YOUTH WORKERS AND THE CREATIVE ARTS

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF BOGOTÁ:

AN ALTERNATIVE INTERVENTION IN SOACHA, COLOMBIA

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Youth Workers and the Creative Arts on the Outskirts of Bogotá: An Alternative Intervention in Soacha, Colombia

This thesis explores the role of youth workers who utilize the arts in Soacha, Colombia. Through a historical and anthropological lens the findings reveal the objectives of the workers and the impact the work has as an intervention with the children. Through the case study of nine youth workers and two administrators of the local NGO, La Fundación Proyecto de Vida, I show how a comprehensive approach strengthens youth's social and personal capacities. This Colombian model of intervention includes workshops that cover areas such as music, visual arts, movement, physical health, and the environment. In addition to the workshops the organization provides psychological resources through family counseling, art and psychodynamic therapy, along with onsite cafeteria service. Ultimately, I illustrate how this comprehensive, arts-based approach to support the youth can break the cycle of violence that is otherwise perpetuated by the lack of governmental social programs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Colombian nongovernmental organization La Fundación Proyecto de Vida offers alternative arts-based education to youth at three sites in the metropolitan area of Bogotá. The youth who attend the programs at the organization are between the ages of three and twenty one years old. I carried out my research on the NGO's site in Soacha, the southern municipality of Bogotá. While Life Project is the name of the organization, it is also a concept within the programs. At its most fundamental level the concept of Life Project is a future goal the youth work towards.

The study I conducted makes visible the perspectives of youth workers at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida. Through this perspective I add an understanding of how arts-based programs, when combined with other services, act as intervention in the lives of youth and families of Soacha, Colombia. The case study provides an important example to the field of child development of an intervention in the lives of youth who have experienced the impact of displacement and/or extreme economic poverty. Specifically, I illustrate the practices established by this program.

In this thesis I look at three themes I identified from my research. Foremost, the youth workers focus on the youth's resilience to violence through the concept of the Life Project. Second, the youth workers use their skills and knowledge in the artistic process to strengthen the youth's personal and social capacities that relate to resilience. The five capacities the youth workers focus on that I identified through my findings are: life direction, self-esteem, responsibility, relationships, and conflict resolution. Lastly, the quality of relationship between youth worker - youth, and youth worker – parent permits

and has an impact on the work that is done. The youth workers have a clear intention behind developing these three areas through the artistic process that is carried out in their arts-based workshops.

I found that the youth workers value the process of learning and making art, music, and movement over a final product. More so, my findings reveal that the artistic process is parallel to the process of the youth's Life Projects. Explicitly, both processes begin with an idea, dream, or desire, and then have concrete steps to work towards a final outcome. The personal and social capacities the youth workers focus on strengthening during the artistic process are also capacities needed to work towards a Life Project. Through these processes the youth take ownership over the ideas; this co-creation leads to relationship building and networking. The capacities that are developed through the processes aim to strengthen the youth's resiliency and to develop assets that the youth can use outside of the organization.

I chose to work at the NGO's Soacha site because the population was the closest related to my previous research on displaced people in Colombia. In Chapter III, I discuss this research and how Soacha is the first part of the metropolitan area that internally displaced people find themselves. Chapter III also discusses the background on the Colombian internal conflict, the Colombian neoliberal economic system, and the impact on civilians and youth. In total Soacha has a population of 400,000 people and growing; I worked specifically in the sixth commune of Soacha. The median income level places this population at the bottom of the economic and social scale ("¿Quíenes Somos?." 2013). Due to rapid urbanization, Soacha does not have a complete sewer or water system, nor are all of the roads paved. According to my findings, the children living in

these neighbors attend overcrowded schools, and confront multiple forms of abuse in and outside of their homes. These conditions create the need for a comprehensive intervention that focuses on holistic child development.

Through my research I found that the youth workers aim to create a community within the organization. Their work focuses on how to strengthen the youth's capacities while being part of this community. Therefore this model of comprehensive intervention counters the neoliberal focus on the individual. According to La Fundación Proyecto de Vida, the children of these neighborhoods are the most vulnerable of the population. It is my recommendation that professionals in the fields of child development and peacebuilding, as well as policymakers, take interest in the model of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida. As my findings suggest there are fundamental elements of this model from which others can benefit.

Overview of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida

La Fundación Proyecto de Vida (Life Project Foundation) began in 1990. According to the organization's website, research at the time showed the need to provide activities for the integral development of youth. The current executive director began working in 1991 in the northern part of the city with a program called "Self-Education Circles." From the beginning the aim of the program was to serve youth in low-income, high-risk areas. The United Nations and the Mayor's Office of Bogotá initially supported the program because involvement showed a prevention of drug use among young people ("¿Quíenes Somos?." 2013). Further analysis carried out by the Colombian Institute for the Family and the Population and the Francisco José de Caldas Colombian Institute for the Development of Science and Technology showed involvement in the program

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prevented child abuse. The executive director has presented at the Psychology Congress of the Americas in Mexico City arguing that a focus on self-esteem was to be attributed to these protective outcomes ("¿Quíenes Somos?." 2013).

The success of the program in the north encouraged the founders to move into Ciudad Bolivar in the south and in 1999 to Soacha. In October of 1999 the programs became officially incorporated and recognized by the Colombian state as a non-governmental, non-profit organization (NGO). The mission of the organization is to provide marginalized youth "guidance and the spaces and the means that will promote their integral development through the acquisition of the social, cognitive, emotional, physical and transcendental skills that will allow them to build their life plan and to live a better life with greater resources" ("¿Quíenes Somos?." 2013). The vision of the organization is to be a leading center of child development. The mission states the five areas that create the holistic approach the organization takes on child development.

The NGO is funded through grants and donations. The donations come from private individuals and a corporate campaign. Individuals can choose to sponsor a child at about $30,000COP (US$16.63) a month, which is the cost of the child to attend the organization. While the specific source of corporate financial support is outside the scope of my study I would like to acknowledge that this dynamic could be researched to understand what if any societal impact this has. For example, who are the corporations and what are the corporate motivations for giving financial support? Furthermore, it is also important to recognize that in general NGOs provide services that address the needs created under the neoliberal economic model where the state itself does not provide these services. Therefore the NGO model of relying on outside sources of funding forces all

NGOs to operate on a possibly unsustainable foundation. However, in 2004 with the support of private donors, foundations, and private companies, La Fundación Proyecto de Vida built a facility in Soacha creating space for a library, a playground, classrooms, and offices. While I was conducting research in August of 2012 I attended the dedication of a new facility in Ciudad Bolivar that was financially supported by donors and corporations.

At the Soacha site the staff and personnel manage the programs and services. Altogether there are 200 youth who are enrolled in the organization at the Soacha site. The onsite director manages the daily operations of the site. Additionally there are social workers, psychologists, therapists, and onsite academic tutors who support the youth and their families. The arts focused workshops are designed and run by the visual arts facilitator, the movement facilitator, and the music facilitator. The arts based programs are run and designed by the environment facilitator, the fitness and health facilitator, and the young child (ages 3-4) program facilitator. The Soacha site is supported by the staff of the organization who work in an office in Bogotá. The office staff includes the executive director, the resource development director, and the programs director. Additional support staff also work in the Bogotá office.

The staff who I interviewed for my research included 7 females and 4 males. All of the staff either already had obtained or were nearly finished with university degrees in their professional areas. The staff members that I interviewed had worked at the organization from one to twenty years. Ten out of eleven staff members I interviewed were Colombian, and one was British. Outside of the organization their collective experience includes past employment in the Colombian public school system, employment with local universities, and additional experience in their individual

professional fields. While I did not include a question directly about childhood, three staff members talked about how their own experience growing up in the metropolitan area of Bogotá influences how they are better able to relate to the challenges of the children that attend the organization.

Workshops and services offered

Once enrolled in the organization the youth are divided into age groups. In general, youth attend workshops with others in their age group. However, there are times and workshops where youth are of mixed ages. The programs of the organization are made up of two types of workshops. One type of workshop that is required is called "formative" and another type that is optional is called "elective." The formative workshops are arts-focused, while the electives are on other topics but use the arts as a teaching method.

Each youth may choose to come to the organization site everyday to participate in workshops. Many times youth do not come consistently and so group sizes in workshops fluctuate. While observing I was told by youth workers that there are various reasons why youth do not attend consistently. The reasons vary but include family circumstances. One important factor to highlight is that the youth can decide whether or not they are going to attend each day. While sometimes the decision is influenced by other environmental factors, this choice demonstrates the youth's sense of agency: even when they attend the workshop they choose to participate or not.

The formative workshops are the ones focused on the visual arts, music, movement, and cognitive development. The workshops are offered once to three times per week. The visual arts workshop involves different types of drawing, painting, and

handicrafts. While I participated in the workshops the youth were creating paintings that depicted scenes from Colombian myths. While I was participating in the music workshops the youth were learning basic music concepts such as singing in tune and timing. Specifically, they were working on Andean music to present at the bi-annual art show. The three to six year olds participated in arts-based workshops that focus on cognitive and kinesthetic development. The youth workers who design the workshops use the arts to develop the skills of the children. For example, I observed that to develop fine motor skills the youth worked on rolling magazine papers into small circle tubes that were then pasted together to create placemats.

The elective workshops are focused on topics such as the environment, fitness, health, and camping. While these workshops may not be focused on the arts, all of them use arts-based projects as teaching methods. The workshops on health topics include sexuality, birth control methods, and values such as gender equality, respect, and honesty. In order to participate in the elective workshops the youth must participate in the formative workshops. In some cases exceptions are made for youth who cannot attend the formative workshops but would like to participate in electives.

Youth attend the programs at the organization site either in the morning or in the afternoon. When the youth attend is dependent on when they attend school. In general, youth attend school in Soacha for a half-day, either in the morning or in the afternoon. In Soacha more youth attend school in the morning; therefore, there are less youth at the organization site in the morning than in the afternoon.

In addition to the workshops the organization offers psychological services to both the youth and their family members. Talk therapy is offered to those who ask for it

by licensed psychologists, or by those identified by the organization's social worker as in need of these services. Separately, both psychodynamic (movement-based) and art therapy are offered to the youth. By offering these free services it supports both the youth and their families to break patterns that often lead to violence.

The youth find security in the food that is offered to them on-site in Soacha. The cafeteria-style dining hall, called the Solidarity Cafeteria, has existed since 2007. However, it is not operated by the organization itself, rather by a separate organization. The youth who participate in the morning session of the organization receive a snack around 10:00 AM immediately following their participation in the workshops. Snack normally consists of milk or juice, a bread roll, and guava jelly. While observing I noticed the youth did not receive a morning snack before morning workshops. I would argue that providing a morning snack would help to edge hunger and possibly help the youth calm down and concentrate during the morning workshops. Before the youth leave to go to school they are provided a lunch. Youth who participate in the afternoon session of the organization arrive beforehand to eat lunch. After the workshops but before the youth leave to go home for the evening they are given a snack similar to what the morning session youth received.

Youth pay $500COP (US$0.28) a day, or $10,000COP (US$5.54) a month for the cafeteria service. Families of four or more are eligible to receive a reduced fare. One interviewee justified charging the children this small fee for the food service as a way for the youth to *value the food they are receiving.* In Chapter V, I discuss "Responsibility" and how this is used by youth workers to instill a sense of value on the Life Project in the youth's lives. Occasionally groups or individuals from outside of the

community donate food to be given to the families who are enrolled in the organization. While I was observing in Soacha one group of a local soccer fan club donated various food items. The items were divided up and given to the youth to carry home. When I asked about this in the interviews I was told that when food is donated in this fashion the families do not pay a fee for the food.

Statement of the problem

Current arguments in the field of child development and intervention make clear that interventions are needed to prevent children from working in the streets in Bogotá and to support families impacted by internal and transnational migration (Duque – Páramo 2012; Dybicz 2005; Pianta et al. 1997; Scales and Gibbons 1996). More so, there is limited literature in the field from the perspective of front line youth workers. Therefore, to shed light on the dynamics of the actual experience of those working with youth, my study aims to capture this perspective through the case study of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida.

I chose this organization in part because the intervention includes a focus on the psychological and social development of youth who live in marginalized neighborhoods. This marginalization is a result of and is furthered by the global neoliberal economic system that supports capitalism. This system is designed to reduce funding to social programming that counters the negative impact of capitalism. Some of the direct impacts created by capitalism include a restructuring of family that can leave children with less support. An example of this restructuring takes place when a mother chooses an economic opportunity abroad so she can send home remittances (Duque – Páramo 2012). While some youth find support from their extended family, this is not the case for all.

More so, as my findings reveal, the youth of these neighborhoods experience multiple forms of violence and it becomes a challenge for them to express themselves in regards to this trauma. While this is the case, the youth demonstrate resiliency and agency by making choices every day that shape the direction of their lives. Without an intervention that supports their resiliency and respects their agency, some of the youth may continue to repeat familiar patterns of violence.

Studies of best practices of youth programs identify that interventions should involve caring adults and focus on developing the assets of the youth, such as their imaginative capacity (Jones and Deutsch 2011; Lerner and Benson 2003; Beck 1999; Bronfenbrenner 1979). Furthermore, in the field of Peacebuilding and the Arts, art is being formalized as an intervention for peacebuilding initiatives. Specifically, art is being documented in interventions that focus on using the arts to develop values and tools that create room for expression and interaction (Cohen 2003; DiCarlo 2000; Fowler 1994). Art in community peacebuilding initiatives is not a new concept; however, now there is a scholarly body of knowledge emerging around it. For example, Cohen (2003) documents, among others, an after-school program from the 1990s called "Voices of Today" that was created by cultural worker Jane Sapp. Cohen highlights how this program used music and song with children to gain a "sense of self-discipline and direction that spills over into their academic work and their planning for their futures" by creating room for expression. Through documenting arts-based case studies the field of Peacebuilding and the Arts strengthens the work being done in communities.

My study seeks to understand what is effective practice with the low-income and marginalized population of Soacha. Through the case study of La Fundación Proyecto de

Vida I aim to illustrate the practices established by this program such as how the youth workers combine the arts with a child development focus. I strive to understand the intention behind what skills and tools the youth workers encourage in the youth. Additionally, the case study shows how combining the arts-based program with academic tutoring, cafeteria access, and psychological services creates a comprehensive approach to support the youth and their families. Finally, I highlight how the work of the organization is effective in part because of the trust developed between the youth workers, the youth and their parents.

