

The Children's Platform: A Parenting Course for Developing and Maintaining Children's Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence – Parental Perceptions of Its Use

Barnas Plattform: Et foreldrekurs for å utvikle og opprettholde barns selvfølelse og selvtillit – foreldres oppfatninger av bruken av kurset

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Sammendrag

Denne studien utforsker foreldrenes oppfatninger av fordeler med Barnas Plattform, et foreldrekurs om barns selvtillit og selvfølelse. Kurset og verktøyene setter søkelys på å fremme barns generelle sosioemosjonelle utvikling gjennom positive barn-foreldre-interaksjoner. Artikkelen beskriver tilbakemeldinger fra 200 foreldre, samlet inn seks måneder etter at de fullførte kurset, angående deres bruk av verktøyene i samhandling med barna. Funnene tyder på at verktøyene støtter et fokus på positive interaksjonsopplevelser og foreldrebevissthet. Bruken av verktøyene ser ut til å bidra til å utvikle og opprettholde positive selvbilder hos barn, som kan spille en avgjørende rolle i barns håndtering av psykiske utfordringer.

Nøkkelord: foreldrekurs, Barnas Plattform, selvtillit, selvfølelse, psykisk helse

Abstract

This post-program follow-up study explores the experiences in and perceived benefits of the parenting tools of the Children's Platform course; a parenting course. The course and the tools provided in the course focus on promoting children's socioemotional development through positive child-parent interactions. The course has been delivered in Norway, targeting parents of children aged 3-12 years.

The parents expressed positive experiences with the use of the parenting tools in their interactions in terms of interactions and the children's self-confidence. The findings suggest that the tools of the Children's Platform course are easy to use and have provided the parents with specific approaches in their interactions with their children to develop and maintain their self-esteem.

Keywords: parental course, The Children's Platform, self-esteem, self-confidence, mental health

Introduction

The Norwegian National Institute of Public Health (2017) stated that nearly 20% of children and adolescents have significant mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, which lead to impaired functioning, and that early intervention programs for this group would be beneficial. Under the premise that good parenting skills are essential for promoting good mental health for children and adolescents, the Norwegian government proposed a strategy to highlight the importance of a safe upbringing in helping promote good, strong mental health for children and adolescents. In response to this proposal, all counties in Norway have begun to offer parenting classes to promote good parenting skills (Ministry of Health and Care Services, 2017). In response to this mandate from the Norwegian government, The Children's Platform, which had been developed in 2007 as a parenting intervention oriented to the development of children's self-esteem, was implemented throughout all counties in Norway from 2015 (https://www.barnasplattform.no/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Barnas_plattform-Vitenskapelig-grunnlag.pdf). This study reports on the results of the experiences of the implementation of the Children's Platform, nationally focusing on the parent-attendees' reports of their experiences in the use of the tools learned in The Children's Platform course collected six months after

their attendance in the course. The course was developed and implemented to enhance parenting skills in parent-child interactions, focusing on building self-esteem and self-confidence in children by providing parents with tools to employ in their relationships with their children. This study was therefore based on the interest in finding out the parent-attendees' perceptions of the use of the tools in enhancing the children's self-esteem and self-confidence following their attendance at the Program. The aim was to assess in what ways the parents attending the program practiced the intervention in their everyday lives and what their views were on the effects of the use of the intervention. The findings from this national study add further to the understanding gained in a study focusing on the experiences of the Children's Platform in one municipality in 2021 (Karlsson, 2022) as well as to the findings reported in seven research studies on the experiences of the Children's Platform (Johansen, 2017, 2018; Karlsson, 2022; Semundseth 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). The major motivation for the development and implementation of the Children's Platform as a parenting program was to focus on the development of children's self-esteem, as there is a paucity of intervention programs aimed explicitly at developing or improving children's self-esteem. There are several evidence-based parenting programs which have a general orientation

towards children's socio-emotional development. Two programs among them, namely the Triple P-Positive Program (Sanders, 1999) and the Incredible Years Program (Webster-Stratton, 2000), emphasize the socioemotional development in their designs with a specific reference to the development of self-esteem. However, these programs have all-encompassing approaches to socio-emotional development rather than targeting self-esteem specifically. This study addressed a recommendation that the development of a positive self-concept should be supported by parenting intervention programs (Benninger & Savahl, 2016).

