Int J Disabil Hum Dev 2012;11(3):221–228 © 2012 by Walter de Gruyter • Berlin • Boston. DOI 10.1515/ijdhd-2012-0037

Promoting leadership and intrapersonal competence in university students: what can we learn from Hong Kong?

Daniel T.L. Shek[1–5,*] and Rachel C.F. Sun[6]

[1] Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, P.R. China
[2] Public Policy Research Institute, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, P.R. China
[3] Kiang Wu Nursing College of Macau, Macau, P.R. China
[4] Department of Social Work, East China Normal University, Shanghai, P.R. China
[5] Division of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Kentucky Children's Hospital, University of Kentucky College of Medicine, Lexington, KY, USA
[6] Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, P.R. China

Abstract

To promote leadership and intrapersonal competence in university students, a general education course based on the positive youth development approach was developed at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong. The course was piloted in four classes of students in the 2010/11 academic year. After completion of the course, subjective outcome evaluation data based on a validated instrument were collected from 189 students. Results showed that the students generally had positive perceptions of the program and implementers, with over 90% of the participants indicating that they were satisfied with the program and that the program was perceived as helpful to them in the domains of holistic development and leadership. Multiple regression analysis revealed that perceived qualities of the program was a major factor predicting perceived effectiveness of the program.

Keywords: intrapersonal competence; leadership; positive youth development; subjective outcome evaluation; university students.

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of transition. Adolescents commonly undergo many changes in the physical, cognitive, social and personality domains, and such changes intensify when young people enter universities. Chen et al. (1) pointed out that university years constitute a stressful time of change for students with the occurrence of many stressors, such as financial burden related to the tuition fee, examination pressure, and the growing demands in early adulthood. Besides psychosocial stressors, various studies showing that mental health is a growing problem in university students: Blanco et al. (2) found alcohol use and personality disorders were the two most prevalent disorders across campuses; there are also findings suggesting that approximately one-half of those entering college would become severely depressed in college life (3); suicide was found to be the second leading cause of death among college students in the USA after homicides and accidents (4, 5). As remarked by Mowbray et al. (6), "averaging across a number of studies, it appears that approximately 12–18% of students on college campuses have a diagnosable mental disorder" (p. 227). Unfortunately, despite the worrying trends of college mental health, only around one-tenth of the students experiencing psychosocial problems seek help.

In addition to stress and mental health issues, university students also possess some attributes deserving the attention of university teachers. First, there has been a sharp drop in empathy in college students (7). Moreover, narcissism levels in university students in the USA have gradually increased over the past 25 years (8, 9). Furthermore, the degree of maturity and sense of responsibility in university students are low (10). Finally, university students tend to adopt more self-focused and financially oriented philosophies, an observation which is in line with a decrease in social responsibility and civic participation (11). As pointed out by Loeb (12), contemporary university students are "pathologically selfish, greedy, apathetic, and unconcerned with higher ideals" (p. 2).

With particular focus on Hong Kong, there are several observations regarding university students (13). First, mental health issues, such as stress and anxiety problems are common among university students in Hong Kong. Second, young people in Hong Kong are quite politically apathetic and they do not have a good understanding of the Hong Kong society as well as China. Third, employers in Hong Kong are not satisfied with the personal qualities of graduates. Fourth, university students in Hong Kong are less mature and are weaker in communication skills when compared with university students in China. Fifth, although "whole person development" and "personal development" are commonly emphasized in the mission and vision statements of different universities in Hong Kong, intra- and interpersonal development in university students are still only paid lip service and few universities actually develop credit-bearing courses on holistic youth development.

*Corresponding author: Professor Daniel T.L. Shek, PhD, FHKPS, BBS, JP, Chair Professor of Applied Social Sciences, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Room HJ407, Core H, Hunghom, Hong Kong, P.R. China
E-mail: daniel.shek@polyu.edu.hk
Received April 6, 2011; accepted August 6, 2011

Against this background, one key question that should be asked is how holistic development, particularly intra- and interpersonal competence could be promoted among university students in Hong Kong. Shek (13) and Shek and Wong (14) argued that developing credit-bearing courses incorporating elements of positive youth development would be a promising strategy. Although there are different views on the nature of positive youth development qualities in the literature, it is commonly referred to as the competencies of: (a) self-understanding and cultivating discipline; (b) working with others, communicating, cooperating, negotiation, and building relationships; (c) coping, adapting, and being responsible; and (d) making good judgments, evaluating, making decisions, and problem-solving. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL: http://www.casel.org), "social and emotional learning" (SEL) covers emotional recognition and management skills, cultivation of care and concern for others, responsible decision-making, positive relationship-building, and effective handling of situations. Research has shown that SEL is vital to the holistic development of young people.

