



333 LEARNING COMPANION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

HONG KONG

Evaluation Report

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Chapter 1 Introduction

With the aim to explore teacher, parent, and student's subjective experiences regarding the 333 program, individual and group interviews were conducted in June and July 2017. In each center, we interviewed one teacher, two parents, and three groups of students (two three-person group of junior-form students and one six-person group of senior-form students). Thus, a total of four teachers, eight parents, and 48 students were interviewed.

This research shows that the 333 program has played a significant role when family and day school's support towards the child is inadequate or ineffective. In the following sections, we will present how the 333 program takes actions to assist the students, based on the understanding of the students' underlying needs and difficulties from the interviews of multiple informants. The first section describes the needs and difficulties of the 333 participants, the second section demonstrates the rationale and strategies of the 333 program, and the third section summarizes the program's outcome in multiple domains. Recommendations for future practice and research are made at the end of the report.

Chapter 2 Needs and Difficulties of the 333 Participants

Most of the 333 participants underperformed at the day schools when they were referred to the 333 program. Yet underlying the presenting academic problems are risk factors at school, family and individual levels that interact with one another and exacerbate the difficulties faced by the students.

Lack of family and school support was prevalent among the 333 participants. Every ordinary student may get temporarily stuck at a particular point in the learning process. Yet for 333 participants, a temporary stuck became an entrenched academic problem as they failed to get effective help from the school and the family. In the day schools, the teachers had to follow the teaching plan and deliver the required contents in each class within the time limit. The teachers could not ensure that each student kept up with the schedule, and they could give limited support to those who were left behind.

When I taught English Language in school, the class size was large and I was required to teach according to the set curriculum. There are students with different learning progress and abilities in a large class; some might be able to follow the designated curriculum and some might not. We will talk to the parents of the students who cannot follow, asking them to provide after-class tutorials or find private tutors. In the primary school, students are allowed to repeat the same grade for once only. After that, even if the student cannot catchup in class, he/she will still be promoted up one grade in school. So, he/she will keep lagging behind in the upcoming years. As a result, the students are very discouraged. We know the situation but cannot help them. (Interviewer: When a teacher faces a situation like this, what are the difficulties in handling such issue?) With a rich content of the curriculum, the teachers face a heavy workload (Teacher P)

Lack of family monitoring was also common among the 333 participants. Most children came from families of low socioeconomic status. The parents were not well-educated and had to work long hours to support the families. Thus, the parents were incapable of supervising their children's after-school learning activities.

Some parents are unable to teach their children ...When students encounter learning problems and cannot understand the learning materials during lessons, they couldn't seek for parents' assistance. (Teacher Y)

Some 333 participants lived with the single parent or grandparents who failed to provide adequate care. Worse still, some parents purposefully ignored their children. *No one in the family cares for their children or guides them in doing homework. No parents' signature was found in the student handbook. Parents didn't sign and they didn't care about it. Some parents even said to me, "Please let him/her alone, Miss. I have given up on him/her.". Many students live in single-parent families, and even with their grandmothers. No one takes care of them. (Teacher M)*

As the frustrating experiences accumulated, the children developed a low self-efficacy and thus were less motivated and reluctant to engage in study activities. In the example below, the teacher described how the child being labeled by the school later self-labeled himself as incapable and incompetent.

When he first came to 333, he felt "I couldn't do anything, don't bother me. I just sit here."(Teacher M)

There was also a small group of 333 participants with special education needs (SEN). Though the government has launched a comprehensive scheme for early identification and assessment of SEN, some students had to wait for a period of time to be assessed. In this "vacuum period", the students could be quite stressed.

I have been here for two years. There weren't many students with special learning needs (SEN) two years ago, but the number of SEN students is increasing recently. Some students are not diagnosed as having SEN. However, when he came to our center, we knew that he might be a SEN student from the way he holds a pencil. Even if the day school teachers find out the problem, the student needs to queue for diagnosis. In the period when he was waiting for diagnosis, lessons were continuing and this was really difficult to him. (Teacher Y)

Even after the assessment, the day school provided limited assistance. In the example below, the day school grouped all the SEN students in the same class and reduced their course load. The disadvantage of doing so is to hint to the students that they are less competent than their peers.

After assessment, the day school provides an adjustment for SEN students. It might be of less homework or simpler syllabus, or even putting them into a small group, which is called the fundamental class. When he was assigned into the fundamental class, the student though he didn't need to learn or study. He thought, "I am not in Class A. Students in Class A have to study. I couldn't learn anything" (Teacher Y)

The above sections describe a vicious cycle in which the risk factors entangle and interact with one another (Figure 1).

