

Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S Project in mainland China: Curriculum development, training, program implementation, and evaluation

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Abstract

The P.A.T.H.S Project in Hong Kong was launched in 2005 with more than 200,000 students (over 600,000 student times) participating in the project. Because of its overwhelming success, Tin Ka Ping (TKP) Foundation provided support for transplanting the project in Mainland China. The research team adapted the curriculums used in Hong Kong for mainland junior secondary school students. At the same time, in view of the need for the P.A.T.H.S. Project of senior secondary school students, the research team also developed senior secondary curriculums. As teachers are key stakeholders for successful project implementation, we conducted training programs for the potential implementers to help them understand the theories behind the positive youth development approach, curriculum design, experiential teaching and learning pedagogies, and project evaluation. Using different evidence-based evaluation strategies, we conclude that the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project achieved great success in mainland China with enthusiastic support from different stakeholders. Evaluation findings strongly suggest that the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project can promote the holistic development of Chinese senior secondary school students and it constitutes an effective protective factor for Chinese adolescents.

Keywords: Hong Kong, the P.A.T.H.S. Project, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project, curriculum development, training, evaluation

Introduction

With rapid social, cultural and economic changes, adolescents face many challenges in different domains and suffer from growing developmental problems, such as internet addiction (1), permissive sexual behavior (2), use of foul language (3), and mental health issues (4-6). For example, a six-year longitudinal study on adolescents showed that high

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proportions of secondary school students in Hong Kong from 7th grade to 12th grade have internet addicted behaviors (1). Furthermore, there is an increasing trend in the willingness of engaging in sexual behavior among students in senior secondary schools in Hong Kong (2). The use of foul language is also a developmental concern amongst senior secondary school students, although they are presumably more educated (3). In addition, Shek and Liang (4) showed that adolescent life satisfaction declined year by year, but the sense of hopelessness increased over time in secondary school students. Research findings also indicate that there are mental health issues in senior secondary school students in Hong Kong (5-7).

Conceptually speaking, there are two orientations for understanding and dealing with adolescent developmental problems: problem-oriented and positive youth development-oriented (PYD-oriented) approaches. The former approach focuses on the deficits of adolescents and maintains that problem behavior of adolescents should be minimized through prevention and intervention. In contrast, the latter view emphasizes the strengths and potentials of young people, and argues that the promotion of holistic youth development, such as psychosocial abilities, can help to prevent adolescent problem behaviors (8). Theoretically speaking, these two orientations are not conflicting with each other. While the former approach adopts a relatively negative view (i.e., adolescents as “problems to be solved”), the latter is based on positive psychology upholding the view that adolescents are “resources to be developed”. In particular, the development of a wide range of social-psychological abilities as “developmental assets,” such as social skills, cognition, resilience, and self-determination (9), would be beneficial to the adolescent overall healthy functioning.

To promote adolescents’ whole-person development, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HKJC) earmarked HK\$400 million to support the Project P.A.T.H.S., which involved five universities in Hong Kong, the Social Welfare Department, and the Education and Manpower Bureau. The research team formed with scholars from five universities in Hong Kong developed a set of evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, and comprehensive curricula to promote positive development of students

(10). In addition to mainstream schools, the project was extended to special schools as well. In the 2005-2006 school year, we launched the project in terms of the Experimental Implementation Phase. From the 2006-07 to 2008-09 school year, we implemented the project on a full-scale basis (P.A.T.H.S. I) in different secondary schools in Hong Kong. As the first phase of the project was very successful, The HKJC decided to fund the project for another three years (P.A.T.H.S. II) starting from the 2009-2010 school year, with additional earmarked funding of HK\$350 million. After these two phases, we implemented the P.A.T.H.S. Project in all districts in Hong Kong (i.e., community-based implementation) from 2013 to 2019. Through the community-based mode, we attempted to help students who had not participated in previous phases of the P.A.T.H.S. Project (11).

