

Benefits of a positive youth development program for students in mainland China: Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project

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Abstract

The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project is a large-scale curricula-based positive youth development (PYD) program aiming to promote holistic development among adolescents in mainland China. In view of the great success in the full implementation phase between the academic year of 2015 and 2018, a new phase of “Building the ‘Tin’ Homeland Together” has been embarked afterward. The present paper evaluated the effectiveness of the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project on the program participants through the perspectives of program implementers in individual interviews. The results showed that the implementers in general perceived the program as useful and practical for students in terms of their developments in intrapersonal (e.g., self-confidence), interpersonal (e.g., bonding) and academic (e.g., promoted engagement and motivation) fields. The implications of present findings to the future development of PYD in mainland China are discussed.

Keywords: Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project, positive youth development, Chinese adolescents, qualitative evaluation, China

Introduction

Chinese young people aged between 10 and 19 years old can be regarded as adolescents and they constituted 11.21% of the whole population in China (1, 2). Under the influences of the traditional values highlighting the importance of academic achievements in climbing the social ladder, the responsibility of taking care of parents because of filial piety expectations and the rapid economic development in the past few decades, adolescents in China are facing tremendous pressure from their academic study, family conflicts and peer competition (3-8). Previous studies showed that Chinese adolescents displayed problem behavior, including delinquency, internet addiction and substance abuse (9-11).

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Unlike adolescent prevention programs which commonly focus on eliminating a single problematic adolescent behavior (e.g., substance abuse and gambling prevention programs), the positive youth development (PYD) approach attempts to provide adolescents with opportunities to develop interests and skills for positive developments through activities in a supporting environment, which would eventually promote holistic development and reduction of problematic adolescent behavior (12, 13). So far, the benefits of various PYD programs are globally recognized including reduction of adolescent problematic behaviors and loneliness, as well as promotion of life satisfaction and positive character qualities (14-20).

The “Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social” programs (Project P.A.T.H.S.), which was funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, is a large-scale curricula-based PYD program implemented in Hong Kong from 2005 to 2019. This program aimed to promote the positive development among Hong Kong adolescents by containing two tiers of programs (21, 22). The Tier 1 program is curricular based, targets on junior secondary students, with the curriculum developed based on 15 PYD constructs such as bonding and resilience (23). The Tier 2 program targets on students with greater psychological needs. Different evaluation studies based on longitudinal survey, student focus groups and diaries have generally revealed the positive impacts based on the perspectives from the students and the program implementers such as enhanced communication skills and self-confidence after joining the program (24-28).

With the great success of Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong, the Tier 1 program was implemented in mainland China with the financial support by the Tin Ka Ping (TKP) Foundation which is entitled “Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project” (29, 30). It began with a three-year pilot implementation in four secondary schools in East China between 2011 and 2014. The teaching materials were based on the curricula used in the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong to ensure the content is conceptually similar yet locally applicable in mainland China. After a great success in the pilot phase, the TKP Foundation decided to further support the project for another three years, starting from 2015 to 2018, as a full implementation phase (31). Then,

the Foundation took it over in 2018 to embark on a new phase entitled “Building the ‘Tin’ Homeland Together.”

The evaluation of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project is encouraging, where over 90% of the program participants (e.g., students) and implementers (e.g., teachers) were satisfied with the program content (e.g., classroom atmosphere), teachers and program effectiveness (e.g., promotion of resilience in the program participants) (32-34). Shek et al. (35) have further studied students’ dairies and found that the students in general have perceived the program as useful and practical. More specifically, the students emphasized the improvement of their capabilities in intrapersonal (e.g., self-confidence), interpersonal (e.g., communications with others), familial (e.g., bonding with parents) and societal (e.g., increased awareness of social norms) fields.

To gain a fuller picture of the impacts of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project on the program participants, the present study aimed to explore the program effectiveness on students through the eyes of implementers via individual interviews. We chose individual interviews for two reasons. First, it provided implementers with opportunities to not only report the program effectiveness, but also suggestions for improvements (36, 37). This is particularly important because no systematic findings have been reported for the new phase of “Building the ‘Tin’ Homeland Together”. Second, implementers can express themselves in their own language and style which would enhance their willingness to express their true opinions within mainland China which is a collectivistic society (38). The 12 criteria set by Shek, Tang and Han (39) (e.g., clear descriptions of objectives) were strictly upheld as far as possible to maintain the quality of conducting qualitative analysis in the present study.

