

Psy-Connection Award - Project proposal 轉念 Duologue

1. Introduction

We are going to propose a project that aims to encourage empathy, understanding and positive action of parents with special education needs (SEN) children. We aim to raise public awareness of the unique challenges faced by families with SEN children. Our ultimate goal is to improve the parenting outcomes of SEN children aged 2-17, mainly focusing on ASD and ADHD. Main activities include an exhibition centred around a two-chair virtual reality paradigm that enables parents to experience the perspective of SEN children, alongside a website featuring online SEN resources. We believe that our project has the potential to create positive social impacts. By creating a more empathetic and understanding community, we hope to improve parenting for all families, regardless of their special needs.

2. Background

In Hong Kong, SEN children include a wide range of disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities, special learning difficulties and the like, with ASD and ADHD comprising a relatively high population among the SEN types (Legco, 2021). The government has taken steps to improve support for students with SEN, such as increasing funding for SEN education and providing school-based educational psychological services (Education Bureau, 2021). However, there is still a need of greater awareness of the roles of parents who influence them as significant others throughout their childhood, an understanding of SEN in the wider community, as well as an increase in resources and support for SEN students.

3. Psychological Approaches used in our Activities

Two-chair Technique

According to Greenberg (1979), the premise of the two-dialogue approach lies in the ‘split’ - two partial aspects of the self are opposed to each other. The two partial selves are characterized as the ‘experiencing chair’ and the ‘other chair’, in which the ‘experiencing chair’ being the recipient, feels and reacts to the dialogue spoken by the ‘other chair’. The ‘other’ part of the self expresses criticism and projects the person’s attribution of the world. The two-chair technique deepens the experience of a conflict, leading to an increase in awareness and a felt sense of conflict resolution (Greenberg & Dompierre, 1981). As a result, the ‘other chair’ becomes more understanding and accepting of the self as well as allowing the two chairs to negotiate by listening to each other, softening criticism eventually (Greenberg, 1980).

The two-chair technique is known as a promising self-criticism intervention, with a significant association with increasing self-compassion and self-reassurance (Halamová et al., 2021). Its applicability in solving intrapersonal conflicts also explains the extensive adoption in counselling and clinical settings (Greenberg & Clarke, 1979; Stiegler et al., 2018). Yet, its effectiveness in addressing parenting problems targeting parents of SEN children remains to be demonstrated. Despite self-critical attacks within the self, we believe parents also experience a lack of empathetic understanding interpersonally which may lead to rejection and criticism towards their SEN children. Hence, we proposed the above to provide them with the perspectives of their children, improving parenting eventually.

Exhibition

Different forms of exhibits educating the public about SEN parenting are presented, namely booklets, art pieces, audio-visual displays, etc. Despite these, the two-chair approach is integrated into a VR paradigm, which is elaborated as follows.

Self-other Virtual Reality (VR) Experience

The VR paradigm is an interactive game that allows the parent to play the role of 1) a parent with SEN children and 2) an SEN child. In the first session, parents will wear a VR headset that displays an SEN child performing typical behaviours. The parents (i.e. the ‘other chair’) are allowed to interact with the VR child and express their emotions verbally or nonverbally. Following the second session in which the parent plays the role of a child with SEN (i.e. ‘experiencing chair’), the parent's parenting in the previous session is recorded and displayed as the ‘other’ self (See *Fig. 1*). Through this self-other analogy, the parents better understand their emotional reactions by experiencing the perspectives of SEN children in concordance with their parenting.

