

SELF FUNDED PhD OPPORTUNITY
School of Education, University of Worcester

Lockdown Legacy: The impact of home-schooling on children's friendships

Unsurprisingly, there is yet little research on how home-schooling has affected children in the medium and long term (Loades et al, 2020). However, perspectives of teachers, school leaders and parents suggest that the impact of not being able to attend school has left many children feeling isolated with less social contact with friends, decreased access to support, and fewer opportunities for social interaction (Crawley et al, 2020; The Children's Society, 2020). Children in the primary phase of education spend much of their time with peers and not in one-to-one interactions with an adult facilitator, exacerbating the challenges faced by the lack of physical contact with friends. Taking the position that these factors will inevitably contribute to a change in child peer dynamics both inside and outside of the school context (Pearcey et al, 2020; Play England, 2020), the proposed project will seek to investigate the experiences of primary school children, teachers and parents as they adapt to the legacy left by lockdown during the COVID-19 crisis. The study will be guided by four overarching research questions:

- (i) How have peer relationships been affected, if at all, during periods of lockdown for primary school children?
- (ii) What are the key reasons for any perceived changes in characteristics of interactions and behaviours in child-child relationships?
- (iii) What do primary school teachers, children and parents perceive as key features of, and influences on, these interpersonal relationships as school attendance resumes?
- (iv) To what extent can primary school teachers foster positive child-child relationships?

The successful candidate will be required to consolidate their methodological approach derived from a review of existing literature, along with discussions with supervisors. However, it is proposed that the most effective way of addressing the research will be by adopting an integrated mixed methods design, utilizing a combination of data collection tools. Through a range of methods (for example, questionnaire surveys, classroom observations, and a range of interviewing techniques), sources of data will be generated that could then be used to analyse and provide insights into the development of positive friendship experiences for primary school pupils. For this reason, findings will be of interest to policymakers, advisors, researchers engaged in primary education, teachers, headteachers and ITE providers.

References

- Crawley, E., Loades, M., Feder, G., Logan, S., Redwood, S. and Macleod, J. (2020). Wider collateral damage to children in the UK because of the social distancing measures designed to reduce the impact of Covid-19 in adults, *British Medical Journal Paediatrics Open*, 4(1).
- Loades, M., Chatburn, E., Higson-Sweeney, N., Reynolds, S., Shafran, R., Brigden, A., Linney, C., McManus, M., Borwick, C. and Crawley, E. (2020). Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of Covid-19, *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(11), 1218-1239.

Pearcey, S., Raw, J., Shum, A., Waite, P., Patalay, P. and Cresswell, C. (2020). *Regular communication with friends outside the household during full lockdown and in the following months when restrictions were eased*. Oxford: University of Oxford.

Play England (2020). *Play After Lockdown: A Play England Briefing*. Bristol: Play England.

The Children's Society (2020). *Life on hold: Children's Well-being and Covid-19*. London: The Children's Society.

Supervisory team

The supervisors for this research would be Professor Alison Kington and Dr Alison Wren, both of whom have extensive experience of conducting mixed methods research of classroom behaviours and interactions. Prof Kington's research, which is cross-disciplinary in its theoretical and methodological approaches, focuses on the nature, quality and dynamics of educational relationships and identities. She has a particular focus on the experiences and perceptions of children and staff in schools, with an emphasis on the utilisation and application of research to improve professional practice. Dr Wren's research is around the lived experiences of children, with a specific focus on their relationships with peers. She is interested in the ways in which these relationships are linked to mental health, wellbeing and resilience for children and how friendships can be better supported by parents and practitioners.

Links to current areas of research

This research would fit within the Social Psychology of Education Research Group, which is undertaking an ongoing programme of activity. Members are involved in a wide variety of projects covering issues such as professional identity, career phase, teacher-pupil relationships, and peer/friendship interactions.

Further information

If you would like to discuss this opportunity, please contact Professor Alison Kington (a.kington@worc.ac.uk).