

The Role of Teacher Care in Determining Academic Success of Community College Students: A Case Study from Hong Kong

Queenie A. Y. Lee & Mantak Yuen

The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

This article highlights findings from a case study research investigating factors that foster the academic achievement of community college students in Hong Kong. Data was collected from in-depth interviews with six community college students in a middle-sized, self-funded community college. The findings illustrate nuanced facets of teacher care that are conducive to students' academic and personal development, including (i) teachers as important transmitters of knowledge; (ii) teachers as care-givers; (iii) pedagogical care; (iv) teachers as advice-givers, and (v) teachers as role models. The research has practical implications for practices within community colleges and teacher training in the sub-degree sector.

Key words: community college, teacher care, school connectedness, college success, Hong Kong

Introduction

The post-school education system in Hong Kong has witnessed some significant changes in the last decade or so. Self-financed postsecondary school qualifications were introduced in the form of Associate Degrees, Higher Diplomas and Professional Diplomas (dubbed collectively as ‘sub-degrees’) and these have been fervently sought by secondary school leavers. However, such self-funded tertiary education was perceived rather dubiously by the populace partly due to its high cost and also its uncertain status in relation to formal degree programmes in the territory. After almost seventeen years of evolution these sub-degree programmes are now much better received because they are seen by students as a stepping stone to possible entry into university later. Over a hundred Associate Degree programmes spanning a wide variety of academic disciplines and professional fields are offered to senior secondary school leavers in Hong Kong every year.

As interest in these sub-degree programmes has grown, more attention is now being paid by the government and the evaluative bodies (e.g., collaborating institutions overseas, quality assurance boards) to assessing the outcomes from such a form of education. The evaluations usually include the quality of teaching, the academic achievement of the enrolled students, and efficiency of the administrative units, as well as how successfully the programmes improve students’ job prospects (Lee & Young, 2003; Yung, 2002).

In spite of the growth of this sub-degree sector—in terms of the number of students and teachers involved and the considerable profits being made by the tertiary institutions, the discourse concerning the relatively new Associate Degree (AD) phenomenon in Hong Kong has been far from positive. There are doubts expressed by the general public, and especially by the employers and admission boards of universities offering formal degree programmes. According to the Editorial of *Ming Pao* (“Associate Degree,” 2010), the government should take reasonable actions to combat this unfavorable public perception of the Associate Degree qualification. According to the editors, one reason for the public discontent is that society is yet to regard the Associate Degree as a valued independent qualification per se. In fact, holders of such a qualification are seen more as ‘under-achievers’ who lack a formal university first degree rather than satisfactory achievers of a qualified academic standard. It even took the government almost three years to consider the level of AD equivalent to that of a Higher Diploma (HD) in 2001, and finally to make graduates from AD programmes eligible for civil service appointments in 2009 (Hong Kong’s Information Services Department,

2009). Another reason for public concern is that the quality of the Associate Degree programmes varies significantly, with some being regarded as poor (Leung, Ng & Chan, 2011). These reasons are conceded by researchers such as Kember (2010) and Yung (2002) who discussed explicitly the hardships faced by holders of the Associate Degree in Hong Kong. These hardships include being perceived as holding a “markedly inferior version” of higher education, a lack of a clear pathway into formal degree programmes, and the question of employability. This latter concern relates to the fact that a large proportion of the Associate Degree curriculum is dedicated to general education rather than specialist training. As a result, students are usually not vocationally-oriented in community colleges and are relatively unprepared for the demands of jobs in real work settings in many industries in Hong Kong.

Given the controversy that has accompanied the growth of AD courses, it is surprising to find that not much research has been done, either quantitative or qualitative, on the outcomes of this mode of further education and/or the development of the students concerned. A literature search yielded almost no results. At most it seems that higher education in East Asia has been studied, including Hong Kong and Singapore, from a comparative education policy perspective (Mok, 2005; Mok, 2012) but not from an Associate Degree viewpoint. There is a strong need for more research to be done in and about Hong Kong.

