly as a service-learning initiative since 2003. Under the supervision of Susan Bazyk (an occupational therapy faculty member), groups of graduate occupational therapy students coplan and facilitate the 1-hr weekly groups, each made up of 8–10 children. After-school care providers also participate in the group activities to learn how to simultaneously engage children in meaningful occupations and attend to social–emotional learning needs (Bazyk, 2005).

Each group is organized into three major segments including an introductory conversation time, participation in a structured leisure occupation, and a short closure discussion (Williamson & Dorman, 2002). During the conversation time, a social–emotional theme is introduced to help the children develop basic social–emotional competencies (understanding the relationship among feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; Elias, Zins, et al., 1997; Goleman, 1995). Themes have been adapted from *Self-Science: The Emotional Intelligence Curriculum* by McCown, Jensen, Freedman, and Rideout (1998) and *Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger* (Whitehouse & Pudney, 1996). Learning activities focus on developing an expanded vocabulary of feeling words, recognizing and expressing feelings, responding to other's feelings, and learning how to express anger in appropriate ways.

The occupation-based project is considered the heart of the group because it exposes the children to structured leisure occupations that may develop into long-term interests. Group projects reflect a combination of short-term activities that take place during one session and long-term projects that last for 2 to 3 sessions. Short-term projects include leather stamping (e.g., making bracelets), constructing crosses out of wooden clothespins, and simple yarn projects (e.g., making "God's eye" crosses), to name a few. Examples of long-term activities include making greeting cards using rubber stamping, creating papier mâché masks, knitting, and doing yoga. The social–emotional theme is reinforced during the group activity and later revisited during group closure.

Group closure also focuses on occupational reflection—thinking about the relationship between doing the activities and how one feels (Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998). This focus allows the children to begin to consider the health-relevant consequences of their occupations.

In addition to participation in meaningful occupation, the HOPE groups were designed to foster peer interaction and group process (Schwartzberg, 2003). Occupational therapy students are also instructed on the use of positive behavioral supports and encouraged to apply these strategies during the groups (Sugai et al., 2000). Strategies included creating a positive culture (e.g., respect, warmth, and caring), creating clear rules and expectations, and providing effective instruction (e.g., simple, clear directions). Further details about the HOPE group procedures and curriculum are described in previously published work (Bazyk, 2005, 2006).

"Reilly (1971) once said that occupational therapists have more medical knowledge than they need to apply in practice, and practice more the use and application of occupation than they have knowledge to support" (cited in Rebeiro & Cook, 1999, p. 177). Although research on the basic and applied dimensions of occupation has grown since the founding of occupational science in 1989, there continues to be a need for further research on occupation and its use in practice, particularly in new practice arenas (Clark et al., 1991; Rebeiro & Cook, 1999). Studies exploring the person's experiences of therapeutic occupation are needed (Gray, 1997; Sviden & Borell, 1998). This knowledge will contribute to the profession's understanding of the impact of occupational engagement, promote the face validity of the profession (Reilly, 1971), and instill confidence in occupational therapists as they use meaningful occupations in practice (Rebeiro & Cook, 1999). In particular, little is known about the meaning of and perceived health benefits of preventive occupation-based groups for low-income urban youths attending after-school care. Knowing how children experience and what they value about such groups will help occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants in designing effective groups and articulating the benefits of participation.

Method

Phenomenology is the study of the individual's experience from her or his perspective (Finlay, 1999; Gray, 1997). Using a phenomenological approach, the purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and describe the meaning of occupational therapy groups focusing on engagement in structured leisure occupations, group process, and social–

emotional learning as experienced by low-income urban youths attending after-school care.

HOPE Group Participants

The HOPE groups were provided to 70 children attending an inner-city faith-based after-school program. Under the supervision of Susan Bazyk, 22 graduate occupational therapy students, assigned in groups of 2 or 3, co-facilitated the weekly groups. The children were placed in 9 groups—5 groups of boys and 4 groups of girls. The average group size was 7–8 children. All group participants were African American, ranging in age from 7 to 12 years and living within the low-income range or near the poverty level. Approximately 70% of the children lived in single, female-headed households (Bazyk, 2005).

Data Collection Methods

All phenomenological approaches focus on how people make sense of experience and transform it into consciousness, which requires capturing and describing how people experience the phenomenon—"how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). To achieve this perspective, a combination of interviews and participant observations were used (Patton, 2002).

In-Depth Interviews. "One clear reason for interviewing youthful respondents is to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives" (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 181). A purposeful sample of 10 children (4 boys, 6 girls) was interviewed after Investigational Review Board approval, written parental consent, and children's assent. Intensity sampling guided the selection and consisted of those children who represented "excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 234). For this study, "excellent cases" were defined as those children who consistently attended the HOPE groups. The interviews took place after the children had experienced several weeks of the HOPE groups—between Weeks 4 and 9. From the 10 children in the sample, 5 children were interviewed 3 times, 3 were interviewed twice, and 2 were interviewed once, resulting in a total of 23 interviews. This form of serial interviewing over time is recommended for collecting in-depth information and allows for the use of content from the first interview to contribute to subsequent sessions (Morison, Moir, & Kwansa, 2000).

