

An English class is available for the Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education programme!

Previously our Department only offered its Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education Programme (which is funded by the University Grants Committee) in Chinese. But starting 2017/18, an English class will be available to provide training to students who want to work in the international school setting in Hong Kong.

This new programme aims to provide students with the academic and professional preparation necessary to become competent, caring and reflective beginning teachers who particularly wish to work in the International School setting and undertake further professional advancement.

Graduates:

- are eligible to register as Qualified Kindergarten Teachers and Registered Child Care Workers
- have the professional qualification required of all child care supervisors
- are recognised as having acquired training on the One-year In-service Course in Special Child Care Work of the Social Welfare Department
- are eligible to apply for the University's Part-time or Full-time Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education) programmes and equivalent programmes offered by other local universities or higher education institutions.

A wide range of teaching methods will be used in the programme, including but not limited to workshops, school visits, seminars, discussions and practicum. The Programme emphasises guiding and encouraging students to actively participate in the learning process; to understand, critically evaluate and apply what is taught and to acquire skills for independent, lifelong learning and development. Students will have the opportunities to participate in academic exchange visits.



Our higher diploma students engaging in after-class activities



Conference on Research in Early Childhood Education 2016

Conference on Research in Early Childhood Education 2017

Following the success of last year's Conference on Research in Early Childhood Education, the Department of Early Childhood Education has decided to host another whole-day conference on May 11, 2017 at our Tai Po main campus (10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories). The theme of this conference is *Social, Emotional, and Moral Development of Young Children*. The intended audience includes principals, teachers, teacher educators, academics, and government officials. Prof Yuko Hashimoto (Kwansei University, Japan) and our colleagues Dr. Margaret Chu, Dr Eva Lau and Dr Amanda Wong will be lecturing on the afore-mentioned theme.

Besides the keynote lectures, there will be a poster session, parallel seminars and workshops. The idea behind this arrangement is to provide an interactive platform for kindergarten educators, professional workers, and schools to share their curricula and their achievements and also to exchange their experience in teaching and learning.

If you have any questions about the conference, please feel free to contact Ms Gigi Cheng (gkccheng@eduhk.hk). Your support is the key to the success of this conference, and we look forward to your active participation in this conference!

The Education University of Hong Kong Early Childhood Education Newsletter

Issue 1, 2017

Message from

Prof Kevin Chung,
Head of Department of
Early Childhood Education

Hello, Everybody!

As Head of the Department of Early Childhood Education (ECE) at the Education University of Hong Kong (EduHK), I am delighted to introduce this newsletter because I want to share with you the latest news about our Department, including its upcoming activities and new programmes. I also want to highlight our research and the many ways in which we promote quality early childhood education in the Hong Kong context. The success of any academic department, however, rests not only on the research it carries out but also on its capacity to engage the wider community. In our case, this means fostering a positive and supportive relationship with children, parents, teachers, classroom assistants, educational support workers, school managers and leaders and representatives of the government - or, to use current terminology, education stakeholders. And for the ECE Department, the maintenance of our relationship with kindergartens, schools and other pre-school educators is a vital plank in the work we do. It perhaps goes without saying that without your involvement, our research might be shelved forever in the library or lost in the virtual world, but what is far more important is that through our productive two-way dialogue frontline practitioners are able to draw benefit from our work and we are able to learn from them. This process may involve pre-school staff attending courses, lectures and conferences run by the University or jointly-organized development and planning meetings, or their active participation in the planning, execution and evaluation of research projects. Whatever form it takes, however, it provides us with the means to carry out work and research that is vital to the continued development of early childhood education in Hong Kong. We keep one eye firmly trained on the present early years teaching environment (which, for us, means both classroom and playground) but the other eye is on future policy. And without help from all of you in the pre-school community it would be impossible for us to help the government formulate important early childhood policies that include your voice and address your needs.

My work

Over the years my research has been focused on youth language and literacy development. This has included detailed study of the ways in which children learn to read and write with a concentration on vocabulary knowledge and the metalinguistic and cognitive skills that children need to support their reading and writing. Much of this work was concerned with the process of acquiring knowledge, and the skills and techniques used by children and teachers to facilitate learning of, for instance, vocabulary, and sound and spelling patterns. My work on cognitive skills, however, drew attention to children's self-regulation and its link with their academic achievement in reading and mathematics. The ability to self-regulate, pay attention, remember, and follow teachers' instructions can account for developmental changes in children's performance over the kindergarten years.

In recent years, my research has expanded to include the study of the socioemotional well-being of young children. My research team and I are painfully aware that in the Hong Kong pre-school provision there is often a lack of play space or opportunity for children to have fun as they learn. There are some parents who do not value the role of play in children's developmental experience, and instead direct disproportionate efforts to pushing their children to master academic knowledge that may, or may not, pave



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the way for their future academic development. However, for us, children's socioemotional skills are as important as academic knowledge, and play is one of the ways in which these skills may be acquired and practised in our increasingly uncertain world. Our children need strength, courage, and stamina to cope with the personal, social, environmental and economic challenges they will face as they grow up. To investigate these matters further, my team and I with the generous support from Simon K. Y. Lee Foundation, have launched a 4-year research project to create a locally relevant assessment tool for young children's socioemotional competence. Our aim is to develop a culturally-sensitive, early childhood programme that fosters the socioemotional well-being of Hong Kong children.