Methods

The present study adopted a qualitative approach, which is commonly regarded as research utilizing non-numerical data and non-statistical analyses. Qualitative research can provide data allowing a more in-depth understanding of people’s subjective experiences (40). Since the curriculum materials of

the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project involved adaptation of the materials used in the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong and further development in the new phase of “Building the ‘Tin’ Homeland Together” is still under way, qualitative research would allow for explorations of the views of program implementers (21, 25, 27, 41-45).

In the previous studies, we reported that both students and implementers had consistently rated the program as very positive in terms of its content (e.g., curriculum design), teachers, and effectiveness (e.g., bonding with others) based on questionnaires and student diaries (30, 33-35). In the present study, we attempted to further understand the program effectiveness from the implementers’ perspectives through individual interviews. This understanding is important because no systematic findings have been reported for the ‘Building the “Tin” Homeland Together’ phase.

Although both individual interview and focus group interview belong to the qualitative approach, as the social structure of mainland China is collectivistic which emphasizes the importance of consensus and conformity, using individual interviews instead of focus groups can reduce the impact of conformity on individual’s willingness to express their true opinions (46, 47). In other words, individual interviews can minimize the reluctance of the implementers to express their disagreements to others’ opinions merely to avoid confrontation (48). Moreover, as the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project has been implemented on a full-scale for more than six years since 2015 and there is a new development of the project, conducting individual interviews with the implementers rather than a sub-group of school leaders or representatives would help us understand the views of frontline implementers who have more direct interactions with students (49). This can help us explore how such views may have changed over time (50).

Data collection

The data were collected in the summer of 2021. All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format as we aimed to explore the implementers’ perceptions and evaluations of the implementation of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project in details, where probing

allows for more information and clarification from the participants (51). The semi-structured interviews focused on implementers’ perceptions of the program implementation and related evaluations of the new “Building the ‘Tin’ Homeland Together” phase. These included program development (e.g., teaching units), program impacts on different stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students, parents, community and schools), difficulties encountered, as well as suggestions for future training and further improvements. The present study focused on the implementers’ views and experiences shared on the positive impacts and benefits on the students.

Each interview was conducted by two researchers who were familiar with the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. A total of nine implementers participated in individual interviews which lasted for approximately 1 to 2 hours. All implementers had rich experiences in teaching the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project with at least five years of implementation experiences. Five interviewees (55.56%) were either the chief or senior implementers in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. Before each interview, the researchers obtained informed consent from the implementers.

Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin and then translated into English. Thematic analyses were conducted, which is a method of identifying and analyzing themes within the dataset which allows a higher level of flexibility as compared to other types of qualitative analyses (e.g., conversation analysis) and it is also not restricted by priori theories and hypotheses (52). First, chunks of texts related to “positive impacts/benefits to students” were pinned down by research colleagues who read through the whole transcript several times. Then, he/she identified patterns that occurred and combined them into themes based on the framework developed in previous studies (25, 34, 53). These included general appreciation (e.g., practical), intrapersonal development (e.g., resilience), interpersonal development (e.g., relationship with others), and academic achievement (e.g., motivation to study). Second, the codes and themes were peer-checked by four trained research

staff, where new themes were added as they emerged. Third, the initial researcher revised the codes and themes based on the feedback. Fourth, these codes and themes were finally checked by the project leader.

Results

A total of 78 meaningful units were derived from the responses concerning the benefits of participating in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project for the students, which can be divided into four categories including general appreciation ($n = 31$), intrapersonal development ($n = 21$), interpersonal development ($n = 20$), and academic achievement ($n = 6$). To calculate intra-rater reliability, we invited two colleagues who were involved in the initial rating to re-rate 20 randomly selected responses on the positivity of the responses. The intra-rater reliability was good (18 agreed responses/20 responses = 90%). For inter-rater reliability, we invited two other research staff who did not involve in the initial rating to rate these 20 selected responses individually. The inter-rater reliability was acceptable (16 agreed responses/20 responses = 80%).