Background

In describing the status, controversies, and advances in parenting programs, Singstad et al. (2020) state that the practice of parenting and child-rearing has become increasingly professionalized based on new knowledge in psychology and pedagogy. The National Center for Parents, Family, and Community Engagement (2015) published a compendium of evidence-based parenting interventions which are defined as "interventions that have a central focus on parenting, offering a structured set of activities that engage parents directly in ways that will influence parenting behaviors such as nurturing, discipline, teaching, monitoring, and management" (p. 2). This report identified 20 evidence-based early childhood parenting interventions developed and used in the US. Another compilation by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) includes 25 evidence-based family skills training programs which target either the general/universal outcomes in children's socioemotional and behavioral development or specific behavioral/

conduct orientations for prevention and/or change. Of these evidence-based programs, there are programs such as Triple P-Positive Parenting Program (Sanders, 1999) and the Incredible Years Program (Wester-Stratton, 2000) which are universally oriented towards children's development, while many are targeted programs for age-specific developmental issues, focusing on the prevention or reduction of problem behaviors/ conducts or substance abuse or specific high-risk groups. These reports provide the evidence in the listed parenting interventions of critical impacts individually or in combinations on social-emotional development, approaches to learning, cognitive development, language and literacy, parent-child interactions/relationships, and preventing problematic conducts or life-style behaviors (National Center for Parents, Family, and Community Engagement, 2015 and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). In addition, parent-child interaction and communication are considered to be one of the critical components of parenting, thus emphasizing how parents' interactive behaviors which take consideration of children's needs influence their development and psychological well-being. The idea is that knowledge about children's development and needs in combination with awareness of how one's behavior affects the interaction leads to change in the elements of the parents' behavior that may not be optimal for the child's development (Singstad et al., 2020).

Parenting programs are based on a wide range of theoretical frameworks with behavioral, sociopsychological, cognitive, and systems perspectives. Socio-emotional development in children is one of the critical

areas of development in children impacted by parenting through interactions and communication, having long-term consequences in children's socioemotional status and competencies in later periods (Shaw, 2006). Self-esteem as a critical socio emotional component of the self is a central construct of the self-concept, which refers to a general representation of the self in terms of affective, behavioral, cognitive, and evaluative aspects. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, and an individual's approval of himself or herself is an evaluative aspect of the self-concept. The literature indicates that self-esteem, especially in childhood, has significant consequences for life outcomes, such as the quality of social relationships, social achievement in adulthood (Magnusson & Nermo, 2018), subjective well-being and psychological well-being especially in relation to depression and feelings of alienation (Orth, Robins et al., 2014). Chida & Steptoe (2008) reported that positive emotions and self-esteem result in a constellation of positive outcomes, such as high resilience, increased executive functioning capacities, greater openness and creativity and satisfying social interactions and relationships. Enhanced self-esteem has been found to be associated with reductions in negative psychological outcomes (Lee et al., 2014). This body of work suggests that the formation of positive self-esteem in children plays a vital role in sustaining mental well-being. Studies have indicated that social support enhances mental health by fostering an individual's self-concept (Kim & Nesselroade, 2003). Social support has been found to promote self-esteem by conveying messages of being cared for, loved, and valued by others and by fostering feelings of belonging (Turner

et al., 2014). Social support from parents and peers is positively associated with children's self-esteem. Levy and colleagues (2018) found that the frequency of social support from parents, teachers, and peers was positively associated with self-concepts and self-esteem in children and adolescents. As an aspect of parenting behaviors and attitudes, the provision of parental support seems to affect self-esteem in children. Brummelman and colleagues (2015) found that the quality of parenting, especially child-reported parental warmth, was associated with children's self-esteem in a longitudinal study of children aged 7 to 12 years. The development of self-esteem in children is a critical parenting issue. Self-esteem is associated with children's well-being, including their mental health and achievements in adulthood.

