Implementation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in a school with a religious background: a case study

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a case study that attempted to identify school-related factors influencing the quality of implementation of the Tier 1 Program of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. The case study method was utilized to investigate perceptions of the program implementers of program effectiveness, and to identify the crucial factors for program success in a school with a religious background that admits students with high academic achievement. Findings demonstrated that incorporation of the program into the formal curriculum, good administrative support, efficient management from school, and presence of dedicated teachers contributed to program success. The present findings provide insight for the implementation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in schools with a religious background.

Keywords: adolescence; case study; implementation quality; positive youth development; Project P.A.T.H.S.

Introduction

There is a growing concern about the problem behaviors of today's youth in Hong Kong. Concerns stem from an upsurge in adolescent problem behaviors such as abuse of psychotropic substances (1), adolescent suicide (2), and school violence (3). Apparently, some adolescents tend to have a greater propensity to engage in risky behaviors that would jeopardize their health and development if not properly dealt with. These behaviors can have dire repercussions for individuals and society. Substantial efforts to address adolescent problems through prevention efforts and positive youth development programs have therefore become urgently vital in Hong Kong.

To help young people to accomplish the developmental tasks successfully, schools are increasingly challenged to offer more than basic instruction in the traditional academic areas, and they are also seen as a key place for preventive intervention. A territory-wide project entitled P.A.T.H.S. (Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programs) initiated by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust has been launched to promote holistic development among adolescents in Hong Kong, with the first author being the Principal Investigator. There are two phases in the project. In the original phase (2005–2009), a total of HK$400 million was allocated for the project. Because of the positive impact of the project, an additional HK$350 million was earmarked for the extension phase (2009–2012).

There are two tiers of programs (Tier 1 and Tier 2 Programs) in the project. The Tier 1 Program is a universal positive youth development program where students in Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 participate in the program, normally with 20 hours of training in the school year at each grade involving 40 teaching units. In the Tier 1 Program, 15 positive youth development constructs are embedded in the 40 teaching units. These constructs include: promotion of bonding, cultivation of resilience, promotion of social competence, promotion of emotional competence, promotion of cognitive competence, promotion of behavioral competence, promotion of moral competence, cultivation of self-determination, promotion of spirituality, development of self-efficacy, development of a clear and positive identity, promotion of beliefs in the future, provision of recognition for positive behavior, provision of opportunities for prosocial involvement, and fostering prosocial norms.

The project is currently implemented in more than 200 secondary schools in Hong Kong. In general, participating schools adopt two primary modes in the program implementation: integration of the program into formal and informal curriculum. Regarding the formal curriculum, the project is implemented in academic subjects such as Life Education, Liberal Studies, Ethics, Life Philosophy, Civic Education, P.A.T.H.S., Integrated Humanities, Moral Education, Religious Studies, etc. For the informal curriculum, the project is implemented in class teacher periods, assemblies or extracurricular activities. This paper reports how a school with a religious background incorporates the Project P.A.T.H.S. into Religious Studies.

The Curriculum Development Council (CDC) of Hong Kong outlined the rationales underlying the guidelines of

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Religious Education for Secondary 1 to 3. According to CDC, religion is 'a universal and supra-historical phenomenon essential in any whole-person education' [(4), p. 7], and is therefore regarded as an academic subject that all students can profitably study. Religious Education not only provides the setting in which different religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islamism, and Taoism are explicitly addressed, but also offers opportunities for personal development and intellectual rigor for students in Hong Kong. It also enables students to explore questions of meaning, value, and purpose in life. Students can develop a reflective capacity, empathetic understanding, and philosophical and evaluative thinking skills. They also can develop insights, a capacity for moral and spiritual life, and personal autonomy via Religious Education.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Religious Education aims to contribute to students' personal development and well-being. It makes significant contributions to other parts of the school curriculum and to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society such as citizenship, personal, social, health and economic education, the humanities, education for sustainable development, and others. It provides opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development, deepening the understanding of the significance of religion in the lives of others – individually, community, and cross-culturally. On the whole, Religious Education in both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom aim to contribute to spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of students.

