

Dao Thi Thuy Chi

MIDDLE ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCES IN EXPLORING IDENTITY:

A phenomenological case study in Denmark

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ABSTRACT

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While the notion of identity has been developed over the course of decades from the perspectives of sociology, psychology and education, not until 2011 that Schachter & Rich (2011) constructed a framework for Identity Education (IdEd) for educational experts and practitioners. To date, however, there has been a lack of research made into the practical aspects of this framework. The current study was conducted with the purpose of filling this gap.

An identity-exploration program was designed based on the IdEd framework and other theories offering criteria for identity-enhancing curriculum. Three participants attended this program, which include four two-hour sessions. Following the program's completion, participants were interviewed about their experiences with the program and about their more general self-exploration process. The participants' discourses gave empirical insights into how the theoretical IdEd framework operates in reality. Another purpose of this study was to experimentally investigate a new approach of meaning-making at a particular school context: the Ranum Efterskole College (REC) in Denmark. During seven-month teaching practice at this school, the author observed that despite showing many indicators of an optimal identity-enhancing environment, the school offered a lack of opportunities for reflection regarding identity development. This program was therefore designed and implemented as a beneficial contribution of the variety of other meaning-making approaches offered by the school. The study used phenomenological methodology, which helped the author enrich and deepen her understanding about how middle-adolescents who participated in the research experienced their self-exploration process.

The study's findings revealed that the experimental program positively influenced the participants in terms of enhancing their self-awareness, diversifying their perspectives through interaction with others, increasing their self-confidence, being more engaged with simplified activities, and creating connections with other participants. The findings thus revealed significant elements of an identity-enhancing program for middle-adolescents, according to the participants' perspectives. The elements were: a) the approach, b) participants, and c) atmosphere. The approach was elaborated in more detailed categories that include diversification, guidance, individualization, reflection, interaction and doable activities. Last but not least, the findings shed light on factors that participants conceived as barriers constraining their self-exploration process. These factors were identified as distractions from social activities, others' opinions and the lack of facilitation from parents and schools.

The presented findings of this study contribute empirical knowledge to identity-educational-related theories. Researchers and experts who are interested in this field could use these findings to develop further knowledge in interventions in identity-exploration. Meanwhile, educators could use them as a reference as to how they could implement better approaches in identity-exploration in school context.

Keywords: identity education, identity enhancement, middle-adolescents, identity-exploration, self-exploration, meaning-making approach, phenomenological research.

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IdEd: Identity Education

IEx: Identity Exploration

ID: Identity Development

IF: Identity Formation

MLE: Mediated Learning Experience

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, while there has been increasing research about identity in general (Miscenko & Day, 2016), and identity education in particular, identity construction “has long been neglected in school education” (Ropo, 2019, p. 140). The increasing demand for identity is attribute to the fact that nowadays people are exposed to multiple identities, which raises a question of who we really are and what make us a unique person, identified among such various individualities. This demand, therefore, brought about new roles for teachers in facilitating students’ realization of the self, because identity development (ID) is an uncompleted process that needs interventions. With the interventions of educators in students’ identity formation (IF) process, students are facilitated in reflecting and making meanings of their experiences as well as making appropriate decisions according to their wish and personalities. However, while there are practices at schools that support students’ ID, majority of schools have not provided optimal environment where students are facilitated in their self-reflection and meaning making process.

With the aim of filling in this gap, this research is aimed at examining if a program for identity exploration would bring middle-adolescents benefits in their self-construction process. An additional purpose of this research is to understand the adolescents’ perspectives on elements contributing to an optimal identity-enhancing programs, as well as what barriers have been preventing them from developing their identity. Even though the research was conducted at Ranum Efterskole College (REC), where there had already been identity-enhancing oriented with various identity-development practices, this research was aimed at introducing an identity-exploration program, which was a new approach. Given the fact that students at REC have been experiencing an optimal identity educational environment, it was assumed that they would be able to come up with critical thoughts regarding identity education based on their on-going study

at REC and this specific program. This also means they could give critical inputs on what would make the program better.

The study focuses on, first of all, building a program aiming at self-exploration, based on the framework for identity education (IdEd), criteria for an identity enhancement curricular, Mediated Learning Experience (MLE), and narrative identity. Secondly, the study interpreted the perception of adolescent participants regarding their ID process after attending this program. Thirdly, in terms of context, while REC is an efterskole (a gap year school) where there was already a vision for ID, shown from many school practices, the author aimed at giving a new approach which is developing identity intentionally by various ways of self-reflection.

With the aforementioned aim and focus, this research will answer the following questions:

1. According to middle adolescents' perspective, what are the benefits did they gain from the experimental self-exploration program?
2. What elements do middle adolescents think would contribute to a useful program/ course for identity development?
3. According to middle adolescents' perspective, to what are the barriers preventing them from exploring their identity?

The research was conducted in Ranum Efterskole College (REC), where the author spent nine months of her internship, being a cultural teaching practitioner. REC is an ideal choice for this research to be taken place for many reasons. First, it is the largest Danish efterskole, which follows the free school tradition, focusing on developing individuals' understanding about their inner world as well as global outlook so as to be best prepared for their future. Second, since this is a kind of gap year high school, the students taking part in this research are supposed to be having struggles with their decision for the next academic choice and have chosen this place to figure out what they want to do next. They also have already spent one semester at the school, meaning they have both concerns about identity, and experience of what have supported them in their IEx process. They, therefore would give quality reflection for this program.

In the follow-up part, theoretical background is going to be brought up and discussed in details.

2 LITERATURFE REVIEW

While the modern world offers individuals variety of experiences regarding studies, entertainment, career or relationships, etc., it challenges people in dealing with confusions. “What should I choose? What distinguish me from others while we are given the same possibilities? What do my choices tell about the person I am?” These are the confusions of “identity”, which is commonly understood as everything contributing to who a person is and who (s)he wants to become.

Regardless of my simplified explanation, the term “identity” holds multi-dimensional meanings that it would be deficient to be only explained from one perspective. Identity is defined by researchers from their perspective of their fields of studies: socio-psychology (Erik H. Erikson, James E. Marcia), anthropology, philosophy (Paul Ricoeur, James Taylor), education (Hanoch Flum, Avi Kaplan, Yisrael Rich, Elli P. Schachter), spirituality (Thich Nhat Hanh, Dalai Lama) etc. Each of the given insights has contributed to the fulness and thoroughness of the definition of identity, as Flum and Kaplan (2012) wrote, despite of the “ambiguity”, the richness and the depth make the concept “invaluable” (p. 241). Besides, the term is multi-dimensional because each author usually constructs the knowledge of their previous studies (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968; Flum & Kaplan, 2006, 2010, 2012). Identity is even more complicated when the concept is fragmented into its different aspects such as religion, gender, or professional identities.

Within the scope of this study, the author will make sense of “Identity”, which explains how this term was first known, became popular along the history and how it is understood; and the educational perspective, which is the framework for this research. Finally, there will be more detailed description of IEx among adolescents.

2.1 *The conception of identity and identity exploration*

2.1.1 Understanding identity

The idea of identity gradually became popular along the history, with different causes and indicators in each stage of time. The first awareness of “identity” arose during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in Europe, when people were becoming less dependent and dominated by traditional contexts (Côté and Levine, 2002; Kroger, 2007; as cited in Kaplan & Flum, 2012). The movement of individualism became more popular, in that people were given more freedom in making choices, yet were confused as being self-reliant had not been what they had got used to as well as not being prepared for. Later in 1960s and 1970s, the issues of identity became more specific. If in Europe, people were struggling in making decisions in the growing complexity of technological development (Erikson, 1968), immigrants in the U.S. were more concerned about defining their identity due to the social and cultural differences between their home country and the new land they had moved to (Erikson, 1975). Finally, in our contemporary society where there have been rapid changes in every fields and the diversity in developed countries, new identities have been created, meaning more confusions to individuals, including having to manage to be recognized by others (Gee, 2000, as cited in Flum & Kaplan, 2012).

Erikson was the first researcher focusing on the popular and the scientific meanings of identity. He initially noticed his mentor, Sigmund Freud, using the term “identity” for Jewish people and then he created “ego identity” (Erikson, 1956). His studies on identity contributed to the foundation insights of identity in the field of social science from the late 50s up to now (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

In one of his first writings, Erikson (1968) stated that in understanding identity, it is necessary to initially learn about human development since it is the root, from and to where identity develops. From this knowledge, it is crucial to emphasize that, even though common approaches to identity have been from social and psychological aspects, it “could be conceptualized only as a kind of psychosocial relativity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 22). With this being said, identity deprived from the understanding of human development, from where the

researchers of different fields would develop their directions to different aspects and frameworks of identity, such as psychology or education.

Erikson's (1968) concept of identity emphasizes the following features. He defined identity as a process of "sameness and continuity" (p. 23) and of "simultaneous reflection and observation... the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves..." (p. 22). This process "is always changing and developing" (Erikson, 1968, p. 50). There are two points which need to be discussed here. First of all, why did Erikson integrate such contradict phrases ("sameness and continuity" and "always changing and developing") in one process of identity? In fact, the "sameness and continuity" implies the individual with his core values and personalities, which guide him in the "always changing and developing" society and outer factors. The changes and development here also mean the ones within the individual, or we call it personal growth. In relation to this point, Erikson (1968) considered IF as a lifelong process, where "(w)e deal with a process "located" in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of these two identities" (p. 22).

This leads us to the second point, which is the Erikson's emphasis on the "interrelatedness" of the personal and the social (Côté & Levine, 1988, 2002; as cited in Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Personal growth and communal change are not separable when discussing identity (Erikson, 1968). According to his view, the "self" is understood in the connection with other aspects of the world, the time span (past, present and future), and relationships. This is also the key features guiding educators in facilitating adolescents' IEx process, which will be discussed in the later sections.

Another vital feature of identity according to Erikson is the conscious and the unconsciousness. As given above, identity formation is the process of reflecting and observing simultaneously, meaning the individual is proactive and owns the process. However, in reality, Erikson (1968) stated that, identity formation underwent mostly unconsciously. This means, there seems to be a lack of consciousness or awareness in developing identity, especially among adolescents who start to have intriguing concerns related to identity, yet tend to not reflect further with those inquiries. This in the reason why interventions are

needed, so that adolescents could receive facilitation in their ID process. The following part is presenting an understanding of identity from educational perspective, which also explaining how educators could intervene effectively in an individual's IF process.

2.1.2 Identity from the educational perspective (Identity Education)

An educational framework has a crucial part to play for studies related to ID in general and for this research in particular. Researchers are the first group beneficial from this theory, which serves as a “common scholarly foundation that can serve as the basis for coherent and productive study and debate” (p. 5). Even though identity has been a concerned topic among educational researchers and Erikson's theory of identity formation “has become a staple in teacher education curricular” (p. 4), not until 2011 that there was a framework tailored for education. This theory also provides educators orientations for making decisions in identity-enhancing involvement. (Schachter & Rich, 2011.).

Identity, from the educational perspective, is defined by Schachter and Rich (2011) that:

“the individual's dynamic self-understandings and self definitions used to structure, direct, give meaning to and present the self, that are negotiated intra- and interpersonally across the lifespan within sociocultural contexts, along with the psychosocial processes, meaning-systems, practices and structures that regulate their continued development.” (p. 6)

Accordingly, Schachter and Rich (2011) describe IdEd as: “the deliberate active involvement of educators with the psychosocial processes and practices that are involved in students' identity development.” (p. 7)

According to this definition, identity educational framework changes the mindset of teachers and students involving in the learning process. Students are viewed as “definitional and self-definitional agencies” (p. 7), who go beyond the action of gaining knowledge, attitude and skills, by reflecting on how these are understood and used. They should also be able to relate their current and past knowledge acquisition, the world view and their personal view adaption. Last but not least, this framework suggests teachers and students having a mindset of

learning with certain purposes serving the needs and directions of individuals rather than serving the society. (Schachter and Rich, 2011). In short, identity education broadens educators' vision in facilitating learning processes, that is giving students opportunities and supports to develop themselves as a wholeness, not only cognitive development. The learning process, therefore, has intentions and meanings.

From the above-mentioned explanation, it is shown that the definition by the educational perspective is based on the main ideas of Erikson's definition of identity. What makes identity education framework distinctive from the ones with other perspectives is perhaps intentionality. Considering the "Significant building blocks of identity" (Archer, 1994, p. 13), one's identities include "inborn talents" and "discovered and constructed" identities (p. 13). The latter is felt experiences and viewed by others. According to this classification, excepting for the "inborn talents", the other identities are the changeable variables. This is where educators can participate in facilitating their students' identity development process, for them to make meaning of their experience, negotiate or construct different aspects of their identities. The idea of creating opportunities for identity exploration and facilitating in meaning making is intentionality. In other words, this is how educators are actively involved in and smoothing the students' process of ID.

Intentionality is actualized by interventions. There are reasons for the fact that interventions are vital in making ID to happen. In educational context, variety of actions needed to facilitate students' growth are called interventions. They are necessary because, according to Archer (1994), different groups need different ways of interventions, such as genders, ethnicities, personal stages, etc. The adjustment of interventions at the right time and focus will optimize the individual's ID.

However, an intriguing question is how to intervene in the process of ID. With an intention of developing students' identity, it is crucial to have some guidance regarding how to do it. Schachter and Rich (2011) gave a description of "Parameters for identity" (p. 14) with the pedagogical approach, which could be used for curriculum design or lesson planning, with the purpose of enhancing

identity development. Parameters for identity, proposed by Schachter and Rich (2011), are explained below.

Educational goal(s) must be the first to be considered. The authors presented three educational goals suggested by Lamm (1976). If the goal is socialization, the plan is designed to adjust the individual identities with what are desired by the society or community. This goal is usually seen to be chosen among religious schools, where many school activities are involved in religious practices and beliefs. Another example is that in developing countries, there have been more needs in the area of natural science, leading to more investment in the subjects of this field rather than ones of social science. This goal, obviously, comes from the demand of the society. Instead of educating students the needs of society, the second goal, enculturation, inspires students with their communities' excellence, virtue or ideology. Although the second goal seems less imposing, both goals would limit students' identity development in that students are only provided with what their society needs or values. They both come from outside rather than what is desired and valued by the student. Thirdly, the goal of individuation presents the shortcoming of the other two. The idea of this is self-exploration and personal growth, meaning educators would follow individuals' lead in discovering and constructing their own identity, rather than offering pre-decided identities.

Second, the levels of identity include social identity (sense of belonging), personal identity (sense of uniqueness), and ego identity (sense of sameness and continuity).

Third, facets of identity give more detailed explanation in terms of content, structure, processes and context for constructing a curriculum or lesson for identity. The content should be in accordance with the chosen educational goal. In structure of identity, the following features should be taken into consideration: "stability, flexibility, degree of complexity" (p. 27). For instance, it is important for the individual to understand about fragmentary and consistent identity. Preferred identities could be temporary, but could also be encouraged to be explored further and maintained to be a permanent identity. This is a change in the structure of identity. The last facet is the "process of acquisition, maintenance and transformation" (p. 27), which suggests two traditions: Eriksonian developmental

process representing identification, exploration and commitment; and SI (Symbolic-interactionist) indicating actions of positioning, negotiation and resistance. If the former is understood as human developmental stages, happening along one's life span, the latter seems to comprise stages of self-reflection when one faces with an event or situation that makes them think of their identity. Given these processes, educators might flexibly take into their consideration both of them, not necessarily to only one process.

Finally, curriculum for identity is designed based on context. Individuals' ID should be put in their macro context, being global, cultural, economic, or religious one, etc.; intermediate context includes the conditions of family, school or community; and micro context is teaching conditions.

