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Click! Using photo elicitation to explore youth experiences and positive youth development in sport

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The purpose of the study was to use photo elicitation to explore youth experiences and positive development in sport. Participants ($N=26$) involved in either a high-performance sport context or a sport camp context were recruited and focus groups were conducted using photographs taken by the participants. The photo methodology involved participants taking pictures of their experiences in their respective sport context. Two separate studies were conducted and the setting features framework was implicated in the analysis. Results point to differences in youth sport experiences between the contexts. The setting feature related to supportive relationships was more prominent in the sport camp context and the feature related to opportunities for skill building was reported more in the high-performance context. Other setting features were also implicated in the analysis and discussion. The suitability of the photo methodology is also discussed.

Keywords: photo; youth; sport; positive youth development; qualitative

Examining the perceptions of children and youth in sport has been a cornerstone of many research areas within the field of sport psychology. The views of children and youth in sport have informed our understanding of various topics including enjoyment (Wiersma 2001), motivational climate (Vazou *et al.* 2006, Macdonald *et al.* 2011), ability (Petlichkoff 1993) and peer relationships (Weiss *et al.* 1996, Weiss and Smith 2002). Since children and youth are the main beneficiaries of sport participation, it is the responsibility of researchers to explore not only contextual factors (i.e. coaches, peers) but also a child's personal perspective on the context. Investigating the perceptions of young people has included various quantitative and qualitative methods in the form of self-report questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The use of questionnaires with young children is particularly challenging as problems may arise with reliability and validity (Brustad 1998). Further, classic interview or focus group methodologies may not be an interesting or meaningful experience for children (Scott 2008). Scott argues that traditional interviews and focus groups are problematic due to a lack of understanding on the part of the participant. Although these methods can be adapted to the participants, it is Scott's belief that newer methods are required and necessary. As research in this field

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expands, unique methodologies should be explored and considered. One method is photo elicitation.

Power (2003) suggests that our culture is 'a visual culture in which the image has become more powerful than the word as a form of communication' (p. 9). One type of photo elicitation methodology involves individuals taking photographs within a specific context in order to explore the environment in greater depth. Taking pictures has been utilised as a way to collect scientific data since the late nineteenth century but it has only been in recent years that the subjective viewpoint of the participant has garnered interest (Harper 2003). Harper (2002) argues that when combining words with the presentation of images, more of the brain's capacity is utilised than dialogue based on words alone. Further, photos can serve to improve recall and lower incidences of misunderstanding when interpreting the data (Harper 2002). The photo elicitation methodology has been a method of choice in sociology in order to discover various perspectives of people within their environments. For example, research with this methodology has gathered ethnographic data about rural farm life (Schwartz 1989), examined children and youth's perspectives about their environment/community (Morrow 2001, Cook and Hess 2007), and studied attitudes towards female sport participation (Snyder and Kane 1990). To illustrate an example in the sport literature, Snyder and Kane studied attitudes toward two female sports – gymnastics and basketball. The 145 participants were shown eight black and white pictures and were asked to write their reactions. Contrary to the hypothesis, the authors found that perceptions toward the two sports were similar. Snyder and Kane noted that the use of photographs 'provides an opportunity to gain an understanding about sport that is not available from more traditional techniques' (1990, p. 26). Researchers well versed in the photo elicitation methodology suggest that the use of photos in the research process de-centres the influence of the researcher, allows for many different interpretations to be collected and increases the attention of those being interviewed (Harper 2003, Power 2003). With many positive reviews attributed to this method, it is clear that it may have a great deal of potential within the field of sport psychology. Phoenix (2010) comments that while visual methods are not the only way to conduct research in the physical domain, respondent-generated data encourage cooperation between the researcher and participant and enables research to see the viewpoint of the participant. In particular, this methodology holds promise as a way to engage children and youth in the research process (Azzarito 2013).

Since the perceptions of children and youth are separate and different than adults, it is important for researchers to recognise young people as collaborators and take the time to fully explore their contexts (Cook and Hess 2007). Wang (2006) and Wilson *et al.* (2007) employed photovoice methods to explore participatory action research with youth. These studies are strong examples of how photovoice might be used to create social change and action. Researchers noted that youth were engaged in the process and co-learning situations were established between youth, researchers and policy-makers. While action research appears to be the main platform for the use of photo elicitation, some studies are focused on presenting the experiences of youth in a particular context. The photo image offers an opportunity for young people to introduce topics that may not arise in a purely verbal conversation (Croghan *et al.* 2008). Cooper (2010) recently used a photo method to explore soccer in Lavender Hill, Cape Town prior to the 2010 FIFA World Cup of soccer. Youth between the ages of 11–13 years were asked to take pictures of soccer in their

neighbourhood. The author then analysed and interpreted the pictures noting the heavy influence of gendered norms in this neighbourhood. Cooper, however, also noted that the photo method enabled youth to explore notions of themselves and their environment and empowered them to reflect. This method offers a unique opportunity to see the sport context through the eyes of youth.

With a large majority of children and youth participating in at least one extracurricular activity (Guèvremont *et al.* 2008), structured programmes are an important developmental context for young people. Involvement in sport activities comprises a large portion of extracurricular participation, with approximately 76% of Canadian children and youth engaged in organised sport (Guèvremont *et al.* 2008). By taking part in sport programmes, children and youth have the opportunity to fulfil three main objectives. These include goals to improve overall physical health, to develop motor skills and to encourage psychosocial growth (Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2011). Even with these explicit goals in mind, research in sport points to the presence of negative outcomes related to participation including burnout, injuries and dropout (Fraser-Thomas *et al.* 2005) to name a few. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that 92% of Canadians believe that sport has the potential to be a positive avenue of growth and development for children and youth (Mulholland 2008). Therefore, along with the physical and motor skill development that is inherent in sport, participation in sport can be valued as a crucial context for personal development.