Since many graduates from AD programmes actually do well while studying and after leaving the programme, it is pertinent to wonder what factors have enabled them to succeed. One important factor that helps students of all ages do well is the nature and quality of the support they receive from their teachers, and it comes in many forms (Wentzel, 1997). Ryan and Patrick (2001) defined teacher support as ‘the extent to which students believe teachers value and establish personal relationships with them’ (p. 440). Whitlock (2006) investigated elements of teacher care among high-school students and it was found that teachers’ willingness to provide time and assistance, their emotional availability, and their open acknowledgement of each student and his or her personal worth constituted valuable teacher support at middle and high school levels. In the research by Bulach, Brown and Potter (1998), they abstracted from graduate students teaching in elementary schools what constitutes teachers’ caring behaviours. They found that creating an environment where students feel safe and that warmth and care is perceived by the students were the most important. Freeman, Anderman and Jensen (2010) have acknowledged that college students’

perceptions of pedagogical caring from the professors with whom they interact is one important contributor to their sense of belonging at the university level.

The importance of this teacher support (or care) is well-documented in many studies (Chan, Lau, & Yuen, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Resnick et al., 1997). However, it seems that teacher support is under-researched in the college or community college setting. As Wood and Turner (2011) have suggested, community college students appreciate and need much teacher support in their learning and also in their personal development. However, no evidence exists in this context to indicate what teachers could do to give the best support to this particular group of students. Are these older students in need of the same types of teacher care and support, or do they differ from their middle and high school counterparts? What do community college students perceive as the best support given by teachers? Against this background, the case-study research described here was conducted with **some** Associate Degree students in Hong Kong. The aim was to explore important factors that have helped them to achieve academic success in the community college setting despite serious failures in their prior secondary education. It is expected that the study may benefit all stakeholders involved—including but not limited to the programme providers, the faculty members and the students.

Method

This qualitative study used a case study approach in which six Associate Degree students were interviewed individually. It aimed to find out how students excelled in their studies at a community college and identify factors that may have influenced their academic achievement.

The community college from which the participants came was a middle-sized institution which was affiliated with a mother organization that provided government-funded degree and higher degree programmes in Hong Kong. About 3,000 Associate Degree students were recruited for each cohort at the time the research was conducted. The six student participants were either current students or fresh graduates from the community college.

Data Collection

The six participants were interviewed individually by the first author of this paper to collect information about their community college experience. Voluntary and informed consent was

gathered from each participant before the interview, and important ethical considerations such as confidentiality and the right to withdrawal were explained clearly by the researcher prior to gathering their consent.

To collect information about the participants' community college experience, a semi-structured interview was adopted. Some guiding questions had been prepared in the form of an interview guide, and participants were also allowed the flexibility to share and discuss other issues as long as they were directly relevant to the topic under discussion. Merriam (1998) contended that a semi-structured format is desirable as it allows the researcher to adhere to the topic and at the same time respond to the situation at hand and the participants' ideas.

Participants

The researchers recruited potential participants who had been observed to perform extraordinarily well in the Associate Degree programmes. Some of these students had been taught directly by the first researcher, while others were nominated by her teaching colleagues. The initial pool of potential subjects contained ten individuals.

To ensure that the selected participants were students with a "success" story in AD, the following criteria were adopted: (i) for participants who had already graduated with AD, they had been admitted to a degree programme after finishing AD. For current AD students the participants their grade point average (GPA) had reached or exceeded 3.5 out of 4.0. or were listed in the Dean's Honor List.

As the researchers also aimed to investigate how Associate Degree students who had previously experienced academic failure were now experiencing greater success in the community college, potential participants were then screened to identify those who had suffered prior failures. The screening was based on participants' past public examinations results, with any scores lower than 14 in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). For A-level students, as the minimal entrance requirements for a formal degree programme was passing two A-levels subjects plus Chinese and Use of English, any results lower than this requirement were considered 'academic failure'.

