

Preface

Adolescent risk behavior is growing in different parts of the world. Adolescent developmental problems, such as mental disorders, suicide, substance abuse, violence, nonengagement, and unemployment, are thorny matters that confront parents, educators, youth workers, and public policy makers. Besides the basic question of how adolescent developmental problems can be reduced (i.e., pathological focus), the question of how holistic development in adolescents can be promoted (i.e., developmental focus) is also raised by professionals who are concerned about adolescent development.

To reduce adolescent developmental problems, one common formula accepted by prevention scientists, pediatricians, psychologists, social workers, and allied professionals is to weaken the harmful effects of risk factors and to strengthen the beneficial effects of protective factors surrounding adolescent development. As far as protective factors are concerned, promotion of psychosocial competencies, such as the development of resilience and positive identity, is focused upon. Actually, the emphasis on the promotion of inner strengths and resources in young people is the cornerstone of the movement on positive youth development. At the same time, the focus on the importance of inner strengths of young people is consistent with the Chinese notion of “gu ben pei yuan,” which means the consolidation of inner foundation and strengthening of the inner strengths.

In the era of evidence-based practice, policy makers, service providers, and the general public are asking one simple but important question: Do we have evidence-based positive youth development or preventive programs targeting adolescent holistic development and risk behavior? In North America, effective programs have been developed to promote the psychosocial competencies of young people in the past few decades, which in turn have been effective in promoting adolescent holistic development and reducing adolescent risk behavior. Organizations such as Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Search Institute have been established to promote holistic development in young people. Besides, databases such as the National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices (NREPP) of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration (SAMHSA) have been set up to document effective adolescent prevention programs.

In different Chinese communities including Hong Kong, the plain truth is that there is a severe lack of evidence-based adolescent development and preventive programs. Systematic and longitudinal evaluation programs are lacking and the standard of proof in most of the existing programs is very low. Besides, there is also no credible indigenous database on effective adolescent prevention and positive youth development programs. Against the above background, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust initiated a youth enhancement program entitled “P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme,” in 2004, with an initial earmarked grant of HK\$400 million and an additional grant of HK\$350 million for the extension phase. The word “P.A.T.H.S.” denotes Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes. The Trust invited academics of five universities in Hong Kong to form a research team with The Hong Kong Polytechnic University as the lead institution to develop a multiyear universal positive youth development program to promote holistic adolescent development in Hong Kong.

There are several unique characteristics of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong. First, it is the first large-scale positive youth development program in Hong Kong and other Chinese communities, hence making it a pioneer and an innovative project. Second, it provides 60 h of universal training on positive youth development in the junior secondary school years utilizing the constructs identified in the successful programs. Third, it includes both universal and selective programs (i.e., primary and secondary prevention programs). Fourth, it includes the development of a multiyear positive youth development program, the provision of training on a massive scale, and the implementation of rigorous evaluation. Fifth, it involves the collaboration of five universities, different government departments, NGOs providing school social work service, and the education sector. Sixth, a substantial amount of research grant was earmarked for the initial phase and extension phase of the project. Finally, it utilizes longitudinal evaluation over a long period of time involving the collection of different data from different sources.

When we designed the Project P.A.T.H.S. in 2004, a rigorous evaluation component was included in the project. In particular, a 5-year longitudinal evaluation component was planned (2006/07 to 2010/11 school years). Throughout the years, evaluation based on multiple evaluation strategies clearly showed that students who joined the program had better development and lower risk behaviors than did students who did not join; the program and different stakeholders also had positive views of the program, workers, and benefits of the program.

As one important feature of evidence-based practice is the systematic documentation of the intervention and evaluation, it is our great pleasure to write this book which outlines the background, design, implementation, evaluation, and implications of the Project P.A.T.H.S. In chapters “[Adolescent Developmental Issues in Hong Kong: Phenomena and Implications for Youth Service](#)” and “[Conceptual Framework Underlying the Development of a Positive Youth Development Program in Hong Kong](#)”, adolescent developmental issues are outlined and positive youth development as a promising strategy to promote adolescent development is presented.

In chapters “Development of a Positive Youth Development Program in Hong Kong” and “Evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. Using Multiple Evaluation Strategies”, the curriculum framework and evaluation design are outlined. In chapters “Objective Outcome Evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S.: Longitudinal Study Based on Indicators of Positive Youth Development” and “Impact of the Project P.A.T.H.S. on Adolescent Risk Behavior: A Five-Year Longitudinal Study”, objective outcome evaluation findings of the project are presented. In chapters “Subjective Outcome Evaluation Based on the Program Participants: Does Dosage Matter?”, “Subjective Outcome Evaluation Based on the Perceptions of the Program Implementers”, and “Subjective Outcome Evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S.: Secondary Analyses of the Qualitative Data Collected from Program Implementers”, subjective outcome findings based on program implementers and participants and related secondary data analyses are discussed. For interim evaluation findings, they are presented in chapter “Interim Evaluation of Project P.A.T.H.S.: An Integration of Findings Based on Program Implementers”. In chapters “Qualitative Evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S.: Narrative Findings Based on Focus Groups with Participating Students” and “Qualitative Findings Derived from Focus Groups Based on the Program Implementers”, evaluation findings based on focus groups of program implementers and participants are highlighted. In chapters “Evaluation Based on Weekly Diaries Written by the Students”, “Evaluation Based on Personal Construct Psychology: Findings Based on the Repertory Grid Test”, and “Process Evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong”, evaluation based on diaries, systematic observations in process evaluation, and repertory grid technique are presented. In chapter “Using Different Programs to Help Adolescents with Greater Psychosocial Needs”, evaluation findings based on the Tier 2 Program are presented. In chapter “Lessons Learned, Emergent Issues, and Future Directions”, conclusions based on evaluation studies of the project and future research directions are presented. In the last three chapters, the impacts and implications of the project are discussed. In chapter “Development of a Positive Youth Development Subject in a University Context”, a “university version” of the Project P.A.T.H.S. at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is presented. In chapter “Impact of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in China”, the transplant of the program in a project supported by Tin Ka Ping Foundation in East China is described. Finally, the insight of the project to evidence-based work youth in the Chinese contexts is described in chapter “Evidence-Based Positive Youth Development Programs: Insights from the Project P.A.T.H.S.”.