Conscious of the importance of promoting holistic development in university students, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University will require all students to take a course on leadership and intrapersonal development under the new 4-year curriculum starting from the 2012/13 school year. With reference to the literature on positive youth development, different positive youth developmental constructs, such as resilience, cognitive competence, social competence, emotional competence, behavioral competence, moral competence, spirituality, clear and positive identity (15), are important qualities to be nurtured in university students. To test out the curriculum, a pilot course entitled "Tomorrow's Leaders" was offered in the 2010/11 academic year. To evaluate the course, different strategies including objective outcome evaluation, subjective outcome evaluation, process evaluation, and qualitative evaluation were used to examine the program effect. In this paper, subjective outcome evaluation findings based a standardized instrument are presented.

In human services, the importance of involving the service users or program participants in evaluation is advocated. As such, subjective outcome evaluation becomes a popular strategy to capture the viewpoints of the participants. In this regard, client satisfaction surveys are commonly used as a method for gauging service quality to meet the users' needs for planning and administration purposes, or used as an indicator of program effectiveness from the participants' perspective for research purpose. The client satisfaction approach or subjective outcome evaluation is a commonly adopted strategy in program evaluation.

In the context of higher education, subjective outcome evaluation is commonly used via student feedback questionnaires. A survey of the literature shows that different dimensions of evaluation are covered in different studies of subjective outcome evaluation in the education context. Cohen (16) identified six dimensions of teaching, including skills, rapport, structure, difficulty, interaction and feedback. Marsh and Roche (17) proposed nine dimensions underlying the Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ), including learning/value, teacher enthusiasm, organization/clarity, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, examinations/grading, assignments/readings, and workload/difficulty. In the model proposed by Litzelman et al. (18), seven dimensions of teaching effectiveness were reported, including establishment of a positive learning environment, control of the teaching session, communicating goals to the learners, promoting understanding and retention, evaluation of achievement of goals, feedback to the learners, and promotion of self-directed learning. In the Teacher Effectiveness Survey (TES) developed by Stringer and Irwing (19), five dimensions including teaching quality, feedback and support, learning, workload, and overall evaluation were described. Waugh (20) advised six dimensions, including student support, learning resources, learning community, intellectual motivation, course organization, and graduate qualities dimensions in the Course Experience Questionnaire. Kim et al. (21) suggested eight broad dimensions underlying course evaluation, including teacher character traits, management of the class, assignments, course design, testing, grading, feedback, and course materials. Finally, Spooren et al. (22) developed a theory on teaching quality with eight dimensions and 22 sub-dimensions. The major dimensions were course objectives, subject matter, course structure, teaching activities, course materials, course feasibility, coaching, and evaluation. Utilizing confirmatory factor analyses, ten final empirically supported dimensions were found, including clarity of objectives, value of subject matter, build-up of subject matter, presentation skills, harmony organization course – learning process, contribution to understanding the subject, course difficulty, help of the teacher during the learning process, authenticity of examination(s), and formative examination(s).

In the context of Hong Kong, some validated measures of student feedback questionnaires have been constructed. Kember and Leung (23) identified nine dimensions in the Exemplary Teacher Course Questionnaire (ETCQ). They are understanding fundamental concepts, relevance, challenging beliefs, active learning, teacher-student relationships, motivation, organization, flexibility, and assessment. Shek and his associates (24–27) evaluated the subjective outcomes of the students after attending a positive youth development course based on three dimensions. These included qualities of the program, qualities of the implementers, and perceived benefits of the course. In the present paper, student feedback based on an instrument modeled after the subjective outcome evaluation tool used in the project Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes (Project P.A.T.H.S.) in Hong Kong was collected.

Methods

Participants and procedures

The subject "Tomorrow's Leaders" was offered to 268 students in the second term of the 2010/11 school year in four classes (65 students

in Class A, 68 in Class B, 66 in Class C, and 69 in Class D). At the last lecture of the course, students were invited to respond to a subjective outcome evaluation form. This form was modeled after the subjective outcome evaluation form developed in Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. There are research findings showing that the scale was valid and reliable (24–27).