The Children's Platform – Its Theoretical Orientations and Design

The Children's Platform course is a two-hour parenting course specifically oriented to develop, maintain, and repair children's self-esteem and self-confidence. The program targets parents of children aged 3-12 years old, focusing on strengthening self-esteem and self-confidence in children through interaction with their parents. Emphasis is put on how to promote mental health, happiness, and coping among children and parents, as well as on the conditions necessary to provide security and create the best possible development for children. The course focuses on promoting everyday skills and strengthening the socio emotional competence of both children and parents through the adoption of strategies in parent-child interactions. Although the course is open to any caregivers of

children, the participants in the course have mostly been parents. In addition to biological parents, there were also foster parents who took the course. The course was initially developed and implemented in 2007 and has been available in all counties in Norway since 2015, with over 100 certified course leaders conducting the course. Some aspects of the experiences of the Children's Platform implemented in Norway have been reported in seven studies as summarized in the Children's Platform – A Parenting Intervention website (Johansen, 2017, 2018; Karlsson, 2022; Semundseth, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018).

A. The Theoretical Orientations

The course was developed adopting the theoretical orientations of Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) and Mead's symbolic interactionism (1934). These theoretical frameworks are the major foundations in the substantive area of family studies throughout the decades, although there have been considerable variations in their interpretations and applications in empirical studies. Bowlby's attachment theory has been applied in the study of attachment security and parenting in relation to self-esteem, while symbolic interactionism following through the lineage of Mead (1934) has branched out to the study of family in terms of role-relations, child-parent interactions, parenting, and the development of self. The theory of symbolic interactionism emphasizes that the quality of parent-child interaction has an important influence on the early development of self-esteem. In the early stages of life, parents are the critical significant others in a child's life. The child's emotional life and self-understanding are created and developed through relationships

with significant others (Mead, 1934; Løvelie Schibbye & Løvelie, 2017).

B. The tools

The major component of the program is the use of the four essential tools to help parents to develop self-esteem and self-confidence in their children. The tools specify the ways parents can adopt specific interactive patterns and habits with their children in their ordinary life situations to enhance self-esteem. The four essential Tools were developed in consultation with psychologists, teachers, health professionals, and child welfare professionals. The developing process consisted of a series of discussions involving the staff members of the organization and 15 consultants. The tools were developed guided by the theoretical orientations of attachment theory and symbolic interactionism.

The starting point for developing the tools guided by these theoretical orientations was that they should be (a) easy to use, (b) take a short time to implement, and (c) give effective and consistent results. The tools were designed to be valuable both for "repairing" and preventing stressful challenges among children (Children's Platform, 2015). The tools consists of four specific ways of carrying out parent-child interactions in everyday life.

1. Tool One (Dinner Talk): Every day when the family sits down for dinner, the parents would ask the question: "*What is the best thing you experienced today?*". Different strategies that ensure children's involvement, depending on whether there are one or two adults present at the dinner table, were illustrated. The

parents were trained to handle, if necessary, children's lack of interest in participating in the tool.

2. Tool Two (Touch Massage): Depending on the child's age, parents choose between two types of massage. The touch massage is carried out with the same background music and for a given length of time. The parents give the child a three-minute massage while the child is sitting or lying.
3. Tool Three (Dialogue): The parents may use this tool once a week or when appropriate: *"Today, I'd like to say something I appreciate about you. And maybe afterwards, you'd like to say something you like about me?"*. The child must experience that what the parent emphasizes about the child is true. Adults convey the children's good qualities, and the child is trained to convey what he/she thinks is good in the parent.
4. Tool Four (Good Words): This tool emphasizes positive things to say about a child. For younger children, there are mainly sentences concerning good self-esteem, such as: "I am a valuable child". The sentence is repeated three times, emphasizing different words in the sentence, for a total duration of six minutes. For older children, there are sentences about having good self-esteem and self-confidence. This session lasts for ten minutes.