Obviously, one basic question that should be asked is how Religious Education is linked to positive youth development. The linkage between the Project P.A.T.H.S. and Religious Education lies in several striking similarities to each other. In the first place, the fundamental aim of both the Project P.A.T.H.S. and Religious Education is to promote youth development. The former is to promote positive youth development in the junior secondary years by developing a quality curriculum, and the latter aims to enhance and reflect on adolescents' spiritual, moral, emotional, and cultural development.

Religious Education is also intimately related to the whole-person development of adolescents in several areas. The first area is faith development, such as the impact of faith on our lives and futures, the search for and the building up of faith, the relationship (compatible or contradictory) of religion and science, the relationship (harmonious or discordant) of people with faith to people without faith, and the quality of life for people of different religions. The second area is esthetic development such as the beauty of a 'religious' life. The third area is moral development which addresses 'the rightness (or wrongness) of certain issues based on general moral principles, the rightness (or wrongness) of certain issues based on principles of different religions, the methods to differentiate right and wrong in moral aspect' [(5) , p. 6]. In addition, Religious Education usually focuses on the importance of intrapersonal cultivation and interpersonal skills.

In the present case study, the participating school with a religious background has incorporated the Tier 1 Program into one of the academic subjects, Religious Studies (RS).

In view of the prominent role of RS in the implementation of the Tier 1 Program, it should come as no surprise that the ways how the project is incorporated into RS are the central themes of the present case study. In addition, this paper also aims to complement the literature which little credible data about how the implementation of a positive youth development program into a formal curriculum exist. For schools with a religious background, it is common for them to reject positive youth development programs for two reasons. First, there is the myth that cultivation of values (which is emphasized by Religious Education) and psychosocial competencies (which are emphasized by positive youth development) are incompatible. Second, schools can simply say that they have also taught what positive youth development programs cover. Therefore, it would be necessary to document the implementation experiences of schools with a religious background.

Furthermore, to date, although there remains a wealth of data about the program outcomes, what tends to be missing in the existing literature is a dearth of sufficient data on implementation or the quality of program delivery necessary for positive outcomes to be yielded (6–8). For instance, Durlak (8), in a review of over 1200 published prevention studies, reported that only 5% provided data on implementation. Obviously, the program evaluation field has ignored the intimate relationship between process and outcome. Barry and colleagues (9) urged that implementation is an area that needs increased theory development and systematic research. Furthermore, they called for a focus on investigating the process of implementing programs in naturalistic settings, that is, outside of controlled research conditions, and identifying the primary factors and conditions which facilitate high-quality implementation. This is crucial, as argued by Barry and colleagues (9), because our understanding can be enhanced to a higher level, that is, 'beyond the question of whether programs work (efficacy), to also consider what makes them work, with whom and under what circumstances (effectiveness)' (p. 30).

Gleaned from previous limited findings on program implementation in both Western and non-Western countries, we reviewed some of the primary factors underpinning successful program implementation. Kam et al. (10) stressed that the support and leadership of the school principal is one of the crucial factors in determining the success of the program implementation. Rohrbach et al. (11) added that apart from principal support, teacher factors (years of experience, enthusiasm, and preparedness) also influence the quality of implementation. Mihalic et al. (12) listed some barriers that have potential to affect the implementation quality, including failure to invest time and resources, hiring program implementers who lack the relevant skills to deliver the program, insufficient organizational and key leader support, poor motivation and buy-in of implementing staff, failure to provide continuing support and technical assistance, and lack of program monitoring. Sanchez et al. (13) emphasized that incorporating the program into the school's formal curriculum with high program fidelity and a clear manpower deployment for program implementation is essential. Added to this, research studies indicated that the active involvement and support of

school administrative personnel is another factor that enhances implementation success (14).