On the day of data collection, the purpose of the evaluation was mentioned, and the confidentiality of the data was repeatedly emphasized to all students. The students were asked to indicate their wish if they did not want to participate in the study (i.e., "passive" informed consent was obtained from the students). All participants responded to all scales in the evaluation form in a self-administration format. Adequate time was provided for the participants to complete the questionnaire (28).

Instruments

The subjective outcome form used in this study was modeled after the Subjective Outcome Evaluation Form for students (Form A) of Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. Broadly speaking, there are several parts in this evaluation form as follows:

- Participants' perceptions of the program, such as program objectives, design, classroom atmosphere, interaction among the students, and the respondents' participation during class (10 items).
- Participants' perceptions of the implementers, such as the preparation of the lecturer, professional attitude, involvement, and interaction with the students (10 items).
- Participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the program (such as promotion of different psychosocial competencies, resilience, and overall personal development) and achievement of the intended learning outcomes (17 items).
- The extent to which the participants would recommend the program to other people with similar needs (1 item).
- The extent to which the participants would join similar programs in future (1 item).
- Overall satisfaction with the program (1 item).
- Things that the participants learned from the program (open-ended question).
- Things that the participants appreciated most (open-ended question).
- Opinion about the instructor(s) (open-ended question).
- Areas that require improvement (open-ended question).

Data analyses

Percentage findings were examined using descriptive statistics. A composite measure of each domain (i.e., perceived qualities of program content, perceived qualities of program implementers, and perceived program effectiveness) was created based on the total scores of each factor divided by the number of items in that domain. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine if the program content and program implementers were related to the program effectiveness. Multiple regression analysis was performed to compare which factor would predict the program effectiveness. All analyses were performed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 16.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, New York, USA).

Results

A total of 189 subjective outcome evaluation forms were collected at the last lecture of the course. The quantitative findings based on the closed-ended questions are presented in this paper. Several observations can be highlighted from the findings. In the first place, roughly four-fifths of the participants generally had positive perceptions of the program (Table 1), including clear objectives of the curriculum (89.4%), well-planned teaching activities (90.4%), and adequate peer interaction amongst the students (89.8%). In addition, a high proportion of the students had positive evaluation of the implementers (Table 2). For example, 99.5% of the participants perceived that the program implementers were very involved and were ready to offer help when students were in need; and 98.9% of the participants agreed that implementers encouraged them to participate in the activities. In particular,

Table 1 Summary of the views of the program participants of the program (n=188).

	1		2		3		4		5		6		Participants with positive response (options 4–6)	
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Slightly disagree		Slightly agree		Agree		Strongly agree			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. The objectives of the curriculum are very clear	0	0	7	3.7	13	6.9	35	18.6	119	63.3	14	7.4	168	89.4
2. The design of the curriculum is very good	1	0.5	5	2.7	19	10.1	47	25	94	50	22	11.7	163	86.7
3. The activities were carefully arranged	0	0	1	0.5	17	9.1	48	25.7	98	52.4	23	12.3	169	90.4
4. The classroom atmosphere was very pleasant	1	0.5	11	5.9	19	10.1	40	21.3	90	47.9	27	14.4	157	83.5
5. There was much peer interaction amongst the students	2	1.1	3	1.6	14	7.5	42	22.5	85	45.5	41	21.9	168	89.8
6. I participated actively during lessons (including discussions, sharing, games, etc.)	1	0.5	2	1.1	17	9.1	48	25.8	85	45.7	33	17.7	166	89.2
7. I was encouraged to do my best	1	0.5	4	2.1	13	6.9	67	35.6	83	44.1	20	10.6	170	90.4
8. The learning experience I encountered enhanced my interest towards the lessons	2	1.1	6	3.2	14	7.4	58	30.9	89	47.3	19	10.1	166	88.3
9. Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of the program	0	0	8	4.3	10	5.3	57	30.3	85	45.2	28	14.9	170	90.4
10. On the whole, I like this curriculum very much	1	0.5	4	2.1	17	9.0	51	27.1	91	48.4	24	12.8	166	88.3

Table 2 Summary of the views of the teachers implementing the program (n=189).