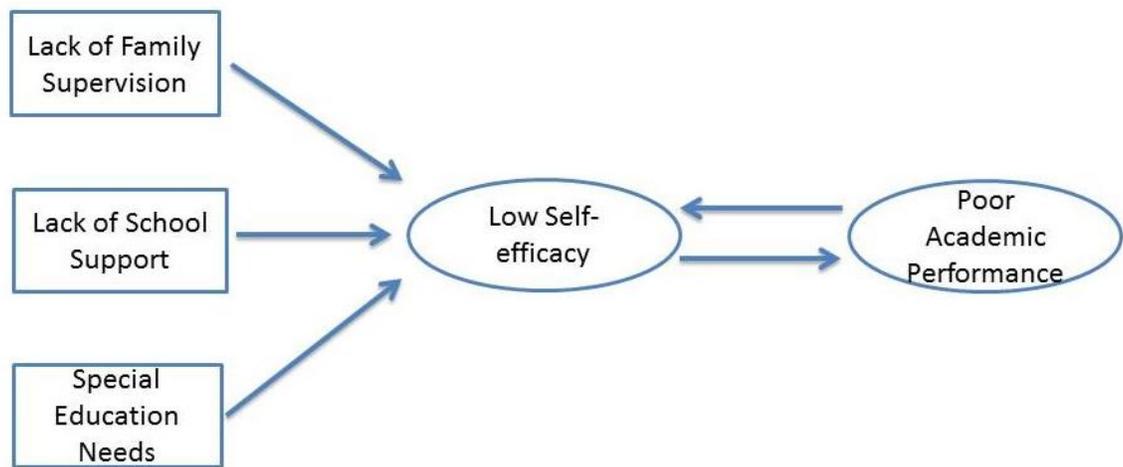


Figure 1. Needs and Difficulties of the 333 participants

With or without SEN, a child may encounter problems at a particular point in the learning process. Without school and family support, the problem persisted and resulted in students' low self-efficacy. The students with low self-efficacy believed that they could not succeed and thus were less likely to try, which lead to a deteriorating academic performance. Nevertheless, as explicated in the next section, the 333 program broke this vicious cycle through the joint efforts of teachers, students and parents.

Chapter 3 Rationale and Strategies of the 333 Program

This section explicates rationale and strategies of the 333 program. Assisting in homework completion and school subject enables the participants to meet the essential requirements of the schooling. Improving students' self-efficacy and building teacher-student bonds facilitate the participants to engage in learning activities. Finally, establishing teacher-parent partnership promotes collaboration between family and the 333 program in promoting the students' positive development.

3.1 Assisting in homework completion and school subjects

The 333 program was held from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. on weekdays during the school term. The first one and a half hours were spent on homework assistance. Students and parents appreciate that the program provided a quiet, spacious, well-lit and well-conditioned place to do homework. The teachers, the teaching assistants (graduate volunteers and secondary-school volunteers), and the peer students ("little teachers") assisted in the homework completion process. A teacher described the routine of the homework session.

He lists every assignment in the homework handbook and takes them out. After he has finished one assignment, he checks and updates the to-do list. He can ask for help when he doesn't know how to do. When he has finished the assignment, the teacher or teaching assistant will check it. If there is a mistake, he will correct it. It is relatively effective, at least he knows which assignment has been completed. (Teacher Y)

The Little Teacher Scheme during the homework session promoted collaborative learning, where the students would be actively involved and mutually support one another in the learning process (Miller, Barbetta, & Heron, 1994). The P1, P3, and P5 students were grouped together, while P2, P4, and P6 students formed another group. The upper-grade students could act as "little teachers" to tutor the lower-grade students. Sometimes lower grade students could also offer help to upper-grade students.

P1, P3, P5 students are grouped together while P2, P4, P6 students are also grouped. For example, if a junior grade student doesn't know how to calculate 20×26 , he/she can seek

help from a P6 student. P6 students teach P1 students how to do the calculation, then P1 student follows the steps. They help one another when doing their homework. The seniors help the juniors. (Interviewer: What will happen if P6 students don't know how to do their homework?) If P6 students cannot help, they can ask the volunteers from the secondary schools. Sometimes the juniors even can help the seniors. For instance, a P6 student forgot how to spell "water", a junior student taught him. Actually, there is continuous interaction between them. (Teacher P)

Interviewer : You are in P3. When you accompany the P1 students to do the assignments, did the teacher ask you to be the tutor for the junior grade students?

Student S1-3 : Yes.

Interviewer : Can you do it?

Student S1-3 : Yes.

Interviewer : Can you teach them?

Student S1-3 : Yes.

Interviewer : What benefits will you get?

Student S1-3 : I can review things learned before.

In the 333 program, homework completion was not only a valued outcome on its own, but a means to develop students' good study habits and instill in them a sense of responsibility as well. In the example below, a student claimed that he forgot to bring his homework book, which appeared to be an excuse for not doing homework. Rather than confronting the student, the teacher politely asked the student to write the answers on a sheet of blank paper. In this way, the teacher showed respect to the student's self-determination, yet insisted that a student must fulfill his duties by completing the homework.

At one time a student claimed that he didn't bring his workbook. I said, "You write on another book first, then copy your answer on your workbook". It wasn't a good idea because he needed to do it twice. He wrote his answer on a piece of paper then copied that on the workbook when he went home. It was silly, wasn't it? The student tried once or twice

then he'd never do it again. It is important that children shouldn't feel that there aren't consequences when they haven't brought their homework to the Centre.. The bottom line is that a student must finish his/her homework. (Teacher Y)

Upon the completion of their homework, the participants attended added-value classes (e.g., enhancing English proficiency program, moral education, music, sports, etc.). The students enjoyed the classes in which the teachers helped them review the lessons or demonstrate learning strategies that the day school may not offer.

Student K1-1: Teacher will teach us phonetics.

Interviewer: Do you believe that this would improve your English proficiency?

Student K1-1: Yes.

Interviewer: Did the teacher in the day school teach you phonetics?

Student N1-1: Yes, but I didn't understand.

Student N2-2: I like English add-valued class most. Tutors will show us some pictures, and say some sentences. After that, we will do some role-play.