Positive youth development (PYD) 'is a broad notion that includes the development of diverse competencies that can help a young person in sport, in their current life and/or in their future' (Gould and Carson 2008, p. 59). The core constructs of PYD have an ecological element focusing on contexts involving the youth, personal characteristics possessed by the individual and developmental outcomes (Lerner 2003). Several frameworks have been brought forth in the PYD literature to assist in understanding youth development including the 5 C's (Lerner *et al.* 2000) and the developmental assets (Benson 1997). These frameworks have also been extended into sport through a model of personal and social responsibility (Hellison 2003), the Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation programme (Danish *et al.* 2005), and the 4 C's framework (Vierimaa *et al.* 2012). One framework that has not been often promoted within a sport context is the setting features framework.

In 2002, a cohort of experts in the field of youth development through the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM) developed a set of eight guidelines or setting features that should be recognised within youth programmes to encourage PYD. These setting features include (1) physical and psychological safety, (2) appropriate structure, (3) supportive relationships, (4) opportunities to belong, (5) positive social norms, (6) support of efficacy and mattering, (7) opportunities for skill building and (8) integration of family, school and community efforts (NRCIM 2002). Researchers have suggested that sport programmes have a key role in promoting these setting features (Perkins and Noam 2007) and can be instrumental in youth development (Petitpas *et al.* 2005, Côté *et al.* 2008). Côté *et al.* (2008) addressed each of the setting features for PYD and made a case of each one within a youth sport context. The authors suggested that there are clear links between the setting features and the development of a positive youth sport setting.

In terms of physical and psychological safety, Côté *et al.* (2008) proposed that although physical safety is important, safe peer interactions must also be considered as they impact a child's perceived competence and self-worth (Horn 2004, Vazou *et al.* 2006). These interactions with peers are closely linked to youth being

psychologically safe and hence, the two concepts in the first setting feature are independent. Appropriately structured sport programmes (i.e. the existence of clear rules and expectations, practice plans and supervision) help youth to work within boundaries and to respect rules, leading to secure and positive experiences. The authors also contend that the amount of deliberate play versus deliberate practice also needs consideration in the programme structure. Next, supportive relationships in youth sport are linked to the environment created by the coach. Coaches affect motivation, enjoyment and self-efficacy (Black and Weiss 1992, Jowett and Poczwardowski 2007) and are important in the development of physical, psychological and social skills for all athletes in their care (Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2011). Youth sport coaches are particularly important in programme delivery and play a key role in shaping sport programmes. Opportunities to belong in youth sport include the presence of meaningful inclusions and this feature encourages persistence and interest in an activity (Allen 2003). The next feature, positive social norms, involves the ability of sport programmes to develop values and morals, including fair play, respect and cooperation (Côté 2002). Support of efficacy and mattering (i.e. the opportunity to make a difference in a young person's social world) includes concepts of empowerment and autonomy which are key aspects in developing intrinsic motivation (Mallett 2005). The feature relating to opportunities for skill building can have many different definitions in sport. Skill building may relate to physical and motor skills, as well as psychosocial learning experiences (Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2011). Finally, the integration of family, school and community provides an opportunity for sport programmes to deliver unique experiences for youth that may be transferred to other contexts. This 'developmental redundancy' has been found to increase the likelihood of thriving (Benson *et al.* 2006).

One qualitative study using the setting features as a framework in sport research examined high-performance coaches and how they promote PYD in their respective sport programmes (Strachan *et al.* 2011). After an analysis of interviews with coaches, the authors noted the presence of each setting feature in the sport context although not each one was suggested to the same extent. For example, the integration of family, school and community were not perceived to be as present as opportunities for skill building. Since this study was exploratory, more evidence is needed linking the setting features to youth sport. The setting features hold promise as a framework when examining how sport is structured (Perkins and Noam 2007). This framework encourages positive outcomes and, if used to frame youth sport settings, may have a direct impact on decreasing youth withdrawal from sport (Fraser-Thomas *et al.* 2005). In addition to withdrawal, research has highlighted other negative experiences in youth sport, including increased alcohol consumption and aggression (Fredricks and Eccles 2006), that might not be present in other activities. There is a need to explore different contexts to see which components may lead to more positive experiences in sport to counteract the possible negative outcomes. The setting features framework, therefore, is an appropriate framework to explore in youth sport contexts so that an appropriate structure for sport can be developed. The ultimate goal is to assist youth in sport and encourage awareness of positive programme delivery to coaches and others in the sport environment.

To bridge the PYD and sport literature, the purpose of the current study is to use photo elicitation to explore youth experiences in sport contexts and connect to the setting features. Participation in sport has been linked to higher rates of initiative, teamwork and emotional regulation when compared to other structured activities

(Larson *et al.* 2006). However, in this same study involving 2280 participants, youth involved in sport also reported lower rates of identity work, positive relationships and adult network experiences (Larson *et al.* 2006). Research has suggested it may be possible that different experiences within sport may lead to the accrue of distinct development outcomes. For example, Strachan *et al.* (2009) found differing developmental experiences between ‘specializers’ and ‘samplers’ in youth sport. Delving deeper in each context will offer additional insight. In the current paper, two studies were conducted. Study 1 explored children and youth in high-performance sport settings and Study 2 investigated children and youth who participated in a week-long summer sport camp.