I focus on understanding the comprehensive approach because it supports the current arguments in the field for interventions with this population. More so, this approach shows how the artistic process develops the assets of the youth, makes explicit the role of youth workers, and emphasizes the importance of their relationships with the youth and families. My research findings illustrate the tools and skills the youth workers focus on strengthening and how these skills and tools encourage the youth's capacities to be resilient to the violence they face in their environment.

Motivation for the research

I became interested in researching how the arts are utilized by youth workers with youth who live in marginalized areas through reflection on my life experiences. From my life experiences I have come to learn that violence is not limited to marginalized neighborhoods or areas of extreme poverty. My motivation to begin my research began during a year of service with the United States governmental program AmeriCorps*VISTA. This experience as the Service-Learning Coordinator at Towson University introduced me intellectually to the root causes of extreme poverty, such as

social exclusion and capitalism. I gained intimate knowledge of the impact of economic poverty in the lives of people living in the city of Baltimore, Maryland. This experience gave me a different perspective on the violence I and those close to me had previously experienced. It revealed to me that violence is a symptom of a sick society that is ruled by self-interest and fear.

The courses I completed during my graduate studies at the University of Oregon allowed me to begin an understanding of the history of how the systems we live in today have been formed. Additionally, I began to understand which populations have been and are marginalized by these systems. I became interested in how the decisions of the United States government historically and currently shape the lives of people domestically and internationally. Specifically, my interest fell on Latin America, the closest neighbor of the United States.

Furthermore, I became aware of how these histories are intentionally not ones included in US public education. This lack of public education creates an environment of ignorance that allows for the continued abuses by those in power. I have a respect for the importance of education, as my mother has modeled for me as an educator for low-income families. From my perspective education serves multiple purposes, including supporting youth, and strengthening their tools and skills to achieve their goals. It also allows educators to learn from the youth who are experiencing multiple realities that can inform the health of the larger society.

Due to these interests and curiosities, during my graduate studies I ultimately sought out organizations that work with youth in creative ways in the Pacific Northwest. I attended a sixth month facilitator training led by two local nongovernmental

organizations. I strengthened my skills and tools to work with groups on a personal level. Through this network of people I became connected with the organization Partnership for Youth Empowerment (PYE) Global. This connection introduced me to the Colombian NGO La Fundación Proyecto de Vida where I carried out my fieldwork. I hope to bring what I have learned through this process with me as I continue to work with youth in my future career.

Thesis statement

Through readings and courses I gained a deep understanding of how neoliberal economic policies influence and shape the internal conflict in Colombia. The conflict increases the internally displaced population and level of extreme poverty that exists in, among other areas, Soacha. Therefore, I focus on an intervention that takes a holistic approach to child development with youth living in this environment. With an appreciation for the transformative nature of the arts, my research focused on arts-based approaches with youth and the role of youth workers in these programs. Ultimately I argue that when combined with complimentary services arts-based programs strengthen the resiliency of youth who experience multiple forms of violence; therefore, policymakers should increase funding to such programs.

Research objectives

The objectives of my qualitative research at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida were to:

1) Document and make visible the practices and intention of youth workers in Soacha

2) Understand the effects of the arts-based program in the lives of the families and youth of Soacha from the youth worker perspective

Limitations and scope of the study

In this study I do not look at the efficacy of art as a therapy. Although art therapy is a service offered at the organization, it is not the focus of my study. Nor do I investigate the long-term impacts of the arts on the lives of the youth. To investigate this aspect, a study would need to be longitudinal and take more time than I had for this study.

In addition, I do not use the lens of social capital. While there is overlap, the concept of social capital seemed too broad. Therefore, I look specifically at which tools and skills the youth workers focus on developing and how the arts are used to achieve those objectives. To understand the concept of social capital developed by the program I believe the youth themselves would need to be interviewed, however this is outside the scope of my research.

Structure of thesis

In this thesis I use qualitative data to create a case study of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida as a model of intervention in youth's lives. To give context to the population of youth who live in the rapidly urbanizing neighborhoods in Soacha, I begin in Chapter III by sharing the historical roots of the Colombian internal conflict in regards to its impact on internal displacement and civilians. In Chapter IV, I situate the work of the organization by sharing my findings on the types of violence the youth in Soacha face at home and in their communities. This understanding of the context helps to establish

the importance of youth workers who support the youth in developing their personal and social capacities.

I document in Chapter V the social and personal capacities the youth workers focus on developing with the youth. For example, I discuss how in my findings these capacities are: life direction, self-esteem, responsibility, relationships, and conflict resolution. In Chapter VI, I show how the arts and the artistic process are used to strengthen these capacities. Lastly in Chapter VII, I address the importance of establishing healthy relationships between youth worker and youth, and youth worker and parent. To conclude in Chapter VIII, I summarize my observations on the work of the NGO, noting areas of success, critiques and limitations of the intervention, and form a recommendation to the Colombian state on how to better support youth workers and youth themselves.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHODS

The goal of my research was to gain first hand knowledge of how the youth workers of the organization used the arts to develop capacities in the youth's lives. I lived in Bogotá, Colombia and worked in Soacha, Colombia from July 2012 to September 2012. While at the organizational site in Soacha the main research methods I utilized were participant observation in the programs and semi-structured interviews with the youth workers and other staff of the organization. These two approaches allowed me to observe the interactions that take place between youth worker and youth, as well as the role of other staff members and parents at the site on a daily basis. I recorded observations daily that I later used to create the structure of my interviews. The semi-structured interview approach allowed me to explore areas more in depth and thereby gain a deeper understanding of the interactions I observed.

I carried out eighty hours of participant observation over a time span of five weeks beginning in August 2012. I participated in the different workshops offered to the youth, and spoke with the youth workers about their goals and objectives for each workshop. For example, if the youth were making music that day, I made music with them. If the youth were playing a recreational game in a workshop, I played along too. By engaging in the workshops as a participant I observed the design of each workshop. For example, each youth worker began his or her workshops with an introductory activity. The objective behind this was to engage the child on the level of mind, body, and soul before beginning the main activity for the workshop. I observed that this approach had a calming and focusing effect on the youth. Those that entered the

workshop with a lot of energy were often able to tune into the activity after the opening group activity. Such knowledge of the inner workings of the activities would not have come from interviews alone.

I took part in the daily routines of the organization while consciously observing conversations and events that I later recorded in daily field notes. In order to identify my own preconceptions and biases I kept a second personal journal. By participating in activities other than the workshops, such as library use and lunchtime, I saw how the youth workers interacted with the youth in less formal ways. For example, the youth workers ate lunch with the youth and engaged in conversations with them about family life. As I learned later in my interviews, the conversations held during this informal time are intended to gain a more intimate knowledge of each youth to be able to better support them.

In addition to the daily routines of the Soacha site, I attended one of the monthly staff training days and a dedication of the Ciudad Bolivar site building. Through attending the staff training I gained an understanding of the cooperation that goes on between the youth workers to improve the work they are doing. At these trainings the youth workers receive skill trainings on both the personal and professional levels. I would argue the relationships the youth workers have between themselves influence the quality of programs and interactions they have with the youth. During the dedication of the Ciudad Bolivar site building I observed how the youth participate in events with the organization outside of the workshops. This event took place on a Saturday, reflective of the normalcy for both the youth and the youth workers to be involved with the organization more than from Monday through Friday.

Additionally, I observed the role of religion in the life of the organization. For example, a blessing and mass was held during the dedication of the Ciudad Bolivar building. During interviews, I was told "the Church" is important to the families of the organization and is also a financial supporter of the organization. For these reasons the organization works to maintain ties with the Church. I observed the role of religion within some of the workshops as well. It was not uncommon for some youth workers to incorporate a prayer with the youth in the beginning of their workshops. The organization is theoretically non-denominational, but in practice incorporates Christianity into their work. This is reflective of the cultural values of the society in which they work.

After conducting formal participant observation, I carried out individual semi-structured, open-ended format interviews that allowed for the flexibility to explore topics in depth with different informants. I carried out 12.5 hours of interviews with 11 people employed by La Fundación Proyecto de Vida. Each interview lasted between 1 – 2 hours and was one-on-one except for one interview that was with two people simultaneously. I audio-recorded the interviews for systematic analysis at a later time. I invited a translator to join me on all of the interviews where the informant chose to use Spanish. The translator was certified and works professionally with other organizations in the city. Out of the eleven informants, two of them chose to use English during the interview. The people in the individual interviews all worked at the Soacha site and include: the site director/site social worker, the psychologist, the visual arts facilitator, the movement class facilitator/psychodynamic therapist, the music workshop facilitator, the environment program facilitator, the site academic tutor, the fitness and health class facilitator, the small child (ages 3 - 4) program facilitator. The two people interviewed

together were the Executive Director and the Director of Resources.

I followed a guide that I developed for interview questions; please refer to Appendix B. The guide was created based off of my research objectives and my daily field notes. The style of semi-structured interviews allowed me to get more in depth on topics that the interviewee was inclined to talk about by asking unscripted follow up questions. Furthermore, I tailored each interview to the informant based on his or her area of expertise. Therefore, there were some questions that I asked all eleven informants, and other questions that only a few responded too. This allowed me to gather qualitative data that spoke to many areas of the organization.

At the end of some interviews were separate questions I conducted as research for the organization Partnership for Youth Empowerment (PYE) Global. PYE Global had held two prior "facilitator" trainings for the organization. From November 2011 through March 2012 I participated in and completed a facilitator training conducted by a sister NGO of PYE Global. Through this network I became connected to La Fundación Proyecto de Vida. Therefore, I carried out these evaluations for PYE Global in order to collect feedback about the usefulness of the prior trainings. Additionally, I videotaped three of the responses from the interviewees to be sent to PYE for use on their blog site. In my introduction to each interview I explained my relationship with PYE Global and made clear that the beginning of the interviews were questions for my research, and the end were specific for PYE Global. I also explained that responses to the questions regarding the past trainings would be sent back to PYE Global.

Process of analyzing the data

Upon my return in September 2012 to Oregon I transcribed and translated from Spanish into English each interview. I systematically coded each interview for key words and phrases, which I did by looking for words, phrases, and themes that emerged across interviews. I then compiled the data based on each overlapping interview question and/or shared theme between interviews that I identified after coding. Three themes emerged from this process. The first area is the youth workers objective to increase the youth's resilience to violence through the structure of the Life Project. The second area is how the youth workers use the arts and the artistic process to strengthen the youth's personal and social capacities. The third area is the importance of the quality of relationships that exist in the organization, specifically between youth worker - youth, and youth worker - parent.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Considering the historical risk community leaders and NGO employees have faced in the past and continue to face in Colombia, I decided to collect the interview materials on the basis of anonymity. Before each interview I read a Verbal Consent Form to each interviewee who then gave me permission to publish the information they shared with me; refer to Appendix C. In this process I explained that I would not have them sign their names, nor would I use identifying factors to particular information shared in my publications. While the name of the organization is real, I have chosen to use alternative names when I use direct quotations.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND ON COLOMBIAN INTERNAL CONFLICT

"One of the world's largest and longest-running armed conflicts raging in

its territory, which forced the displacement of 5.2 million people between

1985 and 2010 (CODHES 2011) — the highest number of internally

displaced persons (IDPs) in the world" (Martinéz 2011 as cited by Zea

2010).

 The lives of the youth discussed in this thesis have been greatly impacted by the

internal conflict of Colombia and the neoliberal economic system in which they live. For

some youth it has meant that they were displaced from one area of the country to Soacha.

For other youth, it means that they were born and live in an area where there exists

extreme economic poverty. Because of the conditions in which these youth live, they

face obstacles such as domestic violence and gang recruitment. In order to understand

the underlying events that led to and create the conditions of Soacha, I look at the

historical roots of the internal conflict and its impact on the lives of civilians.

The majority of displaced people in Colombia are low-income, rural, small

landowners, and ethnic minorities. Specifically, displaced people are more likely to be

Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples (Kovalik 2012). According to Zea (2010), "in

2010 alone, violence displaced over 280,000 people, or about 780 people a day — a

reduction from 2009, when over 286,000 were displaced. Acción Social, the Colombian

government office that registers IDPs, registered 86,312 people as displaced in 2010"

(CODHES 2011). These individuals are considered to be less economically capable of

defending themselves from the violent tactics used by the government, paramilitaries, and

guerrilla groups (Braun 2009; Ibáñez and Velásquez 2009).   According to current literature on peace and conflict resolution, civilians will continue to be the target of the armed conflict until the warring groups come to a peaceful compromise and the damages victims have faced are recognized (Bleaney & Dimico 2011; DeRouen 2010; Sobek 2010; Azam & Hoeffler 2002). Until then, the state will lack the confidence of civilians, and civilians will continue to rely on guerrilla groups to provide economic and physical security (Justino 2009).

As many scholars have written, the contemporary history of internal violence in Colombia is a product of nation state building. The violence in Colombia dates back to the territory's independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century. With the development of Latin America's oldest political parties, Colombia has routinely been a violently divided state (Braun 2009). In 1958, following the civil war between the Conservative and the Liberal parties known as La Violencia, a coalition of the parties formed a government that ruled for sixteen years (Uppsala 2012). As a reaction to being excluded from the bipartisan government, leftist groups began an armed rebellion against the Colombian state (Uppsala 2012). Although motivations have changed over time, Ibáñez and Velásquez (2009) argue the conflict was more than a political confrontation and the leftist guerrilla groups were additionally fighting for rights to land and access to resources.

The conflict continued to expand in the 1980s as leftist guerrilla groups gained access to resources through the rising drug trade. Among other guerrilla groups, FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army) gained access to capital through the developing coca cultivation and cocaine trafficking. In

order to secure more resources, Braun (2009) illustrates how FARC began to "act as a protector for the coca growers and levied taxes from them and the drug traffickers who came into their territories to buy the coca." The FARC's need for access to land for coca cultivation grew rapidly and in response land-owners, as well as other drug lords, began to hire paramilitary forces to protect their land and their families (Uppsala 2012; Braun 2009). In response to the rising level of violence taking place in rural areas, new paramilitary groups were formed supported by the Colombian state.