Theme 1: General appreciation of the program

In general, the implementers reflected that the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project was good, helpful and practical as well as popular among students.

“The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project is good”

The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project provided students with opportunities to learn from their firsthand experiences. This is different from the typical learning mode which is more teacher-centered. According to the teachers, the students in general found it good and interesting. Some narratives are as follows:

- “The results from the student evaluation is positive in general.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)
- “Students said the course was very good, as they never had any courses like this before.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)

- “At least two-thirds of my students were actively engaged in my lessons...Overall, I found it pretty good.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “Of course, students do learn something new from the lessons.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)
- “Definitely no negative outcomes at all. Our school heads always emphasize that the P.A.T.H.S. Project is more important than other courses, as it creates a relaxing environment to students for their psychological adjustment. Therefore, the benefits outweighed the costs.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 7)

“The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project is helpful and practical”

Since the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project was designed to guide students in developing skills to deal with issues in their everyday life, the teachers shared that the students found it useful and practical. Through the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, it also provided teachers with opportunities to identify needy students and provided them with timely interventions. Some sharing is as follows:

- “Most of the students found the lesson useful when I asked for feedback.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)
- “This program helped a lot.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)
- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project should also be implemented in other schools for pilot studies, as this is really useful to enhance students' moral developments.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project works like a speech therapy, in which its treatment included solving students' concerns on their family conflicts via speech.” (Teacher 6)
- “We can clearly see the changes shown by students after taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)
- “This program enhanced children' developments in certain aspects.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)

- “Through the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, we can identify problematic students and provide them with intervention in time.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)
- “What teachers said do have a big impact on their students ... and I just want to provide my students with a warm environment for them to grow up.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)
- “Our major aim is to try to put our effort to help students change themselves, regardless if you are a teacher or school representative.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)
- “We are trying our best to create a good and healthy atmosphere for our students in multiple ways... This includes the program itself and face-to-face consultation.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)
- “The principle of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project focused on the environment where children should not be labelled in terms of their growing process. Instead, it treats the problems which are associated with the growing process as resources for teaching purposes.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)

According to the teachers, there are two major reasons why students enjoyed the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. They are “opportunity to learn from firsthand experiences” and the “learnt skills can be applied to their everyday life conditions.” Some examples are as follows:

- “General moral education course tends to adopt a teacher-centered approach ... However, the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project emphasizes learning from firsthand experience, which is more practical.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)
- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project covers children' development in multiple aspects.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)
- “Since the principle of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project allowed students to learn from their firsthand experiences rather than merely throwing them with information, many of our other school activities have also adopted

the same principle and it reduced the level of pressure students need to deal with their examinations.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)

- “Students like the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, as they found it more interesting than other lessons (e.g., language courses) where the content is much more related to their everyday life (e.g., emotion) and being delivered in a relatively more relaxed way.” (Teacher 6)
- “One of the biggest gains of our students from the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project is the knowledge from every aspect they may come across in life.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)
- “Through the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, we can teach students about knowledge and skills relating to various fields, included family, school and society based on their needs. These included emotional control and social relationship during adolescence.” (Teacher 8)
- “Students are so obsessed with advanced technologies and internets within these two years, so we tried to integrate the relevant topics in the teaching materials for the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project ...These included technical skills (e.g., how to use internet effectively), cyber-danger (e.g., how to avoid virus, propaganda and fraud) and so on.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)

“The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project is popular among students”

In general, students enjoyed attending the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project since it created a relaxing environment for them to learn skills and share their opinions. Some examples are as follows:

- “My students like the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (Teacher 8)
- “Most of the students like the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)
- “Students like this course, they are really interested in it.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)

- “Children are excited to attend this course.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)
- “Students enjoyed the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project so much, where they got disappointed if I was absent from the class.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 7)
- “In general, students like the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. This does not only include the course curriculum, but also the relaxing learning environment, where there is no exams and students can participate various activities to share their opinions.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 7)
- “Students love the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project ... as they found this course pretty relaxing, thus they were willing to participate in the class discussions with teachers.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)

Theme 2: Intrapersonal development

In terms of intrapersonal development, teachers shared that the program promoted the development of the students in different areas, including emotional skills (e.g., how to deal with negative emotion), resilience (e.g., effective ways to deal with toughness), self-confidence (e.g., boosting self-confidence to express self), creative thinking (e.g., thinking out of the box), positive character/virtues (e.g., honesty), and future planning (e.g. discovered self-strength for future careers).