Interviewer: Is it similar to having daily conversation by using English?

Student N2-2: Yes.

Interviewer: Will you do role-play in day school?

Student N2-2: Sometimes, but less than here.

The added-value classes were conducted in an interesting way. Positive emotions experienced in classes improved students' attention and cognitive performance (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). As shared by the students below, the funny examples and the joyful activities helped them memorize the key points of the lesson. This will increase their sense of achievement.

Student S1-2: He will tell us some funny examples.

Interviewer: Teachers have different teaching methods, which one do you like most?

Student T1-1: Watching videos.

Interviewer: And you?

Student T1-2: Watching videos too.

Interviewer: And you?

Student T1-3: I love playing games. We can learn things from some specific games.

3.2 Creating rewards and mastery experiences to nourish self-efficacy and engagement

The 333 provided participants opportunities to obtain both tangible (e.g., snacks and stationary) and intangible rewards (e.g., most improved students award, and verbal praise from the teacher). The rewards could facilitate students' interest in things that they originally did not have interest in, enhance students' feelings of pride, and encourage students' desirable behaviors as a form of positive reinforcement (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). For instance, the teachers invented a system of earning points for rewards. The students were motivated to earn points by accomplishing academic tasks, e.g., spelling the English words correctly or completing the homework on time.

I will let them count their marks, because it can increase their learning motivation. For example, they can get one mark for spelling a word correctly, two marks for two correct spellings. They count by themselves and construct their scoreboard. Everyone shows their marks to others. For example, they are asked to memorize some sentence structures. They get marks when they answer correctly. If a student is naughty during class, I don't punish him. Instead, I give one mark to each student except the naughty one. Then I ask the students to show the marks to other. The naughty one finds out that everyone gets four marks but he only gets two or three marks. He will then have some insights. So, what is the use of the marks earned? At the end of the class, there will be three or four gifts, for example, some biscuits, pens and rulers. The student who earns the highest mark can choose first, followed by the student earning the second highest mark. (Teacher P)

They receive a seal after they have finished their homework, and they can get the gifts when several seals are collected. It motivates the students to do their homework daily so that they can get the gifts. (Parent S2)

The rewards were motivating not only because of the prizes, but also owing to the positive message conveyed to the students that their performance deserves appreciation

and recognition. Encouragement increases self-efficacy, because the primary school children are not skilled enough at making accurate self-appraisals and thus depend on others to provide evaluative feedback about their performance (Deci et al., 1999). As was pointed out by one teacher, a piece of candy from the teacher was rewarding in that it expressed the teacher's appreciation towards the student.

The student gets a candy when he or she behaves well. The candy means a lot because it is the candy from a teacher. (Teacher T)

In addition, the teachers rewarded the student by making sincere verbal comments like "I notice that you are attentive in today's class. I appreciate that." The teachers also praised the students through a phone call with the parents.

A student asked me with expectation, "Miss, would you praise me in a phone call with my parents tonight? "I said I would if you perform well today, and talk to your parents about it. He answered, "Hooray!" He was happy.

Rewards and positive messages are the most effective in improving self-efficacy when accompanied by mastery experiences. While rewards represent extrinsic acknowledgement, mastery experiences enhance intrinsic motivation and facilitate the students to internalize the belief that they have the abilities to succeed (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). In the 333 program, the students experienced mastery across multiple domains. In the example below, the teacher designed the classes based on the philosophy of using "small steps" to assist students to make "small achievements" by stages.

It is important that we understand how a student is motivated, so as to help him to succeed. If a student thinks he will never succeed, he may stop trying. This also applies to adults. If a person keeps failing, he won't pay efforts anymore. However, if a person can have a taste of success, he will make efforts towards future success. 333 provides opportunities for students to achieve their goals through small steps. (Teacher M)

When a student starts to learn a new thing, if the day school teachers keep telling him that he wouldn't catch up, he will eventually give up. In contrast, our courses in 333 are simplified and supplemented with detailed explanations. When a student perceives that he

can understand what the teacher said and he can finish his homework, his confidence will increase. (Teacher Y)

In my 30-minutes (English) class, I teach the students several words and sentences. I said to the students, “When you memorize one word at one time, you will memorize 365 words in one year. How many words will you learn if you try to memorize two words a day? Don’t you know that frequently spoken/ written vocabulary consists of 1000 words only?” The students’ eyes glow with excitement, “Oh really?” By making small achievements, the students will be confident to take a step forward. (Teacher P)

The reward and mastery experiences are believed to strengthen the program participants’ self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a personal belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Bandura, 1997). The relationship between reward and mastery experiences, and self-efficacy is reciprocal: the reward and mastery experiences help to enhance self-efficacy, while increased self-efficacy improves the likelihood of future reward and mastery experiences (Artino, 2012). This reciprocal relationship is vividly demonstrated by the example below. The student with increased self-efficacy had more perseverance in studying English. His self-efficacy was validated as he performed better in his English examinations.

One time I taught them the four seasons in English, spring, summer, autumn and winter. I also discussed with them what we would do in each season. One day, a student came to me with excitement. He said, “Miss, I got 60 marks in English dictation. I learned the four words you had taught us.” He was so happy that he got 60 marks in English dictation, which he had never got before. After that, he sets an alarm at night and wakes up at six to recite English texts before going to school. He got 64 marks in a recent English examination. Before that, he can only get around 10 marks. (Teacher P)

3.3 Promoting a Caring and trusting teacher-student relationship

A caring and trusting teacher–student relationship has been shown to be significantly associated with students’ engagement in learning activities and academic achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). The interviewed students reflected

that the 333 teachers were warm and encouraging, and the teacher-student relationship in the 333 program was a great contrast to their experiences at the day schools.

