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# International Journal of the Whole Child


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# Introduction

**Tiffany Wilson, Editor**

This Spring issue provides readers with information related to the challenges of Covid-19 and the importance of teacher self-care. Moreover, this issue also provides content related to students with disabilities and the impact technology and intentional planning can have on play. The IJWC continues to be committed to promoting holistic learning and the development of children.

**Article #1:**
Reflection on Practice: Pre-Service Teachers' Reflection and Intentional Planning to Enhance Toddlers' Engagement During Free Play
Jane Seok Jeng Lim, Robyn Ridgley

In the first article, "Reflection on Practice: Pre-Service Teachers' Reflection and Intentional Planning to Enhance Toddlers' Engagement During Free Play," Jane Seok Jeng Lim and Robyn Ridgley discuss their study aimed at exploring pre-service teacher candidates' (PTCs) observations and reflections on toddlers during free play, as well as to provide an opportunity to enhance these PTCs' development. This study is informed by the bioecological model and experiential learning theory. For the study, PTCs observed and reflected on their observations first individually and then collectively. After doing so, PTCs intentionally planned the learning centers in the classroom followed by additional observation and reflection. PTCs' reflections noted key elements for engagement related to location, variety of materials, and modeling by adults.

**Article #2:**
Motivation for Participation in Extracurricular School Clubs for Students with Severe Disabilities
Alicia Pence

In the second article, "Motivation for Participation in Extracurricular School Clubs for Students with Severe Disabilities," Alicia Pence discusses how students with severe disabilities are often underrepresented compared to students without disabilities in extracurricular school activities. This study seeks to examine the influencing factors of why a student with severe disabilities decides to participate or not participate in extracurricular school activities.

**Tech Talk Manuscript**
The Whole Teacher: Practicing Self-Care
Nancy Caukin, Leslie Trail, Constance Wright

In the Tech Talk article, “The Whole Teacher: Practicing Self-Care,” Nancy Caukin, Leslie Trail, and Constance Wright outline teacher stress, including the pandemic’s impact, the effects of stress, and the antidote of self-care. They define self-care and its importance and deconstruct it into elements they call Head (Mental/Cognitive), Heart (Emotional/Spiritual), and Hands (Physical). They then discuss additional components and resources for managing social and emotional health.

**ETC Manuscript**
Striving From the Margins During COVID-19: One Family's Experience Advocating for Their Middle School E-Learner.
S. Renée Jones

In the ETC article, “Striving from the Margins During COVID-19: One Family’s Experience Advocating for Their Middle School E-Learner” S. Renee Jones seeks to highlight one family’s struggle to ensure their Black middle schooler received a quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Black middle school students can experience various challenges and barriers related to inequities in education. It is imperative that schools work with families to mitigate adverse consequences of learning caused by COVID-19 specifically for marginalized children.

**Children & Families: Health and Wellness Manuscript**
Instances of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Among the Young in Turkey
Simel Parlak, Azize Nilgün Canel

The Health and Wellness article by Simel Parlak and Azize Nilgün Canel researches the origins of emotional and intellectual processes of violence among young people in Turkey. The results of the interpretative phenomenological analysis yielded three themes: childhood experiences, relationship with partner and occurrences of violence, and post-violence experience.

**Education By the Numbers**
Donald Snead

In Education by the Numbers, Donald Snead brings awareness of the influence teachers have on students and society as a whole. In his summary, Snead reviews various characteristics that that are often associated with student success.

**STEAM Manuscript**

STREAM into Online Play Groups: How Children Adapt to Play in a Rapidly Digitized World
Rebecca Horrace

In the STEAM article, "STREAM into Online Play Groups How Children Adapt to Play in a Rapidly Digitized World," Rebecca Horrace provides an understanding of the role technology and digital media have on children's play. She describes the current digital landscape children can use for their play and argues for the integration of technology into children's play stating that it serves as an additional avenue for play that provides enhancement not found in traditional play. Finally, gives a description of how digital play looks within the context of online play groups.

**Page Turners: Books for Children**

Katrina Bartow Jacobs, Carla K. Meyer, Michelle Sobolak, Patricia Crawford, and Maria T. Genest

Katrina Bartow Jacobs, Carla K. Meyer, Michelle Sobolak, Patricia Crawford, and Maria T. Genest review a collection of children's literature. They provide literature for children of all ages aimed at various developmental areas.
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**Emerging Scholar**

The Impact of Emotional Intelligence among Children with Disabilities and the Role of Professional Educators and Caregivers: A Literature Review
Peri Munday, Christan Horton

The Emerging Scholar article, "The Impact of Emotional Intelligence among Children with Disabilities and the Role of Professional Educators and Caregivers: A Literature Review," Peri Mundy and Christan Horton provide a literature review of the intersection of emotional intelligence, students with disabilities, and the role of professional educators and caregivers.

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**Reflection on Practice: Pre-Service Teachers' Reflection and Intentional Planning to Enhance Toddlers' Engagement During Free Play**

Jane Seok Jeng Lim[a], Robyn Ridgley[b]

[a-b]Middle Tennessee State University

Dr. Jane Seok Jeng Lim is an Associate Professor in the early childhood program at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, USA. Her research interests include the issue of bullying among underrepresented populations – refugee children; study abroad; and professional development of teachers. She was the former Executive Director of the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) – AECES, sat on the executive board of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) and is the Past President of Tennessee ACEI.

Dr. Robyn Ridgley is a professor in early childhood education and interim associate dean in the College of Education at Middle Tennessee State University. Formerly, she was a classroom teacher, home visitor, and administrator in an early childhood program. Her research focuses on early intervention services for young children with disabilities and strategies for supporting and improving preparation for early childhood professionals.

**Abstract**
In this paper, early childhood teacher educators describe their work to provide opportunities for pre-service teacher candidates to engage in specific practices that facilitate reflection and planning related to enhancing toddlers' engagement during free play. The practices targeted were structured by the instructor and supported by the mentor teacher and included observation; guided written reflection; collective discussion and reflection; and intentional planning. Each practice and how it was implemented and completed by the instructor and students are discussed. As a result of participating in the practices, teacher candidates identified several factors they believed impacted toddlers' engagement during free play. They included location of centers, materials, and other people, variety of materials, adult interaction, and children's interests, all of which aligned with prior research. Implications for practice for pre-service teacher preparation programs and practicing teachers are provided.

*Keywords:* toddlers, engagement, free play, teacher preparation

The National Association for Young Children (NAEYC), a leading early childhood professional organization, has advocated for developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) since 1986 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). NAEYC's position statement on DAP states that the most powerful influences on how children learn are the teacher's interactions and relationships with the children and how the teacher addresses classroom planning and organization of learning experiences and the environment (NAEYC, 2009). In order for new teachers to be equipped to adequately support young children, pre-service preparation programs must address the multitude of teacher roles, including planning, observing, interacting, directing, scaffolding, reflecting, and ensuring optimal growth and development of young children. High quality implementation of these roles leads to teacher interactions and classroom environments that facilitate the engagement of young children in learning opportunities.

**Toddlers' Engagement During Free Play**

Engagement has been defined as the time children spend interacting in the environment in developmentally and contextually appropriate ways (McWilliam & Bailey, 1992; McWilliam, Trivette, & Dunst, 1985). Engagement with adults, peers, or materials must occur if children are to achieve their optimal development and learning (Aguiar & McWilliam, 2013; Hooper & Hallam, 2017). Deeper learning occurs when children are highly engaged (Singer, Nederand, Penninx, Tajik, & Boom, 2014). The global quality of the classroom has been associated with toddler engagement (Hooper & Hallam, 2017; Ridley, McWilliam, & Oates, 2000). Children in higher quality classrooms, as measured by the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003), tend to be engaged more than toddlers in lower quality classrooms (Hooper & Hallam, 2017; Ridley, McWilliam, & Oates, 2000).

Although engagement of toddlers in classroom settings can vary widely, specific child, teacher, and classroom factors have been associated with toddler engagement (Hooper & Hallam, 2017). Older toddlers (i.e., those closer to 36 months of age) in high quality classrooms tend to spend less time in non-engagement than younger toddlers (i.e., those closer to 14 months of age) in high quality classrooms (Aguiar & McWilliam, 2013). Having peers continuously nearby encourages toddlers to engage more deeply (Singer et al., 2014). Teacher affective style and positive interactions have been associated with higher levels of toddler engagement (Ridley, McWilliam, & Oates, 2000). When adults are nearby and engage specifically with children in back-and-forth interaction, toddlers tend to be more engaged (Hooper & Hallam, 2017; Singer et al., 2014). When teachers use rich, interactive approaches during book reading and play, toddler engagement is higher than when teachers read without interactions or have brief interactions during play (Garner-Neblett et al., 2017; Singer et al., 2014). Specific classroom structure and activities have been associated with higher levels of toddler engagement. Mealtimes and free play generally result in higher levels of engagement in toddlers (Hooper & Hallam, 2017). Adult-child ratio may be connected to toddler engagement. However, studies have produced mixed results (Aguiar & McWilliam, 2013; Raspa, McWilliam, & Ridley, 2001; Ridley, McWilliam, & Oates, 2000) suggesting that the actions and interactions of teachers with children may matter more than the number of teachers and children in the classroom.

**Preparing Pre-service Teacher Candidates (PTC)**

Supporting the development of observation and reflection skills is a critical component addressed by teacher preparation programs (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (2018) indicate that new teachers should know how to create supportive and challenging environments; use multiple approaches, strategies, and tools to support children's learning; observe and document child learning; and use reflective and responsive practice. The field has advocated for teacher training that focuses on relationship-based practices where teachers are reflective and engage in meaningful interactions with children (Degotardi, 2010; LaParo, Williamson, & Hartfield, 2014; Manlove, Vazquez, & Vernon-Feagans, 2008; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Sabol and Pianta (2012) believe early childhood teachers are "central agents of change" since they are integral to meaningful interactions and engagement in the toddler classroom (p. 222). If pre-service teacher candidates (PTC) become good observers, interactional partners, and reflectors, toddler engagement should occur.