Based on the above selection criteria, six community college students (3 males; 3 females) represented the sample to be interviewed. Among them, three were current AD students whereas the other three were fresh graduates from the AD programme. The age range was 19 to 23. Each participant was interviewed once by the first researcher for approximately one

hour. The transcripts of the interviews were sent later to each participant for their checking and endorsement before data analysis. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant during data analysis and in this paper. The interviews and transcripts were in Chinese and later translated to English for publication purposes.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the in-depth interviews was analyzed in accordance with suggestions given by Miles and Huberman (1994), Saldana (2013) and Yin (2009, 2012). In the first stage analysis, interviews were fully transcribed so that a verbatim text was produced for each interview conducted. The transcript was sent to the participants who could add to or amend the responses as appropriate to ensure clarity and intention. When the scripts were returned, coding of the data was implemented following the methods suggested by Saldana (2013). After the data had been coded, they were organized and categorized into central themes and concepts (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) that addressed the issues of the nature of teacher care and how it helped students overcome difficulties they faced.

Findings

This case study aimed to explore how teacher care helps to promote the academic achievement of community college students in Hong Kong. Several important themes emerged from the data, namely: (i) teachers as important transmitters of knowledge; (ii) teachers as care-givers; (iii) pedagogical care; (iv) teachers as advice-givers, and (v) teachers as role models. These different roles played by the teachers illuminate the ways in which adults in a community college can make a difference to students' academic achievement as they navigate through the Associate Degree years.

Teachers as important transmitters of knowledge

Jackie's story of academic success is a good exemplification of how teacher care could make a difference to the life of community college students. Throughout the interview, Jackie had talked predominantly about two lecturers who have not only imparted important knowledge to him but also inspired him how to be a 'human'. The following quote illustrates how good teachers he had met in the community college helped to transform him from a poorly-performing secondary school student to a brilliant high-flyer in AD:

“Meeting a good teacher was the reason why I matured gradually. I must say the teacher I met was a very good one indeed. Although we have to rely a lot on ourselves in the course of our studies, the important role of the teachers cannot be denied because we face them and learn important knowledge from them every day. I think whether you are familiar with the teachers personally and whether there is effective communication between you and the teachers are important because if you do, you are going to absorb what has been taught more easily. What’s more, you won’t be afraid to ask the teachers questions in case you don’t understand the lecture materials.”

Another student, Cherry, recalled how teachers she met in the community college sparked her interests in academic studies:

“I should thank my first Psychology teacher in AD, because it was she that ignited an interest in Psychology in me. The second teacher was the one who taught me ‘Critical Reasoning’, who in my eyes had so much expertise! It was good that he taught the course in an interesting way instead of sticking to the notes rigidly. It was so fun when I studied the course. There was one more teacher that impressed me. He was a teacher that I came across in a course called ‘Creative Thinking’. I remember him so well because when he was teaching, he used many daily life examples to demonstrate the concepts to us. To me, learning doesn’t mean we have to rote-memorize the materials only. Instead, learning means whether or not we could relate what has been acquired to our everyday life. I should say it was great fun when I took the course from this teacher.”

From the comments of Jackie and Cherry, it can be seen that when students studied in a community college, they cared about both the subject knowledge they acquired *and* the way their teachers delivered it. Good teaching, coming in the forms of interesting instruction and practical application on the part of students, not only sparked students’ interest in the discipline but also helped them explore and consolidate the subject contents more. In sum, teachers **can** play an important role as transmitters of knowledge in the community college, as this **may** stimulate the intellect of the students on the one hand and promote their whole-person development on the other hand.