Interviews took place on the day after the weekly group and were conducted in a familiar conference room at the youth center during after-school hours. Questions focused on eliciting information about what was done in the groups, what participants liked and disliked, and what participation meant to them. Although open-ended questions were written to guide the interviews, each was followed by the use of probes to obtain a full understanding of the participants' experience of the groups. A validity check was conducted during each participant's final interview. This check involved verbally summarizing information provided during the previous interview and asking whether the content reflected an accurate description of the participant's thoughts and feelings regarding the HOPE groups. Susan Bazyk conducted, audiotaped, and transcribed verbatim all of the interviews.

Participant Observation. A benefit of direct observation is the opportunity to learn about things that people are unable or unwilling to talk about. Although these data were not as essential to understanding the meanings of the groups from the child's perspective as the interview data, the inclusion of observation data contributed to the credibility of the interview findings. Susan Bazyk randomly observed five different groups during the Sessions 4 through 8 and wrote detailed field notes after each session. Her role was one of full participant in the setting by being an assistant to the group facilitators to develop the perspective of an insider. Both the group facilitators and the children were familiar with Bazyk because of her role in overseeing all group activities. Observations lasted anywhere from 10 to 30 min at a time and focused on the children's experience of the group. Field notes consisted of detailed descriptions emphasizing the children's occupational engagement, social interactions, group process, and the setting.

Data Analysis

Credibility refers to the perceived accuracy, fairness, and believability of the researcher and findings (Patton, 2002). To enhance credibility, two forms of triangulation were used—multiple qualitative methods and multiple data analysts. The use of multiple data sources allowed for a comparison between the interviews and observations. Because most of the informants were interviewed more than once, we were able to cross-check the consistency of information obtained at different times and using various methods (Patton, 2002). The use of multiple analysts (2 occupational therapists with more than 25 years of experience and 1 graduate student in occupational therapy) was the second type of triangulation used.

Giorgi's (1985) data analysis strategies, as described by Polkinghorne (1989), were closely followed to understand the essence of the group experience from the subjective perspective of the participants (see Appendix). Data analysis was initiated after transcription of the first set of interviews and was ongoing throughout the data collection process. Analysts

independently studied the interviews and observation data before group discussions focusing on clarification of procedures and a comparison of results to ensure uniformity in the analysis process.

Findings

After reading the interviews, identifying meaning units, and transforming the meaning units using an occupational science perspective, it became apparent that a synthesis of the meaning units could be presented in terms of occupational meaning, form, and function. Participant responses to the interview questions and follow-up probes provided information about the meaning ascribed to the groups (occupational meaning), what actually took place during the groups (occupational form), and the perceived effects of group participation (occupational function). Two major themes describing the essential elements of the group experience emerged from the data: "The HOPE groups are fun" and "the children learned to talk about their feelings and express anger in appropriate ways." Each theme is described in the following sections along with selections of the interviews presented verbatim to provide the reader with a true sense of the children's voices. The "R" in the interview excerpts stands for the researcher. Pseudonyms, selected by each participant, are used instead of actual names to ensure confidentiality. A total of 6 girls and 4 boys were interviewed; their ages ranged from 9 to 12 years.

Groups Are Fun

Meaning of Occupation. When asked what comes to mind when thinking of the occupational therapy groups, all 10 participants said that the groups are fun (occupational meaning) because of the projects and because of being able to talk about their feelings (occupational form), resulting in feeling happy and wanting to repeat the experience (occupational function). Corey emphasized his enjoyment of creating as noted in this excerpt:

> R: What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the groups on Wednesdays?
>
> C: I think that we gonna have a fun project and we're gonna have fun.
>
> R: What makes it fun for you?
>
> C: I like creating things and I like doing them. (emphasized *creating things*)
>
> R: Oh. . . . what kind of projects have you made so far?
>
> C: We made a cross, puppets, bowls. . . . (voice trails off)
>
> R: Those mosaic button bowls?
>
> C: Yeah . . .

> R: OK, out of the ones that you remember, which ones did you like best?
>
> C: Uhh, the puppets. (smiles)
>
> R: You did? What made you like it so much?
>
> C: Cuz you got to talk to it with a puppet . . . I created something that is like if you pick up . . . like if you make a sandwich at home, I'd take the puppet with the hole in the bottom in the back of my puppet and I take the puppet and make it eat it and then it's all in my hand and then the puppet eats the sandwich. (smiling and demonstrating with his hands)
>
> R: Oh, eat your sandwich? (chuckling) . . . pretend it was eating?
>
> C: Yeah. . . . (smiling)

The children's nonverbal behaviors supported their claims of having fun by smiling or laughing when talking about the group activities. Gabrielle indicated that fun means being happy, having a lot of energy, and wanting to do it again. Although all of the participants agreed that the groups are fun because of the activities, 2 girls in the fourth and fifth grades also emphasized that being able to talk to each other was a significant part of why the groups were enjoyable, as noted in this excerpt from Nicole:

> R: So, the first question is—what comes to mind when you think of the groups on Wednesday?
>
> N: That I wish they could come every day.
>
> R: Because?
>
> N: Because it's fun and sometimes we don't have nothin' else to do but sit in the classroom.
>
> R: Hmm—and what makes it fun for you?
>
> N: That we can design a group project and talk about our feelings.
>
> R: When you say design, what does that mean?
>
> N: Like group projects . . . the little plate.
>
> R: The bowl with the buttons?
>
> N: Yes.
>
> R: And how did you design yours?
>
> N: A whole lotta hearts—that I'm gonna give to my granny.