In a non-Western context, Shek and colleagues (15, 16) conducted several case studies to examine the salient factors for successful implementation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. For instance, Sun et al. (15) reported that several positive school and classroom attributes were conducive to program success, including positive school culture and belief in students' potentials, an inviting school environment, an encouraging classroom environment, high involvement of school administrative personnel, and systematic program arrangement. Lam (17) concluded that seven primary features make a program effective: having committed and enthusiastic teaching staff, teacher belief, leadership, school culture, prior planning, policy and administrative support, and program ownership. Based on seven cases under review, Shek and Sun (16) concluded that factors related to the 5 'P's (i.e., program, people, process, policy, and place) affected the quality of implementation.

Based on the work of Shek and Sun (16), in this paper, we attempted to examine factors affecting program implementation in a school with a Christian background admitting students with high academic performance. The case study method was utilized to explore perceptions of the project coordinator and the teacher about program effectiveness and to identify various factors for program success.

Methods

A total of 167 schools participated in the Project P.A.T.H.S. (Secondary 3 Curriculum) in the Full Implementation Phase in the 2008–2009 academic year. In the Tier 1 Program, 63 schools adopted the full program (i.e., 20-h program involving 40 teaching units) and 104 schools adopted the core program (i.e., 10-h program involving 20 teaching units). The school in the present study was chosen and invited in March 2009. The second and third authors conducted the interviews with the school coordinator and the RS teacher, which lasted for 58 min and 29 s. The interviews were conducted in April 2009, after the school had completed the Tier 1 Program.

In this case study, focus group interviews with the school coordinator and the RS teacher of the Tier 1 Program were conducted. Prior consent from the principal was sought for the school's participation. At the beginning of the interviews, informed consent was obtained from the respondents, and the purpose of the study and the principle of confidentiality were repeatedly emphasized. As the purpose of this case study was to examine the school administrative arrangement and its implementation process of the Tier 1 Program (Secondary 3 Curriculum) in a retrospective manner, the interviews were conducted in Cantonese.

The interviewed school is a school with a Christian background that admits primarily high academic achievers. In Hong Kong, schools are highly segregated in relation to ability. Students are streamed into Band 1 schools if they perform well in their achievement test scores in three major academic subjects, that is, Chinese Language, English Language, and Mathematics near the end of primary schooling. Students with the highest achievement levels are allocated to the higher-band schools (i.e., Band 1), whereas those with lower achievement levels are placed in the lower-band schools (i.e., Band 3).

Being branded as high-achieving learners, the students could have higher goals and self-expectations. High academic achievers are always portrayed as students who have high task and ego goals, and who report greater use of self-regulated learning strategies. They have been characterized as having more positive personality traits than underachievers. However, 'Band 1 students have no problems' is mythical. Findings demonstrate that bright students are no less vulnerable to socially related self-concept problems than are members of the general population. High achievers in a highly competitive academic environment tend to focus on achievement through competing and comparing (18), and they are more likely to face pressure from examination or relationship problems. Academic issues (19), family problems (20), peer rejection (21), and personal distress (22) affect all adolescents regardless of academic achievement.

The participating school joined the Project P.A.T.H.S. in the academic year 2006–2007. The school adopted a double class teacher system and there were five classes of Secondary 3, approximately 220 students in total. The school adopted the 10-h core program (twenty 30-min sessions). The medium of instruction for the program was Cantonese, despite the fact that the participating school was one of the prestigious elite schools which English is used as the medium of instruction. The school incorporated the Project P.A.T.H.S. into the formal curriculum of RS and to facilitate its implementation, the curriculum of RS has been adapted. Because there are numerous religious schools in Hong Kong, the present case study enables us to understand how the Project P.A.T.H.S. was implemented into RS.

Instruments

A specific self-conducted, semi-structured interview guides for the interview was designed to collect the data. There were three parts in each interview guide:

- Respondents' perceptions of the school administrative arrangement, including preparation, support within the school and from the social work agency and program evaluation.
- Respondents' perceptions of the program implementation process, such as teaching process and techniques, students' worksheets, and student assessment.
- Respondents' overall perceptions of program effectiveness and program success.