In order to equip PTC to provide high quality environments that include appropriate materials and arrangements, interactive and affective styles, and daily routines and structures that support and encourage toddler engagement, learning opportunities must be provided in their preparation programs that facilitate these components. The overarching purpose of this project was to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in specific practices that facilitate their reflection and planning related to enhancing toddlers' engagement during free play. We were interested in learning more about how observations of toddlers in an early childhood program during free play would be interpreted by pre-service teacher candidates within written reflections and group discussion and used to make decisions about changes in the learning centers to enhance toddlers' engagement.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Two theoretical perspectives, the bioecological model and the experiential learning theory (ELT) were used to guide this work. The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2001) suggests that interactions between a child and people, objects, or processes in the immediate environments impacts the child's development and learning. There are four components within this system comprising the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. This study focused on the first level of microsystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), "A microsystem is the complex relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.)" (p. 514). The proximal influence of the classroom environment, including teacher interactions and planning, plays a role in toddlers' engagement. When adult-child interactions and environmental adjustments are made to encourage toddlers' engagement, the microsystem level is enhanced.

The second theoretical perspective supporting this work is the experiential learning theory (ELT). This framework guided the specific opportunities used to enhance the PTCs' learning. This learning theory suggests that learning is a process in which experiences create knowledge

(Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). Learners must understand and incorporate their experiences in order for learning to occur. ELT has a 4-stage learning cycle in which learners grasp experiences through concrete experience or abstract conceptualization. Experiences are then transformed through reflective observation and active experimentation. By engaging in a concrete experience, individuals are prompted to observe and reflect. The reflections create abstract conceptualizations that promote action. This learning process was intentionally incorporated into specific components of this project. By providing opportunities for PTC to engage in specific practices, observations, and reflections, they acted to enhance toddlers' engagement during play. Furthermore, this project informed our practice and work with teacher candidates in higher education as we strive to ensure they are knowledgeable and skillful at identifying factors that enhance engagement in the learning environments for young children.

**Context and Participants**

This project took place in an undergraduate early childhood education course at a southeastern public university in the United States. PTC are required to take the course that entails working with toddlers between 12 to 36 months of age. Sixteen PTC were enrolled in the course during the spring 2019 semester. The faculty instructor of the course recruited each of the 16 PTC to participate in the project using IRB-approved consent procedures. Fourteen PTC agreed to participate, allowing the researchers to collect and de-identify specific written work submitted as part of the practicum course. Only 13 of the 14 consented PTC completed the course activities related to the project. Of the 13 PTC, nine were White, two were Hispanic, one was Asian, and one was African American.

All PTC were juniors or seniors majoring in Early Childhood Education. Each PTC enrolled in the class spent three hours one day per week with a group of six-to-eight toddlers enrolled in a part-day, two day per week university early childhood classroom (EC classroom). A total of 30 toddlers were enrolled during Spring 2019. A mentor teacher and two-to-three PTC were present during each session in the EC classroom. In addition, all PTC enrolled in the course met as a group with the faculty instructor and mentor teacher one time per week for a two-hour seminar session.

All PTC enrolled in the course had completed two child development courses and a beginning course on teaching children birth through age eight. Two of the PTC also had completed a course on literacy development and instruction in early childhood and a practicum course focused on supporting preschoolers in an early childhood classroom.

**Practices and Process for Implementation**

As part of the practicum course, PTC were responsible for determining changes, updates, and additions to the learning centers in the classroom two times during the semester. They worked in small groups during seminar sessions to make the needed changes. Prior to making the changes, PTC engaged in specific practices that facilitated their learning, reflection, and planning related to enhancing toddlers' engagement with the learning centers available during free play. The practices were structured by the instructor and supported by the mentor teacher. The four

targeted practices included observation; guided written reflection; collective discussion and reflection; and intentional planning. Each practice and how it was implemented and completed by the students are discussed.

**Practice 1: Observation**

The first critical practice PTC were required to use was observation. The purpose of the observations was for the PTC to carefully watch the children in the classroom and note their movement, behaviors, and interactions during free play. PTC were given specific directions for observing and noting their observations (see Appendix A). By observing, PTC were given a concrete experience that provided an opportunity for considering what they know about toddlers' engagement and how it "looked" in the classroom. The observations also provided information about specific children's interests or patterns related to areas of the classroom in which they spent time, people that they were near, and materials that were used. Each PTC observed the children prior to each center planning seminar. Practice 1 enabled the PTC to go through the process of concrete experiences through their observations and transforming their learning through their reflective observation. PTC were to learn more about the children's interests in order to inform discussions, moving from abstract conceptualization to active experimentation in making decisions for changes in the centers.

PTC observed on their scheduled practicum day during the free choice play through a one-way mirror, eliminating the possibility of the PTCs' notetaking impacting the toddlers' engagement. When observing, PTC observed each child for 10 consecutive minutes, noting where the child played and briefly how he/she engaged during play. Each time the child moved from one center to another, the order of the stop was noted. When the observation was concluded, the PTC sketched the classroom layout with centers labeled and drew the movement path of the child from center to center noting the sequential order of the movement. This process was continued until all children present in the classroom had been observed on that given day.

**Practice 2: Guided Written Reflection**

After collecting information through observation, PTC engaged in review and reflection on the information gathered. The purpose of this practice was to encourage PTC to engage in the experiential learning theory stage in which concrete experiences are reflected upon in order to inform the active experimentation to come. PTC were asked to review all of their notes taken during the observations and the sketches drawn at the conclusion of the observations. To facilitate their individual reflections about all children's patterns of movement and engagement during free play time, PTC were given specific prompts to guide them. They included the following.

(a) What did you learn about the children's interests in the classroom?
(b) Which centers were engaging and not engaging to children?
(c) What recommendations about changes to the learning centers would you make?
(d) What opportunities do you see for providing differentiated instruction to children in the centers?

PTC individually considered and responded in writing to each of these prompts. The resulting reflection responses were brought to a designated seminar session (i.e., within one to two weeks

following the observations). PTC were to use their reflections and responses to support their contributions as they participated in practice 3, Collective Discussion and Reflection. PTC also submitted their reflections to the instructor of the course who read them and responded to their ideas with written feedback about the level of detail, specific observations noted, or additional considerations for future observations and/or reflections.

**Practice 3: Collective Discussion and Reflection**

The third practice used to support PTCs' learning related to creating environments that support toddlers' engagement was collective discussion and reflection. The purpose of this practice was to promote a community of learners through the sharing of ideas and provide opportunities for the PTC to learn from one another, build on others' ideas, and develop deeper knowledge and understanding about the toddlers' interests, engagement, and movement patterns. This discussion and reflection occurred during the seminar in the toddler classroom prior to the PTC updating and planning learning centers. This was an open discussion led by the faculty instructor in which students referenced their written reflections about their observations of the children during learning centers. They shared their perspectives related to the four prompts: interests of children; specific centers that were engaging or not to specific children; recommendations for changes; and opportunities for providing differentiated instruction. Each prompt was discussed sequentially and thoroughly until no other comments about a specific prompt were made by PTC. Notes were taken on big paper so all students could see the ideas shared by others. If PTC provided limited or vague details, the instructor or mentor teacher scaffolded through follow up prompts, such as "Tell me more about how you know Evie was interested in blocks," or "How would you recommend we support Keshawn's language at the sensory table?"

As PTC shared details, other PTC confirmed or disputed the information shared. The discussion allowed the PTC to discover that some toddlers' engagement, interests, and behaviors varied from day to day or were similar across days. This allowed the PTC to triangulate their data and make connections to prior learning about what influenced children's engagement. As PTC shared details about interests, impact of peers, location of centers, or other observations, new conceptualizations and ideas were developed. The faculty instructor noted commonalities between ideas shared and recorded specific details and strategies they identified related to how learning centers could be enhanced to encourage more engagement from the children. Students took pictures or took notes of this recorded information. These notes were used when the next practice was implemented.

**Practice 4: Intentional Planning**

The final practice used to support the PTCs' work in supporting the engagement of toddlers during free play was intentional planning. The purpose of this practice was to allow PTC to make decisions and actively experiment with implementing strategies for improving the toddlers' engagement during free play. This practice followed the collective discussion and reflection and focused on intentionally planning the learning centers available in the classroom during free play. PTC were placed in small groups of two-to-three and assigned specific centers on which to focus. The centers assigned included reading, fine motor, math, science, dramatic play, music, and blocks.

During the week after the collective discussion and reflection, the small groups were to engage in an online discussion with the following prompt. "Read the requirements of ITERS-R and relate them to the centers you are assigned. Review your individual notes from your observations, your individual written reflection, and the notes from our last seminar session (i.e., collective discussion and reflection). Also, review and reflect on the sketch of the classroom layout completed when observing. Then, write three possible items that should be added or removed from the centers you are assigned. Also, write any other changes that need to be made to the learning center to enhance the toddlers' engagement."

On the day of the center planning seminar, PTC, the faculty instructor, and the mentor teacher met in the toddler classroom and reviewed the notes from the prior seminar that included teacher candidates' initial ideas for enhancing the learning centers to promote the toddlers' engagement. PTC were encouraged to share any new ideas, additional thoughts, or further observations. They were provided the plan for the day that included working with their small group to update the learning centers assigned to them. The mentor teacher provided directions about not removing materials from the centers that served as a transition or comfort items for some toddlers in the classroom. The small groups were instructed to begin their planning process by reviewing the details their small groups discussed online from the discussion prompt and to make final decisions about what should be removed or added and decide if any other changes needed to be made. They then began the work of making the needed changes in the centers. The faculty instructor and mentor teacher moved around the toddler classroom to support them by responding to questions as they worked. Once all changes were made in the centers, the small group captured their thinking on the center planning form (see Appendix B). They worked collaboratively to complete the details in the plan. Once completed, PTC shared their plans for the learning centers verbally while their peers toured the center. The peers were encouraged to provide feedback on the contents in the center and on the plan. The plan was posted on the wall in the designated center at the end of the seminar so that PTC could visually reference it each time they worked in the classroom to be reminded of the purpose and goals of the center.