General methodology

Approach to research

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, one could posit that a constructivist approach would be taken. The inclusion of links to the setting features in the analysis phase, however, does not simply point to constructivism. One could ascertain that there is a slight positivistic slant as well in an attempt to frame the findings. Cupchik (2001) argues that the ‘potential interplay between these two approaches implies that in fact they share many qualities in common as part of the research enterprise’ (Method Section, para. 14). Therefore, a constructivist realism (Cupchik) approach was taken to account for patterns experienced in the real world. The researchers of the current paper wanted to bring to light the idea that meaning derived from the data may exist within an existing framework. Meaning is constructed by the participants and through the analysis. This meaning continues to hold through the inclusion of the setting features framework. The authors wanted to demonstrate that it is possible to have the two approaches ‘living together’; the approaches can ‘bring accounts of social phenomena to progressively greater levels of clarity’ (Cupchik 2001, Conclusion Section, para. 4).

Overview

For Study 1, recruitment occurred by contacting coaches of high-performance sport programmes in a mid-sized Canadian city. Of the programmes that responded, consent was obtained from coaches, as well as from the parents and participants. Recruitment for Study 2 occurred by contacting the director of a large summer sport camp in the same city. The proposed methodology involved four separate sessions, following a similar established protocol for photo elicitation as demonstrated by Cook and Hess (2007). In Cook and Hess’ paper, three projects were conducted. In project 1, seven children were examined about their perceptions of enjoyment in school life and the school environment. Three separate sessions were conducted. The first session was a brainstorming session where children thought about what they liked about their school and why this was important to them. The participants were also instructed that they could only take 12 photographs and the children discussed what pictures they might take and why. The second session involved the actual picture taking and this part was conducted in one day. The final session had the children selecting their pictures and discussing which ones were meaningful to them and the group decided on which pictures to keep. In the case of Cook and

Hess' project, one of the primary researchers and another colleague did the data collection and analysis.

Procedure

Ethics was obtained through the appropriate board at the university. There were additional considerations that needed to be pondered given the age of the participants and the nature of the study. These considerations will be included in the explanation of the photo procedure. The procedure was decided upon based on Cook and Hess' (2007) work with children in a school environment. Session one was designed to orientate the participants to taking pictures and think about what they find meaningful in their sport experience. The participants brainstormed as a group and came up with several ideas. In order to satisfy ethical requirements, the participants were urged not to only consider people within their sport context but also the environment and objects. If a participant really wanted to take a picture of a person, the ethics board required that they be trained to ask first before taking a picture and if the person said 'no', they were not to take the picture. This point was emphasised in a demonstration that occurred in the first session. The primary researcher or a trained research assistant administered the 'role playing' with the participants and they all practiced on each other as well.

The next session had the participants taking disposable cameras (i.e. 1 camera per participant, 36 exposures) into their sport environment and taking pictures of objects or people within the environment that they find meaningful, whether it is positive or negative. When given the cameras, participants were reminded of the procedure and importance of asking a person before taking a picture. In addition, each camera had a label with simple reminders about the procedure and this satisfied ethical requirements. The participants had two days to take pictures throughout the day or at a practice. The lead researcher or research assistants brought the disposable cameras to a local store for 1 h processing. Duplicates were made and given to each participant for them to keep.

The third session was completed the next day after the cameras were collected. In this session, participants were invited to choose eight to ten of their own photographs that identified strongly with meaningful aspects of their sport experience. If a child wanted to choose more pictures, they were welcome to do so. However, all participants worked within the 8–10 picture range and this worked well to help them choose their most meaningful pictures based on their own experience.

Finally, the fourth session was conducted on the day following the third session and participants were asked to share their pictures and thoughts with the researcher. The children were in groups of 2 or 3 when sharing their photos. The decision to share their pictures with a small group was aimed to create more comfort for the child who was sharing his/her meaningful pictures with friends and not only with a researcher. All participants were excited to share their own thoughts with others and created energy in the focus group. Participants were asked standardised questions such as 'Can you tell me about this picture?' and 'What does this photo mean to you?' Responses were accompanied by probes that were appropriate to the responses given to encourage more detail by the children. Each focus group lasted approximately 30–45 min. Each participant commented only on the pictures that were taken with their own camera. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a research assistant for use in the analysis. In compliance with ethics,

transcripts were sent to participants via their parents for review. This step provided the participants with an opportunity to clarify or edit any statements made in the focus group.

Data analysis

The analysis procedure used was based on a process established by Burnard (1991). This procedure is a stage-by-stage process for performing a qualitative analysis. Generally, the purpose of the process is to ‘produce a detailed and systematic recording of the themes and issues addressed in interviews and to link the themes and interview together under a reasonably exhaustive category system’ (Burnard 1991, pp. 461–462). From this process, the meaning units (Tesch 1990) were categorised inductively first and then deductively analysed using the setting features as a framework (Côté *et al.* 2008). A reliability check of 10% of the meaning units was performed with the help of two researchers familiar with the field. Due to space considerations, results from the deductive analysis are presented in this paper.

Study 1

Participants

Study one focused using the photo elicitation methodology to explore high-performance sport contexts, particularly swimming and gymnastics. All athletes involved in this phase of the study were participating in their sport of choice for a minimum of 10 h per week. Twelve athletes (nine females and three males; Mage = 11.0) participated in this study. These athletes had been involved in their respective sports for a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 6 years.

Results

The analysis yielded 124 meaning units relating to the eight setting features (NRCIM 2002). The number of meaning units for each setting feature is listed on

Table 1. Analysis (number of meaning units) of high-performance context versus sport camp context.