The paramilitary groups have always been supported by local politicians and members of the military because the military alone was not able to stop the leftist uprising (Uppsala 2012; Braun 2009; Ibáñez and Velásquez 2009). Braun (2009) argues further that "during the 1990s, they (the paramilitaries) developed into powerful organisations which conquered, often with extreme cruelty, vast parts of Colombia." It should be noted that beginning in the early 2000s the United States government supported the Colombian government with funds given through the campaigns of the "War on Drugs" and later the "War on Terror" (North American Congress on Latin America 2009; Mondragón 2007). In reality, this war over access to and control over land, is furthered by the free trade agreements the Colombian state continues to sign, including the agreement with the United States government (Kovalik 2012; Nichols and Sanchez-Garzoli 2011; Vernengo 2011). Therefore, it is to be recognized that both the Colombian and United States governments are clearly waging a war to keep control over land, a war that has had an enormous negative impact on the citizens of Colombia.

Civilians as targets

Deliberate targeting of civilians is a trademark characteristic of the armed conflict in Colombia. Through "false positive" scandals and the recruitment of child soldiers, children are especially vulnerable targets of the actors in the internal conflict. False positives scandals happen when military officials are awarded for body count numbers of the enemy (FARC members). For example in 2008, families of 19 young men learned that their sons living in Soacha were fooled by members of the Colombian military who in turn killed them and dressed the corpses in guerrilla clothes to increase their body count numbers (Isacson 2011). Furthermore, the statistics of children soldiers are high:

> "families migrate to avoid forced recruitment of their children into illegal armed forces. Children as young as eight years old are currently recruited by illegal armed groups to fight as soldiers in the Colombian conflict (Salazar 2001). After an engagement in October 2001, military forces found that 43% of dead guerrilla members and 41% of captured guerrilla members were below 18 years of age," (USCR 2001 as cited by Ibáñez and Velásquez 2009).

The impact of the armed conflict on civilians is multifaceted. Displaced people experience loss of loved ones, loss of property, drop of income and consumption, and broken social networks (Zea 2010; Braun 2009; Ibáñez and Velásquez 2009). Worse, because military groups target civilians who they claim support guerrillas and drug trade, displaced people are stereotyped and discriminated against for being supporters of terrorists by those residing in the cities where they arrive, and by those who work for government aid programs (Zea 2010).

Root causes and needs of IDPs

The Colombian state employs neoliberal policies that cause severe poverty for some and riches for others by cutting social programs that would otherwise act to counter some of the negative outcomes of the economic model. In this section I discuss the economic factors at play but do not expand on the socially constructed hierarchies of race, gender, and ethnicity that impact the conflict. However, I would like to emphasize that together neoliberalism and neocolonialism are the foundation for the current armed conflict. An analysis can be done of the needs and wants of each actor of the conflict; however, for the purpose of this study I limit it to those who have been displaced and impoverished by the conflict. I use current literature and news articles that identify the needs of the internally displaced population in Colombia.

Forced displacement brings people living in rural resource rich areas into areas of urbanization. According to Kovalik (2012)

> "87% of Colombian displaced population originate from regions that are being
>
> mined for the extractive resources – such as coal and oil… The conflict has
>
> displaced 10% percent, or five million people out of forty five million people
>
> living in Colombia… Most of the 102 indigenous groups and Afro-Colombian
>
> population are included in the displaced population."

People who are displaced come to city outskirts with limited knowledge of and access to resources (Zea 2010). The stigma attached to the status of being displaced makes it difficult for people to integrate into society and receive state aid (Zea 2010). Braun (2009) identifies the major needs of displaced people as: 1) the need to open up economic opportunities, 2) assist the victims of violence and 3) return to one's home region. In

addition, Zea (2010) illustrates the continued challenges displaced people face in securing

these needs. Through his study of internally displaced people in the city of Bogotá, Zea

argues that a third of displaced households are not registered to receive government aid,

and 22% of which are because they were uninformed or determined to be not qualified.[1]

In order to determine if the needs of civilians are being met it is imperative to

look at the self-identified needs of the group. Zea (2010) examined public marches of

internally displaced people in Colombia and determined their "demands" as being:

1) the development of a strategy to promote human rights and International

Humanitarian Law (IHL)

2) a political and negotiated resolution to the armed conflict in the country (a

major cause of displacement)

3) the right to truth reconciliation, justice, and reparation to violent events

4) promises by the government that such events will not occur again

5) the recognition by the Colombian state of actual displacement figures put forth

by non-governmental organizations

6) the implementation of agile and responsive legal mechanisms that respond to

the reality of the loss of lands and territories by ethnic and multicultural societies

and to the economic rights of those properties and assets

7) the guarantee to displaced individuals of a safe return to the place of origin

where displacement occurred

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[1] Demand driven aid system: "requires households to approach government offices and prove that they are victims of forced displacement; however, households mistrust the government because of the inability to protect them in the first place." For a more detailed discussion of the limitations of this system refer to

The state has issued new laws addressing some of these needs, but many of them have yet to be met. I argue that the armed-conflict cannot be determined to be over until the internally displaced peoples' demands are met and there is an end to structural violence. Moreover, one can refer to Braun's (2009) case study of repatriating displaced peasant families to Catatumbo, where armed groups were still present and war was still going on in the area where the families returned. Based on testimony from NGO employees who accompanied displaced people on the journey back, Braun argues the Colombian government fails to protect against armed groups. Therefore it is obvious that still the government does not have control over areas and cannot successfully enforce the law. Furthermore the Colombian government played and continues to have an active role in displacing its civilian population in order to gain access to land and resources. These dynamics have led to an environment of disenchantment with the Colombian and United States governments. Additionally, the dynamics have helped to create a segment of society that is marginalized while living in the conditions of economic poverty. From this perspective I argue that a third party needs to administer the meeting of civilian needs and demands, as the state is unfit.[2]

The context I have described here creates unique challenges for the youth and youth workers whose experiences I engaged in my research. The events that led to and create the conditions of economic poverty in Soacha continue to impact the lives of its citizens. The role of the state in the internal conflict and neoliberal economic system

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[2] See Vieira, Constanza. Inter Press Service News Agency, "Victims of Sexual Assault Under Threat and on Their Own." Last modified 2011. Accessed December 7, 2012 for one example of trust broken between the Colombian government and its citizens.

requires NGOs to give support where it does not. In the next chapter I look at the importance of child development work with the population of Soacha.

CHAPTER IV

IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH WORK IN SOACHA

The socio-economic-political change described in the previous chapter has produced areas of the country where people live in the conditions created by extreme poverty, marginalization, and violence. In 2003 the National Statistics Department (DANE) reported a growth rate in the population of Soacha as 6.3% since 1993. This growth rate was three times the national average of 2.1%. The rapid increase in the population is directly related to the high rates of internal displacement due to the internal conflict.

A characteristic of these conditions is instability. For example my findings illustrate that families do not always know how they will earn their weekly income. Within the instability created by the political and economic violence of the internal conflict exists violence that is interpersonal, such as domestic and sexual abuse in the households of Soacha (Bryson 2011). The types of violence that exist within Soacha were not a main research area for my study; refer to Bryson 2011 as a study of the violence that exists within Soacha. However, all of my informants mentioned that the children who attend the organization experience violence in their homes and in their neighborhoods. Therefore, the violence that exists within the environment of the youth plays out in the work at the organization.

The political violence the families experience leads to lives full of violence. According to the most recent census of Soacha, the 2005 survey conducted by the Colombian government shows that only 8.5% of the households have formal economic activity (DANE 2005). Poverty rates are determined by the national system known as

SISBEN. This system assigns levels reflective of household economic income and is used by various social programs to determine eligibility. The poverty rate of Soacha according to a 2005 census was 47.5%, as determined by a SISBEN level of 1 or a formal documentation of displacement (DANE 2005). I want to emphasize that though cycles of violence exist within families and neighborhoods, if blame is placed somewhere, it should not be placed on any individual. Rather, policymakers should examine the economic and political structures that force people into lives of economic poverty.

Furthermore, a development plan prepared by Jose Ernesto Martinez Tarquino provides more information that illustrates the environment in which the youth live. In 2007 there were 119,628 children between the ages of 0 and 14, among which there were "25,638 children under age 6 in sectors of extreme poverty with economic and social vulnerability levels 1 and 2 of Sisben" (Martinez – Tarquino 2008). In addition there were "40,704 adolescents between 7 and 18 years of diverse ethnic and economic vulnerability of sectors" (Martinez – Tarquino 2008). Adolescents and young adults ages 13 to 26 years old comprised 26.1% (97,503) of Soacha in 2005. Martinez - Tarquino attributes the high level of gang violence and other crimes to the lack of job opportunities as identified by young people. However, one should keep in mind that some people living in Soacha had jobs in the countryside before being displaced to Soacha, therefore more low quality urban jobs does not address the underlying factors of the internal conflict nor of the impacts of the neoliberal economic system.

Additional statistics that reflect the economic conditions of the youth are seen by the number of pregnant women, street children, and reported cases of abuse. According to Martinez-Tarquino, in 2007 there were a "recorded 2,722 pregnant women … in conditions of economic and social vulnerability" and "1,605 children between 10 and 14

years old" working in the streets (Martinez – Tarquino 2008). He refers to figures from the Institute of Legal Medicine that show in 2005 and 2006 Soacha had the highest rates of reported domestic and sexual violence in the department of Cundinamarca. He attributed the root causes of abuse to be "economic difficulties, alcoholism and disrespect of rules at home, jealousy and infidelity" (Martinez – Tarquino 2008). In this context the types of interpersonal violence represent a symptom of the abuse of power that we all live in within our economic and political systems.

Findings regarding violence in the lives of youth

As I found in my research, the youth who live in Soacha are exposed to violence. What makes the work at the NGO's Soacha site unique is the environment in which the work is being done. Foremost, according to my findings the arts are the first thing to be cut in the public school curriculum. My findings show how the personal and social capacities the arts-based programs focus on strengthening confront the violence in the youth's lives. For many of the youth the organization is the only space where they can participate formally in the arts and gain alternative skills and tools to confront violence.

In addition to the lack of access to arts education, the relationships in the youth's lives are either directly or indirectly impacted by the larger political economy. The restructuring of family due to parental migration and/or alternative forms of maternal care also create a need for additional support of the youth in these neighborhoods (Duque – Páramo 2012). The decision for parents to migrate transnationally is motivated by the opportunity to obtain an income that can support their families. The earned income is then sent back in remittances. However, for Soacha specifically, it is less likely that the parents have the initial capital to migrate. Instead, parents either choose to work or not

within the city limits. Youth workers indicated that even when parents find work nearby it creates a need to support the youth. For parents who choose to work, it means that they become too busy to be full time parents and maternal care is delegated to others, such as siblings.

In some cases mothers decide not to work. While the reasons behind this decision were not clear to me in Soacha, what is known is that there are multiple NGOs in the neighborhood that provide for the needs of the families. Some youth workers believed the presence of the NGOs has created a climate of dependence and has led to parents choosing not to work. I would argue that whether the parents are working abroad, or not working at all, the education and services provided within the organization plays a critical role in the network of care for the youth by providing a comprehensive approach to child development.

More so, the youth encounter violence in and outside of their homes. Youth workers spoke openly about the types of abuse they were aware of in the lives of the youth. The types of abuse that the youth have experienced include sexual violence, domestic violence, physical and psychological abandonment. The youth also have experienced verbal and physical attacks by parents, siblings, and schoolmates. Gangs that offer them easy but dangerous income and security recruit the youth. In addition, the youth's basic needs of water, food, and security go unmet.

The impact this violence has on the youth manifests in multiple forms. Psychologically, the youth were described by youth workers as disconnected, helpless, and afraid to express themselves in regards to the trauma. This causes some youth to have difficulty connecting to others. My findings showed that some youth tend to be

aggressive while feeling the need to be "strong." It is also believed by some youth workers that it may "be a challenge for the children to be loved." The youth then look for ways to escape and resort to drug abuse. All of this leads to academic issues in school and the youth having difficulty working in groups. More than one interviewee expressed that the children end up living a bit alone.

Based on the environment in which the youth live, what they experience within the organization is something different. One of those things is the artistic process. Creating the opportunity to learn from professionals provides the youth a space for experiences they otherwise would not have. The youth are able to enjoy the programs offered and shift their focus from the violence in their lives. Confrontation between what they think and what they know is created through this process. One youth worker describes this in regards to what the youth think they need to do to be safe:

"It's a constant confrontation of what they live normally in their daily lives and think that they need to be able to defend themselves" (Andres, male, 9/7/2012).

The youth first come into the organization through a period of enrollment. From the beginning the youth workers' actions build a foundation for the work that is to come later in the workshops. The youth enroll in the organization during an open enrollment period. This period takes place annually for two weeks in January. Youth workers ensure a bond is started with not only the youth but also with their parents or guardians. This is the beginning of the important relationship that is created between the organization and the families (Pianta et al. 1997; Scales and Gibbons 1996). Youth and their families find out about the organization through word of mouth. Contrary to other organizations in the community, La Fundación Proyecto de Vida has very few requirements of youth who

want to enroll in the organization. The youth are required to have a parent or guardian accompany them to their interview during enrollment. For youth whose parent or guardian cannot come with them, they are asked to provide a phone number. The youth workers then get in touch with the adult to ensure they are aware the youth will be attending the programs and answer any concerns they may have.

The youth that attend workshops at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida are best understood within the multiple systems in which they live. Specifically one can analyze the influence of the family, school, neighborhood, and community organizations that the youth are involved in, in addition to the institutions, social and political systems that directly or indirectly impact the youth (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Moreover, the interactions between these systems have further influence on the youth, for example the quality of the relationships that exist between youth worker and primary caretaker (Jones and Deutsch 2011; Beck 1999; Pianta et al. 1997; Scales and Gibbons 1996). I explore these interactions in depth in Chapter VII.

One requirement for enrollment is that the youth must be attending school while enrolled in the organization. If a child is not attending school at the time of enrollment, the youth workers support the youth in re-enrolling in school. The value on education and school enrollment is evident as one interviewee declares she has *"absolute faith in education as a way to contribute to the development of children and of a country" (Ana, female, 9/4/2012).* The school attendance requirement reveals the value the youth workers place on education and why they work to support the youth in their academic pursuits. In addition to workshops, there is a library on-site where the youth go to work

on homework. In the library are services to give guidance on homework and activities for reading.