**Circling Back Through the Practices**

After the changes were made to the learning centers, PTC, children, and mentor teacher used the learning centers daily as designed for one month during free play. After a month of observing and engaging with toddlers as they played in the updated centers, PTC went through the process again implementing each of the four practices once more in order to gather information, reflect, and make decisions that resulted in revising and updating the learning centers for a second time. This process allowed the PTC to move from their abstract conceptualization of learning to transforming their learning through active experimentation. In addition, they were able to observe how their updated centers promoted engagement during the toddlers' play.

**Reflections from Pre-Service Teacher Candidates**

At the conclusion of the course, PTC were provided a reflective prompt, "What have you learned about planning centers using this process of observation and reflection to enhance the

engagement of children?" to provide insight into their learning and realizations about factors that impacted the toddlers' engagement. The instructor and her researcher colleague independently read and re-read each reflection by each teacher candidate in its entirety to learn more about the PTCs' perspectives about factors that impacted the engagement of the toddlers during free play. Using an inductive coding process in which the codes were derived from the data (Mason, 1996), each researcher identified codes. At mid-point during the coding process, the two researchers met to discuss the coding of the data. Specific codes were shared and discussed, and consensus was reached about the codes. After both had read, re-read, and coded all the reflections, the researchers met to share and reach consensus on the coding of all the data. Consensus was reached, and codes were categorized and grouped into themes collaboratively by the researchers.

Generally, PTC perceived there was a connection between teachers' observing children, noting where they spent time and their preferences, and reflecting on the observations with their co-teachers and toddler engagement. PTC had participated in a specific process of observing and reflecting on those observations to determine changes in centers to encourage engagement of the toddlers. Three PTC noted that this experience was helpful when planning centers. One PTC suggested, "I learned so many different things" including details about children's interests, the impact of environmental arrangement, how children play in centers, and how children's engagement changes when the room is arranged in different ways. Another PTC agreed that observing and reflecting helped her know more about the "influence the environment has on children." Furthermore, one PTC indicated that observations and data collection were "essential, the observations provided details about how to individually support children and insight into where teachers "should position themselves during the next center time."PTC noted several components in the classroom that impacted toddlers' engagement. They perceived location of centers, materials, and other people, variety of materials, adult interaction, and children's interests as factors that impacted the toddlers' engagement.

**Location Matters**

All PTC noted location of three environmental components impacted the engagement of toddlers within centers. They included the location of centers, materials, and other people. When reflecting on their learning, PTC discussed the location of centers and the importance of children being able to see the center furnishings and contents as valuable when trying to enhance engagement of the toddlers. An example provided by PTC when planning the reading center was "The reading center was in the back corner of the classroom and hidden from view behind a bookshelf;" another PTC elaborated, "If the reading center was moved to the front of the classroom, I think the children would spend a lot more time in that area." When discussing the music center, a similar issue was noted. "The music center is on a shelf in the same space that the children have circle time after centers. The instruments are hidden from view by the teacher's reading chair and books for small group." PTC perceived that the location of a given center impacted children's engagement with the center. If children could not see the center or were not regularly in that part of the classroom, children did not engage in the center as frequently.
PTC noted location of materials in the center as a possible factor to toddlers engaging in a center. When considering the math center, one PTC noted that moving puzzles from the floor to a higher

shelf where children could easily see and access them would increase engagement in the center. PTC also believed that if the items in the music center were made more visible and placed on shelves at eye level for the toddlers, they would engage in the center more frequently.

PTCs' reflections suggested that the location of people in or near a center encouraged children to join a center. PTC noted that adults in the classroom were more likely to join a center after a child began playing there. However, children tended to play in centers in which adults were already present. In order to heighten interest in a center in which children did not regularly visit, PTC believed, when possible, adults should position themselves in the center prior to a child arriving. One PTC said this about the reading center, "Since we follow the children to whichever center they go to, there is not normally an adult there unless there is a child there. If possible, ensure there is an adult ready to share books and stories with the children as they come over." Another PTC noted that children are "more motivated to investigate" when an adult was present in the center. PTC noted the power of other children playing in centers, too. PTC noted that some children engaged in more interactive play and sought out other children, while some children were "more prone to go to an area and play with other children and adults." The location and interaction of the centers, materials and people within the microsystem impacted upon the level of engagement of the toddlers.

**Variety of Materials**

PTC learned that the materials included within each center are key to heightening children's engagement in the center. Varying types, challenging materials, and novel or new materials were needed to ensure children engaged in a center. PTC noted that providing various types of materials could heighten engagement of the toddlers in various centers. In the math center, one PTC noted that providing "different size and shape materials could be helpful." Providing various types of musical instruments and props, such as scarves, in the music center was suggested by multiple PTC. They also suggested including materials with various sensory aspects as a strategy for increasing engagement in centers. Specifically, including materials that made noise, had lights, were various colors, and included varying textures could encourage children to engage in the science center.

When focusing on some centers, PTC reflected on the challenge of the materials in the centers and suggested that challenging materials would encourage the toddlers to engage in the centers more frequently. Books that included more interesting and challenging vocabulary and pictures were suggested as a strategy to encourage the children to engage. One PTC recommended materials that had a "puzzle aspect. She elaborated that the children seemed "engaged by things that they can take apart and put together." One PTC noted how most children played parallel next to others; however, she suggested providing some materials that encouraged children to play with one another to provide opportunities for children to grow in this area. These reflective observations showcased that the PTC were also applying the theoretical concept of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development using scaffolding and transforming to active experimentation to engage the toddlers in their play.

When selecting materials, PTC believed that new or novel materials often enticed the toddlers to enter and engage in a center. PTC recognized that with time, "the novelty wears off" with materials and new play could be "prompted" with different materials. One PTC indicated that materials that are on the table for arrival time could be appropriate to include in centers. She suggested when toddlers were interested in the table materials that were available for a short period of time during the day, including them in a center could encourage children to engage more frequently in a center.

**Adult Interaction**

PTC noted that toddlers were engaged in specific centers more frequently when adults were interacting with them by modeling how to use materials or use them in a new way and prompting children to engage with them in a center. PTC noted the power of adult interaction in encouraging toddlers to engage. One PTC wrote, "Modeling can do so much for children of this age. I have noticed that they imitate movements and actions from others a lot." Later the PTC wrote, "The children go in and out of these areas a lot. This is where showing them how to use the different materials would come in handy. If they understood how to use them, then it is more likely they will play with them [rather than enter the center and leave]." PTC recognized that young children may not engage with materials that are new if they are unsure how to use the materials, therefore, adult interaction is needed. Also, they acknowledged that modeling encouraged the toddlers to engage with new or novel materials.

PTC realized that children may not visit a center if not encouraged to do so. They suggested inviting children to a center when children are less likely to join the center on their own. One PTC shared, "The teachers should be encouraged to draw children into less popular centers. It is likely that the children have not experienced what is in each of these centers and, therefore, do not know what the center offers." Showing children toys or materials that would "spark children's interest" was noted as a strategy to use when prompting children to enter a center. PTC discussed how the children seemed to visit the same centers each day. By an adult prompting children to join him/her in the center, children would be more inclined to visit.

One PTC summed up the power of adult interactions in relation to the toddlers' engagement in centers, "I realized how vital it is to have adults that willingly and purposefully engage the children in questioning, exploring, and interacting with objects . . . I also realized how often children will simply watch each other or adults. This means adults should be aware of how they are presenting and modeling when they are in these spaces." This candidate's summation meets NAEYC's position statement on DAP that the most powerful influences on how children learn are the teacher's interactions and relationships with the children and how the teacher addresses classroom planning and organization of learning experiences and the environment (NAEYC, 2009).

**Children's Interests**

PTC believed including materials related to children's preferences and removing non-preferred items would encourage the children to engage in a center. As PTC discussed what they learned about supporting toddlers' engagement, many discussed focusing on the children's interests. When discussing how to utilize interests to encourage toddlers' engagement, one PTC shared,

"Recently, I have noticed most of the children making animal sounds a lot more frequently. The animal books would strengthen their knowledge about animals, spark their interest in books, and be an interactive way to introduce the animal puppets to the children." When considering interests, PTC identified materials that children engaged with frequently and proposed providing similar types of items in other centers as a possible strategy for encouraging engagement in different centers. Similarly, PTC discussed how removing items that are not of interest to children and replacing them with preferred items could contribute to heightened engagement in a center. A PTC noted, "We can replace certain toys that do not get used with toys the children will like." While another PTC when discussing the block center said, "The vehicles are popular, but it seems the overall novelty has worn off and new toys could prompt new play."

**Summary**

PTC identified factors that were aligned with indicators associated with global quality of early childhood classrooms (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003; Ridley, McWilliam, & Oates, 2000). Specifically, considering where centers and materials were located and having a variety of materials that were novel, challenging, and interesting to children were noted as factors that may enhance toddlers' engagement. Similar to prior research, they perceived that adult and peer proximity, and adult interactions were influential in toddlers' engagement (Garner-Neblett et al., 2017; Hooper & Hallam, 2017; Singer et al., 2014).