Teachers as care-givers

The importance of teacher care to students' learning has been documented in extant literature (e.g. Chan, Lau & Yuen, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004). In their qualitative inquiry that explored factors that contributed to students' success in a community college, Wood and Turner (2010) affirmed that 'positive social relationships between faculty and students serve to enhance student academic success' (p. 146). In the present research, finding that teacher care facilitates the academic development of community college students has been replicated. The narrative from Andrew below exemplifies how a teacher has touched and changed him through constant love and care:

"During my AD years, I was impressed by a teacher the most. He was simply an excellent teacher. I remember I met him in the second semester in year one when he taught me a course 'Micro Economics'. Since that time, he started to get to know me. He always told me I was a good student although I had little idea why he said so. I guess one of the reasons was that I always answered his questions in class as I wanted to get more marks from him. Over time, I talked more with him and we became more familiar with each other. It was so kind of him that he treated me to lunch often and asked about my academic performance. When we met, he would ask me how I was doing in the college, whether I needed help in my studies and whether I had questions about the course. Sometimes, I would ask him questions about articulation to a degree programme. I would say he had helped me a great deal in my studies."

Very similar to Andrew's experience, when Elaine was asked what the most impressive influence to her was in the Associate Degree years, her answer was again, 'a teacher':

"If you ask me what's the most impressive to me in AD, I would say it's a teacher! I remember when I was doing the foundation course, there was a period when I felt quite downcast as something bad happened to my family. That teacher had so smart eyes that she saw something was wrong with me. One day she said to me, 'Do you have time after class? Can I have a word with you?' At that time, I was panicky as I worried that something must be wrong with my project or assignment. It came as a surprise, though, that when the teacher talked to me, she asked if something was wrong because she observed that I had become quieter in class. She asked, 'Are you sick? Or did anything happen?' I replied to her, 'No, I am not sick. Only something happened to my family. I think I would be fine after a few days. I may just be tired.' I

was thankful that the teacher had stayed in touch with me and supported me since then.”

Elaine went on to describe the support given by the same teacher when she was feeling very stressed from her studies. She recounted,

“Sometimes, when I felt I could not go on anymore in my studies because I had set too high targets for myself, I wanted to give up. In my head I was thinking ‘Could I make it? Will I be able to graduate from AD? Should I quit and start working? My parents did not go to college but they could make a living anyway. Maybe I should follow their example too?’ At that time, my teacher came to encourage me. She said, ‘Don’t you be silly, my dear! The society now is no longer the same as the older days which your parents had lived. You may need to work even harder and get more qualifications to get a position your parents got in the old days or even a lower-ranking job.’ Later, the teacher shared with me how competitive our society has become in her first-hand experience. I must say it was her continuous encouragement and support that made me persist to this day.”

The narratives given by Elaine and Andrew above demonstrate that good, caring teachers in a community college could provide important support to the students. This support is particularly necessary and crucial when students do not receive it adequately at home, either because parents lack the college experience themselves or the family is facing some adversities at the moment. Whatever the situation might be, the kindness and encouragement the students receive from teachers should be a source of consolation and strength. The guidance from the teachers is like a lighthouse when students are struggling in a sea of doubts, challenges and turbulences in the course of life.

Pedagogical care

Wentzel (1997) postulated a construct “pedagogical care” which denotes teachers’ care about students’ academic endeavors as a strong motivator behind students’ learning. Wood and Turner (2011) also established that community college students in the U.S. needed much teacher support in their learning and personal development if they were to succeed in their studies. One of the participants in this case study, Ethan, affirmed the importance of pedagogical care as a key determinant in his academic success in the community college:

“I must thank the first Psychology teacher I encountered in AD. I really enjoyed her class...I really did! She was a really kind teacher, and she made me feel Psychology was interesting. I remember the first Psychology course I took was ‘General Psychology’. I could see that the teacher had put so much effort in her teaching. I also learned a lot of English from her when she was teaching us.”