In summary, on the one hand, the given framework for IdEd sheds light on an educational approach to identity, which has been researched mostly in social-psychological field of study. The framework brings about different aspects that are crucial to be considered when researching, lesson and curriculum designing, or implementing identity in education. In this study, the author uses this framework as the main material for planning a program for identity exploration and as criteria for assessing the research result. On the other hand, this framework is not the only tool when conducting an educational research since there has not been many researches utilized so as to measure its practical application. Therefore, some other insights, which will be displayed below, will also be used as guidance for this research.

2.1.3 Identity exploration among middle adolescents

Identity exploration is "the work of identity" (Grotevant, 1987). This idea was also highlighted by other researchers of this field, such as Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966, 2002), Luyck et. al. (2008). Firstly, given the definition of identity, which is formed and developed by being exposed to different aspects of the world, it is indispensable for adolescents to undergo diverse experiences to be able to develop their identity. The more opportunities that adolescents are given to take up a new hobby, travel to a different place, or start a connection with somebody, etc.; the more they learn about what suits their needs and preferences. Secondly,

as mentioned in the previous session, the “Significant building blocks of identity” (Archer, 1994, p. 13) give an idea that in the process of exploring, “discovered and constructed” identities are the potential for one to optimize their ID. With these being explained, not only adolescents should seek for new experiences, but also schools play an important role in providing them with a variety of chances for self-exploration.

However, in the process of self-exploration, experiencing comes along with self-reflection, without which one only does things that have no meaning to them, resulting in not helping them learn about who they are. Reflection means that while doing, one answers questions about their identity and realizes how their experiences contribute to the understanding of themselves. For example, one 17-year-old student has been doubting about whether she should be an artist because her hobby is drawing. She decides to join a drawing course and soon realizes that she does not like drawing enough to be patient learning in-depth about techniques and materials. It could be seen from this example that the experience may not tell the girl what she should pursue as a future job, but crystalize the understanding of who she is not, which is also a part of her identity exploration. This way of evaluating individuals’ commitments was emphasized by Luyck et. al. (2008) and he called it “exploration in-depth”.

While both teenagers and adults never cease exploring their identity, middle adolescents ranging from 14 to 17 years old are the focus of this research. Even though Erikson (1902-1994) never clarified the age range of adolescents in his writing, his descriptions of vocational choices and clues from his time being suggested by Kroger (2017) that Erikson’s perception of adolescent was 18 years old. However, it should be emphasized that, with the speed of development nowadays, we assume that children younger than 18 years old have already turned to face their crisis of “role versus confusions”. Therefore, Erikson’s theory of adolescent’s identity can serve as a theoretical background for this research, which aims at middle adolescents, who are in their transition to “non-college-bound” (Kroger, 2006, p.73).

Middle adolescents’ characteristics in identity development are shown in different aspects. If people tend to struggle with biological transformation during their early adolescence, in this later stage, they usually can make peace with

these changes and deal more with complex thinking. This is, according to Erikson (1968), the beginning of IF, whereby the major crisis is “role and confusion”. People at this stage might be concerned about justice, values, opposite gender or the expectation of fitting in their community, etc., among which, vocational identity is one of the main concerns that they explore. Now that the fantasy of their dream jobs is evolved to tentative and realistic intentions, meaning a career choice is made because the job suits the individual’s ability and values rather than only an interest. However, to be able to understand desired ability and values, one needs more advanced skills. “Identity formation (in this stage) requires flexible, abstract thinking skills and reality testing that only full formal operation can bring” (p. 65-66). This refers to the process of ID at this point requiring greater level of cognitive complexity such as reasoning, logical thinking, critical thinking, etc. (Kroger, 2006).

Given the essence of middle adolescence’s identity developmental status being exploring how their interests suit their ability, enabling them to find commitments, IEx is chosen as the main focus of this research. Following Erikson’s conception of adolescence’s ego identity, Marcia (1966) and Marcia et. al. (1993) created a model assisting in identifying the status of IF, particularly the exploration and commitment aspect. The model includes Diffusion (no commitment, with or without exploration), Foreclosure (commitment without exploration), Moratorium (in the progress of exploration, vague commitment), and Identity Achievement (commitment following exploration). Waterman (1999) predicted that middle adolescence may have the tendency of decreasing Diffusion and Foreclosure, while increasing the remaining statuses. This was examined and confirmed in a meta-analysis study investigating how identity status changes during this stage of life, by Kroger et. al. (2010). These authors also found out that Identity Achievement is not reached by a big number of investigated individuals by their young adulthood. These findings convinced the author to orient this research to focus on exploration aspect of identity.

2.2 *Aspects of interventions optimizing identity exploration in school context*

In this section, the author is discussing theories and methods facilitating middle adolescence in optimizing their IEx at school. This is, at the same time, the background and orientation for designing the program which is used to investigate how middle adolescents at Ranum Efterskole experience their IEx process.

To start with, even though researches on identity with the educational perspective is rare (Kaplan and Flum, 2010, Schachter and Rich, 2011), many authors share the same idea that there is an indispensable connection in ID: internal and social world (Erikson, 1968, Côté and Levine, 1988, Archer, 1994, Flum and Kaplan, 2012). The social world in general and schools in particular are environments where educators can be involved in IF process. This facilitation should not be underestimated because it was pointed out that young people tend to be less initiative in constructing their identity (Côté and Levine, 2002, as cited in Flum & Kaplan, 2012).

2.2.1 Criteria for enhancing identity exploration in school context

Interventions can be conducted in school regulations, activities, curriculum, etc., which are guided with the following criteria. It should be noted that these are taken from different researches and collated by the author, based on the validity of the researches and the author's experience as an educator for 10 years.

The sense of safety

The sense of safety, suggested by Flum and Kaplan (2012), does not only refer to physicality but also mentality in school environment. Indicators of a safe environment are surrounding students with clean and harmless habitat. When implementing IF, it is important to make sure that facilitators and friends are people each individual can trust and feel secured in expressing their thoughts and feelings. This seems to be simple but very complicated and requires the facilitator's sensibility in noticing if the individual is feeling unsafe because they

do not usually express it obviously. Safety is the initial step to help an individual open to what they are about to experience.

Exploration process

The second criterion is triggering exploration (Flum and Kaplan, 2012, Kroger et. al. 2010). On the one hand, Kroger et. al. (2010), with the situational approach to identity, elaborate this criterion that middle adolescents should be given “accommodative challenge and environmental supports”, meaning being given opportunities intriguing enough for them to challenge themselves. At the same time, the sense of safety and available facilitation are always guaranteed for their best experiences. On the other hand, exploration process would not produce any result in forming identity without the self-determination element, given by Archer (1994). While exploring possibilities could be overwhelming, middle adolescence could be guided to control the process by reflecting on the experience logically so as to make their own decision. By doing this, one gains knowledge from being given possibilities, critical thinking skills from analyzing the situation and self-determination by negotiating, making decision or commitment (Archer, 1994). Many schools lack of the self-determination factor, which enhances ID (Archer, 1994). Interestingly, decisions are varied from person to person and educators need to understand and allow this to happen as this is the essence of identity.

Social interaction

Even though IEx is an individualized process, integrating interactions is considered to be more beneficial in that identity includes how one sees themselves and how others see them. Interactions can be individuals telling their stories, facilitators sharing their perspectives or friends having conversations with each other about aspects of identity. While telling stories plays as oral reflection which helps individuals express and deepen their thoughts, listening to others' stories gives them input about others' identities, from which they could understand how others' identity as well as relate to their case. Archer (1994) proposed role-playing as a method for enhancing social interactions. She

believes that the youth's identity is defined after role-playing, in particularly in occupational context, which is the middle adolescence's major concern. She gives an idea that even the compulsory subjects at school could be example of occupational role-playing, in that it is the chance for students to experience, imagine themselves in the view of someone who is going to work in that field and continuously reflects on whether it could be their future choice. To take mathematic course as an example, the facilitator could guide students to the idea of experiencing the work of a mathematician rather than purely solving mathematic problems. In short, interactions contribute to IEx through sharing and seeing what they are experiencing with more thorough understanding.

Understanding of time

A person's identity is understood from his (her) connection with the past, present and future (Archer, 1994, Erikson, 1968). It is explained by Archer (1994) that by relating the present self to the past self, one could relate to their "cultural past" (p. 133), such as origin and family history, etc., and their personal experiences. This reflection gives individuals ideas on what made them who they are at the present, and how they would continue to construct their identity in the future. For instance, in cultural studies classes, identity is developed by participants sharing about their cultures, either from different countries or regions. Another example is that when reflecting on a turning point, students may be guided to think about how it happened and had a contribution to their current identity.

Flexibility

The last but not least is flexibility. While this has not been mentioned particularly as a criterion in any research, the author realized it is not less important than the other criteria after conducting the experimental program for IEx. When it comes to IdEd, facilitators should "understand each student as a whole person with a complex life and dreams that extend far beyond the classrooms" (Archer, 1994, p. 132). This means one should not be judged and assessed by only his (her) certain subjects, skills or attitude. Rather than that, school plays a partial role in

one's life long development and what individuals show at school is only part of themselves. Furthermore, flexibility is also indicated in planning and executing identity curricula. Even though happening in school context, identity education is not as concrete as common knowledge. In other words, it is individualized in the sense that each person may have different mood and perception. They experienced the past differently and share distinctive plans for the future. All these elements should be taken into account when conducting interventions in IEx.

Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)

This chapter has demonstrated identity-enhancing principles guiding the author in designing a program for adolescence to explore their identity. It is now necessary to explain a method of facilitation, which is Mediated Learning Experience (MLE).

While this method was developed by Dr. Reuven Feuerstein (1921-2014), there had been some theories inspiring his work and called by a more general term - mediated interactions. This term was originally brought into attention by Hegel and Marx, prolific philosophers, describing that working is an activity that bridges human and the environment. As cited in Kozulin & Presseisen (1995), in the field of sociology, Mead (1974) emphasized on social interactions being a critical kind of mediated activity. In his perspective, "stimuli", which carry meanings, is involved for triggering human cognition development. While both above-mentioned philosophers and sociologists had mentioned the mediated agents being material tools and psychological tools, not until Vygotsky had another individual been addressed as an important factor mediating meanings and developing mediated activity a higher mental process.

Recognizing the valuable application in education of this theory, Feuerstein developed MLE. This is defined as the quality that indicates important role of mediator, whose initiation and intention are organizing activities supporting how a child get meanings from the environmental stimuli (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). Among twelve criteria in achieving MLE, there are three major principles. The first criterion is intentionality or reciprocity, which suggests the experienced

individual to organize mediated activities with a purpose that eventually benefits the learner's thinking. In any case, the outcome which is aimed at is not only what is understood, but rather what is perceived and constructed by learners. With this awareness in mind, the mediator would design a systemized process and comes up with appropriate learning methods for students. Second, transcendence is equally important since it guides students to exceed the scope of classroom, in the way that students would relate the lesson's application in other contexts. If this criterion is integrated, students would gain their confidence in solving their future problems. The third principle is meaning, understood as how the mediator explicit, enabling the learner to get meaning from specific content in a particular context. If this is ignored, the learner may experience with purely achieving knowledge and skills without having the sense of meaningful experience, which therefore leads to reduction in having self-motivation. Learning, eventually is a part of personal growth, so it should give learners opportunities to relate to how each learning experience means to them.

Even though Vygotsky and Feuerstein never mentioned their research implications in identity in particular, their theories are relevant to this research in that it indicates how human grow and understand the world and themselves through interactions. "One may say that only through the other that we become ourselves, this rule applies to each psychological function as well as to the personality as a whole." (Vygotsky, 1983, p.144). In addition, on the journey of exploring the self, one undergoes struggles and questions of their identity, which should be answered on their own. Therefore, MLE is an appropriate in optimizing the individual's ability to not only solve their problems but also to anticipate and have better control of similar problems coming. IEx, as well as learning, is a distinguished activity because of "its focus on the changes produced in the learner" (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). Finally, mediators can be teachers but also experienced and competent individuals who accompany and support students in need, so this method is useful also in the fields other than cognitive development. IF is one of them.

The role of mediators is very crucial in executing MLE. In the process of exploring identity, teachers are suggested to make effort on relating to individuals' experience rather than only transferring knowledge (Rich & Schachter, 2012).

They also need to accept uncertainty in the sense that what is taught is always possible to be perceived differently by students, which should be respected instead of being restricted within certain viewpoints (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Teachers need to be sensible so that students are not given too much freedom or control (Erikson, 1968). There are some more roles of teachers, so called mediators, in adolescence's self-exploration process that were discussed in the previous section about methods of implementing identity.

It can be seen that all above-mentioned characteristics of an identity-enhancing environment involve uncertain guidance such as: flexible, uncertain, adjust, sensible, etc. This seems to mislead readers because while it should be a guidance for them, it actually confuses people by not actually giving certain standard. However, returning to what was discussed about identity in general, it is necessary to allow identity to be experienced and developed in various aspects, with different individuals. Identity education should not be put in a boundary where individual identity is pre-understood and decided. In fact, in IdEd, not trying to make an impact is how an impact happens.

2.2.2 Narration contributing to identity positionality, negotiation and construction

While the preceding sections present principles and methods in facilitating IEx, narration is being discussed in this part as a means of developing identity. Recalling past memories, people may find themselves familiar with their parents' question after returning home from school: "How was your day?". They may have told their parents about what significantly happened and how that made them feel. This is actually regarded as a simple form of narrative identity, when one recalls some memory and puts it into words. In other words, parents, by asking guiding questions, have intentionally or unintentionally led children to recall memories and construct self-reflection about themselves (Fivush, Hayden and Reese, 2006; Harley and Reese, 1999; Nelson and Fivush, 2004; Reese and Fivush, 1993; as cited in Singer et. al., 2013).

Some may argue that we may gradually gain our understanding of identity without our experiences being narrated. In fact, narration brings more advantages

than it may seem. Psychologically speaking, “the shaping of experience into a storied form might be a central way of understanding human psychology” (Singer et. al., 2013, p. 1). In relation to identity formation, Singer (2004) emphasized that retelling lived experiences is the fundamental activity of IF. By doing this, one can relate the self with an event, from which certain personalities are elaborated, explained and realized to be characteristic or uncharacteristic of the person. Singer et. al. (2013) called this the “self-event” connection of stability, in the sense that a personal trait is maintained, reinforced or denied by the individual. These authors also proposed another type of connection which is connection of change, in which self-reflection leads to new insight of the self. Other than this, some studies have proven that one of effective ways of narration is narrative script, has a positive impact on how individuals reconstruct reflected identity and interpret new characteristics (Siegel and Demorest, 2010; Demorest et. al., 2012; as cited in Singer et. al., 2013). Without narration, one is not only struggling with understanding themselves thoroughly at the present but also this lack of clarification may cause confusion for future identity construction.

While narrative identity process has been used as a treatment for variety of psychological problems (Singer et. al., 2013), it has vital role in developing identity in educational context. As proposed by Ropo (2019), a useful approach for facilitating students’ identity construction is telling personal stories (narratives). Each personal story is temporal in the sense that it happened at a specific context and time, in relation with specific person or people. However, by telling and reflecting such temporal stories, we create meanings that affect our identity, which could be permanent. When these narrated memories become more crucial that they form important traits of one’s identity, they become life-story narratives (Singer et. al., 2013). The process of narrative identity consists of two basic activities: memory specificity and meaning-making. Although Singer and his colleagues (2013) differentiated more terms other than these two, such as autobiographical memories, self-defining memories or life story, etc., the author believes that these are the essential steps for adolescence, the target of this research, to experience. It is because of the fact that the main purpose of the program for IEx which only lasts for four sessions, the author would initially focus

on these two activities, while the other insights could be more useful in the following stages if there are any.

