

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: [The Education University of Hong Kong |

Unit of Assessment (UoA): [41 Education (incl. curriculum & instruction, education administration & policy and other education)]

Title of case study: [Promoting parenting practices that foster positive development in kindergarten children in Hong Kong |

(1) Summary of the impact

[This research contributed to a paradigm shift from parenting guidance based on Western studies to one that emphasises the use of local research to inform parenting practices. It provided evidence-based strategies for parents which take into account local customs and ideas. With the aid of broadcast media, knowledge exchange activities with major influencers such as principals and government officials, and intervention programmes, the research has educated over half a million parents, promoting their relationships with their children and leading to more positive child development. |

(2) Underpinning research

[The lack of relevant local research spurred Lam and Lau – who joined EdUHK in 2012 and 2011 respectively – to examine how Chinese parents can promote positive child development. Supported by GRF (#18607017) and separate ECS grants (#28401714; #28401914), they not only filled important gaps in the international literature, but also identified effective parenting strategies in the Chinese context. Specifically, their work highlights (a) the importance of involving both mothers and fathers; (b) the contribution of family activities to the development of children’s “hard skills,” or knowledge about letters and numbers; and (c) the role of family relationships in shaping children’s “soft skills,” or executive functioning and socioemotional competence.

Maternal and paternal involvement. In most societies, mothers continue to be more involved in childrearing than fathers but Lau’s qualitative research found that Chinese fathers in Hong Kong reported budgeting time for their children [R4]. A subsequent study [R6] with 277 families found that the quality, rather than quantity, of fathers’ involvement affected the children’s level of aggression of their children at school. The study found that although both maternal and paternal coercion were linked to kindergarten children’s aggression, fathers’ warmth was linked to decreases in aggression in boys and that fathers are highly aware of the unique contribution of the quality of their involvement to child development.

Academic achievement is highly prioritised in Chinese cultures and is evident in Hong Kong in the trend to enrol even two-year-olds in phonetic and numeracy classes. Lau and Lam, however, have confirmed that parental involvement outside of formal classroom settings are important in promoting children’s academic achievement. In a longitudinal study with 324 Chinese families, Lau and Power found that mothers’ involvement in interactive reading and stimulating games predicted increases in their children’s liking for school, independent participation, and cooperative participation in the transition to primary school [R5]. Further, a cross-sectional study with 369 Chinese families demonstrated that visual motor skills can be learned through family activities such as building blocks and making crafts, and were uniquely linked to Chinese reading and writing abilities in the kindergarten years [R1].

Knowing how to control impulses, regulate emotions, and make friends prepares children for formal learning. Studies with Chinese families indicated that parent-child and co-parenting relationships shape the development of children’s soft skills. A longitudinal study with 333 families, found that both maternal and paternal hostility, such as venting anger on and arguing with the child, predicted poorer child executive functioning [R2]. Further, in a cross-sectional study with 258 families, Lam and colleagues found that coparenting cooperation where mothers and fathers reinforced each other’s authority as parents was linked to children’s socioemotional competence [R3].

Thus, parenting of and cooperation between both parents' impacts on child development, highlighting the need for training for parents as individuals and dyads. |

(3) References to the research

[R1] Chung, K. K. H., Lam, C. B., & Cheung, K. C. (2018). Visuomotor integration and executive functioning are uniquely linked to Chinese word reading and writing in kindergarten children. *Reading and Writing*, 31, 155-171. (2017 JCR impact factor: 1.84; Q2 in Education and Educational Research)

[R2] Lam, C. B., Chung, K. K. H., & Li, X. (2018). Parental warmth and hostility and child executive function problems: A longitudinal study of Chinese families. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1063. (2017 JCR impact factor: 2.09; Q2 in Psychology, Interdisciplinary)

[R3] Lam, C. B., Tam, C. Y. S., Chung, K. K. H., & Li, X.M. (2018). The link between coparenting cooperation and child social competence: The moderating role of child negative affect. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 32, 692-698. (2017 JCR impact factor: 2.23; Q1 in Family Studies)

[R4] Lau, E. Y. H. (2016). A mixed-methods study of paternal involvement in Hong Kong. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42, 1023-1040. (2017 JCR impact factor: 1.70; Q2 in Education and Educational Research)

[R5] Lau, E. Y. H., & Power, T. G. (2018). Parental involvement during the transition to primary school: Examining bidirectional relations with school adjustment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 88, 257-266. (2017 JCR impact factor: 1.38; Q2 in Social Work)

[R6] Lau, E. Y. H. (2019). Parenting and childhood aggression in the Chinese context: An examination of parental responses, physical coercion and warmth. *Early Years*, 39(1), 36-50. (2017 SJR cites per doc: 1.43; Q1 in Education)

Research funding: [R1-3] were supported by an ECS to Lam as principal investigator (PI): Parental emotion socialization: The roles of fathers, parental gender attitudes, and child temperament. Early Career Scheme (ECS, #28401714), (Jan. 2015 to Dec. 2016). [R4-5] were supported by an ECS to Lau E. Y. H. as PI: A longitudinal study of parental involvement and school adjustment during the transition to school. ECS (#28401914), (Jan. 2015 to Dec. 2016). [R6] was based on Coercive parenting, child temperament, and child aggression: A mixed-methods and two-wave longitudinal study. General Research Fund (GRF, #18607017), (Jan. 2018 to Dec. 2019). |

(4) Details of the impact

[Armed with these findings Lam and Lau used the media, knowledge exchange activities, and intervention to (a) raise awareness of culturally-sensitive parenting, (b) shape the practice of non-academic professionals, and (c) promote children's soft skills.