Setting features	High performance youth sport context	Sport camp youth sport context
Physical safety	22	12
Psychological safety	10	12
Appropriate structure	18	12
Supportive relationships	9	25
Opportunities to belong	4	5
Positive social norms	15	6
Support of efficacy and mattering	16	14
Opportunities for skill building	30	14
Integration of family, school, and community	1	9

Note: Classification of the setting features is based on links to the features and youth sport research found in Côté *et al.* (2008).

Table 1. The first setting feature, physical and psychological safety, was divided in the presentation of the results as per research from Strachan *et al.* (2011). Classification of the themes was based on suggested links from Côté *et al.* (2008). Each setting feature was examined separately and quotations were provided in the following sections to enhance the clarity of the information presented. The corresponding pictures are also included in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Photos taken by participants in study one. These pictures are from those participants in the high-performance sport context.

Physical safety

The majority of the participants (i.e. 11 out of 12) chose pictures that demonstrated the importance of physical safety in their sport participation (22 meaning units). Information provided highlighted safe equipment, feeling safe when learning a new skill, the presence of trained personnel, feeling comfortable in the environment and knowledge of safety protocols. One athlete took a picture of the foam pit in the gymnastics centre (Figure 1(a)) and said: 'I chose the pit 'cause ... it doesn't make you crash mat at first. It makes you land on a soft surface' (G100). The same athlete also took a picture of the whole gymnastics centre and mentioned that 'It makes me feel sort of like, I'm at like my second house. Because I'm here often' (G100). These two quotes demonstrate the presence of safe equipment and also the comfort this particular athlete has with the training environment.

Psychological safety

Six of the twelve athletes in the study (10 meaning units) included photos pertaining to the close friendships, as well as the support and encouragement received from their friends present in their sport experience. One athlete mentioned that 'when you have really good friends in swimming it sorta, helps you. Like I have to wake up on Thursday mornings and Saturday mornings and it sort of motivates me to wake up or I probably wouldn't be doing it' (S600). One interesting picture was taken of the pool deck (Figure 1(b)) and this particular athlete said this about that picture: 'this is where, like, at swim meets we cheer. 'Cause, we cheer a lot' (S100).

Appropriate structure

The awareness of the provision on an appropriate structure in a high-performance sport experience was mentioned by 10 of the 12 athletes (18 meaning units). The athletes mentioned themes relating to physical preparation, cues, conditioning, training expectations, specific practice structure, proper progressions and the use of play as a reward. For example, an athlete took a picture of the low beam (Figure 1(c)) and said that 'if you are learning a new skill on beam, you have a lower beam to do it on before you go up to the really high beam' (G200). This demonstrates an understanding of proper progressions.

Supportive relationships

Half of the athletes included pictures relating to the adult supportive relationships that were present in the sport environment (nine meaning units). Athletes reported on coaches but also other adults including lifeguards, other teachers (i.e. ballet teacher) and the gym administrator (Figure 1(d)): '(She) pays for all of our stuff ... just what makes us able to train here. She gets all of our equipment and makes sure everything is all good' (G200). This is an example of the awareness the athletes had regarding other adults in their environment and their importance in their experience.

Opportunities to belong

Only four athletes included pictures relating to opportunities to belong (four meaning units). Themes included feeling part of a team, having training partners or groups and

the ability to have friends of different age groups (Figure 1(e)): ‘the age doesn’t really matter at swimming, but at school you usually hang out with your grade’ (S100).

Positive social norms

Nine of the twelve athletes selected pictures of themes relating to the development and presence of positive social norms that they have learned in their sport experience (15 meaning units). These themes were related to pride, enjoyment, responsibility, positive values and commitment/dedication. One athlete took a picture of the clock on the dashboard of the car which read ‘5:42’; this was taken before a morning practice (Figure 1(f)). When asked why she took this picture, she said ‘I think it’s important for people to know that we’re really committed to the sport and that we get up really early’ (S200). There were also many quotes related to the pride felt in accomplishing goals: ‘It makes me feel important, like I did good and got myself this far’ (S600).

Support of efficacy and mattering

Most of the athletes (10 out of 12) discussed themes related to efficacy and mattering including building confidence and persistence, motivation and getting recognition (16 meaning units). In particular, one athlete took a picture of a bell (Figure 1(g)): ‘So you, like, ring if you get a new skill. So it’s fun when you get a new skill and you get to show everyone’ (G300).

Opportunities for skill building

The majority of athletes (11 out of 12 comprising of 30 meaning units) discussed the opportunities they have in sport for building a variety of skills including knowing the rules, physical skill development, knowledge relating to strategies and new skills, and goal-setting: ‘This is like, the national novice requirements ... it makes me want to like, do more skills, and try to get it’ (G300). The picture is included as Figure 1(h).

Integration of family, school and community

Only one athlete made a mention of the integration of family, school and community in their sport experience (one meaning unit). There was a picture of the athlete’s mom and the athletes commented that ‘she always encourages me and never says I can’t do anything’ (G300). The picture is not included as the parent did not want her picture included in the study.

Discussion

This study used a unique methodology, photo elicitation, to engage children and youth in research exploring high-performance sport experiences. The current study serves as a follow-up to Strachan *et al.*’s (2011) paper exploring the setting features from a coach’s perspective. It is important to not only explore contextual factors related to sport participation for children and youth but to also gain insight into the experiences of young athletes using a different method.

Results from study one point to the setting features framework (NRCIM 2002) as an appropriate model to use for examining PYD in high-performance youth sport programmes. This framework may be used as a platform for evaluating the presence and growth of various features and also allows researchers to view different aspects of these programmes and obtain insight into which elements may be missing in order to promote a more positive experience for talented youth.