Form of Occupation. When asked what makes the groups fun, five overlapping features of occupational form were identified as contributing to the meaning of the HOPE groups: (1) doing novel and challenging structured leisure occupations that promote creativity and choice, (2) being able to talk about feelings and interests during both the structured and the unstructured segments of the group, (3) working together in a cooperative manner, (4) interacting

with group leaders who are caring and create a supportive and nurturing context, and (5) participating in groups that are different from the regular after-school program—more child than adult directed.

Doing novel and challenging structured leisure occupations that promote creativity and choice. The projects were new to the children (e.g., rubber stamping cards, making Guatemalan worry dolls and mosaic button bowls) and often involved the use of new tools (e.g., paper crimper, glue gun) and the development of new skills (e.g., grouting, mixing paint colors). Children enjoyed the creative aspects of making the projects such as selecting materials from an appealing assortment based on personal interests and then choosing how to construct or design the item. Corey indicated that he liked doing the projects because "like you get to pick whatever you want to put on it." This process created challenge and promoted autonomy. Additional meaning was associated with all of the projects because the participants were able to take the final product home and use it (e.g., pencil holder), play with it (e.g., puppets), or give it as a gift to a loved one (e.g., greeting cards, potted plant). The final project, which involved making a personal frame for their group picture, provided a meaningful and lasting memory of their group experience. Terrence indicated that he still had his group picture from the previous year in his bedroom. James exclaimed that he was going to "keep it and keep on keepin' it."

Being exposed to a range of different structured leisure occupations allowed the children to experience first hand the skills, requirements, and benefits of each task. All of the participants were able to identify favorite activities based on personal interests, thus enhancing sense of self.

When asked what was "not fun," children indicated "just coloring," "cutting magazines," and "when everybody does the same thing." These responses suggest that a lack of novelty and choice are less desirable qualities when doing activities and projects.

Being able to talk about feelings and interests during both the structured and unstructured segments of the group. Although all of the children expressed enjoyment in being able to talk about feelings, this occupation was especially meaningful for some of the fourth- and fifth-grade girls. In particular, Lakisha and Nicole appreciated having the opportunity to talk and indicated that "talking about feelings" made the group experience different from the other days of the week in the after-school program. During the activity or project portion of the group, talking was child directed and generally revolved around the activity or light conversations about everyday life events and personal interests. Children talked about favorite colors, how they were going to design their project, and also dislikes. Sometimes during an activity children spontane-

ously brought up topics reflecting the challenges that are a part of their lives (e.g., presence of guns, violence, sex, peer pressure to fight) as well as the strengths (e.g., close relationship with grandmothers, church involvement). By contrast, during the structured conversation segments of the group, the talking was more adult directed, focusing on the social–emotional theme for the week.

Working together in a cooperative manner. In addition to enjoying doing the projects, many of the children specified that they liked to work together while doing them. The experience of doing and having fun together appeared especially significant for Terrence and De. The boys in this group were observed enjoying the shared camaraderie of "doing" versus talking together—appearing to be connected to each other by the activity. Group leaders designed the project or activity so that children worked in a circle while sitting on a throw rug or on chairs around a table. This promoted close face-to-face interaction, sharing of materials, and helping each other. A preference for group cooperation and positive behavior versus arguing was expressed by several of the participants. When asked what they considered to be "not fun," two participants said that they didn't like when their peers go "ballistic," "catch an attitude," or misbehave because this takes away from being able to do the project. Fun was associated with productive activity versus negative forms of behavior and conflict.

Interacting with group leaders who are caring and create a supportive and nurturing context. Fun was also directly attributed to group leader qualities. All of the participants indicated that the group leaders were "nice" because of a variety of the following characteristics:

- *Positive mood and playful interaction:* Keisha indicated that she liked having "fun and exciteful [sic] grownups around." Participants noticed the group leaders' mood (e.g., that they came in smiling) and were positively affected by it (e.g., made them feel happy). Gabrielle liked that the leaders said funny things and that they could laugh together— "When they teach us how to do it if you don't know how and then, uh, and something like they ask you what you're doing and sometimes they be laughing with you—then you'll crack up and then be laughing together" (chuckles). This comment suggests that the group leaders promoted fun by using playful styles of interaction.
- *Effective teaching and responsive to needs:* Participants indicated that the group leaders explained things clearly, which made the projects easy to learn. Leaders were also viewed as responsive to needs by stopping and answering questions.
- *Caring and concerned:* Deajia thought her leaders were caring because they took a personal interest in her by asking her about her day. Nicole appreciated that group

leaders attended to her feelings—"you can like express your feelings and like, if I'm angry, they say 'do you want to sit down and talk about it?' or 'do you want to talk about it in group?' If you say 'no,' they say, 'I'll respect that.'"