	1		2		3		4		5		6		Participants with positive response (options 4–6)	
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Slightly disagree		Slightly agree		Agree		Strongly agree			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. The lecturer(s) had a good mastery of the curriculum	0	0	0	0	3	1.6	36	19.1	107	56.9	42	22.3	185	98.4
2. The lecturer(s) was well prepared for the lessons	0	0	0	0	2	1.1	26	13.8	95	50.5	65	34.6	186	98.9
3. The teaching skills of the lecturer were good	0	0	2	1.1	6	3.2	43	22.9	86	45.7	51	27.1	180	95.7
4. The lecturer(s) showed good professional attitudes	0	0	0	0	2	1.1	21	11.1	110	58.2	56	29.6	187	98.9
5. The lecturer(s) was very involved	0	0	0	0	1	0.5	25	13.3	96	51.1	66	35.1	187	99.5
6. The lecturer(s) encouraged students to participate in the activities	0	0	0	0	2	1.1	16	8.5	107	56.6	64	33.9	186	98.9
7. The instructor cared for the students	0	0	1	0.5	1	0.5	38	20.1	102	54.0	47	24.9	187	98.9
8. The lecturer(s) was ready to offer help to students when needed	0	0	0	0	1	0.5	33	17.5	98	51.9	57	30.2	188	99.5
9. The lecturer(s) had much interaction with the students	0	0	0	0	5	2.6	45	23.8	94	49.7	45	23.8	184	97.4
10. Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of the lecturer(s)	0	0	0	0	4	2.1	27	14.3	107	56.6	51	27.0	185	97.9

an overwhelming majority of the students believed that the course had helped them appreciate the qualities of effective leadership. As shown in Table 3, roughly more than nine-tenths of the respondents perceived that the program promoted their development. Finally, more than 90% of the participants indicated that they were satisfied with the program (Table 4).

Reliability analysis showed that the subjective outcome evaluation form was internally consistent (Table 5): 10 items related to the program (α=0.94), 10 items related to the implementer (α=0.93), 17 items related to the benefits (α=0.97), and the overall 37 items measuring program effectiveness (α=0.97). Results of correlation analyses showed that both program content (r=0.73, $p<0.01$) and program implementers (r=0.45, $p<0.01$) were strongly associated with program effectiveness (Table 6). Table 7 presents multiple regression analysis results. Interestingly, program content but not program implementer was found to be a significant predictor of perceived program effectiveness when other factors were controlled.

Discussion

There are three purposes of this study. First, the effectiveness of the course entitled "Tomorrow's Leaders" based on four classes of students was investigated. Second, reliability of the subjective outcome evaluation form used in the study was examined. Third, prediction of perceived effectiveness of the program based on program and instructor was investigated. As the course under focus (i.e., Tomorrow's Leaders) is the first credit-bearing course on positive youth development in Hong Kong, it is a pioneer evaluation study in the higher education sector in different Chinese communities.

Several observations can be highlighted from the present study. First, the students generally perceived the course positively in terms of the program content, program implementers, and program effectiveness. The findings showed that a very high proportion of the subjects had positive perceptions of the course design, implementation quality, and the dedication of the instructors. Regarding perceived effectiveness of the course, an overwhelming majority of the students were of the view that the course could help them develop their psychosocial competencies and self-reflection. They also indicated that they had better understanding of the qualities of successful leaders. In short, the findings strongly suggest that the intended learning outcomes of the study were successfully achieved.

Second, the study showed that the subjective outcome evaluation form was reliable. The correlation between perception of program and instructor is also a sign of the convergent validity of the instrument. This observation is in line with the previous findings that the instrument was valid and reliable in other adolescent samples (24–27). Because of the small sample size involved, it is not possible to perform factor analyses. It is suggested that factor analyses be carried out in future to look at the underlying dimensions of the scale. As there are few published studies on student evaluation forms, the present findings can be regarded as interesting additions to the literature. Likewise, because there are few studies on student evaluation of holistic youth development in the higher education sector, the present study is a pioneering attempt.

Finally, regarding predictors of perceived effectiveness of the course, findings showed that although both program and implementers were correlated with perceived effectiveness, program is more important than implementers in influencing the perceived effectiveness of the course. This observation is

Table 3 Perceived effectiveness of the program by the program participants (n=189).

