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**The Effects of a Group Guidance Programme on the Self Esteem  
of Newly Arrived Children from the Chinese Mainland to Hong Kong\***

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*\*The authors would like to thank Dr. Anthony K.K. Siu, Mr. Kenneth Ho, Mr. Simon Ng, and Mr. Edward S.C. Poon for their support to the study. This article is based on data collected by the first author in his B.Ed. dissertation under the supervision of the second author. Address all correspondence to Mantak Yuen, Department of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong, People's Republic of China.*

# **The Effects of a Group Guidance Programme on the Self Esteem of Newly Arrived Children From the Chinese Mainland to Hong Kong**

## **Abstract**

The present study investigated the effects of a school-based group guidance program on the self-esteem of newly arrived children from the Chinese Mainland to Hong Kong. A sample of 31 subjects (19 male, 12 female) from a primary school was selected for participation in this study. Among the 31 subjects, 16 joined the programme which was designed and implemented according to the *Enhancing Adolescents' Self-Esteem: Facilitator's Manual* for ten 90 minutes sessions over a 7-week period. The other 15 newly arrived children acted as the comparison group. The self-esteem of the participants was measured by the Self-Description Questionnaire - 1 (SDQ-1) (Marsh et al., 1983) and follow-up interviews were conducted. Results showed that the subjects in the experimental group had significantly higher peer relationship self-esteem than subjects who received no treatment.

Descriptors: immigrant children, self-esteem enhancement, group guidance

Immigrant children are a concern not only for teachers but also for guidance personnel in schools. In Hong Kong, newly arrived children are defined as children who have come to Hong Kong from the Chinese Mainland for less than two years. The Basic Law of Hong Kong legitimated that, the children from the People's Republic of China (PRC), whose parents are permanent Hong Kong residents can have rights of abode in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. According to the survey from the Education Department (2000), during the period from October 1998 to September 1999, a total of 17,518 newly arrived children were reported to have been admitted to primary education. Comparing with the figure of 5, 177 in 1988 the number of the PRC pupils showed an increase of 238.4%. The figures shown above underscored that the pervasion of newly arrived children constitutes a heavy load to Hong Kong primary education. Newly arrived children may be over-aged, repeating or degraded when they are admitted to Hong Kong schools. They may face lots of school adjustment problems which include the language barriers, differences in social standards, values, and manners between local children and newcomers (Chan et al., 1999; Cox, 1990; Furman & Burmester, 1982; Kim & Kunst, 1988; Oberg, 1960). There are a number of studies aiming at assessing the adjustment of newly arrived children. Chan, Yip & Yuen (1996) conducted a survey study to investigate the adaptation and needs of newly arrived children. They found that 70.8% of the newly arrived children did not have obvious difficulty in mastering Cantonese which is the local dialect in Hong Kong. However, they reported that English learning was the main factor affecting newly arrived children's adjustment. Studying factors affecting the success of newly arrived children in Hong Kong schools, Li (1996) found that the language barrier and poor recognition of traditional Chinese characters led to poor communication or participation in the classroom. Other problems reported included academic failure, social isolation, rejection by school authorities, and the mismatch between age and learning level. Chan et al. (1999) in a survey of 174 principals and teachers reported that the main problem of newly arrived primary school children was emotional adjustment including sense of inferiority and feeling of helplessness. Strengthening school-based counselling services for newly arrived children was considered a priority in accommodating the newcomers and preventing adjustment problems.

Research has shown that self-esteem is among the most important factors in children's social-cognitive development (e.g. Donegan & Rust, 1998; Rosenberg, 1979). In particular, social relation is one of the major factor constituting children's self-esteem (Shavelson et. al., 1976). In the acculturation process, changes in social relation are likely to be experienced by newly arrived children. In a new social environment, newly arrived children may be hesitant to approach others, and be withdrawn and lonely (e.g. Tsoi et al., 1999). Children who have poor communication skills tend to be less liked by their peers. A lack of acceptance by peers may lower newly arrived children's self-esteem (e.g. Gottman, Gonso & Rasmussen, 1975). Immigrant children's self-esteem might be lowered by discrimination or prejudice and was often encountered when the peer group to which the child belonged was negatively perceived or devalued by society (e.g. Kopala et al.,1994).

