

Resilience Attributes and Positive Outcomes

LEE, Mah Ngee
TAY-KOAY, Siew Luan
Psychological Studies Academic Group
Nanyang Technological University
National Institute of Education, Singapore

Abstract: The paper presents a Singapore study on the Youth Expedition Project experience and its positive outcomes on participants who were involved in their overseas community service-learning in six Asian countries. Resilience attributes that determine positive outcomes in terms of civic attitudes and personal competence skills are explored. The samples were the November/December 2004 cohorts of the Youth Expedition Projects (YEP), funded by the Singapore International Foundation, to various parts of the districts in Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand. In this study, 428 youths were compared in terms of scores on resilience personal attributes such as coping abilities, self-esteem, self efficacy, mastery goal orientation, ego-resiliency and ego-undercontrol, and positive outcomes as in civic attitudes and personal competence skills by gender, age, educational levels and leadership roles. Significant differences were found among the youth types in terms of coping abilities, self-esteem, self efficacy and mastery goal orientation, and ego-resiliency. In positive outcomes, significant differences were found in scores of civic attitudes and personal competence skills among youth types by gender, age, educational levels and leadership roles.

Keywords: service-learning, resilience, positive youth development, civic attitudes, competence skills

Background

Research has identified community resources and opportunities as one of the resilience factors that contribute to positive development in youth (Larson, 2000; Masten & Powell, 2003; Neill, 2000). Benard (1993) and Constantine, Benard, and Diaz (1999) posit we can create environments that promote positive development and successful learning for young people, such as through adventure learning, service-learning or community service. Resilience research has highlighted the importance of tracking the effectiveness of functioning in major developmental tasks and also assessment of qualities in relationships, schools, and communities that appear to make a difference (Masten & Powell, 2003). Human potential can be unlocked through challenging experiences in supportive group environments (Neill, 2000). Bringle and Duffy (1998), Ferrari and Chapman (1999) as well as Jacoby (1996) argue that service-learning can help youth develop a wide range of positive personal, attitudinal, moral, social and cognitive outcomes related to service-learning. Service-learning also helps them to see why it matters that they are involved in addressing the needs of their communities.

How one cope with the challenging situations has implications for subsequent outcomes (Jew, Green, & Kroger, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Those who are able to cope effectively may see themselves more capable of successful managing future stressors. This will lead to positive development and resilience such as increased sense of community, relatedness, and self of self (Glantz & Johnson 1999; Goh, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). Community and service-learning allow youths to gain a heightened sense of personal

and social responsibility as well as more positive attitudes towards oneself and others (Batchelder & Root, 1994, Eyler, Root, & Giles, 1998; Shumer, 1994).

Objectives and Methodology of the Study

The paper presents a youth study conducted in Singapore on the resilience factors that contribute to the development of civic attitudes and personal competence skills as a result of having gone through overseas community service-learning experience in six Asian countries. The samples consisted of 428 participants involved in the Youth Expedition Projects (YEP), funded by the Singapore International Foundation, to various parts of the districts in Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand. Pre- and post-test questionnaire surveys, observations, and focus group interviews were conducted. The participants were compared in terms of scores on resilience factors such as coping abilities, self-esteem, self efficacy, mastery goal orientation, ego-resiliency and ego-undercontrol, and positive outcomes as in civic attitudes and personal competence skills by gender, age, educational levels and leadership roles.

Research Question

1. What personal attributes are associated with resilience in youths?
How do they differ in coping, self-esteem, self efficacy and mastery goal orientations, ego-resiliency, and ego-control by gender, age, educational levels, and leadership roles before the expedition?
2. What positive outcomes can be attributed to the participation in the overseas community service-learning experience?
How do youths differ in civic attitudes and competence skills by gender, age, educational levels, and leadership roles after the expedition?

Results of Findings

The research finding showed that personal resilience attributes such as coping abilities, self-esteem, self-efficacy and mastery goal orientations, and ego-resiliency were generally high for the group as a whole. In analyzing youth differences, statistical findings showed significant differences in subscale Social Support for female participants ($p < .04$). Analysis of variance revealed significant differences by age group in subscale Non-Productive Coping, subscale Mastery Goal Orientations, and Personal Resilience Factor Total score, at $p < .05$ respectively. Significant differences by educational level were shown in the mean scores of Positivity, Self-Esteem, Efficacy and Mastery Goal Orientations (at $p < .05$ respectively), and Ego-Resiliency at $p < .01$. Statistical results reported higher mean scores for Leader in personal resilience attributes than Non-Leader while negative characteristics, as in Non-Productive Coping and Ego-Undercontrol, differed in opposite direction.

The research finding also revealed positive outcomes in terms of civic attitudes, relationships, and sense of self. Quantitative analyses indicated moderately high overall mean scores for civic attitudes and competence skills as a whole ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .29$). The findings suggest that participants appeared to benefit more in terms of interpersonal skills and problems-solving skills. The findings were consistent with most researches on outcomes of service-learning in terms of interpersonal relationships and teamwork (Moely et al., 2002; Weglarz, 2000). The lowest mean scores for the participants was political awareness ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .58$).

In terms of gender, the results showed no significant differences between female and male participants at the .05 level of significance for all the mean scores of civic attitudes and competence skill measures, except sub-scale political awareness. Male participants scored significantly higher in subscale political awareness ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .57$) than female participants ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .56$), $t(345) = 3.72$ at $p < .001$. It appears that male participants were more interested in political issues than female participants. The results seemed to confirm the finding of Switzer, Switzer, Stukas, and Baker (1999) who found that females were more interested in the social aspects such as concern for others. Females were more motivated to volunteer by the need to express concern for others, to gain knowledge, and for person growth.

