Training program of the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China: A qualitative study

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Abstract

Using a qualitative approach, this paper reviewed the effectiveness and benefits of the training programs of Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China. Nine teachers who participated in the previous training programs in different cities since 2015 were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview in the summer 2021. Four domains of responses were addressed, including: 1) teacher training arrangements; 2) teachers' experience of teacher training; 3) teacher training impact; and 4) room for improvements. The findings showed that the training programs were highly appreciated by the program participants in terms of training content, administrative support and organization, and perceived effectiveness of the training programs over time. Besides interviewees' positive perceptions of the program, difficulties and challenges were also discussed with reference to the new phase of the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project - "Building the 'Tin' Homeland Together."

Keywords: Training program, Building the 'Tin' Homeland Together, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project, mainland China, qualitative study, evaluation research

Introduction

Based on the positive youth development (PYD) approach (1), the Project P.A.T.H.S. was initiated and financially supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust in 2005. Related programs have been successfully implemented and impacted countless secondary school students since then. In developing, promoting and implementing the project, several evaluation studies have been published. Evaluation research can be seen as a "conversation" between researchers and practitioners (2). When conducted "systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis" (3), evaluation research contributes to the knowledge development and sustainability of a program. As

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such, in the implementation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong, the research team conducted many evaluation studies via different approaches, including objective outcome evaluation, subjective outcome evaluation, qualitative evaluation, process evaluation, and repertory grid evaluation (4, 5). Such evaluation studies provide evidence for program effectiveness as well as pointers for the development of PYD theory and research in the Chinese context. In particular, evaluation studies arising from the project suggest that the curriculum-based programs could generate impacts on the life skills of program participants (6) and prevent risk behaviors (7). For example, evidence in a study showed that the program was able to promote moral competence, behavioral competence and cognitive behavioral competencies of the students who joined the project (8). To ensure that the potential program implementers grasp the spirit and know-how of the project, training programs were held to prepare potential implementers in gaining solid teaching efficacy and skills for implementing the program, as well as enriching their understanding of the concepts related to PYD (9). In fact, we can argue that training programs have a big share in the success of the Project P.A.T.H.S.

Due to the success of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong, Tin Ka Ping Foundation funded the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project (TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project) which was initially implemented as a three-year pilot program in four secondary schools in four cities in East China from 2011 to 2014. The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project entered the full implementation phase from 2015 to 2018 when the pilot program received positive feedback from project implementers and students. From 2014 to 2015, we conducted intensive training for potential program implementers. As far as the curriculum material is concerned, although mainland China and Hong Kong share the same Chinese culture, the two societies have different social characteristics, particularly in their educational and social systems. Therefore, the research team adjusted the curriculum and training programs for the potential implementers and students. In addition, to implement the program with reference to the unique social background of mainland China, the research team covered topics including CC (Cognitive Competence), MC (Moral Competence),

SD (Self-determination), SP (Spirituality), ID (Clear and Positive Identity), SC (Social Competence), EC (Emotional Competence), BC (Behavioral Competence), SE (Self-efficacy), and RE (Resilience), in the training programs.

From 2011 to 2018, the research team conducted a series of intensive training programs for potential implementers in different cities. In each program, participants were asked to fill out a subjective outcome evaluation survey in the last session. They were also invited to give some qualitative comments on the training program. Overall speaking, the quantitative evaluation findings on the training programs consistently showed that the participants had very high satisfaction and perceived effectiveness in the areas of program content, administrative arrangement, instructors' performance, and participants' own performance. For example, Shek, Chung and Sun (10) evaluated a TKP training program held in Shanghai in 2015, and reported that among the participants (N = 117), positive response percentages were high in different domains, including program quality (95%), administrative arrangement (99%), instructors' performance (98%), and their own performance (74%). The study also revealed that perceived program quality and administrative arrangement predicted perceived program benefits, and perceived program quality and benefits predicted overall satisfaction with the training program. Besides, similar positive findings were found in training programs held in Suzhou (11), Chongqing (12), Changchun (13) and Zhaoqing (14). The evaluation findings showed consistent results suggesting that the TKP training programs have been a success in mainland China. Obviously, successful training programs have played an important role in better equipping the program implementers and promoting the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China.