Interviewer : What do you like about your teacher?

Student N2-1: She is gentle.

Student N2-2: Always with a smile.

Interviewer: How about the day school teachers?

Student N2-2: They wear a scowl on their face all the time.

The day school teachers look serious. In contrast, teachers in 333 are nice; they answer whatever questions I have and will never become annoyed. (Student S2-3)

The students also felt that the 333 teachers took a genuine interest in them. In the examples below, the teachers showed their concern for the students' academic performance as well as psychological well-being.

Teachers guide me how to do my homework. If they don't know how, they will ask others or try whatever means they could to teach me. (Student N3-1)

The teacher asks for reasons when I look upset. If it's because of my study, he helps me to review the lessons. If it's because I am scolded by my mother, he says comforting words to me. (Student T3-2)

Emotionally supportive teachers can make children feel that there is an adult who cares for them, listens to them, and provides encouragement. When students feel emotionally secure, they are more willing to take on further challenges.

If I failed my exam, the school teacher said it was because I didn't study. In contrast, teachers in 333 told me not to be upset and to work harder next time. (Interviewer: What do you think when the teachers encourage you?) If I can be forgiven after I have done something wrong, I will improve afterwards. (Student K3-1)

In addition to care and support, the 333 teachers showed respect for the student's autonomy. In the following example, when a student refused to join the review session, the

teacher called the vice-commissioner of the center and let the student recognize the consequence of his behavior through the dialogue with the vice-commissioner. In doing so, the teacher implicitly gave the student a warning, but still provided him with choices. The teacher's tactic was proved effective. The student appreciated the opportunity and behaved responsibly.

Students are required to do revision during examination period. There was a student who didn't want to study and was lying on the desk. I called the vice-commissioner, "There is a student who doesn't want to study, but I don't want to tell you who he is." The student appreciated that I didn't disclose his name in order to protect him. I followed, "I don't want to tell you who he is. However, if he really doesn't want to study, please call his mother and take him home. I don't want to waste his time as well as other students'. The learning environment is affected when other students see him lying on the desk without studying." The vice-commissioner said "That's nice. Just give him a chance. If you call me later, I will inform his mother." The student was thankful for being given a second chance. I put down the phone and continued to ask questions for revision, he took initiative to answer. (Interviewer: Has anyone treated him like this before?) I guess no. You have to give him a chance. In the day school, the teacher may report to the principal immediately and let his mother take him home. As a result, the student continues to behave like that and thinks that all teachers are bad. (Teacher P)

In summary, the 333 teacher-student relationships meet the students' three basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). By showing care and concern, the teacher-student connection satisfies the students' need for relatedness. By validating the students' achievements and encouraging the students to overcome obstacles, the teacher-student connection satisfies the students' need for competence. By giving students the freedom to make choices and take responsibility for their behavior's consequences, the teacher-student connection satisfies the students' need for autonomy. When the three basic psychological needs are fulfilled, the students become motivated and engaged, and aspire to do better in school (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

3.4 Establishing partnerships with the parents

Limited day school teachers keep in regular communication with parents, probably because they have already been overwhelmed by the heavy teaching and administrative workload. In contrast, in the 333 program, teacher-parent communication is embedded in the school's daily work.

Immediately after my child has joined the 333 program, the teacher called me to talk about my kid's learning progress. The teacher kept regular contact with me. For example, some activities were organized by 333. If I enrolled for the activity, the teacher called to remind me the time and place. Sometimes I didn't join the activities, the teachers called me and persuaded me to join, by saying that the students' variety show was good. Besides, I can meet the teachers if I join the activities.

One unusual practice was that the 333 teachers frequently called the parents to tell them what and how their children performed well at in the 333 program. Parents were impressed to receive such calls because the day school teachers call only when the students did something wrong. When the 333 teachers made calls to share positive information with parents, the parents sounded pleasantly surprised.

The day school teachers call the parents when their children perform poorly on tests. Thus, the parents are defensive when they first receive calls from us. However, we don't call them to complain their children's misbehaviors. Instead, we wish to praise their children. I say to the parents, "Your kid performed well today, you should praise him." (Teacher T)
I call the parent when their kids are doing well. "He/She is good in school, and got 60 marks in dictation. Please give applause to him/her. Can you do this for me?" The parents respond with excitement, "Sure. Thank you so much!"

The teachers were also passionate about establishing strong partnerships with the parents. They felt that their connection with the parents was strengthened through regular telephone contact. The parents also appreciated the close and frequent interaction with the teachers.

The relationship between the parents and the day school teachers is quite formal; in 333, the teacher-parent relationship is more like friends. (Teacher P)

Teachers of the 333 are different (from those of the day schools), they give me their mobile phone numbers and welcome me to call when I need help. I really appreciate that. (Parent K1)

The benefits of teacher-parent partnerships were multiple. First of all, the teachers learned more about the students' home environment, which was an invaluable source of information that they could apply towards better meeting the needs of the students.