- *Flexible and open to play:* These group leader qualities were acknowledged in comments such as the leaders "let you play and stuff," "let us have fun," and "let us talk." Less restrictive rules were associated with the group sessions compared with the regular after-school program.
- *Understanding:* Antonajia appreciated that the leaders understood when mistakes were made by saying "accidents happen."
- *Respectful:* Participants appreciated the leaders talking to them versus yelling when requests were made to modify behavior. Nicole recognized politeness when leaders said "please be quiet" versus "shut up."
- *Nurturing:* Leaders were seen as encouraging. It became clear during the interviews that group leader interaction played a significant role in how the group was perceived.

Participating in groups is different from the regular after-school program—more child than adult directed. Participants indicated that the HOPE groups were different from the other after-school activities because of doing projects and activities. After-school activities scheduled during the other days included math skills, computer skills, Bible study, soccer, and homework help. Most of the activities were conducted with the children sitting at desks in a typical classroom fashion. By contrast, the HOPE groups were specifically designed to promote group interaction and trust. Participants indicated that they had more freedom to make choices and do things by themselves than the other days of the week.

In addition, the approach used for behavior management appeared to differ between the after-school staff and occupational therapy students. Deajia, Keisha, and Nicole indicated that they didn't like being yelled at by their teachers. Lakisha also expressed displeasure over not being able to talk to her friends in the classroom during the other days of the week. By contrast, by applying positive behavioral supports strategies during the groups, occupational therapy students promoted positive behavior by being caring and communicating clear rules (Sugai et al., 2000).

Function of Occupation. Many examples of how the groups influence emotional health and quality of life have already been mentioned in the previous sections. For example, participation in meaningful structured leisure occupations led to feeling happy and energized. Children began to experience a relationship between doing meaningful and challenging activities and feeling good as noted by Lakisha in this excerpt:

R: When you think of the Wednesday groups, what comes to mind?

L: They fun. (voice inflected upward)

R: They're fun?

L: Because they help me forget about what happened at school.

R: Mmm-hmmm.

L: And they help for um, when like, when I'm feeling bad, they help me.

R: Uh, so what is it about the group that you think makes you feel better?

L: That it's fun because we do activities and stuff and it ain't boring like the other days.

R: The other days are boring sometimes?

L: (L interrupts) cuz our teacher always doing is make us be quiet.

R: Makes you be quiet. . . .

L: And I don't ever get to talk.

Exposure to a range of projects and activities also resulted in the children beginning to identify personal skills and interests. Participants indicated that the groups helped them learn how to work together as a team and they were observed sharing materials and complimenting each other's products. In addition to these examples of occupational function, children specifically talked about learning how to express their feelings and respond appropriately to anger, which were components of the social–emotional learning curriculum.

Learned How to Express Feelings and Respond to Anger in Healthy Ways

The second major theme reflected the social–emotional learning aspect of the HOPE groups. A majority of the participants indicated that talking about feelings was fun too. Deajia indicated that talking about feelings was not something that was done during the typical after-school program. When asked what was learned from the groups, most of the participants indicated that they learned how to identify and express different emotions. Some of the learning activities were identified as being helpful, such as the feeling continuum and feeling charades (McCown, Jensen, Freedman, & Rideout, 1998). Several participants conveyed an appreciation for talking about feelings, especially when something was bothering them.

Most of the participants indicated that they learned appropriate ("clean") and inappropriate ("dirty") strategies for expressing anger and were able to give examples for how they would apply these strategies in their own lives. Nicole found the role play of ways to express anger particularly helpful because she was able to envision expressing anger like the

group leader did. Many of the children were able to state the "anger rules" almost verbatim—it's OK to be angry, but don't hurt yourself and don't hurt others (Whitehouse & Pudney, 1996). These examples indicate that the participants gained a cognitive understanding of anger management. Two boys, however, also gave examples of applying this understanding in real situations. Terrence indicated that he walked away from a conflict at school, and James described how he tried to calm down a classmate who was angry. The strategy of "stop and think" was demonstrated when he said "I told him to stop and try and take a deep breath. He had dirty anger though . . . yeah, I be like, think of something, think of something you do, you're doing, say what you're doing in your mind."

Discussion

This study revealed how low-income urban children experience and what they value about participation in occupation-based groups embedded in after-school care. The findings have implications for how therapists and therapy assistants can design and implement groups to address the occupational and social–emotional needs of children. Moreover, findings may be used to articulate the mental health benefits of participation in occupation-based groups.

Groups Are Fun

The first essential element is that the groups are fun (occupational meaning) because of engagement in novel and creative structured leisure occupations that take place in a supportive group context (occupational form), which results in feeling happy and a desire to repeat the experience (occupational function). The interrelationship between occupational meaning, form, and function is evident in this theme.