To explain this process, first of all, memory specificity is giving detailed information of a past event in relation with the individual's actions, thoughts and feelings. On the one hand, people who undergone negative experiences are prone to avoid telling about them. This in fact has a serious influence on for gradually they may face with depression and vulnerability (Anderson et. al., 2010, as cited in Singer et. al., 2013). On the other hand, if this activity is conducted as a habit in early stage of life, individuals are not only more efficient in IF process, but also can avoid the risk of suffering the above-mentioned mental problems. The second step is meaning-making. If the previous action is merely generating facts, this step requires more facilitation from the mediator and higher cognitive level of the individual. Sometimes with a same story reflected in different times, we create different meanings. We are still ourselves but based on certain experiences, we gradually discover new features and decide what to keep and develop as our own identity. This is called identity negotiation. Singer and his colleagues (2013) suggested three characteristics of this activity, being "coherent, flexible and accurate". This means the event should not be understood separately, but rather in connection with the whole conceptual self, with the previous understanding of the individuals themselves. Besides, the elaboration of meanings should be flexible when some new insight appears and balanced between "self-critical and grandiose" (Singer et. al., 2013). "A flexible combination of these two narrative processes is a key to psychological health and well-being" (Singer & Conway, 2011, as cited in Singer et. al., 2013).

2.2.3 Danish efterskole – an optimal educational context for adolescence's identity exploration

In the previous part, principles, methods and means for facilitating IEx were discussed. While they play a crucial role in the implementation of IEx, it is essential to understand IdEd with a broader scope, which is in the school where this process is taken place. What follows is an account of how Danish efterskole represents an optimal educational environment for IEx.

To begin with, while researches investigating IdEd are rare (Kaplan & Flum, 2009; Schachter & Rich, 2011), there have been some authors dedicating to the realm of IF in educational settings, particularly among adolescence (Rich & Schachter, 2012; Flum & Kaplan, 2006; Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2013). All of these researches prove that there is a positive influence of identity-enhancing schools towards adolescence's ID and suggest elements promoting IEx as an educational goal. The first authors initiating these are Flum & Kaplan (2006), pointing out four features, including: autonomy facilitation, educational content related to individuals' experiences, interaction enhancement, and supports for individuals' the sense of belonging and security. Interestingly, these standards are reflected fully in the Danish free school tradition, particularly the efterskole system.

The Danish free school tradition

Free school tradition is a unique tradition in Denmark, where identity is prioritized and enhanced to the fullest. This tradition has been maintained for the course of 150 years and was rooted by the idea of N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783 – 1872). He was a priest, politician, historian and poet, who has a great impact on how Danish people define their values. In the realm of education, his belief of school being a part of life-long education and a place where youngsters figure out about themselves as well as gain their understand of the world by building connections with others, shed light of the development of the Danish free schools (Korsgaard & Wiborg, 2006; The Danish free school tradition, 2017). The major methods used in free schools are story-telling and developing individuals according to their interests, abilities and values (Korsgaard & Wiborg, 2006). The First Free School Act (1855), as cited in Korsgaard & Wiborg (2006), includes two progressive notions. First, it is obliged for parents to be responsible for their children's education, which is different from the obligation of going to school. This means it is not necessary for children to go to school, but parents can decide which education, regardless of public, state or home school is the best for their children. Second, either impactful groups or minorities can open their own private schools, offering their values and culture. For instant, there are Muslim and German

schools in Denmark. Especially, political-wise, the right and the left wings, state and private schools work and support each other to develop free schools. These features show that freedom is not only indicated in how children are educated, but also other sectors such as parents and governors are involved in this process.

While there is no doubt about Grundtvig's impact on Danes' outlook and practice in education, there have been debates on the extent to which the influence is. On the one hand, in terms of ideas and methods, Grundtvig's were not completely new back in his time (the 19th century), since there had been theories of identity, narration and social-personal interactions, etc. However, the value that Grundtvig contributes is to combine these ideologies together and made them happen in education, which is still not implemented efficiently nowadays in most schools around the world. On the other hand, it was not Grundtvig alone making all the effort for free schools. His followers, so called Grundtvigians, kept promoting and reinforcing the idea, so that it resulted in the First Free School Act in 1855, and later on the establishment of different kinds of free schools (Korsgaard & Wiborg, 2006). Furthermore, as mentioned above, free school tradition has been the work of governors, teachers and parents who continuously develop it over the history of 150 years. In short, the influence of Grundtvig on the Free school tradition is in the sense that while his ideology seemed to be macro and romantic, it was a source of inspiration urging Danish people to make changes in education. One of those successful changes is the Danish efterskole.

The Danish efterskole

Let us now turn to how efterskole, a specific case of free school and the context where this study is conducted, represents indicators of the tentative development of identity. If Grundtvig was the founder of Folkehøjskole (folk high school), a free school model for youngsters from 18 years old, Kristen Kold (1816-1870), Grundtvig's follower, established the first efterskole for adolescence from 14 to 18 years old (Fedorenko, 2019). While there are three types of efterskole: general, special needs and specialized efterskole which focuses on one specific area for those having particular interests, such as sports, music, arts, etc.

(Fedorenko, 2019), only general efterskole is discussed in this thesis, where I did this research.

Developing from Grundtvig's ideas and Honneth's theory of personal development through interactions ((Fedorenko, 2019), Kold created efterskole a unique place for enlightening lives for adolescents. It is life enlightenment because this place, particularly general efterskole, offers youngsters with distinguished experiences and outlook, which most students have never experienced in regular schools before. The first thing is daily routines at efterskole. Beside spending some hours for academics, the remaining time of a day is for profile subjects, which could be sailing, music, martial arts, etc. Every evening and at weekends, there are various options of activities, created by teachers. For example, it could be dancing, mini singing show, volleyball match, movie night, or cooking session, etc. As mentioned in the previous sessions, one of criteria for identity exploration is giving adolescence chances to experience and decision making, so a general efterskole makes an outstanding model for this. Second, students are enlightened regarding the sense of responsibility. In the modern world, when parents are prone to be lenient towards their children in the way that children do not need to do a lot of house chores, in efterskole they come to a realization that their personal chore management as well as shared chores and projects with their friends are their responsibility and also meaningful contributions. Third, the teacher and student interaction at efterskole is unique. Unlike other public schools, teachers here are not necessarily required certain pedagogical degree to be a teacher. They are athletes, chefs, football players, etc., who are very good at their profession. Therefore, their approach tends to be more practical, just like sharing experience. There are always some teachers staying at the school until late night, so they are there to also share with students about other problems not related to study. They are a great source of real stories where students can discuss and understand more about how they might go through if they pursue the similar way as a teacher. Finally, the most distinguished enlightening feature at general efterskole in general and at Ranum Efterskole in particular is the exposure to culture exchange. When some teachers and students at REC were asked about the most outstanding point which attracts students the most, they said it was because of the international idea, meaning they can build connections

with friends with various nationalities and take part in three travels to three different countries within one academic year. This is no doubt an ideal condition for identity exploration for adolescents can observe and exchange dissimilar cultures and points of view.

As can be seen from the case of Danish efterskole, the implementation of IdEd involves various factors and huge effort. On the academic side, curriculum should be designed in the ID orientation. In execution, from my conversations with the teachers in REC, teachers, regardless of teaching any subject, seemed to be familiar with the notion of integrating identity education into lessons and school activities. Their role is also being mediators when adolescence have other problems not related to academics. Furthermore, school budget is very important to provide students with various options for experiences, such as extra-curricular subjects promoting personal interests, travels broadening friendships and cultural exchanges, or simply healthy diets for healthy condition, etc. In short, to have an ideal identity-enhancing educational system like in Denmark, it is not only contributed by some certain elements, but also from a number of elements, implemented by collaboration of teachers, parents and government, in a course of 150 years. Identity education needs lots of resources, effort and patience.

On the other hand, despite the undeniable efficiency of efterskole in promoting identity development, such an optimal environment can still be further optimized. In fact, since adolescents at efterskole are overwhelmed with a wide range of activities from early morning till the evening, they seem to lack their time for self-reflection, which is, according to Cole & Cole (1989) and Erikson (1968) (as cited in Flum & Kaplan, 2012), an essential action for developing adolescents' identity and cognitive capacity. Self-reflection could be done in various ways. During the lessons, it lies in self-related questions. In other cases, it could be an activity where students can work on a project of planning their career orientation and make a presentation about it. There could also be a photograph competition with a certain topic, from which individuals find the best way to express their view of the world. While these examples are conducted in REC in various creative ways, it seems that a consistent concern of reflection has not been promoted. This is the reason why the author proposed a program called "identity exploration", which offered students chances to address their specific interests in

identity and discuss together with other participants to gain different perspectives. Details of this program will be described in methodology section.

Overall, the literature review has given the theoretical background of this research through three main points: the definition of identity, particularly IEx among middle adolescents; and aspects of intervention that optimize IEx in school context with the elaboration of Ranum Efterskole College as an example for an optimal identity-enhancing environment. Although there have been numerous ways of explaining the term “identity” and “identity exploration”, the author conducted this research with the point of view of an educator, whose role is to give appropriate interventions so that middle adolescents could reach their self-understanding as who they are and who they want to become. The major theory underlying this thesis is the framework for IdEd (Schachter & Rich, 2011). This theory has a crucial role in, not only presenting my perspective in doing this paper, but also being the guidance for me to design an IEx experimental program, which was then used to understand how middle adolescents have experienced their IEx process. As being shown in the literature review, there have been various researches about IEx among middle adolescents. However, there seems to be a lack of empirical research which would examine and crystalize the real experience of middle adolescents when experiencing what the given theories presented as effective approaches in identity enhancement. This study was conducted to fill in that gap, with the hope of contributing an understanding of interventions in IEx through lived experiences. The following part is continued with explaining methodology of the research, as well as how the program for IEx was designed.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This study has focused on presenting the research problems and theoretical background of the research. The following section will discuss: (a) how the research was conducted and why it was done that way; (b) details of how the identity-exploration program integrated identity-enhancement methods; and (c) how the data was collected and analyzed.

In fact, even though some research methods being used have been described in the literature review, the general method of this research is going to be presented in this part. The reason is that phenomenological research, carrying the characteristics of qualitative research, requires integration of different methods rather than only one concrete methodology. In particular, unlike quantitative research, which involves surveys and questionnaires to achieve certain statistics, phenomenology requires the researcher to adopt the methods that assist them in understanding the phenomena as detailed as possible. The methods include how to offer informants an experience, how to make them feel the most comfortable in sharing more details of their thoughts and feelings, how to interpret their answers, how to relate the answers to the research questions, etc. These were mentioned in the previous part when the author discussed about aspects of identity-enhancing elements, MLE or narrative identity, etc. On the other hand, phenomenology plays a vital role in guiding the author to go on the right track of conducting phenomenological research. This is going to be elaborated as below.

3.1 Phenomenological case study

The general methodology chosen for this research is phenomenology, which “allows us to understand and appreciate educational issues by exploring the

unique experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in the process” (Hopkins et al., 2016, p. 1). Although having three participants in this research is validated as a phenomenological research (Boyd, 2001), it was also called a case study because, as the nature of a case study suggests, the limited informants were involved and analyzed individually. This phenomenological case study approach helps the researcher gain the understanding of how the informants experienced the “Self-exploration” program, the result of which can be valuable resources for educators improving their identity-enhancing approaches. It is obvious that there are various ways to assess a program, such as evaluation from facilitators who execute or observations by educational authorities. However, perhaps the most valid way to understand the effectiveness is from the perspectives of people who involve, perceive the IdEd as well as see how their personal growth progresses. There are many reliable theories and pedagogical methods which are believed to produce a great facilitation for adolescents’ IEx and phenomenology would help the researcher assess whether these actually work in real context.

The means for achieving the truth should be “rich descriptions of phenomena and their setting” (Kensit, 2000, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 47). To reach this standard, the researcher, first of all, used either written or oral form of informants’ reflection in the end of each session. The reflection was usually about their significant feelings, thoughts and realizations of themselves or something from the discussions they remembered the most. In providing the most comfortable atmosphere for reflection, they were allowed to write on their notebooks or phone. At times, some participants could write and send the note later to the facilitator if they did not feel like doing it at the session. In discussions, if one felt like it would be too sensitive to share, they could listen to the others and talked to the facilitator in private later. The second tool was field notes, so called “memoing”. According to Groenewald (2004), The notes should serve the functions of description and reflection and all documents need to be dated. Among four types of field notes introduced by Groenewald (2004), there are three types being used in the research: observational (reporting what happened with all senses), theoretical (meanings interpreted from what being observed), and analytical (analyzing the session with a broader view, in relation to the progress

of the whole program). These types were incorporated in each report after each session by the researcher. Since field notes include both description and analytical notes, they would be useful assistance to analysis stage. The last as well as the major source of data is the interview, which is explained in detail below.

There are a number of requirements for the phenomenological interview. Initially, the researcher is expected to be aware of the vital purpose of phenomenological study in general and phenomenological interviews in particular, that is "...understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 189). In other words, the researcher used questions to trigger informants' reflection so that they would express their opinions and feelings in the most direct and easy way. It is interesting that in phenomenological interviews, "inquiry doesn't mean looking for answers" (by Jon Kabat-Zinn, cited in Betz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 39). Even if the participant cannot come up with a concrete answer, his or her elaboration of their thoughts is also valuable for the research, as long as it is understood correctly. Hoffling & Martiny (2015) listed the following as a principle phenomenological commitment: "subjective perspective being understood in its own terms" (p. 16). This means informants can use whatever terms that they want, but the researcher needs to find ways to clarify until it is confirmed by the informant that it is what (s)he meant. Furthermore, after transcribed and interpreted, a text should be given to participants to validate their answers Groenewald (2004).

The interview questions were semi-structured and designed according to two principles. Firstly, they follow the structure of phenomenological interview, suggested by Bevan (2014), that questions follow three levels: contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon and clarifying the phenomenon. In contextualizing the phenomenon, informants were invited to describe their experiences with places, events and activities (Spradley, 1979, cited in Bevan, 2014). To capture the phenomenon further, informants were asked more in-depth questions regarding their major interests or impressions, yet the questions remained descriptive with the purpose of having the richest detailed "picture". Last but not least, the researcher asked hypothetic questions to receive fuller perception of the informants about the phenomenon. For example, a question

-serving this purpose that was used in this study was: “If you could create a program for IEx for yourself and people of your age, how would it be?”. This kind of question allows informants to have more freedom in imagining their ideal identity-enhancing program and their ideas of such ideal program could be optimally exploited. The second principle for the semi-structured interview questions is that the questions are organized in the way that they gradually help find answers for the three main research questions: the benefits of the program, the elements for an identity-enhancing program and how the program has had an influence on the participants’ IEx progress. At the same time, the researcher could ask questions that had not been prepared but would give the informant more chances to clarify and elaborate what they were sharing.

While designing and conducting the interviews are among the challenges in doing phenomenological research, the most difficult part is how the researcher positions herself in all research procedure. This is crucial because it allows the researcher to see the research with a broader vision so as to be flexible when collecting and analysing the data. Positionality is basically the researcher’s decision about to what extent they would integrate the dimensions of an ideal phenomenological research: general and particular, reduction and reflexivity, description and interpretation (The “3+1 phenomenology framework”, Hopkins et al., 2016). The researcher may lean themselves toward one spectrum, but all spectrums must be taken into consideration. Taking reduction and reflexivity as an example, pre-understanding of a phenomenon should be reduced so that the researcher’s subjectivity would not affect informants’ answers. Meanwhile, some previous knowledge about the informants is still needed, enabling the researcher to reflect on how the informant’s perspective shapes and is shaped throughout the research procedure (Hopkins et al., 2016). In short, Hopkins and his colleagues (2016) emphasized that positionality is “a dance such that one touches different points interactively” (p. 5).