The P.A.T.H.S. Project has two tiers of programs. The first tier was universal PYD programs designed for all students in junior secondary schools from 7th to 9th grade. In forms of 40 teaching units per grade (120 units in total), these programs were designed based on 15 PYD concepts, such as social skills, cognitive skills, emotional control skills, and resilience (9). The second tier was designed for students with “greater” social and psychological needs, such as students experience academic issues, interpersonal relationship problems, and family relationship conflicts (11). In addition, to ensure project quality, we designed and implemented comprehensive training programs for potential instructors who would implement the Tier 1 program. From these training courses, the potential program implementers could understand the nature of PYD and the curriculum, as well as develop a positive attitude and skills in program implementation (12).

Since the 2005-06 school year, more than 200,000 students have benefited from the P.A.T.H.S. Project in around 300 senior secondary schools in Hong Kong. Regarding the effectiveness of the Tier 1 programs, studies using different evaluation strategies have shown that the programs could promote students’ whole-person development and prevent problematic behaviors (10-12). In terms of the impact on policies, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has incorporated the P.A.T.H.S. Project in youth enhancement policy, poverty alleviation policy and anti-drug education

policy. In terms of the impact outside Hong Kong, the project has been transplanted to Macau and mainland China. The project has also received much attention from overseas scholars and institutions, including Singapore and Sri Lanka. In terms of the academic dissemination, we have organized several international conferences and seminars. Moreover, the project has generated many scholarly articles and publications to fill the gaps in the literature on Chinese PYD. Notably, in a literature review on effective youth prevention programs in the world, the P.A.T.H.S. Project was the only effective evidence-based PYD project identified in China (9). The World Health Organization (WHO) also listed P.A.T.H.S. Project as a project that could promote adolescent life skills (13). Other researchers have also highlighted the value and positive impact of the P.A.T.H.S. Project and the related work on PYD assessment (14, 15).

Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project

Since the P.A.T.H.S. Project was very successful inside and outside Hong Kong, Tin Ka Ping (TKP) Foundation explored the possibility of transplanting the project to mainland China in 2010. Eventually, we embarked on a three-year project to implement the project in four senior secondary schools in East China (Shanghai, Changzhou, Suzhou, and Yangzhou). The research team included colleagues from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, and East China Normal University. In this pilot implementation phase, the research team used the Tier 1 programs in Hong Kong as a blueprint and made adaptations to suit junior secondary school students in mainland China. In the pilot implementation, we incorporated the curriculum content of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project into the existing subjects such as moral education and mental health subjects (16). In addition to adapting the curriculum manuals, we also trained teachers, provided support during the implementation, and evaluated the programs.

To understand the impact of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, the research team conducted the evaluation in all four pilot schools. The evaluation strategies included “subjective outcome evaluation (SOE),”

“objective outcome evaluation (OOE),” “process evaluation,” and “qualitative evaluation.” Regarding the OOE, findings based on a quasi-experimental design showed that the students who had joined the project demonstrated more positive changes in the developmental outcomes. Concerning the SOE, both students and teachers showed positive perceptions of the project in terms of the programs, teachers, and benefits. For process evaluation, we observed that the teachers demonstrated what they had learned from training and used experiential learning techniques smoothly. Finally, qualitative evaluation based on focus groups and weekly diaries written by students also showed that students and teachers had positive perceptions of different aspects of the project. They unanimously agreed that this project was helpful to students’ holistic development. The results of these evaluations strongly support the remarkable achievements of the pilot TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project (17).

Since the pilot project from 2011 to 2014 was very successful, the TKP Foundation continued to support the project. However, before scaling up the project, we decided to step up training for teachers in the 2014-2015 school year as a one-year preparation for the subsequent full implementation in more schools. Based on the training experience in Hong Kong, the research team organized four training programs in different cities in mainland China during the preparatory period. Through these training programs, the potential program implementers knew more about the project and appreciated the factors contributing to successful project implementation. During this year, each project school gradually established a P.A.T.H.S. project team which worked out the teaching and staff deployment plan and figured out how to integrate the P.A.T.H.S. programs into the formal curriculum of the school.