It is clear in the results that youth in these high-performance contexts have many perceptions relating to training, practice structure, safety considerations, strategies and skill development. Specifically, 55% of the meaning units were related to these themes. In research with high-performance coaches, there were also many themes related to training and skill development (Strachan *et al.* 2011). Since this phase of the study examined the context of high-performance youth sport, it is very probable that these particular athletes are on the road to sport expertise through deliberate practice (i.e. structured practice activities with the main goal of skill acquisition; Ericsson 2002). With this type of practice, it is expected that these athletes would gain information about their skill development and progression. An interesting addition to this information, which was reflected in some pictures, is the insight gained about safety and rules which are not typically topics included when there is a discussion about deliberate practice. It would seem that these youth have a clear idea about what is safe and how to maintain safety in their sport environment.

Positive social norms and support of efficacy and mattering are another two setting features that stood out among the results. Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2011) list the growth of psychosocial skills as one of the outcomes of youth sport participation. In this case, it would seem as though the growth of these attributes is also important in a high-performance sport context. Similar to the characteristics listed by the coaches in Strachan *et al.*'s (2011) paper, athletes perceived the sport experience as being essential to the growth and development of confidence, dedication, commitment, enjoyment, pride and persistence. These attributes mirror some of the life skills discussed in the PYD literature (Danish *et al.* 2005, Petitpas *et al.* 2005, Côté *et al.* 2008). It would seem that even in a high-performance culture, these attributes are recognised as being developed.

The athletes in this study did demonstrate low responses on some of the setting features. Notably, pictures related to supportive relationships, psychological safety, opportunities to belong and integration with family, school and community were not as emphasised as the other setting features. This does not mean that these are not present. In fact, the data collected through pictures points to rich peer relationships that may emerge in these settings. This result is similar to previous research which demonstrated that diverse peer relationships were one of the positive experiences of young 'specializers' (Strachan *et al.* 2009). It is surprising, however, that even with the amount of time these young athletes spend in practice contexts, there were not very many pictures chosen that reflected the coaches or other adults present in their sport environment. The focus of the pictures seemed to fall into the category of deliberate practice and less on the presence of others. Perhaps it can be suggested that coaches need to spend more time with these athletes in non-sport-related interactions (i.e. casual conversations, asking about hobbies). This may make a difference in the connection that young people experience. Gould and Carson (2008) suggest a heuristic model of coaching life skills in sport and the coach characteristics include relationship skills such as listening, caring and showing interest. Due to

the focus on skill development and practice, this is often lacking in high-performance youth sport settings.

It has been suggested that ‘youth-sport programmes that focus on fun, skill development, and maximum participation encourage people to stay involved and achieve success at all developmental stages of life and at all levels of sport’ (Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2011, p. 229). Considering the intense level of participation and inherent skill development, high-performance youth sport programmes have the potential to be model contexts of sport development if a positive focus is placed on psychosocial skill development along with the physical skill development.

Study 2

Participants

Study two used photo elicitation to explore youth experiences in a summer sport camp context. All athletes involved in this phase of the study were participating in a variety of sport for a minimum of three weeks (i.e. they each enrolled in at least three sport camps over the course of the summer). Fourteen children and youth (two females and 12 males; Mage = 9.4) participated in this study.

Results

The analysis yielded 109 meaning units relating to the eight setting features (NRCIM 2002). The number of meaning units for each setting feature is listed on Table 1. The first setting feature, physical and psychological safety, is divided in the presentation of the results. Each setting feature will be examined separately and quotations are provided in the following sections to enhance the clarity of the information presented. Results were organised according to the theoretical links made by Côté *et al.* (2008). The corresponding pictures are also included in Figure 2.

Physical safety

Only six of the fourteen participants discussed themes related to physical safety including a safe environment and the establishment of rules and equipment that are safe (12 meaning units). One camper took a picture of the harness used in the rock-climbing sport camp: ‘So, that was also very important because, that’s what keeps us safe in, when we’re rock climbing’ (C009). The picture is included as Figure 2(a).

Psychological safety

Again, six of the fourteen participants reported on pictures taken that reflect the presence of psychological safety (12 meaning units). More specifically, all six participants expressed the same theme which involved the importance of close friendships. One participant included a picture of his friend (Figure 2(b)): ‘I have a ton of good times with him’ (C005).

Appropriate structure

Seven participants (12 meaning units) included pictures which discussed the structure of the programme as important to their experiences. This involved themes relating to scheduling, rules, equipment and the inclusion of play experiences. When