Additionally, the school was required to complete a school background information questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions, to provide basic information about the school, the Tier 1 Program implemented in the school, instructors conducting the Tier 1 program, and the implementation process.

After data collection, the data were neatly typed and the recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Before data analysis, the raw transcription scripts were sent to the interview participants for their confirmation to ensure that there was no error in the precision of the dialogue in the transcribed texts. Then words, phrases, and/or sentences that formed meaningful units at the raw response level were coded and categorized by the research assistant and further checked by the second and third authors. The procedures for data collection described above satisfied principles in the implementation of evaluation research proposed by Shek et al. (23).

Results

The characteristics of the participating school are summarized in Table 1. School I is a high-band Christian school (i.e., Band 1) for girls, with the mission to provide their students with a Christian education that develops the whole person in the areas of moral, intellectual, physical, social, esthetic,

Table 1   Summary of the characteristics of the school.

I. Basic information of the school	
Total no. of S3 students (no. of S3 classes)	220 (five classes)
Class teacher system	Double class teachers system
Participation in Life Education program organized by other organizations	No
No. of uniform/social and voluntary services groups in school	Two
Small groups, workshops, and seminars specifically arranged for S3 students	i. Voluntary services; ii. Peer counseling program; iii. Religious program
II. Basic information of Tier 1 Program Participation	
Hours	10-h core program
Mode	Mode 4 (twenty 30-min units)
Program arrangement	Formal curriculum: Religious Studies (ca. once a week)
Rationales of the program arrangement	1. No other lessons could be used for the project 2. The curriculum of Religious Studies was revised to facilitate the program implementation.
Medium of instruction	Cantonese
Introduction session	No
Conclusion session	No
Supplementary activity	No
Other activities	Award scheme
Student assessment on P.A.T.H.S. Program	Use student log book and reflection book
Have joined Experimental Implementation Phase	No
III. Information of the instructors who conducted the Tier 1 Program	
No. of instructors conducting Tier 1 Program	One teacher, one agency social worker
No. of instructors joined Training Workshops	Three teachers, one school social worker, two agency social workers
IV. Basic information of Tier 1 Program implementation	
No. of preparation meetings and content	Two meetings were held to discuss the content of P.A.T.H.S. where there was discussion on the implementation details
No. of instructors who conducted Tier 1 Program in each class	One teacher
Person responsible for preparing the teaching material and the method of preparation	Both teacher and social worker
The format and frequency of experience sharing after class among instructors/reasons for not sharing	Irregular meetings were held
No. of evaluation meetings and content	One mid-term evaluation and one final evaluation meeting. Issues related to preparation, implementation, and revision were discussed.
Cooperation between the school and the social work agency	The social worker was responsible for preparation of some teaching materials, whereas the teacher took the main role in teaching the Tier 1 Program
The role of the teacher in Tier 1 Program implementation	i. Teaching the program; ii. Monitoring classroom discipline; iii. Preparing teaching materials; iv. Following-up
The role of the social worker in Tier 1 Program implementation	i. Preparing teaching materials; ii. Coordinating the program-related matters; iii. Following-up

S3, Secondary 3.

and spiritual. For the Secondary 3 Program of the Project P.A.T.H.S., the school adopted the 10-h core program (i.e., 10-h program involving 20 units), which was incorporated into the formal curriculum of RS and offered once a week.

In the implementation process of the Secondary 3 Program, a school coordinator was responsible for coordinating the administrative work and providing support. A RS teacher was responsible to teach, develop the unique handbooks for students, prepare all the RS teaching plans and materials, and reserve all the audiovisual aids for the lessons.

School administrative arrangements

The results of the school administrative arrangements could be categorized into four primary categories: (a) support for the program and its rationales, (b) perceived program arrangement

and its advantages and disadvantages, (c) manpower deployment, and (d) support within the school and from the social work agency. The integrated findings and interpretations are summarized in Table 2.