Relationship Between Fun and Quality of Life

Fun is defined as "that which provides mirth and amusement; enjoyment; playfulness" (Parham & Fazio, 1997, p. 230). Although literature addressing the relevance of "fun" in children's lives was not identified, literature on the implications of enjoyment, a word roughly synonymous with fun, was. In his research on optimal experience, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) observed a relationship between enjoyment and quality of life, specifically happiness. On the basis of years of research studying thousands of people around the world to identify when people experience the most enjoyment in their lives, he concluded that optimal experience occurs when people are actively versus passively engaged in meaningful activity. In this study, by actively engaging children in meaningful occupations, the HOPE groups were viewed as enjoyable. Occupational therapists need to be aware of how to design groups to promote fun and, moreover, to articulate the relationship between active participation in meaningful occupations, fun, and life satisfaction to children, after-school care providers, and parents.

Designing Groups for Fun

The HOPE groups were carefully designed to attend to multiple aspects of occupational form, which, in turn, influenced occupational function. The significant aspects of occupational form that emerged from the data included a combination of what was done (e.g., projects, activities, talking) and environmental factors (e.g., therapist–child interaction, setting characteristics). This supports the claim that occupational therapists need to attend to both the occupation and the environment to influence the person (Rebeiro & Cook, 1999). Findings suggest, that for this group of children, engagement in structured leisure occupations provided enjoyment and life satisfaction, opportunities for enhanced development, and occupational enrichment (occupational function).

Activity Features. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), enjoyment or fun occurs with the presence of several major components that, based on the findings, were present in the HOPE group activities. Enjoyment occurs when activities have clear goals (e.g., making greeting cards), involve concentration (e.g., thinking about how to design the card), are doable (e.g., children have a clear chance of completing the cards), and provide immediate feedback (e.g., children are able to see the end product and take the cards home to give to family and friends). Enjoyable experiences also allow people to have a sense of control over their actions, or choice. The opportunity to exercise choice was explicitly made available in the HOPE projects by offering a variety of materials for the children to choose from.

Challenge is another important element of enjoyment— where "the opportunities or action perceived by the individual are equal to his or her capabilities" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 53). Occupational therapists have traditionally valued the use of occupations that provide the "just-right" challenge—a concept inspired by A. Jean Ayres (1998). The occupational therapy students were acutely aware of the importance of this feature when designing group activities. When the occupational therapy students succeeded in doing so, they felt that, at some level, the activity ran the group. Creating the just-right challenge however, demanded thoughtful planning involving a careful consideration of the children's skills and interests combined with an analysis of the activity demands and the group dynamics. Occupational therapists can design groups for fun by explicitly attending to all of these elements.

Features of the Environment. "Occupational therapists now recognize the environment as an important consider-

ation in occupational therapy practice" (Rebeiro, 2001, p. 81). Providing meaningful occupation within an environment perceived to be safe and supportive is recommended (Rebeiro, 2001). Study findings suggest that both the social and the physical environments influenced occupational meaning.

The social environment offered the children an opportunity to interact with adult role models who were viewed as caring, positive, and playful; effective teachers; flexible; understanding; respectful; and nurturing. According to Rebeiro (2001), these qualities are important for creating a "just-right environment"—one that is safe, fun, and client driven. Occupational therapy students were encouraged to connect with the children by taking a personal interest in their lives and focusing on their abilities. The experience of care and support from a positive role model is especially critical for youths living in fragmented families that may be unable to offer these types of experiences (Dworkin, 2003). In a caring relationship, the therapist feels a commitment to the child's needs and interacts in a way that supports the child's growth (Wright-St. Clair, 2001).

The occupational therapy students' affect was also noted by some of the children. Both Keisha and Gabrielle appreciated the leaders' positive affect (they came in smiling) and playful interaction style (saying funny things and laughing together). Playfulness is a style of interaction that communicates flexibility and promotes "having fun" (Bundy, 1997).

Although leaders encouraged the children to have fun by interacting in a playful and flexible manner, they also elicited cooperation through the use of positive behavioral supports and clear directives. Children recognized the leaders as being respectful and appreciated being talked to versus yelled at when requests were made to modify behavior. Several participants stated that they did not like when other children in the group misbehaved or were uncooperative. Children's preference for cooperation and respectful interactions points out how critical it is for group leaders to be knowledgeable and skilled in using strategies to promote positive behavior and group interaction.

Structuring the physical environment to bring about group cohesion involved thoughtful preparation as well. A consideration of the spatial context of intervention includes an "appreciation of how spaces and objects support, shape, and inhibit individual" or group experience (Pierce, 2001, p. 254). Group leaders rearranged the classroom environment to promote face-to-face interaction and sharing among group members. Group projects were completed either around a table or while sitting in a circle on the floor.

These findings suggest that occupational therapists need to be skillful in designing the just-right occupation and the just-right environment to promote trust, group cohesion, positive behavior, and fun. Being aware of the importance of both elements is essential in group development.