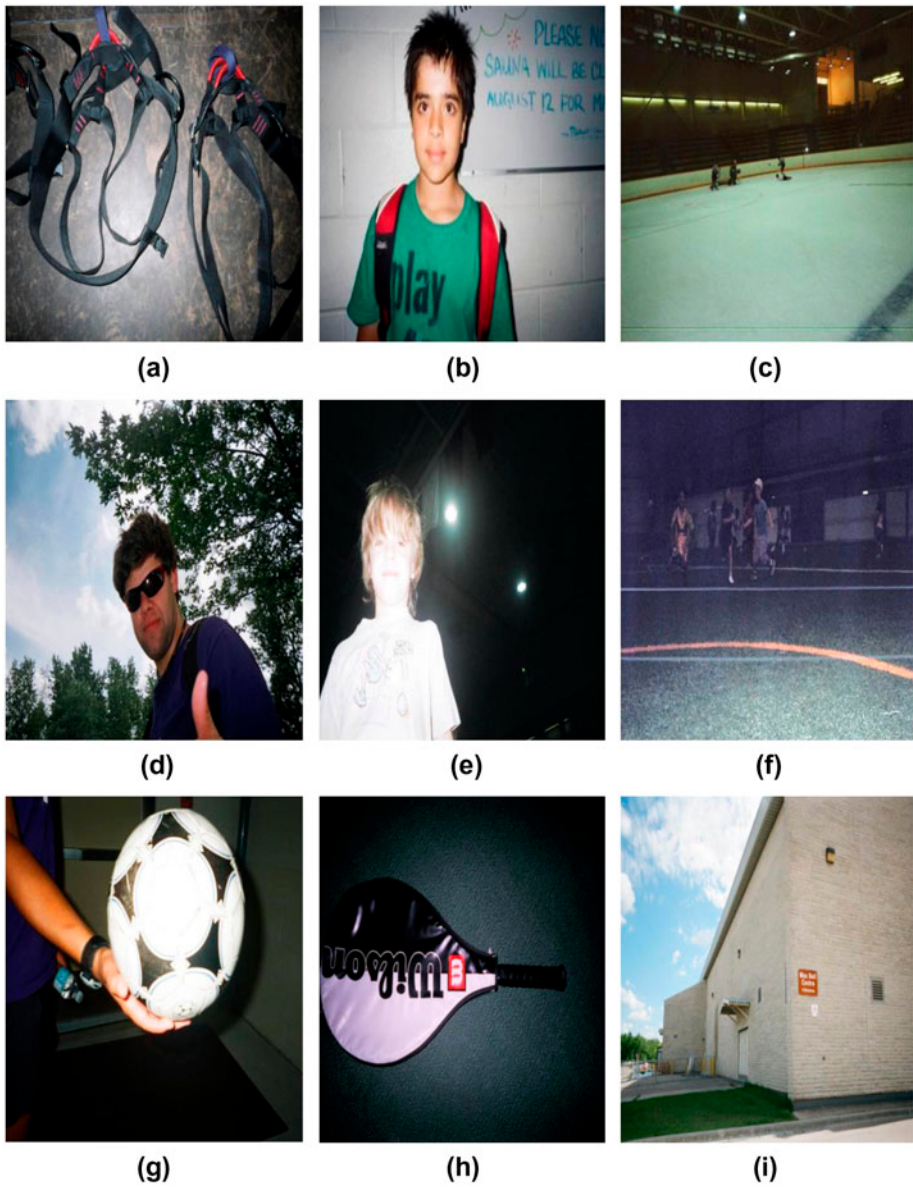


Figure 2. Photos taken by participants in study two. These pictures are from those participants in the sport camp context.

speaking about the picture (Figure 2(c)), which shows children playing on an ice surface, the participant said that the picture ‘shows that, like, it’s important to me because I get to play games instead of just doing drills the whole time’ (C012).

Supportive relationships

The majority (11 out of 14) of participants chose pictures that included their instructors. This feature included 25 meaning units. Participants spoke about the role the

instructors played in teaching skills but, more notably, instructors were viewed as people who were their friends and made them laugh. One of the youngest participants sought out an instructor he had the previous year and really wanted to take a picture of him (Figure 2(d)). Of this particular instructor he said 'He's my best friend adult' (C013).

Opportunities to belong

Five participants (five meaning units) each discussed themes related to having a partner to play with while at the sport camp and feeling a sense of belonging in the programme. As an example, one camper took a picture of a friend (Figure 2(e)): 'This is meaningful to me because, um, he's my friend and I have somebody to play with' (C006).

Positive social norms

For this setting feature, only three participants chose pictures relating to the development of positive social norms (six meaning units). Particularly, the participants spoke about learning teamwork and having a healthy lifestyle. The picture depicted in Figure 2(f) is a group of children running in space and the participant commented that 'This picture is playing games. Um, I took a picture of this because ... we're getting active again' (C010).

Support of efficacy and mattering

Nine participants selected pictures that included themes related to the presence of this setting feature (14 meaning units). Enjoyment was a recurring theme and the picture taken (Figure 2(g)) reflected this theme: 'This is a picture of a soccer ball ... I really like soccer. It's fun' (C003). Other themes mentioned by the participants were feeling a sense of pride and having recognition for accomplishing a skill.

Opportunities for skill building

Eight of the fourteen sport campers (14 meaning units) discussed opportunities that the programme gave them to maintain their skill and learn new skills, games and sports: 'I like the tennis camp ... this is my first time doing tennis camp. I've never done like tennis ... I've only done like badminton' (C011). The picture is included as Figure 2(h).

Integration of family, school and community

Five participants chose pictures that reminded them of family, school or community ties (nine meaning units). In fact, campers commented about sibling influence, the presence of camp instructors in school or community and ties to a sport venue due to previous sport involvement in the community (Figure 2(i)): 'Because this year I played hockey ... and so when we came here to play, we were always home. 'Cause this was our home arena' (C001).

Discussion

As a follow up to study one, study two focused on the experiences of children and youth in a summer sports camp. After conducting the analysis using the setting features framework, particular features seemed to be reported more often in this context. In particular, pictures relating to supportive relationships were the most selected pictures among the campers who took part in the study. In more traditional sport programmes, coaches are in contact with children and youth over the course of a season and are the key adults in that context. In a summer sport camp context, instructors take the role of coaches for the particular sport but are also with the campers for the whole day. These instructors also play the role of supervisor for lunch breaks, travel time to a particular field or gym and for parent drop off/pick up among many other things. Due to the time that is spent with the children and youth, instructors may hold a high value to these young people. The opportunity for casual communication in this context on a daily basis is abundant and this factor may lend itself to an enhanced experience for the participants (Gould and Carson 2008, Strachan *et al.* 2011).