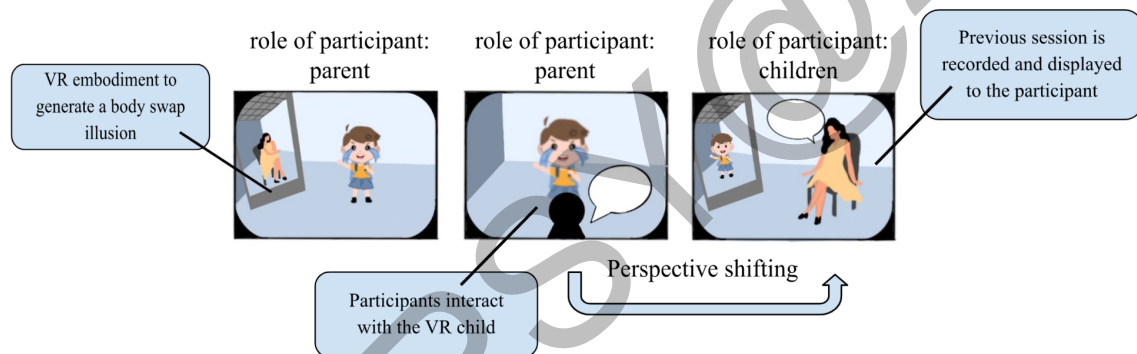


Figure 1: Diagram illustrating what participants are supposed to see in the VR headset

Virtual Reality

Considerable research has shown that virtual reality embodiment increased self-compassion (Falconer et al., 2014) (See *Fig. 2*). This paradigm also revealed substantial clinical potential, for example, in treating depression, social phobia, etc (Falconer et al., 2016; Wechsler et al., 2019). As mentioned, the two-chair approach involved the ‘experiencing chair’ and the ‘other chair’. A body swap illusion is created to allow the participant to immerse themselves in their own virtual body before interacting with the child. This further enhances the experience of receiving feedback as an imaginary child and achieving synchronization of the participant and the performer (i.e. the parent acting as the ‘other’ chair). The ability to shift perspective to their own child can be strengthened by providing participants with a sense of presence, and the feeling of being displaced from their own self (Cebolla et al., 2019). It is for this reason that VR experience is adopted to promote self-other compassion targetting parents of SEN students.



Figure 2: With reference to “Virtual reality therapy could help people with depression.”

Website

Alongside an Instagram account of our campaign, we will also launch a website which includes resources such as articles, guides, videos, webinars as well as experts’ advice on parenting strategies, communication skills, behavioural management etc. In terms of parenting support, a forum where they can expand their connections by exchanging their experiences is provided. Apart from cultivating a supportive online community for parents, a web-based two-chair technique will be launched. We first provide different types of SEN for parents to choose from. After that, typical scenarios of the chosen types of SEN are presented accordingly. The parents are then allowed to input in the textbox provided, expressing their thoughts and what they would tell the children. Followed by explanation of why SEN students behave in a certain way, their characteristics and needs are included in the educational video. Guidance in taking the children’s perspective with reference to the two-chair technique is introduced. We then show them their input again, enhancing the understanding of the ‘experiencing chair’. Parents will be asked to answer follow-up questions to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach in helping them with perspective shifting (See *Appendix I* for Website).

4. Expected Outcome

Evidence of efficacy in improving parenting

A study looked into the effects of two-chair practice on parenting outcome, showed efficacy in reducing internalization and externalization of problems in children (Ansar et al., 2022). By having a dialogue with the ‘imaginary child’, parents fostered emotional processing by increasing emotional arousal and thereby gained a deeper sense of how their own emotions may impact their child. On the other hand, it is suggested that two-chair is effective in addressing, not only limited to problematic parenting but also parents' underlying love-based fears about their children and themselves that may hinder their ability to provide attuned care to their children (Sabey et al., 2021). With reference to these two recent studies, it is expected that a deeper connection between their intuitive parenting strategies and the imagined experience of the children will be formed, leading to a refinement in relating to their child’s difficulties. Therefore, we believed in its strong applicability for parents of children with special needs.

Positive social influence

Our project benefits society in the following ways. One of the primary benefits is that it provides a practical day-to-day approach for parents to increase the ability to empathize in parenting, especially SEN children. The understanding of emotion and intention behind the conversation contributes to effective communication. Only with the ability to take on a different perspective, can mutual acceptance in parent-child relationships be created (Runcan et al., 2012). As suggested, children often fail to receive accurate messages from parents due to the use of inappropriate vocabulary, body language, tone and parental anger. The two-chair technique allows parents to reflect on how they interact with their children by adjusting their current communication styles and practising two-chair whenever they tend to criticize their children. At the end of the day, improving parent-child relationships.