For tools 2 and 4, the parents were provided with an App that comes in two age-specific versions (one for 2–6 years and one for 7–12-years). The course addresses explicitly skills for parents in relating with their children by using the tools shown in Table 1. Parents' use of the set of these tools

Table 1. Details of The Children's Platform tools

Tools	Specifics
1. Dinner talk based on the following question: "What is the best thing you experienced today?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue initiated by parents • Focus on good things that happen in the child's everyday life, which helps to develop an appropriate and positive focus • Emphasis on family members wishing each other well
2. Touch massage for three minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch massage initiated by parents • Transformation of negative feelings into positive feelings for both children and parents • Promotion of closeness between children and parents • Routine for sleep promotion • Touch massage is recorded in the custom-made app for the Children's Platform
3. Dialogue based on the following: "Today, I'd like to say something I appreciate about you. And maybe afterwards, you'd like to say something you like about me?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue initiated by parents • Discovery and communication of character strengths • Strengthening of self-esteem • Development of social skills
4. Appropriate and positive thought patterns and self-talk through a mental training method (Good Words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedtime use of the custom-made app that helps to increase resource building thoughts and self-talk ("the good words") • Strengthening of self-esteem and self-confidence

in their interactions with their children takes approximately 10 minutes per day. The course program emphasizes the critical use of all four tools by parents.

C. The Program design and implementation

The course included a general introduction to the development of self-esteem and self-confidence in children, and parent-child interactions in everyday life, followed by the explanations and demonstrations in the use of the tools in everyday parent-child interactions. Within the three months of completing the course, parents received five emails containing videos that reminded them to use the tools and provided new tips and parental reflections. The emails with videos encouraged parents to maintain the use of the Tools as well as to share new tips for interaction with their children.

The course is delivered by course leaders who had their background and experience as school/kindergarten teachers or school nurses and were trained to run the program. The course leaders were certified by the Children's Platform. Certification follows four days of intensive training, including lectures on the theoretical background and content of the program, demonstrations of how to use the Tools, and teaching practice.

Study Design – Methods

The researchers were contacted by the Center for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Eastern and Southern Norway (RBUP), for an evaluation study after the implementation of the program nationally. The Children's Platform asked the Norwegian organization of Mental Health (www.mentalhelse.no) if they could assist. They recommended us to ask the Center

of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the University of Southeastern Norway. The study was a post-program evaluation using a semi-structured survey design with two series of data collection. The data were collected via telephone interviews in May 2017 for Series #1 and in April 2018 for Series #2.

The survey included these open-ended questions:

1. To what extent has the course been useful?
2. Have you used one or more of the tools in your everyday life?
3. Which of the tools do you use frequently and regularly?
4. Are you prepared to continue using the tools in your daily life?
5. Have you seen any positive changes in your child and to what extent were these changes caused using the tools?
6. Do you have a comment or experience you would like to share?

The questions above were developed in collaboration with the Center for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Eastern and Southern Norway (RBUP). The questions required both qualitative and quantitative answers from the parents. The questions in the survey were oriented to obtaining the parents' perceptions and thoughts associated with the use of the Tools and the parents' perceptions regarding the changes in their children using the Tools. Since the course was oriented to the enhancement of self-esteem in children through the parenting program, the question #5 delving into the parental perceptions of changes in their children was oriented to the parental

perceptions regarding the children's self-esteem. The evaluation questionnaire was developed after the completion of the course. The questionnaire did not include any demographic data.