PTC applied developmentally appropriate concepts when reflecting on their observations of children and the factors that impacted their engagement. The PTC seemed to understand the influence of the organization of the learning environment, interactions that occur between adults and children, and the influence of peers (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). The specific actions taken by the adults in the classroom, related to modeling, prompting, and encouraging children to join other children in a center were seen as supportive to the toddlers. PTC saw themselves as agents that could facilitate engagement of the children (Degotardi, 2010; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Furthermore, acknowledging and incorporating children's interests were seen as key elements in engaging young children during free play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

**Implications and Directions for the Future**

There are several implications for practice and future work in early childhood preparation programs derived from this work with pre-service teacher candidates. They include purposefully designing courses that include providing time and space for implementing practices, using practices grounded in theory, and encouraging collegial collaboration.

PTC were provided with the opportunity and time to observe toddlers during free play to learn more about their engagement. As a result, they identified specific factors that seemed to impact the children's engagement that they could then alter, add, or remove to facilitate more engagement from the children. The factors they identified were aligned with quality indicators and developmentally appropriate practice providing an authentic assessment of their ability to apply these concepts. Teacher preparation programs should embed authentic opportunities with guided questions for teacher candidates to observe and reflect on the children, the learning

environment, and their own interactions with children. This enables teacher candidates to take the lead in applying their knowledge and skills and impacting the learning of children. Practicing teachers also should be provided time to observe the children in their classrooms during free play. By doing so, they can make more informed decisions about the environment, materials, and interactions.

Another result of providing opportunity and time for teacher candidates to observe and reflect on toddlers' engagement during free play was that teacher candidates saw the impact of their presence and interactions on toddlers' engagement. Teacher preparation programs and early childhood programs for children should invest time in this process in order to provide evidence to teachers about their role in children's engagement. By watching other adults interact with children and observing children not interacting with others, teachers will become more aware of their role in engagement. This heightened awareness could impact their practice within the classroom.

Teacher candidates must be provided structured opportunities to develop reflective skills (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013; NAEYC, 2018). The structure provided within the reflective prompts encouraged the teacher candidates to individually and collectively consider aspects of the centers and identify recommendations. The prompts were straightforward and specific. Observations and reflections vary in their purpose. They can provide structure to teacher candidates and ensure that they consider the aspects that are the primary focus. All the candidates' observations and reflections impacted the environment due to the changes made in the centers after observations and reflections were completed and discussed. Purposefully discussing the role of observations and subsequent reflections could have an impact on teacher candidates and practicing teachers' acknowledgement of the value and use of the practices. Purposefully designing practicum and field-based courses using a theoretical framework helps the teacher preparation program to be more grounded and intentional in the learning experiences provided. This course adopted both the bioecological and experiential learning theories to guide and inform the practices implemented. Both frameworks provided specific components to consider when providing a rationale for the work and identifying practices for students to implement. The reflections and learning from the teacher candidates suggested they had an understanding of the impact of the microsystem and could use the practices with guidance and structure, while the instructor facilitated their progression through the four-stage learning cycle of the experiential learning theory.

The design of this practicum course provided many opportunities for both self-reflection and collegial collaboration for teacher candidates and faculty. PTC were first asked to observe and reflect individually on the toddlers' engagement during free play. Collegial collaboration occurred when PTC discussed their observations first online in a small group, then in the seminar as a large group. Finally, PTC moved to the actual implementation of updating the centers with their colleagues during seminar. This platform of transitioning from self-reflection to small group to large group collegial collaboration added depth in the learning process. Intentionally including opportunities for self-reflection and collegial collaboration shows promise in

enhancing the learning and development of teacher candidates and should continue to be explored.

For the higher education faculty, collaboration between the faculty instructor and researcher colleague brought insight into the analysis of the data. The faculty instructor was the primary researcher for the project. During the semester-long course, she observed the PTC working in the EC classroom, graded their lesson plans and other work, including the work submitted for this project, and structured the weekly seminar sessions. The second researcher was a faculty member in the early childhood education program. However, she was unfamiliar with all other teacher candidates enrolled in the current study. Furthermore, she had no interaction with the teacher candidates during the project. Her collaboration on this study provided an objective perspective during coding and peer consensus building and a collaborative partner with whom to reflect about the practices and data collected after the work with students was completed. As early childhood teacher preparation providers, purposeful collaboration and reflection can provide meaningful opportunities to learn together and facilitate richer and more meaningful learning experiences for our teacher candidates.

Ultimately, the benefactors of the process presented were the toddlers. The teacher candidates engaged in specific practices that were intended to provide a richer and more interesting environment for their free play. Anecdotally, the teacher candidates saw the children engage more actively when their teachers observed them and used those observations to reflect and plan their environment. Future research should focus on the impact of the practices on children's engagement during free play.

Implementation of the practices presented provides a rich opportunity for teacher candidates and faculty to actively investigate and learn together. By collecting data, reflecting, and making decisions together, all parties learn more about the specific children in the classroom. The experiences provided enhance the microsystem for children and the learning for all.

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# Appendix A

## Observation Guide

<u>Task:</u>

1. Observe each child for 10 consecutive minutes (please note the time start and end and if possible, time spent in each area).
2. In the table below, as the child stops at a center, note the order of the stop (first, second, third) and make a brief note about what the child does when he/she stops in the center (e.g., child engaging with materials; adults; peers, etc.).
3. On another piece of paper, draw the layout of the classroom with centers labeled and the flow of the child during the 10 minutes, from stop 1 (starting) to all other stops in sequential order.
4. At the bottom of the page, note the total number of stops for the child.

Name of Child:

| Time | Blocks | Dramatic | Music | Art table | Reading/ Cozy | Fine motor/ science/ math | Sensory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |

## Appendix B

## Learning Center Planning Form

| Component | Descriptive Details |
|---|---|
| Learning standard | |
| Objective | |
| Assessment gathering and recording methods | |
| Materials | |
| Description and arrangement of environment | |
| Introduction to children | |
| Practice and interaction support | |

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**Motivation for Participation in Extracurricular School Clubs for Students with Severe Disabilities**

Alicia Pence[a]

[a]Middle Tennessee State University

Dr. Alicia Pence is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education. Dr. Pence received her Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests are in the areas of inclusive education and professional partnerships with families. Her current research investigates the beliefs and preparedness of early intervention service providers that are working with families of limited financial resources. Dr. Pence also supervises student teachers, while teaching courses related to professional partnerships, math, and literacy. Prior to her appointment at Middle Tennessee State University, Dr. Pence taught middle school special education in Kentucky for ten years where she served as a resource teacher, co-teacher, and Response to Intervention Math Specialist. Ultimately, Dr. Pence endeavors to prepare dynamic educators while maintaining strong advocacy efforts for individuals with disabilities.

The participation of students with severe disabilities in school-based extracurricular activities provides students with opportunities to experience a full inclusive school event. Typically, however, students with severe disabilities remain underrepresented in extracurricular involvement as compared to their peers without disabilities (Agran et al., 2017; Cadwallader, et al., 2003). Understanding factors influencing students' decisions to participate, or not to participate, in extracurricular activities is a concept frequently investigated in the existing literature for students without disabilities; however, participating in extracurricular school events is seldom explored for students with disabilities. Research highlights two factors when considering participation by students without disabilities in why these students select extracurricular school activities; these factors include individual and social-environmental motivational influences.

**Individual Factors**

Evidence indicates that individual (or psychological) factors contribute to a student's decision regarding whether or not to join an extracurricular activity. For example, Fredricks and Eccles (2002) discuss how that out of 41 students interacting in extracurricular programs focusing on athletics and/or art, students describe enjoyment as the most common reason to participate. These youth describe feelings of pleasure, fun, and satisfaction as rationales to initially interact

in extracurricular activities and then, refer to these same reasons to continue their participation. Additional fewer common reasons cited by youth to participate in extracurricular school activities included filling their free time, gaining useful skills for future careers, as well as a release from family/school pressures.

Weiss and Williams (2004) describe perceived competence as "…a child's belief about his or her own ability" (p. 228). Youth that join and continue participation in extracurricular activities oftentimes do so because they believe they are 'good at it." Fredricks and Eccles (2002) describe adolescents who positively perceive their ability to succeed in an activity as more likely to continue investing in the same event across time because they felt they possessed the abilities to evidence success, thus increasing their self-confidence. Increased self-worth (i.e., self-esteem) also influences students' decisions to participate in activities. Bohnert, Martin, and Garber (2007), in examining the relationship between adolescent self-worth with activity involvement, discuss how adolescents with high levels of self-worth demonstrate more involvement in extracurricular activities during school as compared with students who did not report high levels of self-worth. Their findings suggest students with high levels of self-worth tend to expect more positive gains and rewards (e.g., contact with peers, awards, and honors) from participation, which is an underlying motivation for their initial decision to become involved in activities.

**Social-Environmental Factors**

Social-environmental factors affecting participation in extracurricular activities also include the roles of parents and friendships. Parental encouragement for involvement in extracurricular activities appears to increase youth participation (Fletcher, et al., 2000; Hueber & Mancini, 2003; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Through parental endorsement for participation in activities, parents send strong messages to their children about the value of involvement. Parents with high expectations for their child's success in extracurricular activities become more willing to provide access to such opportunities; thereby, parents positively impact their child's motivation to participate (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Hueber & Mancini, 2003). Parents' decisions and resulting behaviors (e.g., enrolling their child for music lessons, buying sporting equipment) influence children's interests, skills, and preferences for future activity choices. Additionally, parents who value community civic engagement and demonstrate high involvement with community activities provide their children with positive role models. In turn, parents' actions result in their children's enhanced interaction in extracurricular participation (Fletcher et al., 2000).