In addition, it is expected that our project eliminates stereotypes of SEN children so as to create a supportive and inclusive environment for SEN. By educating the public about the typical behaviours of SEN and proper SEN parenting, wider knowledge and awareness of the issue helps remove societal stigma and increase support in response to the needs of SEN. Dissemination of accurate information through social media and exhibitions will foster a greater understanding of SEN students in the community, leading to a higher level of acceptance. Step by step, our ultimate goal is to cultivate a relatively stigma-free environment for all children.

5. Uniqueness of our project

- 1) The needs of SEN parents are often overlooked by society which can be reflected by the resources targeting mainly SEN children themselves. The two-chair technique is an easily-adapted and consistent approach, which can be applied in a range of everyday scenarios in a home setting.
- 2) We play a proactive role in advocating two-chair communication into the community. Due to differences in educational level, parents may find it difficult to reach out to SEN-related resources, our exhibition provides an interactive two-chair dialogue experience to the public, especially to parents with low digital literacy.
- 3) The use of VR technology in parenting is an innovative approach with the potential of creating positive parenting outcomes. Its uniqueness lies in enhancing the experience of embodiment into the children's perspectives, allowing parents to experience the world through their children's eyes, and providing a deeper sense of empathy and reflection on their current parenting behaviour.

6. Timeline

Throughout the execution of our events, the website and Instagram page will be launched in phase 1. Phase 1 focuses on reaching out to a larger population, promoting our exhibition on both social media and the website to engage more people. As for phase 2, the exhibition will be held after gaining some attention from the public. (See *appendix II* for Working Schedule)

	Goal	Content
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open a public Instagram account - reach out to the public and collaborate with other psychology-related pages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduce the idea of two-chair dialogue and our aspiration - update posts about parenting skills and parent-child communication regularly (at least twice a week) - symptoms of SEN students - common SEN parenting difficulties/problems in Hong Kong
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organize an exhibition to the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide VR experience of two-chair dialogue to the public - present different forms of exhibits (e.g., paintings, art pieces, audio-visual displays) to educate the public about parenting - introduce basic information about parenting and SEN students

7. Budget plan

Projected allowance & loss	HKD	Remarks
IT-related expenses	\$8,000	Cost of web page and two-chair VR paradigm design
VR equipment	\$7,000	1 VR headset
Exhibition expenses	\$1,000	1 Backdrop + Display board + Decoration materials + Booklet about SEN children and parent-child relationship
Venue expenses	\$4,000	Venue for one day exhibition
Total budget	\$20,000	/

8. Possible Challenges and Solution

Potential challenge 1: There is a risk of motion sickness or other adverse physical effects on participants. Some parents may experience discomfort or nausea when using VR headsets, limiting the effectiveness of the technology.

Solution: We will ensure that participants are aware of the potential risks and inform them that they are always allowed to take breaks or stop if they experience any discomfort.

Potential challenge 2: The exhibits or two-chair VR experience featuring certain scenarios may trigger parents' emotional responses.

Solution: Content warnings are issued for exhibits that contain sensitive elements. Before the VR session, participants will receive an emotional preparedness statement and they will be reminded that they can withdraw any time if they feel uncomfortable during the experience.

Potential challenge 3: The cost of VR technology is high.

Solution: To address this issue, it may be necessary to explore alternative sponsorships and fundings.

Potential challenge 4: The reliability and effectiveness of this project may be doubted by the public since it is proposed by college students instead of professionals.

Solution: Our approach is evidence-based. We will look for supervisors to ensure the quality of our program.

