

Positive Youth Development Programs: Experience Based on the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong

Daniel T L Shek

Department of Applied Social Sciences
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Andrew M H Siu

Department of Rehabilitation Sciences
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract

A survey of the literature shows that there are worrying trends and phenomena related to the development of adolescents in Hong Kong. As such, primary prevention programs targeting specific adolescent developmental problems and positive youth development programs are called for. However, research findings show that there are very few systematic and multi-year positive youth development programs in Hong Kong. In response to this worrying picture, a positive youth development program entitled Project P.A.T.H.S. was initiated by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to promote holistic development of junior secondary school students in Hong Kong, with the involvement of five universities in Hong Kong the program development, training and evaluation. Based on different evaluation strategies, existing research findings generally revealed that different stakeholders had positive perceptions of the program, workers, as well as benefits the program and the program was effective in promoting holistic positive youth development in Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong.

Keywords: Youth Development, Chinese, Positive Psychology

Introduction

Research findings showed that there were worrying trends and phenomena related to the development of adolescents in Hong Kong (Shek, 2006). In the area of substance abuse, there was a growing trend of psychotropic substance abuse among young people in the past decade (Shek, 2007, 2010b). In the area of adolescent suicide, there was a growing trend of adolescent suicide in the past two decades. Researchers have also reported that adolescent problem gambling and Internet addiction are growing problems deserving the attention of youth workers and policy-makers (Derevensky, Shek & Merrick, 2010; Shek, Tang & Lo, 2008; Shek, Siu & Yu, 2010; Siu, Ma & Shek, 2010).

How can we reduce adolescent developmental problems? A review of the literature shows that two non-mutually exclusive approaches can be adopted. The first approach is the prevention approach which attempts to prevent adolescent developmental problems via well-conceived intervention programs. According to Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard and Arthur (2002), there are several attributes of the prevention science perspective. These include These include: 1) identification of risk and protective factors; 2) adoption of a developmental perspective; 3) assertion that problem behaviors share many common antecedents; and 4) assertion that risk and protective factors change youth outcomes.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel T L Shek, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Hong Kong.
E-mail: daniel.shek@polyu.edu.hk

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Besides prevention initiatives, an alternative approach emphasizing the importance of positive youth development rather than focus on adolescent developmental problems has been proposed. Damon (2004) stated that the field of positive youth development (PYD) focuses on each child's talents, strengths, interests, and future potential in contrast to approaches that focus on problems that some youth display when they grow up, such as learning disabilities and substance abuse. Catalano et al. (2002) pointed out that there are several characteristics associated with the positive youth development approach. These include: 1) emphasis on integrated youth development (i.e., focusing on a range of youth developmental possibilities and problems) rather than dealing with a single youth problem; 2) upholding the belief that "problem-free is not fully prepared" (Pittman, 1991); 3) emphasis of person-in-environment perspective; and 4) focus on developmental models on how young people grow, learn and change.

Graczyk, Weissberg, Payton, Elias, Greenberg and Zins (2000) argued that promotion of social and emotional learning of adolescents (SEL) can serve as a unifying framework that can integrate the risk and protective factors paradigm and the competence enhancement paradigm. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. Research has shown that SEL is fundamental to children's social and emotional development - their health, ethical development, citizenship, academic learning, and motivation to achieve. Social and emotional education is a unifying concept for organizing and coordinating school-based programming that focuses on positive youth development, health promotion, prevention of

problem behaviors, and student engagement in learning" (<http://www.casel.org>). Generally speaking, several SEL attributes are commonly included in different SEL models. These include self-awareness (identifying emotions and recognizing strengths), social awareness (perspective-taking and appreciating diversity), self-management (managing emotions and goal setting), responsible decision making (analyzing situations, assuming personal responsibility, respecting others, problem solving) and relationship skills (communication, building relationships, negotiation, refusal). Sun and Shek (2010) showed that higher positive youth development predicted lower problem behavior, thus suggesting that positive youth development is an important protective factor in adolescent problem behavior.

There are many positive youth development programs in the field. In a review of existing programs on positive youth development, Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak and Hawkins (2002) reviewed 77 programs and concluded that there were 25 successful programs involving 15 positive youth development constructs.

