

Abstract

An Analysis of the Growing Process of Middle School Students : Focusing on schools, families, and communities(I)

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This study was conducted to understand the life and growth that middle school students go through in post-2010 era. To specifically and comprehensively reflect dynamics and contextuality of the youth group, a 4-year long qualitative longitudinal study will be conducted. This report illustrates results of the first-year study which focused on designing qualitative termination study and identifying characteristics behind backgrounds of research participants based on their development prior to their middle school years. The participants were categorized into 4 different groups depending on the neighborhood at which their middle school is located. Students whose middle schools are in 1) urban low-income neighborhood, 2) urban middle-class neighborhood, 3) urban high-income neighborhood and 4) rural neighborhood students (Hereinafter Group A,B,C, and D respectively). Each group was designed to include at least 6 male and female students, and interviews with a total of 52 students and their parents were conducted.

Horizontally, this study encompasses various types of influential environments: home, schools, local communities as well as macroscopic social structures, while vertically

examines lives of the subjects with life course theory—a theory that focus on how the life of the individual become social through experiences he enacts. Also, this study is designed around following five questions: 1) what were the characteristics of participants as a learner during their middle school year? 2) what are the features of middle school students' learning experiences? 3) what are the characteristics of transition from middle school to high school? 4) what impacts do middle school years have in subsequent years? and 5) how and why socioeconomic and regional differences factor in growth process?

To find answers to the prior questions, this study selects an additional topic along with identifying key experience and characteristics of the growth process for each year. For the first year, this study will examine participants' growth progress prior to middle school years. Moreover, for each subsequent year, participants' growth process as 7th, 8th and 9th graders, and their relationship, identity, and career, respectively, will be studied. The fourth year will also consist of discussion of the correlation between educational policies and participants' growth to attain policy implications.

Analysis of background and growth process prior to middle school years show each group holds different perceptions regarding home, neighborhood, and learning experience. In general, participants of all groups perceived home as a comfortable place. But when educational characteristics as well as the role of parents are added for consideration, group A characterized home as a place of receiving love and care, and group B perceived it as a place to get recharged under the combination of coaching and teaching. Group C deemed home as a widow's cruse managed by a tutor and Group D considered home as a shelter.

Although all participants considered their neighborhood a place where their friends live, perspectives regarding it in conjunction with growth were drastically different group by group. For group A participants, various institutions such as public study room and the church as well as tutoring places provide educational and safe environment by serving as an educational safety net. Group B participants considered neighborhood a safety zone where neckless behaviors are seldom observed and all students were under the management of their parents. With an utmost focus on education, the neighborhood signified a go-to place for private education after spending years abroad for group C participants. The neighborhood of group D participants served as a buffering system based on the personal

relationship among the local community-inducing the sense of collaborative upbringing.

Regarding elementary school, all participants considered it as a place to meet friends and experience communal environments in general. Additionally, Group A viewed school as a place of experience and learning providing various programs. On the other hand, Group B—whose home emphasizes on communal relationship and rules—perceived school as a place to learn the society and community. Because most of their learnings are conducted outside the school in private institutions, Group C considered school as a place to rest or be evaluated. The school offers unique educational opportunities with the small-scale relationship for Group D who perceive it as educational home.

Each group's unique perception of their environments formed different characteristics in the learning process. Group A believed that they have accumulated various experiences with relatively sufficient freedom whereas Group B displayed strong desire to become successful in the future while mentioning their individual forte. Group C lived quite arduously while defining success as emulating their parents. Compared to students from the urban neighborhood, Group D recognized themselves as ordinary rural village students.

Findings outlined by fundamental analysis of this study are provisional with utmost room for change. Consequently, it is recommended to consider participants' growth process as a series of continued events and attempt to further comprehensive understanding of their life.