	1		2		3		4		5		Participants with positive response (options 3–5)	
	Unhelpful		Not very helpful		Slightly helpful		Helpful		Very helpful			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. It has strengthened my resilience in adverse conditions	4	2.1	18	9.5	53	28.0	94	49.7	20	10.6	167	88.4
2. It has enhanced my social competence	4	2.1	11	5.8	43	22.8	98	51.9	33	17.5	174	92.1
3. It has improved my ability in handling and expressing my emotions	4	2.1	16	8.6	47	25.1	98	52.4	22	11.8	167	89.3
4. It has enhanced my analytical ability	3	1.6	20	10.6	60	31.7	79	41.8	27	14.3	166	87.8
5. It has improved my ability to resist harmful influences	5	2.7	18	9.6	64	34.0	76	40.4	25	13.3	165	87.8
6. It has strengthened my ability to distinguish between the good and the bad	5	2.6	17	9.0	64	33.9	78	41.3	25	13.2	167	88.4
7. It has increased my competence in making sensible and wise choices	4	2.1	14	7.4	59	31.2	85	45.0	27	14.3	171	90.5
8. It has helped me to have life reflections	3	1.6	8	4.2	37	19.6	106	56.1	35	18.5	178	94.2
9. It has reinforced my self-confidence	5	2.7	21	11.2	45	23.9	93	49.5	24	12.8	162	86.2
10. It has increased my self-awareness	2	1.1	15	8.0	43	22.9	97	51.6	31	16.5	171	91.0
11. It has helped me to face the future with a positive attitude	3	1.6	16	8.5	52	27.7	83	44.1	34	18.1	169	89.9
12. It has helped me to cultivate compassion and care about others	2	1.1	20	10.6	56	29.8	85	45.2	25	13.3	166	88.3
13. The theories, research and concepts covered in the course have enabled me to understand the characteristics of successful leaders	2	1.1	6	3.2	46	24.5	98	52.1	36	19.1	180	95.7
14. The course has helped me synthesize the characteristics of successful leaders	1	0.5	9	4.8	45	23.9	96	51.1	37	19.7	178	94.7
15. It has enabled me to understand the importance of interpersonal relationship in successful leadership	2	1.1	7	3.7	34	18.1	105	55.9	40	21.3	178	95.2
16. It has promoted my sense of responsibility in serving the society	2	1.1	20	10.6	50	26.6	82	43.6	34	18.1	166	88.3
17. It has enriched my overall development	1	0.5	13	6.9	45	23.9	95	50.5	34	18.1	174	92.6

somewhat not consistent with the general findings that both program and implementers predicted perceived effectiveness (24, 29). There are two possible explanations. First, it is possible that satisfaction with teachers may have no effect on the perceived effectiveness. Second, this observation may be a statistical artifact because the range of scores for the perception of instructors is not wide. In view of the small sample size in the study, further studies are needed to reflect a more comprehensive picture.

There are two unique features in this study. First, different aspects of subjective outcome, including views on the program, implementers, perceived effectiveness, and overall satisfaction were covered in the study. Second, the present findings showed that the rating items were reliable with reference to the sections and the whole scale. According to Royse (30), client satisfaction surveys are commonly criticized as invalid because there is a lack of standardized assessment tools for conducting subjective outcome evaluation. As such, he suggested using subjective outcome evaluation tools with good psychometric properties which would "eliminate many of the problems found in hastily designed questionnaires" (p. 265). It is noteworthy that the use of subjective outcome evaluation tools to assess student perceptions of courses is very common in higher education settings (31–33).

Although the present observations can be interpreted as reflecting the effectiveness of the program, there are several possible alternative explanations. The first alternative interpretation is that the students responded positively because they were afraid of punishment if they did not say good things about the program. However, this alternative explanation can be partially dismissed because the students responded in an anonymous manner. The second alternative interpretation is that there was "demand characteristic" of the respondents (i.e., they attempted to please the teachers). However, this alternative explanation can also be partially dismissed because students were encouraged to respond in an honest manner. Finally, findings based on objective outcome evaluation and qualitative evaluation also showed that students showed positive changes after taking the course. In conjunction with other evaluation findings,

Table 4 Other aspects of subjective outcome evaluation.

Will you suggest your friends to take this course? (n=187)

1		2		3		4		Participants with positive response (options 3–4)	
Definitely will not suggest		Will not suggest		Will suggest		Definitely will suggest			
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2	1.1	23	12.3	124	66.3	38	20.3	162	86.6

Will you participate in similar courses again in the future? (n=188)

1		2		3		4		Participants with positive response (options 3–4)	
Definitely will not participate		Will not participate		Will participate		Definitely will participate			
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
6	3.2	40	21.3	122	64.9	20	10.6	142	75.5

On the whole, are you satisfied with this course? (n=187)

1		2		3		4		5		6		Participants with positive response (options 4–6)	
Very dissatisfied		Moderately dissatisfied		Slightly dissatisfied		Satisfied		Moderately satisfied		Very satisfied			
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
0	0	5	2.7	8	4.3	87	46.5	71	38.0	16	8.6	174	93

the present study suggests that the developed course was beneficial to the holistic development of the program participants.