Features related to support of efficacy and mattering, as well as opportunities for skill building also stood out in the results as areas that were chosen by the campers. The participants were excited to show pictures related to enjoyment, pride, recognition and skill building. Perkins and Noam (2007) cited these factors as being very important in the development of positive youth sport programmes. In particular, enjoyment is often cited as the most important factor that needs to be included in youth sport programmes to increase persistence and maintain interest and motivation (Wiersma 2001). The development of skill and having a chance to be recognised within a sport context was also important to this particular sample. Ryan and Deci (2000) have pointed to one factor, competence, which can help individuals develop the intrinsic motivation needed to continue in an activity. By showing pictures related to feeling more competent (i.e. learning and mastering new skills), these participants did indicate this theme as important to them and an important step to redefining success in youth sport.

Opportunities to belong and positive social norms were the features selected the least for the campers. It is difficult to determine if the prevalence of these features were not strong or if these features were simply not as meaningful. This does not mean that experiences were not present. In fact, the participants who did include pictures relating to these features tended to be the younger participants and were vocal about individuals playing together and in having partners for play. It is possible that these themes are more emphasised at the younger age levels and the 'buddy system' could be utilised more than just as a safety strategy.

Summary and concluding discussion

The main purpose of this research was to use a photo elicitation methodology in youth sport. As there is not a great deal of research done with visual methods in physical cultures, such as sport (Phoenix 2010), this study demonstrates that this type of research is possible. Participants in this study did have an opportunity to 'show' and not only 'tell' about their experiences (Croghan *et al.* 2008) and this is a valuable piece to research, particularly with children and youth. Samuels (2004) conducted a study with children and youth in a Sri Lankan monastic culture. The

author used a traditional interview style in phase one of his research and then used an auto-driven photo elicitation method in follow-up research. Not only did the author find that interviews with the photo more informative with ‘richer descriptions’ (p. 1532) but he also commented that the presence of the pictures evoked a more emotional and expressive response during interviews. He also discussed Harper’s (2002) original thoughts about ‘breaking frames’ (i.e. enabling meaningful thought and reflection on a particular topic). The idea is that visual methods might lead researchers to help participants ‘break frames’ and explore their own context in a more meaningful way. While that may happen, Samuels ‘found that auto-driven photo elicitation facilitated the breaking of my own frame more than the frames of the monks’ (2004, p. 1541). In conducting the research in youth sport, the researchers in this study felt the same way as Samuels. In reviewing the high-performance sport literature, this context is painted as a hindering experience in terms of development. While it is not perfect, the participants’ experiences point to the possibility that there are positive aspects that research should not ignore. On the other hand, summer sport camps contexts are often viewed as a ‘babysitter’ – a place for children and youth to be while parents are at work. The analysis allowed the researchers to see valuable aspects of the programme that might not be apparent to a parent or onlooker. The visual method forced us to challenge our own assumptions about high performance and sport camp contexts.

Authors using photo elicitation in research with youth need to be mindful and aware that they are working with youth and are giving them a voice. Participants need to be a centred part of the research process if we are to understand more about the sport context. Mills and Hoeber (2013) suggest that the use of this method ‘can contribute to theory building by offering alternative ways of accessing participants’ ideas, particularly when their viewpoints differ significantly from the researcher(s) ...’ (p. 18). This particular study contributes to the idea that the voices of youth can help build upon previous frameworks and ‘give life’ to theory building. Seeing personal pictures and explanations of the meaning derived from the youth experience in sport helps research to make connections to current frameworks such as the setting features. Even with the challenges and limitations that may be inherent to participating in auto-driven research (Mills and Hoeber 2013), the richness of the data and excitement of the process allow for genuine and interesting interactions with children and youth. As researchers work to extend this field and explore other aspects of youth sport including perceptions of sport related to culture (McHugh *et al.* 2013), the use of visual methods such as photos can continue to include youth in the process and allow researchers to take a step back.

The use of the setting features framework served as a way to explain the data from the meaning units and categories. The setting features provide a limited understanding of experiences in sport but do provide a platform to consider these experiences (Strachan *et al.* 2011). Interesting themes and differences emerged from the data related to PYD. The two youth sport contexts outlined in study one and study two were quite different as one context was focused on high-performance sport development and the other context was a summer sport camp. Upon closer examination of these contexts, it can be concluded that those in the high-performance context spent more time per week in their activity over a longer period of time (i.e. a season) and those in the sport camps had less time with instructors and peers (i.e. approximately three weeks).

It would appear from the data that there were differences in these contexts. One area that stood out was the feature related to supportive relationships. In study one, only half of the high-performance athletes chose pictures relating to this feature and that included only nine meaning units. Upon closer inspection, it would seem that these meaning units and pictures were primarily of adults other than coaches in their sport environment (i.e. lifeguards, sport administrators). Considering the amount of time that these invested athletes spend with their coaches, it is surprising that more pictures were not taken in this regard. On the contrary, the participants in study two included several pictures of instructors and the majority of youth (11 out of 14) reported 25 meaning units. Considering that the time spent with the instructors was considerably shorter than the time spent with coaches in the high-performance context, this is an interesting dichotomy. An ecological approach would point to the idea that time spent in an activity is important, as well as the contextual factors that are present in the environment to help with youth development (Bronfenbrenner 1999). Perhaps there is something to be said for shorter sport programmes. It would seem as though the impact of adults in this context has the potential to be just as meaningful and arguably, even more meaningful. Erickson *et al.* (2007) have suggested that more expert coaches have received relatively little training when it comes to athlete development and this may also include specifics about PYD as well. Due to the shorter time of contact, sport camp instructors may place a greater emphasis on the experience that the youth are having and less on skill practice. Although training needs are quite different for athletes who specialise (Côté *et al.* 2010), greater care needs to be taken about how PYD is being delivered in this context and coaches need to be more willing to engage these athletes in meaningful, non-sport-related conversation to inspire a greater sense of connection (Strachan *et al.* 2011).