We spend a lot of time communicating with the parents. We talk with the parents more often than the day school teachers do. By talking to the parents, we know more about the children's background. We know how the students are disciplined at home, which is an important factor shaping the students' thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Teacher Y)

Second, the teachers shared knowledge and skills of positive parenting with the parents. In the example below, the teacher advised the parent to stop criticizing and start encouraging the student.

We need to educate the parents as well. It is a pity that being a parent does not require a license. Some parents don't know how to teach their children. For example, I tell the parents to encourage rather than scold their child when the child fails his/her English exam. (Teacher Y)

Third, the parents got to know how their child was doing at school, which promoted parent-child communication and enhanced family harmony.

I know more about my son's school life because the 333 teachers keep regular contact with me. There was a soccer competition in Sheung Shui organized by the 333. I didn't watch the competition, but I got to know what happened from the photos sent by the teachers. When my son came back, I talked to him about the competition. "This photo is great!" My son pointed at the photos and introduced everyone in the photos. We were happy on that night talking about the competition. (Parent K2)

Finally, the teachers were even involved in addressing parent-child relationship problems.

A student's parents got divorced, and he lived with his dad. Yet his dad rarely stayed at home. I contacted his mom. The mom told me, "I do not know the situation of my son either.

He did not answer my call.” I told her, “Why don’t you try to call your son at a regular time each day? (If you keep doing so for some time) then one day if you stop calling, your son will wonder why you do not call. He will think of you and care about you.” The mother followed my advice and successfully established regular contact with her son. Now I can contact the mother when I need assistance from the parent. (Teacher M)

Previous studies have consistently shown that partnership between teachers and parents positively influences children's learning (Billman, Geddes, & Hedges, 2005). Moreover, an emphasis on teacher-parent partnerships reflects a contextual understanding of the child’s behavior. The importance of understanding a child in multiple contexts is well-explained by the human development psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989) in his Ecological Systems Theory of Child Development. According to Bronfenbrenner, children develop in the ecosystem, like a series of layers (Figure 2).

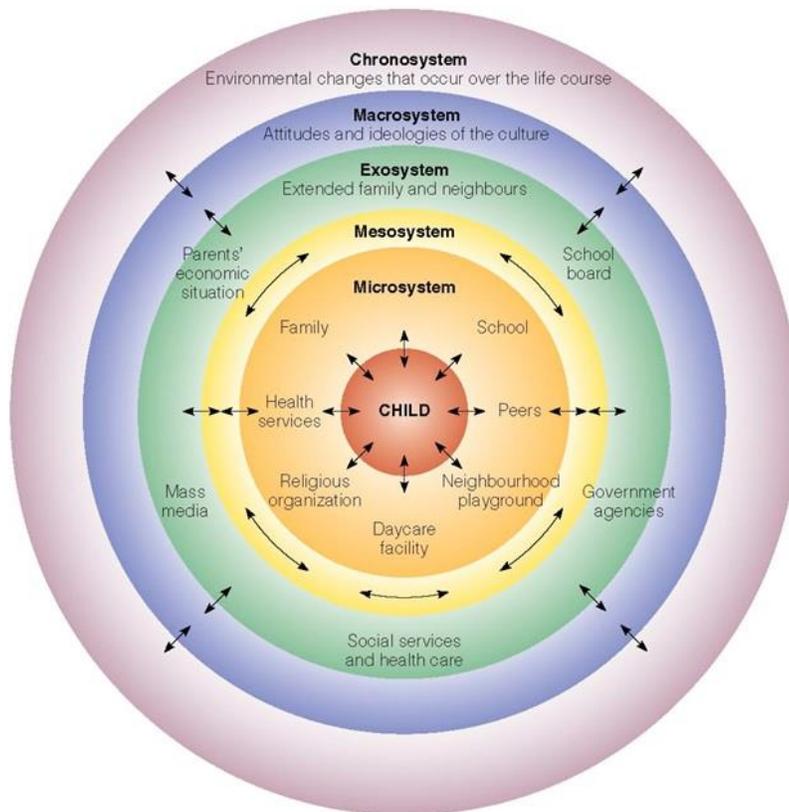


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory of development

Retrieved from: <http://msnaeemsclass.weebly.com/developmental-theories.html>

3.5 Promoting collaboration among different systems

As illustrated in Figure 2, the most central layer is called the microsystem, which includes home, school, peers and other settings where the child lives or spends significant portions of his or her time. These microsystems also interact with one another. The relationships between microsystems are referred to as mesosystem. The teacher-parent partnership reflects the mesosystem between family and school that is influential in child development. Other layers in the ecological system are exosystem (e.g. extended family members, workplaces, mass media, community health systems, social welfare services), macrosystem (includes ideologies, values, attitudes, laws and customs of a particular culture) and chronosystem (environmental events or major transitions like marriage, divorce, birth of a baby, etc.).

The following example illustrated how the 333 program mobilized support from multiple systems: microsystem (teacher, family, and peer), mesosystem (teacher-parent partnership) and macrosystem (social welfare service), in assisting a student in need. The student had emotional problems and engaged in self-harm behaviors during emotional outbursts. The student lived with his grandmother since his father left home, while his mother was in a poor health condition.