As a follow-up research, the present study attempted to understand participants' personal experiences regarding the training programs, perceived effectiveness during and after the training programs, and the needs and difficulties they have encountered in routine teaching so that future training programs could be further improved. With these objectives in mind, we addressed three questions in this paper: 1) What

is the participants' perceived experience of the training programs? 2) What are the perceptions of the participants on the effectiveness of the training programs in their teaching practice? 3) What are their suggestions with reference to their needs and challenges in implementing the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project in the community?

Methods

In summer 2021, nine first-line teachers who had previously joined the TKP training programs (i.e., seven females and two males) were invited to join the online interviews conducted by the research team. The interviewees were teachers from secondary schools that were sponsored by the Tin Ka Ping Foundation in mainland China and joined the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. Most of them had more than five years of teaching experience in the project, and some were project leaders in their schools, in charge of communication with school managers, other project teachers and students, as well as overseeing project development at the school level. In addition, most of them joined all nationwide teacher training programs hosted by the research team during the full implementation phase from 2015 to 2018. Furthermore, they also joined the new phase of the project entitled "Building the 'Tin' Homeland Together" after 2018. Besides training, the interviewees received individualized support from the research team via emails, phone calls, and/or visit to the project schools. The interviewees also received training from their schools, including project team meetings and teacher training.

Procedures

In this study, two experienced researchers hosted nine individual interviews each lasting for 1-2 hour(s). The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews with four foci: 1) teachers' project experiences, such as teaching experience and awards and teacher training; 2) project implementation at the school level, including course setting, teacher development and training, and school policy and support; 3) project effects, such as influence on students (e.g., mental health, academic performance, and intrapersonal relationship), parents, teachers, and schools; and 4) difficulties encountered and support needed.

Before the interviews, informed consent was obtained from the interviewees. The interviewees were informed of the interview purpose and that their participation was voluntary in nature. They were also aware that the interviews would be recorded, and that the interview content and their personal information (i.e., names and schools) would be kept confidential and presented in an anonymous manner. All interviewees gave their consent before joining the interviews.

Data analysis

The qualitative data collected from the nine interviews were first transcribed into written words by five research staff, and the transcriptions were double-checked before the next step. The interview content was further categorized into four parts, and this study zoomed in on data about teacher training. Following the principles of thematic analyses (15), well-trained research staff viewed and reviewed the data several times to familiarize themselves with the data. After this step, researchers coded the data with reference to the following four areas: 1) teacher training arrangements (e.g., "teacher training time" and "training content"); 2) teachers' experience in teacher training (e.g., "project school welcoming teacher training"); 3) teacher training effects (e.g., "benefits of strengthening core project values" and "influences of teacher training across schools"); and 4) room for improvements (e.g., "time constraint on attending training").

The original interviews were conducted in Mandarin, and the data were translated into English by the research staff. To ensure the reliability of data analysis, all steps mentioned above were checked and double-checked by a senior researcher who also serves as the project leader. In addition, we randomly selected 20 responses to assess the inter-rater reliability on the positivity of responses in the domain on the impact of training.

Results

We coded the data with reference to the following four domains: 1) arrangements of training programs; 2) teachers' experience in teacher training; 3) impact of teacher training; and 4) room for improvement in the training programs. Overall speaking, the responses are highly positive and the interviewees indicated their strong wish for future training including online and face-to-face modes. Besides feedback on previous training programs, the interviewees also made suggestions for future training arrangements.

Theme 1: Arrangement of training programs

Interviewees recalled their previous participation in different training programs in mainland China. Most of them joined the offline training programs from 2014 to 2016 and online training in recent years. Some of them participated more than once. According to the interviewees, people who came to the training were not only teachers but also school managers at different levels.

- "So, the first three times were basically the five core members who joined the training, a leader, a political director, an educational director, a psychologist, and a young teacher. Basically, we were a fixed team. Later, the school said that for the sake of work and our needs, all the young head teachers should go. In order to spread this concept across the school, the head teachers should be trained first." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "At that time, not only ordinary teachers, but also some school leaders participated in the training." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

When talking about teacher training content and activities, the concept and core values of the P.A.T.H.S. program and the opportunities to share with teachers from other schools were emphasized. Some examples can be seen below.