Educating Children and Caregivers About the Mental Health and Developmental Benefits of Fun. In addition to designing groups to promote fun, occupational therapists need to be aware of and articulate the mental health benefits of participation in such activities. Enjoyment involves becoming fully absorbed in the activity and allowing the person to forget her or his problems. When fully absorbed, or in a state of "flow," the person does not have enough attention left to think about anything else except doing the activity and, in a sense, becomes one with the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Temporary relief from the everyday anxiety and concerns may be particularly significant for children living in low-income urban environments because of the associated risks of higher rates of internalizing (e.g., depression) and externalizing (e.g., aggression) symptoms (Grant et al., 2004). Both Gabrielle and Lakisha indicated that the groups helped them to forget about having a bad day. For example, when asked how she will be different from being in the groups, Lakisha said, "It's going to help me be different cuz I ain't going to always bein' grouchy. . . . I forget about being grouchy."

As a part of intervention, occupational therapists can educate children, after-school staff, and parents about the immediate and long-term mental health benefits of engaging in activities that promote flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) found "that flow does not just improve the quality of experience momentarily, but it also has important long-term effects" (p. 41). Teenagers who experience more flow report being happier and more academically successful than those experiencing less flow in their daily life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). When applied to this study's findings, Csikszentmihalyi's work suggests that the fun experienced during the HOPE groups may have benefits beyond the actual group experience.

It is also important for occupational therapists to communicate the developmental benefits of participation in structured versus nonstructured leisure (Dworkin, 2003; Passmore, 1998). By being exposed to a variety of activities, children learn new skills, resulting in exploration and identity work. Participants in this study began to identify favorite activities based on innate skills and personal interests.

Embedding Occupational Therapy Services to Promote Occupational Enrichment. In addition to enhancing life satisfaction and mental health, findings suggest that engagement in structured leisure occupations provided occupational enrichment for the participants. This particular after-school program was designed to emphasize a variety of spiritual, academic, and physical activities offered by after-school teachers within a classroom-like setting. *Occupational enrich-*

ment refers to the deliberate manipulation of the environment to facilitate participation in a range of occupations designed to reduce the state of deprivation (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999, p. 127). By focusing on structured leisure and social–emotional learning, the HOPE groups were specifically designed to do just that. When asked what makes the occupational therapy groups different from what is done the other days of the week, participants indicated that the groups were different because of doing fun projects and activities, getting to talk about feelings, and having choices.

Occupational therapists need to be on the lookout for occupational imbalance or deprivation within our places of employment and within a variety of community settings. This type of occupational perspective can be used as a foundation for influencing the social and institutional structures preventing children from participation in a range of health-promoting occupations.

Social–Emotional Learning: Expressing Feelings and Controlling Anger. The second major theme concentrated on social–emotional learning. Although this aspect of the program was secondary to the occupational focus, even in a relatively short amount of time, the participants recognized the importance of identifying and communicating their feelings and learning appropriate strategies for dealing with anger. Nicole stated, "Like the talking part, you can like express your feelings and like, if I'm angry, they say 'do you want to sit down and talk about it?'" Findings also suggest that the groups offered the participants an opportunity to think about anger as a normal feeling and to differentiate appropriate and inappropriate ways to respond to anger. The children were also able to describe the "anger rules" and give examples of how to apply them in their lives, indicating that they gained a cognitive understanding of anger management (Whitehouse & Pudney, 1996). One boy was actually observed by a group leader in applying an anger management strategy to help another boy to calm down when he was angry.

Although the interview participants were able to verbally describe the social–emotional lessons, without further observation or assessment it would be difficult to assess the long-term benefits from such a program. It is recommended that social–emotional learning skills be taught incrementally and reinforced over a long period of time (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 1997). Occupational therapists can advocate for children's mental health by helping teachers and caregivers learn how to tune into and respond to children's social–emotional needs on a daily basis.

Although this purposeful sample of 10 children appears small, it met the purpose of the study. One limitation may have been that the children's language skills somehow limited their ability to describe the essence of their experiences. Then again, the goal of interviewing was to learn about the children's ideas, thoughts, and feelings using their own words and language structure (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Although the language skills of children in this study were generally poor, each participant listened carefully to the interview questions and answered thoughtfully. The children were clear in their likes and dislikes.

Summary

The task of a sound education, Plato argued twenty-five centuries ago, is to teach young people to find pleasure in the right things. If children enjoyed math, they would learn math. If they enjoyed helping friends, they would grow into helpful adults. If they enjoyed Shakespeare, they would not be content watching television programs. If they enjoyed life, they would take greater pains to protect it. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 39)

By applying an occupational science perspective, the occupational therapy groups for HOPE were designed to help low-income urban youths "find pleasure in the right things" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 39). Findings of this study contribute to an understanding of the role of occupational therapy in a relatively new practice arena—after-school programs in low-income urban contexts. Interviews of the child participants provided an inside view into their thoughts and feelings about the HOPE groups. When given an opportunity to talk about their experiences, children were clear about what was meaningful. The occupational therapy groups were fun because of the just-right occupation (those providing opportunities for creativity and choice) provided within the just-right environment (flexible and supportive). This study provides a glimpse into the possibilities of enhancing occupational balance and mental health by engaging children in occupations they find to be fun. There is a clear role for occupational scientists to explore these possibilities and an equally clear role for occupational therapists to promote occupational enrichment for children at risk of or experiencing occupational deprivation. ▲

References

Ayres, A. J. (1998). The art of therapy. *Sensory Integration Special Interest Section Quarterly, 21,* 1–6.