Based on the experiences from the past years, there are several things that we would like to share with the readers of this book. First, despite the difficulties we encountered, many challenging tasks were accomplished in the past 8 years. When we looked back, we actually faced many challenges and much hardship in the initial months of the project. Externally, resentment and hostility from the education and welfare sectors were great challenges. Internally, manpower conflicts and unexpected disappearance of some members of the research team created many extra burdens. Nevertheless, the challenges and difficulties at the initial stage facilitated the development of our resilience, forgiveness, and spirituality (i.e., “positive researcher development”). At the same time, we have also witnessed the joy and positive

development of students and workers who have joined the project. In these 8 years, we successfully developed the Tier 1 Program, trained 7,356 teachers and social workers, implemented the program in more than 280 schools with the participation of more than 210,000 students, and conducted many evaluation studies based on different strategies. To sum up, we have successfully achieved (and overachieved) the original research objectives.

Second, evaluation findings consistently suggested that the Tier 1 Program was able to promote the holistic development and reduce adolescent risk behavior in junior secondary school students in Hong Kong. The positive impact of the project was also recognized by international academic and professional communities. Research articles based on the project have been published in high-impact journals such as *Research on Social Work Practice* (Q1 journal in Social Science Citation Index), *The Scientific World Journal* (Q1 journal in the Science Citation Index), and the *Lancet*.

Third, the Tier 1 Program has been piloted outside Hong Kong, including Shanghai, East China, Macau, and Singapore. We have already started a project supported by the Tin Ka Ping Foundation in East China (Shanghai, Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Changzhou) with excellent evaluation findings in the first year. The project has also been launched in the secondary school affiliated to Renmin University (Ren Da Fu Zhong) in Beijing. At The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, a “university version” of P.A.T.H.S. has been developed which is taken by 2,100+ students in the 2012/2013 school year.

Fourth, in the past 8 years, it is our honor and privilege to walk together with many dedicated colleagues who are passionate about the development of young people in Hong Kong. As we always share with our colleagues, the Project P.A.T.H.S. will never be successful without the dedication and commitment of frontline teachers, social workers, and administrators. It is indeed our privilege to work with many committed, dedicated, and loyal souls in this project. Special thanks must go to these “comrades” who have made valuable contribution to the project.

Fifth, we wish to take this opportunity to express our deepest thanks to The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for its vision in initiating this groundbreaking project. Without the initiation of the project by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, this project would never exist in Hong Kong. The unfailing support and passion about young people in Hong Kong of colleagues of the Trust are also engraved in our hearts.

Sixth, we thank God for the joy, tears, grace, and blessings we have had in this project. One example we often cite is that in the 603 days of training days in the past 8 years, only 3 days required rescheduling because of bad weather. To me, the whole project is a miracle.

Finally, how the positive findings in this project can be translated to regular programs in the school and community contexts is a challenging question for academics, researchers, and policy makers. While no school administrator would dispute the fact that psychosocial competencies are important for youth development, whether time from the formal curriculum would be allocated to formal lessons on positive youth development is another concern. We desperately need a paradigm

shift in the mind-set of educators, parents, and adolescents themselves in seeing psychosocial competencies as important as intellectual competencies in students. As Hong Kong is a place with strong examination orientation, how to emphasize holistic development in young people is an important task to learn.

This book is unique in three ways. First, it takes positive youth development seriously. It is our firm belief that through strengthening psychosocial competencies of young people, they will develop in a holistic and healthy manner. As such, the conceptual framework of the curriculum materials underlying the Project P.A.T.H.S. is based on 15 positive youth development constructs identified from successful programs in the literature. Second, different evaluation mechanisms that can be possibly used to evaluate positive youth development programs are presented. Such materials are important for researchers and students in different disciplines, including social work, education, psychology, sociology, and youth work. In particular, the book is a good research textbook for research methods in human services. Finally, the insights of the project to university students and young people in other parts of China as well as evidence-based youth work are presented.

It is our humble wish that as a small step, the project will benefit more Chinese young people so that they will grow in a holistic manner. Chinese young people constitute roughly one-fifth of the world's young people population. Obviously, much more work should be conducted to develop positive youth development programs and to evaluate their impacts in different Chinese communities.

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