- "We practiced this concept (P.A.T.H.S.), including some of the new spirits (ideas)… these were all taught to everyone (all teachers), including the concepts (of the P.A.T.H.S. course), we all used them (in our teaching)." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "In fact, our school is still developing the program and the model classes. First of all, I think we strictly follow the requirement of the teacher training programs. That's it. It is the requirement of the Polytechnic University for us to implement the P.A.T.H.S. course step by step. We will add it (the P.A.T.H.S. course) to the school's timetable very soon, because we are all doing it now. Then, we communicated with teachers from other schools... Then, we followed the class schedule very closely... It had become a weekly class, which is exactly in accordance with the program requirement. We've kept it that way ever since." (Interviewee 4, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

The influence of teacher training did not stop after the programs. School managers and teachers paid special attention to sharing with other teachers who did not come to the training, as well as on localizing training fruits into their implementation of the P.A.T.H.S. programs. Conducting model classes and sharing meetings and seminars across schools successfully spread the fruits of teacher training programs. Some sharing of the teachers can be seen below.

- "Every time after we joined the training, an education forum would be held, and teachers who attended the training would report to everyone else. When I taught a class, I would invite other teachers to observe as a model class. Also, when they were on the stage teaching, I would listen at the back and then gave feedback to the class. They were all high-quality, highly-educated, and savvy young teachers. They received very good higher education with excellent academic quality. If we consider it only from the teaching skills level, they have no problem at

all." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "After we took this training program, I asked other teachers who have taught the P.A.T.H.S. course to come and listen to each class (of mine). Then, I also gave each of them a review, and assigned tasks. In this way, the teachers were asked to not only listen to but also participate in the class. I think the process of listening and commenting also helps with improving professionalism. Listening to a class is actually a learning process." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "At this time, the teachers would come to listen to the model classes, and listened to the class altogether as a way to learn what had been taught in the training programs." (Interviewee 3, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "Before they (teachers who did not attend national teacher training programs), I emphasized that they must read the textbooks (TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project textbooks) before class and figure out what the key points and main themes were. Then, they needed to communicate more with other teachers (TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teachers) who have taught (TKP P.A.T.H.S. course) and been trained for several years, in things like how to organize a class, how to communicate with students, and how to deal with the situations that students have. These are the main points of our teaching and research meetings.… New teachers can communicate with senior teachers (who attended the training programs). Also, if they have any questions, they can discuss with them at our teaching and research group meetings." (Interviewee 4, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "Then, maybe during the class, we would invite them to listen to the class together. They can familiar with the model class and the lesson plan. The effect of implementing the same lesson plan may be different in each class, so I encouraged them to listen to more classes. Each teacher's teaching style is different, and children are also different.

Therefore, they will be encouraged to attend more classes. After listening to the class, we will let them know our comments for improvements. In fact, the class is just a model. We can also find many problems in the comments after the class, so we will make corrections. We let capable young teachers follow this revised courseware and then go to the class. We use this model to guide them, and then let them learn slowly how to teach a TKP P.A.T.H.S. class in the process of learning and revising again and again." (Interviewee 4, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

Theme 2: Teachers' experience in teacher training

Generally speaking, interviewees' impressions of teacher training programs are highly positive. Some mentioned that the training content was easy to learn and training qualities were high. They believed that the training programs brought "fresh air" into their teaching by introducing the concept and core values of the P.A.T.H.S. program. Schools, on the other hand, welcomed the teacher training programs, and encouraged teachers to improve their understanding of the P.A.T.H.S. program and how to implement such a program. Some narratives are as follows:

- "Anyone who has experienced this training program all say that this is a good course. It is definitely a good course… The Foundation (the TKP Foundation) doesn't often have online training or mentor training. Therefore, every time when there was a meeting, we invited teachers as many as possible in the school and announced this online training opportunity in our school's chat group on social media. They (other teachers) were invited individually to come to the meeting room to study." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "My understanding of our Hong Kong teaching materials and knowledge may be deeper, so my acceptance will be faster."

(Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "As a part of the P.A.T.H.S. course, we (as a teacher) were offered extra outbound training opportunities, which was an impressive experience, especially on stress management …" (Interviewee 3, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "In fact, after you understand the core of it (the P.A.T.H.S. course), many of them are in patterns, and you can enrich yourself." (Interviewee 6, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "...I knew some of the class teachers. They were willing to join our P.A.T.H.S team after taking the course…Although some of the core tutors (in the P.A.T.H.S course) are no longer working in the P.A.T.H.S team (of our school), they ask if I can also bring them to the training if possible..." (Interviewee 8, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "After taking the training of the P.A.T.H.S course, our teachers adjusted their teaching from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching. Teachers from other schools found it amazing and took it as a reference to improve their teaching skills." (Interviewee 9, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