This point about challenges brings the author to a discussion of validity. Firstly, it might be argued that this research is not valid due to the fact that there are only three participants, which cannot be generalized. In fact, if we relate to the above-mentioned essence of phenomenology, “phenomenology is neither mere particularity, nor sheer universality” (Manen, 1990, cited in Hopkins et al.,

2016, p. 4), because understanding individuals' perspectives contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, in education, it is controversial to generalize, since each person possesses distinctive backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities. Secondly, Boyd (2001) indicated that two to ten participants are enough for achieving saturation. In this research, three informants were exploited with rich description of their experience (cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 46). The author also facilitated them by asking further questions so that they could provide their answers in fullness.

3.2 A self-exploration program

Given the idea of offering adolescents a specialized identity-enhancing program, in which the topic of identity is intentionally discussed and reflected, the author designed a self-exploration program for three voluntary adolescents at REC. While there is a lesson plan for each session, the author, who is also the facilitator, senses the students' flows of reflection so as to adjust the content. This means the participants have freedom to express their opinions and feelings as long as they are discussing the given topic within the certain time. These are the controlled factors that the facilitator has to ensure. On the other hand, what cannot be controlled are the participant's physical and mental status at the time the session is taken place, the flow of the discussion, and sometimes unexpected facility issues. To be able to manage the above-mentioned factors so as to lead the participants to effective reflection, the facilitator needs to always be aware of the ultimate goal of the program, which is facilitating self-exploration and personal growth, which requires time and patience. This helps both facilitator and students not be panic and frustrated when not yet having the answer for students' concerns of identity at the session. The essence of this program is to give youngsters a chance for reflection on their identity, and from there they could maintain doing this even when the program has finished. At the same time, this program serves another purpose, being investigating how middle adolescents experienced this program. Since the lesson plans are based on the framework of IdEd and the above-mentioned identity-enhancing components, this is an empirical research examining if the theories are compatible with implementation.

This part is followed with descriptions of the program. Participants taking part in this program is informed with a letter, stating that this course offers a journey of self-discovery, where they are given opportunities and facilitation to understand and construct who they are and who they are becoming, by expressing their inner thoughts and meanings and reflecting them individually and with others. At the same time, they are explained that the focus of this program is to facilitate each participant in being mindful of their own feelings and awareness rather than for the purpose of skills acquisition. Individuals' personal wishes are respected in the way that they are encouraged to share their thoughts only and if they prefer not to, there can be other options for reflection that does not require verbal sharing with the group. Some pure fun activities are also organized to enhance the sense of belonging and trust within the group. Participants will realize, negotiate, reposition and construct their identity through expressing their inner thoughts in various ways (drawings, photographs, writings, stories, music, etc.); making meanings of their experiences; and listening to others' stories and perspectives.

Each lesson is planned with the objective of helping middle adolescents in discovering and developing their identity. To put it simple, participants are going to elaborate their concerns related to who they are and who they are becoming. There is one an-hour session per week and there are four sessions in total. Theoretically, the program is designed according to the Parameters for IdEd mentioned in part 1.1. (Schachter and Rich, 2011). In particular, the levels of identity oriented for the sessions are personal (sense of uniqueness), ego (sense of continuity) and social (sense of belonging) (Schachter and Rich, 2011). These levels are usually combined because identity is not only realization about how individuals see themselves at the present, but also in relation with the past and future self (sense of continuity) and in connection with the community (sense of belonging). For instance, there is one session where the discussions are about the uniqueness, while the consistency is also deliberated. In terms of content, the facilitator brings up popular topics of identity, such as hobbies, dreams, fears, self-esteem, family, etc. From these ideas, participants were led to construct their thoughts regarding identity's "differentiation, comprehensiveness, consistency, flexibility, complexity", etc. While doing this, individuals are expected to be able

to position, negotiate, resist, identify, explore and even commit to a personal trait of theirs.

As to the pedagogical methods, the facilitator is guided by three characteristics of identity enhancement curriculum (Archer, 1994). The first feature is elaborating the options (knowledge) while evaluating the problem from various aspects (critical thinking), and encouraging individuals' room for making their own decision (self-determination). Second, role-play situations are created. This characteristic is exemplified in an activity in which each student is given a concern or question of identity, written by one of their friends. Each has to imagine themselves in the given situation and says their thoughts and what they would do in that case. Other people then contribute their perspectives. This is how one can practice self-construction by analyzing a hypothetical situation while perceiving how others think about the same issue. The last characteristic is understanding of time, meaning reflection is involved the past, present and sometimes future self.

3.3 Data collection and data explication

The preceding parts were to explain the method, which is phenomenological research, and how the experimented identity-exploration program was designed. The following part is presenting details of data explication process.

3.3.1 Participants.

The participants include three students who were studying at Ranum Efterskole College when the study was conducted. They were from 16 to 17 years old. There is a boy from Denmark, a boy from Hong Kong and a girl from Mexico. Only participants who can speak English with intermediate level can be recruited for ensuring the conversations between the researcher and the participant would be comprehensively. They all agreed to take part in four-session program called "Identity exploration", conducted by the author.

The participant's information is shown in the following table:

TABLE 1. Summary of participants' information

Category	J	N	A
Age	16	17	16
Nationality	Danish	Hongkong	Mexican
Before studying at REC	Studied in public schools in Denmark	Studied in private school in Hong Kong	Studied in private school in Mexico
Usual behaviors during the program (observed by the researcher)	Proactive in taking part in activities Always willing to contribute his thoughts	Shy but became more open in a familiar group Has some difficulties in managing his feelings (experienced mood swings quite often during the sessions)	Willing to experience new things with happy and positive attitude Might experience struggles with more detailed and deeper reflection
Expectations for the program	Psychological treatment which helps find solutions for some specific scenarios	Did not have a clear expectation. He thought it would be exploring something but had no idea what it might be	To become more open and express herself better To figure out her strengths and weaknesses

3.3.2 Data collection procedure

In understanding the middle adolescents' experiences in an IEx program, particularly in answering the three research questions, there are three main sources of data being collected: field notes, interview recording and transcription, and participants' portfolios.

First of all, the author took notes during the sessions and wrote a report after each session. The report includes descriptive notes of the session and the author's observations. This method was also implemented for the interviews.

The second source of data is the interviews' recordings and transcription. A series of three individual semi-structured interviews was conducted. The interview questions were designed according to the research questions and the structure of phenomenological interview (Bevan, 2014), based on which, the

questions were created with the following order: contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon and clarifying the phenomenon. Besides, the author leaned on the participants' responses to adjust or ask further questions. The interviews were conducted after the program had finished.

Finally, participants' portfolios include all drawings and reflection notes produced by participants during the sessions.

3.3.3 Data explication

The qualitative data from the above-mentioned resources were explicated based on the procedure given by Groenewald, 2004, P. 50). In phenomenological research, Groenewald called the usual data analysis procedure "data explication" because he believed that this phrase expressed more accurately the essence of phenomenological research, which "investigate(s) the consistence of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole" (Groenewald, 2004, P. 50). That is the reason why the title of this section is "data explication" instead of "data analysis", even though there is just a small difference. The details of data explication procedure is presented as below":

- The recordings were transcribed and put together with the researchers' filed notes, observational reports and participants' reflection notes.
- The transcription and reflection notes were sent to the participants to get confirmation of their information and messaged being conveyed and reported accurately.
- The data was read 2 times enabling the researcher to have a holistic understanding of each participant's experience and emerge myself into how the participant viewed the phenomenon. It should be notified that when conducting this process as well as the whole data explication procedure, the research had to always keep in mind that all the given data must be interpreted and understood according to how the participants defined and understood, not how the researcher did. This was to avoid subjective influence from the researcher to the result of the study.

- The researcher then read each answer, highlighted phrases comprising information which provided the answer, and put them together in a table. Each participant's answer was classified separately.

- Group the phrases which express similar unit of meaning, such as diversification, individualization or interaction. The number of repetitions of each unit was recorded.

- Group the units of meaning into bigger themes. For instance, the above-mentioned units could be thematized as "the approach".

- Form a table which includes themes and units of meanings, put under a research question that they were aimed at answering for. The number of times mentioned by each participant and the total number of repetitions was also included.

- The statistics provided by the table gave the author a summary of the findings as well as which groups of information stood out. Basing on this, the author rearranged the order of themes and rename some themes and units if they affected the comprehension of the findings.

- The data would then be described and made sense according to the order of themes presented in the table.

- The interpretation went along with the reference to the relevant theoretical backgrounds and any theories not having been mentioned. Some new ideas were also brought out for discussions. This part was done with serious attitude because "good research is not generated by rigorous data alone... [but] going beyond the data to develop ideas" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, P. 139).

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

So far, this paper has addressed the research problem, presented the theoretical background of the topic and explained the methodology which helped find out the answers for the proposed research questions. This section will reveal the results by describing the data, analyzing and synthesizing the data so that the findings are understood in its relation with the above-mentioned theoretical backgrounds.

Table 2 shows the key information, interpreted from the participants' interviews in revealing 3 research questions. It includes the answers given by the participants, categorized into themes; the number of participants who mentioned a theme in their answers; and the number of times each theme is repeated by each participant. The findings are written in the order of answering three research questions about benefits of an identity-exploration program, elements for an identity-enhancing program and barriers preventing middle adolescents on their identity exploration process. The results are presented based on the most to the least significant data.

TABLE 2. The results of three interviews categorized into themes

Topics	Theme	No. of participants who identified the theme	Frequency (No. of times that each theme is repeated)			
			J	N	A	Total
Benefits and influences	Self-awareness and understanding	3	2	4	4	10
	Perspectives	2		2	2	4
	Self-confidence	2		1	4	5
	Simplification	1	2			2
	Connections	2		1	1	2

Elements of an enhancing identity-exploration program		Diversity (choices, people)	3	10	10	6	26
	The approach	Guidance	3	12	3	1	16
		Individualization	3	5	2	1	8
		Reflection / intentionality	2		4	3	7
		Interaction and doable activities	2	5	6		11
		Participants	3	7	3	5	15
	Atmosphere / setting	3	7	2	2	11	
Barriers preventing participants from exploring the self		Distractions	3	1	2	3	6
		Lack of facilitation	3	2	1	2	5

4.1 Benefits and influences of an identity-exploration program for adolescence

In responding to the question of how the IEx program has benefited and influenced oneself, all participants identified “self-awareness and understanding” and two of them mentioned “perspectives”. The remaining themes (“self-confidence”, “connections” and “simplification”) are less significant due to the fewer participants recognizing them, but they should also be taken into analysis and discussion.

This section is followed with a detailed description and analysis of how the program has an influence on the participants.

4.1.1 Self-awareness and understanding

It is obvious from the figures in table 2 that, after attending the program for IEx, all participants found it useful in helping them understand themselves better. However, the awareness of identity is revealed differently among the participants.

For N, since he had not had any idea regarding identity, he started having some notion regarding this topic after joining the program, which inspired him to explore himself even when the program was over.

It gives me a notion or idea of “What’s my identity”. This sort of ideas. I wasn’t aware of that at all before that. I had questions about myself but I didn’t explore before. Now I know I have some problems and I am gonna fix it and how, step by step. – N

I am satisfied because from that I could explore on my own. – N

Meanwhile, while A had noticed her struggles in answering some simple questions about herself, not until experiencing the program had she become more conscious about understanding her abilities, which would assist her in making her future choices.

“I realized that it’s very important to know more about myself so in the future it would help me to choose what I want. Be more conscious about what you are good and not.” – A

Both J and A also thought that it would be useful for people of their age since they had observed the same struggles from them when it came to questions of identity:

“I have a lot of friends that the teacher asked them what are you good at or what are the good things about you... and they normally don’t know what to answer, so I think it’s very necessary to talk about it.” – A

“They lost the motivation to achieve something. Because of that, a lot of young people get lost. They don’t find themselves from social media instead of their real life.” – N

While having had an awareness of identity like A, J was influenced in a different way after the program. If A became more conscious, J was affected in the way that his thoughts were triggered and his reflection was expanded.

“I was already kind of aware in the first place. ... I did get to think. It was a great opportunity for me to think in a situation you wouldn’t normally have thought about stuff ... it goes into a drive, ideas coming in a chain one after another, so I kind of thought of an idea and expanded on it and then it opened up new doors and growing the chain bigger...” - J

However, J was not very satisfied with the outcome of the program because he had expected this program to give him some specific advices for his issues.

“I thought that it was gonna be a bit more therapeutic than it was... kind of psychological treatment... like this is what you can do that helps you in these

scenarios but it was more about realizing certain things about yourself so it was not exactly what I expected from the beginning – J

J's expectation triggered the author's thought regarding the educational approach to a program for IEx or other kinds of identity development in general. J's expectation was to be given some specific advices for his problems. Meanwhile, instead of giving direct answers to the participants, the author's approach was to offer them opportunities to activate and deepen their thoughts into what had been struggling them. During this experience, they were given facilitation that could assist their reflection process, such as a calm and relaxing setting, contributions of solution by the facilitator and the other participants, and other forms of self-reflection, etc. The author's belief is to facilitate these adolescents to get used to self-reflection, which would benefit them in a longer term in the way that they would be able to reflect and figure out their answers of identity on their own thanks to the given reflection experience.

In short, while it makes sense that a young adult might feel more confused when the reflection becomes more complicated, the author believes that as many as other people can suggest their solutions, it is the individual to decide eventually what they see their "self" and what they should do with their specific situations. However, it is necessary that they are provided with appropriate facilitations, and identity educational program is one of them.

Overall, all subjects agreed that the program had helped them to gain their self-awareness and understanding but in different levels. In other words, some were introduced about the idea of identity for the first time, which triggered their curiosity of themselves and urged them to learn more about that; some did not find the topic new, but could use the chance to expand and deepen the issues that they had not normally put a lot of thoughts about them.

4.1.2 Perspectives

Following "self-awareness and understanding", the second most influential aspect among the participants is "perspectives". Interestingly, this was identified by both N and A, while not being mentioned by J.

Both N and A agreed that it was helpful for them to listen to others' points of view.

"For me I could have more perspectives. Sometimes you come up with a statement and you confirm it immediately without hesitation, right? But with reflection you can check it out again." – N

"The first session was a bout all people telling you what you look like. For example, I was told that I am friendly and a "party girl". So I think it was like see what other people see about you, that you may not know." – A

With an intention of implementing this element in an identity-enhancing program, there were many activities in the program being designed so that the participants could perceive how others think about them and about certain issues. By giving these chances, the author expected that the participants would be triggered their excitement about self-exploration after getting to know their traits being felt and seen by others. Furthermore, they would be able to take others' opinions into their consideration in figuring out their own issues.

Seemingly, this attempt was paid off with the participants' recognition. A was excited and surprised about her different image in other people's eyes, while N realized the benefit of perceiving various perspectives in decision making. This gives evidence of how social interactions could impact identity exploration process, as given in the literature review of this paper.

4.1.3 Self-confidence

Even though this benefit was only recognized by A, she mentioned about this four times, which is worth some discussion.

The following is an extract from A about how this experience had influenced her confidence:

"I was a little shy at the beginning but in the end, I was more open and freer to say what I really wanted" – A

When talking about A's expectations about this program, A shared that gaining more confidence in expressing her thoughts and feeling is one of her aims. Therefore, having a sense of "self-confidence" gives her a real benefit.

From A's discourse, it could be understood that she has not reached the level of self-confidence in the sense that she has understood her identity so well that she is confident about that. "Self-confidence" here relates more to the meaning that she gained a feeling that she could express herself without worries about what other members might think. It could also be understood that by discussing various aspects about identity, she seemed to have increased her confidence because of her improvement in critical thinking, language capacity and interaction. In other words, A's "self-confidence" increased because of her comfortable feeling with the group and her increased ability of self-expressions.

This result shows the essential relation between self-confidence and ID in the way that the more opened one becomes to express their reflection, the more effective they could acquire fuller self-understanding. Similarly, the more one understands themselves, the more they become confident.