Friendship is another reason why youth choose to participate in extracurricular activities. Specifically, peer relationships may assume heightened importance during adolescence as compared with earlier years of development because of the redefining nature and complexity of peer networks (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). Opportunities to spend time with friends as well as make new ones indicate links to higher involvement of youth in extracurricular activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002; Hueber & Mancini, 2003). Also, continued involvement in an extracurricular activity demonstrates an increase in the likelihood youth will develop sustained relationships with peers participating in the activity (Patrick et al., 1999).

Fostering relationships with peers evidence an influence on students' decisions to participate in extracurricular activities. Youth who identify with club members as sharing common values and interests as their own are more likely to join for membership, compared to youth who perceive club members as representing different values and interests (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002; Patrick et al., 1999). Youth may also desire to expand their social networks. For instance, Patrick and colleagues (1999) assert youth perceive their involvement in activities as increasing the extent to which they could initiate contact with new peers, thus expanding their peer network. As youth create new peer relationships and nurture existing ones, they continuously improve social skills, concepts of well-being, and motivations to continue involvement in the activity. However, when youth are unable to build satisfying peer relationships within the activity, their motivation for involvement decreases as time spent with friends outside of the activity becomes more important (Lovitt, et al., 1999; Patrick et al., 1999). Youth participating in athletics indicate greater enjoyment and intrinsic motivation for continuing involvement in the activity when they have established personal friendships with other team members (Weiss & Smith, 2002; Weiss & Williams, 2004).

Little is known about the motivation for students with severe disabilities to participate in extracurricular activities. Limited evidence alludes to potential explanations, such as socialization with peers and skill acquisition; however, existing research for typically developing peers and youth with challenging behaviors suggest additional reasons like perceived competence, increased self-worth, and parental encouragement. There have been no empirical studies investigating motivation, extracurricular participation, and students with severe disabilities. Understanding what motivates students with severe disabilities to become, and stay, involved in extracurricular activities is critical for providing evidence as to the importance of these broad school experiences. To address these gaps in the literature, a study is warranted to explore the involvement of students with severe disabilities in extracurricular activities.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the motivating factors for school-aged students with severe disabilities in extracurricular school clubs. Of the variety of extracurricular activities available in most public schools (e.g., choir, sports), school clubs were selected because research has shown them to be the most frequented activity for students with severe disabilities (Kleinert, et al., 2007a). Additionally, school clubs typically have many opportunities for students to participate and are accessible to most students in the school. To address the gaps in the literature, this study examined what motivated students to initially join school clubs and, once enrolled, describe reasons for their continued participation.

**Method**

This qualitative investigation exploring the participation of students with severe disabilities in extracurricular school clubs sought to answer the research question, "What do stakeholders believe motivates students with severe disabilities to participate in school clubs?" To explore the phenomenon of motivation, in-depth interviews were conducted with parents of students with severe disabilities, school club sponsors, and special education teachers. Bandura's theory of

self-efficacy (see Bandura, 1991) was also used to inform the design of this study as well as to explain the construct of motivation. Therefore, for purposes of this research, motivation was defined as being a perspective given by an individual about the rationale, reasoning, and/or purpose for the involvement of a student with SD in a school club.

Three students with severe disabilities, along with their parents, school club sponsors, and special education teachers were purposefully selected to participate in this study. For this project, a student with a severe disability was defined as having extensive support needs (e.g., autism, intellectual disability) and meeting eligibility criteria for the state's alternative assessment. Extracurricular school clubs were defined broadly to include any student-interest organization that had regular scheduled meetings and were open to all students. Each student participated in one school club related to either spirit, leadership, or service.

Three students with severe disabilities were the focal participants in this study. These students had previously identified intellectual disabilities, with one of them also having a rare neurological disorder that impacted her fine and gross motor abilities. Students were receiving special education services in their local public secondary schools and ranged in ages from twelve to fifteen years. The time that students spent in school, typically involved spending most of the day in special education self-contained classrooms, while occasionally included with their peers without disabilities for elective courses (e.g., music, choir).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Interview data were collected for three club sponsors, three special education teachers, and the parents of three students with disabilities. In total, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted (i.e., two for each club sponsor, two for each special education teacher, and one for each parent). Each interview took approximately one-hour to complete, was audio recorded, and consisted of one to two specific questions related to student motivation for (a) joining the school club, and (b) continued participation in the club. Interview questions were developed based on the literature in the field and the researcher's experience facilitating extracurricular opportunities for students with severe disabilities. Interview questions were piloted with four non-participants of similar backgrounds as the research participants. Subsequently, minor revisions were made to the interview questions to provide greater clarity.

All interview data were analyzed using open-coding and constant comparative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Individual interviews were coded, one at a time, by the researcher and a second coder (i.e., graduate student). Both coders met multiple times to discuss and compare codes. Codes were then defined and recorded in a master codebook, and interview data were analyzed again to apply the codes. These coding procedures were repeated for each set of interview data until coders agreed data reached saturation. Final codes were then merged into categories which led to emerging themes that were represented across all interview data (Miles, et al., 2014).

Measures were taken during the data collection and analysis stages to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of findings. First and second level member checking procedures were employed so

that participants could have many opportunities to provide feedback (e.g., clarify a response). Investigator triangulation allowed for multiple perspectives from several investigators (i.e., researcher, second coder, second researcher) throughout data analysis. For example, the researcher peer debriefed during weekly meetings with a second researcher to discuss emerging codes, categories, and themes. Lastly, a researcher identity journal was used consistently throughout the study. This journal provided a space for the researcher to challenge personal assumptions, perspectives, and biases.

**Findings**

Findings are organized by themes that emphasize commonalities across all interview data (Stake, 2006). The first two themes (i.e., who you know matters, what you know matters) relate to why students initially joined clubs. Although several examples of motives for students joining clubs (i.e., recruitment efforts by club members, prior experience participating in clubs, variety of extracurricular activities from which to choose, relationship with the club sponsor, adult advocated for the student) were identified, data describing the most prominent reason students with severe disabilities enrolled in extracurricular activities were used in order to engage in activities they enjoyed with their friends. The last theme (i.e., finding a niche) explains motivators that influenced students' ongoing participation in club activities. In general, students were motivated to continue their involvement because they liked being part of a group and they were continuously encouraged to participate; identified as less frequent motives included related to having a relationship with peers outside of club activities and learning new skills.

**"Who" You Know…Matters**

Ultimately, students were motivated to take part in club activities because they perceived these events as fun activities that they could experience with someone they knew. In each case, there was at least one club member (e.g., childhood friend, peer mentor, sibling) who assumed an integral part in motivating students to join the clubs. In fact, all the students with severe disabilities who became club members evidenced pre-existing relationships with individuals/club members with whom they already felt comfortable. Interestingly, two of the club members indicated relationships with typical students emphasizing providing mentoring or personal support as contrasted with reciprocated friendships. For example, one student with a severe disability that participated in a leadership club had a preexisting relationship with a club member. Adult participants strongly believed that the student's awareness of this relationship was a key motivator for her wanting to get involved in the club. The relationship between the student with a severe disability and the peer typically consisted of partaking in school activities together, like eating lunch at the same table or saying hi to each other in the hallway. This relationship did not, however, extend beyond the school day to other common social activities such as attending sleepovers or talking on the phone together. Irrespective of the parity in this relationship, the peer oftentimes spoke to the student about the particular club and would frequently invite the student to attend club activities.

In another case, adult participants agreed that the sibling of a student with a severe disability was a major reason for joining a spirit club. The student with severe disabilities sibling was heavily

involved in the spirit club the year prior to the student showing an interest in joining. In particular, the club sponsor believed that the student's sibling frequently encouraged him to join the club, and even "drug him along [to club activities]" before he was a club member. The student's mother also conveyed strong viewpoints about the profound role that the sibling had on her son's eagerness to join the club by stating, "He just knew right away that he wanted to be a part of it [the club]."

**"What" You Know… Matters**

Students' interests, experiences, and skills influenced the types of clubs they chose to join. Club selection had more to do with students' familiarity with certain activities and knowing how to participate in the activities than their belief that a club sounded intriguing or their desire to experience something new and different. Before deciding to join a club, students participated in leisure activities with their families. Due to these experiences, students selected to participate in club activities at school that closely resembled their family activities. In turn, membership in familiar clubs meant that students could capitalize on previously learned skills that closely aligned with what was soon becoming an area of leisure interest.

Family experiences helped to cultivate a sense of curiosity and personal interest for students with severe disabilities. These experiences also afforded students with opportunities to gain skills required for participation. In one student's case, her mother discussed how she had grown to enjoy cooking, a skill that was important for her participation in a service club. "I always try to include my daughter in everything [in the kitchen] … I think the club drew her [in] because that is what we do all the time [at home]." Importantly, the student's engagement in family cooking helped her to acquire skills (e.g., making simple measurements, following a cooking recipe) that were utilized in various club activities such as preparing and serving food at a local community center.

Similarly, one student participated in the spirit club and had been raised in a family environment that valued participation in community activities (e.g., sports). In fact, the student spent the majority of his childhood attending his older sibling's basketball and football games. He was described as having a "good understanding" of the basic rules that govern common sporting events such as basketball. Through his involvement in sporting events with his family, he also mastered the skill of cheering (i.e., appropriate voice inflection, use of hand signals). The student's mother remarked on how the spirit club became a natural fit for her son, "He identifies with sports fandom because that's what we do all the time…since he was born. I think it's just so much a part of what we do as a family."