According to a study in Hong Kong by Leung & Chiu (1996), most of the newly arrived children chose to get each other's company rather than that of local children. This was closely related to the perception of social identity. Children who identified themselves as immigrants were intended to get along with their counterparts regardless of how long the period of time they had arrived at Hong Kong. The study also indicated that social identity was one of the crucial factors affecting the self-esteem of newly arrived children. In other words, children's self-esteem might be enhanced through good relationship with local children or identification of themselves as Hong Kong people. However, no local study concerning the enhancement of self-esteem of immigrant children from the Chinese Mainland is yet available in the literature.

Research showed that group guidance programmes had positive effects on immigrant children's adjustment. For instance, Liu & Baker (1993) showed that the *Friendship Training Program* helped the immigrant children communicate with their peers better and become more involved in their school activities. Havelka (1978) reported that peer helpers, students from the host country assigned as buddies to the new immigrants, helped immigrant children feel less isolated. Self-esteem enhancement is considered as one of the most important goals of school guidance and support services (Borba, 1994; Lam, 1995; Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997; Pope et al., 1988; Thompson & Rudolph, 1997). To

improve Hawaiian children's self-esteem within the US education system, Omizo et al. (1998) designed a self-esteem enhancement programme using guided affective and cognitive imagery approach. The result showed that children who participated in the program felt better about themselves and had significantly higher scores on the academic self-esteem sub-score compared with those who did not participate.

In Hong Kong, from 1995 onwards, the government has organized adjustment classes for newly arrived children. The 60-hour intensive introductory program included understanding the Hong Kong society and school environment, Chinese and English remedial teaching as well as homework guidance. However, from Leung & Chiu's study (1996), over 55% of the newly arrived children did not attend such classes. The main reason was that they did not know such service was being provided to the newly arrived in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it was not possible for immigrant children to cope with all the problems in a few weeks' time. In addition, Chan, Ip & Yuen (1996) reported that these induction programmes tended to focus on coping with the academic demand in schools and not on enhancing the newcomers' psychosocial adjustment. In a recent review on the effectiveness of support services for newly arrived children, the reviewers recommended 'to input new elements, such as life skills and self-esteem training' into the programmes (Hong Kong Institute of Education, 1999).

To help newly arrived children in psychosocial aspects other than academic achievement, the authors and the student guidance teacher set up a school-based group guidance programme in a primary school which had admitted a number of newly arrived children. The present study aimed to investigate the effects of a group guidance programme on the self-esteem of newly arrival children in a primary school.

## **Method**

### *Subjects*

At the beginning of 1997-1998 academic year, the authors of the present study planned to offer a school-based self-esteem enhancement program for the newly arrived children and applied for a grant

from the Hong Kong Government Education Department. Owing to government regulation, the programme could only serve those newly arrived children admitted from 1 April to 31 October 1997. According to the school record, there were 31 newly arrived children admitted during the said period. They were invited to join the programme and all of them showed interest to do so. Finally only 16 of them participated in the programme because the rest 15 had already joined other activities at a community centre. They did not have the time to join the programme during the said period. For the present study, those children who joined the programme were treated as the experimental group and the rest were placed to be the comparison group. The children were of Grade 3 to Grade 4 levels and their ages ranged from 9 to 13. There were 9 boys and 7 girls involved in the experimental group. Another 10 boys and 5 girls were involved in the comparison group.

#### *Instrument and Procedure*

In this study, the Chinese version of the Self-Description Questionnaire – 1 (SDQ1) was adopted to measure the self-esteem of the newly arrived children in the experimental and comparison groups. They were asked to complete the same set of questionnaire in a group before and after the school-based program. They were briefed on the purpose of the questionnaire in both Cantonese and Putonghua. Basing on Shavelson's model (Shavelson et. al., 1976), Marsh et al. (1983) devised the SDQ-1 to measure the self-esteem of children. The questionnaire consisted of 76 items. Each subject had to respond to every item, and the answers for each question were along a 5-point scale (1=false; 2=mostly false; 3=sometimes false/sometimes true; 4=mostly true and 5=true). Other than the Total Self score, each subject was given the General Self score, the Non-academic Self score, the Academic Self score, and seven other sub-scale scores. The seven sub-scales were classified under the Non-academic (Physical Abilities, Physical Appearance, Peer Relations, Parent Relations) and Academic (Reading, Mathematics, General School) domains

