Abstract

One of the most important tasks for all adolescents is learning the skills needed to take charge of their own lives and make positive and healthy choices. In the field of Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE), an important course element, Final Expedition, has been built into program design in an attempt to facilitate personal growth and developmental outcomes in youth.

Findings from the qualitative data analysis indicated that the absence of limited assistance received from instructors during the Final Expedition heightens adolescents’ awareness of their own potential and skills, which leads to reinforcing their competency and confidence in surviving in the outdoors. In addition, heightened awareness of others’ strengths, weaknesses, and needs during the Final Expedition contributes to facilitating adolescents’ development in connecting with and caring for others.

Positive Youth Development (PYD)

Beginning in early 1990s
- New and Strength-based perspectives of youth development
- Focus on building protective factors, resources, and assets aroundadolescents

Lerner et al. (2005) in studying PYD in 4-H organizations, identified “Five Cs” of PYD.
- Confidence: having internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy
- Competence: having positive views of one’s actions in specific domains
- Connection: positive bonding with people and institutions where there are bi-directional exchanges between the individuals and their peers, family, school and community.
- Caring: possessing compassionate behaviors
- Character: having respect for societal and cultural rules

Mechanisms underlying ASE & PYD

Heightened awareness of self -> Confidence and Competence
- Yes, we can go on an expedition or I can go on this expedition by myself, "um, which is huge and it’s also very nice a recap the whole Outdoor Bound experience (Clark).
- I feel like if I didn’t have that Final Expedition, I wouldn’t have been able to openly talk to people right now like I did at school (Stephen).

Heightened awareness of others -> Caring and Connection
- I think it was because of the absence of instructors, everybody was helping each other during Finals. It wasn’t like just me, everybody was extremely aware of theirs (Clark).
- We learned just taking care of yourself. That is a great value, and taking care of others instead of just yourself. We just together, if somebody got hurt we took heavier pack and took more weight off of them and put them on ourselves. So they could make it through without having to leave (Lawrence).

Implications
- Program managers should consider including ASE in long-term OAE programs.
- Outdoor institutions should consider providing trainings for their instructors and staff who design long-term expedition courses for adolescents for the purpose of promoting positive youth developmental outcomes.
- Field instructors should pay attention to participants who play leadership roles during ASE.
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- Implications for seeking funding for OAE youth development programs.