1. Promotion of Bonding: Development of the program participants' relationship with healthy adults and positive peers in the extra-familial contexts (school, community and cultural contexts) and caregivers and significant-others in the intra-familial context.
2. Cultivation of Resilience: promotion of capacity for adapting to change and stressful events in healthy and adaptive ways.
3. Promotion of Social Competence: Training the program participants' interpersonal skills (including communication, assertiveness, refusal and resistance, conflict resolution and interpersonal negotiation) and providing opportunities to practice such skills.
4. Promotion of Emotional Competence: Training the program participants' skills

to recognize feelings in oneself and others (including empathy), skills to express feelings, skills to manage emotional reactions or impulses (delay of gratification and frustration tolerance), and emotional self-management strategies.

5. **Promotion of Cognitive Competence:** Developing the program participants' cognitive abilities, processes or outcomes, including academic performance, logical thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision making, planning and goal setting, and self-talk.

6. **Promotion of Behavioral Competence:** Cultivation of verbal communication (making requests and positive response to criticisms), non-verbal communication and taking action skills, and providing reinforcement for the effective behavior choices and action pattern.

7. **Promotion of Moral Competence:** Development of a sense of right and wrong and respect for rules and standards as well as social justice.

8. **Cultivation of Self-Determination:** Promoting the program participants' sense of autonomy, independent thinking, or self-advocacy.

9. **Promotion of Spirituality:** Helps the program participants to develop purpose and meaning in life, hope, or beliefs in a higher power.

10. **Development of Self-Efficacy:** Promoting the program participants' coping and mastery skills and changing their negative self-efficacy expectancies or self-defeating cognitions.

11. **Development of Clear and Positive Identity:** Promotion of healthy identity formation and achievement, including positive identification with one's social or ethnic identity.

12. **Promotion of Beliefs in the Future:** Helping program participants to develop future potential goals, choices or options.

13. **Provides Recognition for Positive Behavior:** Developing systems for rewarding, recognizing or reinforcing participants' positive behavior such as prosocial behavior or positive changes in behavior.

14. **Providing Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement:** Designing activities and events for program participants to make positive contribution to groups.

15. **Fostering Prosocial Norms:** Encouraging program participants to develop clear and explicit standards for prosocial engagement.

The Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong

With reference to the intensification of adolescent developmental problems in Hong Kong, there are very few systematic and multi-year positive youth development programs in Hong Kong (Shek & Sun, 2009). For the existing youth enhancement programs, they commonly deal with isolated problems and issues in adolescent development (i.e., deficits-oriented programs) and they are relatively short-term in nature. To promote holistic development among adolescents in Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust initiated and launched a project entitled "P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme". The word "P.A.T.H.S." denotes Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes. The Trust invited academics of five universities in Hong Kong to form a Research Team with The Hong Kong Polytechnic University as the lead institution to develop a multi-year universal positive youth development program to promote holistic adolescent development in Hong Kong. Besides developing the program, the Research Team also provides training for teachers and social workers who implement the program, and carries out longitudinal evaluation of the project.

There are two tiers of programs (Tier 1 and Tier 2 Programs) in this project. The

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Tier 1 Program is a universal positive youth development program in which students in Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 participate, normally with 20 hours of training in the school year at each grade. Because research findings suggest that roughly one-fifth of adolescents would need help of a deeper nature, the Tier 2 Program is generally provided for at least one-fifth of the students who have greater psychosocial needs at each grade (i.e., selective program).

There are three basic components of the P.A.T.H.S. Project. The first component is curriculum development for the Tier 1 Program.

The overall objective of the Tier 1 Program is to promote holistic development among junior secondary school students in Hong Kong. To achieve this objective, program elements related to the 15 positive youth development constructs identified by Catalano et al. (2002) are covered in the Project P.A.T.H.S. Both Chinese and English curriculum manuals have been produced with reference to all constructs except recognition for positive behavior. For recognition for positive behavior, it is argued that it should be implemented as a regular principle within and outside classrooms. As such, no specific curricula are needed. The topics of the 120 units in the three junior secondary school years can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of teaching units across Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 (S1-S3) curricula with reference to the 15 positive youth development constructs