Bazyk, S. (2005). The meaning of occupational therapy groups for low-income urban youth in after-school care: A phenomenological study (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University, 2005). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 66, 2508.*

Bazyk, S. (2006, September). Creating occupation-based social skills groups in after-school care. *OT Practice, pp.* 13–18.

Bouffard, S. M., Wimer, C., Caronongan, P., Little, P., Dearning, E., & Simpkins, S. D. (2006). Demographic differences in

patterns of youth out-of-school time activity participation. *Journal of Youth Development, 1,* 24–39.

Bundy, A. C. (1997). Play and playfulness: What to look for. In L. D. Parham & L. S. Fazio (Eds.), *Play in occupational therapy for children* (pp. 52–66). St. Louis, MO: Mosby.

Clark, F. A., Parham, D., Carlson, M. E., Frank, G., Jackson, J., Pierce, D., et al. (1991). Occupational science: Academic innovation in the service of occupational therapy's future. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 45,* 300–310.

Crepeau, E. B., Cohn, E. S., & Boyt Schell, B. A. (2003). Occupational therapy practice. In E. B. Crepeau, E. S. Cohn, & B. A. Boyt Schell (Eds.), *Willard and Spackman's occupational therapy* (10th ed., pp. 27–33). Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience.* New York: Harper & Row.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). Activity and happiness: Towards a science of occupation. *Occupational Science: Australia, 1,* 38–42.

Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2004). *All work and no play? Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time.* Retrieved on August 13, 2008, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/a9/6f.pdf

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills.* Retrieved April 20, 2007, from www.casel.org/downloads/ASP-Full.pdf

Dworkin, J. (2003). Adolescents' accounts of growth experiences in youth activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 32,* 17–26.

Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2002). Interviewing children and adolescents. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Ed.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method.* (pp. 181–201). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Elias, M. J., Bruene-Butler, L., Blum, L., & Schuyler, T. (1997). How to launch a social and emotional learning program. *Educational Leadership, 54,* 15–19.

Elias, M. J., Zins, J. D., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., et al. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum.

Farnworth, L. (1998). Doing, being, and boredom. *Journal of Occupational Science, 5,* 140–146.

Farnworth, L. (1999). Time use and leisure occupations of young offenders. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 54,* 315–325.

Finlay, L. (1999). Applying phenomenology in research: Problems, principles, and practice. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 62,* 299–306.

Giorgi, A. (Ed.). (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research.* Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28,* 235–260.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ.* New York: Bantam Books.

Grant, K. E., Katz, B. N., Kina, T. K., O'Koon, J. H., Meza, C. M., DiPasquale, A., et al. (2004). Psychological symptoms affecting low-income urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 19,* 613–634.

Gray, J. M. (1997). Application of the phenomenological method to the concept of occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science: Australia, 4,* 5–17.

Hall, G., Israel, L., & Shortt, J. (2004). *It's about time: A look at out-of-school time for urban teens.* Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Retrieved January 3, 2005, from www.niost.org/AOLTW.pdf

Institute for American Values. (2003). *Hardwired to connect: The new scientific case for authoritative communities.* New York: Author.

Jackson, J., Carlson, M., Mandel, D., Zemke, R., & Clark, F. (1998). Occupation in lifestyle redesign: The Well Elderly Study Occupational Therapy Program. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 52,* 326–336.

Johnson, J. A., & Yerxa, E. J. (1989). *Occupational science: The foundation for new models of practice.* New York: Haworth Press.

Mahoney, J. L., & Stattin, H. (2000). Leisure activities and adolescent antisocial behavior: The role of structure and social context. *Journal of Adolescence, 23,* 113–127.

McCown, K. S., Jensen, A. L., Freedman, J. M., & Rideout, M. C. (1998). *Self-science: The emotional intelligence curriculum.* San Mateo, CA: Six Seconds.

McLoyd, V. C. (1990). The impact of economic hardship on Black families and children: Psychological distress, parenting, and socioemotional development. *Child Development, 61,* 311–346.

Molineux, M., & Whiteford, G. (1999). Prisons: From occupational deprivation to occupational enrichment. *Journal of Occupational Science, 6,* 124–139.

Morison, M., Moir, J., & Kwansa, T. (2000). Interviewing children for the purposes of research in primary care. *Primary Health Care Research and Development, 1,* 113–130.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2007). *Making the case: A fact sheet on children and youth in out-of-school time.* Retrieved November 3, 2007, from http://www.niost.org/publications/Final2007FactSheet.pdf

Parham, L. D., & Fazio, L. S. (Eds.). (1997). *Play in occupational therapy for children.* St. Louis, MO: Mosby.

