

5th Conference for Research in Early Childhood Education, 2019

Department of Early Childhood Education,
The Education University of Hong Kong

Our department will host the 5th Conference for Research in Early Childhood Education on 23 May 2019 (Thursday). This year the Conference is themed, “Enhancing the Learning Outcomes of Disadvantaged Children.”

As early childhood educators, we are entrusted with the mission to promote whole child development, including physical, mental, and cognitive skills, in order to lay a solid foundation for children’s long-term development and life-long learning. We are highly concerned about the education and well-being of disadvantaged children, especially those with special educational needs, of ethnic minorities, or in poverty. We deeply and conscientiously believe that, with education and pastoral care, these disadvantaged children will get over the hedge of physical, mental, and environmental constraints, have their learning potentials maximized, and enjoy optimal development. They will thrive and no longer merely survive.

This year we have invited a keynote speaker, Professor Mark O’Reilly from The University of Texas at Austin, to talk about interventions for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in inclusive school settings. In addition, our faculty members, Dr. To-Chan Sing Pui and Dr. Sun Jin, will talk about supporting ethnic minorities in kindergarten and working with children from families with different socio-economic status, respectively.

The conference aims to provide an interactive platform for kindergarten educators, academics, professional workers, and organizations to share their achievements and exchange their experience in learning and teaching, particularly with the disadvantaged children. Parallel seminars, workshops, chatrooms, and a poster session will be offered. We welcome schools to participate in our conference or presenting their work to support the learning of disadvantaged children with special educational needs, and of children from multicultural backgrounds or low social-economic status.

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Executive functioning and self-regulation in the preschool context



Prof. Kerry Lee
Professor



Executive functioning (EF) is not a term that most people use every day. It sounds even more alien in Chinese (執行功能) and brings to mind corporate executives going about their chores. Yet, research suggests that it is a fundamental cognitive capability that is related closely to children’s achievement and abilities to regulate their own behaviour. What is EF?

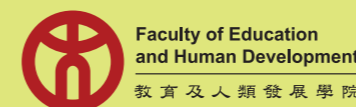


In the scientific literature, EF is treated as separate but related capabilities. Updating or working memory refer to the ability to manipulate and remember information at the same time. Children need to have sufficient updating capacity to remember and execute instructions given by teachers, especially when they involve multiple steps. Inhibitory abilities refer to how well irrelevant information or inappropriate behaviour can be suppressed. As children mature, their abilities to control habitual or impulsive behaviour improve, but the extent of improvement varies across individuals. Mental flexibility refers to abilities to switch swiftly from one cognitive operation to another. This is often required in both the preschool and social settings when

children have to engage with and move between different situational demands. Although not the sole causal factor, problems in EF can be manifested in difficulties concentrating, following instructions, or controlling emotions and behaviour.

Given the strong association between EF and children’s development, many efforts have gone into intervention. However, researchers have not yet found a silver bullet. There is some evidence suggesting that different preschool (e.g., Montessorri) and extracurricular (e.g., martial-art training) experiences are associated with better EF. However, there are gaps in our knowledge on the extent to which such experiences vary across children with different cognitive or socioeconomic profiles.

In a study to examine these issues in Hong Kong, a group of researchers at ECE will examine what kinds of kindergarten environments are best suited to children of different cognitive profiles and are most closely related to optimal holistic development. Led by Professor Kerry Lee, this will be a population representative study and will involve many centres across the whole city. We hope to have an opportunity to collaborate with you in this important endeavour.



Promoting self-regulation through positive teacher-student and parent-child relationships

During the early years of development, children experience complex changes and new challenges such as acquiring basic skills, adapting to school environments, forming relationships, and taking on new roles and responsibilities. Self-regulation is robust in helping children navigate these challenges to facilitate positive developmental outcomes. Good self-regulation means being able to cope with negative emotions, focus and shift attention, persist in completing learning tasks, initiate and maintain close relationships with others, and successfully control behaviors required to work towards goals.

Our recent study (Li & Lau, 2018) indicated that a positive, nonconflictual teacher-student relationship is important in facilitating children's development of self-regulation. Similarly, developing and maintaining warm and responsive parent-child relationships can instill self-control in the child (Karreman, van Tuijil, & Dekovic, 2008). How do children's relationships with teachers and parents promote their self-regulation?

1. Positive relationships with teachers and parents can activate teachers' and parents' effective discipline through monitoring children's behaviors, recognizing their misbehaviors, and disciplining them in a timely manner.
2. Positive relationships with teachers and parents can facilitate children's compliance, which increases the effectiveness of the adults' discipline.
3. A psychologically secure and warm environment may buffer the effects of other stressors and encourage children to explore and develop self-regulation.
4. Responsive teachers and parents are more likely to address children's emotional needs through a clear standard for children's behaviors that can nurture self-regulation.



Dr. Eva Lau
Associate Head of Department, Assistant Professor

On the basis of warm and responsive relationships, teachers and parents may consider the following approaches in facilitating children's self-regulation skills:

1. Teach emotion regulation skills, such as strategies for identifying emotions, solving problems, and calming down.
2. Teach behavioral regulation skills, such as focusing attention, sitting still, and waiting for one's turn.
3. Model the skills you teach.
4. Prompt and provide structured and predictable environments to create a supportive context for children to practise new skills.
5. Develop clear rules and expectations and enforce them firmly and calmly.

References:

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Promoting young children's self-regulation

self
regulation



Dr. Becky Lau
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The development of self-regulation is a critical achievement of early childhood (McClelland & Tominey, 2013). Self-regulation involves intentionally applying attentional control, working memory and inhibitory control to actions (McClelland & Cameron, 2011). This article attempts to transfer research findings into practical classroom ideas and practices, such as daily routines and learning activities, for teachers to promote children's development of self-regulation in early childhood settings.

Daily Routines

A normal daily routine that is adaptive to children's needs and interests brings comfort, predictability, and consistency to children's school life. Large group time, small group time, music and movement time, mindfulness exercise time, snack time and transition times can help children establish many day-to-day basics, such as regular eating habits, bowel movement control, and an ability to wind down after play. When children know what to expect, they are better able to understand their role and control their behavior, which makes self-regulation easier. As a teacher, you will become a partner in that routine and not the person who is constantly telling children what to do or not to do.

References

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Learning Activities

Evidence suggests that games can provide children with opportunities to practice self-regulation (Eisenberg & Sulik, 2012). Games that require children to listen, to follow instructions, to control their own behavior, and to persist are excellent in promoting self-regulation skills in school (Lau, 2016). Games such as "Head and shoulder, knees and toes", "Simon says", "Red light/Green light", "Freeze", "Hide and seek", and puzzles that require preschool children to persist or control their responses are appropriate and interesting to develop self-regulation skills. Besides, role play can also be an effective way to promote self-regulation, as it requires children to temporarily inhibit the behavior of their own role and take on a new role of another character. Incorporating play time that promotes self-regulation and designing a relevant learning environment is crucial for young children to develop self-regulation.