A. Participants

The study participants were parents who attended The Children's Platform course from November 2016 to January 2017 (telephone interviews conducted in May 2017 for Series #1) and from May to October 2017 (telephone interviews conducted in April 2018 for Series #2). There were 200 participants (100 in each of the two series). The 100 participants for each series were recruited among all the course participants during the two study periods. We made a roster of potential participants in the study, drawing from the list of all registrants in the program from November 2016 to January 2017 for Series #1 and from May 2017 to October 2017 for Series #2, using random number generation. We made telephone calls to those in the roster until we reached 100 respondents agreeing to participate in the study in each of the two series. In Series #1, 371 parents were called, 254 of whom did not answer their phone, while 17 parents did not want to participate. In Series #2, 361 parents were called, 253 of whom did not answer their phone, and eight parents declined to participate. Regarding parents who did not answer the phone, there was no way of knowing the reasons for not answering telephone calls, as they did not anticipate follow-up calls. There is no way of determining the representativeness of the sample, as it was not possible to determine the reasons for the parents not answering the telephone calls. In addition, as we did not collect any demographic or personal

data on the participants of the course, it was not possible to compare those consenting to participate in the study and those refusing or not responding to the telephone calls.

The participants were mothers or fathers from various counties in Norway. The children of the participants in the interviews were both boys and girls. For Series #1, the participants' children included 74 boys and 84 girls between 3 and 12 years old, and for Series #2, they included 76 boys and 72 girls between 3 and 12 years old. The children's age in series, #1 were approximately 7 years old. The children's age in series, #2 were approximately 8 years old. Many of the participants had more than one child.

B. Data Collection Procedures

The participants of both the Series #1 and Series #2 were interviewed via telephone six months after they attended the course, i.e., in May 2017 for the Series #1 participants and in April 2018 for the Series #2 participants. There was one telephone interview for each participant in the two samples in the series, and the average length of the interviews was nine minutes. The telephone interviews were carried out by a research assistant who was a bachelor student at Kristiania University College (Kristiania University College).

C. Data Analysis

The participants' responses to the questions in the telephone interviews were recorded verbatim by the interviewer and were compiled into a qualitative written format for analysis.

A thematic approach was used to analyze the empirical data (Braun & Clarke,

2006). As a first step, the data were thematically coded based on the participants' interview responses for each of the interview questions into either the discrete type or the descriptive type. Those coded into the discrete type were either in the yes/no category or a graded category. The participants' responses coded into the discrete type were then analyzed quantitatively applying descriptive statistics. Those coded into the descriptive type were examined by the researchers to consolidate them into thematic categories as the second step as specified by Braun and Clarke (2006). The trustworthiness and the rigor in the application of this research method is assured by the involvement of the research team as a group in every phase of data collection and data analysis.

D. Ethical Considerations

All participants consented to answer the evaluation questions at the beginning of the telephone interviews. The participants were informed about the key ethical issues of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the freedom to withdraw without consequences. All information regarding personal identity was removed from the data set to assure participants' anonymity and the protection of their privacy. Since the study posed no informational or physical harm to participants and participants were free to withdraw from the study or refuse to answer questions, it was determined that this process of obtaining the informed consent was sufficient to meet the ethical guidelines and that it met the general principles for an exemption for an institutional review process.

Findings

A. Quantitative Findings

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 show the responses to the quantitatively oriented questions. Most participants stated that they had used one or more of the tools in their everyday lives after taking the course and that they were planning to continue using the tools. Only 1% of the parents stated that they did not find the course useful at all six months after taking it. The most popular tool among the

Table 2. Parents' use of the tools and their plans to continue using the tools

Question Items	Yes	No	Total N =
Use of one or more tools in everyday life (Item #2)	190 (95.0%)	10 (5.0%)	200
Plan for continued use of the tools in everyday life (Item #4)	191 (95.5%)	9 (4.5%)	200

Table 3. Frequent and regular use of the specific tools in daily life

Use of the specific tools (Item #3)	Number (%)	Total N =
Tool 1	138 (69.0)	200
Tool 2	95 (47.5)	200
Tool 3	52 (26.0)	200
Tool 4	98 (49.0)	200