15 Positive Youth Development Constructs	Full Program			Core Program
	No. of Session (Each has 30 minutes)			
	S1	S2	S3	
1. Bonding	4	2	2	Core Program
2. Social Competence	2	2	4	
3. Emotional Competence	2	4	2	
4. Cognitive Competence	2	2	2	
5. Behavioral Competence	2	2	2	
6. Moral Competence	2	2	4	
7. Self-Efficacy	4	2	2	
8. Prosocial Norms	2	4	2	
9. Resilience	4	4	4	
10. Self-Determination	4	2	2	
11. Spirituality	2	4	4	
12. Clear and Positive Identity	4	2	2	
13. Beliefs in the Future	2	4	4	
14. Prosocial Involvement	4	4	4	

Note. The fifteenth construct of “Recognition for Positive Behavior” is spread over all 14 constructs. This construct is used as a teaching strategy and no teaching activity is designed for this construct.

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The second component of the project is training program. It is argued that well-designed training for the potential program implementers can minimize the chances of committing a type III error—correctly concluding that the prevention program is ineffective for the wrong reason. There are times when program results display no preventive effects and researchers naturally attribute such to the inadequacies of the program curriculum when in fact, the lack of implementers' training could have contributed to its ineffectiveness. Despite the importance of training in adolescent prevention and positive youth development programs, the significance of training prevention professionals tends to be overlooked. Shek and Wai (11) reviewed the training programs for adolescent prevention and positive youth development programs. The authors' conclusion is that the documentation for training programs in positive youth development programs was weak and that the existing training programs had limitations.

Against such a background, training is strongly emphasized in the P.A.T.H.S. Project. For each of the Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 programs, both teachers and social workers involved receive 20 hours of training before implementing the program in their schools. Generally speaking, there are three days of training at each grade. In Day 1, the conceptual foundation, program philosophy, curriculum issues and evaluation methods are introduced. In Day 2 and Day 3, the training program covers the teaching units in the curriculum as well as the ways by which the program can be successfully implemented (e.g., program implementers have adequate debriefing skills and adopt reflective practice). In the training program, the potential program implementers are encouraged to reflect on their motivation to teach the program and identification with the program philosophy. They are also empowered to carry out the experiential learning activities which are quite foreign to Chinese teachers. The principles underlying the design of the training programs can be seen in Shek and Wai (2008).

The final component of the project is program monitoring. Actually, one unique characteristic of the Project P.A.T.H.S. is systematic evaluation of the program. Utilizing the principle of triangulation, various evaluation strategies have been used to evaluate the Tier 1 Program as follows (Shek, Sun & Siu, 2008; Sun, Shek & Tang, 2009):

1. Objective Outcome Evaluation: A randomized group trial with 24 experimental schools and 24 control schools initially has been carried out.
2. Subjective Outcome Evaluation (Tier 1 Program): Both students and program implementers are invited to complete subjective outcome evaluation forms (Form A and Form B, respectively) after completion of the program (e.g., Siu & Shek, 2010).
3. Process Evaluation: Systematic observations are carried out in randomly selected schools to understand the program implementation details.
4. Interim Evaluation: To understand the process of implementation, interim evaluation is conducted by randomly selecting roughly half of the participating schools in the Experimental and Full Implementation Phases (e.g., Shek, Sun & Siu, 2008).
5. Qualitative Evaluation (Focus Groups Based on Students): Focus groups involving students based on schools randomly selected from the participating schools are carried out.
6. Qualitative Evaluation (Focus Groups Based on Program Implementers): Focus groups involving instructors based on schools randomly selected from the participating schools are carried out (Shek, Siu & Lam, 2006).
7. Qualitative Evaluation (In-depth Interviews with Program Implementers): Prolonged in-depth interviews with teachers are carried out.

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8. Qualitative Evaluation (Case Study Based on Focus Groups): A case study documenting the implementation experience of schools that have incorporated the Tier 1 Program into school formal curriculum is carried out.

9. Qualitative Evaluation (Student Logs): Students are invited to reflect their experiences after attending P.A.T.H.S. lessons and application of things learned to real life.

10. Qualitative Evaluation (Student Products): Students' weekly diaries are collected after completion of the program. Students' drawings are also collected to reflect the experiences of the program participants.