Ethan explained further how the teacher taught the class very patiently which helped him and other students in their learning:

“What I appreciated the most was that the teacher would explain the concepts very clearly and she cared about our feelings in the learning process. Sometimes if students didn’t understand a concept, she wouldn’t mind explaining it one time after another until we finally understood it. You know what, in the community college many teachers just cared about following the teaching schedule. Even students couldn’t understand the lecture materials, many teachers didn’t care and they simply continued with their teaching. These teachers came to class, lectured for hours, and left when time was up. If you tell them you don’t understand something, they may ask you to come for a consultation. In the worst case, some don’t even bother to do so! Sometimes, teachers may ask you to send an email to him/her to ask about what confused you; however, it can happen that what you write in an email does not capture what really confuses you, and it is difficult to ask questions impromptu in an email! It was great that the Psychology teacher was not like these teachers as she put her heart into teaching. Oftentimes when we approached her to ask questions during the breaks, she would explain the concepts that puzzled us very patiently. I remember there were times when I came up with extended questions beyond the topic, she would also answer them benevolently. I would say this was the reason why I wanted to learn more about Psychology after this first course.”

The sharing by Ethan above shows that a teacher who cared about the learning of the students in a community college could help them to resolve queries in the course, inspire them to explore issues outside of the regular curriculum, and sustain their interest and stamina in finding more about an academic discipline.

Teachers as advice-givers

Other than imparting care and support, another important role played by teachers in a community college is being advice-givers. In the following transcript, Candy told how teachers she met deepened her self-understanding and inspired her career development:

“If you ask me what the most impressive thing or person was in AD, I would say it’s my teachers. Actually there are quite a number of teachers whom I find impressive, like the teachers in Communication, Psychology and the counsellors. They have really helped me a lot when I was in AD. When I was with them, I always had a chance to reflect on what kind of a person I was. Also, I could figure out my career path better when I talked with my teachers. After all, teachers have good experience. They have seen so many students so they can readily tell me what would happen if I choose a particular path. Of course, there could be times when things didn’t turn out the way my teachers predicted but at least I could know what may lie ahead of me. For example, what career paths I can pursue and what may not suit me at all.”

In a similar vein, Jackie was inspired by good teachers in a community college as to how he could develop professionally after AD:

“I remember when I first came here, I saw some exhibitions at the counter after the admission interview. I can still remember the first teacher I met there. I came before him and asked, ‘Sir, how many points do I need to get if I want to get into a university? How about if I want to study in a particular programme?’ After listening to my questions, the teacher answered them one after another and then I felt so much relieved. Since then, I just tried to do my part and study hard. I began to forget my failures before and started a new life here.”

Based on Candy’s and Jackie’s accounts, teachers could be important resource persons to whom students turn when they are in doubt, particularly when they are struggling with career choices. As students may look up to their trusted teachers for advice pertaining to career choices and development, teachers serving in community colleges could prepare themselves adequately so they can give up-to-date career-related information to their students.

Teachers as role models

Jackie was deeply inspired by the firsthand experience of his teacher when the teacher was a younger lad. He recollected what his teacher had told the class:

“The teacher shared with us that when he graduated from college, he was doing something in marketing. At that time, his job was to sell something to people ... but he learned later that the products would harm people’s health. He said his boss pushed him to sell them but he rejected. This escalated to heated argument with the boss and the teacher was fired in the end. Alas! It was his first job! Hearing this experience, I was thinking when I start my career I may face a similar situation in which I need to do something against my conscience. Then I figured out that I needed to know my standpoint and my bottom-line clearly. My teacher taught us a good lesson about what we should do and what we shouldn’t do when we work full-time in the future.”

In a similar vein, Candy shared what her teacher told the class that impressed her deeply:

“When I was your age, you know what I was doing? I was actually doing some very low-paid, labour work. One day, I was like ‘awakened’. I knew that I could not go on like this so I started to study. It was a long road but I managed to get a lot of qualifications as time passed.”

As community college students might lack experiences in life, both Jackie and Candy were grateful to their teachers who had showed them what life was like when the teachers were young and inexperienced. From the teachers, the students learned that failures and challenges could be inevitable in life but what mattered more was how one survived them. As the admirable teachers could make it through the challenges, the students dared to follow their examples and footsteps. Jackie’s and Candy’s accounts evidently show how teachers can be positive role models and inspirations for students’ academic and personal development in the course of life.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate factors that could provide a positive influence on the academic achievement of Associate Degree students in Hong Kong. Results of the research suggest that ‘teacher care’ was one of the prominent factors that helped community college students achieve success in college. All the student participants regarded care and support from their teachers as an important factor behind their academic success. This finding is consistent with earlier studies which investigated the importance of teacher care among different student populations, including high school students (Chan, Lau & Yuen, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004; Resnick et al., 1997; Whitlock, 2006) and community college