Table 5 Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's α, and mean of inter-item correlations among the variables.

	Overall	
	Mean (SD)	α (Mean[a])
Program content (10 items)	4.62 (0.74)	0.94 (0.60)
Program implementers (10 items)	5.09 (0.56)	0.93 (0.59)
Program effectiveness (17 items)	3.64 (0.75)	0.97 (0.62)
Total effectiveness (37 items)	4.46 (0.58)	0.97 (0.45)

[a]Mean inter-item correlations.

Table 6 Correlation coefficients among the variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Program content (10 items)	–			
2. Program implementers (10 items)	0.56[a]	–		
3. Program effectiveness (17 items)	0.73[a]	0.45[a]	–	
4. Total effectiveness (37 items)	0.92[a]	0.75[a]	0.87[a]	–

[a]$p<0.01$.

Table 7 Multiple regression analyses predicting program effectiveness.

	Predictors		Model	
	Program content	Program implementers		
	β[a]	β[a]	R	R^2
Program effectiveness	0.70[b]	0.05	0.73	0.53

[a]Standardized coefficients; [b]$p<0.01$.

Astin and Sax (34) commented that "although we argued that institutions needed to focus more on student outcomes, we avoided specifying what any of these outcomes should be, arguing instead that this task should be left largely to the individual institution. In retrospect, I think this was a mistake. If we had been more forthcoming about our own values with respect to some of the most important student outcomes, we certainly would have generated more controversy, but I think the controversy would have been healthy. More specifically, I wish we had spoken more directly about the importance of so called affective outcomes, such as self-understanding, tolerance, honesty, citizenship, and social responsibility" (p. 587). Obviously, the development of the course entitled "Tomorrow's Leaders" at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is a constructive response to this comment. The evaluation findings reported in this paper also suggest that the course can promote the holistic development of the students taking this course. As there are few validated

programs to promote holistic development in adolescents in Hong Kong (35–39), this study is an important addition to the literature.

Conflict of interest statement

Authors' conflict of interest disclosure: The authors stated that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.
Research funding: None declared.
Employment or leadership: None declared.
Honorarium: None declared.