Contrary to other organizations in the area La Fundación Proyecto de Vida does not require proof of displacement in order to be eligible to enroll. Proof of displacement would include a government issued displacement card. Instead, the youth workers at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida operate by what they refer to as an "open door" policy. A child from any income level or background may enroll in the organization; from my perspective, this as a positive characteristic of the organization. According to Juan Esteban Zea (2010) families that have been displaced confront multiple forms of bias and prejudice. Specifically, those that are forced from the rural countryside into the city are seen by others as having been part of the conflict and carry blame. These prejudices manifest to include the denial of displacement cards by governmental employees at social service centers. La Fundación Proyecto de Vida "open door" policy disengages from this bias that exists within Colombian society. I argue that the policy is one factor in the trust that is built between the employees of the organization and the families that enroll in the organization because the families are recognized as human first, rather than by a label of displacement.

While at the organization the youth do not need to be as protective of themselves as they do outside of the organization. They do not need to hit someone to get respect; the youth workers give the youth respect. While observing an environmental workshop I saw how the program creates moments of security. For example, after collecting different types of small rocks in buckets for an activity, the youth were instructed to leave their buckets of rocks in a designated area so the group could do something else. Some of the

youth were hesitant to leave their bucket of rocks and began protesting the next activity. The youth worker who was close by then ensured the youth that no one would steal their bucket of rocks while they went to do the activity. After a few minutes the youth relaxed a little and decided it was okay to leave their buckets. The youth worker explained to me that the youth are normally very protective of themselves and their things because they have learned that at any moment someone can steal their things. In this microcosm of a workshop, the youth are able to try out what it is like to trust that no one will steal their buckets.

More so, the youth are offered a sense of security in other ways. Two examples of this are the affection they receive from the youth workers, and the food they are provided at the organization. Both of these are on a consistent basis, thereby allowing for trust to be built. Affection comes in many forms. One way I observed was a youth worker teaching a young girl how to comb her hair. This type of affection is sometimes not experienced by the youth in their homes. Giving youth this secure space *"allows them to feel like children" (Paula, female, 9/4/2012).*

The work then is to engage the youth in as many developmental building interactions as possible. This approach values the youth for who they are and recognizes the possibility for each individual to reach his or her full potential. Through this process "cycles of violence" may be broken and the youth may construct a new reality: *"That they can gain enough of a positive experience that they can break the cycles a bit. That they can see and experience that not everything is tough. They are able to see that they have options, this would be my main goal" (Luz, female, 9/10/2012).*

Overall the work of the youth workers aligns with the vision one of the interviewees had of creating a less violent society. To him he would like to see the *"work of the country"* be *"to develop pacific, peaceful, creative, and constructive youth" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).* It is evident from this response that this is not the current priority of mainstream Colombian people nor their government. Instead it is the work of youth workers like the ones at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida. The work that the organization does seems to fill a gap between what others in the larger society may want for youth, and the actions that are actually carried out towards achieving a better future for the youth. The need for an intervention by the organization is evidence in itself that mainstream society and the state do not prioritize the needs of low-income people but rather leaves this work to the web of NGOs.

The context described in this chapter reveals the impact of the internal conflict and the neoliberal economic system on the actual experience of the youth who attend the organization in Soacha. As illustrated by my findings, the environment of the youth includes multiple forms of violence. As identified by the youth workers, this violence creates challenges for the youth and their families. For this reason the curriculum of the organization is designed to strengthen specific capacities within the youth. In the following chapter my findings identify these capacities to be life direction, self-esteem, responsibility, relationships, and conflict resolution. All of these capacities are important because they help to strengthen the resiliency of the youth. In addition to the five capacities, Chapter V shows how the artistic process is parallel to the Life Project of each youth.

CHAPTER V

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

The youth who live in the sixth commune of Soacha clearly face obstacles that are both immediate and long term. In response to the obstacles and the absence of the state many NGOs operate in this neighborhood. The NGOs provide an array of services from giving out school supplies to creating a sports complex. Examples of other organizations in operation are Jehovah Witnesses where people can go for prayer, UNICEF which built the sports complex. World Vision has been in Soacha for twelve years working to improve water and sanitation systems as well as offering various skills trainings to displaced people. In this web of NGOs, La Fundación Proyecto de Vida has established an alternative, arts-based education approach for the youth.

The organization operates on established methodologies through the relationships the youth workers create with both youth and parents. In this chapter my findings reveal the objective the youth workers have to strengthen the personal and social capacities within the youth themselves. Additionally, my findings show how strengthening youth's personal and social capacities ultimately builds their resiliency to the violence that poses obstacles in reaching their future goals. My analysis, as built upon the youth worker's testimony in their interviews, reveals five main areas in which the youth workers focus: defining one's life direction, improving one's self-esteem, building a sense of responsibility, strengthening of relationships in the youth's lives, and broadening their approaches to conflict resolution.

Resiliency and the Life Project

Resiliency is a process in which an individual overcomes challenges and obstacles he or she faces in the environment (Raitzer 1999). For this reason youth workers have an objective to strengthen the personal and social capacities within the youth themselves. This objective is based on the belief that with access to more tools and skills the youth are able to make decisions that involve less violence (Lerner and Benson 2003). In the sections to follow I analyze my findings to show how both personal and social capacities are related to increasing the youth's capacity to be resilient to the violence that they confront.

Once the youth begin to participate in the workshops the youth workers focus on developing personal and social capacities. My data analysis identified that one of the personal capacities the youth workers focus on is life direction. Life direction refers to the concept of Proyecto de Vida (Life Project) within the organization. At its most fundamental form, the Life Project of each youth is a construction of a "different reality." The importance of the youth creating a different reality was evident in one interviewee's response to the question *"Why do you work with children?"* He explained that the reality the youth know is not only violent, but is disconnected from what is ideal. Within Colombian society there exists a "rupture" created by corruption. Consequently, the role of the youth workers is to teach the youth that it is possible to have a reality in-line with an ideal. As Santiago illustrates in his testimony, the youth workers aim to strengthen the tools and skills needed to create this new type of reality: *"So we have to think about how to teach them (the youth) to construct a different reality… It's the same thing with so many other things. This rupture with what's ideal and what's real… Our role is to show*

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by example that even though things aren't working as well as they should, even though there is corruption, we can still begin to try to make a change" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).

The objective of strengthening the youth's tools and skills is so they are able to more effectively construct a reality that is in-line with their personal aspirations. This objective is evident in the five main areas of child development that the organization includes in the mission statement and prioritizes: acquisition of social, cognitive, emotional, physical and transcendental skills. Specifically life-direction is found in the "transcendental" category that focuses on the Life Project. The word "transcendental" refers to the ability of the youth to go beyond what they know is possible. The youth workers strengthen the tools necessary for this to happen with the underlying motivation being to provide the youth with the same opportunities that are available to others in different, less violent, circumstances. Illustrating this point one interviewee, when speaking about the Life Project, pointed out that, *"We had a poster where it said 'We all have a life project, but we don't all have the same opportunities'"* (Ana, female, 9/4/2012).

The youth workers are building on the assets that the youth already have within themselves. The skills and tools that the youth workers are developing already exist but in some of the youth are underdeveloped. This perspective is reflective of the positive youth development model that focuses on the strengths the youth have rather than attempting to eliminate deficits (Lerner and Benson 2003). In her testimony Paula talks about how the children have everything they need within themselves: *"The feeling that I*

get when I work with them is that they are so rich, like I learn so much from them, it's

beautiful. Within the person they have everything" (Paula, female, 9/4/2012).

Focus on personal skills and tools

In this section I discuss the complex teaching approach of the youth workers and

their focus on developing the youth's personal skills and tools. Explicitly, the personal

skills and tools consist of forming individual direction in the youth's lives, developing

self-esteem, and increasing their sense of responsibility. My analysis reveals that forming

life direction is motivated by the desire for the youth to pursue a passion and to find

happiness in that pursuit. Also, the direction of life encouraged by the youth workers is

not limited to careers in the arts, rather what is important is that it is a new construction

of reality that is "better" than what the youth currently know. Developing self-esteem is

seen by the youth workers as a critical asset that allows the youth to be resilient to

violence and to choose to follow the direction of their Life Projects. This perspective of

developing self-esteem is linked to positive youth development which in this context can

be understood as resiliency and the capacities to work towards a Life Project (Lerner and

Benson 2003). In the context of the organization, self-esteem includes two personal

assets that the youth workers strengthen: to love oneself and to believe in oneself. Finally,

developing the youth's sense of responsibility is a focus within the workshops offered by

the youth workers. The youth workers believe that in order for the youth to be

consistently working towards one's Life Project, the youth need to feel a responsibility to

it. In addition to the workshops, the organization is designed to develop responsibility

within the youth through monthly participation fees as well as holding them responsible

to the expectations of the workshops.

Life direction

At its very core, the concept of Proyecto de Vida (Life Project) refers to identifying direction in youth's lives. This direction requires the youth to be disciplined and resilient. It's creating a *"step by step plan" (Paula, female, 9/4/2012)* to achieve their goals. This discipline and focus on direction requires that the youth are resilient in other circumstances and obstacles that exist in their communities – such as gang involvement, domestic violence, and drug use. Teresa describes these obstacles in her testimony: *"The neighborhood offers them easy things, easy money, an easy life, but it is dangerous, but it is also easy. The Foundation says if there is something that you want you have to fight for it. It's difficult, you have to work for a better future. That's a challenge the children are facing, making that decision" (Teresa, female, 9/5/2012).*

A "better future" in the above passage is indicative of a value set by the youth workers that they work to strengthen in the youth. Specifically, this value of betterment asks the youth to envision and work towards a goal for which they have a passion. However, this does not mean that the youth will go on to be painters or dancers. While it is a possibility, the direction and goals of the youth are supported by the youth workers without limitation to the arts. Other examples were given in response to the question "What does the concept of Proyecto de Vida mean to you?". For example, one response identified "being a mom" as a Life Project: *"It's actually giving the kids an opportunity to have a vision. Like a kid who wants to be a mom, okay then what do you need to be a mom. I want to go to school, then what can we do to help you. To be a bit more conscious of not just going from one day to the next, and not repeating patterns that happen all the time there (in their lives)" (Luz, female, 9/10/2012).*

The word choice of "vision" in the above passage refers to direction and future goals. In order to achieve this vision, youth workers referred to the youth not repeating patterns, or cycles, of violence. The patterns that the youth workers do not want to see the youth repeat include economic poverty, domestic abuse, and psychological violence that may show itself as low self-esteem. This is seen in the quote from Andres: *"I would wish for them to be able to break the cycle of poverty, to believe in themselves. By cycle of poverty I'm not just referring to the economic problems which do exist, but also to mental or psychological obstacles, this "I can't" because the reality doesn't allow them to see beyond this situation"* (Andres, male, 9/7/2012).

The capacity to imagine a different reality requires many things such as the ability to be creative and to imagine those things that do not exist in one's current reality. In the field of child development it is believed that a child with a strong fantasy world and capacity to imagine an alternative reality is reflective of a high level of cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Therefore, creativity is at the core of the work of the youth workers. In Chapter VI, I explain how the youth workers incorporate and foster creativity in their work with the youth through the arts. Art is believed by scholars in the field of Peacebuilding and the Arts to be an effective medium for creating spaces of interaction and engagement (Cohen 2003). These spaces are similar to the ones the youth workers create to encourage the skills and tools of the youth.

Ultimately, the goal the youth workers articulated for the direction of the lives of the youth is for them to be happy. Specifically to discover what they want to do, to gain the skills to work towards this future, and to be resilient along the way so as to never stop believing in themselves. This goal is evident from Ana's testimony: *"Identify what do I*

like to do, what's my talent, what am I good at. And working towards that is a way of being happy. You're happy when you're doing something that you do well, and that you enjoy" (Ana, female, 9/4/2012).

The youth workers use the arts and other activities as a mode to enable the youth to discover what is it they want to do. I go into detail in Chapter VI about how they use the activities to promote the process of discovery. As I continue I look in depth into why the youth workers indicated that an important aspect of the youth's Life Projects was that they have high self-esteem. In the next section I look at what this concept means to the youth workers and how they work to foster it.

Self-esteem

As reflected by my interview material the youth workers believe that it is important for youth to have high self-esteem in order to reach their full potential. Additionally, having high self-esteem is necessary for youth to be resilient to the violent environment in which they live. As indicated by one interviewee self-esteem is *"how they (the youth) see themselves and how they understand themselves" (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012).* With this understanding of the concept, desirable self-esteem is evident in a youth's capacity for self-love and in a belief in the ability to achieve the goals set for oneself. Diego told me in his interview that: *"I want them to become human beings who are integral in terms of education, family, and society. That they believe they have the potential to become something" (Diego, male, 9/5/2012).*

The perspective expressed by the youth workers in regards to self-esteem is one of an "asset-based" approach to youth development (Lerner and Benson 2003). *"We are trying to show them that they have lots of abilities and potential that they can use to*

succeed in their lives" (Paula, female, 9/4/2012). The choice of words *"they have lots of abilities"* indicates an asset-based approach to youth development, contrary to a deficit approach. The youth workers believe that the children have *"everything they already need"* to succeed and work to develop those assets.

Through my observations and interview material it is evident that the youth workers support the development of two of the assets they believe are important for the development of high self-esteem in the youth: to love oneself and to believe in oneself. During my observations of the daily routine at the Soacha site, I observed one youth worker teaching a young girl how to brush her hair. When I asked about this act in the interview the response I received was that is it to teach the children self-love. *"We (the youth workers) get them (the youth) use to taking care of their bodies and that helps to promote self love, have a better self image and increase their self esteem" - (Teresa, female, 9/5/2012).*

This act of love was one that I was told many youth do not receive in their homes, and therefore is sometimes only provided by the youth workers at the organization. In the literature regarding after school programs in the United States it is found that youth workers can have similar roles to parents, but are not to be thought as replacing parents (Scales and Gibbons 1996). However, as seen by the youth worker who was teaching the young girl to comb her hair, the youth workers can provide for the youth in ways that parents may or may not. Consequently, the youth workers play a critical role in the development of the youth's self-esteem.