**Finding a Niche**

Students' reasons for wanting to join clubs revolved around their desire to participate in activities they enjoyed and, sometimes, with peers that they already knew. However, their motivation for continued membership stemmed from finding their own niche, a place where they fit-in with their peers, within the larger context of their school communities. Students continuously looked forward to going to club activities and "being with their friends." On the days that clubs met,

students spoke often about their excitement about upcoming club activities; while at home, clubs were an important topic of conversation around the evening dinner table. One club sponsor noted, “This is her [student with severe disability] club. This is where she comes on Wednesdays once a month…she doesn’t want to miss anything because she is having so much fun.” Students were also committed club members who took great pride in their affiliations with the club. They demonstrated their commitment by attending many of the club meetings and events as well as signing up for volunteer activities. As one club sponsor stated, “If she [student with severe disability] signs up for an activity, I know that she will show up for it.” Students were also perceived to have participated in more activities than many of their peers. For instance, one student with a severe disability won a selfie-stick for being one of her club’s highest sellers of raffle coupons. As students’ commitment to their clubs deepened, so did a newfound sense of pride for their schools. “I think he considers himself a Lion…he’s proud of that,” the spirit club sponsor commented as she discussed how the student wore blue and grey school colors almost daily.

After approximately two months of participating, students with severe disabilities became increasingly accustomed to the different types of club activities and routines. As students’ awareness for club rituals strengthened, so did their comfort as club participants. These growing positive experiences led to a greater sense of self-confidence in their own abilities to be contributing club members, fueling their motivation for continued involvement. The club sponsors took notice of the positive changes in students. The leadership club sponsor remarked on one student’s more recent involvement: “I think she feels more comfortable now…especially since she has gotten to know so many of the [club] members through the activities she came to…she doesn’t seem as shy anymore.” Interestingly, the student was later nominated and elected, by her peers, for an official officer role in the club.

Emotional support from students’ families and individuals in the school clubs, also enabled students to find their niche. Club sponsors oftentimes used phrases such as “considerate,” “tolerant of (student’s) idiosyncrasies,” “patient,” and “accepting” to describe club members without disabilities. Club sponsors were also continuously reinforcing the same expectations for everyone. One club sponsor spoke extensively about her personal belief in the importance of following the basic principle of “treat everyone the same” while participating in the club. Essentially, club sponsors strongly believed that each club member should be expected to attend meetings, participate in club events, and follow appropriate social norms (e.g., raising your hand before speaking, not touching other club members). In addition, encouragement from parents was paramount to students’ ongoing participation in club activities. Parents ultimately placed great value in their children being involved in school activities with their peers. As one parent remarked, “I like that she is working with peers [in the service club] and getting out of that special class all day…it’s good for her.” Encouragement from parents happened often. Another parent reinforced the importance of extracurricular activities by telling her child, “the best part of school is being involved and getting to know the people you go to school with.”

**Discussion**

Students with severe disabilities joined clubs for the same reasons as their peers without disabilities. Youth with and without disabilities simply wanted to have fun with their friends while participating in activities they enjoyed. This finding is supported in the existing literature on extracurricular activities (Bohnert, et al., 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2002; Hueber & Mancini, 2003). Research for typically developing students also describes these youth sometimes indicate more sophisticated reasons for deciding to join an activity, such as a desire to expand their social network (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002; Hueber & Mancini, 2003). In contrast to this literature, students with severe disabilities associated joining a club with people with whom they had a pre-existing relationship (e.g., childhood friend, sibling) and might not have perceived the opportunities to make new friends as a potential motivator. Complicating the issue of expanding peer relationships is the disenfranchisement that is often experienced by students with severe disabilities. Students, who are spending large amounts of time in classrooms separate from their peers, have fewer opportunities to create or maintain social networks with peers that are outside the purview of the school day.

The current data substantiate the claim that having fun is an underlying motivator for joining activities, holding equal value for students with and without disabilities. However, students with severe disabilities might not be able to accurately assess their preference for certain activities because they have few experiences to compare an event, since past research has shown that students with intellectual disabilities have limited leisure time activities in which they partake (Buttimer & Tierney, 2005; McGuire & McDonnell, 2008; Orsmond, et al., 2004; Solish, et al., 2010). Moving forward, it will be imperative for students with disabilities to be provided with multiple opportunities to experience a wide range of extracurricular activities. Through these experiences, students will have a deeper understanding of what *having fun* feels like and be better positioned to make choices about the activities in which they choose to participate.

Once an extracurricular activity is selected, it is important students with severe disabilities feel motivated to continue their involvement. Parent encouragement remains a significant motivator for students with and without disabilities. These current data demonstrate the importance of parental encouragement for students with severe disabilities joining in extracurricular activities and support the existing research describing how parents' high expectations for students influence the motivation of students without disabilities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Hueber & Mancini, 2003). These results emphasize the important role for parents in supporting youth involvement. However, parents' support is especially significant for students with disabilities as many will require additional efforts to participate in activities. For instance, activity buses taking children home after school might not be equipped to transport students with complex support and physical needs. As a result, students with severe disabilities may need to rely on their parents for coordinating or providing transportation. Essentially, the influence of parent encouragement is far-reaching, providing important motivation for students as well as access to activities.

Students without disabilities continue involvement in extracurricular activities because of their positive self-concepts (i.e., high self-confidence, increased self-worth), as many of these youth have a reputation for being hard workers and over achievers. As these youth maintain their involvement, their self-concepts continue to improve as they are reinforced by positive gains and benefits (e.g., improved athletic skills, increased time with peers) (Bohnert et al., 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2002; Weiss & Williams, 2004). On the contrary, students with severe disabilities only begin to develop a positive self-concept across an extended period of time, and after their initial involvement. In part, this might result from the need for additional time and supports for students with severe disabilities to establish new club routines and interactions with peers. Club facilitators become integral in aiding the improvement of self-concept for students with severe disabilities. Through active, ongoing, collaboration with the special education teacher to understand effective strategies for supporting students with severe disabilities in club activities, facilitators become better positioned to create and sustain a supportive welcoming climate. As a result of these ongoing concerted efforts, students with severe disabilities will likely have greater intrinsic motivation, through improved self-concept, to continue their involvement.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study that should be considered when interpreting findings. Findings from interviews with adult participants (i.e., special education teachers, club sponsors, parents) are based on the perceptions of these individuals. Although these perceptions offer important insights into the underlying motives for why students were involved in clubs, they might not be an accurate representation of views held by students themselves. For instance, the findings related to leisure preferences for students with severe disabilities consistently demonstrate the mismatch between students' actual preferences when compared to their parents' preferences for them (Buttimer & Tierney, 2005). In addition, others involved in school club activities, like peers or paraprofessionals, might represent other insights not captured in this study.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

In order to provide an inclusive and holistic life experience for both students with and without severe disabilities, continued research examining motives for students with severe disabilities involvement in extracurricular activities is beneficial. For example, comparing factors associated with joining and participating in extracurricular programs for students with and without disabilities would support school personnel and club facilitator's efforts. Significantly, it will be imperative for future studies to include the authentic youth voice of students with disabilities. Innovative methods for capturing students' voices through artwork, collective stories, and interviews indicate potential for learning more about this topic.

Findings from this study also indicate critical implications for practice. Foremost, it is important for special education teachers to use evaluative tools beyond preference assessments to determine leisure preferences for students with severe disabilities. For instance, affording students with opportunities to explore and try-out various extracurricular activities will be essential for helping students to establish preferred interests. Secondly, it will be essential for

club sponsors to maintain standards which cultivate an inclusive-shared space that consistently promotes a culture of high expectations, acceptance, and openness for every club member. To help nurture club members positive self-concepts, club sponsors encourage members to share their unique qualities in the safety of the club environment where club members' differences are seen as benefits. Ultimately, a collaborative and supportive approach involving all membership in the extracurricular activity (e.g., special education teachers, club sponsors, parents, peers) becomes a necessary component to full inclusion in extracurricular opportunities for students with severe disabilities.

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**Tech Talk**
**The Whole Teacher: Practicing Self-Care**

Nancy Caukin[a], Leslie Trail[b], Constance Wright[c]

[a]North Greenville University, [b]Middle Tennessee State University, [c]North Greenville University

Nancy Caukin, Ed.D. is the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs at North Greenville University. She began her career working in outdoor education before her fifteen-year tenure as a high school science teacher. She has been a teacher educator in higher education since 2013. Her research interests include teacher candidate beliefs and sense of self-efficacy. She is on a journey of being an edtech learner along with her teacher candidates.

Leslie Trail is an Adjunct Professor in the Womack Family Education Leadership Department in the College of Education at Middle Tennessee State University and a High School English Teacher at Eagleville School. She began her career working in Health Care management for seven years before further putting her English Degree to work as an English teacher. She loves learning ways to engage students more effectively in the classroom to move their learning forward, so her research interests generally revolve around teaching strategies.

Constance Wright, Ed.D. is the Dean of the College of Education at North Greenville University. She began her career working as an elementary education teacher and Title I reading specialist before her seventeen-year career as a college professor and administrator. She has been a professor and administrator in higher education since 2004. Additionally, she supervises teacher candidates in their clinical practicums. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking and exploring beautiful vistas with her family and friends.

**Abstract**
At all times, and particularly during a global pandemic, teachers need to practice self-care so that they may focus on teaching the whole child. Teachers are under an incredible amount of stress during the best of times, and now anxiety is at an all-time high. This Tech Talk article explains ways to promote self-care of the whole teacher focusing on the head, heart, and the hands (mental/cognitive; emotional/spiritual; and physical) using both tech and non-tech options.

Teaching is incredibly stressful, even in the best of times. According to a study conducted by the Robert J. Woods Foundation, 46% of teachers reported having high levels of stress that impacted their health, sleep, teaching, and overall quality of life (Greenburg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016). This statistic is pre-COVID. As one can imagine, stress levels have multiplied during the COVID

pandemic. Stress has been compounded by school closures, a shift to online and/or hybrid teaching, quarantining, isolation, anxious students, overwhelmed parents, and lack of training and resources (Luthra, 2021; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Teachers are tired. *USA Today* published an article on January 4, 2021, that states, "The level of stress isn't sustainable…Teachers have been operating in crisis mode since spring. By now, any surge of energy that fueled them through the pandemic's initial months has been depleted" (Luthra, 2021, para. 18). The words "new normal" and "not sustainable" are polar to one another, yet teachers find themselves slogging between the two phrases.