With the concerted effort of all stakeholders, over thirty project schools participated in the three-year full implementation from the 2015-16 to the 2017-18 school year. In addition, although the original P.A.T.H.S. Project mainly targeted at junior secondary school students, we also developed senior secondary school programs at this stage for the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project because senior secondary school students also have acute developmental needs, such as career planning, maintenance of family harmony,

handling of open examination stress, and building healthy interpersonal relationships. Actually, we originally had no plan to develop the senior secondary school programs. However, because of the enthusiasm and commitment shown by the teachers (e.g., they joined the training as potential implementers, and they developed their own senior secondary school programs), we eventually decided to develop some teaching units for senior secondary school students on a voluntary basis.

TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project: Junior Secondary school curriculum

For the curriculum materials of 7th to 9th grade, the teaching units and curriculum guides were modeled after the materials in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong research team, the East China Normal University research team, and four frontline teachers from TKP junior secondary schools participated in the compilation work in 2013. They collected the frontline teachers' experience and localized these textbooks to meet the needs of mainland Chinese adolescents.

The attempt to adapt the Hong Kong version of the P.A.T.H.S. programs is necessary because there are differences in the social contexts between Hong Kong and mainland China. For example, while we use the term "mini-bus" in Hong Kong, "mini-bus" is not a common form of public transport in mainland China. Although we used 15 PYD constructs in Hong Kong, we selected eight core constructs in the junior secondary school programs in mainland China. These included connection with healthy adults and good friends (BO), social competence (SC), emotional control and management skills (EC), cognitive skills (CC), behavioral competence and action-taking ability (BC), ability to distinguish right from wrong (MC), self-efficacy (SE) and prosocial ability (PN). Besides, we selected six other constructs as supplementary constructs (i.e., teachers could teach these teaching units if they had time), including resilience (RE), self-determination (SD), spirituality (SP), clear and positive identity (CPI), goal setting and decision-making (BF), and prosocial involvement (PI). The PYD constructs were embedded in the curricula materials and addressed via different experiential

learning activities, such as role play, reflective learning, and collaborative learning.

Each teaching unit lasts for 40 minutes. There are multiple sessions in a teaching unit, including stimulation activities, main activities, secondary activities, and post-class activities. The purpose of the stimulation activities is to arouse the interest of the students and pave the way for their learning. Through a wide range of experiential learning activities such as individual reflection, group reflection, class reflection, debates and role plays, students learn about the attitude and behavior associated with the PYD constructs (e.g., empathy in social competence). If time permits, teachers could carry out both main activities and secondary activities. If time is limited, the teacher can focus on the main activities only. In addition to the basic teaching units, there are post-class learning activities for students to deepen their understanding and application of the constructs they have learned (16).

TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project: Senior Secondary school curriculum

There are many developmental tasks faced by senior secondary school students in late adolescence. In addition to adjustment to physical changes, senior secondary school students need to learn how to interact with their peers in a healthy manner. Furthermore, with cognitive and social maturation, late adolescents need to learn how to balance the quest for autonomy and fulfillment of parental demands. Academically, senior secondary school students normally need to face fierce competitions in open examinations. For those who decide not to study further, they need to consider career planning. In short, many burning developmental stresses are intrinsic in late adolescence.

Originally, we did not plan to develop curriculum materials for senior secondary school students for two reasons. First, there is the view that schools would not have time for implementing youth project like the P.A.T.H.S. Project during the senior secondary school years. Second, because of the budget constraint, we decided to focus on junior secondary school programs. Contrary to our expectations, many senior secondary school teachers joined the training

programs conducted in the 2014-15 preparatory year. They even developed their own programs based on the junior secondary school programs. Because of the enthusiasm and needs of the senior secondary school teachers, the research team eventually spent extra manpower and financial resources from the first author's other research grants in developing the senior secondary school curriculum in a voluntary manner. After considering different factors such as developmental needs of the students and changing ecological contexts, we developed 60 teaching units, with 31 units for secondary four students, 19 units for secondary five students, and 10 units for secondary six students. While covering the same PYD constructs as the junior secondary school curriculum, the senior secondary units also covered eight developmental domains. These included civic responsibility (seven units), enhancement of family connection (nine units), stress management (seven units), friendship and love (five units), career planning (11 units), internet use (four units), positive development (nine units) and academic study (eight units).