Moreover, the youth workers focus on teaching the youth to value themselves on the basis of what they learn and the decisions they make, rather than on what they have

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materially. This is in contradiction to mainstream society as influenced by the values of capitalism that values material wealth as a reflection on the importance and value of the person. Teaching the youth a different understanding of self-value works to strengthen their self-esteem and ultimately gives them more skills and tools to be resilient. In the literature this is referred to as an assets-based approach to child development. Andres illustrates this in his response: *"So instead of wishing for what they don't have they have to build from what they do have" (Andres, male, 9/7/2012).*

Furthermore, one interviewee explains how she connects decision making to improving how the youth think of themselves. The youth have learned to say *"ok I'm better, I didn't take this because I know it's not right, so I'm a better person because I didn't take it" (Isabel, female, 9/2/2012).* This is an example of how what the youth workers teach directly influences the youth to change how they see themselves. In this case, the youth are learning the value of not stealing by instilling in them that they are a "better" person when they make the choice not to steal. Linking decision making to the way they see themselves is a strategy to improve their self-esteem.

One of the most important aspects of self-esteem is its relation to the youth's resilience and achievement of personal goals. Having positive self-esteem is evident of the ability to love oneself and make decisions that lead to a desired future. This imagined future is encouraged by the youth workers to be a future that in someway is new or different from the reality in which they currently live. Support of the youth's agency is illustrated by Ana and Luz: *"They (the youth) realize they can change things in their lives, they can create new things.. the promise of the Foundation is Yo quiero, Yo puedo, yo tengo futuro (is I want, I can, have a future)" (Ana, female, 9/4/2012).*

"To me it's about showing them that they can change, that they can leave the vicious circle" – (Luz, female, 9/10/2012). In both of these passages the word "change" is symbolic of improvement. The youth workers would like to see the lives of the youth improved from what they currently think is possible outside of the organization. The youth workers are acting as an intervention to change the future trajectory of the youth. One way they are intervening is by prioritizing the youth's development of self-esteem and taking actions to increase the way the youth see and think of themselves.

Responsibility

The youth workers encourage the youth to feel responsible to the goals that they set for themselves as part of their Life Projects. The goals, along with having direction in life, were described to me by one interviewee as *"fulfilling certain stages"* of life. More so, these stages are what it takes for the youth to develop *"comprehensively and happily"* *(Ana, female, 9/4/2012).* The word "comprehensively" refers to the five areas of development that the organization works in: physical, transcendental, cognitive, social, and emotional.

In order for the youth to be responsible to the larger Life Project the youth workers develop responsibility to other things. During my observations I observed a youth worker recognizing some of the youth in a small ceremony for paying their participation fee. When I asked about this in the interview I was told that each youth is responsible for paying $500COP, roughly US$0.27 cents, each month. When a youth enrolls in the organization he or she signs a contract to follow the rules and to make a *"social co-responsibility payment" (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012)* each month. The idea is

that the youth is responsible for this money and should not ask their parents for the money. If a youth does not make the payment, there is no consequence; however, if they do make consistent payments, they are recognized in front of their peers and receive a small prize – such as a piece of candy. Personally, I understand how this process is aimed at creating a sense of responsibility, but I wonder how the youth come up with the $500COP each month. I am unsure of where they would find or earn $500COP and hope that they do not make the choice to steal to get it. This was not an issue while I was observing, rather a personal concern.

In addition to the monthly social co-responsibility payment, the youth workers encourage the youth to be responsible to the workshop rules. For example, one youth worker articulated the rules to include *"no violence… work in groups … have discipline."* He goes on to explain how this expectation is different from environment the youth experience outside of the organization. Through teaching the youth to be responsible to the expectations of the workshop it challenges what is normal. *"It's a constant confrontation of what they live normally in their daily lives and think that they need to be able to defend themselves. So the main impact is the confrontation for the children of what they see in their homes and what they are required to do here" (Andres, male, 9/7/2012).* Holding the youth responsible to the agreed upon expectations enforces norms that are consistent with the values the youth workers are encouraging in the youth as related to their self-esteem and commitment to achieve their goals. The role that the youth workers carry out in teaching these lessons are critical for the youth to gain the skills and knowledge needed to be resilient to their environment on a daily basis.

Focus on social skills and tools

In addition to the personal skills and tools, social skills and tools are important to developing the youth's capacity for resilience and achievement of their Life Projects. My analysis, as built upon the youth workers testimony in their interviews, reveals two main areas in which the youth workers focus: strengthening of relationships in the youth's lives, and broadening their approaches to conflict resolution. I explore the different relationships that exists within the organization in detail in Chapter VII. However in this section my analysis demonstrates why relationships are important in regards to expanding the youth's social capacity to be resilient.

Specifically my analysis shows that the youth workers are modeling "healthy" relationships with the youth and encouraging them to have a healthy relationship with their peers. I argue that the ability to develop and maintain a healthy relationship is especially important within marginalized populations since solidarity is a key component to social change. In addition to healthy relationships, the youth benefit from having more choices for conflict resolution. Conflict is a normal aspect of any relationship, however the youth often resort to violent ways of resolving conflicts. The youth workers model and show the youth how to have conflict while remaining civil. These are skills that the youth may choose to use in the future and can be part of how they are able to be resilient to the violence that surrounds them.

Relationships

The youth workers model "healthy" relationships for the youth and show how to have a healthy relationship. As discussed in depth in Chapter VII, a healthy relationship may be defined as a relationship without violence. In addition, a healthy relationship

may include "authentic caring" defined by the characteristics of being "genuine, voluntary, child focused, and benefiting children or parents themselves… caring and acceptance of children … based on children's worth, strength, and perceived value" (Angell et al. 2009). In order to work toward a goal it is necessary to have a support network that involves parents and extended family, adults in schools such as teachers, and other mentors and youth workers in the larger community (Rae-Epsinoza 2010; Angell et al. 2009; Sheldon et al. 2002; Pianta et al. 2001). Modeling a "healthy" relationship involves showing the youth the value of relationships; the importance of modeling was stated by 11 out of 12 interviewees. It was stated explicitly more than once for example, *That's the whole basis of why you do (it). You offer them a healthy relationship that hopefully in the future they can draw from" (Luz, female, 9/10/2012).* The phrase "in the future they can draw from" indicates how the youth workers perceive the healthy relationship they create with the youth to have additional benefits than those created in the moment – such as teaching them music or art. Instead, they see this as creating an asset the youth will carry with them and continue to develop in the future as they work toward their Life Projects. In this way the importance of the relationship is how it expands what they know as reality.

The next quotation shows that not only do the youth benefit from the youth worker relationships that exist within the organization, but the youth-youth relationships as well. *"They can see there is a different way of living and of interacting and relating to other children is part of them being here" (Andres, male, 9/7/2012).* The more immediate impact the youth workers have is giving the youth tools to improve the relationships they have in their lives with their peers, families, and communities. Specifically this is done

through finding new ways to *"communicate with the 'other'"* (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012). In the setting of the Soacha site, the youth are coming together with peers that are from different backgrounds. In this context many of them face or carry prejudices. The youth workers are aware of these dynamics and work to teach the youth how to work as a group despite their differences. As Sandra and Diego told me: *"The children all come from different backgrounds and they meet in one place. So they have to learn how to get a long with the differences they have and the prejudices that come with that"* (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012).

"What I'm interested in is developing their capacity to work in groups – team work. And that they express their ideas and thoughts" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).

To be resilient both inside and outside of the organization it is important for the youth to be able to work in groups and have a network of support. The youth workers address issues around building an inclusive group identity that the youth can use outside of the organization and in their futures. As is true in many social movements in Latin America, change occurs when people are able to be in solidarity with each other. In this regard, the value of the youth workers are modeling and teaching about relationships is critical not only for the youth to achieve their Life Projects but to effect social change and shape policy.

Conflict resolution

Conflict is a normal and expected part of daily life, especially when working in groups. According to Brunson et al. (2002) the response to conflict is what arts can address, "it is what people in conflict do with the experience that determines whether it

will be constructive or destructive." The environment in which the youth live is one of violence and conflict. Therefore, the youth develop ways to address conflict that are sometimes violent. For example, *"They (the youth) think the only way to shut someone up is to hit them, which is what happens 9 times out of 10 in these circumstances. But if we are able to break that cycle.. to me that is a process" (Luz, female, 9/10/2012).* It is evident in this passage that the youth worker identifies that the violence the youth display is learned. Additionally, the youth may only know violent conflict. Therefore, as stated by another youth worker within the organization they are teaching the youth how to handle conflict, *"they are developing social skills – how to resolve conflicts, how to have conflicts" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).*

Within the organization there are different services offered that address conflict resolution. The psychologists and social workers work with the whole family to address conflict at home. There are barriers to this process, such as the stereotype that "therapy is only for crazy people." However the youth workers have found ways to develop trust with the families. This trust is what lets the parents engage in the services offered by the organization.

In addition to formal services offered, within every workshop the youth workers address the conflicts that arise. One strategy that was given in an interview includes identifying that a conflict is going on, and exploring with the youth different ways to resolve it: *"When the child arrives at the Foundation, we make them aware that "yes, ok this problem exists" but we might have a way to resolve it. That he is going to be in a space that is going to give him a good and positive experience. That will strengthen him or her" (Isabel, female, 9/2/2012).*

It is evident in the above passage that the youth worker believes teaching the youth new ways to resolve conflict will "strengthen" them; this relates to being resilient to the environment in which they live. For example, a youth who learns nonviolent ways to resolve conflict will then have the tools to choose to be violent or not in response to conflict. The organization provides the space for the youth to have conflicts and to learn new ways of resolving them.

The organization is a unique space for learning conflict resolution because of the value placed on the arts and creativity. Arts are believed to create spaces that can hold "paradox" (Cohen 2003). For example, the arts welcome different perspectives and interpretations, even if they are in contradiction to each other. Therefore the arts can create space for expression by different people even if it is contradictory. One youth worker clearly identifies the positive impact of the artistic process with youth who come to the organization affected by conflicts. The youth worker describes how the process helps to calm and stabilize the emotions of the youth: *"They go through this artistic process and they are more calm, more stable in the end. They've stabilized in a way their emotions. There's a change in development at the end of the process" (Teresa, female, 9/5/2012).*

Through my observations of workshops I observed the process the youth workers go through with the youth who are in conflict. For example, the youth had been in conflict during a previous workshop and then they entered as a group the workshop I was observing. The youth workers spoke to each other before the workshop began about what happened in the previous workshop. Then, before beginning the workshop, the youth worker sat with the youth and discussed the conflict with the youth – describing the

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impact the conflict was having on his colleague and on the youth's learning process. The workshop continued and the youth became focused on the art project at hand. By the end of the workshop the youth were calmer and more attentive to the directions of the youth worker.

In addition to what the children learn through the artistic process, the youth workers find that creativity is at the basis of their work. More importantly, as is evident by one youth worker, creativity is a tool the youth can use to imagine new ways of resolving conflict: *"Children that don't have the opportunity to learn through art are not going to be able to use it to resolve their problems and be in society in the future. When this capacity to work through art has been developed and nurtured, then they have tools to be creative in the way that they lead their lives"* (Teresa, female, 9/5/2012).

For the youth to be resilient requires them to be creative. The youth need to be able to imagine and develop new ways of dealing with conflict and obstacles that they encounter in their environment. Through the use of the arts and the artistic process the youth are able to gain social skills and tools that they can use both inside and outside of the organization. The youth workers play a critical role in teaching and modeling these different social skills.

Key aspects of the intervention and implications for the field

The focus on developing the youth's personal and social capacities fills a critical gap in services that support the youth of Bogotá. As discussed in Chapter IV there are diverse situations that create the need for intervention among the youth of Soacha. Scholars who research youth in Bogotá have identified youth of transnational parental migration and youth who work in the streets as two populations in need of interventions

(Duque – Páramo 2012, Dybicz 2005). Specifically Phillip Dybicz (2005) calls for interventions that focus on preventing youth from street life. In the following section I show how the intervention of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida fills these needs by supporting the future goals of youth and parents while focusing on improving the home life of youth.

An additional reason for intervention is due to the background of the population in Soacha. As many people are displaced and/or living in extreme poverty, Cynthia Cohen (2003) calls for a need for arts focused interventions with the ability to engage people in post conflict areas. In this section I show how my analysis reveals the youth workers focus on increasing conflict resolution skills through arts-based work.

In addition to the need of an intervention, scholars researching youth programs have identified key features of effective programs, such as caring adults who support the youth (Jones and Deutsch 2011, Beck 1999). I show how the youth workers at the organization influence the youth specifically through focusing on specific values and skills. This illuminates the processes behind the relationships between youth worker and youth, further adding to the literature in this area. More specifically, scholars of child development have written on the importance of strengthening youth assets (Lerner and Benson 2003, Bronfenbrenner 1979). Through the case study of the organization my analysis shows how the programs work to increase the capacity of youth to imagine a reality different from the one they know, while simultaneously developing other important assets.

Isabel Claudia Duque-Páramo (2012) calls for interventions and policies in response to transnational parental migration. Beyond addressing the root causes of

migration, Duque-Páramo calls for "local, regional, and national" policies focused on helping "children, parents, and other family members" manage the negative impacts. The work of the youth workers at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida is one example of a "local" response to the emotional and social types of fractures that children and families experience in regards to transnational parental migration. This intervention is unique to the people of Colombia as it supports the parents' and child's future goals as they exist in Colombian society. Duque-Páramo identifies the parents' goals as being a "better future" for the children, and for the youth as furthering their education and becoming more independent. The work of the youth workers focuses on both of these goals through the concept of the Life Project. Therefore, this model of intervention may be used to help future policies that aim to support marginalized populations in Colombia.

Phillip Dybicz (2005) examines interventions for street children, a population defined as children who live at home but work in the street to earn an income. His work is built on and supported by other scholars such as Madeleine Goutard (1994). Goutard reflects on the decades of work by scholar Nicolo with street children of Bogotá. She shows how Nicolo's work identifies community organizations as a space to replicate familiar relationships with street children. Nicolo argues that these organizations may provide the children with other services such as medical care and building their self-esteem. Dybicz argues that best practices involve interventions that mitigate the motivating factors that influence children to start working in the street. He identifies improving home life and family income as two specific areas for intervention. Furthermore, he argues that increasing what he calls "political consciousness" among the youth can in effect place pressure on the government for social change (Dybicz 2005).