Support for the program and its rationales As revealed in the interview, earnest support from the principal, the school coordinator, and the subject teacher was crucial as this facilitated the program implementation. The school coordinator reflected that she was willing to participate in the project, because she supported its rationales and regarded the program as beneficial to the students. For this reason, she took the initiative to discuss with the principal on how to implement the program in the school. The school coordinator stressed that the high support from the principal facilitated the program implementation. She was also thankful that

the principal is open-minded with clear vision on students' development. In addition, the RS teacher also showed great support for the program and its rationales. She considered the program to be comprehensive and helpful to students, and she identified with all the constructs introduced in the project.

Perceived program arrangement, and its advantages and disadvantages As highlighted by the respondents, owing to the implementation of the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination had been replaced; a more flexible curriculum framework was then offered to the subject of RS in the coming academic year, which facilitated the program implementation. Because the teachers were given a high degree of flexibility and autonomy to revise the curriculum, including the subject

Table 2 Administrative arrangements and related issues in school I.

Aspect	Integrated findings and interpretations
(a) Support for the program and its rationales	• Support from the principal facilitated the program implementation. • The teachers considered the program was good for their students. • The teachers identified with the constructs introduced in the program. • The teachers were given autonomy to revise the curriculum and to adjust the content of Religious Studies, which facilitated the implementation. • Support from other teachers exerted positive impact on the teachers involved. Other RS teachers were also willing to teach the program.

(b) Perceived program arrangement, and its advantages and disadvantages	• The program was incorporated into the formal curriculum.
	• Advantages:
	  1. Smooth incorporation of the program into the existing curriculum.
	  2. The program topics could merge with the school-based curriculum.
	  3. The topics and values in Religious Studies complemented the program topics.
	  4. Unlike other subjects, it was conducted in Cantonese.
	• Disadvantages:
	  1. The program curriculum could not be fully utilized.
	  2. Sometimes the content is too superficial (for Band 1 school).
	  3. Sex education was not included.
	• Suggestions:
	  1. Some topics could be revised or supplemented with religious values.
	  2. The team had to revise and tailor-make the content for their students.
	  3. Sex education should be included in P.A.T.H.S. II.

(c) Manpower deployment	• Simple manpower deployment: one RS teacher was responsible for teaching the S3 program (derived from the interview) and one social worker was responsible for preparing teaching materials. • Experienced and self-motivated teachers facilitated the implementation process.
(d) Support within school and from social work agency	• Flexibility in school curriculum (both Religious Studies and Family Life Education) facilitated the implementation. • Attributes of the school principal and senior management: supportive, allow flexibility in school curriculum to facilitate program implementation. • Qualities of the teachers: enthusiastic, supportive, experienced, and devoted. • The relationship between the school and the social work agency was good. • Good workload distribution between teacher and social worker.
(e) Impression on the overall administration	• The school contact person was satisfied with the administrative arrangement because the school gives a high degree of autonomy to the teachers.
(f) Other aspects: meetings within school	• Meeting among teachers involved was held approximately once a month. • Informal meetings among the social worker and teachers involved.
(g) Other aspects: support from P.A.T.H.S. colleagues	• Obtained adequate support from P.A.T.H.S. team.

S3, Secondary 3.

content and the medium of instruction, they were contented with the high degree of autonomy to include topics and had positive perceptions of the new arrangement.

Specifically, there were four prime advantages for the changes in the curriculum. First, the revamp of the school curriculum and the incorporation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. into the Secondary 3 Curriculum demonstrated that it was a feasible practice, as the program was conformed to the existing school curriculum with similar content which benefitted the RS teacher and the students. Both teachers and students were already familiar with the topics, the content and the format of the lessons. Second, the integration merges well with the previous and existing school-based curriculum, and as a result there was a smooth incorporation of the program. Third, according to the RS teacher, the authoritative realm of religious doctrines, clear norms and standards are provided, and concurrently religious values of Christianity do offer absolute answers to some essential questions about students' lives. In this way, the RS teacher could convey the messages via the traditional religious doctrines, as the topics and values in RS complemented the program topics. Students would not be bored by the repeated topics in the RS subject. Noteworthy, contrary to RS, there is no correctness of answers for the project. This provides students with a good opportunity to discuss some controversial or debatable issues. Students' interest and skills were enhanced, and they learned to be receptive to many different possibilities of answers. Finally, the medium of instruction was switched from English to Cantonese. The RS teacher reflected that this change again facilitated the program implementation. Although most of the students in School I are proficient in English, using Cantonese provides a better and more conducive learning environment because the language barrier was completely removed. Students were more engaged in discussion, sharing, or even disclosing their feelings. They also enjoyed learning, thinking, and participating in the activities.