Same as the junior secondary school curriculum materials, the senior secondary school curriculum materials also utilize experiential learning pedagogies, such as group discussion, class discussion, group sharing, class sharing, role-play, and group activities. These methods are helpful for building up a positive class atmosphere facilitating student participation, collaborative learning, reflections, consolidation of past successful experience, and integration of the class experience into daily life. In the 2016-2017 school year, the research team completed the curricula materials for the 60 senior secondary teaching units. The trial versions of the manuals for these units were also printed and distributed to the project schools. In addition, we invited 10 senior secondary schools to participate in the refinement of the teaching manuals. These schools implemented the units in multiple senior secondary classes and thus generated important teaching experiences for further refinement. Specifically, each school was invited to review the content of six units with reference to student feedback, classroom situations, and teachers' personal experiences. Based on the implementation experience and feedback from schools, the research team refined the curricula materials, such as worksheets, recommendations for teaching, and reflective

questions after class. After this refinement process, the updated teaching manuals were printed and distributed to schools before April 2018 (16).

Evaluation of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project

To yield the effectiveness of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, there is a need to present evidence to substantiate this claim. In the project, we collected data from both students and teachers. For students, we conducted a quasi-experimental study and collected SOE data using a client satisfaction approach. We also collected student diaries after they had participated in the programs. For teachers, we collected SOE data in terms of their perceptions of the P.A.T.H.S. Project, as well as their views of the training programs.

To examine whether students changed in a positive direction, we conducted objective outcome evaluations. In the initial phase of the project (2011-2014), we collected data from the experimental schools ($N = 1,056$ in posttest) and control schools ($N = 786$ at posttest) using a quasi-experimental design. Results showed that relative to the control group participants, students in the experimental schools displayed positive changes after joining the program in different dimensions of PYD (18). In an evaluation study based on 539 students in the experimental group and 505 students in the control group, Zhu and Shek (19) showed that students in the experimental schools achieved better developmental outcomes in terms of improvement of PYD attributes, and relatively more stable life satisfaction and depression (i.e., no worsening as compared with the control group).

To understand students' subjective feelings, the research team encouraged schools to invite their students who had participated in the project to complete the SOE form (i.e., Form A), where students responded in a positive manner in the pilot implementation (20, 21). In the full implementation phase, studies further showed that the participants had positive views towards the program, teachers, and gains from the programs. In a recent study combining the data collected in the 2016-17 and the 2017-18 school years ($N = 20,480$), Zhu and Shek (22) used

Form A to examine perceptions of the student participants on the programs, teachers, and benefits of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. In addition to the establishment of the psychometric properties of Form A, results also showed that high proportions of the respondents had positive views towards the quality of the programs and implementers, as well as the benefits of the programs. Apart from students, teachers were also invited to complete the SOE (i.e., Form B) to express their evaluations of the project. Results revealed that teachers generally held positive comments on the programs and their own teaching, and they were positive about the programs being able to promote student holistic development (17, 23). Taken together, findings derived from students and teachers unwrapped the facts that different stakeholders had positive perceptions of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, and that they underscored the benefits of the related programs.