People who are in service professions such as teachers, find it easier to assume the role of caregiver, rather than take care of themselves (Coaston, 2017). Teachers are often more outward focused and because the idea of *others before self* takes priority for them, it becomes even more challenging and important that they engage in self-care (MindPeace, 2018).

Teachers and other essential workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic compose nearly half of the workforce. It is reported that 56% of American adults and 64% of frontline workers identified a connection between worry and disturbed sleep, changes in appetite, frequent headaches and stomachaches, difficulty controlling temper, increased alcohol and drug use, and worsening chronic health conditions (Blau, Koebe, & Meyerhofer, 2020). This means that there is little respite from daily stress.

Still, part of being able to teach the whole child connects to being present as "whole" teachers. When we think about the *whole child* approach to education, we recognize that we are referring to more than educating the brain; we are concerned with the head, heart, and the hands (Easton, 1997). In order to teach the whole child, we need whole teachers. Whole teachers practice self-care: they work on developing and protecting their own body, mind, and spirit (Miller, 2010). Now, more than ever, teachers need to practice self-care.

**Facets of Self-Care**

Self-care can support teachers' resilience and improve their ability to overcome adversity and adapt to challenging situations, as required during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hanover Research, 2020). It can prevent burnout as well as unnecessary stress (MindPeace, 2018). By focusing on a healthy diet, exercise, better sleep, meditation, and other solutions for stress relief, self-care will help teachers be on top of their game as educators, and it will ultimately benefit student success (Wei, 2018).

Self-care can include many things. Some teachers practice self-care individually; others may find additional encouragement by forming self-care support groups at work and encouraging each other to set common goals. Setting aside time for activities outside of the workplace creates community and a place where teachers can release stress and help them to relax and refuel for the days ahead (Nelson & Gfroerer, 2015). Practicing self-care allows people to be better parents, spouses, caregivers, and friends (Collins, 2005). For optimal health and continued resilience, it is extremely important that teachers take care of themselves mentally, emotionally,

spiritually, and physically. In this article we focus on the head (mental), the heart (emotional/spiritual), and the hands (physical).

**Head (Mental/Cognitive)**
Mental health has been important long before 2020 and the pandemic that left educators separated from students and navigating a world where teaching expectations changed overnight. However, in these days where some teachers are left teaching only to a computer and others are in a classroom full of masked faces with hybrid instruction, mental health has become even more critical to teacher efficacy and sense of well-being.

In order to deal with rapid changes in both their professional and personal lives, teachers need cognitive flexibility. The ability to switch between mental processes quickly to produce desirable behaviors in response to shifting factors are hallmarks of cognitive flexibility (Dejani & Uddin, 2015). It's about moving between tasks using what is learned from one task and applying it to a new situation (Verdoloin, 2019). Cognitive flexibility is highly beneficial to people, including teachers, as it is essential for problem-solving by being open-minded to new solution options, and helping people to be more resilient, confident, and creative (Verdolin, 2019; Watters, 2019). Jennifer Verdolin, Ph.D. offers three ways to improve cognitive flexibility in her *Psychology Today* (2019) blog: 1) Do routine things differently and often. For example, try new foods, drive home a different way, or exercise a different time of day. 2) Pursue new challenges and experiences~~. S~~, such as learning a new language, taking up dancing, and traveling to new places. 3) Meet new people to broaden exposure to different perspectives and worldviews. Engaging in these activities can increase cognitive flexibility, which, for those who need to break out of routines, will improve adaptability, decrease anxiety, and stress, and broaden viewpoints (Verdolin, 2019).

**Heart (Emotional/Spiritual)**
The emotional and spiritual dimensions of a person are equated here with the heart. Wanda Collins, author of *Embracing Spirituality as an Element of Self-Care* (2005) suggests that self-care is a spiritual act. It requires self-awareness, self-love, and self-worth. Spirituality compels us to make connections with others and with the Creator. She outlines six strategies for self-care: 1) Sabbath keeping (day of rest, time with family, time to play, and time to be still). 2) Finding Holy silence (praying, meditating, and reducing distractions). 3) Expressing gratitude (thankfulness over entitlement, compassion over privilege, and humility over power). 4) Expressing spiritual essence (keeping a prayer journal and seeking and giving forgiveness). 5) Developing a sense of compassion (reaching out to those hurting, practicing kindness, and being aware of suffering). 6) Embracing a principle of stewardship (giving back, serving others, and being a good steward of resources).

Spiritually active people are better able to cope with stress, defuse negative thoughts, have lower rates of depression, have lower incidences of suicide, are happier, and are more resilient (Collins, 2005; LaBarbera & Hetzel, 2016; Ramsey, 2001). They have "[a] sense of purpose, warm belonging, trustful sharing, and increased human joy" (Ramsey, 2001, p. 59).

**Hands (Physical)**
When we think about the physical facet of self-care, we consider physical activity and exercise, sleep, as well as nutrition.

**Physical Activity and Exercise.** Physical activity and exercise, while related, are defined differently. Physical activity is any activity that requires movement and expenditure of energy, including walking, housework, leisure activities, gardening, and washing your car as examples. Exercise, on the other hand, is planned, structured physical movement to improve or maintain fitness (Mayo Clinic, 2017). The health benefits of exercise and physical activity are well documented. They are shown to improve mood, self-esteem, and sense of well-being, and reduce anxiety. They release "feel-good" endorphins, take the mind off worries, boost confidence, improve healthy coping skills, may increase social interaction, and can reduce mortality up to 30%. Regular exercise (approximately 30 minutes a day for three to five days a week) can reduce and even prevent high blood pressure, diabetes, and arthritis, as well as decrease age-related memory and cognitive decline. Adults who engage in regular exercise experience fewer anxiety and depressive episodes (Anderson & Shivakuma, 2013; Mayo Clinic, 2017).

Increasing physical activity is as easy as starting to do what you enjoy, for example, walking, hiking, gardening, etc. Consider rediscovering running, swimming, riding bikes, etc. Let your doctor know your goals to increase your activity. Once cleared to engage in physical activity, start small and set achievable goals. Increase the level of activity over time. Treat exercise as you would any important appointment and change up your physical activity to prevent boredom. It is important to identify and plan for potential obstacles, for example "I do not have enough time" - do 10 minutes of activity three times a day; "the weather is not conducive" - wear the correct clothing or find an indoor location; "it's too expensive" - check out low-cost recreation and community centers or walk/run in your neighborhood. It is helpful to have an accountability partner, and finally, be kind to yourself if you miss days (Mayo Clinic, 2017; NIDDK, 2017). Tech tools abound in today's society to help individuals successfully track and even share their physical exercising goals. Apps such as MAPMYRUN and STRAVA offer ways to track running, biking, walking, and other physical exercise options while connecting with other users for encouragement and even competition. There are many "virtual" races and team competitions that can help improve motivation as well. Active.com now allows users to seek "virtual races" anywhere. By signing up for an event, participants may feel more motivated to continue regular exercise when otherwise motivation would wane. Virtual races allow the user to participate and when a virtual race is a multi-day event, users also can use the race as the tracking mechanism.

Furthermore, even weight loss apps such as noom and Weight Watchers now add value to tracking exercise. It has been noted that "self-reflection is crucial to the tracking process for stress management and mental well-being" (Kelley, Lee, & Wilcox, 2017). Therefore, using a fitness tracker (such as FitBit, Garmin, or Apple Watch) or simply using an app such as STRAVA or MyFitnessPal that allows a user to track their progress encourages self-reflection. Still, it is important to realize that these tracking mechanisms can have the opposite effect as "People can be overwhelmed by their data and ashamed of what the data reflects" (Kelley, Lee,

& Wilcox, 2017, para. 9). Self-awareness and knowledge of how an individual will respond to this data is key in determining if such tracking will be beneficial. What some may find incredibly helpful in tracking and reflecting on exercise may cause stress for others. It is important for individuals to not only find things that they enjoy doing in the area of exercise but also to ensure that the way in which they participate in these activities is mentally healthy as well.

**Sleep.** Patrick Finan, Ph.D. in a Johns Hopkins infographic titled, *Sleep Deprivation Effects* (2021), reports that people who are sleep deprived tend to have more cravings for sweet, salty, and starchy foods. If they receive less than five hours of sleep on average, they are at a 50% greater chance of being obese. They are 36% times more likely to get colorectal cancer and are nearly three times more likely to get type 2 diabetes. An increased risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, dementia, fatal accidents, and lower immunity response can also be caused by sleep deprivation.

The division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School (2018) recommends seven to eight hours of sleep a night for restorative function of cells. As indicated above, lack of sleep can lead to diabetes, as well as cardiovascular disease, and impaired immune function. Sleep disturbance can be caused by stress itself. While diet and physical exercise may be within the control of the individual, sleep itself both helps manage stress and also becomes disturbed when affected by stress. It is a vicious cycle wherein sleep is needed and then is disturbed by stress - the very thing that requires an increase in sleep. However, there are steps that an individual can take to help increase the likelihood of getting a good night's rest. According to the Sleep Foundation (2020), a strict sleep schedule, a relaxing bedroom atmosphere that is conducive to sleep, the removal of electronics from the sleep area, the reduced consumption of nicotine and caffeine near bedtime, and regular exercise are all ways to improve quality sleep even during times of stress. The Sleep Foundation also recommends that after 15 minutes of attempted sleep, individuals may find sleep easier to attain by getting up and moving to a different part of the living area to do something relaxing (as long as it does not include a blue screen).