While the work of the youth workers does not focus on the latter, it does have a role in improving the home life of the youth. This improvement happens through the relationships developed and services offered to both the youth and families at the organization. In addition, the Life Project gives the youth the space to learn new skills and tools to strengthen their resilience to the violent environment in which they live, including their home life. My research therefore offers an alternative solution than focusing on changing the current situation in the home, and rather looks at how to combine this effort with building youth's capacity for resilience.

Cynthia Cohen (2003) studies coexistence in conflict torn environments. She argues the arts are an effective approach for creating coexistence and conflict resolution. In support of her argument, I argue that the personal and social skills developed in the Life Project address the main causes of resistance to coexistence. For example, Cohen states that resistance can "arise because people often defend themselves against facing the suffering of their own communities and the suffering of others— suffering caused by actions in which they or the institutions of their country may be complicit" (Cohen 2003). The Life Project shows how teaching the arts directly addresses this sense of defending the pain felt by others when those involved feel responsible for it. The youth and their parents learn skills and tools for nonviolent conflict resolution and building group identity across differences. Furthermore, the Life Project model shows how combining the teaching of the arts with offering additional psychological services acts as a comprehensive approach that leads to changes in the patterns of families and builds coexistence amongst the youth.

Elizabeth Beck (1999) identifies key programmatic features of effective after-

school programs in the United States and concludes that there are six main areas that lead to strengthening the assets of the youth involved. Among others, these features range from creating a safe environment, supporting academic achievement, and having a core of "committed authoritative adults." My findings show that the use of the artistic process to strengthen capacities is an additional area that leads to child development. Beck contextualizes the population of youth that benefit from positive adult relationships as low-income, citing that in the early 1990s in the United States up to 25 percent of children lived in high-risk environments. For this reason she calls for interventions that increases the time youth spend with "caring and authoritative" adults whose work "fill critical gaps in the emotional, social, and academic needs" of the youth. My research expands how these gaps are filled by the personal and social tools and skills developed by the Life Project, in combination with the use of the arts and other services. It shows explicitly the values that "caring" adults instill in youth that develop resilience to high-risk, or violent, environments.

Jones and Deutsch (2011) examine a Boys and Girls Club to demonstrate what they call a relational pedagogy within the organization. He argues that youth workers are able to provide extra support to youth that helps the youth reach their full potential. He identifies this ability as a key factor in the success of after-school programs. Specifically he identifies the youth workers relations with the youth's families as a resource they use to provide support. Additionally, Jones' discusses how youth workers are positioned to increase the youth's skills in conflict resolution. My research aims to add to the growing body of literature on the processes the youth experience in after-school programs that contribute to youth development. My analysis supports Jones conclusions regarding the

position of the youth workers to give support to the youth in the areas of self-esteem and conflict resolution. However, my research reveals additional tools and skills the youth workers focus on in the model of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida. For example, they focus on the direction of the youth's lives. Moreover, I show how combined these skills and tools ultimately relate to increasing the resilience of the youth to the obstacles they may face.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the perception a youth has of his or her ecological environment and the ability one has to alter it is reflective of the level of development. Bronfenbrenner defines cognitive development as the "lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment." Therefore, Bronfenbrenner states that a child's fantasy world reflects the level of development in how he or she is able to refashion the reality one knows. The ability to restructure a reality "that it is more compatible with his abilities, needs, and desires…represents the highest expression of development" (Bronfenbrenner 1979). In this regard the Life Project of the youth at La Fundación Proyecto de Vida can be thought of as the reconstruction of one's known reality. The youth workers support the development of the youth's Life Projects. My data analysis reveals that the five areas that the youth workers focus on are what I labeled: defining life direction, self-esteem, responsibility, relationship building, and conflict resolution. Therefore my research adds to the understanding of the developmental process that takes place for the youth to reach Bronfenbrenner's "highest expression of development."

Lerner and Benson (2003) address the role of youth workers in regards to their model of youth development. Their model, supported by Search Institute, identifies key

developmental assets that youth possess. Identified are a total of 30 assets; Lerner argues

community development should be designed to foster these assets. One potential resource

to develop these assets is the "presence of supportive adults" whom Lerner and Benson

argue "have a positive impact on the healthy development and well-being" of youth

because youth were shown to have lower drug use. In the same line of literature, Peter

Scales et al. (1996) identify adult-youth relationships as contributing to youth resilience.

My research adds to the body of literature about the characteristics of effective youth

workers and intervention programs in the lives of youth by demonstrating why and how

the model of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida works to develop the resilience of youth.

CHAPTER VI

DEVELOPING YOUTH CAPACITIES THROUGH THE ARTS

In order to develop the skills and tools that strengthen the youth's resilience, the youth workers design and carry out workshops. In the introduction I explained the workshops in depth in the section "Workshops and Services Offered." In addition to the workshops offered, the youth workers provide psychological and academic services. In the following sections I draw from both the workshops and services to illustrate how the programs are strengthening the capacities of the youth. I focus on the capacities identified from my findings in the previous chapter that increase skills and tools used for resiliency: life direction, self-esteem, responsibility, relationships, and conflict resolution.

The youth first give voice to what their Life Project is at the time of enrollment. They are asked to answer, "What do you want to do or be in the future" on the application form. Each youth worker is conscious that the youth have a Life Project and takes the initiative to ask the youth about it. For example, one youth worker takes the time between workshops, such as during lunch, to ask the youth about their Life Projects. My findings also show that the artistic process is parallel to the process of the Life Project. In this chapter I focus on how the artistic process is used to strengthen the capacities of the youth.

As a review of the previous chapter I argued that the motivation to develop the youth's life direction is the desire for them to work towards a passion and be happy doing it. The life direction supported by the youth workers is not limited to a path in the arts. Rather, life direction is conceptualized as a different reality than the youth currently know. Second, I showed how my findings revealed that the youth's self-esteem is

thought to be important so that they have belief in their Life Project and in their own capacity to achieve it. Increasing the youth's capacity to love themselves is an important aspect of self-esteem. The last personal capacity was developing the youth's sense of responsibility that is thought to be important so they have a feeling of responsibility to their Life Project. Mechanisms outside of the arts that develop this include monthly participation fees and expectations of the workshops.

Moreover, in the previous chapter I identified that developing relationships are important to the youth workers. Specifically showing the youth how to have healthy relationships and work as a group. In Chapter VII to follow I demonstrate the importance of the multiple relationships related to the organization and the intention the youth workers articulate for creating them. In this chapter I look at how the arts are used to facilitate relationships and the benefits that extend from this. In literature on arts-based programs it is believed that space is created for interactions and coexistence, specifically in areas that are conflict torn (Cohen 2005). For example, the youth are able to use the arts to express themselves and this allows the youth workers to better know the youth. Literature also shows how youth workers can use the artistic process to better know the needs of youth (DiCarlo 2000).

The second social capacity the youth workers focus upon is conflict resolution that is believed to be important in increasing the nonviolent tools the youth have to face obstacles. These tools increase their capacity to be resilient by increasing their skills to create solidarity among peers and community. The youth workers' increase the youth's skills and tools in regards to having conflict and remaining civil. Specifically in this section I show how the arts and other activities within the organization create the

opportunity for the youth to increase spaces for nonviolent expression (Cohen 2005,

Fowler 1994).

Life direction

How does art increase the youth's capacity to develop direction in life? The youth

workers of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida use the arts as a vehicle that allows the youth

to explore and discover. Specifically, the youth workers use the arts as one method to

engage the youth on a process of discovery. As explained by one interviewee the purpose

of the work is to offer space for *"exploring, seeking what they (the youth) are interested*

in through the art" (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012). Having the space to explore and discover is

important because it is similar to the process the youth go through to know what is their

Life Project. Specifically, through the visual arts exploring happens through analyzing

images. When one interviewee described his work he said *"I want them (the youth) to*

analyze or explore a certain image ... To look at the form, the color of the lines, the size,

everything" (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012). For example, the youth create art and music that

they are interested in making during the workshops *(Diego, male, 9/5/2012).* The youth's

agency is evident during the workshops when they decide to *"take the workshop in*

another direction" than the one that the youth worker planned. Exploring and

discovering through the arts is an important process that is related to the youth

developing what their goals will be in life.

The process of learning or making art, music, or movement is valued over the

final product by all of the youth workers. In regards to developing life direction, the

youth sometimes explore their Life Project through art. For example, during a painting

exercise one youth who wanted to be a fashion designer decided to create images of

clothing. The youth worker, who asked the youth what the name of her design store will be, was consciously encouraging the child's goal. Through this example it is obvious that the arts allow the space for youth to imagine what their direction in life looks like.

Furthermore the arts allow the youth to learn how to build on ideas that lead to some kind of product. One interviewee explains how this may begin with an emotion. *"Taking a sense, a perception and building something from it. Like an emotion and expression through art" (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012).* This process is similar to that of developing life direction where the process begins as an idea. One example such as a youth having a passion for the environment and over time develops a plan of how to do something with this passion, such as be a forest ranger. The Life Project inherently implies going through a process similar to that of the artistic process.

More so, to define what someone wants to do means being able to know what one does not want to do. As explained by one youth worker, she sees her workshop as a space where the youth can decide that what she is offering to them is not for them. This is equally as important as discovering and finding things that do turn youth on, especially when this rejection can happen in an environment where the youth feel safe and will not be punished for their decisions. At no point during my observations did I see a youth "punished" for choosing to sit out, the youth worker would simply acknowledge the choice, ask why they did not want to participate, and then respect the decision.

In order to develop direction, it is important that the youth are creative and imaginative in order to construct a reality different from the one that they know. The youth workers use the concept of co-creation to develop creativity in different ways. Specifically in one workshop the youth were asked to think of new ways to move like

animals and to mimic their peers' movements. When I discussed this with the youth

worker she explained that she creates opportunities for the youth to develop their

creativity in structured ways by *"giving them the chance to put something of their own*

into it" (Luz, female, 9/10/2012). While participating in a movement workshop the youth

created movements for various Andean animals as they circled the room.

Self-esteem

The process involved creating and performing art, music, and movement is

important because it is a process within which the youth learn and change. Youth learn

how to "transform" art materials into images. The youth change and become conscious of

their changes. Specifically, one interviewee describes how she raises consciousness of the

youth about the process they are participating in. She asks them to remember where they

began, what they could do, what they needed to learn, and have them compare those

experiences to where they are now in the process, what movements they have learned to

do, what sequences of movements they can remember. In this way process is used to

increase self-esteem by echoing back to the youth that they can change so that they begin

to believe it.

Creating and performing art provides the opportunity for the youth to recognize

their accomplishments. While recognition comes from others, one youth worker

expressed that it is more important for the youth to praise themselves. *"The important*

thing is that the recognition should be from the child themselves, their art and the way of

expressing themselves should be for themselves and nothing else" (Ana, female,

9/4/2012). While I was participating in the workshops everyone was preparing for the bi-

annual art show put on mainly for donors and parents. This is one example of an

opportunity the youth have to show their skills in front of others and to themselves. Additionally while I was observing the organization held a dedication ceremony of a building in Ciudad Bolivar. This ceremony included some of the youth performing musical pieces that they had learned in a workshop. Again this was a time for recognition of their accomplishments. While the children may give this self-recognition, I question if this happens consistently. One would have to conduct interviews with the youth to know this. What I can conclude is that the youth received recognition from the audience members and the youth workers at the performance.

Responsibility

Responsibility is developed within workshops and is able to be measured outside workshops. In addition to holding the youth responsible to the rules of the workshops, the arts specifically provide a unique opportunity to increase one's sense of responsibility. One youth worker discussed how music requires the youth to *"perform at a certain level with a certain quality."* This requirement reflects the use of the concept of co-ownership with the youth, for example in order to reach this level of quality they need to practice inside and outside of workshops. Additionally, they need to come consistently to the workshops so as not to miss out on opportunities to practice with the group. More so, the youth learn to be responsible to the group. If they do not perform at the level of quality *"they are affecting the performance of everyone" (Andres, male, 9/7/2012).* Therefore, music provides the opportunity for youth to hold themselves responsible while learning what it means to be part of a group.

The youth workers observe the youth to see if they are applying what they learn in the workshops outside of them. For example multiple workshops touch on the topic of

environmental awareness. One workshop that I participated in involved the youth exploring their natural surroundings, while in another the youth created recycled paper and discussed the benefits of recycling. Environmental awareness is a value that the youth workers try to encourage. This value is observable by seeing if youth respect their surroundings outside of the workshops, or if they work to improve their immediate surroundings. One interviewee described how if he *"sees a child who is taking this course (on environmental awareness) but who is knocking down trees, I can see that he is not really incorporating what he's learning. But other children might like to have some plants for their neighborhood, so this child would be incorporating environmental awareness into his behavior" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).* This statement also reveals that to the youth workers it is important for the youth to bring what they learn in the workshops back to their communities. This action would demonstrate that the youth has also learned how they can act responsibly within their own neighborhood to make improvements.

Relationships

The process of creating and performing art, music, and movement allows the youth workers to know more about the youth. Through the concepts of co-creation and co-ownership revealed in the previous sections, the youth workers are able to gain more intimate knowledge of the youth as allowed through the artistic process. Ultimately this leads to the youth belonging to the community of the organization and a more extensive network of support. Specifically, interviewees mentioned that through the artistic process they could understand the youth's self-esteem, their need to be listened to, the youth's relation to a group, and the youth's feelings and emotional states. As explained by

Alberto the aesthetic of the work speaks to the emotions of the youth: *"So by the lines, by the colors, you can tell if they are happy or sad, what they   (the youth) are feeling. In that way the aesthetic of the object speaks about them"* (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012).

Diego goes on to explain how the artistic process creates space for expression and how this is valuable in the relationship between youth worker and youth:

> *"The child creates on the basis of certain guidelines that are given to them. But they take something from the inside and show it, they show emotions, they show feelings, they sometimes demonstrate some kind of hidden skills. We observe those hidden skills and try to get them to improve them by giving them other tasks that allow them to improve and develop that"* (Diego, male, 9/5/2012).

The use of the words "hidden skills" shows how the artistic process can create knowledge about someone that otherwise would not be known.