“Improvement of emotional skills”

High school students tend to deal with pressure from various fields, including challenges from academic studies, family and peers. Hence, teaching them how to manage negative emotions (e.g., anger) does not only enhance their relationships with others (e.g., parents, teachers and peers), but also improve their academic study. Some narratives showed the benefits for students in different aspects:

- “Teaching children how to manage their negative emotions, which is part of the curriculum in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, is important as children nowadays can get angry easily towards their teachers or parents

due to the high pressures accumulated from their academic studies and everyday life.” (Teacher 6)

- “What our students have learnt from the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project included being calm and rational.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)
- “Students can now control their emotion more easily. For example, just let go of the negative events.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 7)
- “Both children and adults do have moments of feeling confused particularly under the influences of negative emotions. A student from my class used to have arguments with his mum all the time, but the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project has somehow improved his emotion.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)
- “Most of them stated that the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project promotes their emotional skills in peer relationships.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “Our students do face intensive pressure from various fields including academic study, parents and peers. ... Once this pressure has been accumulated, it will cause students to feel annoyed towards their academic studies. Thus, psychological counselling is essential during this critical moment for stress release.” (Teacher 6)
- “Children stated that their mood improved after the lesson, in which it enhanced their learning.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)
- “Students showed a great change in terms of their emotion after taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. This included learning how to deal with negative emotion via talking or writing notes to teachers.” (Teacher 6)
- “Taking lesson is just one of the many ways to teach students knowledge and skills ... For example, regarding ways of dealing with emotion or pressures from examinations, we can use other activities to lead students in learning how to deal with them.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)
- “The combination of taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project and the one-to-one

consultation from teachers ... It has a great impact on students' emotional controls and stress release.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 5)

- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project provided us (as teachers) chances to observe which students required extra reminders of controlling their anger.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)

“Promotion of resilience”

Being resilient towards toughness is another essential skill being taught through the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project with the aim to help students adjust their perceptions towards challenges. Once they have learnt to perceive challenges as positive rather than negative, it also enhanced their psychological well-being. Some narratives can be seen below.

- “The curriculum has been changed recently, where students now face with an even higher level of academic stress. Therefore, our moral education should also be improved by adding fields like emotion, emotional control and resilience.” (Teacher 6)
- “Used to have more extreme cases where students may have issues in terms of their psychological health. Yet, resilience may have been learnt (via the TKP P.A.T.H.S. project) and applied to their life. Hence, students tend to be positive now and thus the number of extreme cases has since decreased a lot.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)
- “The lessons aimed to change children's cognition, once the cognition has been changed, so does the perception towards the world and they will achieve whatever they wanted.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)
- “I thought the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project provides children with chances to at least understand more about their family and ways to solve issues, where these kinds of reflection is part of the development.” (Senior P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 2)

“Promotion of self-confidence”

Other than deliberately teaching students skills in managing negative emotion or being resilient towards tough environment, the activities in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project also helped reveal students' hidden talents in which their confidence has been improved via participating in these activities. Some examples are as follows:

- “A student of mine, who used to be very shy and introverted, has become much more confident since her talent in drawing had been discovered via the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project ... I also promoted her as a team leader, where she had more chances to interact with others.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)
- “This course led various benefits to our students... These included: first being more confident; second how to communicate with parents; and third peer relationship, especially how to interact with peers of opposite gender.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)
- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project does have an impact on students in multiple domains... When they grow up as an adult, whatever they will face, they can recall what they have learnt from the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project to solve issues. These include emotional control, building up self-confidence and how to become a responsible parent.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)

“Promotion of creative thinking”

Teachers commented that the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project inspired students to engage in creative thinking and to think out of the box. A teacher shared that “when delivering the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, I stated to my students that how they do in the activities is unrelated to their academic performance. Instead, I emphasized that they will gain something as long as they put effort in it. Surprisingly, for those who may not perform well in their academic study, they tend to be able to do well in the activities, where they can always think out of the box.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 7).