References

1. Chen H, Wong Y, Ran M, Gilson C. Stress among Shanghai University students: the need for social work support. J Soc Work 2009;9:323–44.
2. Blanco C, Okuda M, Wright C, Hasin DS, Grant BF, Liu SS, et al. Mental health of college students and their non-college-attending peers: results from the national epidemiologic study on alcohol and related conditions. Arch Gen Psychiatry 2008;65:1429–37.
3. Fox P, Caraher M, Baker H. Promoting student mental health. Ment. Health Found. Updates 2(1). URL: http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/?entryid5=39405&q=0%C2%ACstudent+mental+health%C2%AC. Accessed 28 June, 2011.
4. Barrios LC, Everett SA, Simon TR, Brener ND. Suicide ideation among U.S. college students: assocations with other injury risk behavior. J Am Coll Health 2000;48:195–8.
5. Young CB, Fang DZ, Zisook S. Depression in Asian-American and Caucasian undergraduate students. J Affect Disorders 2010;125:379–82.
6. Mowbray CT, Megivern D, Mandiberg JM, Strauss S, Stein CH, Collins K, et al. Campus mental health services: recommendations for change. Am J Orthopsychiatry 2006;76:226.
7. Konrath S. The end of empathy. URL: http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-empathy-gap/201006/the-end-empathy. Accessed 28 June, 2011.
8. Twenge JM, Konrath S, Foster JD, Campbell WK, Bushman BJ. Egos inflating over time: a cross-temporal metal-analysis of the narcissistic personality inventory. J Pers 2008;76:875–901.
9. Twenge JM, Foster JD. Birth cohort increases in narcissistic personality traits among American college students, 1982–2009. Soc Psychol Personal Sci 2010;1:99–106.
10. Bips L. Students are different now. New York Times. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/10/11/have-college-freshmen-changed/students-are-different-now. Accessed 28 June, 2011.
11. Bourke B, Mechler HS. A new me generation? The increasing self-interest among Millennial college students. J Coll Char 2010;11:1–6.
12. Loeb PR. Generation at the crossroads: apathy and action on the American campus. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
13. Shek DT. Nurturing holistic development of university students in Hong Kong: where are we and where should we go? ScientificWorldJournal 2010;10:563–75.
14. Shek DT, Wong KK. Do adolescent developmental issues disappear overnight? Reflections about holistic development in university students. ScientificWorldJournal 2011;11:353–61.
15. Catalano RF, Berglund ML, Ryan JA, Lonczak HS, Hawkins JD. Positive youth development in the United States: research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. Ann Am Acad Pol Soc Sci 2004;591:98–124.
16. Cohen PA. Student ratings of instruction and student achievement: a meta-analysis of multi-section validity studies. Rev Educ Res 1981;51:281–309.
17. Marsh HW, Roche LA. Making students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness effective: the critical issues of validity, bias and utility. Am Psychol 1997;52:1187–97.
18. Litzelman DK, Stratos GA, Marriott DJ, Skeff KM. Factorial validation of a widely disseminated educational framework for evaluating clinical teachers. Acad Med 1998;73:688–95.
19. Stringer M, Irwing P. Students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness: a structural modeling approach. Br J Educ Psychol 1998;68:409–26.
20. Waugh RF. The Course Experience Questionnaire: a Rasch measurement model analysis. Higher Educ Res Dev 1998;17:45–64.
21. Kim C, Damewood E, Hodge N. Professor attitude: its effect on teaching evaluations. J Manage Educ 2000;24:458–73.
22. Spooren P, Mortelmans D, Denekens, J. Student evaluation of teaching quality in higher education: development of an instrument based on 10 Likert-scales. Assess Evaluat Higher Educ 2007;32:667–79.
23. Kember D, Leung DY. Establishing the validity and reliability of course evaluation questionnaires. Assess Evaluat Higher Educ 2008;33:341–53.
24. Shek DT, Ma CM, Tang CY. Predictors of subjective outcome evaluation findings in a positive youth development program in Hong Kong. Int J Disabil Hum Dev 2011;10:249–55.
25. Shek DT, Sun RC. Evaluation of Project P.A.T.H.S. (Secondary 1 Program) by the program participants: findings based on the Full Implementation Phase. Adolescence 2008;43:807–22.
26. Shek DT, Ng CS. Subjective outcome evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. (Secondary 2 Program): views of the program participants. ScientificWorldJournal 2009;9:1012–22.
27. Ma HK, Shek DT. Subjective outcome evaluation of a positive youth development program in Hong Kong: profiles and correlates. ScientificWorldJournal 2010;10:192–200.
28. Shek DT, Sun RC, Chui YH, Lit SW, Yuen WW, Chung YY, Ngai SW. Development and evaluation of a positive youth development course for university students in Hong Kong. ScientificWorldJounal; in press.
29. Shek DT, Yu L. Subjective outcome evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S.: descriptive profiles and correlates. ScientificWorldJournal 2010;10:211–23.
30. Royse D. Research methods in social work. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2004.
31. Alessio H. Student perceptions about and performance in problem-based learning. J Scholarship Teaching Learning 2004;4:23–34.
32. DeBrew JK. Perceptions of liberal education of two types of nursing graduates: the essentials of baccalaureate education for professional nursing practice. J Gen Educ 2010;59:42–62.
33. Lo CC. How student satisfaction factors affect perceived learning. J Scholarship Teaching Learning 2010;10:47–54.
34. Astin AW, Sax LJ. How undergraduates are affected by service participation. J Coll Student Dev 1998;39:251–63.

35. Shek DT, Ng CS. Early identification of adolescents with greater psychosocial needs: an evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. Int J Disabil Hum Dev 2010;9: 291–9.
36. Shek DT, Ng CS, Tsui PF. Qualitative evaluation of the project P.A.T.H.S.: findings based on focus groups. Int J Disabil Hum Dev 2010;9:307–13.
37. Shek DT, Yu L. A review of validated youth prevention and positive youth development programmes in Asia. Int J Adolesc Med Health 2011;23:317–24.
38. Shek DT. Quality of life of Chinese people in a changing world. Soc Indic Res 2010;95:357–61.
39. Shek DT. Quality of life research: responses to emerging issues in a changing world. Soc Indic Res 2011;100:371–4.