This student is emotional. When he has conflicts with his classmate or is asked to do something by the teachers, he will become furious suddenly. He will hit someone or rush out, or pinch himself. He knows that pinching himself is hurtful but he seemingly doesn't feel the pain. His father left him. His mother is sick and cannot take care of him. He lives with his grandmother. His grandmother told us that he yelled, cried or hurt himself when he stayed at home. (Teacher Y)

As a response, the teacher endeavored to establish an emotional bond with the student, so as to provide an alternative source of love and security for him. The teacher also solicited collaboration with the student's grandmother in establishing an emotionally supportive family environment. Through the 333 program, the student was also able to familiarize himself with several classmates who could accompany him and have fun together.

We noticed the situation from February. This is a child lack of parental concern I decided that I would take up the role of his mother for the time being. It took some time, several months, for a child to feel loved and trusted me. When the relationship was built, I tried to make changes. I said to him, "Can you stop pinching yourself next time? That's hurtful." He understood me well when he was calm. In addition, I told his grandmother to stop scolding or spanking him, "Children observe and learn from adults. If you are emotional and scold him frequently, he will learn to be impatient and impolite to others at school." His grandmother took my words. We collaborated well with each other. (Teacher Y)

In addition, the student was referred to a social service center in which social workers and education psychologists collaborated to deal with the students' emotional problems. The social workers also assisted the student to apply for subsidy in seeing psychiatrists.

We refer the kid to see the social worker of Caritas. The social worker helped arrange him for meetings with educational psychologists. The psychologist found that he might have emotional control problems. The social worker also helped him to seek for a subsidy to see the psychiatrists for medical treatments. (Teacher Y)

In the above example, the 333 program played a significant role in primary prevention and early detection of at-risk and vulnerable students. By establishing collaborative partnerships with the families and the community, the program brings together multiple resources to support the students in need.

Chapter 4 Outcome of the 333 Program

Findings of the interviews showed that the students have improved not only in academic performance, but also in their attitudes towards schooling, motivation of learning, social skills and self-confidence after joining the 333 program. The students also enjoyed better peer and family relationships.

4.1 Improved academic performance, learning attitude and study habit

Overall, most of the students were capable of completing the assignments and get higher marks in the examinations after joining the 333 program.

I got 40 marks in my first English examination. After I have joined 333, I got 68 marks. (Student T1-1)

I learned a lot of Chinese characters after I have joined 333. (Student S2-3)

I am happy, because my kid failed examinations before, but he got all pass this time. (Parents K2)

The parents also acknowledged their children's improved academic performance. Furthermore, the parents also recognized that their children have more positive attitudes towards schooling, e.g. stop avoiding or procrastinating in doing homework or reviewing lessons.

I saw my son working hard before the examinations which I've never seen before. He studies harder because he aims to pass the examination. He is motivated. (Parent K2)

My daughter was unwilling to do homework when she entered Primary 1. Homework of primary 1 is quite different from that of kindergarten. In kindergarten, she just wrote ABC and drew lines among the words. In primary 1, she was annoyed by lots of homework assignments in text form. Then she joined 333. Now she is in Primary 2 and has taken initiative to do the homework. (Parents N1)

The parents also reported that their child developed good study habits after joining the 333 program. Below, the parent describes how her daughter initiates her homework completion process at home.

One day when the observatory issued the Black Rain Storm Signal, she could not return to the 333. She opened her school bag and did the homework herself. Surprisingly, I noticed that she knew how to find answers from the textbooks, which must be taught by the teachers of the 333. After completing the assignments herself, she told me, “mum, I have finished the assignment, please check”. This is another good habit developed from her experience in the 333. (Parent S2)

4.2 Higher self-efficacy and self-confidence

The students perceived themselves as becoming more self-confident after joining the 333 program. As a result, they were more attentive to the classes and less anxious in examinations.

I used to stay in a corner in the classroom. Now, I am active at class. I no longer get nervous when having examinations and dictations. (Student S2-2)

In the past, my daughter refused to talk about her conditions during examinations. She said, “I don't know. Please don't make me talk about that. You will know the result when you get the report card.” Her attitude has changed after joining the 333. She has just finished the examination recently. She was willing to tell me how she was performing in the examinations. For example, she told me that she has not completed one question in Math examination and forgot how to write a word in General Studies examination. (Parent N1)

In addition, students with higher self-efficacy had more confidence in reaching for their goals. As was shared by one parent, her daughter set a higher goal and put forth greater amounts of effort in achieving the goal. One student shared that with higher self-efficacy, he was less likely to give up when facing setbacks.

I am confident in learning and I won't give up easily. (Student K2-1)

My daughter was really happy when receiving the awards. She never received any award (at the day school). I talked to her, "Why does the teacher of 333 give you the award of 'improvement star' for two consecutive months? It is rare to be awarded continuously, isn't it?" My daughter replied, "I do not know, mom, I am so happy, and I wish to get the award again next month." Now she had a goal and became motivated. (Parent N2)

4.3 Enhanced social skills and peer relationships

The students reported that they know more friends from the 333 program. The parents also appreciated the opportunity for their children to learn how to interact with peers of different ages and different backgrounds.

I meet some new friends here. (Interviewer: Do you like them?) Yes, we will help each other. (Student S3)

The 333 experience provides my child opportunities to interact with other children of different ages. My child learns how to interact with and blend in with different people, which is an important learning opportunity. This will benefit her in the future. (Parent N1)

The impact of the Little Teacher Scheme on participants' social skills was acknowledged by both parents and teachers. In the example below, the teacher guides the student to tutor the peers in a polite, gentle and encouraging manner.