Manpower deployment   A simple but effective manpower deployment was apparent in this school. Firstly, the school coordinator was the chief member to oversee the program implementation of all levels and communicate with the form and subject teachers in the school. Secondly, only one RS teacher was responsible for teaching both RS and the Project P.A.T.H.S. This idea of a specialist subject teacher has already been put forth for some time. Thirdly, one social worker was responsible for preparing the learning materials for the students.

With regard to the manpower deployment for the Secondary 3 level, the school coordinator emphasized that the RS teacher was very dedicated, as her workload was very heavy. At the same time, the RS teacher and social worker involved had positive perceptions of the administration done by the school coordinator. The teachers also treasured the presence of the social worker as she could help reduce the workload of the teachers and hence they could then focus on dealing with the administrative and teaching issues. Taken as a whole, the cooperation and the communication climate among different teachers and the social worker were good.

Support within the school and from the social work agency   From the interviews, a strong support for teachers was evident. The teachers perceived that they had full support from the principal, who had allowed prior arrangement, which facilitated the implementation. As reported by the respondents, although teachers of other subjects in the school might not fully understand the program, the school coordinator and the subject teacher took initiative to share experiences and provide information to them and let them know more about the project. This created a supportive and positive culture among teachers.

Furthermore, the practical support from the social work agency was also adequate. The school coordinator stressed that there was a very good and clear collaborative relationship between the social work agency and the school, and the communication among different parties was also sufficient. The work was even, and there was a fair workload distribution between the school and the social work agency.

Implementation characteristics in the school

The findings of the implementation characteristics in the school and related issues could be categorized into three main categories: (a) teachers' and students' responses in the implementation process, (b) teaching techniques, and (c) student assessment in the Tier 1 Program. The results are presented according to the school contact person interview, instructor focus group interview, and integrated interpretations. Details of the results and related interpretations are summarized in Table 3.

Teachers' and students' responses in the implementation process   For the Secondary 3 program, even though only one RS teacher carried out teaching, she found that she could manage very well. There were no major obstacles encountered during the teaching process. She expressed repeatedly that she highly appreciated the program because of the careful program design such as program objectives and program content. Added to this, there was a great support from the Research Team. Nevertheless, she noted that students' interest and involvement still varied. She highlighted that the students' responses depended very much on the topics and teachers' teaching skills. One noticeable feature was that students were interested in the personal stories and sharing from the teachers, which in turn, also stimulated their thinking, sharing, and encouraged their participation.

Teaching techniques   To enhance teaching and learning, the teachers suggested some teaching techniques that were beneficial to the program implementation. These included: (a) understanding and responding to students' needs, (b) giving recognition of good behaviors, (c) linking the program contents to students' daily lives, and (d) making use of teachers' self-disclosure, personal stories, and experiences which are likely to have resonance for students. By utilizing all these techniques, the RS teacher reflected that there was an increase in student participation.

Table 3   Implementation characteristics in school I.