Table 4. Degree of usefulness of the course

Degree of usefulness (Item #1)	Number (%)
Very useful	50 (25.0)
Useful	98 (49.0)
Moderately useful	40 (20.0)
Slightly useful	10 (5.0)
Not at all useful	2 (1.0)
Total N =	200 (100)

Table 5. Level of positive changes seen in the child with the use of the tools

Level of change in the child noted (Item #5)	Number (%)
Much improvement	12 (6.0)
Some improvement	112 (56.0)
Used the tools for preventive purposes	42 (21.0)
No change	14 (7.0)
Used the tools only for a short period of time or did not use them	15 (7.5)
Total N =	200 (100)

parents (69%) was the dinner talk question: “What is the best thing you experienced today?”. The least popular tool (26%) was the dialogue tool aimed at discovering character strengths in both children and parents. The responses to the interview question #5 are shown in Table 5 distributed into five categories of much improvement, some improvement, used the tools as a preventive measure, no change, and used the tools only a short time or not used them. The category of “used the tools as a preventive measure” refers to the position that the parents used the tools in anticipation of a possibility of problems in terms of self-esteem in their children although they believed that their children did not have any problems with it. Approximately two-thirds of the participants (62%) stated that they had seen positive changes in their children in terms of self-esteem using the tools. In addition, 21% of the participants stated that they had not seen any changes in their children but that their children did not have any challenges in the beginning, suggesting that these parents attended the course with the intention of maintaining their children’s already well-developed self-images.

B. Qualitative Findings

Through the thematic analysis of the data from the two series, two main themes were identified: Benefits of using the tools in everyday life and changes in the child associated with the use of the tools in everyday life. These two themes are illustrated with the selected quotes that represent the meanings of the themes.

Theme One: Benefits of using the tools in everyday life. There were two sub-themes under this theme. The first sub-theme, learning new techniques, emerged from the parents’ answers to the question about how the tools contributed to strengthening their roles as parents. The tools made them more aware and conscious of their communication and interaction with their children. A parent described increased awareness of how to communicate with the child: “The tools gave us new ways of thinking about and handling our child. They made us more aware of how to communicate”. Another parent stated: “We learned techniques that worked well. We became more conscious of how to communicate. My child appreciates us sitting down at the dinner table sharing positive experiences during the day. She asks for “the good words” when she is going to sleep. The difference is noticeable when it comes to self-awareness and coping with different situations”, One parent said: “ I took the course mostly for my own learning. I see that the tools I learned have positive effects on the relationships in the family”.

The second sub-theme was appreciating the goodness and giving positive feedback that indicated the influence of the tools on the relationships between the parents and children. Using the tools made the parents

aware of the positive things in their own and their children's everyday lives that could affect their relationships: "It made us conscious of other ways to think of how to strengthen self-esteem and focus on positive aspects". Others described how focusing on positive feedback and good things made parent-child relationships better: "I have had a closer connection with my children since the course. I have a better understanding of my children". Another parent explained: "My child appreciates talking about the best experience of the day. We have been more determined to talk about good experiences in everyday life and the child appreciates it".

Theme Two: Changes in the child associated with the use of the tools in everyday life. Many parents reported positive changes that they attributed to the use of the tools. Their children had developed more positive perceptions of themselves and referred to themselves in more positive ways: "Joining the program started a positive change. The child has developed more predictable behavior and seems far more secure and more positive. She reacts more appropriately when we say 'no' or stop her in one way or another". The parents described that their children had developed more positive attitudes, were more confident, and handled difficult situations better than previously. The participants observed that their children were able to establish and maintain good relationships with other children and relate to them in good, positive ways: "My child has better self-confidence and more contact with children of her same age. She is more confident around others, cries less and talks better about herself. She does not give up as easily anymore and has more

patience". Another parent stated: "My child has become more positive-minded. She can put up with more and is more confident in herself. She handles difficult situations in a better way and is confident that she is a valuable individual with good qualities".