The Little Teacher Scheme is significant in teaching children social skills. Some students, while being little teachers, said to the peers, "how stupid you are!" When we overheard that, we knew this was the chance to teach children appropriate responses. We told the students that criticizing others was not a good way to teach. We show the children how to encourage peers. (Teacher M)

The parents found that their children were more patient in interacting with younger siblings and relatives, and know how to respond appropriately when the younger ones lose their temper.

She is patient now and willing to take care of other kids. She has a cousin, a naughty boy. She can help her cousin now. I think her improvement should be attributed to the Little Teacher Scheme. (Parent K1)

My daughter learns how to take care of her little sister. When her little sister lost temper, she tries to comfort the little sister by sharing candies. She doesn't fight back when her sister is beating her. She tells us what happens afterwards. (Parent S1)

4.4 Improved communication and family relationships

Improved family relationships were reported by both parents and students. The parents were relieved of the burden of homework mentoring and were less likely to have conflicts with their children over the homework assignments.

I was frustrated. I didn't know how to teach him and he wouldn't listen to me when I was disciplining him. We had conflicts and he could not complete the homework as a result. (Parent K2)

Before joining the 333, she had many excuses when I asked her to do homework or revision. Now, when I ask her to do homework or revision, she immediately responds and takes action. (Parent S2)

When homework was no longer a central issue of the parent-child relationship, the families had a greater chance to spend quality time together. The students were more willing to share their learning experiences with the parents.

The parents tell us that they are happy. They don't have to scold their child for not doing homework anymore. The family members have more time to chat and have fun together. (Teacher M)

Everyday when my son gets home, he tells me interesting things that happened in 333. I tell him, "put down your bag and tell me after shower." He was even talking when he is in shower. He enjoys sharing with me now. (Parent K2)

My daughter is willing to tell us everything happened in 333, for instance, which teacher didn't come to class today, who was the supply teacher, I took a singing class, I played interesting games, etc. She tells us what she did on that day. (Parent S2)

Chapter 5 Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

Recommendation for future practice

5.1 Fostering a growth mindset in students and teachers

The 333's emphasis on enhancing self-efficacy has been clearly stated in the program's mission statement. As analyzed in section II, reward and mastery experiences are found to effectively improve the participants' self-efficacy. For future work, we recommend an additional strategy of fostering growth mindset. Dweck (2006) identified two opposing beliefs about intelligence and talent. People with a growth mindset believe that intelligence and talent are malleable and can increase with effort and learning, while people with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence and talent are an entity at birth.

The importance of growth mindset can never be overstated. Recent research has shown that students from lower-income families were less likely to hold a growth mindset than their wealthier peers (Claro, Paunesku, & Dweck, 2016). Economic disadvantage may lead to poorer academic outcomes, in part by leading low-income students to believe that their intellectual abilities cannot be improved. On the other hand, the growth mindset is found to buffer against the deleterious effects of poverty on achievement (Claro, et al., 2016). Hence, fostering a growth mindset in students from low SES families may temper the effects of economic disadvantage on their achievement.

As a matter of fact, some teachers in the 333 program have already used the language of growth mindset in communicating with the students. In the example below, the teacher reminds the students to focus on improvements in the learning process.

I talked to a student, "Did you realize that you have improved? You failed to hand in homework twice a week, now you are able to complete all assignments on time. You make efforts and thus you have improvements in homework completion. " Or I reminded a student, "You got 60 marks in a dictation, didn't you? You're making progress. You got 30 marks previously." My focus is always on the progress that the students have made. I help the students to realize that they have better performance. (Teacher P)

However, some teachers may still adopt a fixed mindset. Hence, training workshops for teachers could be organized and specific teaching strategies to foster growth mindset in

333 students could also be designed and implemented. For instance, the Stanford University's Center on Learning Mindsets (2017) suggests three strategies to foster a growth mindset. First is to convince students that the brain is malleable. Second is to help students recognize how their specific actions lead to their success. The final strategy is to encourage students to do challenging work, explore different approaches to the problem, and learn from the mistakes.

5.2 Promoting positive peer relationships and enhancing emotional competence of students

Successful development of peer relationships is important for child development. Children with friends are more socially competent and have fewer psychological problems than those without friends (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Friendships are also important for school adjustment, motivation, and engagement (Ryan, 2000).

The 333 program has encouraged positive peer interaction through the Little Teacher Scheme. The participants also make friends through added-value classes and extra-curricular activities. On the other hand, some students mentioned the occasional occurrence of peer conflict or even harassment (e.g. being teased). Yet these negative peer interactions could be an opportunity for the students to learn essential social skills such as conflict resolution and problem solving (Rohrbeck & Gray, 2014). In addition, due to their family background, some students have emotional problems and do not know how to manage their emotions. It is recommended that a classroom-based curriculum could be developed to facilitate the students' social and emotional learning. The curriculum could include a variety of topics such as identifying positive and negative emotions, regulation of emotions, evaluating alternative solutions to interpersonal problems, resolving conflicts, etc. Using small-group discussions, role-plays and games, the curriculum can encourage participants to learn and apply interpersonal skills in real-life peer interactions.

5.3 Increasing resources to deal with difficult parents and enhancing parent-teacher partnership

Positive teacher-parent partnerships are essential for the education of children. An encouraging, harmonious learning environment and family atmosphere contribute to

children's school success. In addition to the parent-teacher telephone conference that is currently used, we would suggest broadening the venues of communicating with parents. The teachers may edit monthly newsletters (e.g. news and stories of students' achievement), conduct home visits, or invite parents to visit and observe their children's classes.