In offline training, the interviewees especially praised the "atmosphere" of studying and discussing with other teachers from all over the country, which is a rare opportunity for communication and idea exchange. This is also one thing that the online training mode lacked. However, offline teacher training programs required more time commitment and some interviewees felt it was especially hard to travel long distances considering their tight work schedules. Some shared the following experiences:

- "We had a chat group for work (during and after training). I would post my feelings, and how we designed a class in the group. Basically, most of the time I learned a lot in the chat group." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "It's a course (the training program) that people entered the venue to study the concept (of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project), feel the atmosphere, and share with each other." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "Offline training is very good. The atmosphere is different (from online training) and better. Offline training can help increasing physical memory. There are many things you have learned and forgotten, but your body is in this meeting place and the good feelings are stored in your body. This will definitely work better and the effect on you will last longer." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "In teacher training, I remember that there was a teacher from another school asking me (questions). I interacted with him at the time. We had different opinions." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "That is to say, I still hope to have this kind of intensive training like the previous ones (offline teacher training programs)... teachers from different schools gathered together... It is also good to have this kind of learning exchange... In such a group communication, it is very beneficial to have more communication opportunities with teachers from other schools." (Interviewee 4, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "I went there (teacher training programs) twice. At that time, I got to know a lot of very excellent teachers, and I also learned so much from them. I want to participate it (teacher training program) again." (Interviewee 6, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "Then, the thing is that the communication among schools was mainly among several of us who were in charge. Every time when we had an online meeting, it basically depended on us, the heads of our school. So, for us, teachers who often held meetings together, we communicated about the course privately on WeChat (a popular social media in mainland China) and became friends. That has also made us more familiar with each other." (Interviewee 8, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

As for the online training mode, the interviewees thought that it was a new and convenient way for future training programs. The features of time-saving and flexibility of the online training mode are well recognized and accepted. Although online training is timesaving and more convenient, some interviewees preferred offline teacher training programs as it would be easier for group discussion and sharing.

- "We participated in the training program held by the Foundation at the end of December last year, an online training activity. I think that many teachers participated in the training activity, and the teachers said that they were very rewarding ... The online training, the effect of the online training is very good, and we were asked to provide recorded videos of the training as proof of attendance. Every time when I have an opportunity, I just share it with other teachers… we would record the online classes and learn together. Everyone would have a certificate afterward. Everyone is happy. The open class in the school is also very good, especially for those class teachers who do not know about the P.A.T.H.S. courses. If they understand more about it, it can be an opportunity to exercise." (Interviewee 8, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "We discussed with each other in an online group (in online training)… the Foundation (the TKP Foundation) also organized some online video conferences. Originally, if there is no epidemic, there would be a meeting for P.A.T.H.S. teachers once a year. Now, we can only communicate like this on the Internet.… it is good that many teachers can arrange their time for training in a more flexible way… Well, the training effect of the offline face-to-face communication should be much better. However, now because of the epidemic, there is no way to do it. It is also beneficial to have online training, as everyone can save a lot of time." (Interviewee 9, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Solid support provided by the research team also enriched interviewees' experience in

teacher training. Either during or after teacher training, the research team's efforts, such as nationwide patrols in different schools, also helped with interviewees' implementing the P.A.T.H.S. courses." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Then, in 2018, we became a project school, and Prof. A and Dr. B (from the research team) were very supportive to my school. There also provided a lot of guidance for us, and that's what helped us become a school base… In addition, Prof A's team (the research team) also visited my school once in the national visit program." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Actually, I admire your professionalism and your caring attitude to us. I think it is completely different from the training in the mainland. One reason is your professionalism in class teaching. You (the research team) know very well on what teachers needed." (Interviewee 3, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

The interviewees also pointed out that their professional skills was enhanced and they had a growing recognition of the P.A.T.H.S. programs. The systematic training programs encouraged them to step out of their "comfort zone" and take on challenges.