Furthermore, the programs and processes that the youth participate in relieve them of emotional stress. This is evident when one youth worker compares youth who have participated in the programs for longer than those who are new to the workshops: *"For the children and youth who are already in the process it's a little bit easier to relieve them of this emotional weight that they come (to the workshops) with"* (Andres, male, 9/7/2012). One reason it is possible to relieve the emotional stress is because of the quality of relationship the youth worker has with the youth. The work through the arts teaches the youth about healthy relationships by modeling for them a relationship with the youth workers around intimate knowledge such as feelings and emotional weight.

Beyond the arts-based workshops, the therapy services offered create space for the youth workers to know the youth. For example, through the use of play during

therapy the youth are able to express their need to feel secure. The therapist is then able make connections between what happens during the play, what happens with the youth's bodies during the play activity, and with what the youth talk about. In this way, play and imagination is a critical component in how the youth workers understand the youth. A session described by a therapist illustrates the role of play,

> *"Just 10 - 15 minutes of them playing or moving in their own way and that's when things really happen... we were throwing an imaginary ball and suddenly the ball was inflated and blown up.... One of the kids opened the balloon and stepped inside ... to go inside, symbolically that's huge because what came up after reflected a little bit of their need to feel safe. Various things were talked about, such as entering this space, and they (the kids) were like "we should put padlocks on it!" (Luz, female, 9/10/2012).*

Moreover, participating in the arts at the organization involves interacting with other people. Sometimes the youth work individually and other times they share their work with their peers. In a climate where prejudices exist, art is a tool for communicating. Specifically, *"It (creating art in a workshop) is especially a way of opening themselves up and communicating with the other child" (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012).* The youth can discover that they have things in common with each other, and give their support to each other. During a workshop I observed the youth worked independently on drawings of wildlife specific to Colombia. At the end of the workshop the youth worker asked each child to show and share what he had created. All of the youth gave their attention to their peer who was presenting. This demonstrated a moment of respect that was created by the youth for their peers. It is one example of how the

youth have encounters with each other through the artistic process. In the words of one interviewee, sometimes art *"seeks to unite us with others" (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012).*

Conflict resolution

One way creating and performing art, music, and movement strengthens conflict resolution skills is by creating an outlet for non-violent expression. By increasing their capacity to express themselves non-violently, the youth develop additional skills for communicating with other people. These skills can lead to more options for conflict resolution that are less violent. During workshops the youth express their thoughts and ideas *"visually, graphically, and verbally" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).* Another youth worker explicitly states that he is teaching expression through art, *"I'm not teaching "how to," paint, but how to express yourself through art" (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012).* Another example is teaching the youth to express themselves through writing poems and songs. The emphasis is to strengthen the youth's creativity and apply this to how they express themselves.

Creativity was identified as the foundation to the workshops of the youth workers. In regards to conflict resolution it can be used to try new was of problem solving. By increasing the youth's creativity through artistic processes, they have a greater ability to create multiple solutions. Sandra spoke about the role of creativity in her testimony: *"It's through creativity, even if were in the same community facing the same problems and issues everyday, if we work with creativity it makes us want to work, it motivates us to work. It empowers us to study, to reflect, to do and undo, to realize what works, what doesn't work" (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012).*

In addition to the art-focused workshops, the fitness and sport workshops also teach skills for conflict resolution. The emphasis is not placed on who wins a game but on other values. Specifically, on *"knowing how to play, how to share, on teamwork. It's respect on the game field, and it doesn't matter whether you are a boy or girl, your age, if you have the proper sport equipment or attire, but it's that you are participating and that you have fun" (Diego, male, 9/5/2012).* For example, while I was observing I noticed the youth had impressive jump rope skills. When I asked about where they learned the skills I was told it was from the fitness instructor. He then explained to me that he encourages the youth to show others in their neighborhood their skills and to use those moments as opportunities to create new relationships. Ultimately, through jump rope the youth are learning new tools and skills for non-violent communication.

Role of the arts and implications for the field

Youth workers use the arts to develop skills and tools identified as important in strengthening the youth's capacity to be resilient. These skills and tools include life direction and vision of the youth, self-esteem, responsibility, relationships, and conflict resolution. Using these categories I show how the arts within the workshops strengthen all of these capacities. My findings support the current literature in the fields of Peacebuilding and the Arts and Arts Education. Specifically, Cynthia Cohen (2005) and DiCarlo et al. (2000) discuss how the arts create space for expression and for understanding others. My findings support this conclusion, and demonstrate how the arts when administered by youth workers may be a vehicle to strengthening capacities in youth. My findings further the argument of Charles Fowler (1994) that engagement in the arts encourage youth to be active in constructing their realities, open to differences,

and gain skills for conflict resolution. I further his argument by demonstrating the process and intention of the youth workers who use the arts purposefully with youth.

Cynthia Cohen (2005) in her article "The Artist's Way as a Path Toward Peace" argues that engagement in the arts fill the need created by violence for "modes of expression that embrace paradox." She discusses this need in the context of reconciliation and coexistence interventions; however, I find it applies to situations of violence that require a focus on resilience. Furthermore, in Cohen's (2003) article "Engaging with the Arts to Promote Coexistence," she argues the arts stimulate creative solutions to perceived obstacles. My findings support her argument that the "ability to imagine" can improve relationships and quality of life. More so, I argue that my findings show how the arts play a vital role in creating and achieving future goals by strengthening the youth's capacities to be resilient.

In further support of Cohen (2003), my research illustrates a case study of the type of intervention that is important to the work of coexistence. As she identifies, the educational work through the arts strengthens "individual and collective capacities for intellectual, social, emotional, creative, and spiritual life.. that are vital to sustaining both individual well-being and intergroup coexistence over time" (Cohen 2003, Fowler 1994). My findings situate this work with youth and families in Soacha, Colombia illustrating a culturally relevant model of intervention. In addition, the case study shows how community art work can be combined with additional services such as psychological therapies and food provisions. Supporting the youth's multiple needs creates a comprehensive approach to youth and community development.

Charles Fowler (1994) in his article "Strong Arts, Strong Schools" argues that the arts encourage youth to be active rather than passive in constructing their reality. He argues that the students learn "craftsmanship" through the processes of creating art. My findings directly support that the youth workers use the arts because of the skills and tools taught through the process of creating. These skills and tools, as illustrated earlier, strengthen capacities for resilience. The youth define their Life Projects, and then take steps to work towards that goal.

In regards to strengthening resilience, Fowler (1994) argues that youth learn discipline and "how to handle failure and frustration in pursuit of their goals." The youth face obstacles in the process of creating, and as my findings show, the youth workers are able to guide them through those obstacles. Through this process the youth learn skills that they may utilize outside of the arts in regards to their Life Projects and to their lives in their neighborhoods.

In regards to building relationships and conflict resolution Fowler (1994) argues that the arts teach an "openness towards those who are different than we are." As illustrated in my findings, the arts create space to encounter others who are different from us. The youth workers guide these encounters with an awareness of the social prejudice that exist between the youth in the organization. Together, the arts as facilitated by the youth workers are strengthening the youth's capacities to be empathetic. Fowler and Cohen support the concept of creation of empathy and/or sensitivity for others through the artistic process. This emotional resource ultimately leads to healthier relationships and stronger communities; however one area for future study would be to measure this in the youth's families and communities.

DiCarlo et al. (2000) in the article "Street children's drawings: windows into their life circumstances and aspirations" investigate a Honduran health education and social service program by looking at the scoring-procedure of a particular drawing-evaluation system applied to the drawings of street children. For example, they believe that the system reveals the presence of emotional indicator such as insecurity, anxiety, shyness, etc. Furthermore, the authors conclude that drawing is an activity that creates the space for child-service provider interaction. In this space, the service provider can use the evaluation system to create a better understanding of the child. While La Fundación Proyecto de Vida does not focus on the arts in the same capacity, the youth workers were able to connect to the youth in these artistic spaces. More so, they explicitly stated that the artistic processes allow them to know the strengths of the youth, as well as areas to focus development strategies. Therefore, my findings are in support of DiCarlo et al. that drawings, and other art forms, allow the youth workers to know the youth and build on their assets, encourage their hopes, and manage their fears.

CHAPTER VII

HOW RELATIONSHIPS INFLUENCE YOUTH WORK

In addition to the objectives and methods of the youth workers, the relationships that are built within the organization increase the effectiveness of the programs and support of the youth. Based on my findings, the youth workers decide to work with youth because of their own desire to see Colombian society improve, and because they believe that all children deserve equal opportunities to reach their full potential. Therefore, the relationships they develop with the youth include certain objectives. Among these are creating space for the youth's expression, acceptance of the youth as they are, and modeling a healthy relationship for the youth.

Another important relationship is between youth worker and parent. The youth workers educate the parents on what the purposes of the programs are and how they are essential in the education of the youth. The interactions that take place between adults in the youth's lives has an impact on them as well (Bronfenbrenner 1974). This education of the parents helps to build trust and understanding so the parents continue to send their children to the organization. Without this trust, the organization would not be able to operate in the neighborhood. As was described by one interviewee, the community chooses to accept or reject organizations. Those that they reject, they and their children do not go to.

The quality of the relationships impact how the youth workers are able to connect with the youth. The better the quality, the better the youth workers are able to understand the youth's situation at home and how this impacts the youth in workshops. The relationship between youth worker and parents is an important feature of effective after

school programs in the United States (Jones and Deutsch 2011; Scales and Gibbons 1996). More so, the relationships between youth worker and youth do not substitute for parent relationships. Instead, the relationships are part of the larger social sphere as an intrinsic part of maternal and paternal care (Rae-Epsinoza 2010). These larger networks of care provide comprehensive support to the youth. The knowledge gained by youth workers through quality relationships allows for them to better support the youth and develop the skills and tools necessary for working towards their Life Projects. In this chapter I first present my findings from the perspective of the youth workers on the motivations the youth workers have to work with the youth, followed by the style of relationship that exists. Lastly I look at the qualities of the relationship between youth worker and parent.

Motivations of youth workers to work with youth

One of the most vibrant relationships at the organization is between the youth and the youth workers. The responses I received to the question "Why do you work with youth?" revealed the underlying motivation of the youth workers and their faith in the work that they do. Not only do the youth workers see their work as impacting the youth, but also as reaching the youth's families, communities, and even creating ripples of change in Colombian society as a whole. For example, this motivation was expressed clearly by Diego, and then Isabel: "*I want to teach them how to transmit this potential to their parents, professors, teachers so that they can help them move forward*" *(Diego, male, 9/5/2012).*

"He (the youth) might find a space to calm down and to get motivation. He can bring that calm and motivation back to his family" (Isabel, female, 9/2/2012).

The youth workers see "potential" in the youth. Potential can be described as "open minds" and the "ability to be formed." Contrarily, most of the youth workers viewed the parents as not being able to be impacted as much as the youth because they are adults. Despite this belief, I illustrate later in this section the strong relationship that exists between the youth workers and the youth's parents. Ultimately, the motivation behind the youth workers maintaining their relationships with the youth is so they can be a part of what leads to the youth's happiness.

The idea is that by working with the youth towards their Life Projects, the work of the youth workers ultimately contributes to "improving" society. This reflects the youth workers underlying belief that the violent society in which the youth live should change to become more peaceful. As illustrated by Santiago, a more peaceful society is an underlying motivation for the work that he does with the youth: *"It's because I see in them a capacity for change and transformation…there is the possibility of creating a different culture in relation to their development as humans and as a community" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).*

There is also a sense that youth "deserve" more than what they find in their current living situation, being that of their families where violence or neglect is present, and in their neighborhoods where opportunities to live without violence are not common. In the words of one interviewee: *"They (the youth) deserve everything you can give them" (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012).* Another youth worker frames this in the form of what is just and fair: *"One (reason) is justice – all children should have the same*

opportunities, and they don't… The children (should have the opportunity) to achieve and fulfill their capacities" (Ana, female, 9/4/2012).

Style of relationship between youth worker and youth

The relationship that exists between youth worker and youth is one of reciprocity. The youth workers offer the youth love, and in return the youth love them back. The youth workers also learn from the youth as the youth learn from them. More explicitly, the youth workers are called "orientador," (or 'mentor' in English) by the youth, rather than "teacher." This was explained to me by a youth worker as a way for the youth to understand that the youth workers are "guiding" them while they share their expertise of the arts with the youth. The concept of reciprocity is stated by Alberto when speaking of his role as mentor: *"It's kind of this mutual understanding of me understanding the children and what they are going through, and the children understanding me and my role"* (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012*)*. The use of the word "understanding" shows a sense of consciousness that the youth worker has around their role of loving the youth while sensing that the youth see the youth worker as artist and mentor.

Moreover, the youth workers are aware of the expectations the youth have of them and that they are making a promise to the youth to give their support. Therefore the quality of the relationship is motivated as a fulfillment of this promise. Even though the youth workers are strengthening the capacities of the youth to be resilient, the youth expect the youth workers to keep supporting them. For this reason, the youth workers continue their support. The continued support reflects a cultural idea of solidarity as articulated by Sandra: *"Children have told us that they don't want to be left alone with the responsibility of improving the world, it's something that they want to do together*

with adults, or have their support. So we have to be careful of not leaving children alone just because they seem so resilient and have so much strength to face the problems, we can't be negligent with them" (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012).

The mentor-like style of relationship allows the youth workers to create space for the youth to express themselves without punishment. In this way, they are modeling a relationship without violence. What does this look like? As answered by a youth worker it is when they do something wrong, make a mistake or are rude, and you don't hit them and they can apologize to you without punishment. It gives the youth a chance to see how relationships can have conflict without violence.

To accept and love the youth as they are is something youth may not receive in their homes. This population of youth does not have a lot of material things. In a society that values those things and the people who own them, the youth workers show them they can be loved despite how little material things they might have. In this way the youth are learning that they are deserving of love, and may begin to love and accept themselves more. Love in the NGO also means being there for the children "100%" of the time. While observing, I saw that the youth workers not only engage the youth in their workshops, but outside of them as well. For example, all of the youth workers would eat lunch at the same tables as the youth, instead of going off to eat somewhere else. This demonstrates the idea of "availability" and solidarity.