“Promotion of positive character and virtues”

Teachers believed that having positive character/virtues (e.g., honesty) is much more important than being knowledgeable. If students could cultivate these positive character/virtues, it would be beneficial for their whole life. A teacher shared that “I always emphasize to my students that being honest is the most important thing in our life, in which knowledge only comes in the second place ... For me, as a teacher, being honest is important as we are teaching students (as a human beings) and they will be affected by what we have taught and delivered.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3).

“Students discovered their own strength”

Under the intensive pressure from academic study and examination, most of the students lacked opportunities to discover their strengths and weaknesses. However, through participating in the activities in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, the students could discover their own strengths for future planning. A teacher shared that “Children nowadays are very uncertain and confused of what they want to do or achieve in their future because of two reasons. First, they are being forced to start learning at an early age. Second, no guideline is given to them to help them explore their strengths and interests. Thus, they end up just focusing on study and exam. As teachers, our role is to guide children to build up their dream and motivate them to learn for their own good and future.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1).

Theme 3: Interpersonal development

For benefits in the interpersonal domain, teachers shared that they included improved relationships with peers (e.g., conflict-resolution through teamwork), improved relationships with parents, improved relationships with teachers, and improved social skills.

“Improved relationships with peers”

The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project includes various activities aimed to provide students with opportunities to work as a team. Through these activities, they learnt how to interact with others and developed their sense of empathy. Some narratives are as follows:

- “The activities in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project provided students with opportunities to participate in team work, where they might initially be shy to interact with others. Yet, after participating in the activities, they started to familiarize with others and they learnt putting themselves in others' perspective when having conflicts with peers.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)
- “Using the live resource (in class) to educate and lead children to learn that other children may have different perspectives from themselves, in which we (as teachers) work as mediators, will definitely help to enhance their peer relationship. An example included a lesson about emotion where students need to express their blessing to others on cards. One student said that emotion should be handled by oneself but not by others. Then, I have not only appreciated his courage to express his viewpoint, but also invited other students for discussion, where other students stated that they felt warm and positive by receiving cards filled with blessing by others.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)
- “Conflicts between students have somehow been solved via the activities in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “By telling others explicitly of what you felt (via the activities from the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project), it can impress others.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “Most of the consultations (required by students) involved after breaking ups.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)

“Improved relationships with parents”

In the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, there are various activities targeting not only children, but also their parents with the aim to improve the parent-child relationship via effective communication. Initially, students might be reluctant to communicate with their parents. However, their attitude and willingness to communicate with their parents greatly improved after taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, especially

when their teachers acted as mediators to resolve parent-child conflict. Some examples are shown below.

- “Students’ attitudes towards their parents had improved a lot after taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (Teacher 6)
- “As teachers in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, we acted as mediators between children and parents, so that they can communicate more effectively to resolve conflicts.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)

Some teachers pointed out that the activities designed involved teaching students how to communicate with their parents effectively and also develop the sense of empathy, which is particularly useful on those students who rarely see their parents. Some examples are shown below.