- "Another thing, teachers need systematic training to get out of their comfort zone (to be trained up and grow)." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Then, these activities generated some gains that I didn't expect. Even we teachers, first of all, we also felt a sense of crisis in class… Then, I recognized this training program even more. The teachers all thought that this training program was so good." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "I still felt quite confused. At that time, it was mainly the school leaders who put a lot of pressure on us. So, at that time, I really wanted to focus on learning (how to teach TKP P.A.T.H.S. course), because I had to teach the P.A.T.H.S. course when I went back. However, I still felt confused about

some topics (of the training content). Yes, that was my first impression." (Interviewee 3, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

Theme 3: Impact of teacher training

The interviewees' narratives showed that other than the gains on interviewees' personal professional development, teacher training programs also radiated influence to other teachers, schools and even the society via constant sharing and promotion events held by the interviewees and their schools.

After the training programs, the schools were keen on arranging meetings for sharing, hosting model classes by interviewees, to teachers who did not participate in the programs so that more young teachers can be nurtured. These moves were systematically performed and could effectively promote the P.A.T.H.S. program in the school, to enlarge the teacher team and enhance the program influence among students and parents. Some examples are as follows:

- "We also had a Senior Secretary of the Youth League Committee in the team, more than 20 TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teachers joining us. We already have had a good reserve of resources." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Although they are enthusiastic and well-qualified, they also know a little bit about P.A.T.H.S.… and the density (intensity?), depth, and quality are incomparable. I think this kind of training is very important for us... I watched them (young teachers) grow… we will have an unexpected harvest." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "… for new teachers, we must conduct training for them. They are supposed to listen to the model classes and exchange opinions with senior teachers. Then we may start a school meeting on a regular basis as well. We would discuss about some of the existing problems (in a way to train up new teachers)." (Interviewee 4, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "Because of the impact of the epidemic, we do not have intensive training, or there are very few opportunities for learning and communicating with cooperative (collaborative?) schools. Well, the training for young teachers who joined the P.A.T.H.S. Project is more needed than for senior teachers in our school." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

The interviewees also shared that the P.A.T.H.S. program benefited teachers in other disciplines, particularly to teachers who are teaching moral and mental health. Traditionally, middle schools in mainland China have moral education in the formal educational system, while mental health education has been added to the school curriculum in recent years as the mental health of adolescents has drawn more public attention. Some interviewees had teaching experiences in either moral education or mental health education. After joining teacher training programs, they could integrate their teaching experience with teacher training content. In this way, teacher training programs contributed to the existing moral and mental health education in the project schools. Related narratives can be seen below.

- "There is such a passion to support the P.A.T.H.S. project because it can effectively support the mental health education of my school." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "But when my team came back from your training, I felt that it was very timely to get (the P.A.T.H.S. course) started with what they had (teachers who participated in the training programs) learned (from the training program) in their heads." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "In the third year of high school, it may be more of a combination of P.A.T.H.S. and psychological counseling activities... I have a feeling that the current model of the P.A.T.H.S. course and its core values, such as focusing on students' interactive experience, is very similar to what we are currently practicing in mainland China, such as the psychological counseling activity class. So,

we may combine it." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

Besides sharing training content within project schools, interviewees and their school managers also invited teachers from other schools to attend model classes to apply training content in teaching practices. The invited schools were usually other local Tin Ka Ping schools or cooperative (collaborative?) schools of the project schools. Teachers' feedback on the model classes turned out to be very positive, and P.A.T.H.S. program was further promoted and became popular among schools.

- "Including our partner schools, they were also invited to send teachers to study through online learning. Offline, we used this theme to conduct large-scale events… It (the P.A.T.H.S. course) is also cultivated and promoted through activities across schools." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Although most of the young teachers may not stay in the school for long due to their short-term contracts, they will transform what they have learnt from the P.A.T.H.S. project trainings to other schools…" (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Well, every time we started a class, there were still many teachers who were willing to listen to and learn from our P.A.T.H.S. course, especially when we had a large-scale public P.A.T.H.S. model course. Many teachers were willing to come. Every classroom we used must be a very big one. Basically, the back of the room was full every time. If the back space was not enough, we must move to a bigger conference room when too many teachers came… Every time, this kind of model class was very popular." (Interviewee 8, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "Our classroom was so full that we couldn't host so many people at all, so this (the model class) was very popular at the time. This was beyond our expectation, but on the other hand, our P.A.T.H.S. course also means that we can explain our P.A.T.H.S. course from another aspect. I don't want to brag about it,

but we do have a very good reputation (about the P.A.T.H.S. course) among our partner schools. So it must have been well-known, or there will not be so many people coming here. Well, the effect is very good." (Interviewee 8, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