On the other hand, as reflected by the interviewed teachers, not all parents are responsive to the teacher's contact. Some parents respond in an impatient and disrespectful manner; some parents rarely respond, and it seems that they abdicate their responsibilities for their children. There are also families with multiple problems, which might be beyond the teacher's ability to deal with. In view of both the importance and challenges of establishing teacher-parent partnerships, we suggest that more resources should be allocated in supporting the teachers to deal with difficult parents. The program may consider employing a social worker who would be responsible for addressing challenging family cases. The social worker could also assist in conducting evening or weekend workshops that can teach parents positive parenting attitudes, knowledge and skills that parents can apply to their children at home.

Suggestions for future research

A questionnaire survey with the existing 333 participants will be undertaken. The aim is to investigate whether the findings based on interviews with a selected group of students, parents, and teachers could be generalized to all the group's participants. The survey will adopt a rigorous quasi-experimental pre-post design, and will provide substantial evidence to testify the program's effectiveness. If the questionnaire survey also found significant improvements in academic performance, self-efficacy, teacher-student relationship and family relationship, there would be substantial evidence supporting the program's effectiveness.

In addition, further qualitative research will be conducted to take a more nuanced approach in addressing significant research questions. Students who have graduated from the program will be interviewed to explore the long-term impact of the program. Regarding future interviews with existing students, we may explore their feedback regarding specific

added-value classes, e.g. moral education, which may assist in improving curriculum content and design. Moreover, in the current research there is inadequate information regarding the students' experiences at day schools from the students' own narratives. Future research will explore in greater depth and detail how the schooling experiences interact with the 333 program experiences in impacting the students. Another possibility of further qualitative research is to search for discrepant evidence and negative cases, e.g. students who do not make progress or even drop out. Findings of negative cases will show why and how the program failed to assist specific types of students and suggest directions for future work.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Based on the interviews with four teachers, eight parents, and 48 students, this qualitative research revealed that lack of family and school support, special education needs and low self-efficacy have negative impacts on the 333 participant's academic performance, peer relationship and family relationship. These four factors are considered as risk factors. The risk factors interact with one another and result in a vicious cycle. With the aim to break the vicious cycle, the 333 program cultivates and promotes protective factors such as academic assistance, reward and mastery experience, trusting teacher-student relationships, and strong teacher-parent partnerships. The improvements of the 333 participants depend on the interaction between risk and protective factors. When the protective factors outweigh the risk factors, the 333 participants report improved academic performance, learning attitude, self-efficacy, peer relationship and family relationship. Figure 3 illustrates how the 333 program impacts their participants in the context of existing risk factors.

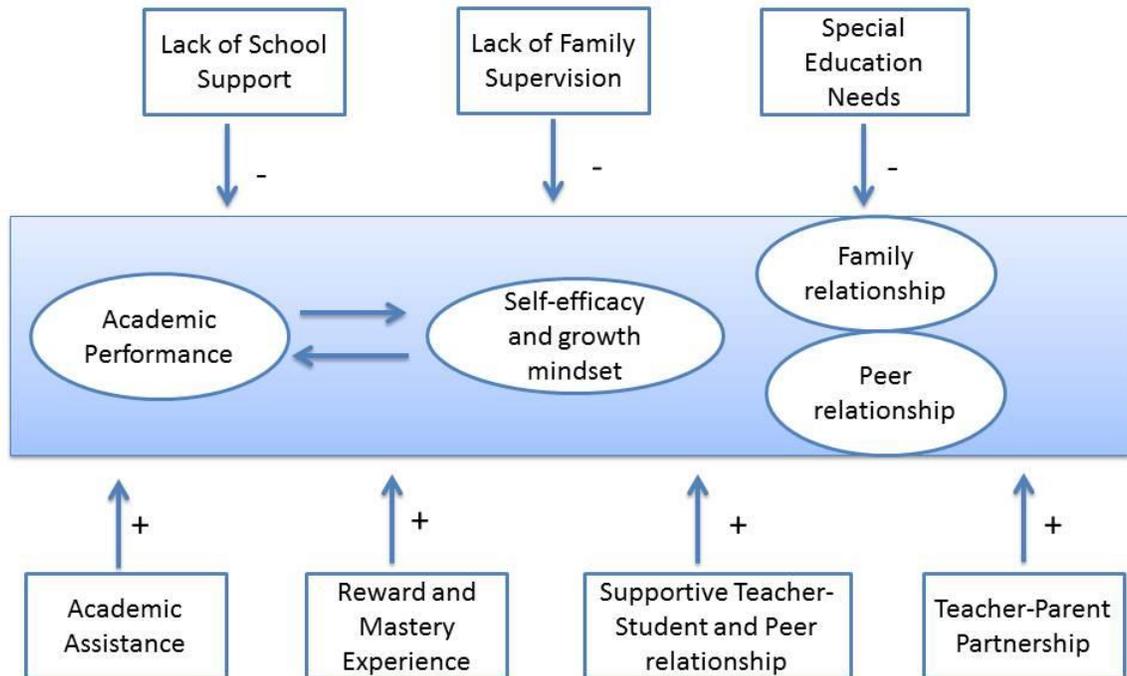


Figure 3. A conceptual framework for the 333 program

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