4.1.4 Simplification

J shared about this as a standing-out feature that he gained from this program, while N also found drawing activities useful in assisting him expressing his thoughts. The following are their extracts:

"The last part that we were drawing because other than it being a reflection of entire program, it was also, as I told you earlier, it's nice to simplify what you thought and trying to explain how we feel and how we think. So trying to quantify that and simplify enough to make it into a picture really gets you to think about what's important in some way. You can't explain everything in details, something has to be done in a bit more roughly." – J

"Drawing section in the program. I usually can't describe myself or things in general in words, but drawing might have helped my express what I am thinking" – N

In these discourses, J and N mentioned a reflection activity that the group were asked to do in the end of the program. In this activity, instead of having students recall all the significant points we had made throughout the sessions, the author asked them to make a visual art with the topic of identity. As the topic suggested, there wasn't any restriction regarding how their products would look like. They could be paintings, posters, photo collections, handmade booklets, etc. It could

be about their self or their view of identity in general. They were encouraged to start thinking about their ideas and inform the author about necessary materials for their project.

The purpose of this activity was to help participants identify what was the most significant for them in relation to the topic of identity. While during the program, there had been several topics being discussed and many intriguing questions being raised, it was important for the participants to be able to summarize their most crucial content. Besides, this is also the author's measure regarding how the participants perceive identity on the whole and what remained in them after four sessions.

J's reflection on simplification characteristic bringing about some benefit for him is relevant to the author's aim and expectation when designing the course. This somehow proved that this method is effective when designing identity-enhancing educational content.

Even though the other participants did not mention this trait as a benefit, there are indicators from the other two participants showing that simplification actually made it an easier process to invite them to the activities as well as reflection. In the case of N, due to his psychological issue that he easily became moody, he usually went off in some sessions in the way that he refused to talk to even went back to his room. This happened 3 over 5 times. One session was canceled because he could not attend from the beginning. Later when he was asked if there was something from the session that caused such reaction, he explained that it was because he did not feel comfortable with what had happened during that day. Having noticed his characteristics, the author made different efforts to make the session less intensive, which reduce N's struggles in processing his thinking. At the same time, since reflection requires individuals to think a lot, making it easier task would also benefit others who did not have struggles like N. What the author actually did was implementing the criteria for identity enhancing program, especially "the sense of safety", "social interaction" and "flexibility". In particular, from the beginning of the program, all participants including N were informed that they could suggest whatever ways that would assist them in undergoing the sessions; or if they did not feel comfortable, they could discuss for changing the approach or even reschedule the session if

needed. These are examples of “the sense of safety” and “flexibility”. There were numerous discussions which, as mentioned in the literature review, would reduce the burden of sharing if some participants might feel uncomfortable to raise their voice at that point. This does not mean that they would not benefit if they did not share because they could listen to their friends, which offered them different perspectives that would help them in their nonverbal reflection process.

In short, simplification means trying different ways to make the tasks less complicated, such as using drawing, simple projects or telling memorable stories, ect.; so that the participants may not notice that they were doing a difficult task. This was proved, as mentioned above, that it was beneficial for the participants in this kind of self-exploration program.

4.1.5 Connection

Similar to “perspectives”, except J, both A and N identified that another benefit of this program is “connection”. The following is an extract from N’s interview:

“I usually don’t take chances until there’s someone I trust do. I would follow them. ... I wasn’t expecting anything. Maybe discovering something but I don’t know what that something might be.” – N

It could be seen from N’s reflection that his existed connection with the other participants had driven him to take part in the program. Obviously, although this does not explain how he was beneficial from the program, the benefit here to N was that the initial connection gave him such a courage to try something that he had not known and experienced before. This could be seen more clearly in A’s extract:

“I got used to the people in the group. At the beginning I thought “oh what would I say, I am not sure about saying this.” But in the end, I was more open... We were friends and it was easier to say with friends. At the end it helps me to realize that depends on who you are talking with, you can be open or not. I mean, sometimes it’s good to be open with people. I was a little shy at the beginning but in the end, I was more open and freer to say what I really wanted.” - A

Connection, according to A, benefits her in the sense that her friendship with the other two participants made it easier for her to share her thoughts and feelings

during the program. Seemingly, being surrounded by familiar faces gave her a sense of safety that she could share about a topic that is not usually brought up. However, she still found it uneasy to open up throughout the sessions because of her shyness and lack of confidence in expressing ideas. Not until the end of the program that she found herself more comfortable with the group.

This result indicates that it is crucial to create connection within the group before and during identity-enhancing programs. The group taking part in this kind of program could be connected in some ways. The first case could be that they have already been friends, but the characteristics of this group of friends need to be understood thoroughly before deciding if they could join together as a group to reflect these sensitive topics. For example, some people are classmates but they are not close to each other and this could result in their unwillingness to collaborate. In case participants are totally strangers, it is the facilitator's essential role of organizing some bonding activities before the program starts. Take this program as an example, at the beginning of the first session, the author / facilitator invited the whole group to join a getting-to-know activity in which each person showed a picture representing something significant about himself / herself and talked about it. Another activity was to write on each other's back the first expression on each individual. These are "ice-breakers" that could somehow narrow the distance and strange feelings of the participants, helping them to gradually welcome the upcoming sessions which were mostly related to sharing. Thirdly, whether or not participants are already friends, facilitators' effort in connecting individuals during the program is not less important. This idea is going to be discussed further in the next part regarding elements of an identity-enhancing program.

4.2 Elements of an identity-enhancing program for middle-adolescence

In this session, the author is elaborating participants' answers to the question about elements contributing to an identity-enhancing program. The centered question with the purpose of understanding elements contributing to an identity-enhancing program is as following:

Talking about the whole program, can you tell me what elements that make it useful? (you can think about the content, space, facility, teacher, participants, timing, interactions, etc.).

As being shown in the table at the beginning of this section, there were 5 elements mentioned, all of which were identified by all participants. It should be notified that while the question is to find out elements for this kind of IEx program, the participants' answers were based on not only their attendance in this experimental program, but also their prior personal experiences of identity development, including their attendance in this experimental program and their 6-month study at REC, which was proved to be an optimal environment for identity development. This is beneficial to this research because by comparing the experience in this program with participants' experience at REC, they might be able to notice the advantages and disadvantages, which would bring up valuable ideas in contributing to identity-exploration-related courses and programs.

This part is followed with details of 4 identity-enhancing elements which the subjects of this program found the most significant. They are presented in the order of the most to the least importance. The first element, "approach", will be divided into 6 sub-elements because each sub-element has an important role to play in conveying accurately what the participants need in the approach to an IdEd program.

4.2.1 The approach

The approach was brought up by all participants 53 times, which is 3.5 times more than the repetition of the second significant element. This means the approach should be the focus to be able to build an efficient identity-enhancing program. After thematizing the participants' answers, there are 6 specific themes to be discussed regarding this element: diversification (in terms of choices, content, skills, etc.), guidance, individualization, intentionality, interaction and doable activities (level of difficulty). The first three elements were identified by all three subjects, while the remaining were mentioned by two with considerable number of times.

Diversification

This result is not a surprise since it is relevant with the mentioned theories regarding identity exploration, that one of the fundamental criteria for identity exploration is offering adolescents various experiences. However, the participants' answers would give more details in terms of what kinds of experience they would want to diversify and how they would be benefited from such diverse experiences.

The element diversification was the most identified criteria, which was mentioned 26 times by all three subjects.

First of all, they all agreed that being given chances to choose their favorite subjects, extra-curricular activities, hobby groups, etc. was a major factor helping them to learn about themselves. This opinion was derived from their 6-month study at REC, where they experienced such diverse choices.

All three subjects had been assumed to be familiar with contemporary education, which usually involves identity development in its curriculum and school practices because J's prior educational school to REC was a Danish public school and the others studied at private schools in Hong Kong and Mexico. However, the fact that all subjects mentioned this feature as the first and foremost and showed their appreciation as well as excitement, highlights how useful and distinguished diversification of choices means to them in their self-exploration process.

Sometimes if you stay in the same environment for (Hongkong) too long... In Ranum Efterskole you have many chances to look at what you are doing because there are a lot of opportunities - N

this place gives me a lot of opportunities to really explore myself if you can say that is exploring who I am and who I want to be... and it gives me a fresh start as well. – J

Whilst it was proved theoretically (from the given theories in Literature Review part) and practically (from students' experience) about the necessity of diversification of experiences in enhancing IEx, it depends on the scope of each program or course to be able to design such diverse opportunities or experiences. Perhaps organizing a number of clubs with different interests is quite challenging.

Second, besides diversification of choices, the content and topics were also identified as aspects that need to be varied. In particular, J shared his opinion that this experimental program seemed to only provided them with specific identity issues instead of exploring themselves as a whole.

This idea is maybe not good when it comes to the broader aspect of identity in trying to figure out who you are but I think it's very good at figuring out maybe specific things. Like if you already aware of something, like figuring out how you should go from there. – J

J's idea is actually an interesting observation, which triggers the author's reflection about how specific and broader aspects of identity were and should be addressed in such a program. On the one hand, it is true that there were four topics having been discussed during four sessions of the program. They are: (1) my multiple identities, (2) what make me unique, (3) questions of identity, and (4) an art work of identity. Therefore, it could be difficult for participants to realize "broader" aspects of identity integrated in each session. On the other hand, the sessions were designed with a sense of wholeness, while being aware of bringing in specific issues which might be commonly shared among middle adolescents. For example, while reflecting on what make an individual unique, the subjects were not only asked about their distinguished features, but also oriented to link to the past stories and how they relate to the present self. This is the sense of continuity, one of three characteristics of identity enhancement curriculum given by Archer (ed. 1994) that the author implemented. To sum up, even though the sessions were designed with a sense of wholeness in mind, it could be improved in the way that it should be somehow communicated better with participants so that they could not only realize some certain areas but also make the connection with their "self" as a wholeness.

Third, according to N, adolescents could explore new abilities thanks to a number of new skills that were chosen for them by some teachers.

Some activities that teachers held require skills which some students may not even know they have. For example, coordinating, organizing, leading skills... - N

Unlike most other schools, REC is a place where teachers and students are further connected through "contact group" activities. Basically, each teacher

takes care of one contact group, who (s)he would understand each individual more than other teachers, and therefore (s)he could create activities outside class time that might educate each individual further. What N mentioned were among such activities. The teacher could have given him some coordination tasks, which (s)he might have chosen from his/ her observation to N's preferences or potentials. N later on realized that those new skills were something he had not have discovered had his contact teacher not introduced those experiences to him.

All in all, even though the criteria of diversification were theorized and agreed by many experts in the realm of IEx (Archer 1994, Schachter & Rich 2011, Flum & Kaplan 2012), the above result gives more information in terms of what aspects of an IEx program that middle adolescents need to be diversified. They are learning and extra-curricular activities, chances to reflect on specific topics of identity as well as the wholeness, opportunities for discovering new interests and skills. These are some specific themes, among further thoughts that educators could be triggered after knowing this result. It should also be emphasized that the purpose of giving adolescents diverse opportunities is not only for the exposure of new experiences, but also for decision making. Schachter & Rich (2011) stated that students are the "self-determination agents" while Archer (1994) pointed out that this factor is lack of concern among most schools. Perhaps this is the reason why various experiences and the freedom in choice-making at REC were highly appreciated by these participants that they repeated this criterion with the greatest number of times.

Another interesting point to be discussed is the limitation of diversification in identity-enhancing program or curriculum. To my point of view, there is no limitation when expanding the opportunities for adolescents because the more experiences they could choose from, the more possibilities that they could find some areas that could really excite and develop themselves. This means the diversity of content, topics, approaches, etc. in identity-development programs should be boosted as much as possible. Elements could restrict this effort are probably resources, material- and human-wise. With the scope of a program or a short course, it is a challenge to provide participants with various activities. Even in school context, given the school's focus is academics, they might not have ability to organize a big number of interesting activities like an efterskole can. This

resource is dependent quite a lot on the budget of the nation as well as the school itself. Human resource also plays an important role. As suggested by Schachter & Rich (2011), educators are the element actively involved in students' IdEd process, so they need to have profound understanding about IdEd so as to implement it and diversify their approach. Unfortunately, it does not seem that this awareness among educators is not gained by most teachers worldwide.

Guidance

The second most important element identified by the participants was guidance. This implies the role of the facilitator and how participants wanted to be guided in their self-exploration process in general and in identity-enhancement programs in particular.

The first outstanding point understood from the participants' extracts was that they all mentioned the crucial role of the facilitator in creating close connection with the participants. J described ideal facilitators as "more like friends than authority figures". N said that the closeness between the participants of this experimental program and I was needed but he also recommended that "*Maybe you can spend more time with us outside the program*". A made her point: "*The most useful was the teacher because you were really into the topic so you helped us to understand more about it.*" These all suggest that the facilitator should always strengthen the bond between them and participants so that as soon as the participants have gained their trust, the followed-up guidance and facilitation would be taken positively.

Apart from the above-mentioned agreement in terms of the facilitator's role, some participants shared contradict opinions regarding the guidance they received when taking part in this program. While J had expected that his concerns would be solved by specific answers, N was content with the fact that he was put in such condition that he could think about some topics of his interests, discussed and figured out the answers on his own. The following are their extracts:

"I thought that it was gonna be a bit more therapeutic than it was... kind of psychological treatment... like this is what you can do that helps you in these

scenarios but it was more about realizing certain things about yourself so it was not exactly what I expected from the beginning.” – J

We shared stuff, discussed about a topic, we gave each other’s advices which could be useful or not but it helped. I am satisfied because from that I could explore on my own. - N

The different opinions between J and N raised a question regarding whether or not IdEd should provide the individuals with an answer for their certain problem. On the one hand, it makes sense that one needs an answer when they are facing a problem. If they come to a program or a course which is supposed to help them reveal their identity, knowing that they would not receive such clear answer, their confusion is understandable. On the other hand, confusion is essential to drive them to reflections, from which they come to the realization of their identity. In other words, confusion is a part of the ID process. Identity development is very personal so I believe that even though there should be suggested options from different perspectives, it should be the individual who owns the action of finding out his own answer. Furthermore, despite how experienced the facilitator is, how could (s)he knows that the answer given to the individual is accurate.

However, this leads to another question that if we would not give the individual an answer, how we could better facilitate so that the participants would not give up when they are too confused. J gave some profound answers in terms of how the guidance could have been better.

Finding identity shouldn’t be a focus. It should be a consequence. It’s about giving people opportunities to realise themselves instead of deliberately trying to make them realise or trying to focus on that. Because that’s what we do naturally anyway. – J

J’s opinions triggered a critical question in relation to identity-enhancement program that weather such an identity-enhancement program is really necessary. The fact is that while the design of the program is to support IEx process among middle-adolescents within the scope of some sessions, within a limited space and group of participants, J believed that it did not seem to be a natural way of enhancing one’s identity. J suggested other ways to enhance IEx rather than gathering a certain group within a limited space. The methods could be giving

participants chances to meet role models who can inspire them for taking actions and changing.

Have you ever gone into a presentation and some person is talking about something very inspiring and you get inspired to do something afterwards about it? It's important to somehow go for that direction instead. ... because it's really rewarding to see someone talk about something and you act on it in your own way because you want to do it. – J

Another method could be letting the participant experience something outside classroom and let them learn the lessons from such real experiences.

