

# That Magical Power: High School Students' Camping Service Experiences and Self-Concept Development

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**ABSTRACT---** *In Taiwan, the recent education reforms and policies have drawn its focus on transforming “spoon-feeding education” to “adaptive education” with the main purpose of cultivating our students to have multiple-competence development. Following such trend, there have been quite a lot of service camps organized for the youth to help them develop communication skills, social responsibilities, positive thinking and self-concept. This study was conducted by adopting a case-study approach with the use of semi-structured interviews with high-school students for data collection. The researcher, a junior college student also as a volunteer serving for a youth camp, has chosen her service summer camp as a research setting to consult the research participants. There were totally four high-school students participating in this research; two females (vocational high-school students) and two males (one general high-school student and one vocational high-school student). Based on the analysis of interview data, it was found: 1. High-school students' camping service experiences will help them to have a sense of belonging and developing their competence; 2. High-school students' negative experiences will have an influence on their self-concept; 3. High-school students' camping service experiences will help them to construct self-concept positively.*

**Keywords---** Self-concept, camping service, off-campus service learning, Taiwan

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Under the oppression of social environment, senior high school students devote so much to the schoolwork that they often confuse self-development and could not find self-value when facing such heavy schoolwork and pressure. Erikson (1902-1994) indicates that individual self-development is not the same mental process in the life, but the psychological crisis with various properties at different ages. Being in the adolescence, the crisis of senior high school students appear between ego identity and role confusion. An individual starts to integrate several dimensions of self to form the perceived coherent whole self (Chang, 2007). The educational practice in Taiwan has been broadly criticized for emphasizing on the credentials rather than schoolwork orientation; as a result, a lot of camps and service learning activities therefore prevail. It is mentioned in Executive Yuan Youth Policy White Paper that participation in voluntary service could assist adolescents in developing the abilities of adaptation, challenging themselves, and learning to cooperate with others (National Youth Commission, Executive Yuan, 2011). Some research findings also point out that the experiences of learning by doing and self-reflection from service learning process could help to enhance students' self-concept (Peng, 2013; Wang, 2014).

Based on “learning-by-doing” proposed by Dewey, *service learning* combines “service” and “learning” and considers that the processes of action and reflection could achieve the learning effect. It stresses on learning as the basis, enhances participants' self-development through empirical pedagogy with planned design, and has “reflection” and “reciprocity” as the core elements (Huang, 2008). Li (2015) indicates that self-reflection could help adolescents learn independent thinking, enhance the communication and coordination ability, explore themselves, and further develop their value. Chen (2010) discovers that adolescent volunteers are not only aware of the role changes in the service processes, but their self-reflection also allows them to learn the responsibilities and develop self-confidence. Chen (2010) and Cheng (2014) mention that the interaction activities planned in camps could enhance participants' growth and change, especially on interpersonal communication skills, social concern, group consciousness, and civic responsibility. Participation in camps could facilitate adolescents being aware of their roles as well as their strengths and weaknesses, which could help them to plan their future goals (Chen, 2010; Lin, 2012; Peng, 2013; Wang, 2013). It is also found that adolescents could learn to develop empathy, responsibility, and social concern by observing the behavioral performance of role models during the participation of service learning (Chen, 2010; Wang, 2014). Self-concept is composed of several dimensions, such as

awareness of self-appearance and social role, and an individual self-evaluation is affected by her/his interaction with the environment. Lin (2002) argues that there is a gender difference in self-concept and females tend to have higher self-concept than males. Chen and Weng (2006) indicate that family interaction would have a significant influence on children; the children would likely show lower self-concept when parents discipline them with blame without listening to their ideas. Self-identity is critical in adolescence and peers relationship is an important factor for adolescents to develop their self-identity (Lin, 2012; Su, 2013; Wang, 2013). Moreover, the sense of learning accomplishment would also influence students' self-assurance; good learners could enhance the self-confidence, while ones with low performance would appear low self-concept and further affect their behavioral performance (Chen & Weng, 2006; Kuo, 1996; Ling; Su, 2013).