Most participants reported that using the tools contributed to solving different challenges and problems their children had experienced. Some parents described how their children who had struggled with sleep, school peer relations or homework had improved in these areas and felt better. The parents reported fewer instances of rage, fewer struggles with frustration, homework, anger and better sleep at night. One parent said: "Our son thinks more positively, has better thoughts about himself and cares more for others. He is braver and dares to be with friends alone". Another parent stated: "My daughter does her homework without tears and frustration. She very seldom says 'I can't do it, I'll never learn this'. Earlier, she was more skeptical about doing new things. Now, it is easier to talk to her. She does not worry about doing new things". Another parent described: "We have had challenges when it comes to sleeping. It took time for her to fall asleep. We had to sit with her until she fell asleep. Now she can keep calm and listen to 'the good words' before she falls asleep alone".

The telephone survey included the following open-ended question: "Do you have a comment or experience you would like to share?" The participants' responses were predominantly positive as specified in the two themes. However, there were few criticisms related to Tool Two (touch massage) and tool Four (good words with

the custom-made app). Two participants wanted more options and varieties of the massage, and three other participants responded that the audio file should be a little easier to use. The findings of this study regarding parents' perceptions in the use of the course material, and more specifically, of the use of the tools, suggest two facets of positive impacts on parenting: 1. Awareness as a strategy for strengthening positive parent-child interactions and 2. The benefits of affirmational support.

Discussion

The findings are in line with the theoretical and empirical literature regarding the association between parent-child interaction and the development of self-esteem in children. Apparently, the tools of the program were perceived to aid the parents to become more aware of their ways of communicating and interacting with their children. Incorporating awareness and positive feedback into parenting interactions seemed to have enabled the parents to focus on the strengths and resources of their children. The parents felt that their children developed more positive self-images. These findings align with the finding that parental support tended to predict higher self-esteem (Amato & Fowler, 2002). Feedback from and the attitudes of significant others play critical roles in shaping the self, of which self-esteem is a part. This suggests that positive feedback seems to promote good self-esteem. The findings are consistent with the theoretical perspectives adopted in the study, especially the attachment theory, which posits the importance of parenting and the quality of parent-child interactions for children's development (Bowlby, 1988), and the theory of symbolic interactionism

(Mead, 1934). Significant others play key roles as partners in social interactions, thereby influencing children's self-image development (Levin & Trost, 2005). Parents are the most important significant others during early childhood especially in influencing and contributing to the development of self-image (Levy, Kivity, Johnson & Gooch, 2018).

It has to be noted that in the study the parents were not asked directly as to whether or not their attitudes regarding how to help their children to develop or continue to develop self-esteem have changed as the result of taking the parenting course. Therefore, it was not possible to assess whether or not the parents' attitudes and their perception of their own strength in helping their children have changed by taking the course and or whether such changes have influenced their uses of the tools in their interactions with the children. We assume that the participating parents were motivated to enhance their children's development of self-esteem as the parents' participation in the parenting course was voluntary. Therefore, although it is not possible to attribute the parents' perceptions of improvements in their children's self-esteem directly to the use of the Tools, it is possible to make a conjecture that the participating parents' views of the positive change may have resulted from the parents' heightened insights into their parenting habits in relation to the development of self-esteem in their children through using the Tools in their interactions with their children.