With regard to internal consistency, Marsh et al. (1983) reported Cronbach  $\alpha$  values for the seven sub-scales of the SDQ-1 ranging from .80 to .92. Six months sub-scale test-retest coefficients

had ranged from .27 to .74 with most in the .50 - .70 range. Several factor analyses had confirmed the presence of seven factors within the scale with all items loading on their expected factor. (Marsh et al., 1983). In addition, the Marsh/Shavelson model had been used in a variety of cultural backgrounds and generally very high within-construct validity had been obtained. For instance, Watkins & Regmi (1992) found strong evidence of cross-cultural validity of both SDQ-1 and the conceptual model proposed by Shavelson. Studies in Hong Kong had substantiated the validity and reliability of Chinese versions of the SDQ-1 for Chinese students( Chung & Watkins, 1992). In the present study, the Cronbach alphas of the pre-test and post-test sub-scale measures were found to be within a satisfactory range of .7122 to .9324.

In order to obtain qualitative information about the effects of the programme, the students who participated in the programme were also interviewed to explore their perceptions about the programme. Interviews were conducted after the program had ended. All the students in the experimental group were invited to the group interview. With a set of semi-structured questions, the subjects asked to speak freely without turn taking. The children's responses were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

### *Treatment*

The experimental group met for 90 minutes twice a week, for a total of 10 sessions over a 7-week period. Because the meeting of the group took place after the regular class periods, subjects in the experimental and comparison groups continued with their usual school activities. The first author, who was a senior teacher in the school, collaborated with the student guidance teacher to conduct the sessions. The programme intended to help the participants learn about themselves, make friends with others, appreciate one's strengths, set goals and involve in school activities. The programme activities were adapted for the specific purpose of the present study from the *Enhancing adolescents' self-esteem: facilitator's manual* (Yiu et al., 1996). The programme builds upon the five sequential components of healthy self-esteem including security, uniqueness, belonging, mission and competence (Borba, 1989).

The group guidance programme is outlined below.

*Session 1. Making friends*

- Objective: To encourage students know and trust each other; make them feel secure and have a sense of belonging.
- Activities: 1. Trust-building games  
2. Drawing to express one's expectations towards the group.

*Session 2. Understanding self-esteem*

- Objective: To help students know about the factors affecting their self-esteem.
- Activities: 1. Sentence completion  
2. Case study

*Session 3. Having achievements*

- Objective: To assist students to observe and confirm their achievements, and to guide them face failures positively.
- Activities: 1. Sharing about one's achievement in the past three years.  
2. Writing a letter to congratulate others' achievements.

*Session 4. Holding tomorrow in my hands*

- Objective: To assist students develop the skills of "self-talk" and "affirmation"
- Activities: 1. Checklist of positive and negative self-talk  
2. Change some of the negative beliefs into positive beliefs

*Session 5. Being the real me*

- Objective: To encourage students to tell how they camouflage their personality and hide their inner feelings, to find out the reasons for doing so and to encourage them to reveal their real self.



- Activities: 1. Role play to feel one's own feelings  
2. Record one's hidden feeling and analyze what one have to do in similar events.

*Session 6. Who can understand me?*

- Objective: To let students understand the importance of building up good relationship with others, and its prerequisite.
- Activities: 1. Sharing on how good friends support and help oneself  
2. Think of ways one can be another person's good friend.

*Session 7 Stick to the destination*

- Objective: To help students set reasonable goals, and work out the procedure of goal setting.
- Activities: 1. Setting goals that are achievable, clear and measurable  
2. Write down the specific action plan and reward.

*Session 8. On the road to success*

- Objective: To let students share their experience on goal setting and processing, and try to perceive the gratification when the goal is attained.
- Activities: 1. Draw a picture of oneself in a successful situation.  
2. Being a coach for one's partner and reward oneself for one's effort.