students (Wood & Turner, 2011). More importantly, the findings from this qualitative inquiry seem to suggest that teacher care may come in various forms. In addition to valuing and establishing personal relationships with students (Ryan & Patrick, 2001) and giving support to students' learning and development (Wentzel, 1997; Wood & Turner, 2011), one important element in teacher care appears to be teachers' sharing of their own life experiences, which could be a good role model as well as inspirations for students. The 'caring teacher' in a community college thus needs to be aware of the many ways that he or she can support students and help them make optimum progress.

Implications for Senior Administrators of Community Colleges

Based on the findings above, it is important to recognize that a caring culture needs to be cultivated on any community college campus. Teacher care has emerged here, and in other studies, as **one of the factors which could be conducive to** student success. There are a number of measures that senior administrators can take to help create a caring atmosphere on campus. The most important is that the supervisory members of the college board and the senior administrators could have a mindset that a caring environment that creates a feeling of 'connectedness' among staff and students **could facilitate** students' academic achievement and personal growth. Prior research (e.g., Wood & Turner, 2010) and this study have affirmed that a friendly demeanor from staff not only helps freshmen adapt to college life faster but also makes them feel more comfortable with interacting with teachers.

When college heads acknowledge the importance of connectedness and caring on campus, they are more likely to encourage all staff to promote this ethos within the college. This could be done also through new staff induction and by ongoing supervision of current staff members, both in class time and outside of it.

Teachers are important transmitters of knowledge, and pedagogical caring was found here to make a difference to the academic achievement of students. It is therefore vital that teachers who have both the passion to teach and sound subject knowledge are recruited to community colleges. After the recruitment, it is important that programme leaders review and supervise academic staff constantly in order to give them constructive feedback about their teaching.

Implications for teachers of community colleges

In this research, teachers have emerged as one of the most important factors that influence students' academic success in a community college. In the light of this finding, the following recommendations are made to help students achieve greater success and promote their personal development.

First, teachers can be more aware of the different roles they play that directly and indirectly affect the development of their students. Being an effective lecturer in the classroom should be the most important because teaching is the primary job and responsibility of a teacher and students expect to be taught well. Teachers should, therefore, expend reasonable time and effort to prepare an effective and motivating lecture. Their teaching must take account of the fact that students in this setting are older adolescents and young adults who are more mature and have already acquired knowledge in various fields. To cater for the learning needs of these students, teachers serving in community colleges are advised to keep themselves up-to-date not only with subject matter but also with current global and social issues as well as advancements in technology and entertainment. If teachers can share some personal stories of their youth and of their education and working experiences, students will not only be greatly interested but also be able to acquire important information about the working world and correct values in life.

Another important role played by teachers is being an advisor to students. This is important because it was found here that students rely on teachers to provide helpful current information on links to university degree programmes and career choices. This need is most urgent for students who lack access to such information and/or with no support and role models at home.

Perhaps the key role that can be played by teachers, based on the findings in this research, is that they should be genuinely interested in their students as individuals and are willing to care about their learning and personal life. This requires patience to connect with the students, both during class time and outside class. Teachers can chat with students and ask about their life and studies when they meet in the hallway. Past research (e.g., Pascarella, 1980; Wood & Turner, 2010) has documented the benefits brought about by informal contact between teachers and students, including but not limited to students' positive attitude towards college, their educational aspirations, academic achievement and personal development. Some teachers may even spare personal time and space to have lunch or afternoon tea with students, where they can talk in a more relaxed and personal manner.