The parents reported that affirmational support provided through using the tools seemed to increase their children's self-esteem

and self-confidence. The importance of support from parents is relevant to enhancing self-esteem among children. Ross & Broh (2000) found among children and adolescents in the 8th to 12th grade that academic achievement and parental support are associated with increased self-esteem and a sense of personal control". As significant others, parents play essential roles in promoting children's self-esteem because they occupy critical positions in their children's lives, specifically when parents provide positive affirmation, love, and a sense of security. The Children's Platform tools seem to strengthen this parental role by encouraging a focus on constructive and positive experiences as well as recognition of the child's strengths and abilities. From the parents' perspective, the use of the tools seems to be especially useful in creating opportunities for the parents to use affirmation and reinforcement in their interactions with their children. Encouragement and positive affirmation from parents, such as being praised for achievements and receiving recognition for their strengths and qualities, seem to promote children's development, especially in relation to coping and functioning in everyday life. The quantitative results shed light on the usefulness of the tools as three tools (#1, 2, & 4) were used daily, indicating that the parents found them to be generally useful and usable. However, the result that only one quarter of the parents used the tool #3 regularly suggests difficulty or reluctance in implementing this tool. It is possible that parents may need some training in sharing the children's character strengths.

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the parents seemed to

have adapted well to the daily use of the Tools of the Children's Platform in general. These tools are simple directions for specific types of child-parent interactions, and seem to have been used without much difficulty, although there were a few suggestions for improvements for tools #2 and #4. It is possible that parents need more practice with the tools' use within the course in order to become competent especially for tool #4 and also to have chances to individualize specific interactive strategies appropriate in each tool. Compared to many of the currently available parenting programs, the Tools of the Children's Platform are simple, easy to incorporate into daily child-parent interactions, and require only about 10 minutes of dedicated interaction time.

Conclusion

The format of the course is different from most other parenting courses because the parents need to attend only one two-hour session in which a set of specific tools for everyday use is provided. However, the implementation of the course involved sending out five emails with videos within three months of completion of the course to remind participants to continue the use of the tools and to provide additional tips and parental reflections. The fact that the tools take only a few minutes for parents to use appears to be crucial for establishing new habits. This study shows insights into how a simple program that provides specific ways for parents to interact with their children can benefit children's self-esteem and self-confidence. The findings suggest that the tools, being designed to influence parents' everyday interactions with their children, can facilitate the process of strengthening children's self-esteem

and self-confidence. The study enhances understanding of the effects of parent-child interactions in which parents are aware of how their communication styles and affirmational support affect children's self-esteem and expands on the knowledge and research on parenting programs guided by the interaction perspective. Further research is needed to examine children's outcomes in terms of self-esteem, self-confidence, and the long-term effects of the course on psychological well-being. The usefulness and efficacy of any parenting program must be examined by bringing in the factors and forces associated with parents' personal and social characteristics, motivations, experiences, knowledge, and social forces that exist in participants' lives.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was in the research design, which did not allow controlled investigation of the changes in the children. The findings on the participants' experiences and perceptions are descriptive, only providing insights into the experiences with the parenting course. We recruited the participants from the parents who had signed up for the course. This recruitment strategy may have yielded a sample of parents who were more highly concerned about their children's self-esteem and development and more motivated to voluntarily seek out the course than other parents in general. Although the findings of the study regarding the post-course experiences of the attendees of the program were in general positive, it is not clear whether the changes in children perceived by the parents were from the use of the Tools or from the parental awareness and vigilance in their parenting practices resulting from

their participation in the course. Other factors may have impacted on the children and their self-esteem, such as social support or a lack of it in the children's social arena, exposure to new experiences and change in the social dynamics.

An additional limitation was that as the data regarding the participants' sociodemographic backgrounds including ethnicity and culture were not collected, it was not possible to consider questions related to the differences in their experiences according to sociodemographic variables. In addition, since the quantitative analyses reported in this study used sets of quantitative codes developed by the researchers from the qualitative answers, the questions of reliability and validity of the data limited the quantitative analyses to the descriptive ones reported. The results of the study are limited to the parents' perceptions of the experiences, and the fact that the study did not collect any data on the children's self-esteem objectively or from the children's perspective is limiting as well. The study sample cannot be considered a representative sample of the population, and the results of the study only endorse our insights regarding the use of the Children's Platform course. Rigorously designed research to test the effectiveness of the Program both from the children's and parents' perspective would add significantly to our knowledge.

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