*Session 9. Active involvement*

- Objective: Through practicing, students can understand the advantages of their active involvement in social service to the community and themselves.
- Activity: Students participated in the preparation of a games day for the other students

*Session 10. I can be the great*

- Objective: To make sure the students can understand the meaning of self-esteem, establish the ways to enhance self-esteem and strengthen the student's mind in enhancing their own self and others positively.
- Activities: 1. Reviewing and sharing what one has learnt in the previous sessions.

## 2. Filling in a course evaluation form.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis consisted of comparing the mean scores of subjects in the experimental group with mean scores of those in the comparison group in measures of self-esteem. We used the ANCOVAs procedures to test whether significant differences existed between the comparison and treatment groups on the post-treatment self-esteem measures. The pre-treatment scores in self-esteem measures were used as the covariates. A probability level of  $p < .01$  was used to determine significance because of the number of ANCOVAs that were computed for this research.

### **Results And Discussion**

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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### *Mean Scores in Pre-Test Self-Esteem Measures*

Table 1 shows the mean scores in the SDQ-1 sub-scales of newly arrived children. It should be noted that the possible score on each specific sub-scale ranges from 8 to 40. Thus, mean scores above the mid-point value of 24 indicates a higher self-esteem while scores below the same value indicates a lower self-esteem. The mean self-esteem scores of the newly arrived children in the present study on most domains were relatively high, ranging from 22.33 to 34.33. The highest mean scores were found on the Parent Relations Self of the experimental group (33.63) and the Mathematics Self of the comparison group (34.33). The lowest mean score (22.33) was found on the Physical Appearance Self of the comparison group. Comparing the mean scores in the pre-test self-esteem measures, table 1 shows that the newly arrived children in the experimental group had a significantly higher Physical

Appearance Self sub-scale score than children in the comparison group ( $t=2.76$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). There were no significant differences between the two groups on scores for Physical Ability, Peer Relations, Parent Relations, Reading, Mathematics, and General Self sub-scales as well as for Total Non-Academic Self, Total Academic Self and Total Self.

#### *Mean Scores in Post-Test Self-Esteem Measures*

In order to investigate the effects of the treatment to the experimental group children, 11 ANCOVAs were conducted to compare the post-test mean scores of the post-test self-esteem measures using the pre-test measures as covariates. The probability level was set at  $p<0.01$  as many ANCOVAs were being performed. The results shown in table 1 indicate that subjects who participated in the programme to build self-esteem exhibited significantly higher scores in post-test Peer Relationship, Total Non-academic Self, Total Academic Self and Total Self self-esteem measures than children who received no treatment. There was no significant difference in the mean scores in the post-test Physical Ability, Physical Appearance, Parent Relationship, Reading, Mathematics, General School, General Self self-esteem measures between subjects in the experimental and comparison groups.

#### *Children's Perception of the Programme*

In the group interview, the children revealed that the programme was useful to them. They felt great when they participated in the activities. One of the children told the first author that his parents appreciated very much that the school could offer such program to newcomers so that he could adapt to school life quickly. Most of the children reported that after joining the programme, they could make friends with others easily, not just their counterparts but also classmates from Hong Kong. All of them thought that it was an important part to their school life. Besides, some of the children said that the programme could help them in academic performance. When asking how it helped, the children responded as follows: "I would not hesitate to ask the teacher when problems arise"(Student A); "I would ask the classmates for help on schoolwork."(Student B); "I would get actively involved in

discussion with others about schoolwork”(Student C); “Co-operate with others, never escaping from responsibility”(Student D). After joining the programme, most of the children said they had some positive changes in self-concept, attitudes and behaviors. Children reported as follows: “I got more confidence in doing things and communicating with others”(Student C); “I’ll never fear to speak up even though my speech carries an accent”(Student E); “ I’ll try my very best to overcome the problem in learning English and work hard to seek improvement”(Student F).

When asking them what they learnt from the programme, they all emphasized the importance of social skills which helped them get along better with classmates. Having known their strengths and weaknesses, they could make adjustments on their future lives. As a whole, all the children thought that the programme activities were interesting, such as watching cartoons, playing puzzles, and doing role-plays. Some of them felt the worksheet exercises were too much. Writing made them feel bored for they were tired after a long school day. Nevertheless, all children thought that the programme was valuable and they would join if it would be offered again.