Taking them and putting them in a different environment that it's (their behaviors) not accepted would make them realize that it's not right. It's less about crafting and more about nourishing. – J

Or it could be allocating suitable supports when one comes and shares their problem. J believed that by doing that, it would be *“more like how can I help you realize something without necessarily be involving yourself too much.”* (J)

This category was referred to 16 times, among which, 12 times were addressed by J. This means he was the person concerning the most about this aspect. Obviously, his ideas are valuable in the sense that there were more variations in designing this kind of program in particular and identity education curricula in general. The facilitator should not restrict themselves with only classroom conditions. Rather than that, more effort in approaching various resources such as other facilitators and opportunities so that the individual could reach out to the fullest possible chances to enhance their self-exploration. This also helps distract them from spending the whole time to focus on reflecting their identity related issues. However, while the above-mentioned ideas are useful, it should be understood that it is still necessary for participants to sit down and discuss, which is the distinguished value that this program was supposed to bring about.

In conclusion, what could be taken from the participants' extracts is that the role of the facilitator is undeniably crucial in IEx programs. In addition, the way that facilitators guide participants to realizations of their identity should be “natural”, meaning that participants should be able to approach experiences which exceed the scope of the classroom, while at the same time they could still

gather and reflect about such experiences. The possibility of this expansion of activities depends on the condition of the broader educational environment where an identity-enhancement program is taken. If the school is not a diverse place like REC, it could be a big challenge to make this happen.

Individualization

Subjects' answers were categorized as "individualization" when they imply indicators such as personal space, personal interests, intentional skills, or specific areas developed. As being shown in table 3, this factor was identified by all participants with a total of 8 times of repetition. J mentioned this the most, with 5 times in total. The extracts of J and A are shown as below:

It's important to also think about participants. Discovering identity is a lot about discovering what you like and don't like. What you can and can't do... figuring out who needs to boost in which ways and capitalizing on that and not putting them in a way they have to do something in an environment where that have disability... - J

Then I would do some activities where you can develop different areas of myself – A

On the one hand, this approach is consistent with the given theories in literature review that each subject has to be the self-defined agent of their ID process, meaning that beside them being given an environment to interact with other people and activities, they should be given attention to their individual space and reflection and make choices based on that. This approach is, as well, consistent with this experimental program's plans that all sessions were designed with a tremendous focus on facilitating each individual to the fullest based on their own wish and progress. Now that all subjects agreed that individualization is significant in constructing an identity-enhancing program, it shows that it is very essential to integrate this orientation into the program or curriculum for IdEd, either theoretical- or practical-wise.

On the other hand, when it comes to implementation, considerable efforts are needed to give sensible individual attention as well as make appropriate adjustment according to individuals' changes along the period of conducting IdEd. Attention to individuals is indicated through the facilitator's effort on

understanding individuals' expectations and reflections along the course they are in charge. Besides, during the session or lesson, personal time and space should be given, allowing each person to process their own thoughts and feelings. Observation and note taking could be applied so that individuals' progress of identity development is recorded, which would give the facilitator fuller information to facilitate. The individuals themselves could also be encouraged to write their own notes or journal as a way of owning their IEx process. However, paying attention to individuals leads to a challenge in allocating efficiently between individual and social aspect of a program. For example, when joining this experimental program, N usually experienced mood swings that when it happened at the beginning or during a session, he usually kept silent or went off to his room. This happened three times over four sessions, among which, he remained in the session twice and postponed a session. These situations required the facilitator to be capable of taking sensible, delicate and flexible actions. What I did was to let the individual go to his room when he needed it because it could have been worse if he had been forced to stay. In other occasions when he was willing to stay with probably limited interactions, I arranged more personal reflection activities and allowed N to listen to the others' discussions rather than having to share as much as he normally did. This seemed to work in this case because at the end of our last session, N came to me, suggesting that he would like to write his reflection to me since he refused to do it during the session because of his down mood.

In a nutshell, individualization is one of the most essential elements in enhancing identity exploration due to the personal essence of identity development. What could be taken into account when implementing this criterion is sensible choices of individual activities, balanced allocation between social and individual tasks and suitable adjustment when personal factors negatively affect the whole group.

Reflection/ Intentionality

While all other categories were come up by the participants, I decided to ask a specific question about this category, "intentionality", so as to understand how the

participants perceive this significant notion in IF process. When trying to understand IF, I mentioned in literature review about Erikson's notion of "consciousness and unconsciousness". He invited us to think about the fact that even though the IF mostly happens when the individual is continuously active in observing and reflecting, in reality, it happened mostly unconsciously. This could be understood that at the time when Erikson was active with his studies, most people were not very aware of developing their identity. By raising a question about intentionality, or reflection in particular, I longed for understanding how middle adolescents perceive "intentionality" in their self-exploration process and how it could impact the process. By having such insight, hopefully there could be better ways to facilitate adolescents in optimizing their ID with intentions.

Initially, it is important to elaborate the meaning of intentionality. From the aspect of individuals who own their ID process, intentionality could be classified into three levels:

- (a) There was something so significant and has such strong impacts on individuals that makes them think and relate to their identity. (*experience leading to reflection*)
- (b) The individual has an awareness of reflecting on significant experiences with the purpose of identity development. (*intentional reflection*)
- (c) The individual intentionally searches for selective experiences that might suit his or her identity development and maintains reflections on those experiences. (*intentional experiences and reflection*)

Following is the question regarding intentionality that was asked during the interview:

How do you understand "discovering yourself intentionally"? (In case the participant could not understand the term "intentionality", the researcher would explain: doing something intentionally means you do something with an awareness. For example, you keep asking yourself questions about your identity and reflecting on your thoughts after experiencing something)

A's response shows that she found intentional experiences useful but she would prefer experience the unintentional which usually leads to a lot of fun and people

could come to realization afterwards. A's idea and practice of intentional ID relates to case (a), experience leading to reflection.

It could be useful because you have something in mind, so you get directly to it. But on the other hand, you know what you want so you sometimes change some parts of you... Doing without it (reflection), you don't know what you want but it's really good you know it's good. – A

N experienced some changes regarding intentionality in self-exploration. Talking about the experimental program, he said:

It gives me a notion or idea of "What's my identity" I wasn't aware of that at all before that. I had questions about myself but I didn't explore before. Now I know I have some problems and I am gonna fix it and how, step by step. - N

He gave an example of how he made efforts in finding answers about his identity issues recently, when he has been spending some months at a new college in the UK.

This year, this school wasn't my choice. This was my sister's former school, so she encouraged me to study here. She is closed to the teachers. I thought I could give it a shot. When I came here I felt something was missing. I am living alone it's gonna be more thinking and over-thinking time. I am missing this part so what can I do about it? So I tried to reach out to teachers and friends. - N

Searching online (about his psychological problem) surprisingly helped. Quora and Reddit ... those platforms used worldwide and shared by people with the same experiences. – N

It seems that after having some insight and practice in self-reflection of identity issues, N was more proactive in seeking the answers instead of "*I had questions about myself but I didn't explore*". He is now in case (b), whereby he is aware of reflecting and taking actions to understand himself better, but does not seem to proactively make decisions with ID intention.

Of course, it's more useful with intentions, but most people and for me I have to discover myself without intentions and then I can intentionally discover more about myself. – N

J shared a different approach, which relates to case (c), intentional experiences and reflection. He described intentionality in identity development as "being

aware and keeping that awareness”, “more about taking an idea and building on that instead of just ignoring it”, and “willing or not willing”. He also emphasized the role of environment or conditions that trigger ID:

“You can say I might like this and might not like this and you can put yourself in that environment... but it’s still the environment that acts on you ultimately to make you more aware of and you can intentionally try to change that if you want.” – J

On the whole, intentionality is perceived and implemented differently among three participants. There are some highlights that I want to make. Firstly, this case study tells us that these middle adolescents nowadays are undergoing their IF process with lack of intention, or in Erikson’s term, it’s “consciousness”. While J seems to be the most conscious of his ID progress, N and A had a tendency to respond to the situation and experiences happening to them rather than making prior decisions in selecting their preferred. This is actually not a negative thing. This is only a fact that give educators better understanding, so that they could make appropriate intervention.

This point leads to the next highlight. Interventions should be based on each individual’s preference and interests. For example, it is not sensible to force A to search for experiences that suit her ID when she does not want that restriction. What the facilitator could do is perhaps providing her with some options that the facilitator has already considered suitable for her. By doing that, A would be experiencing unintentional experiences, yet intentionally chosen by the facilitator.

Interaction and Doable activities

These are two elements but they are going to be elaborated in the last part because they are the least mentioned categories by the participants. Both of these elements were identified by two participants but the idea of “Interaction” was repeated 3 more times than “Doable activities”.

In terms of “Interaction”, the participants talked about how important this criterion was and conditions that help them interact efficiently. N believed that once the interaction was improved, within the scope of classroom, teambuilding

and extracurricular activities, between facilitator and participants, participants may feel more opened to share their thoughts.

I think the interaction between you and us was quite close. That is a factor that is needed. Maybe you can spend more time with us outside the program so that we would feel more comfortable and share my things to everyone else. – N

J added that good interactions not only help increase the bonding among the members during the program but could also potentially develop their existing friendship to a higher level and in a long term. Speaking about proficient approach to improve interactions in IdEd, J proposed the conditions include providing “right setting” and topics, increasing participants’ talks among themselves, and ensuring a sense of safety. The right topics were discussed in the “content” part in answering my first research question of this paper. The “right setting will be crystalized in the upcoming part about “atmosphere / setting”, an element enhancing identity education programs. Besides J, N also gave his suggestions, which were improving facilitator- participants’ connection and offering constant and various interactions. Below is N’s extract regarding the latter point:

There (REC) you can do all sorts of activities and constant interactions with people. – N

N was taking REC as an ideal example for a kind of education having provided a great environment for him to explore his identity. “Various interactions” was interpreted by the author because what N experienced was regular experiences in different kinds of activities, each of which he usually interacted with different group of students and teachers. It must be noted that this way of interaction which N took as example is relatively different from that in an identity-enhancing program within a fixed small group. Perhaps with a smaller scope, “various interactions” means that the individual is given chances to discuss and connect with different individuals within the group. By doing that they could gain diverse perspectives in the form of discussion about specific topics, while in N’s example of the school activities, it seems more like learning how diverse other people experience and find meanings from a mutual interest or activity.

The last but not least approach that was mentioned by two over three participants was “Doable activities”. Even though the number of repetitions is not significant, it is worth considering because each participant repeated this category twice. The following extract is actually the same as the one identifying “simplification” as a benefit the participants gained from the experimental self-exploration program.

Instead of being a complicated mess in your head, you tried to simplify it more so you might have understood it more...So trying to quantify that and simplify enough to make it into a picture really gets you to think about what's important in some way. – J

As having been discussed, when there have been various topics being talked about during the program, participants might feel overwhelming and it would be impossible for them to remember everything. It is crucial that the facilitator could condense the task so that individuals have the ability to reflect the most standing-out thoughts. N expressed a similar idea with J and he also addressed “Doable activities” in a slightly different way:

Then, the activities. Everyone can do it. Let's say if the activity is writing a poem, some people might be good at it, some people might not but they may be able to think of something. – N

It is obvious that making sure about the level of difficulty of a task is a familiar criterion in lesson planning, in terms of certain subjects or educational curricula in general. It is not an exception for identity-enhancing programs. Particularly, since the questions of identity are usually intriguing, participants would have tendency to give up answering if they receive a complicated task. Apart from the above-mentioned example of the drawing task being used in the experimental program, another example of “doable activities” is the scaffolding in pedagogy. This method originates from Vygotsky who proposed the role of teachers in supporting learners in gradually achieving their understanding of a certain knowledge (Raymond, 2000). Scaffolding was implemented in this self-exploration program in the way that the facilitator provided tasks that were increased their level of difficulty. Before the individual could reach their own reflection or conclusion, they were given chances to brainstorm with more simple questions, listened to other participants' ideas and think on their own about the

discussed ideas. All these tasks were built to slowly facilitate an individual to achieve their ability to generate all reflection and perspectives and eventually answer the question on their own.

To sum up, speaking of approach, while it is a broad term regarding its meaning and such various aspects that could be discussed, the participants' answers brought up some major aspects that were mostly studied in the field of identity development, yet still leave identity educators intriguing puzzles to research further. Diversification is an example. Theories provided us with some suggestions in terms of creating various options, identity-related topics or the ways an activity could be conducted with ID orientation (Archer, 1994; Schachter & Rich, 2011). The result of this section proves that these methods are practically reflected in reality. In addition to that, more details of what need to be done to achieve the most effective identity-enhancing programs were elaborated by the participants. However, while giving identity educators more empirical insights within the scope of such experimental program, it raises questions of to what extent identity-enhancing programs should be diversified and how to design a curriculum so that individuals could improve their decision making instead of being overwhelming by the given options. There are more of such questions regarding diversification and the other above-mentioned approaches. Perhaps, more case studies should be conducted so that identity educators and researchers could have more profound understanding of approach, a complicated element in IdEd.

Following the approach, I am going to present the two other elements for identity enhancement: participants and atmosphere.

4.2.2 Participants

In answering the first question about the benefits that the participants had gained from the program, participants were partially identified in the parts about "perspectives" and "connection". This element was also referred to in the precious section, "the approach", in the category of "interaction". This section is going to present how the participants see themselves as one of the most important

elements in constructing ideal self-exploration curricula, especially in what ways this element could contribute to the success of identity educational programs.

According to the result, “participants” was identified by all participants with 15 times of repetitions, among which, J mentioned it with the greatest number of times (7 times). This shows that he had a considerable concern towards this element. Speaking about the choice of participants, he insisted that having strangers or people who “barely know” each other in a group was not an effective choice.

“One of the participants decided not to continue or go through the program. I barely knew her. I did not incredibly be comfortable talking about certain things around her” – J

Both J and N said that there should be some bonding among participants before they join an identity-enhancing program. The following are their extracts:

In a perfect world, it would be optimal to have... a class of students... - J

For friends, I would say living together – N

Sharing a little different perspective from J’s and N’s about the choice of participants, A cared more about how much one could gain from different perspectives rather than the existing connection with the other participants. However, the condition is that everyone in such a group needs to treat each other with respect and open mind. She took her experience at REC as an example:

Danish students are very open, so everything you do, they would not judge you. They would respect, so you can do something else different. That really impressed me because everyone tells you everything. It’s not bad or good, it’s what you want to do. – A

As can be interpreted from the above discourses, three participants shared three different levels of bonding within a group: people regardless of backgrounds yet with respect and open mind (A), people interacting with each other on a regular basis (J), and people studying and living together (N). It seems that each person shared their own preference for their comfort zone when it comes to expressing their deeper thoughts and feelings, which they hardly talk to someone they do not have connection with. This leads to a question of how to make sure that all

participants feel safe mentally to freely take part in identity educational activities while they have such different preference towards their companies. In the literature review, “sense of safety” initiated by Flum and Kaplan (2012) was mentioned as a criterion for IEx in school context. It was emphasized that this is a complicated task to fulfill and the participants’ answers have played as an empirical evidence showing the same result. This is understandable since individualization is the essence of identity.

While a program cannot meet the needs of every individuals, it could be built so that each of them could feel secured to express themselves comfortably to some extents. Firstly, even though there were three levels of bonding suggested by the participants, what is in common about those ideas is that a group should share some common backgrounds and / or concerns. For example, the Danish friends that A referred to were in fact her friends from REC, where she had been studying. Many of them she did not actually interact but they have same features such as school, common friends, age, interests in diverse environment and cultural differences, etc. Secondly, A gave a positive and flexible outlook on possible benefits that could be gained from a group of people who they do not have much in common.

Maybe I want to create 2 different groups, one that people know each other for many times, the other is strangers. So, the difference changes the behaviors of each one. - A

This idea implies that in a group of strangers, people tend to express themselves differently from when they are with their friends, which could lead to some realization about the self.