In addition to OOE and SOE that are presumably quantitative in nature, we also collected weekly diaries from students after completion of the program so that we can know more about their subjective feelings, thoughts, and behaviors surrounding the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project (24). During 2015-2018, the research team collected over 4,200 student diaries. After sorting, classifying, and analyzing students' diaries, researchers found that students expressed their positive perceptions of courses and teachers. Students also expressed their ideas and preferences for the interactive experience in the project. Meantime, students also believed that the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project promoted their confidence, emotional management abilities, communication abilities, and social responsibility, and that it also enhanced their relationships with students, teachers, and family members (17). In Shek et al.'s study (24), 859 student diaries were analyzed to understand the subjective experiences of the students. Results showed positive narratives on the program and the implementers. Students also expressed that the programs had helped them in different areas, including personal, social, family and community areas after joining the program. Some of the narratives are as follows:

"Through the P.A.T.H.S. lessons, I learned many things which promoted my ability to interact with others, ability to analyze, optimism about the future, contribution to society and sense of responsibility. I learned many useful

things in the program that contributed to my holistic development. The most important benefit of the P.A.T.H.S. lessons is that it helped me how to act in a responsible manner. I thank the P.A.T.H.S. lessons, teachers, and Tin Ka Ping School."

"In the P.A.T.H.S. lessons, I learned how to respect others and help others. I also learned how to speak in front of the class in a confident manner. The teacher encouraged me in the lesson so that I learned how to differentiate right from wrong. The teacher also taught about the importance of honesty. I believe the aim of the P.A.T.H.S. lessons is to help us live a meaningful life."

"In my Grade 7 life, my favorite subject is the P.A.T.H.S. subject. It helped me deal with people with respect and a helping mentality. I learned a lot this year. I learned many practical things from the lessons. When using public transport, I will not act in a selfish manner, and I have learned the importance of giving up seats to the needy. I also learned not to speak loudly in public places. In the past, I only paid lip service to the importance of caring for others. After taking P.A.T.H.S. lessons, I have changed much. The greatest gain from the P.A.T.H.S. lessons is that I am now a real senior secondary school student."

"I could learn much from the P.A.T.H.S. subject that is not covered in other subjects. From my participation in this subject, I discovered my life philosophy and there was growth in my value system, positive interaction with teachers and students, and the ways to handle life challenges. I also gained in the areas of making choices and contributing to society. If there is a chance, I would like to learn in this 'great' course again."

"P.A.T.H.S. is a great course. Each lesson has a different interaction pattern. The lessons can promote the feelings between classmates, their cooperative ability and tacit understanding between classmates. Each class has a theme, which can bring us joy, and after joy, we can deeply appreciate the truth. We learned how to get along with people and what to do after encountering difficulties. The teacher was also very kind and guided us forward. Sometimes the teacher will show us some thought-provoking movies. Generally speaking, P.A.T.H.S. is a subject that allows us to develop in an all-round way."

In conclusion, evaluations based on different approaches clearly indicate that the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project was well accepted by different stakeholders; program implementers as well as program participants perceived students had benefitted from their

participation in the project. Moreover, students showed positive changes after joining the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.

Training of potential program implementers

The effectiveness of any PYD program is closely dependent on the implementers' quality (25). As such, based on the training experience in Hong Kong, we organized regular training programs in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. The training content and section design was modeled after the Hong Kong model and related principles.

During the preparatory period for the full implementation phase in the 2014-2015 school year, the research team organized four national training courses, providing 69 hours of training for 785 potential program implementers. The training courses introduced the theoretical framework of PYD, curriculum design concepts, and specific content of the teaching units in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. In addition to the training on classroom teaching skills and evaluation methods, project schools were invited to share their experience and conduct on-site exchanges with other schools. Through participating in the training programs, prospective implementers acquired a deeper understanding of the concept of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, and gradually mastered the skills of experiential teaching methods, which laid a solid foundation for the subsequent smooth comprehensive implementation (17). In the three years of the full implementation period, the research team continued to provide nine training programs all over the country (three times per school year) with a total of 180 training hours benefitting a total of 1,589 participants. In these training programs, separate training programs were provided for junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools simultaneously (17).

