Chapter 4
Revised Reality Therapy:
A New Intervention to Help Boost Self-Esteem in Malaysian Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT
This chapter proposes an intervention – revised reality therapy – that has been developed to help school guidance counsellors treat low self-esteem in Malaysian secondary schools. Revised reality therapy has been developed using literature from a range of fields, including: choice theory, reality therapy, social identity approach, and first-hand experience in Malaysian secondary schools. The proposed intervention uses a simple, easy to use method which - for the convenience of school guidance counsellors and laypeople alike – has been presented as a six-step process. The theoretical background, implementation, and validity of revised reality therapy will be presented in this chapter. Future directions and limitations are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION
Imagine you are a student who attends a secondary school, you have just received important academic results and you rush home to share the results with your family. After sharing your results, you ask your family what they think. “The results are not good enough” is the reply you receive. How do you feel in this situation? Ashamed, disappointed, embarrassed, like you have let your family down? In Malaysian society, being below average is unacceptable. Most Malaysian students strive to achieve outstanding academic results. However, in the real world, it is impossible for everyone to achieve outstanding results. Consequently, many people fall short of their expectations, and often think “I’m not good enough”. This form of negative self-evaluation is formally known as low self-esteem.

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Self-esteem is broadly defined as a person’s subjective evaluation of their worth as an individual (See, e.g., Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2011). In contrast to what many people think, low self-esteem is not a reflection of a person’s ability, and it certainly is not a representation of how a person is evaluated by others. Instead, low self-esteem is a negative pattern of thoughts, characterized by a person’s subjective perception that they are inadequate in many facets of life (Sorensen, 2018).

For many years, psychologists have recognized that self-esteem is an important aspect of mental-health and is relevant for many important life outcomes. For example, high self-esteem predicts happiness, better job performance and academic achievement (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Judge & Bono, 2001; Marsh & Craven, 2006). In contrast, low self-esteem predicts antisocial behavior, delinquency, anxiety and depression (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Sowislo & Orth, 2013; Steiger, Allemand, Robins, & Fend, 2014; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006). So, on the basis of the literature discussed, you may now - as the authors of this present chapter did before you – ponder the following question, surely Malaysian schools have effective interventions to help students overcome low self-esteem?

Evidence suggests this may not be the case. In recent years, Malaysian secondary schools have been teetering on the edge of a ‘self-esteem crisis’. Nationally the number of Malaysian students suffering from low self-esteem has risen from ten-percent to twenty-percent, meaning that low self-esteem currently affects one-in-five Malaysian students (The Sun Daily, 2016; Yaacob, Juhari, Talib, & Uba, 2009). Given that low self-esteem is a strong predictor of many detrimental life outcomes (e.g., depression, delinquency, antisocial behavior etc.), the looming ‘self-esteem crisis’ represents a serious problem for Malaysian students.

Currently, within context of the Malaysian education system, ‘school guidance counsellors’ play a crucial role in helping students with low self-esteem. For many students, school guidance counsellors provide an essential, valuable service that – to a certain extent – helps treat low self-esteem. However, a school guidance counsellor’s ability to help treat low self-esteem has been hindered by a number of barriers, such as: (1) a lack of support from school faculty, who prioritize academic grades and teaching; (2) a lack of cooperation from the parents of students; (3) being assigned admin tasks, such as photocopying and delivering reports; (4) being responsible for roughly five-hundred students; and finally (5) the incompatibility of Western interventions in Malaysian schools (Low, Kok & Lee, 2013; Othman & Abdullah, 2015). In short, many barriers impede a school guidance counsellor’s ability to help Malaysian students suffering from low self-esteem.

It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to address all the barriers listed. In truth, a textbook chapter can have little influence on the culture of schools, parenting styles and the workload of school guidance counsellors. However, in line with previous literature, this chapter acknowledges that there is a need for a Malaysian compatible intervention to help boost self-esteem (Othman & Abdullah, 2015).

So, the aim of the current chapter is to introduce a new, innovative intervention that has been developed in the context of Malaysian Secondary Schools. On the basis of literature on choice theory and reality therapy (Glasser, 1998; Wubbolding, 2015), social identity approach (e.g., Haslam, 2001), and first-hand experience in Malaysian secondary schools, this chapter will propose a simple ‘step-by-step’ intervention to help boost the self-esteem of Malaysian secondary school students.

For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the theories mentioned, a brief laypersons introduction to the key principles of choice theory and reality therapy, and social identity approach will be presented. In the following sections, each of the theories will be mentioned in isolation, then the overall framework for the new intervention will be presented.
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