- “Children around this age may be reluctant to talk to their teachers or parents. Thus the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project taught them how to conduct effective communications with their parents more frequently...” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project served the role of leading students to change gradually, including effective communication with parents or teachers, as well as the development of empathy.” (Teacher 6)
- “80% of our students live on campus and they rarely see their parents ... The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project has a big impact on students as it teaches them how to communicate with their parents effectively by understanding that their parents are out for work to improve their life.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 3)

Moreover, the activities designed for parents aimed to reduce their tendency to overprotect their children (e.g., making decision for their children in everything), in which they learnt how to let go and provide their children with chances to become independent. Some examples are as follows:

- “In fact, both parents and children do love each other. However, most parents make decisions for their children, in which their children instead felt being manipulated... Therefore, this program is helpful to teach parents how to let go of their children, give chances to their children to make decision themselves and become independent.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)
- “Parents tend to be more anxious than children before the examination. Thus, this program provided us (as teachers) a chance to explain to parents about children’s emotional issues which is beneficial to parents.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1)

The activities also included collaboration between children and parents, which aimed to provide them with chances to show their care and love towards each other explicitly. Some examples are as follows:

- “As part of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, we would set some exercises for children and parents. These included expressing love, appreciation towards parents or taking a family picture, which all provided opportunities for children to communicate with their parents.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)
- “Within the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, parents might be invited to join the classes for demonstrations. Some children were really impressed by their parents’ strengths as they never had any chances to know their parents well, especially under the tradition that fathers tend to be the breadwinners and mothers as the care-givers. Therefore, the bonding between children and their parents improved after taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (Teacher 8)

“Improved relationships with teachers”

Through the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, teachers had more chances to interact with and get to know their students. Thus, their relationship improved a lot since the students were more willing to open themselves toward their teachers. Some examples are as follows:

- “The outcome is obviously good especially when students were willing to cooperate and interact with teachers in classes.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)
- “Since the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project included cultivation of empathy, this provided teachers with chances to open up their students' heart.” (Teacher 6)
- “Sense of belonging is necessary for everyone, particularly for students. Since teaching the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, I have now guaranteed myself at least having a few conversations with each of my students, just to ensure that they do not feel being isolated.” (Teacher 6)

“Improved social skills”

Other than having improvements in the relationship with specific individuals (e.g., peers, parents and teachers), students also showed great improvement in their general social skills, in which they learnt to be empathic. Teachers shared that “social relationships also included those between parents, teachers and peers, right?” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 1) and “students learnt empathy via the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project.” (Teacher 6).

Theme 4: Academic achievement

According to the teachers, they perceived that the academic achievement and students' attitudes towards their academic studies have improved after taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. These included benefits in the areas of enhanced engagement, motivation and stress management.

“Enhanced engagement in academic studies”

There are views suggesting that the learning attitude of the students has changed to be more proactive after joining the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. Some examples are shown below.

- “For some students, they used to be shy in expressing their opinions. Then, we (as a teacher) guide them how to present themselves. An obvious improvement can be seen after one to two years of taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, where students had

grown a lot by being proactive in terms of their learning attitude.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 4)

- “Although taking the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project may take students' time from their academic learning, it promoted their interest and engagement in learning which enhanced their academic performance as a result.” (Chief P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 9)

“Enhanced intrinsic motivation in academic studies”

According to the teachers, the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project created a relaxing environment for students to learn how to care for their peers, parents and teachers. Once they received care in return, it improved their mood and they became more intrinsically motivated in their academic study. Some examples are shown below.

- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project created an environment for students that is relaxing and full of love. For example, students learnt how to respect and care for their teachers, parents and peers. Once they received care from their teachers, parents and peers (in return), it improved their mood and motivated them to engage in learning. Thus, it all enhanced their academic study.” (Teacher 6)
- “The TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project could enhance students' intrinsic motivation in their learning to become a better version of oneself.” (Teacher 6)
- “When the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project first began, some children just shouted out their answer without proper thinking. However, as time went by, since they were so excited in participation, they started to think properly before answering questions in classes.” (P.A.T.H.S. Implementer, teacher 7)

“Better management of academic stress”

Although participating in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project may take students' time away from academic studies, they acquired skills to deal with examination stress. A teacher shared that “the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project can be used as an academic guideline, in which students

can learn how to deal with the intensive pressure from examinations”. (Teacher 6).

Most importantly, the implementers also mentioned that not only students, but they also benefited from participating in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project. Benefits in this aspect is discussed in details in another paper included in this special issue.