Reference

- Ansar, N., Nissen-Lie, H. A., Zahl-Olsen, R., Bertelsen, T., Elliott, R. J., & Stiegler, J. R. (2022). Efficacy of Emotion-Focused Parenting Programs for Children's Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms: A Randomized Clinical Study. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 51(6), 923–939. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2022.2079130>
- Cebolla, A., Herrero, R., Ventura, S., Miragall, M., Bellosta-Batalla, M., Llorens, R., & Baños, R. M. (2019). Putting Oneself in the Body of Others: A Pilot Study on the Efficacy of an Embodied Virtual Reality System to Generate Self-Compassion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01521>
- Education Bureau. (2021). School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) Guide. https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/professional-support/school-based-educational-psychology-service/SBEPS%20Guide_Eng_2021_FINAL.pdf
- Falconer, C. J., Rovira, A., King, J. R., Gilbert, P., Antley, A., Fearon, P., Ralph, N., Slater, M., & Brewin, C. R. (2016). Embodying self-compassion within virtual reality and its effects on patients with depression. *British Journal of Psychiatry Open*, 2(1), 74–80. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjpo.bp.115.002147>
- Falconer, C. J., Slater, M., Rovira, A., King, J. R., Gilbert, P., Antley, A., & Brewin, C. R. (2014). Embodying Compassion: A Virtual Reality Paradigm for Overcoming Excessive Self-Criticism. *PLOS ONE*, 9(11), e111933. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0111933>
- Greenberg, L. S. (1979). Resolving splits: Use of the two chair technique. *Psychotherapy*, 16(3), 316–324. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0085895>
- Greenberg, L. S. (1980). The intensive analysis of recurring events from the practice of Gestalt therapy. *Psychotherapy*, 17(2), 143–152. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0085904>

- Greenberg, L. S., & Clarke, K. (1979). Differential effects of the two-chair experiment and empathic reflections at a conflict marker. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 26(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.26.1.1>
- Greenberg, L. S., & Dompierre, L. M. (1981). Specific effects of Gestalt two-chair dialogue on intrapsychic conflict in counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(4), 288–294. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.28.4.288>
- Halamová, J., Dvoranová, A., Zlúkyová, S., & Vráblová, V. (2021). Consensual Qualitative Analysis of Self-Criticizing Using the Two-Chair Technique. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4750>
- Runcan, P. L., Constantineanu, C., Ielics, B., & Popa, D. (2012). The Role of Communication in the Parent-Child Interaction. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 904–908. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.221>
- Sabey, A. K., Stillar, A., & Lafrance, A. (2021). Processes and outcomes of an emotion-focused family therapy two-chair intervention for transforming problematic parenting patterns. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 48(3), 738–757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12580>
- UCL News. (2022, May 6). *Virtual reality therapy could help people with depression*. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2016/feb/virtual-reality-therapy-could-help-people-depression>
- 香港立法會 (2021)。《審核二零二一至二二年度開支預算管制人員對財務委員會委員初步書面問題的答覆》。香港：香港立法會。
https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr20-21/chinese/fc/fc/w_q/edb-c.pdf

Appendix I: Website



Appendix II: Working Schedule

Period	content
February - March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formation of founder teams - literature review on topics
May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formation of advisory board - seek approval from professionals - seek collaboration with other psychology-related pages - risk management
June 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - technician recruitment (for website programming) - design and promotion team recruitment (volunteer) - preparation of web page & Instagram page
July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - create educational videos about behaviours of different SEN types - browser testing for the website
August - September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instagram page set up - web page set up - promotion period - find potential sponsors for the exhibition (goal: \$10000)
October -November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promotion on social media and reach out target audience - actively engage followers on Instagram
December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - start preparation work of the exhibition - seek instructions and advice from technician (prepare for the two-chair scenario for VR experience) - site-visiting (look for possible venues for exhibition)
January - March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - design display boards and parenting-related education materials - technical inspection of the VR headset - check on the click rate of posts on instagram and webpage
April - June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - confirm sponsorships of the event - venue booking for the exhibition - prepare logistic plan for the exhibition
July 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - final preparation period of the exhibition - promotion of the exhibition one month in advance
August 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exhibition about parenting