Passmore, A. (1998). Does leisure have an association with creating cultural patterns of work? *Journal of Occupational Science, 5,* 161–165.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pierce, D. (2001). Occupation by design: Dimensions, therapeutic power, and creative process. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 55,* 249–259.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential–phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41–60). New York: Plenum.

Posner, J. K., & Vandell, D. L. (1999). After-school activities and the development of low-income urban children: A longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology, 35,* 868–879.

Rebeiro, K. (2001). Enabling occupation: The importance of an affirming environment. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 68,* 80–89.

Rebeiro, K., & Cook, J. (1999). Opportunity, not prescription: An exploratory study of the experience of occupational engagement. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 66,* 176–187.

Reilly, M. (1971). The modernization of occupational therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 25,* 243–246.

Roffman, J. G., Pagano, M. E., & Hirsch, B. J. (2001). Youth functioning and experiences in inner-city after-school programs among age, gender, and race groups. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 10,* 85–100.

Schwartzberg, S. L. (2003). Group process. In E. B. Crepeau, E. S., Cohn, & B. A. Boyt Schell (Eds.), *Willard and Spackman's occupational therapy* (10th ed., pp. 171–184). Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Snyder, C., Clark, F., Masunaka-Noriega, M., & Young, B. (1998). Los Angeles street kids: New occupations for life program. *Journal of Occupational Science, 5,* 133–139.

Sugai, G., Horner, R. H., Dunlap, G., Hieneman, M., Lewis, T., Nelson, C. M., et al. (2000). Applying positive behavioral support and functional behavioral assessment in schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention, 2,* 1–25.

Sviden, G. A., & Borell, L. (1998). Experience of being occupied—Some elderly people's positive experiences of occupation at community-based activity centers. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 5,* 133–139.

Whiteford, G. (2000). Occupational deprivation: Global challenge in the new millennium. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 63,* 200–204.

Whitehouse, E., & Pudney, W. (1996). *Volcano in my tummy: Helping children to handle anger.* Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers.

Wilcock, A. A. (1993). A theory of the human need for occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science: Australia, 1,* 17–24.

Wilcock, A. A. (1998). *An occupational perspective of health.* Thorofare, NJ: Slack.

Wilcock, A. A. (2000). Development of a personal, professional, and educational occupational philosophy: An Australian perspective. *Occupational Therapy International, 7,* 79–86.

Wilcock, A. A. (2006). *An occupational perspective of health* (2nd ed.). Thorofare, NJ: Slack.

Williamson, G. G., & Dorman, W. J. (2002). *Promoting social competence.* San Antonio, TX: Therapy Skill Builders.

World Health Organization. (2002). *Towards a common language for functioning, disability, and health: ICF, International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health.* Geneva: Author. Retrieved November 2, 2007, from www.who.int/classifications/icf/training/icfbeginnersguide.pdf

Wright-St. Clair, V. (2001). Caring: The moral motivation for good occupational therapy practice. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal, 48,* 187–199.

Zemke, R., & Clark, F. (Eds.). (1996). *Occupational science: The evolving discipline.* Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.

Appendix

This study relflected Polkinghorne's (1989) description of Giorgi's (1985) data analysis strategies as a way to understand the subjective perspective of participants:

1. *Obtain a sense of the whole.* Analysis began by reading through the data from one protocol (1 participant) to obtain a sense of the whole. This was repeated with each of the transcribed interviews and written field notes.

2. *Divide content into meaning units.* During a slower second reading, the protocol was divided into units or themes that seem to represent a self-contained meaning from an occupational science perspective. While reading, each time a change in meaning was noted, the meaning unit was documented. Sensitivity to the phenomenon being studied (occupation-based social skills groups) and to the researcher's discipline (occupational science) resulted in attention to participant statements having to do with occupational form, meaning, and function as well as social–emotional learning and group interaction. The end of this step resulted in a series of meaning units still expressed in the participant's own language.

3. *Transformation of the meaning units into the disciplinary language.* The researcher analyzed the everyday expressions of the informants and through the process of reflection determined what was truly being said before redescribing the reflective reality in a language appropriate to the discipline of occupational science. When adopting an occupational perspective, the data were analyzed through occupational eyes—seeing phenomena as fundamentally occupational. An occupational analysis was used to redescribe the meaning units in terms of occupational form, meaning, and function.

4. *Synthesis of the transformed meaning units into a descriptive statement of the essential elements of the experience.* Synthesis involved reflecting on the transformed meaning units or themes to determine which were essential in describing the phenomenon under study (Giorgi, 1997). The researcher developed thematic descriptions of the essential elements of the group experience that emerged from the data for each participant before determining themes that would apply to the entire data set. This step involved combining themes that were redundant and eliminating themes that were not consistent throughout the entire data set.

5. *Develop a generalized structural description of the phenomenon that leaves out the particulars of the situation.* After completing the above four steps with each participant's transcriptions and the observation field notes, a final general description of the entire data set was developed reflecting the core meanings of the experience.