



Play in Community: Promoting Social-Emotional Development through a Culturally Designed Play-based Intervention for Preschoolers in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Emotion comprehension is the heart of children's social-emotional development, learning and wellbeing. The recent Covid-19 pandemic underscored the need for increased emotion comprehension and regulation at a community level (in both the school and home setting). In response to this need, a community-based, play-focused programme rooted in the 'bioecological model' was designed to explore the impact of caregiver involvement in both home and school settings on children's emotional development. In this research, we developed a play-based emotion-regulation training programme for preschoolers aged 3-6 years, utilizing a community-based approach with 230 participants across three stages: i) exploratory discussions with parents and teachers on social-emotional socialization and enculturation in early childhood; ii) designing and adapting the play-based programme; and iii) implementing and evaluating the effects of the programme on children's emotion comprehension, regulation, and prosocial behaviours. Findings revealed that young children benefitted from the programme in terms of showing improvements in emotion comprehension and prosocial behaviours such as comforting. Results also showed that language mediated the programmes' effect on emotion comprehension. This study demonstrated that emotion regulation training is feasible and beneficial for young children. More research is required to understand the role of parents' and teachers' involvement in enhancing children's social-emotional development.

Keywords: early childhood; emotion comprehension; socialization