The youth understand the role of the youth workers and therefore know what to expect when they come to the organization. Moreover the youth workers are an alternative form of caregiver and role model for the youth. These types of relationships lead to what one youth worker described as a family-like environment at the

organization: *"It is a construction of family within the workshop and of understanding ourselves"* (Alberto, male, 9/4/1012).

The above passage uses construction of family to include acts of love and giving attention to the youth. The proof that the youth see the youth workers as positive role models come from the feedback that the youth workers receive indirectly. During one interview I was told that *"Basically we (the youth workers) become a model for the children. Very few children will tell us this directly but we find out through other means, so we serve as an example for the children"* (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012). Whether or not the youth have positive role models outside of the organization makes it no less important that they exist within. As described by one youth worker of her co-worker an example of this caring role model is: *"she (my co-worker) is extremely fair and she's a really good model for the kids. She can be firm when she has to be... but you rarely hear her raise her voice, and the kids respect her"* (Luz, female, 9/10/2012). Ideally, future study would look at the youth's perspective on the youth workers.

Relationship between youth worker and parents

The youth workers actively develop relationships with the parents of the youth from the time they are asked to come to the enrollment process with their child. It is important for them to build trust with the family of the children. Specifically, they keep parents involved by sharing what happens in the programs with them and by sharing the results of the work by inviting them to the performances. It is recognized by the youth workers that the parents often decide if they will let their child come to the organization.

There were a few reasons shared with me as to why parents do not let their children come to the organization. The first is that they do not fully understand what the organization does. Some parents think the space is just for play. In response to this, youth workers try to help the parents understand that the programs and services offered to the youth are educational and comprehensive. This is reflected in my interview materials by Santiago: *"They have difficulties, for example, if the child flunks a course the parents may not allow them to come back. There is a misguided idea that the Foundation is a place where the children come only to play, and that it's a waste of time. .... We speak to the parents to try to get them not to use participation in the Foundation as the punishment that is taken away" (Santiago, male, 9/5/2012).*

The second reason parents hesitate to allow their children to come to the organization is their fear of the psychological services that are offered. The youth workers told me that the fear parents have is their children talking about the violence they experience and to be reprimanded for it. In order to mediate these fears, the social workers and psychologists work with the parents to show them the benefits of the services. The fear of judgment is articulated by Paula: *"I think what is behind that is that they are very scared of being judged because they know they could be better parents but they don't know how or they don't have the ways to do it.. I think that it is what really makes them hesitant of wanting a psychology process" (Paula, female, 9/4/2012).* This speaks to the remaining tension between the youth workers at the organization and the parents of the youth. Further research of this tension could be assessed through parent interviews.

Parents are involved in the organization in multiple ways. First, the youth

workers welcome the parents to come to them with concerns. For example, one way a

youth receives extra help in school is if a mother comes and discusses it. While observing

at the Soacha site, almost everyday a few mothers would come and sit outside of the

cafeteria. By welcoming the mothers to come and spend time at the organization, it

means that communication with the youth workers is easy. Furthermore, parents are often

engaged in psychological sessions through the organization. The psychologists work with

whole families rather than solely with the youth. Ultimately, parents are able to see what

the youth learn and how they are happy at the organization. These "results" are what

develop the parents' trust in the youth workers: *"We also have the trust of the parents*

who like the work we are doing because they see the results" (Sandra, female, 9/5/2012).

Key aspects of relationships and implications for the field

In the field of child development it is believed that the quality of relationships

youth have directly with caring adults leads to positive development (Jones and Deutsch

2011; Scales and Gibbons 1996). In the following section I look at how the current

literature helps to understand the network of relationships in the youth's lives. More so, it

is believed by scholars of systems ecology that youth's lives are influenced by the quality

interactions that take place between adults in a youth's life (Bronfenbrenner 1974).

Specifically, it can lead to higher rates of academic success (Pianta et al. 1997). I situate

my findings within this body of literature to strengthen it, and to show how trust is an

important factor that determines the quality of relationships that exist at La Fundación

Proyecto de Vida.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1974) in "Developmental Research, Public Policy, and the Ecology of Childhood" explains how a child's ecology is made of two layers. The first level is the child's immediate setting, such as school and family. The child's second level is what the first is "embedded" in, such as the neighborhood and social systems. More importantly, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that to understand a child, one must analyze the relationships that exist within and between these ecologies. Using this framework, my findings show that important relationships exist between youth worker and youth, youth worker and parents, youth worker and youth worker, as well between youth and youth. By analyzing these relationships, I conclude that the quality of the relationships depends on the level of trust and ultimately impact the effectiveness of the programs offered by the organization. Further study would need to look at this from the perspective of the youth. Lerner and Benson (2003) also argue that the extent to which actors in the youth's lives can coordinate their efforts, the greater the impact on the development of the youth.

Jeffery Jones and Nancy Deutsch (2011) in "Relational Strategies in After-School Settings: How Staff-Youth Relationships Support Positive Development" identify staff-youth relationships as key to the success of after-school programs. Their study focused on "relational strategies that staff employ within an urban youth organization, and the ways in which those strategies contribute to a positive developmental climate" (Jones and Deutsch 2011). Ultimately they conclude that the dynamics create a "relational pedagogy" in the program, "serving as the foundation for youth engagement and promotion of positive developmental outcomes" (Jones and Deutsch 2011). In addition Scales and Gibbons (1996) identify non-familiar relationships between a caring adult and an adolescent as important to youth development. Scales and Gibbons argue that while

these relationships may have similarities to that of youth – parent relationships, they are able to provide to the youth the type of support that leads to development. Pianta et al. (1997) further support the importance of child-adult relationships showing how these are related to the success the child experiences in school settings (Sheldon et al. 2002; Angell et al. 2009; Pianta et al. 1997). My findings support their conclusions by illustrating from the youth worker perspective the importance and style of relationship that exist with the youth. My study goes further to suggest more research is needed to identify how other relationships such as youth worker - parent and youth – youth impact how the youth perform in settings outside of schools.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION:

STRENGTHENING YOUTH THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION

The first objective of my research was to document and make visible the practices
and intention of youth workers in Soacha. My findings showed that strengthening
personal and social capacities of the youth were a focus of the youth workers.
Additionally, the methods of the youth workers were to develop five areas of the youth:
physical, transcendental, cognitive, social, and emotional. The intention behind this focus
was to bolster the resilience of the youth as they worked toward future goals. The artistic
process was used to develop the capacities of the youth. Additionally my findings showed
that supplementary supportive services and relationships help youth workers reach their
objectives with the youth.

The programs of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida demonstrate how the arts can be
used intentionally in an intervention with youth to increase their capacities. Ultimately
this case study shows how the artistic process is similar to the process of the youth's Life
Projects. Specifically, both processes require a focus on shared social and personal
capacities that the youth workers aim to strengthen. Therefore, based on my findings, the
arts-based intervention is a model for encouraging the youth to imagine a reality different
from the one they currently know.

The second objective of my research was to understand from the perspective of
the youth workers the effects of the arts-based program in the lives of the families and
youth of Soacha. The case study reveals that the Colombian internal conflict and the
neoliberal economic system have impacted children's development. However, my

findings show how the model is closely tied to the culture of the neighborhood and is responsive to the needs of the youth. Furthermore the youth workers prioritize the youth and their goals. As one youth worker told me, everyone in society wants the youth to achieve, but they either can't or don't know how to support the youth. Therefore the intervention is designed to respond to the needs of the community by guiding the youth in a way that others do not.

This NGO is filling a need to support the youth of the sixth commune of Soacha in a way that the state is not providing. The role the NGO plays in Colombian society is an example of what policymakers should support regarding child development and intervention. For example, in response to the need of an intervention that aims to prevent street children, this study reveals that the arts-based program acts as an engaging and supportive environment for the youth. The success of the program is demonstrated by the fact that the youth continue to return to the organization. Therefore, the youth who remain interested in the organization and their Life Project, and thus may not become street children. Furthermore, the comprehensive intervention looks to fill other needs the youth may have, such as access to food. It can be argued that this type of comprehensive intervention lessens the need for youth to find work in the street. In addition, the intervention of La Fundación Proyecto de Vida includes ways of involving parents and improving home by providing psychological services.

This NGO is also an example of an intervention for families with parents who migrate to other countries to work. This case study reveals how comprehensive intervention supports the future goals the parents may have for their youth by encouraging the youth to work towards their Life Projects. Through this process the

youth workers have roles that may be similar to parents, but are not in place of parents. They act as caring adults who support the youth and work to instill specific skills and tools to strengthen the youth's capacities to be resilient. More so, the arts-based program creates space for expression and allows the youth worker to know the youth on a level where they can better provide for the youth. Interventions that create strong adult-youth relationships is one response to the restructuring of family due to transnational parent migration.

Areas for future study

The youth workers spoke openly about the limitations of their work. The work is most effective when there are small groups in the workshops. Small groups mean that the youth workers spend more quality time with each person. Within the organization, group size varied between two people and forty-five people. In the larger groups it was observable that the youth interacted less with the youth worker one on one. An area for future study might be how to serve more children while maintaining the possibility for close relationships.

Additionally there is a tension between the focus on the products of the workshops and the process. As mentioned earlier, it is within the artistic process that the youth develop skills and tools. However, there are varying opinions about the value placed on a good-looking final product to show to donors and the broader community. Future study may look at what impact this has on the artistic process and experience of the youth.

In addition, the quality of the youth worker – parent relationship fluctuates based on how consistent the youth worker can interact with the parent. This depends on the

availability of the parents and their work schedules. As one youth worker told me, the

parents work whenever there is an opportunity because they have such low-incomes.

Therefore, the work schedules can interfere with when they are able to connect with the

organization. Future study may look at this element from the perspective of the parents.

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS

1) Intervention – Actions taken towards transformation

2) Youth – Young people ages 3-21

3) Community – A geography of influence and socializing factors within definite boundaries (Raitzer 1999)

4) External Assets – Positive developmental experiences that enhance maturation of youth (Raitzer 1999)

5) Internal Assets – Elements of a child's character which support success and inhibit health compromising behavior. (Raitzer 1999)

6) Full potential – Developmental capacities one possesses for working towards and realizing goals

7) Resiliency: Ability to "bounce-back" from adversity or trauma; the environmental and individual dynamics that help individuals face and overcome challenges. (Raitzer 1999)

8) Positive youth development (PYD) refers to efforts aimed at helping youth achieve their potential, viewing youth as having competencies to be developed rather than risk factors to be prevented (Jones et al. 2011)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?
2. Did you participate in either of the PYE trainings in March 2011 or April 2012? At the end will you answer questions about this experience?
3. In Soacha, how many children do you typically work with? In general, what are their ages?
4. Do the children choose to work with you, or is there a process of selection?
5. Can you describe the work you do in Soacha.
6. How do you incorporate the arts in your work with the children?
7. Why do you think it is important to use art as a teaching method?
8. What value do you place on the atheistic with the work you do with the children?
9. What is the importance to you of teaching the children the process of making art?
10. What is the role of creativity in your work with the children?
11. Why do you work with children at the organization?
12. Why have you chosen to do the social work you do now?
13. What are your personal goals/aspirations?
14. How are your these goals supported in the Foundation?
15. What impacts do you think your work has on the children's lives? Can you give me examples of this?
16. What do you see as your strongest personal assets?
17. What assets do you see in the organization?
18. What assets do you see in the broader community? (Soacha/families)
19. What does the concept of "Proyecto de Vida" mean to you?
20. How do you support the children's personal goals/interest?
21. What are your hopes for the children?
22. What do you think are the main challenges the youth whom you work with face today?
23. What do you think are the societal challenges to the children's "Proyecto de Vida"?
24. What are the challenges you face in your work?
25. Do you make sacrifices to be able to do the work?
26. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
27. Is it okay with you for me to make copies of some of your taller reports?

Questions for PYE Global training evaluation

1. Is it okay to video tape your responses to the questions? It would mean   that this section is not anonymous. The video might be used as part of a short video for the website of PYE Global.
2. What training have you done with PYE?
3. Please briefly describe the work you do.
4. Do you think creativity is important in working with groups?
5. Do you use the Creative Facilitation exercises in your work as a team? In your

work with youth?
6.   If so, which exercises do you find most effective? [If not - why not?]
7.   What did you like most about the PYE training?
8.   What did you like the least about the PYE training?
9.   What could PYE do better to support you as a facilitator?
10.   Do you have any other feedback that you would like to share with PYE?

APPENDIX C

VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

My name is Kate Faris and I am a graduate student in International Studies at the University of Oregon in the United States. As part of my studies I am carrying out research here in Colombia to better understand how art is used with children to better their lives. The research I am doing today is to help me gain a better understanding of the work you do. I plan to use what I learn today to create a case study that can be used as part of my masters thesis when I return to the United States. I will return in September and work on my thesis until June 2013. Because the research I am doing today might be used in a publication later, I need your consent to use the information you decide to share with me today.

Before we begin lets go over the format of the interview. I will begin by asking you to describe the work you do and then I will give you time to answer. We will use a translator to insure I do not misunderstand anything, so please allow time for translation. We will then continue with questions about your work. In total the interview should last no longer than an hour.

For your safety, I will not ask you to sign your name, nor will I use any information in any publication that could link this information back to you. I've decided to do this considering the possible risk you as a member of a nonprofit could face here in Colombia. Through your participation in today's interview there is the potential that after I publish, the knowledge you provide today man be used to inform future social and economic policy. This knowledge then has the potential to increase support for the work you do.

It is important to note that participation in this interview is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve in no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Also you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may elect not to answer any question that you do not want to answer and either stop the interview at that time or go on to the next question.

Do I have your consent to use this information in a later publication? So I can best remember what it is we talk about today I would like to voice record our interview. I will be the only person who has access to these voice recordings. Is it okay to voice record this interview?

If you have any questions about my research you can contact me, Kate Faris, at kfaris@uoregon.edu or 401-252-9268; or by writing at 3501 Hilyard St, Apt 22, Eugene, OR, USA. Or you can contact my academic advisor, Dr. Stephen Wooten, at swooten@uoregon.edu; 354 PLC, 5206 University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA 97403-5206; or by phone (541) 346-5299. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subjects you can contact the University of Oregon's "Research Compliance Services" at 5237 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5237; ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu; 541-346-2510.

If you would like you may keep a copy of this form for your records.

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