

Design of training programs for a positive youth development program: Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong

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Abstract: To facilitate the implementation of the Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 program of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong, systematic training programs are designed for the potential program implementers. The rationales, objectives and design of the Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 training programs are outlined in this paper. The training programs cover theories of adolescent development, positive youth development, background and curricula of the Project P.A.T.H.S., factors affecting program implementation quality and evaluation of the project. Besides introducing the curriculum units, the training programs also focus on nature of learning and related theories (particularly experiential learning), teaching methods and instructional techniques, motivating students, and classroom management.

Keywords: Project P.A.T.H.S., training program, positive youth development

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent developmental issues like substance abuse and mental health problems have received increasing attention from researchers and practitioners throughout the world. Due to these rising concerns, efforts to promote healthy adolescent development, such as development of prevention and positive youth development programs, have emerged. Many studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of such programs (1). Unfortunately, as revealed in the study conducted by Catalano et al (2), among the 77 positive youth development programs under review, only roughly one-third of the programs were effective. The conclusion based on this study is that although there are many “good will” positive

youth development programs, some programs simply do not work.

Why do positive youth development programs not work? Besides the possibility that poor program design may contribute to the non-effectiveness, another possibility is that the failure is due to the inability of the program implementers to carry out the program in the desired direction. Therefore, we can argue that adequate training for the program implementers is an indispensable prerequisite for successful program implementation. Through systematic and well-designed training, the program participants can gain knowledge, attitude, skills and values that are important for quality program implementation. Through well-designed training, program participants can

also develop a sense of ownership of the program, thus enhancing successful program implementation.

Furthermore, 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 (3-6). 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 (7). A study conducted by Rohrbach et al (8) demonstrated this error. The research team evaluated the integrity of program implementation of trained and untrained teachers. The results showed that even the rates among trained teachers in adopting, implementing, and maintaining the program were "highly variable and surprisingly low" (8:249).

Despite the importance of training in adolescent prevention and positive youth development programs, the significance of training prevention professionals tends to be overlooked (9,10). 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. In addition, several principles were proposed for the design of training programs in the context of adolescent prevention and positive youth development programs. These principles included the:

1. design of training program based on training theories/models;
2. acquisition of knowledge about adolescents and the program;
3. acquisition of knowledge about the curriculum structure of the program;

4. cultivation of appropriate implementation skills;
5. cultivation of self-reflection skills;
6. encouragement of workers to be role models;
7. promotion of motivation of the trainees;
8. promotion of self-efficacy of the trainees;
9. provision of opportunities for demonstration and practice;
10. provision of adequate training time;
11. consideration of cultural context in the design of the training program; and
12. evaluation of the training program.

Obviously, these principles are good pointers based on which training programs on positive youth development programs can be designed.

PROJECT P.A.T.H.S. IN HONG KONG

To promote holistic development among adolescents in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust approved an earmarked grant of HK\$750 million (HK\$400M for the first cycle and HK\$350M for the second cycle) to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of a positive youth development project in Hong Kong (12-13). The P.A.T.H.S. Project consists of two tiers of programs. The Tier 1 Program is a universal positive youth development program in which students in Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 participate in a 10-hour or 20-hour curriculum-based program. Before implementing the Tier 1 program, each worker has to join a 20-hour training program for each grade. The training program of the Project P.A.T.H.S. has several general objectives:

1. to understand the nature of adolescent development and the related issues, and to cultivate a positive attitude to adolescent development;

2. to understand the nature of positive youth development, including its basic concepts, related programs, and research;
3. to familiarize themselves with the nature of Project P.A.T.H.S., including its basic philosophy, design, implementation, and evaluation;
4. to understand the content of the Tier 1 Program, including the core program and elective program;
5. to acquire the attitude, knowledge and skills that are conducive to the successful implementation of the Tier 1 Program; and
6. to establish a self-help support network among the program participants.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The training programs of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong have several unique features. First, progressive training programs are designed for the Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 levels. The Secondary 1 training program is an introductory training program that attempts to familiarize the participants with the background philosophy, rationales, program design, teaching methodology, and evaluation strategies of the P.A.T.H.S. Project. The Secondary 2 and Secondary 3 training programs are training programs at the intermediate and advanced levels, respectively.

Second, a 3-day program at each grade is designed. In Day 1, adolescent theories, positive youth development, program implementation issues, and evaluation strategies are introduced. In Day 2 and Day 3, the program content, different techniques and issues that are related to program implementation and ways to promote worker efficacy and involvement are included.

Third, units in the Tier 1 program with reference to different positive youth

development constructs are systematically presented in the training programs. Although an overview of the curriculum is given, a demonstration and discussion of the specific units are also carried out.

Fourth, consistent with the philosophy of the Tier 1 program, experiential learning including active participation of the participants is strongly emphasized in the training programs.

Fifth, interaction, such as open discussion and role play activities, is emphasized in the training programs.

Sixth, a conscious effort is made to promote the passion and involvement of the potential program implementers.

Finally, the program participants are strongly encouraged to carry out personal reflection in the training programs. These unique features are in line with the principles highlighted in the study of Shek and Wai (11), which are outlined in table 1. The content of the training programs are described in table 2 to table 4.

CONCLUSIONS

To enhance the implementation quality of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong, systematic training programs are designed. For the Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 curricula, a 20-hour training program involving 3 days is designed for each grade. The training programs are seen as pioneering, especially in the Chinese context that can be adopted by youth workers to train potential program implementers. Through systematic evaluation, quantitative and qualitative findings generally showed that most participants were satisfied with the P.A.T.H.S. programs (14-15). One possible interpretation of such findings is that systematic training programs have helped the workers to deliver the Tier 1 program in a quality manner.

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Table 1: *Development of the training programs in the Project P.A.T.H.S. with reference to the principles outlined in Shek and Wai (11)*

Principles	Features in the Training Program in Project P.A.T.H.S.
Principle 1: Design of Training Program based on Training Theories/Models	Concepts based on active learning, cooperative learning, experiential learning, self-efficacy theory, social cognitive perspective, and social learning theory are used to design the training programs.
Principle 2: Acquisition of Knowledge about Adolescents and the Program	Theories of adolescence and adolescent developmental issues are included.
Principle 3: Acquisition of Knowledge about the Curriculum Structure of the Program	Sequencing details and rationales involved in different units of the curriculum are presented.
Principle 4: Cultivation of Appropriate Implementation Skills	Appropriate teaching skills and classroom management skills are included.
Principle 5: Cultivation of Self-Reflection Skills	All potential program implementers are encouraged to reflect and related skills are included.
Principle 6: Encouragement of Workers to be Role Models	Workers are encouraged to be role models.
Principle 7: Promotion of Motivation of the Trainees	Training programs promote the willingness of potential program implementers to implement the program and their sense of ownership.
Principle 8: Promotion of Self-efficacy of the Trainees	Training program participants are helped to cultivate the belief that they possess the necessary competence to implement the program.
Principle 9: Provision of Opportunities for Demonstration and Practice	Demonstration of the unit activities is consistently carried out.
Principle 10: Provision of Adequate Training Time	20 hours of training are required for each grade.
Principle 11: Consideration of Cultural Context in the Design of Training Program	Training content is designed with reference to the Chinese culture such as learning characteristics of Chinese and Western students
Principle 12: Evaluation of Training Program	Systematic evaluation strategies are used with diversified approaches.

Tables 2-4 landscape = 18 pp