This small-scale study has affirmed that the power of teacher care should not be underrated, especially at the community college level where students may need assurance, encouragement and advice from their teachers. This is particularly the case for students who have previously experienced academic failure.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size was **very** small and only six cases from one community college were examined so the sample may not be representative of all such establishments and therefore caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to other community colleges and students. However, the in-depth nature of the interviews, and the willingness of the participants to provide information, suggest that the data collected is certainly valid for this sample. Stake (1995) has emphasized that the real business of case study is particularization rather than generalization. In spite of these limitations, this study has yielded some useful findings pertaining to teacher-related factors that can contribute to academic success for community college students in Hong Kong. The data also has implications for practitioners and theorists in the field.

Directions for Future Research

This study deliberately chose to interview students and graduates who were doing very well academically after experiencing failures in a secondary school. Future research could explore negative cases in community colleges, such as students who are not doing well or have dropped out of AD programmes. What factors may have led to their withdrawal? Which particular characteristics of the teachers or the community college, if any, have given rise to the difficulties students faced? We await future research to answer these and other related questions.

References

- Anfara, V. A., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T. L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31(7), 28–38. doi: 10.3102/0013189X031007028
- Associate Degree. (2010, Dec 23). Retrieved from <http://english.mingpao.com/critic.htm>
- Bulach, C., Brown, C., & Potter, L. (1998). Behaviors that create a caring learning

- community. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 4(4), 458–470.
- Chan, R., Lau, P., & Yuen, M. (2011). Interrelationships among teacher care, students' life skills development, and academic achievement: Implications for school guidance work. *Asian Journal of Counselling*, 18(1&2), 63-94.
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2010). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(3), 203–220. <http://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.3.203-220>
- Hong Kong's Information Services Department. (2009).
- Kember, D. (2010). Opening up the road to nowhere: problems with the path to mass higher education in Hong Kong. *Higher Education*, 59(2), 167–179. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9241-x>
- Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 262–273. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08283.x>
- Lee, E., & Young, E. (2003). Pioneering the community college movement in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(2), 147–158. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0260137032000055312>
- Leung, C. H., Ng, C. W. R., & Chan, P. O. E. (2011). Can co-curricular activities enhance the learning effectiveness of students? An application to the sub-degree students in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(3), 329-341.
- McNeely, C., & Falci, C. (2004). School connectedness and the transition into and out of health-risk behavior among adolescents: A comparison of social belonging and teacher support. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 284–292. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08285.x>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Revised and expanded from “*Case study research in education*.” San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Mok, K. H. (2005). Fostering entrepreneurship: Changing role of government and higher education governance in Hong Kong. *Research Policy*, 34(4), 537–554.

doi:10.1016/j.respol.2005.03.003

- Mok, K. H. (2012). The rise of transnational higher education in Asia: Student mobility and studying experiences in Singapore and Malaysia. *Higher Education Policy*, 25(2), 225–241. <http://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2012.6>
- Pascarella, E. T. (1980). Student-faculty informal contact and college outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 50(4), 545–595. <http://doi.org/10.3102/00346543050004545>
- Resnick, M. D., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R. W., Bauman, K. E., Harris, K. M., Jones, J., Tabor, J., Beuhring, T., Sieving, R. E., Shew, M., Ireland, M., Bearinger, L. H., & Udry., R. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 278(10), 823–832. doi:10.1001/jama.1997.03550100049038
- Ryan, A. M., & Patrick, H. (2001). The classroom social environment and changes in adolescents' motivation and engagement during middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 437–460. <http://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038002437>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE.
- Wentzel, K. R. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 411–419. <http://doi.org/10.1037//0022-0663.89.3.411>
- Whitlock, J. L. (2006). Youth perceptions of life at school: Contextual correlates of school connectedness in adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science*, 10(1), 13–29. http://doi.org/10.1207/s1532480xads1001_2
- Wood, J. L., & Turner, C. S. (2010). Black males and the community college: Student perspectives on faculty and academic success. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35(1-2), 135–151. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2010.526052>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Yung, M. S. (2002). Community college: A new born baby of the Hong Kong education system for the new millennium. *Hong Kong Teachers' Centre Journal*, 1, 32-44.