When teacher training programs were conducted by the project schools, officers from local education bureaus were also invited and the influences of teacher training programs were then shared in a wider range. The involvement of officers of local education bureaus provided good opportunities for more people to know about P.A.T.H.S. program. Some related sharing is as follows:

- "We held a national training program in Baiyin city. Every time when we held such event, we would invite leaders from the local education bureau and teachers in the schools nearby. In fact, they all knew that our school was doing this (the P.A.T.H.S. program) and they all said that it was very good." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "We invited a moral education researcher from the Zhoushan Education Bureau to our training sharing events. It (the P.A.T.H.S. course) is well known by all the middle schools in the city, and some teachers of moral education would come to visit, learn, and communicate (over P.A.T.H.S. course)." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

Theme 4: Room for improvements

Regarding training design and arrangement, the interviewees suggested some possible improvements in terms of localizing and specifying training content to better meet teachers' needs, and provide more training opportunities, especially in offline mode. These suggestions were proposed based on the interviewees' daily teaching experiences and the specific needs they had in applying and localizing theories learned from the teacher training programs. Some examples can be seen below.

- "Another suggestion is that, as we often talk about, can we have training nationwide? Or at the bases of TKP schools and partner schools, like a bigger family? And those of us who have so much experience (about teacher training), can we make use of it, and then give lectures, guide, hold meetings, or give lectures, or training all over the country?" (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "We now feel that in terms of depth, including the background of the theory (the TKP P.A.T.H.S. course). I think it (school-based training) is still not enough and it is still necessary. We can do it, but we need more experts to guide us with more training. I believe it will be more beneficial for the advancement of this course." (Interviewee 2, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "But in fact, I think teachers are also under a lot of psychological pressure now. I think we should have a professional training program to help teachers to reduce stress. In fact, the current situation of teachers is not good, and the pressure is very intensive. I think it is possible to have such a project, which can also be used to reduce the stress for teachers." (Interviewee 3, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "We are hoping the COVID-19 will pass soon, and we will have opportunities to go out for training and learn something more fundamental. The materials or some content of the training are close to the actual activities of our school, so we can use this model when we come back. Of course, this model does not mean "copy and paste". In this case, the acceptance of teachers may be faster, because it is an intensive training." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "What needs to be done is to be more specific in training content, which is not detailed enough for now. For example, the guidance for young teachers who newly joined is not enough. It needs to be strengthened. In this way, young teachers will have confidence… A more specific, detailed, and refined guidance is that how to… to avoid misinterpretation (core values and textbooks of the P.A.T.H.S. course)." (Interviewee 6, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "We still hope that the Tin Ka Ping Foundation will host more activities (training programs), so that we can participate in, observe and learn because of these teachers... I just want to go out more (for offline training), otherwise I feel a bit closed-off." (Interviewee 6, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "So, I still hope that the Foundation can provide some opportunities, that is, offline training should be carried out for us. I hope more teachers can participate in (this training program)." (Interviewee 8, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

Some difficulties interviewees encountered were also mentioned and indicated directions for upgrading teacher training programs. Some examples are given below.

- "Just like parents, they (teachers) are always in a hurry giving classes without break. But time is limited. We always have a tight schedule and it is hard to squeeze time for activities beyond teaching… So, for them (young teachers), they have to prepare classes again and enter a new field again. They feel that it will be a burden on themselves... Even if this training program is very good, they feel that they are under a lot of pressure and have very little time… They come back (from training) and don't do it (apply training contents in teaching) because they have many specific difficulties, or because they don't want to burden themselves anymore. That's one reason." (Interviewee 1, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)
- "This is a problem that everyone encounters that there are not many platforms for teachers (to communicate and exchange ideas). So, there are few teachers who know about other teachers." (Interviewee 3, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "I think that many teachers lack professional training, and the current training is at most the kind of guidance in our school. But the ability of this kind of guidance is limited. Also, this kind of training is mixed with a lot of our personal opinions. It is unprofessional after all… However, such abilities are still limited…. Now they (young teachers) are learning from some of our experienced teachers. However, if they want to stably learn more, this would be a real problem." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "If we go online, we have the same arrangement… After all, people's attention or energy is limited. Even if it is online training, we do it during working hours. So, this training may not be the same as intensive training, where we can devote ourselves wholeheartedly. For example, if there is an incident (about students) in the school, then we must go to class (and deal with it), or if the school has a temporary task, then we must go. Therefore, the effect (of online training) may not be so good." (Interviewee 5, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

