PRESS RELEASE

HKU Jockey Club “Play n Gain” Project

“Social-emotional learning through play: Helping children stay connected in times of challenges”

Result Announcement Online Symposium

The Jockey Club “Play n Gain” Project (the Project), implemented by the Centre for Advancement in Inclusive and Special Education (CAISE), Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong (HKU) and funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, organised a project-end online symposium entitled Social-emotional learning through play: Helping children stay connected in times of challenges on February 22, 2022. The event was attended by more than 560 participants, including educators and parents. The pre-recorded opening address was conducted by the Guest of Honour, Mrs Chan Siu Suk-fan, Deputy Secretary, Education Bureau, HKSAR.

The two keynote speeches highlighted the importance of interactive play in children’s learning and health. Professor Nirmala Rao, Serena H C Yang Professor in Early Childhood Development and Education, Academic Unit of Human Communication, Development, and Information Sciences, Faculty of Education, HKU, delivered a speech entitled Supporting playful learning in the early years: Challenges and opportunities in the COVID-19 era. She discussed the pandemic’s impact on children’s leisure and learning activities. Citing international examples, she provided suggestions as to how schools could continue to engage their children in learning and how parents can be supported to facilitate play at home.

Another keynote titled Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on socio-emotional development of children: Challenges and opportunities, was delivered by Dr Patrick Ip, Paediatrician, Clinician Scientist, Clinical Associate Professor at HKU with expertise in Child Health and Development, and the President of The Hong Kong Paediatric Society. Speaking from a paediatrician’s perspective, he explained the role of quality parent-child interactive play among other factors in building children’s resilience during the pandemic. He also shared evidence suggesting good family functioning and parent-child relationship are as ever more important at present times in supporting a better growth and holistic development of children.

Three workshops were also held in which parents, teachers and community members who had participated in the Project recounted their moments of discovery. The rationale of the parent education programme was illustrated with a specific focus on the interactions between communication techniques and the outcomes of play. The notion of communication was expanded in the featured comments from teacher participants to include home-school collaboration, in which play served as a common language. The power of play was also a key aspect of the play stories told by participants who found themselves using play in their own social groups and reaping success in interpersonal relationships and personal development.

Dr Mantak Yuen, Chief Investigator, confirmed that the Project had brought positive influences to young children and enhanced parents’ positive attitudes toward play as an educative process. Adults and children playing together can improve relationships and foster social-emotional health. Appreciation, a key element in play education, is practiced as adults and children learn to praise and give thanks to each other for the rewarding moments in playing. This “culture of appreciation” was a significant part of the Project and was extended to cross-generation interactions in various community sectors.

During the online symposium, Dr Sylvia Liu, Project Director, recapped the Project and thanked The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for its generous support over the past 3.5 years. All output pledges were
met in full, and the total reach of the Project events was 16,900, which exceeded the originally committed number of beneficiaries. The Project was implemented in 14 kindergartens with encouraging results which were in part driven by the parent education programme. The team organised 230 seminars, workshops, practice sessions, and game ambassador workshops with nearly 4,200 attendees benefitting from the programmes.

The Project reached across the community, touching and transforming many lives as early childhood educators, families with children and other members of society embraced the power of interactive play and spread positive energy in their social groups. The more than 7,000 adults directly engaged by the Project, including some 850 kindergarten teachers, experienced first-hand how the unique play education training could enhance social interactions and induce communication. These trained adults delivered enriching “learning through play” experiences to the nearly 5,600 children they taught or met in the Project.

The education resources used in this Project are accessible on the Project website (https://www.jcplayngain.edu.hku.hk/symp2022?lang=en), and the recordings of the symposium will also be uploaded to the above website.

Photos from previous events can be viewed and downloaded at: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14BAIUpFrf7FyUuNKPEEsj2PwOBcAD0Bl?usp=sharing.

About the Jockey Club “Play n Gain” Project
The Jockey Club “Play n Gain Project” is a play education programme funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and implemented by CAISE in the Faculty of Education at HKU. The project was developed from a research-based play education programme used effectively in Hong Kong for over 10 years. The conceptual framework underpinning the project is the “Social Star Mirror Model” created by Dr Liu in 2015 to improve children’s social-emotional learning through playing face-to-face interactive games. Fourteen kindergartens have adopted this approach in which parents join forces with teachers to create positive social learning experiences for children. The parents ultimately become skilled and knowledgeable in applying games as a positive aid to increasing children’s social and emotional development, and they are able to apply the skills at home and in community settings.

Upon completion of the funding under The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust on February 28, 2022, the Project will continue running under HKU in fostering social skills and emotional development of young children through playing interactive games.

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