

Does Play Still Matter? Investigating The Roles Of Achievement Goals, Play Beliefs, And Playfulness In Promoting the Well-Being of Senior Primary Children And Their Caretakers

A 2023 survey commissioned by the Hong Kong government from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, revealed that 6.9% of local students aged 6 to 17 manifested suicidal behaviours, 6.1% had anxiety and 5.4% suffered depression. Despite continuous government efforts to foster well-being, the mental health situation of primary education stakeholders, among them children, parents, and teachers, and including increases in student suicide and teacher burnout, is worrying. On the one hand, Hong Kong's highly competitive and result-dependent academic system shapes children's performance-oriented mindset. On the other, Hong Kong parents highly value academic achievement, investing considerable time and finances to promote their children's subject knowledge through participating in extra tuition classes or enrichment programmes at the expense of more holistic development. Although people generally recognise that play is essential to facilitate learning and development in early childhood, school-aged children's need to play tends to be downplayed or disregarded to squeeze extra time for academic activities. This study proposes a framework that acknowledges that children's achievement goal orientation and playfulness are both important factors in sustaining their well-being through the senior primary years. Other influential factors include the goal orientation and play beliefs of parents and teachers that affect their parenting styles, parent-child conflicts, and teacher-child relatedness, and their own well-being. The potential influences of these factors on children's academic skills (e.g., reading and mathematics) will also be explored. The study employs a longitudinal design with three data collection points over three years (Time 1 - primary 4, Time 2 – primary 5, Time 3 - primary 6), incorporating a series of survey and direct-assessed measures, to collect data from 300 participating children and their parents and teachers. Multilevel path analysis will be used to estimate the longitudinal predictions among the variables. This study expands and augments current theory by examining the unique roles of achievement goal orientation and playfulness in the well-being of senior primary school children. Practically, it also informs alternative approaches to improving the well-being of parents and teachers in the Hong Kong primary education sector.