Time flies. I have been Head of ECE for two and a half years now and I have relished the opportunity the post has given me to work with engaged, imaginative and enquiring colleagues in a wide ranging and multi-skilled department that is committed to developing life-chances and provision for the children of Hong Kong. If we are to prepare our children for the ever-changing world, we need to do more than simply facilitate skills and knowledge acquisition: we need to lay the seed for life-long learning in our children, so that they know how to learn by themselves and to build the stamina needed to stand up to challenges in the future. And within our Department with its synergies across psychology, family studies, pedagogy, and policy studies, we are able to explore how the mesh of home, school, and society can contribute to foster young children's capacity to learn to learn. I am determined to revitalize our current early childhood programmes, so that the results of these synergies will be reflected in our programmes.



Prof Kevin Chung, Dr Dora Ho and our final-year BEd students in a tea-gathering

Future Direction of the Department: Programme Development

The ECE department is revitalizing its teacher education programmes to reflect and contribute to the changing nature of early childhood education and to meet the needs of all those involved in its delivery.

In 2015, recognising the importance of family education, we launched our [Master of Arts in Child and Family Education Programme](#). This course explores the many ways through which parents and other family caretakers contribute to the well-being of children and young people.

Again, highlighting the closely related roles of school and the family in educating young children, we will be offering a [new specialization on "Early Childhood Education and Family Studies,"](#) as part of the [Master of Teaching Programme](#), launched by our University.

In light of the growing request of Hong Kong teachers for systematic training in how to work with children with special educational needs (SEN), we incorporated a series of newly designed courses on recognizing and addressing child SEN in our Higher Diploma Programme.

Relatedly, we launched two new part-time Bachelor of Education Programmes that include additional courses on SEN, childhood education leadership, and ways to teach non-Chinese speaking children. These courses are designed to equip teachers with the skills needed to teach children with diverse needs, and to prepare the teachers, themselves, for career advancement in an increasingly multicultural society.

In order to expose our student teachers to interdisciplinary knowledge and widen their life experiences, we have restructured our full-time Bachelor of Education Programme. Our students will now complete more general education courses to broaden their horizons before they join the field as teachers.

Our Department is aware of the ever changing needs of local children and their teachers, and we are constantly reviewing and adjusting our programme structures and components in response to these needs.



Bullying within the context of early years education

Currently, a team of researchers led by Professor Liz Jones and Dr Richard Wong from the Education University of Hong Kong is examining bullying within the context of Hong Kong preschool education. In general, research into bullying has mainly focused on primary and secondary aged children. In part, this is because historically, for an array of cultural and social reasons, young children have been associated with discourses of innocence and naivety and were therefore thought incapable of bullying. However, as the team is discovering, the age old phenomenon of bullying can and does take place amongst young children in their preschool settings.

"It is by understanding the hurt that is embedded in bullying that a child is less likely to bully and, importantly, is more likely to go to the aid of one who is being bullied."

For the majority of children, entering preschool is a crucial developmental step because it is within this context that they participate, for the first time, as an active member of a peer group. Consequently, preschool may be some children's first experience beyond the home of difficulties in socially integrating. The manifestation of bullying behaviors in early years education can include physical bullying such as hitting and pushing; verbal bullying such as shouting and name calling and relational bullying such as excluding another child from an activity.

However, what must be remembered is that all young children experiment with different forms of behavior, including negative behaviors such as pushing, shoving, name calling or refusing to include a child in their play. Whilst such behavior is potentially hurtful it is not considered to be bullying unless it develops into a systematic pattern and where it is directed at another less powerful child without apparent provocation.

Prof Jones and Dr Wong have used an innovative set of story boards which have been specially designed for kindergarten children. The storyboards feature aspects of bullying behavior and they have allowed the team to interview sensitively over 100 children about their experiences of being bullied and, on occasion, the experience of being the bully. Whilst the team is currently still analyzing the data that has been gathered what is becoming clear is that bullying cuts across gender with both boys and girls being reported as victims of bullying. Further factors that are being examined which may be significant in relation to the bully/victim dyad include the socio economic status of each as well as individual children's verbal and cognitive skills.



Professor Liz Jones

Dr Richard Wong

Interestingly, the team has also identified that the storyboards themselves are a powerful tool for getting children to open up and talk about negative and painful experiences. As experienced preschool teachers appreciate, most negative behaviors including those that have been mentioned can be eradicated by establishing a classroom ethos which privileges being thoughtful, considerate and kind towards one another. However, even in a classroom that is characterized by such an ethos, young children can engage in negative behavior. Selfishly grabbing and holding onto a toy or whispering secrets or name-calling are acts that most children will indulge in at some point. However, it is when these acts are repeatedly targeted towards one child that bullying has been established. Tools such as the storyboards are clearly one mechanism that can be used to develop thoughtful conversations amongst the children so that those who are erring towards becoming a bully can develop social skills including empathy. It is by understanding the hurt that is embedded in bullying that a child is less likely to bully and, importantly, more likely to go to the aid on one who is being bullied.

The success of the storyboards in encouraging children to discuss bullying has led the research team to develop a series of virtual simulations that realistically depict aspects of bullying. Each of the three-dimensional simulations incorporates highly realistic culturally sensitive child avatars who act out forms of bullying behavior within the context of preschool. As a resource, the simulations contribute towards establishing a safe environment where preschool practitioners, children, parents and other key stakeholders can engage with the topic of bullying so that together, as a learning community, they can work at eradicating it. The intentions are to offer these simulations as an online resource.

Prof Jones and Dr Wong would welcome the opportunity to discuss aspects of their work further. If you have questions or suggestions, or require further information please feel free to contact Prof Jones at ejones@eduhk.hk or Dr Wong at kswong@eduhk.hk.