On the other hand, it is clear that opportunities for skill building are heavily emphasised in the high-performance context. In fact, 11 of the 12 athletes comprising 30 meaning units in study one selected pictures related to this feature as opposed to 8 of 14 athletes including 14 meaning units from study two. Training physical skills related to sport is a key aspect of high-performance youth sport. Due to the amount of time spent in training, it is expected that skill development would be a priority in this context. Strachan *et al.* (2011) found that coaches did emphasise physical skill development in high-performance youth sport contexts and deliberate practice is required to help enhance skill building (Ericsson 2002). It is now important to examine how deliberate practice is being delivered. A higher level of skill may lead to increased feelings of competence, which is a key outcome in positive youth sport programmes (Vierimaa *et al.* 2012).

The setting feature related to support of efficacy and mattering was also worthy to note in this study. The participants in the high-performance sport context had more specific mentions of building confidence and persistence as opposed to those in the sport camp context who reported more about enjoyment and fun. This is not to say that those in the sport camp did not build confidence or those in the high-performance context were not having fun. The finding simply reports what were more meaningful to each particular group. An interesting aspect of this setting feature was that both groups chose pictures related to the importance of recognition. Recognition is also an aspect to youth sport that is echoed in previous research (Perkins and Noam 2007, Strachan *et al.* 2011). It is clear that this is an aspect that needs more attention and deliberate delivery within youth sport programming.

Finally, the integration of family, school and community was shown to be a challenge in high-performance sport settings. Coaches recognise that there is a challenge in this regard (Strachan *et al.* 2011) due to the time spent in training. This setting feature was more prevalent in the sport camp setting as the community connection seems to be an easier link for those participants to make. If this setting feature is necessary to encourage positive youth sport programming, more consideration is required in high-performance youth sport to encourage the growth of this setting feature.

Whether it be the feature related to supportive relationships or the feature with links to family, school and community, social relationships and its inclusion in sport programming appears to be important to these athletes and this fact is supported in the literature. Holt *et al.* (2009), in a retrospective study of 40 former competitive youth athletes, found that social interactions were a central piece to how life skills are developed and learned through sport. How these social interactions or relationships (i.e. peer–peer, coach–athlete) are defined however is a developing concept in the PYD literature. A sociological approach might be the ideal answer to expanding and understanding work in relationships. Smith (2013) notes that in the field of sport and exercise psychology ‘the social relationships are talked about, thereby leaving it unclear what relations conceptually “are” and the significance of these in human activity’ (p. 145). Smith defines social relationship as a ‘lived trajectory of iterated bouts of interaction between actors, built up through a history of interaction, but also...entailing anticipation of future interactions’ (p. 143). The main thought is that the outcomes that may emerge from these interactions (i.e. specific emotions, thoughts) do not come from inside the individual but are a direct result from the social interactions that have taken place. Smith speculates that when relationships are discussed in the sport and exercise psychology literature, it is a dualistic interaction instead of a relationship. This represents a shift in our ideas when discussing relationships; we have to be mindful that relational components of development occur outside of the self and be willing to create a ‘space of understanding in which social relationships stands before the individual’ (Smith 2013, p. 145). Coakley (2011) comments that the literature in youth development in sport ‘appears to reproduce a functionalist neoliberal approach to PYD rather than extending ideas about the many ways that youth development can be defined in connection with sport programmes’ (p. 315). Thoughts about connections and relationships need to be more fully developed in the sport and exercise psychology literature and more dialogue within psychology and sociology needs to occur to enhance the depth of understanding and analysis within youth development.

There were a few limitations to this study. First, although the sample size was comparable for this type of methodology, the genders were not balanced. This could have been due to the choice of sports for the study. Those who took part in the study were the participants who brought back consent forms from parents. More consideration should be made in future studies to include male and female perspectives. Also, the age groups were a little different however ages did fall under what would be considered ‘youth’. The next study should consider more consistency in the age of the participants. Next, although the trustworthiness step was completed, it could have been problematic having parents assist with reviewing the transcript. In future studies, the case can be made to ethics to hire a research assistant who did not participate in the data collection or analysis to meet with the children one-on-one and

read their responses to them. Any clarifications or edits can be made at this time and researchers may be more confident knowing that the step was completed thoroughly.

The use of a photo methodology in youth sport contexts is interesting to consider as researchers continue to learn about youth experiences in sport programmes. Recent research has pointed to three key elements needed for positive youth sport programmes including the existence of an appropriate training environment, the provision of opportunities for physical, personal and social skill development, and the presence of supportive interactions (Strachan *et al.* 2011). It would seem that results point to the presence of these elements in each of the sport contexts examined. These elements still need further examination in youth sport. Future directions to this research may examine longitudinal approaches to photo research and also include team sport participants. The two contexts included in this paper seemed much different in terms of time involved in participation and there were differences in their experiences. High-performance youth sport and sport camps are unique sport experiences for youth and each should be valued as such. More is needed to examine these contexts so that youth sport programming can be structured to encourage positive outcomes, regardless of the level of involvement of the child.

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