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training programs, participants of training programs completed an evaluation form with rating scales and a reflection form highlighting what they had learned in the training program at the end of training. For the evaluation form, it covers items assessing a participant's evaluation of "training project quality,"

"trainer quality," "personal performance," and "administrative arrangement" (26). For example, based on the 95 evaluation forms received in Jiujiang, Jiangxi, a very high percentage of respondents agreed that the training program promoted individual reflection (95.8%) and teaching skills (96.4%) and they were overall satisfied with training (98.9%) (17). Many teachers also said they gradually changed their mindset, from ignorant or doubtful thinking to an understanding and trustful attitude. Some teachers believed that training promoted their development. Quantitative and qualitative evaluations also supported that the training programs could promote the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of the teachers.

"My greatest gain from this training program is that I know many schools and teachers are working hard to get better results. This provides an impetus for the development of the P.A.T.H.S. Program. The training also deepens my understanding of the senior secondary school program. This promotes my confidence about the program implementation and evaluation."

"I am very touched. The mentors of the research group and the colleagues of the foundation are doing things from the bottom of their hearts. This is a kind of strong guidance and support. I am willing to teach P.A.T.H.S. lessons in a real and steadfast way like you do. Although it is my first time participating in the conference and I have heard that there will be difficulties and setbacks, I am willing to follow it completely, stick to it, and keep my faith! I hope that one day I can stand up and go forward to share with you happily and do it steadily. Do my best, I said to myself."

"This training gave me a better understanding of the concept of the P.A.T.H.S. Project and the method of implementation of P.A.T.H.S., but the biggest gain was to feel the kind words and deeds of the P.A.T.H.S. team, which allowed me to see the true conscience of educators—for the positive growth of young people has improved our own. Too many people give selflessly and sincerely."

"Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project made me better understand the responsibilities and values of teachers, respect, listen and share. It not only helps our teaching, but also helps me improve my personality, sentiment and how to be a mother, how to accompany me better and lead my daughter to grow up."

“After seventeen years of teaching, I feel tired in my work. The P.A.T.H.S. Program reignites my educational ideals. Through this training, I have a deeper understanding of the concept of P.A.T.H.S. and applied it to political science, science and technology, and the family education of children, and received very good results. I have learned a lot from the work attitude of the mentors and Foundation staff, and I admire your professionalism.”

To recognize outstanding teachers in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project and encourage more teachers to participate in the teaching and research of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, The TKP Foundation and research team jointly launched the Teacher Award Program. According to teachers’ experience, participation, and performance in teaching, training, and research, we set up five types of awards, including “P.A.T.H.S. Teacher,” “Senior P.A.T.H.S. Teacher,” “Principal P.A.T.H.S. teacher,” “P.A.T.H.S. Trainer,” and “Senior P.A.T.H.S. Trainer.” In addition, the Foundation and the research team jointly nominated “P.A.T.H.S. Consultants.”

Other impacts of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project

Because of the contributions of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project to the holistic development of students, additional initiatives have been launched in mainland China. First, a senior secondary School affiliated to Remin University of China (i.e., Ren Da Fu Zhong) adopted the P.A.T.H.S. programs, and developed teaching manuals to promote mental health among students. Second, Adream Foundation has included the P.A.T.H.S. programs in its library system so that teachers from provinces across China can teach P.A.T.H.S. programs online. To date, more than 500,000 students have joined the online P.A.T.H.S. classes delivered by Adream teachers in mainland China. Finally, as the current version of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. curriculum is more applicable to urban areas (e.g., the examples are more relevant to urban contexts), there is a need to develop curriculum materials for rural areas in China. As a result, we are now conducting a project together with colleagues at the Southwestern University of Finance and Economics to develop the rural version of the P.A.T.H.S. curriculum.

Conclusion

Based on the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong and utilizing the PYD approach, the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project has filled the theoretical and practical gaps in promoting holistic youth development in mainland China. The systematic teaching material system, teacher training, and the efforts and support from all parties guarantee effective implementation. Based on the implementation experience, the research team has also published various academic articles and other types of publications, providing valuable experience for the future promotion of the program on a larger scale. In short, there is support for the beneficial impact of the original P.A.T.H.S. programs in Hong Kong and the TKP P.A.T.H.S. programs in mainland China (26-32). In addition, the training programs can help step up more programs of PYD intervention in mainland China (33-37).

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