Aspect	Integrated findings and interpretations
(a) Teachers' and students' responses in the implementation process	• Teachers agreed with the rationales of the program. • The students' interest and involvement varied. • Students' responses depended very much on the topics and teachers' skills. • Some students felt bored with the content as they thought that the content was too superficial and easy.
(b) Teaching techniques	• All S3 classes were taught by one RS teacher. • Technique 1: understand and respond to students' needs. • Technique 2: encourage positive behaviors. • Technique 3: relate the program contents to students' daily lives. • Technique 4: teachers' personal sharing.
(c) Student assessment in the Tier 1 Program	• Student folders were used. A final grade will be given. • There was no examination for RS. • Continuous assessment, such as worksheets and reflection book, was exercised with good effects.
(d) Difficulties encountered and solutions	• The school coordinator: difficulties encountered in revision of the program content to be a school-based program. • Teachers' difficulties: insufficient time to run activities, difficulties in time management, great energy and involvement required, unmotivated students. • Solutions: to select teachers who identify with the program rationales, to familiar oneself with the program, to revise and tailor-make the program content according to the students' interest and ability.
(e) Advice for next year implementation	• Teachers should be familiar with the content of the S1, S2 and S3 programs, so that revision and adjustment of the content can be made to provide a comprehensive school-based program. • Update and revise the program content and teaching materials, e.g., incorporation of sex education into the curriculum.

S1, Secondary 1; S2, Secondary 2; S3, Secondary 3.

Student assessment in the Tier 1 Program   The school coordinator and the teacher stressed that there was no formal examination for RS. At the end of the term, a final grade is given based on continuous assessment, including group assignments (e.g., worksheets, logbook), personal reflection book, and students' participation. In addition, the RS teacher facilitated students' development by enhancing experiential and reflective learning. The RS teacher highlighted that it was crucial for students to have self-reflection during the learning process, as they can explore the meaning by themselves rather than being imposed or transmitted by direct instruction. Therefore, she encouraged them to reflect on what they have learned, and expressed their feelings by writing them down on the reflection book. This can foster them to understand and make sense of their own lives, values, world, and religion.

Perceived program effectiveness, program success, and overall impression

The related findings and interpretations can be seen in Table 4. As reflected in the interviews, the school coordinator and RS teacher had positive perceptions of the program. They acknowledged that the program was beneficial to the students and worth implementing because of the program effectiveness to student development.

Although the respondents did not encounter many hindrances, they did express that there were still some minor difficulties, such as dealing with time management, and unmotivated students. These all required tremendous efforts. To tackle these problems, the respondents suggested that the teacher involved should familiar oneself with the program

Table 4   Perceived program effectiveness, program success, and overall impression.

Aspect	Integrated findings and interpretations
(a) Perceived program effectiveness	• School administrators and teachers perceived that the program was worth implementing. • Some teachers were unsure about the changes in students.
(b) Perceived program success	• Teachers perceived the program content was good and suitable for S3 students.
(c) Overall impression	• The respondents had positive impression of the program. • The school coordinator reflected that not many difficulties were encountered. • Teachers suggested having updated and revision of the program content and teaching materials, e.g., incorporation of sex education into the curriculum.

S3, Secondary 3.

content. To deal with the time constraints and difficult students, the teachers should modify and tailor-make the program content according to the students' interests and ability, to meet students' needs as well as arouse students' interest. By contrast, respondents voiced that as the education on human sexuality was not included in the program, they suggested that the program content and teaching materials should be updated and revised, such as incorporation of sex education into the curriculum.

Discussion

This study attempted to understand the factors that facilitated and contributed to the implementation of the Tier 1 Program of the P.A.T.H.S. Project. Based on the present findings, three primary factors conducive to successful implementation of the program were identified. The first factor is strategic incorporation of the program into the formal curriculum. Both the school coordinator and the RS teacher noted that the Project P.A.T.H.S. fused into RS perfectly, and therefore the content of the Secondary 3 program was entirely incorporated into the subject periods. As unfolded in the interviews, the process of revamping the curriculum was strategic. In the preparatory phase, both the school coordinator and RS teacher (the interviewees) first attended several training workshops to equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge, then held meetings with the school management level to discuss with them about the deployment of manpower, and the preparatory work for those colleagues involved before the final incorporation of the program into RS.