## **Conclusion**

The present study was primarily designed to examine the effects of a group guidance programme on the self-esteem of newly arrived children. The results provide support for the premise that a 7-week programme designed to build self-esteem positively affects the self-esteem of newly arrived children, in particular the Peer Relations Self. The findings of the study were consistent with the findings of other researchers on self-esteem enhancement group programmes (e.g. Omizo & Cubberly, 1984; Omizo et al., 1998; Weaver & Matthews, 1993). The findings from the group interview indicated that the program helped the newly arrived children to get along better with classmates. The findings seemed to support the belief that a healthy social life was deemed to be highly influential to children’s self-esteem in that friends were always being regarded as their most common source of delectation (Bibby & Posterski, 1985). In relation to the studies of newly arrived children from Chinese Mainland to Hong Kong, findings of the present study were consistent with those of Chan, Yip & Yuen

(1996) that among various school activities, the “peer guidance program” was considered most useful to the adaptation of newly arrived children. Another study conducted by Leung & Chiu (1996) also unveiled the fact that peer relations of the newly arrived children with their local peers highly correlated with their self-esteem. In addition, a good relation with their local peers would help to improve the learning self-efficacy of the immigrant children. Keat (1990) also suggested that improved peer relations was a foundation for adjustment in schools. Practically, teachers and student guidance teachers could consider lending more support to newly arrived children through cooperative group work and group guidance program.

There were limitations for the present study. For instance, all the participants came from the same school. Children in the experimental group were mainly from two classes. Any positive results gained might not be the direct effect of the programme itself. The children’s self-esteem could be affected by other variables, such as the Hawthorne effect, a humane class teacher or an effective pedagogy employed by a subject teacher. Also, the sample was entirely composed of newly arrived children. The question arises as to whether a mixed group of local children and newly arrived children would have responded in the same way. Methodologically, the findings of the present study have implications for further studies on group guidance programme. An interesting direction for further research would be to follow up on the long-term effects of the group guidance program. The effects of group guidance on other dependent measures such as social skills, attitudes towards school and academic performance could be examined as well.

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Table 1. Results of the t-tests for Pretest and Posttest Measures for the Experimental Group and ANCOVAs for the Posttest Measures between the Experimental and Comparison Groups using Pretest measures as covariates

SDQ subscale	Experimental Group		Comparison Group		ANCOVA F-value
	t-test				
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	
	M	M	M	M	
	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	
Total Self	28.89 (5.24)	31.96 (3.80)	28.46 (4.47)	27.50 (5.14)	17.41***
Total Nonacademic Self	29.25 (6.06)	32.09** (4.14)	26.98 (5.28)	26.13 (5.64)	14.94***
Total Academic Self	28.52 (5.70)	31.83*** (4.42)	29.93 (4.45)	28.87 (4.45)	11.39**
Physical Ability	26.69 (7.63)	30.13* (5.95)	26.20 (6.42)	26.87 (5.58)	3.65
Physical Appearance	29.19 (7.60)	30.69 (5.29)	22.33 (6.92)	21.93 (7.77)	5.71*
Peer Relationship	27.50 (7.72)	32.31*** (6.06)	26.93 (6.85)	25.20 (7.80)	18.09***
Parent Relationship	33.63 (7.50)	35.25 (5.53)	32.47 (6.20)	30.53 (5.96)	6.82*
Reading	26.44 (6.66)	30.50* (5.70)	27.93 (4.68)	27.60 (6.34)	4.90*
Mathematics	31.88 (6.98)	35.06* (5.40)	34.33 (5.61)	32.27 (5.80)	5.99*
General School	27.25 (7.26)	29.94* (5.74)	27.53 (5.80)	26.73 (6.04)	6.30*
General Self	28.38 (6.31)	32.31* (4.61)	27.27 (6.31)	27.20 (6.28)	7.22*

Note. Total cases, N=31; Experimental Group, N=16; Comparison Group, N=15

ANCOVAs df=(1,28).

Probabilities are based on a one-tailed test

\* p< .05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\*p< .001.