- "Training is needed, but now there is another point that our school may have some other considerations. For example, considering the problem of class hours, there may be some problems with teachers. Some teachers also seem to be able to arrange their time (for offline training). If it were an online training event, the effect might not be the same as the previous arrangement (offline teacher training). In fact, it's also good to have training like this (online teacher training). When there is a(n) (online) training, we can recommend more teachers to participate." (Interviewee 9, TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project teacher)

Discussion

Using a qualitative research strategy, this study examined teacher training programs of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project from the eyes of project teachers

as "the perspective insiders" (16, p. 4). With first-hand narrative data, teacher training was reviewed in the social context of the formal educational system in mainland China. In the form of semi-structured interview, details beyond structured questions were provided (17) which gave a unique picture of the overall training effectiveness and further pointed out the directions of localizing the P.A.T.H.S. program philosophies and the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China.

Generally speaking, interviewees were highly satisfied with the training programs in terms of training content as well as administrative support and organization. These findings are highly consistent with the findings of previous training evaluation studies (11-14, 18). Specifically, interviewees claimed that they benefited from the TKP P.A.T.H.S. program philosophies and practical teaching skills in the training content, as well as the opportunities to communicate with teachers from all over the country. They also appreciated various support and guidance (i.e., in-person, one-to-one, or online modes) from the research team in administrative support and organization during and after the training programs. Furthermore, this study revealed the wide impact of the training programs to young teachers, local schools, and educational development in local societies as additional evidence to substantiate the conclusions based on previous studies.

According to the interviewees, the training programs adequately equipped them with more advanced educational philosophies and teaching skills that have sharpened their own teaching practices, and further helped them grow professionally and personally. Furthermore, the fruits of training were disseminated to other teachers, especially among young teachers, which has been repeatedly mentioned by different interviewees when they shared about what they have learned from the training programs at school routine meetings, model classes and seminars, with the encouragement and support of school managers. In this way, young teachers would be well trained for the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project which could promote the sustainability of the project.

Developed in the Western contexts (19-21), the PYD approach in which the Project P.A.T.H.S. is rooted in requires solid data in its indigenization in the mainland Chinese society through the TKP

P.A.T.H.S. Project. Theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the indigenization of PYD theories in the Chinese context and the training experiences of first-line teachers. Although the project has been proved to be effective in Hong Kong (22-24), there is plenty of room for adjustment in mainland China because of a totally different educational system in mainland China as well as the different challenges that mainland Chinese adolescents have to face, such as the taboo of romantic relationship among adolescents (25) and absence of parental support for left-behind children (26). By uncovering the real needs of first-line teachers, this study provides important information on the potential application of PYD constructs on the specific socio-cultural context of mainland China.

Regarding the practical implications of the findings, this study pointed out the positive attributes of the training programs in training content as well as administrative support and organization, which will help strengthen future training programs. The suggestions proposed by the interviewees could inspire the research team to become more flexible when organizing online and face-to-face training programs, as well as communicating with the Foundation, teachers and schools. The difficulties the teachers have encountered, such as tight schedule for training and the lack of theoretical guidance for school-level teacher training, should also be addressed in future training program development, so that the fruits of the training programs could benefit more teachers, and further contribute to the development of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China.

Despite its innovative nature, there are several limitations of the study. First, as the number of interviewees in this study is small, it would be better to include more voices, not only from first-line teachers but also include school managers who joined the training programs, so that we can have a more comprehensive picture of the implementation and effectiveness of the training programs. Second, the interviews in this study were conducted online due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Although the interviews went smoothly, there were limitations on the access to non-verbal reactions and some technical problems in the online environment. Third, future studies on evaluating the training programs of TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project could consider other qualitative methods, such

as field investigation or combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to better understand the needs of all parties and the local societies, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the training programs and the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.

Conclusion

This study is the first published study that adopted qualitative research method to enhance our understanding of the training programs in TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, especially when the project has moved to the new phase entitled "Building a 'Tin' Homeland Together." In this study, we answered the research questions of whether the interviewees were satisfied with the training programs in terms of training content, administrative support and organization, and the perceived effectiveness of the training programs over time. Overall speaking, the findings highlight the observation that participating teachers had very positive perceptions of the training programs, although they also pointed out the difficulties and challenges arising from the latest initiative of "Building the 'Tin' Homeland Together."

Acknowledgments

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