Discussion

The “Building the ‘Tin’ Homeland Together”, which is the new phase of the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, is a great new development for the project. Nevertheless, there has been no reported evaluation findings for this new phase so far. Previous studies showed that the students in general rated the program as positive in terms of program content (e.g., peer interactions) and program effectiveness (e.g., bonding) (32, 33, 35). However, these findings are mainly based on the subjective perspective of the program participants (13). Therefore, the present study aimed to explore the effect of the program on students through the eyes of the implementers (i.e., a third person perspective) in individual interviews.

Qualitative studies are inherently subjective and do not include empirical statistical analysis, which may impede its reliability and validity. The present study upheld the 12 criteria set by Shek, Tang and Han (39) as far as possible to maintain the qualities of a qualitative study. First, the objectives, procedures, as well as the number and background of the implementers were clearly stated. Second, intra-rater and inter-rater reliability of the coding were included. Third, individual interview strategy was adopted to minimize the impacts of conformity due to collectivistic ideologies in mainland China. Fourth, the interviews were conducted with the involvement of the implementers rather than students to gain a wider view of the program effectiveness. Finally, multiple researchers were involved for both data collection and analysis.

In line with the previous findings (30, 33-35), the implementers in general stated that the program was good and practical, where the students’ development in their intrapersonal (e.g., self-confidence) and interpersonal (e.g., bonding) fields have been greatly improved. Specifically, the implementers emphasized

the benefits of learning from firsthand experiences, which provided students with a relaxing environment to discover their strengths (e.g., hidden talent), as well as cultivate their interests and creative thinking without concerning their performance and competition with their peers. This is consistent with the contemporary idea of “experience is the best teacher” (54).

Such direct learning approach has shaped students to become active rather than passive learners, where the benefits include the enhancement of levels of learning motivation, creative thinking skills and academic achievements (55-60). These findings are consistent with our findings, where the implementers reported that their students have higher levels of engagement (e.g., proactive attitude) and intrinsic motivation in their academic study. Also, creative thinking, which enables students to be more flexible in their cognition, is crucial for innovation and it has been emphasized by many organizations and businesses in the fast-changing world (61-63).

Our findings also have practical value to the future development of PYD in mainland China. First, the parents should reduce their tendencies to over-control and over-protect their children because Chinese parents are commonly being labelled as “authoritarian” or even “tiger mum” with much control (“guan”) of their children (5, 64). Interestingly, the concept of “guan” includes “to govern”, “to care for” and “to love” in the Chinese culture reflecting parents’ responsibility to train their children to maintain the honor and harmony of the family (65, 66). Therefore, future PYD programs should include more activities for parents. Way et al (67) found that contemporary Chinese parents tended to combine both traditional Chinese (e.g., training and shame) and Western (e.g., authoritative and autonomy) cultures in their parenting under rapid economic development. Second, the students started to engage in their future career planning through the activities which explored their own strengths and weaknesses. This emphasized the importance of career training (e.g., career education and career counselling), that aimed to provide students with guidelines on their career paths, which can eventually enhance their mental health (68, 69).

Despite its innovative nature, the current study posed several limitations. First, there is no way to

check if the implementers have exaggerated the benefits. However, our positive findings are consistent with previous studies using both questionnaires and student diaries (32-35). Second, the implementers may just express their opinions for the researchers' praise. However, this should not be the case since the evaluation from implementers is not relevant to their promotion, thus no incentive motivation for exaggeration. Also, the implementers mentioned the negative cases including the increased workload and difficulties in maintaining classroom discipline due to the high ratio of students to implementers, which are discussed in another paper.

In conclusion, the benefits of participating in the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project are not only present in the high school students in terms of their positive developments, including interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, as well as creative thinking and future planning, but also in their parents in terms of learning how to promote the development of their children via healthy parenting practice. We recommend that future studies should also include parental assessments or interviews at multiple time points (e.g., beginning, mid-term and end-phrase) to gain a fuller picture of program effectiveness from multiple perspectives over time.

Acknowledgments

The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project was financially supported by the Tin Ka Ping Foundation. This paper was financially supported by Tin Ka Ping Foundation and Wofoo Foundation.

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Submitted: April 07, 2022. *Revised:* April 16, 2022.
Accepted: April 20, 2022.