On the one hand, a group of strangers may only share a few common standard features such as educational background, school, or age, there could be more similarities discovered when they spend more time with each other, such as abilities, dreams, or fears, etc. Therefore, it is not sensible to only choose people who have already been friends just because their current connection seems to be obvious. It is perhaps better if the facilitator could have prior insights about his or her participants, so that a group chosen is based on a holistic understanding of various aspects rather than only on the basic information. On

the other hand, there should not be an assumption that a group of friends would be definitely end up with better connection and result because friends, depends on their level of closeness, would result in distinctive levels of comfort when sharing about uncommon topics. Friends, despite classmates or roommates, could still have dissimilar hobbies and concerns, which one might find in common with a stranger. To conclude, grouping suitable participants for an identity-enhancing program is uneasy, but what we can learn from the result of this paper is that efforts should be made in figuring out similarities among the members so that they could feel comfortable when entering the program as well as inspired during the process. Similarities and differences should be understood with multiple dimensions instead of only basic information such as age, class and background.

Also speaking about participants' connection, J went further to the construction of friendship before, during and after such a program. He said:

Let's say the people haven't met each other and you monitor how they interact, then you can harder think about before and after without them having any previous friendship that might go. – J

Even though this expectation is ideal in the sense that it is tough already to form a group reaching certain level of bonding to collaborate during the program, let alone the post-stage when the facilitator would not be able to get involved in their interactions. However, J's idea is worth thinking about and it should be a longer-term goal in identity education even if a program or a course only lasts for a certain period of time. Perhaps the success of identity education is not only facilitating one's self-realization but also sow some seeds of inspiration so that after the program, they would still inspire each other and reach out to other sources of inspiration in their self-development journey. This idea reminds me of what Michelle Obama's speech on her podcast channel "The Michelle Obama Podcast" (2020):

"...evolution happens not just day by day but moment by moment, interaction by interaction. All of these little sparks of connection that build on one another and together they compose the magic of a life. It doesn't have to be anything flashy... but those sparks that we have with those people in our lives keep pushing us forward, keep helping us evolve and keep helping us become even more of who we are."

4.2.3 Atmosphere and setting

The third-ranked among three identity-enhancing elements, besides “the approach” and “participants”, is “atmosphere and setting”. “Atmosphere”, besides its first meaning as the air, has a second meaning that is “the character or the mood of a place or situation.” (Cambridge dictionary, 2021). In the context being discussed in this paper, it is the second meaning that is understood. Atmosphere includes everything at school in general and in the space of the experimental IEx program in particular, that influence how positive and efficient participants’ mood during their IEx procedure. The following is the results of why and how the participants perceive this element as one of the most essential elements in identity enhancement.

J and N described an ideal environment for them as “calm, friendly and fluent”. They used these words to refer to the experimental program. N indicated that what made him feel this way was because of the music having been used, while J specified that he felt engaged when being invited to certain topics that he would not have regularly shared with his friends.

Talking about the calm atmosphere, the relaxing/ sleeping music calms my mind somehow. And I think my mood, if I am in the session, is quite determined by the music. It makes me think more – N

It was a great opportunity for me to think in a situation you wouldn’t normally have thought about stuff, but again I was provided an environment where I was able to think about something... -J

N added that the facility could affect their feeling of convenience during the session as well. For instance, he found the space where the program took place was relaxing but the seats were not very convenient which cause his backache and could not be into the session to the fullest concentration. When referring to the school context where these participants were attending, J could point out some indicators of an identity-enhancing environment, such as sharing the daily routines and living space with other school mates and teachers showing no hierarchy.

Apart from the above-mentioned details, these participants seemed to be struggling in finding specific words to describe this element that they repeated

general description such as “the right setting” or “the school environment”. They saw the school environment as a holistic component rather than specific terms:

In this instance we were friends who we came with but I still believe that something you just don't think about it if not in the right setting. It's the environment helps you... The entire environment that we have here is like a soil that helps to fertilize you to grow. It's the essential part. - J

Overall, this holistic environment which was described as “calm, friendly and fluent”, was contributed by calm music (said N), the chosen topics of interests (said N) and the fact that the participants were sharing the same learning and living space (said N and J). The quality of facility also affects the atmosphere, assuring students' convenience and positive participation. By creating such a safe, pleasant and welcoming atmosphere, participants not only feel relaxed but also lead them to efficiently deepen their reflection and “open and express my mood” (said A).

Whilst there have been some studies investigating the correlation between school environment and adolescents' identity development (Faircloth, 2009; La Guardia & Ryan, 2002; Rich and Schachter, 2012), which share some similarity with the above-mentioned results, this paper is shown to contribute in a different aspect in terms of “atmosphere” in IEx. On the one hand, the similarity is that in researches about school climate – identity development correlation, it was confirmed that the school environment or atmosphere positively influences the latter. The study conducted by Rich and Schachter (2012) concluded that high school climate influences ID even more than how much teachers' care does to this element. These researches looked into the “environment/ atmosphere” factor in identity development in broader view which is school climate. Flum & Kaplan (2006) and Madjar & Cohen-Malayev (2013) even had a more practical approach that they gave recommendations regarding which features of educational setting or environment a school should improve to facilitate students' identity development. On the other hand, the distinctive feature of this paper is the viewpoint of the participants which includes the broader meaning of atmosphere that is school and the narrower one which is the space in which the sessions of IEx program took place. Regarding school climate, the result confirmed what was elaborated in the literature review part about how Danish efterskole is an optimal

environment for IEx. From participants' discourses, it is proved that the school meets Flum & Kaplan's (2006) educational goals with exploratory orientation: support autonomy, school content related to students' lives, interaction enhancement and sense of belongings. With regards to "atmosphere" element, it seems that the last feature, sense of safety and belonging stands out according to the subjects' perspective. In particular, this feeling is created when participants are comfortable with the seat and space, soften their feelings with appropriate music, engaged by topics of interests and surrounded by people that share certain degree of closeness.

4.3 Barriers preventing middle adolescents in exploring their identity

So far, this paper has presented the results of the first two research questions. This part follows by answering the third one regarding barriers preventing middle adolescents in their self-exploration process. This result is not limited in the experimented program and school context. Rather than that, the participants shared challenges that they face with their daily life, which include home and the virtual world that we are all living within. The participants' responses to this question were categorized into two themes. The first barriers are "distractions" including social media, social activities and people's opinions. The second is the lack of facilitation, meaning the support in ID from family, experienced individuals and explicit IdEd at school.

4.3.1 Distractions

The contemporary society offers individuals numerous opportunities to connect with others, which means there are more possibilities for interaction, an essential element of IEx. However, spending too much time with others is a drawback in that people could lose more private time, which is meant for reflecting on what they experienced to construct their identity. This is why I thematized this category as "distraction", indicating that, according to the participants, adolescents tend to

be distracted from their ID process by overwhelming social activities, including virtual ones. The following are the extracts from N and A:

People can't leave their phone. They may be doing something to get famous or paid attention online with someone they know, some acquaintance or someone they don't know at all. That's putting mask over your identity. – N

The first thing is that we don't think that's important because we are more focused on parties. My friends are more focused on parties and friends and social life and forget about themselves. – A

It could be seen from N's and A's discourse that even though they did not explicitly mention self-reflection, both of them implied the unbalance between interaction and reflection among the youngsters of their age. N stated that middle adolescents were being drawn towards virtual world that they had been reaching out to various people including people they know well to strangers. They tend to create a different identity from who they are in their real life. This, according to N, somehow affects the process of exploring identity. Likewise, A pointed out another kind of social distraction, that is parties and gatherings. The reality that N and A addressed undoubtedly reflects how the youth is experiencing in the modern society. It could be concluded based on the participants' answers that the overuse of technological devices and overwhelming social activities are among the distractions preventing youngsters from deepening their awareness of their identity. Meanwhile, it is important to note that virtual interaction should not be judged only by its downside in this situation. While this way of interaction might attract people to an extent that they would forget about their real identity, it could be a good way to explore identity if people use it with an appropriate amount of time and quality connections.

Apart from virtual communication and in-person gatherings, N identified that people's opinions are another distraction to IEx process. He said:

For many teenagers, their identity comes from what people think and talk about them. Sometimes those comments decide who they are and who they want. - N

In fact, this factor was not only mentioned by N in our interview but also by all participants during the time the program took place. When being asked to write down some questions about identity, the participants often had questions

regarding how they had been struggling when making decisions of doing what they wanted or what most people did. Other questions were related to how they found it difficult to face with expectations from family and society.

To mitigate the influence of the abovementioned distractions, perhaps we could relate to the element of environment or atmosphere. In particular, with this huge impact of social media, social gatherings and others' opinions on youngsters' identity construction, what individuals need is the courage to stay firmly with their choices. To gain such courage, they need to be nurtured in a welcoming atmosphere in which social acceptance and community support are enhanced and there is no judgement. However, while creating this supportive environment is of paramount importance, in reality, it seems that experienced adults such as parents and teachers are lacking of their mindfulness as well as proper approach in doing this. The next section is presenting the second barrier, which is the lack of facilitation.

4.3.2 Lack of facilitation

Even though having been satisfied with the learning experience at REC, all participants found that they and the people of their age have been lacking of facilitation from parents, school and other experienced individuals.

Speaking of parents in general, both N and A stated that parents' support is a barrier for one's identity construction because of their inappropriate approaches in educating and showing care for their child. N talked about a kind of dominating parenting style, associated with actions of planning ahead for the child and not allowing the child to make his or her decisions. The following is N's extract regarding this idea:

Some parenting style is planning everything for the kid and they don't actually get to decide what they want. – N

In fact, "responsible choice" or "self-determination" was mentioned in Archer (1994) as the initial criterion for identity-enhancing curriculum. Now this is confirmed by the participants in this empirical research that it is of paramount importance for middle adolescents to practice decision-making. This is not only

because that their rights, but also their opportunities to grow their awareness of how such decisions would have an influence on their lives and the person they become. If middle adolescents fail to decide even the smallest issues of their life, they would not be able to gain a sense of responsibility and therefore they would be gradually dependent on their parents.

Another shortcoming about parenting style, pointed out by A, is their lack of concern in their child's development as a wholeness. A said:

Another thing would be the parents who want you to be succeed at career but they just focus about you, not really ask if you are okay. Normally that's the way it is. They just don't think it's necessary to talk about it. – A

This behavior from parents that A addressed is not uncommon nowadays when many parents' belief is succeed bringing a person happiness. Hence, they tend to focus too much on academic aspect while neglect other needs of their child, one of which is the need to figure out what they truly enjoy doing and want to become. Ropo (2019) suggested that story telling can do wonders for children and young adults in reflection and identity reconstruction. With the help of an adult, one can relate his or her experience to some meanings, which could lead to some realization about their identity. In this case, by just asking the child simple questions such as "How was your day?", the child is invited to open up about what significantly happened to them. The parent could ask further questions which trigger the child's further thoughts about meanings. Unfortunately, as A shared, many parents nowadays do not seem to have such an approach. That is why even though they care about their children, their kids could still feel not being listened.

An added that topics associated with identity are not only rarely mentioned at home but also at school. She explained:

I haven't had any subject where they really talked to me like let's discuss what is good for you to have identity – A

It might be argued that it is understandable when students only learn certain subjects with the purpose of gaining knowledge rather than self-understanding. However, self-understanding should not be separated from knowledge acquisition because one should know how the subject they are learning

contributes to their growth as a wholeness. Discussing teachers' role in students' identity construction, Ropo (2019) suggested that teachers could decide either knowledge acquisition or ID to focus on when teaching a subject. This means, at times, the former could be enhanced by letting scientific meanings dominate in that students could only focus on understanding the knowledge. On other occasions, while teaching a certain subject, the teacher could integrate identity development by relating the subject or content to students' personal meanings. For instance, students could discuss about reasons why they are learning Mathematics, how much they like the subject, how do they realize about their abilities while learning this subject, etc.

Besides insufficient and inappropriate support from parents and schools, the subjects participating in this research reported their difficulty in finding people who have insights and experiences associated with their problems, which they believe would help them when dealing with their identity-related issues.

Lots of the time you don't know whether or not they can relate. I have lots of friends that I can talk about something with but they don't necessarily relate to exact problem I have... If you don't know if the person can relate, you can't trust the person and you don't want to risk it... I am going back to environment again because it's the same idea. It's really about being comfortable. – J

By addressing people who can “relate”, J meant that the youngsters of his age might not necessarily need an adult. They could be someone among teachers and their friends, but what might prevent them from finding someone like that is the possibility of not being able to find one among such a number of people in the school. The uncomfortable feeling of talking to someone that they have not had enough bonding to reveal their mutual problems could also be a challenge. The trust is not enough between them to start such conversations about their personal issues. Here is where interventions needed. First of all, as J mentioned, a positive and supportive environment should be constructed so that every individual would feel free to express themselves and not be afraid of judgement that they could approach people to see if they have mutual interests and issues. However, there might be a situation where the individual cannot find a suitable person since there are so many individuals in the schooling community. Hence, another way of intervention should be done by a facilitator. The facilitator might be a teacher or

an academic staff who is closed with students enough to be able to allocate the person with certain issue to receive help.

All in all, this section regarding possible barriers that prevent middle-adolescents in their IEx process has presented the two main challenges: distractions including social activities and opinions; and facilitation from parents and the school. These are such a wide range of issues that need collaboration of school and parents. In terms of schools, the appropriate integration of identity-development orientation needs more attention in curricular development. Parents also need to contribute to their child's IdEd by initiating conversations about daily events, which could be led to the association of IF and construction. Even though the above-mentioned result shows us how complicated these barriers could be handled, it is still valuable for identity researchers and educators to be aware of and probably choose certain area(s) that they could work on at a time.

5 CONCLUSION

So far, this thesis has generated and discussed theoretical backgrounds with regards to middle adolescents' self-exploration. It has also elaborated methodology, research procedures and findings of this research. All of these content serves the major aim, which is understanding how middle adolescents experienced an IEx program in specific and identity-enhancing environment in general. This aim was achieved by designing a based on the framework of IdEd, criteria for identity-enhancing curriculum, mediated learning and narrative identity. The individual objectives being established to answer the main research inquiry was to understand from the participants' experience:

What would be the benefits that they have gained from the program?

What elements should be integrated in an optimal identity-enhancing program?

What barriers have they have faced with during their self-exploration process?

In the rest of this chapter, the results of the research are summarized with the focus on how the aforementioned objectives have been accomplished and how much does it shed light on the researched phenomenon. Recommendations are also given for further research and practices in the realm of IdEd, particularly for the integration of this ideology in school context.

5.1 Conclusion

This research has answered the three research questions. Firstly, according to participants' perspective, the experimented program has positively influenced them in improving self-awareness, gaining perspectives from others, enhancing self-confidence, experiencing self-exploration course more easily with simplified activities, and building connections with the facilitator and other participants. Secondly, according to the participants' experience, they would benefit from an identify-enhancing program that is integrated the following elements: the

approach, participants, and atmosphere. Among these elements, the approach was mentioned most frequently. Particularly, in this category, the participants talked about diversification, guidance, individualization, intentionality, interaction and doable activities. The orders of these themes are put from the most to the least frequently repeated. Finally, the research figured out that the biggest barriers that these middle adolescents realized having influenced their IEx process include distractions from social life, others' opinions, and the lack of facilitation from family, schools and people who they can relate to their problems.