This research was conducted with the main purpose of exploring high-school students' camping service experiences and how such experiences have influences on their self-concept development; the research questions are: 1. How did high-school students' reflect on their motives and experiences from joining the camping service; 2. How did high-school students evaluate their self-concept; 3. How did high-school students reflect on the influence of camping service experiences on their self-concept development?

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Research Strategy and Participants

This study was conducted by adopting a case-study approach with the use of semi-structured interviews with high-school students for data collection. The researcher, a junior college student also as a volunteer serving for a youth camp, has chosen her service summer camp as a research setting to consult the research participants. There were totally four high-school students participating in this research; two females (vocational high-school students) and two males (one general high-school student and one vocational high-school student). The four participants were recorded with A, B, C and D; and their background information is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Background data of research participants

Research participant	Grade	Gender	No. of participation in camps	Date of interview	Code
A	Vocational high school student G3	Female	4	2016/09/23	Interview A20160923
B	Vocational high school student G1	Female	2	2016/10/16	Interview B20161016
C	Vocational high school student G1	Male	2	2016/10/16	Interview C20161016
D	Senior high school student G1	Male	2	2016/10/17	Interview D20161017

### 2.2 Data Organization and Analysis

The research data are coded according to the research technique, participant, and data collection date; for example, "A" who was interviewed on September 23, 2016, is coded as "Interview A20160923". The research data are analyzed with the use of triangulation, including the use of triangulation between different sources and interpretation (previous research findings and literature). The data analysis stages are: 1. Repeating reading and comparison of interview data; 2. Coding and classifying the data according to their relevance to the research questions; 3. Developing the research issues based on the classified data. Participants' feedbacks are also used to enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Motives and Experiences of High-school Students from Joining the Camping Service

Based on the research data, the motivation of high-school students participating in the camp is affected by group members, camp atmosphere, the purpose and content of service learning activities, and the opportunity for enhancing their ability. High-school students' experiences of leading a group could help them to enhance positive self-concept and

develop a sense of accomplishment and belonging.

### 3.1.1 Starting to Change

The camp is organized for high-school students to experience college life through the participation of five-day-four-night activities; the purpose of such camp is to help students to learn themselves and expand their horizons. Most students enjoy the camp atmosphere and gathering with others, which has made them be willing to join the camp time after time.

*Uh, it certainly is... I want to work with partners and then... uh... I like the atmosphere in the team so much and I have been eager to come back (Interview D20161017).*

*I would like to make some changes in myself and my attitudes with others ...because I was not good at dealing with interpersonal relationship (Interview D20161017).*

### 3.1.2 Meeting Adolescent

The activities planned in the camp are different from the learning in schools; it has allowed students to experience the role of service provider and establish the relationship with same-age peers.

*It is that... the camp atmosphere is harmonious, and then... everyone is friendly and nice at camp. That was my second time to join in this camp, because I would like to devote myself to the camp (Interview D20161017).*

The students, being inspired by their positive experiences, have agreed with the benefits received from the camp; such experiences have enhanced their devotion to the camp as well as providing them with the opportunities to serve for others.

*Regarding to the performance, it is... no matter what and how you did, everyone would encourage and support you and don't feel to be criticized. Then... you will come up with the idea to keep on trying... (Interview D20161017).*

The experiences of joining in camps could help students to develop a sense of belonging as well as explore their potential. The students, who have taken up the role of group leader, have learned to take the responsibility as well as develop a sense of accomplishment; such change is promoted by the encouragement and support given from other peers at camp.

## 3.2 The Self-concept Development of High-school Students from Joining the Camping Service

It is found that students' self-concept is constructed by three dimensions, including how they see themselves (who I am), what they want to do in the future (what I want to do), and how they are seen by others (what others see in me). It is also found that high-school students' personal experiences would have an influence on their self-concept.

### 3.2.1 Who I Am

The students do not focus on so much on their appearance; instead, they are much more concerned about the issue of *personality*.

*You cannot decide the look and appearance, but you can decide your mind. So, I don't pay much attention to my appearance (Interview B20161016).*

The students tend to know themselves well in terms of their competence, and such competence is often related to their past learning and performance, e.g. communication and learning skills. The students' past experiences from joining the camps could help them to develop their competence and confidence.