As highlighted in the interview, the new RS curriculum had moved away from traditional content-based approach, but focused more attention on social and personal development of the students by incorporating different constructs and content of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in the subject matter. For instance, when the concept of friend (e.g., BO 1.3, BO 1.4) of the project was introduced, the RS teacher would integrate the idea of brotherhood from the Bible and then select several pairs of brothers from the Bible for discussion. The teacher also would do some personal sharing on the topic. Evidently, this type of flexible curriculum framework was cherished by all respondents in the process of implementing the new academic structure for Senior Secondary Education. Furthermore, they perceived the change to be advantageous as this arrangement allowed systematic implementation and enriched the existing curriculum.

The second factor is sufficient school administrative support. As revealed in the case study, good administrative support from the principal was one of the crucial factors conducive to the program success. The way how she managed the school was very much influenced and shaped by her strong vision for education. The principal identified with the rationales of the program and she recognized that the ready-made materials of the program were valuable resources. Furthermore, the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education has provided a favorable context for the change of RS curriculum. To implement the Project P.A.T.H.S. in School I, the school

coordinator strongly supported the implementation via the school-based curriculum approach. In addition, other salient factors included a high degree of flexibility and autonomy in the design of the curriculum, and the use of Cantonese in the medium of instruction. All these factors repeatedly emerged in the interviews. In addition, efficient manpower deployment and clear division of labor in program implementation are also important. The school coordinator is a key person in providing support and collaboration between teachers and social workers. By creating a harmonious working environment, it fostered a feeling of trust and mutual respect among colleagues. Obviously, this laid a very solid foundation for program implementation.

Finally, positive participation of dedicated and conscientious teachers is a factor conducive to success. When conducting the interviews, both interviewers observed that the school coordinator and the RS teacher shared some important characteristics: very dedicated, conscientious, enthusiastic, humanistic, and responsible. McCroskey (24) suggests that it is paramount for teachers to establish and maintain the perception of credibility in the classroom. There are three primary dimensions of teacher credibility, including competence, trustworthiness, and perceived caring (24). As a competent teacher, he or she is able to elucidate complex teaching materials and values well, as well as communicate with students. Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the teacher can gain trust from the students in the schools. Perceived caring represents the caring attribute of a teacher. If a teacher is caring, the teacher-student relationship is good and the teacher is perceived as a credible source and person. In School I, the findings illustrated that the school coordinator and RS teacher displayed the attributes of teacher credibility.

Conclusions

The present case study clearly illustrates that it is a conceptually and practically viable strategy to incorporate the Tier 1 Program of the Project P.A.T.H.S. into the existing school subject with similar content, topics, and themes, which would ultimately benefit students' whole-person development and teachers' teaching. The present case study shows the possibility of incorporating the curriculum of the Project P.A.T.H.S. into RS and proved to be a great success. Because the proportion of secondary schools with religious orientation in Hong Kong is not small, the experiences reported in this paper provide a great insight for those schools with a religious background. In general, the present findings are also consistent with findings in previous studies.

Despite the above positive findings, there are limitations that need to be addressed regarding the present study. First, as mentioned previously, this case study was based on a convenience sampling therefore its generalizability could then be limited. Second, as only the school coordinator and one teacher were involved in the present case study, the views collected might not reflect the whole picture of the school's situation. To further understand the subjective experiences and to have a complete picture, it is suggested that the school principal, senior

administrators, and other teachers in the school participate in the interviews. Third, as a face-to-face interview was conducted in the case study, the feedback of the respondents' responses might be affected by the presence of researchers. Nevertheless, there is no reason that the interviewees had to provide favorable narratives to gratify the researchers. Finally, as the data were analyzed by the second and third authors, researchers' biases might influence the analysis of data. Nevertheless, as the authors involved in data analyses maintained a disciplined position (e.g., conscious awareness and reflection of their personal biases) and the first author was not involved in the data analyses part, the influence of bias on the interpretations might not be strong.

Despite these limitations, the present results are in line with the previous research findings (15, 16), and reaffirm the effective implementation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in schools.

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