As being shown in the result, the proposed objectives have been achieved. The research has not only achieved its purpose that is finding the answers, but it was also enriched by the participants' elaboration since there are further details in the subjects' discourse that contributed to better understanding of the research problem. Some of the participants' ideas even challenged the author's methods and triggered more layers of meanings for some certain topics. For example, when being asked about elements of an identity-enhancing program, J, one of the participants shared his critical thought as following:

I don't think that you can get the result consistently. A setting like this requires a lot more attention than most people are willing to put into it. It needs to be modified so that it can work both in and out of the session. – J

There are several aspects of consistency being implied in J's idea. First, the consistency of the impact towards the participants may not be moderate because they possess different backgrounds, outlook and levels of concentration. Second, it was also expected that practices given in this program would be able to be applied in both in and out of the session. The author also relates this to the idea of collaborating with other teachers at school and the parents, since, according to the result about the barriers of ID, an optimal identity-enhancing environment would not be gained without the facilitation from both families and schools. The scope of the program, which seems to have been narrower than the participants' expectation, therefore needs adjustment. Third, the preceding interpretations engaged the author's thoughts regarding the consistency of each individual's ID before, during and after the program. The program should be more practical by helping participants to achieve the ability of using what they perceived during the

sessions in their real life even after the program finished. This would be a sustainable impact that identity educators should keep in mind when designing and executing this kind of programs.

5.2 *Validity*

The validity of this research is going to be evaluated with regards to the methodology and the relation between findings and theories. It is followed with an elaboration of how much this study has contributed to the new knowledge of self-exploration among middle adolescents.

The validity of this thesis is reflected in four aspects. Initially, the experimented program, namely “self-exploration program” was designed on the basis of reliable theoretical frameworks for ID in general and for IEx among middle adolescents in specific. The chosen frameworks are IdEd, criteria for identity-enhancing curriculum, narrative identity and MLE. The program design and lesson plans were justified by Professor Eero Ropo, who has been an educational expert in the realm of identity. I, being the researcher of this study and also the operator running this program, have the experience of 10 years working as an English language teacher and international leader in a non-government organization, which ensured a standard qualification for running an educational program. Second, being aware that the focus of the program is enhancing personal meaning making experience, I made the most of my effort in increasing the proficiency of reflection activities and at the same time being flexible in adjusting changes along the process according to individuals’ preferences. This is to ensure the essence of ID that is individualization. Third, the data was acquired with various means, including observational field notes, participants’ reflection notes during and by the end of each session, participants’ other reflection products such as paintings and pictures, researcher’s report after every session, recordings and interviews transcripts. Third, as elaborated in the methodology part about phenomenological research, while the narration of the participants was respected so that the participants were encouraged to give honest and full answers without being interfered by oriented questions from the author, “there was an interchange of view between two people conversing about

a theme of mutual interest” (Groenewald, 2004). This means when encouraging participants to describe their experience and express their thoughts and feelings in the most direct way, the author was also involved in the conversations to understand their implication to the fullest possible. By doing this, the author has found it useful in the “data explicitation” process (Groenewald, 2004). Finally, the findings of this research, which provided informants’ subjective interpretations, are validated, according to the nature of a phenomenological and case study. The results, even though cannot be generalized into a bigger population, can be assumed to represent closely what informants’ people of the same age would have experienced.

5.3 Contribution to new knowledge

The findings from this research have contributed to “a variety of studies and lead to solid knowledge growth” (Schachter & Rich, 2011, P. 235) in the field of phenomenological. Even though the theory and ideology of IF initiated by Erikson has been “a staple in teacher educational curricula” (Schachter & Rich, 2011, P. 223), not until 2011 had a framework for IdEd been theorized by Schachter & Rich (2011). With this novel theoretical background, researchers and teachers were invited to understand the concept “IdEd” and have a reliable source assisting them in identity-enhancing-related research and practice. These authors suggested that:

What is especially important at this stage of developing the field of study is that researchers document carefully the characteristics of the phenomena studied, among other descriptive information in the research context including schools, teachers, students, and community, as well as educational goals and ideologies, and that they delineate meticulously the aspects, levels, contents, structures and process of identity that are being investigated. (p. 235)

In responding to this demand and necessity, these authors pioneered in conducting a study to investigate high school students’ perspective on how identity-enhancing schools affect their ID (Schachter & Rich, 2012). This is a valuable research in that the relations between students’ ID and some major aspects in school such as teachers and academic domains were crystalized.

However, it would not be sufficient to be generalized because the investigated subjects were Jewish public-religious sectors in Israel, which has unique cultural-religious features. In the same year, Flum and Kaplan (2012) published their research about the contextualized outlook on theories of IF in educational setting in practice. In 2013, Madjar and Cohen-Malayev generated characteristics of identity enhancement in formal and informal educational settings.

This study has been constructed based on these qualified and contemporary studies. At the same time, efforts have been made to be able to produce a research with unique contributions. Firstly, as mentioned above, this research has been the first one in which, an IEx program was designed based on the framework of IdEd, especially the parameters for IdEd (Schachter & Rich, 2011). This program, although being used for the purpose of this research, has produced certain impacts to the participants' ID. This was shown in the result responding to the first research question. The school where this research was conducted, REC, was also beneficial to this program since they had never experimented this approach in ID before. Therefore, it could be seen that this study has brought a theoretical framework into practice to see how it works in reality. The empirical findings of this research, even though being gained from the experience of only three participants, would enrich the understanding about how middle-adolescents perceive this kind of identity-enhancing method and what is learnt when constructing other kinds of identity-enhancing platforms. Secondly, this study might draw the attention of identity experts in the Danish efterskole, which was proved to be an optimal self-exploration model that has not been very well-known, so that this model could be learnt and improved by other educational settings in other countries.

The findings from this paper open up more ideas for upcoming research and practices. In the realm of research, there could be other ways to develop the understanding of middle-adolescents' IEx. The scope of the study could be broadened to more than three participants in a different context than an efterskole. By doing this, the researcher might see any different impacts and if there is consistent outcome. A new design of the identity-enhancing program may also produce different effects. In terms of educational practice, which I would encourage educators to focus more, this paper could be a useful source for

curricular development. Although the research refers to efterskole context, its description of how optimal the school climate is in identity exploration might suggest ideas for educators in other school contexts. Furthermore, the findings about barriers in IEx process would be valuable information for mediators like parents, teachers and other adults in facilitating middle-adolescents. Last but not least, I hope this paper would inspire some research or practice in teachers' or parents' training. The development in these facilitators' awareness is the core factor for implementing any ideas in IEx among middle-adolescents.

5.4 Limitation

Besides the above-mentioned accomplishments of the research, there are some limitations. First, the rich interpreted content of this research might challenge identity educational experts in choosing focused areas when creating identity-enhancing curriculum or programs. It is because even though there are, for instance, only three criteria were generated for an ideal program, each criterion might consist of different categories and they should be understood from various dimensions to achieve a full understanding. Particularly, one of the criteria is the approach, in which "diversification" was interpreted in terms of skills learnt, activities, topics, etc. The same complexity is applicable to the category of "atmosphere" and some others. Another shortcoming of this research could be the small number of participants. Although it was proved to be sufficient number for a phenomenological study that it meets the criteria for quality evaluation of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Boyd, 2001, cited in Groenewald, 2004), it is minimum number required. The validity of the research could have been stronger with the participation of more individuals. were more students involved in the research. Third, while the program was designed on creditable frameworks and verified by an expert in the field of education, there is still possibility that the designed curricula does not represent fully the given ideas of the frameworks. Perhaps assessment from some other experts and more times of operations would contribute to the validity of this study. Last but not least, the answers from the interviews could have been not completely accurate in

compared to the original messages due to the language barrier since English is the second language for both interviewer and participants.

5.5 Research ethics

To ensure a high standard of research ethics of this thesis, I consulted “Guidelines for ethical review in human sciences” (Finnish national board on research integrity TENK, 2020). Accordingly, I made efforts in designing a qualified self-exploration program, maximizing informants’ rights and benefits, and producing reliable knowledge. First of all, the self-exploration program, as explained in the validity section, was closely based on the frameworks of IdEd and other identity-enhancing related theories. It was then justified by an expert in the field of ID, and conducted by me, an educated English-as-a-second-language teacher having 10 years of experiences in teaching and training. Secondly, the participants’ rights and benefits were taken seriously in that they were explained about the program, how it was related to this research, and their role in participating in this study. I had at least one conversation with each participant to explain for them besides giving them a handout with details of the program and the consent. All informants were explained about their freedom to participate, leave and express their thoughts and feelings. Their personal information was used only within the scope of this research and their names were shown anonymously. I also gained my initial understanding about each informant through talking to them and their teachers, reducing possible emotional harm while conducting the program. After introducing the program to the participants, they had one week to make decision of joining the study and signing the consent. During the sessions of the program, the participants were encouraged to express their ideas freely and withdraw their participation at any moment if they did not feel comfortable. Last but not least, the validity of the data was controlled closely. During the interviews, participants were facilitated to be able to freely express and fully explain their opinions without being interfered by the author. Even though I made some additional points and questions, as explained in the validity part, my participation served the purpose of triggering informants’ thoughts about the topic and understanding better their experiences. The collected data was then

carefully interpreted. Since there were only three cases in this study, I tried to provide rich interpretation into each case. References were cited precisely and fully throughout the thesis paper.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Transcript of interview questions

Interview questions

The interview questions are designed according to the research questions:

- According to middle adolescents' perspective, what are the benefits and influences they could gain from opportunities for exploring their identity?
- What elements do middle adolescents think would contribute to a useful program/ course for identity development?
- According to middle adolescents' perspective, to what are the barriers preventing them from exploring their identity?

At the beginning of the interview:

Hi..., first of all thank you for taking your time to take part in an interview with me today. Before we start, I would like to make sure you are well informed of the following:

- *This interview is to understand how you experienced the program for self-exploration and the recording will be used for a research namely "Adolescents' experiences in exploring identity intentionally: A phenomenological research in Ranum Efterskole College, Denmark". Therefore, you are expected and encouraged to answer honestly and in however way that you feel most comfortable.*
 - *If you are struggle in finding a suitable word, you can try to explain it in a simpler way or let me know so that we can figure out what you want to say.*
 - *The interview lasts for 30 minutes to an hour. Please feel free to stop anytime you feel uncomfortable to continue sharing and we can arrange another day.*
- Do you have any concerns or questions before we start?
Now let's start!*

Contextualized questions

- *Could you tell me about who you are and who you want to become? Either with full description or some phrases coming up in your mind right now?*
- *How do you explore your identity? This place (school) gave lots of opportunities, fresh start*
- *How have your experiences at REC helped you in discovering and developing yourself so far?
The school is diverse*

- *Could you tell me how did you decide to take part in this program for “self-exploration”?*
Interesting idea, wanted to help
- *What were your expectations before participating the program?*
Psychological treatment, show what to do

Apprehending the phenomenon

Influences:

- *Can you describe to me what did you usually do in the sessions of this program?*
Calm setting, fluent and not cutting stone, talked a lot about different things, wrote down what we think... got to read our own what people thought. The end, draw our thoughts basically, rethinking, trying to simplify
- *Do you think this kind of program is necessary for young people of your age? Why/ why not? The idea is necessary, people need to be aware of this,*
- *How about other activities and projects organized at school to help young people explore and develop their identity, in your opinion, how necessary do you think they are?*
Most if not all acts were designed for students.
- *How do you understand “discovering yourself intentionally”? (In case the participant cannot tell, the researcher can explain: doing something intentionally means you do something with an awareness. For example, you keep asking yourself questions about your identity and reflecting on your thoughts after experiencing something)*
- *So in your opinion, is there any difference between discovering who you are with and intention and without it? How necessary are reflection activities help develop your identity?*
Aware or not aware, willing or not willing

Elements:

- *Can you describe an activity or a content that you experienced in the program and find the most meaningful / useful?*
The last part of drawing, a nice way to simplify your thoughts makes us think what is important
- *How did you find it useful?*
- *Talking about the whole program, can you tell me what elements that make it useful (you can think about the content, space, facility, teacher, participants, timing, interactions, etc.). Ask the participant to elaborate as detailed as possible.*
Interactions between participants, environment,
- *Can you describe some features that you find the program not useful or not done well enough? How do you think it could be improved? (you can think about the content, space, facility, teacher, participants, timing, interactions, etc.). Ask the participant to elaborate as detailed as possible.*
Not enough time for bonding
Making the activity feel the least of what they have to
Giving opportunities to realise, not making people to realise -> creating pressure

Barriers:

- *In your opinion, what are the barriers that prevent you and people of your age in your self-exploration process? Could you explain in details?*

Clarifying the phenomenon

- *If you could create a program for identity exploration for yourself and people of your age, how would it be? (you can think about what would make your experience most exciting, meaningful and helpful).*

This is the end of the interview. Do you want to add or change any content that we have discussed?

For the next step, I am going to make a transcript of this interview recording, as well as some interpretations from your answers (how I understand what you mean from your answers). I will send them to you for any change needed (if some content was understood inaccurately) or/ and confirmation of accuracy.

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Agreement for Participation and Interviews

Informed Consent Agreement for Participation and Interviews

“Middle adolescents’ experiences in exploring identity: a phenomenological research in Ranum Efterskole College, Denmark”

I, _____, hereby agree to serve as a subject in the research project titled *“Middle adolescents’ experiences in exploring identity: a phenomenological research in Ranum Efterskole College, Denmark”*. It has been explained to me that its purpose is to gather information about the necessity of a programme for identity development in school, its impacts on students’ progress of exploring their identity. The research activities I will participate in are:

- a 4-session program called “Self-exploration”. Each session lasts 1.5 hours, during which, my reflection, feedback and any products/ assignment are kept or recorded.
- one or two 30-minute to an-hour audio-recorded interview(s) (An online interview might be conducted if more information is needed)

I have been informed that the information I provide will only be listened to and used for a research paper and presentation by Chi Dao at Tampere University. I also understand that my responses may be reported in the paper and presentation, and my identity will be kept confidential and no identifying information about me will be included.

I understand that the risks to me are minimal. I agree to participate in the program, to be interviewed, and to have that interview audio recorded for this project. I have been told the recording will only be heard by Chi Dao and her faculty and will be destroyed when the project is finished.

There will be no compensation of any kind available for my participation. I have been told that I can skip any question or stop the interview and withdraw my full participation from the study at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions about this project or my participation in it, I can call Chi at +358 40 321 6118, or email her at chi.dao@tuni.fi. Likewise, the person to contact if I have questions concerning my rights as a research subject or I experience problems as a result of my participation in this project is Sari Hyttinen, Coordinator of International Education, Faculty of Education and Culture, P.O. Box 700, FI-33014 Tampere University, Finland; Phone +358 (0)40 190 1530.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and that my choice of whether to participate in this project will not jeopardize my relationship with Ranum Efterskole College. I am free to withdraw at any point before or during the interview. I have read and agree to the foregoing.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 3: Description of self-exploration program

Dear students,

This is a programme facilitating adolescents in discovering and developing their identity (Who you are and Who you are becoming). Before deciding to take part in this programme, please consider the following questions:

Do you feel excited to experience this programme?

Do you feel like this programme is for you?

Please see details as follows:

Educational goal	Self exploration Personal growth Facilitator follows students' flows of reflecting their identity
What?	Participants take part in a journey of self-discovery, where they are given opportunities and facilitation to understand and construct who they are and who they are becoming, by expressing their inner thoughts and meanings and reflecting them individually and with others. Some notice: - The focus of this programme is to facilitate each participant in being mindful of their own feelings and awareness, NOT for the purpose of skills acquisition. - Individuals' personal wishes are respected. Participants are encouraged to share their thoughts but if they prefer not to, there can be other options for reflection. - Some pure fun activities will also be organised to enhance the sense of belonging and trust within the group.
How?	Participants will realise, negotiate, reposition and construct their identity through: - expressing their inner thoughts in various ways (drawings, photographs, writings, stories, music, etc.), - making meanings of their experiences, - and listening to others' stories and perspectives
When?	7:30-9:00p.m. every Tuesday from 05/11/2019 (4 sessions)

Signing up

Participants signing up will be joining the whole programme (4 sessions).

I would also appreciate if you are open for giving your feedback for improvements.

If you are interested, please send me an email, saying your name and your expectations (even if they are not mentioned in the given content).

My email address: chi@ranumefterskole.dk

Thank you!