In terms of educational level, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results indicates that there were significant differences in the mean scores of the overall Civic Attitudes and Skills Measure, where $F(5, 347) = .19$ at $p < .04$. As for the subscales, there were significant differences in the mean scores of the Competence Skills, ($F[5, 347] = .26$ at $p < .03$), Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills ($F[5, 347] = .46$ at $p < .01$), and Leadership Skills ($F[5, 347] = 1.01$ at $p < .01$). Leadership Skills appeared to be lowest for secondary level ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .59$) as compared to those who were working ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .57$). Subscales Social Justice ($F[5, 347] = .69$ at $p < .01$) and Diversity Attitude ($F[5, 347] = .61$ at $p < .05$) were found to be statistically significant by educational levels. Participants with higher educational levels seem to gain more in terms of competency, interpersonal, problem-solving and leadership skills than secondary level students. The finding seem to suggest that exposure to higher education level and maturity might help students gain more positive outcomes from the overseas community service-learning experience.

In terms of leadership roles, the results revealed that those who held leadership roles had higher mean scores than those who were team members except subscales Social Justice and Diversity Attitude which showed a slightly higher mean scores for team members ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .44$ and $M = 3.72$, $SD = .55$ respectively). Significant differences were found in the overall Civic Attitudes and Skills Measure with higher mean scores for Leader ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .28$) as compared to Non-Leader ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .29$), $t(345) = 2.01$ at $p < .05$. There were statistical differences in the means scores of Political Awareness between Leader ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .62$) and Non-Leader ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .56$), $t(345) = 2.25$ at $p < .05$.

The difference was obvious in the subscale Competence Skills for Leaders ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .32$), $t(345) = 2.54$ at $p < .01$. Leaders seemed to have higher mean scores in Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .42$), $t(345) = 2.03$ at $p < .05$. It was even more distinct in the mean scores of Leadership Skills where there was significant difference between those who held leadership roles ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .49$) and those who were team members ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .56$), $t(345) = 3.94$ at $p < .001$. The results seemed to suggest that participants who held leadership roles appeared to score significantly in leadership, competence, interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Thus, participants who held leadership roles such as team leaders, facilitators, or sub-group leaders appeared to be more competent and better problem-solvers than team members.

Conclusion

This study appeared to reconfirm that adaptive coping, positive affective personality traits, and attitudes are critical factors that contribute to positive development of youths' attitudes

and competence skills. It is likely that youth development programmes, such as the Youth Expedition Projects (YEP), may bring vitality to fostering resilience and promoting asset-building in youth. It is hoped that the results of this study offers substantial empirical insight into how youths experience resilience and positive development in overseas service-learning context.

(Note: Tables will be presented in PPT during conference)

References

- Batchelder, T.H., & Root, S. (1994). Effects of an undergraduate program to integrate academic learning and service: Cognitive, prosocial cognitive, and identity outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17(4), 341-355.
- Benard, B. (1993). *Turning the corner: From risk to resiliency*. (Compilation of Articles) WestEd, 730 Harrison St. San Francisco, CA 94107. Available online: <http://www.nwrel.org/index.html>
- Bringle, R.G., & Duffy, D.K. (1998). *With service in mind: Concepts and models for service-learning in psychology*. Washington: American Association for Higher Education.
- Constantine, N., Benard, B., & Diaz, M. (1999). *Measuring protective factors and resilience traits in youth: The healthy kids resilience assessment*. Paper presented at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Society for Preventive Research, New Orleans, LA, June, 1999. Available online: http://crahd.phi.org/papers/HKRA_99.pdf
- Eyler, J., Root, S., & Giles, D.E. (1998). Service learning and the development of expert citizens: Service learning and cognitive science. In R.G. Bringle and D.K. Duffy (Eds.), *With service in mind: Concepts and models for service-learning in psychology* (pp. 85-100). Washington: American Association for Higher Education.
- Ferrari, J.R., & Chapman, J.G. (Eds.). (1999). *Educating students to make a difference: Community-based service learning*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Glantz, M.D., & Johnson, J.L. (1999). *Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Goh, S.L. (2000). *Case study on resilience and desistance of adolescent offenders*. Unpublished Masteral Dissertation, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
- Jacoby, B. (1996). Service-learning in today's higher education. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Service-learning in higher education: Concepts and practices* (pp. 3- 25). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Jew, C.L., Green, K.E., & Kroger, J. (1999). Development and validation of a measure of resiliency. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 32(2), 75-89.
- Larson, R.W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 170-183.
- Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Masten, A.S., & Powell, J.L. (2003). A resilience framework for research, policy, and practice. In S.S. Luthar (Ed.), *Resilience and vulnerability: Adaptation in the context of childhood adversities*. (pp. 1-25). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Neill, J. (2000). *Adventure-based programs: Building healthy challenges for adolescent development*. Paper presented in the Applied Psychology symposium, "Partnership in promoting young people's health in the ACT", 13th June, 2000, University of Canberra, Australia.

- Shumer, R. (1994). Community-based learning: humanizing education. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17(2), 357-367.
- Switzer, C.L., Switzer, G.E., Stukas, A.A., & Baker, C.E. (1999). Medical student motivations to volunteer: Gender differences and comparisons to other volunteers. In J.R. Ferrari, and J.G. Chapman (Eds.), *Educating students to make a difference: Community-based service learning* (pp. 53- 64). New York: The Haworth Press.
- Weglarz, S.G. (2000). Johnson County Community College service-learning student survey. Overland Park, KS: Johnson County Community College. *Eric Document 454 902*.
- Werner, E. & Smith, R. (1982). *Vulnerable but invincible: A study of resilient children*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Werner, E., & Smith, R. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. London: Cornell University Press.