11. Management Information Collected From the Co-Walker Scheme: Because the Co-walkers conducted classroom observations and completed observation forms, such information can give an overall picture about the implementation details in different schools.

12. Evaluation Based on the Repertory Grid Tests: Students are randomly selected to complete repertory grid tests that assess their self-identity systems before and after joining the program and perceived changes across years.

Generally speaking, triangulation of the available evaluation findings shows that different stakeholders had positive views about the Tier 1 Program and they perceived the program to be beneficial to the development of the program participants. Most importantly, the findings suggest that the project is effective in promoting positive youth development among Chinese adolescents at least in the junior secondary school years in Hong Kong.

To illustrate, with special focus on objective outcome evaluation, analyses based on the data collected from 19 experimental schools ($n = 3,006$ students) and 24 control schools ($n = 3,727$ students) in the junior secondary school years showed that

participants in the experimental schools displayed better positive youth development than did participants in the control schools based on different indicators derived from the Chinese Positive Youth Development Scale, including positive self-identity, prosocial behavior, and general positive youth development attributes. Differences between experimental and control participants were also found when students who joined the Tier 1 Program and perceived the program to be beneficial were employed as participants of the experimental schools (Shek & Ma, 2011). Furthermore, results based on individual growth curve modeling generally showed that the participants displayed lower levels of substance abuse and delinquent behavior than did the control students. Participants who regarded the program to be helpful also showed lower levels of problem behavior than did the control students, suggesting that the Project P.A.T.H.S. is effective in preventing adolescent problem behavior in the junior secondary school years (Shek & Yu, 2011).

There are several impacts of the project. First, the project has impact on secondary schools in Hong Kong regarding holistic youth development curriculum. It provides a useful and practical framework with around 220+ schools participating in the project. In addition, more than half of the participating schools have included the program in the formal curriculum. Second, evaluation based on multiple methods, multiple data and multiple informants showed that different stakeholders of the project perceived that the project is beneficial to the program participants and the randomized group trial showed that students participating in the project show better development than the control participants. First, the project is regarded as an important youth enhancement program by the Government. It has been regarded as: a) an anti-poverty initiative by the Poverty Commission, b) a key youth enhancement initiative by the Social Welfare Department, Government of the Hong Kong SAR, c) a key adolescent prevention program

(e.g. Panel on Child Fatality Review; Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse), and a program that can be used for anti-drug education in schools (Resource Kit for Teachers on Anti-Drug Education). Third, the project has impact internationally. The project has been adapted and implemented in Shanghai and Macau. In addition, more than 100 international refereed publications have been generated from the project. The list of publications can be seen in the web site of the project (<http://www.paths.hk>).

In view of the growing adolescent developmental problems, it is important for policy-makers and youth workers to re-think about how to deal with such problems. Although the prevention approach has been widely adopted in the field, it can be argued that it may over-focus on youth problems and different adolescent problem may call for different prevention programs. Alternatively, it is argued that the use of positive youth development approach can help to promote the psychosocial competencies of young people which would reduce their likelihood to engage in adolescent problem behavior. The Project P.A.T.H.S. is an excellent example showing the utility of such an approach. As there are very few validated positive youth development programs in different Chinese contexts, it is suggested that ore effort should be made to develop such programs in future.

Acknowledgement

The preparation for this paper and the Project P.A.T.H.S. were financially supported by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

摘要

「共創成長路」—青少年正面成長課程在香港推行的經驗

在近年，多項本地調查顯示，香港青少年的發展有多個令人擔憂的現象及趨勢。社會有需要發展基層健康方案，以針對年青

人的發展問題及培育正面發展。可是，香港多年來都未有開發有系統及持續的青少年正面成長課程。針對這令人擔憂的現象，香港賽馬會慈善信託基金贊助及推動了一個名為「共創成長路」的青少年正面成長課程，以促進香港初中學生的全面發展。「共創成長路」計劃的課程由本地五所大學所設計、並進行導師培訓及成效評估。通過使用不同的評估策略，成效研究結果顯示，不同的利益相關者普遍對計劃、導師、及效益有正面的評價，認為「共創成長路」的課程能有效地促進香港青少年的正面發展。

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