*Uh... I think... I still have a lot to learn and improve myself..... I did not quite know myself and what I am good at... before joining the camp. After joining the camp, I have known myself better... and what I should improve myself to become better (Interview D20161017).*

### 3.2.2 What I Want to Do

The students tend to express uncertainty about their future. Most of them have stated their current goal is to complete the high school, but do not mention about their long-term plans/goals.

*I will finish my high school next year, and then I will... stay a year here to settle myself and think of what I want to do... During that year gap, I would make money to help my family and others who need help (Interview C20161016).*

### 3.2.3 What Others See in Me

The students are often pleased and encouraged by others people's comments and/or feedbacks on the personality and performance.

*Most people like me probably because they think I am a fool, I guess..... they might not be able to figure out why I say something. Sometimes, I simply say it out, and then they think I am so funny and just like a fool (Interview A20160923).*

When the students have received the negative comments/feedbacks from others, it could often help them to learn their own disadvantages.

*I really do care about what other people see in me... so sometimes, I would make myself become a person who just try to please everyone (Interview D20161017).*

The development of students' self-concept is importantly related to what they perceive from other people's comments/feedback. The students' personal negative experiences would influence their self-confidence and the development of their self-concept.

## 3.3 The Influence of Camping Service Experiences on High-school Students' Self-concept Development

It is found that the development of students' self-concept could be influenced by their own personality, competence, goals as well as other people's comments/feedbacks. Moreover, the development of students' self-concept could be enhanced by their experiences of joining camps.

### 3.3.1 Who I Really Am

The students could see a different "me" from joining the teamwork, taking challenges, and receiving support; they have learned to know about their own advantages/disadvantages and figure out what they want to do.

*What I have benefited most is the change of my personality. I used to be cold and very stubborn... now I am much more open-minded and cheerful. I have made more friends; my interpersonal relationship is much better now... everyone would give me support so that I have courage to do what I want to do..... I would try to make changes when I feel confidence, and those changes often let me realize I could be so different (Interview D20161017).*

*I have to think about what I want to do with my life... either going to college or doing something else. I need to have plans and goals for myself, and then follow such plans and goals... (Interview C20161016).*

### 3.3.2 Feeling the Power

The students' change have reflected on their communication skills, sense of responsibility, and confidence; such change has made them to feel the power, that is, they are in control of themselves and life.

*I realize that people are very different... That is, there are different kinds of people and I need to learn how to get along with them. There were all kinds of situations happening at camp, and we need to deal with them... We never know what would happen in life, and we just need to solve out whatever problem it is (Interview A20160923).*

The camp has offered different opportunities for students to present themselves; such experiences have helped the students to explore and reflect on themselves.

*I think I am pretty confident now... I think "being confident" is very important to me, because you can't do anything without confidence... Confidence is very important no matter where you go and what you do. With confidence, I would no longer feel inferior to others, or care about what other people think about me...or feel negative whenever I try to do something (Interview B20161016).*

The experiences of joining camps could help the positive development of students' self-concept, particularly in the aspect of self-confidence. Self-confidence has a great effect on various aspects of students' life, such as their interpersonal relationship and handling things with positive thinking.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 High-school Students' Camping Service Experiences Will Help Them to Have a Sense of Belonging and Developing Their Competence

The four high-school students mention that the camping service has provided opportunities for teamwork, which is very different from learning in schools. The feeling of "being together with others" allows them to develop a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging and development of self-competent are the important reasons for them to join the camp and transform their role from service receiver to providers.

### 4.2 High-school Students' Negative Experiences Will Have an Influence on Their Self-concept

Self-concept is constructed by an individual's interaction experiences with the environment; self-concept will influence an individual's attitude and behavior. The four high-school students are very concerned about other people's comments/feedback; they have constructed and developed their self-concept through the interaction with others. When there have been more negative interaction experiences, the students tend to have less confidence in themselves.

### 4.3 High-school Students' Camping Service Experiences Will Help Them to Construct Self-concept Positively

The four high-school students have learned to know about their own advantages/disadvantages through taking the challenge, teamwork, peers' support, and self-reflection; such positive experiences of joining the camp has enhanced their self-confidence and has further helped them to make changes. The experiences of joining the camp do not only help the students to have better confidence and construct positive self-concept, but also help them to have self-awareness as well as self-acceptance.

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