Raising awareness through the media. Based on their research [R1-3, R5, R6], Lam and Lau used the media to address the burning questions of parents, educating them about parenting, especially the roles of both mothers and fathers. Lam released articles on parenting on the Centre for Child and Family Science's (CCFS) Facebook page, which attracted over 10,000 followers and over 12,000 likes and shares [S1]. Its success led *Ming Pao*, one of the most trustworthy local newspapers, to invite Lam as a regular columnist on family issues. Lam's articles were also featured on the websites of the Education Bureau (EDB) and other prominent education-related organisations, including HKEdCity and Baby Kingdom. Meanwhile, Lau collaborated with major social media companies in Hong Kong, producing videos on parenting that earned over 407,000 views on POPA Channel and 80,000 on Ohpama. Aside from generating discourse through more than 1,000 comments, these parenting resources were highly appreciated and widely circulated in the community, evidenced by over 9,300 likes, over 6,600 shares, and such comments as "I've always wanted this information, and it has resolved my worries" [S2].

Shaping professional practice through knowledge exchange activities. Through the Department of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and CCFS, Lam and Lau used their research to disseminate parenting practices during numerous knowledge exchange activities. These included the

ECE's annual conference, where evidence-based approaches to promoting children's hard and soft skills [R1-2, R5] were introduced to high-level influencers, notably teachers, principals, and government officials. The conference's reception saw a growing number of participating organisations from 81 in 2014 to 147 in 2017. Further exchanges occurred through 15 departmental newsletters and one booklet on home-school communication sent to all 1,000 local kindergartens.

Through their research [R1, R4, R6], Lam and Lau promoted maternal and paternal involvement in two family festivals hosted by CCFS, and five public talks commissioned by the EDB. These events attracted over 1,000 parents and change agents, including Yip, a mother of two kindergarten children, who realised “that cooperating with teachers will have positive effects on children,” and “decided to make changes, to work with teachers as much as I can and...not go back to my old ways of doing nothing” [S3]. Cheng, a preacher and family educator at a kindergarten with 330 students, also noted that the event “strengthened my knowledge...as well as how to put them into practice...to help parents practice these concepts in real life” [S3].

Change agents outside the educational sector also adopted Lam's and Lau's findings [S4]. Ng, a columnist and business executive, appreciated how “the findings allowed me to advocate for...a healthy parent-child relationship, particularly for those in the business sector. The desire of such relationships is resonated by over 150,000 views with nearly 9,000 likes on my articles sharing parenting tips, and with over 16,000 followers and over 15,000 likes on Facebook.” Tsang, a social worker, “benefitted from being better able to consider parent-child relationship problems from an additional lens...leading me to become a more empathetic practitioner, [and] also saw gain in my personal life from a richer and stronger relationship with my children.” Early childhood educators, like Lau, the principal of a kindergarten with 110 students, saw “better rapport [between parents] with teachers as everyone became more involved...some children have welcomed the changed approaches by their parents who participated in our activities, from their sharing on being happier and more engaged in school.”

Promoting child development through intervention. With the support of HK\$19 million from the Simon K.Y. Lee Foundation, Lam developed and ran an evidence-based [R2-3], culturally-sensitive intervention, titled Early Prevention, Early Identification, and Early Intervention (3Es). In 3Es, parents and teachers learned how to promote children's soft skills. Children also practiced these skills in joint activities at home and structured activities in school. The 3Es project is now being implemented in 24 kindergartens, benefiting over 1,700 children and their families and teachers. Over an eight-month period, children who received the early intervention help showed faster growth in cognitive control, emotional regulation and expressivity, and empathy and prosocial skills [S5]. Such changes were corroborated by the teachers' observation that “children talk more about their emotions—being able to use different emotion vocabularies really surprised the parents” and that “children improved after learning the ‘four problem-solving steps’. Now they actively express their views” [S6].

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] CCFS's Facebook fanpage. (in Chinese) <https://www.facebook.com/eduhkccfs>.

[S2] A video on science-informed parenting. Facebook. 15 March 2017. (in Chinese) <https://tinyurl.com/y4s9pc7s>

[S3] Feedback from participants (Cheng, a preacher and family educator, and Yip, a mother) of a parent talk commissioned by the Education Bureau. 14 March 2019.

[S4] Testimonials from practitioners in the community. 22 October 2018.

[S5] Results of a cluster randomised control trial testing the effectiveness of 3Es. 25 September 2018.

[S6] Feedback from teachers and principals on the effectiveness of 3Es. (in Chinese). 26 June and 9 July, 2018.