**Nutrition.** *You are what you eat* and what you eat directly affects the function of your brain as well as your mood (Selhub, 2020). When it comes to self-care, feeding your body essential nutrients is vital for optimal function and performance. What we eat affects our ability to endure mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Filling our bodies with clean whole foods such as lean meats, fruits, and vegetables is a great place to start. When we focus on eating clean, we are putting in the optimal fuel for our bodies. Eating clean whole food has been shown to nourish the brain and protect it from oxidative stress (Selhub, 2020). Weight loss/ nutrition apps mentioned above, noom, MyFitnessPal, and Weight Watchers are an excellent way to better understand the foods you are integrating into your body and to manage consumption.

Also, by setting small achievable goals towards making better nutritional choices, individuals may improve stress reduction, help maintain a healthy weight, and have a more balanced life.

Some of those goals may include meal preparation. Plan one day per week to prepare your meals for the following week. Include healthy snacks for those times you may feel hungry between meals. There are tremendous benefits from taking time to prepare your meals each week, and some of those benefits include stress reduction, weight loss, increased financial savings, and a balanced diet. There is power in preparation (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2021).

**Other Ways to Bolster Self Care**

Stress is inevitable. Mental health will, at times, feel as though it is suffering. Individuals must be aware of those times and find what works for them to cope through a difficult school year, teaching in a pandemic, or any other stressful time in life. Previously mentioned strategies such as exercise, rest, and nutrition are key, but each person must find what works best for them. For some, escaping in a good book or familiar movie will be ways to destress and unwind. Others, however, may find that hiking, gardening, or otherwise spending time in nature are strategies that help bolster mental health. Still others may seek out spiritual awareness and meditation for dealing with stressful times.

Remember, just as teachers think about the whole child, they also need to think about the "whole" person when it comes to self-care. When thinking about social and emotional health (SEL), what is applicable for students is also applicable for teachers. CASEL (Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning) (2020a) explains five core competencies for social and emotional health that can be taught from childhood to adulthood. They are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. In an effort to support teachers and schools during the COVID pandemic CASEL provides resources in four key areas: 1) Creating a foundation for social and emotional learning. 2) Attending to the well-being and mutual support among adults. 3) Promoting social and emotional learning for young people. 4) Reflecting on how things are going and adjusting as learning occurs (2020b). CASEL recommends that adults foster supportive relationships with peers to assist in processing feelings, sharing challenges, and building community.

Thriving Schools by Kaiser Permanente (2021) in their RISE program (Resilience in School Environments) emphasizes the importance of supporting the social and emotional well-being of teachers for creating a positive school climate. They too recommend creating a support network among personnel, as well as brief breaks for tension relief, training in trauma-informed practices, and redesigning break rooms for teachers to promote functionality, encourage healthy eating, and promote relaxation.

Emotional support can come from one's community, but it can also come from online sources. One such source is Talkspace, a mobile therapy app that provides online licensed therapists through an online site or mobile app at a reported lower cost than in-person therapists. The Social and Emotional Learning Provider's Council through CASEL (2020c) offers this list of remote learning free SEL resources. They include givethx, a practice guide for gratitude, and COVID-19 Stress Supports for Educators, a free online course for educators, as well as resources for teachers and parents to assist and support their students/children with remote learning with

free SEL resources. Additionally, there are apps such as Headspace and Calm that help users find ways to destress in trying times. On the other hand, for self-care, some may find the need to walk away from technology for a while and be "tech-free." Others may find that stress has become greater than what they can individually manage and may need to seek an Employee Assistance Program or help from a licensed therapist.

The key to all of these solutions is self-awareness and action towards mitigating that stress.

***Conclusion***

Eliminating stress for teachers has been a focus for many schools as over this past year, teachers have been asked to endure some of the most challenging times in their lives. To help with stress, some K-12 schools have implemented wellness programs for teachers that focus on the whole teacher (body, mind, and spirit) (Lever, Mathis, & Mayworm, 2017). By acknowledging that stress is a factor in overall well-being of educators, schools have the opportunity to improve the workplace for teachers and thus facilitate better educational experiences for students. Additionally, as individuals realize their own best responses to stress and times when their mental health is at risk, the ability to quickly and effectively respond becomes more manageable. Sadly, stress will never disappear. Mental health will always need attention. As we become focused on the "whole individual," teachers become more able and ready to teach the "whole child." The two concepts should never be separated.

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**ETC**
**Striving from the Margins During COVID-19: One Family's Experience Advocating for their Middle School E-learner.**

S. Renée Jones[a]

[a]Middle Tennessee State University

S. Renée Jones, Ph.D., works as an Assistant Professor for Integrated Studies at Middle Tennessee State University. Her primary research centers her on adults in higher education with specific foci on 1) equity and access, 2) incivility in higher education, 3) experiences of older adult students and 4) doctoral studies.

**Abstract**
In order for children to succeed, access to quality education is an imperative. Education can be used as a means of changing or challenging the problems of the world. Many countries support with legal force the notion of education as a human right. COVID-19 brings to the surface and spotlights a history of educational inequities in the United States. This article highlights one family's struggle to ensure their middle schooler receives a quality education. In spite of Covid-19, the marginalization that is a daily part of a Black child's life should not impede the educational progress of the student. Middle school can be a challenging time for many students and can be fraught with additional struggles or barriers for marginalized children. It is incumbent upon school systems to work with families to mitigate the adverse consequences of learning during COVID-19; in particular, for a marginalized child, the costs could be catastrophic and far reaching.

**Introduction**
During the spring of 2020, public schools across the United States closed temporarily due to the pandemic as social distancing was encouraged to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Viner et al., 2020). The sudden shift from face-to-face instruction to remote instruction, as noted by Cohen and Kupferschmidt (2020), left many schools, teachers and family members ill prepared for this challenge. This change forced family members into a role of learning facilitators, a role many were ill equipped to implement. According to Selwyn et al. (2011), some family members see remote education as an additional burden for them to bear. Taxpayers depend on public school systems to deliver quality education to their children. Being compelled to take on what may seem like most of the burden for educating their children can be extremely challenging for many families, especially when accustomed to entrusting this responsibility to the school systems. Who is responsible for providing quality education to America's students?

**Education as a Human Right**

The right to education is not part of the United States Constitution or Bill of Rights as penned in the late 1700s. After existing for more than 200 years, this right to an education is still missing from the Constitution (The Constitution:  How Did it Happen, n.d.). According to Lindseth (n.d.), the responsibility of education is provided to the states by the Tenth Amendment; the Fourteenth Amendment targets equality in education. Mandating the right to education using the Constitution has been denied by the U.S. Supreme Court. According to Lawler (2018), not only does the United States fail to grant the right to education through the Constitution but does not support international law governing the right to education. Lawler (2018) goes on to suggest that the United States is not equal to other countries in placing value on the right to education and supporting this standard with legal force.

Lawler (2018) points out that the three international documents that affirm the right to education include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), with the UDHR widely accepted as accustomed international law (Digital Record of the UDHR). The United States, along with 47 other countries, signed the UDHR when adopted in 1948, with Article 26 setting forth guidelines for education. Article 26 states that everyone has a right to free elementary and fundamental education and that education must be compulsory (United Nations, 1948). Even though these standards are not legally binding, the international community expects the United States to adhere to these customary standards (Lawler, 2018). Although the United States signed the Convention on the Right of the Child in 1995, it has yet to be ratified. Therefore, there is no legal obligation to follow the standards contained within the treaty. The ICESCR provides legal force to standards in the UDHR. This treaty was signed by the United States in 1977, but again, failed to be ratified (ICESCR, 1966). Other countries acknowledged education is a right and included this right in their constitutions and ratified treaties governing this right (Lawler, 2018).

Lawler (2018) argues in order to provide every child with the right to success, a federal right to education is needed, one that can be enforced through the federal court system. This sentiment was echoed in Brown v. Board of Education when Chief Justice Warren implied that it is not reasonable to believe that a child would be able to succeed without the opportunity to be educated (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Additionally, Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (cited in Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020, p. 99).

**Transitioning to Middle School**

Successfully transitioning from elementary to middle school is a key component to academic success. However, as Crockett et al. (1989) point out, there are limited studies indicating that students blossom during this transition. Instead, the literature describes this period as being a time of stress for many students. Developmental changes evidenced links to the stress experienced during this period (Chung et al., 1998; Crockett et al., 1989). Moreover, Alspaugh (1998) suggests a link between poor educational outcomes and the transition to middle school.

After transitioning to middle school, girls tend to experience psychological stress while boys indicate a significant decrease in academic achievement (Chung et al., 1998).

Elias (2001) posits that a difference in the middle school environment could contribute to the stress experienced when transitioning from elementary to middle school. For example, the middle schooler does not spend the day with a primary set of students nor a single teacher. Instead, students move to different classes hourly, experiencing different sets of behavioral and academic expectations. Further, students may be required to take notes, study independently, and make new friends (Alspaugh, 1998). And all these school challenges occur at a similar time when children experience significant developmental changes.

During early adolescence, students attempt to understand their varied experiences in school whether there is ease or difficulty in their academic and social lives, and, additionally, attempt to determine how these events impact who they become in the future (Oyserman & James, 2009). Students report that they are not as engaged in schoolwork and expend less effort during adolescence. This lack of engagement and effort can result in poor academic progress (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Roeser et al., 1999; Seidman et al., 1994). Fiske et al. (2007) discuss the negative stereotypes regarding the potential of low income and minoritized students; these students remain at higher risk for these negative behaviors.

**Marginalized Students**

It is not a new phenomenon for Black students to experience obstacles to receiving a good and equitable education (Diemer et al., 2016). As noted by O'Connor, et al. (2007), research tends to focus on the disparities in educational outcomes instead of examining the context of family and community and does not offer ways to improve the achievement of Black students. Some barriers confronting Black students include attending low achieving schools, accessing few community resources, living in poverty, and experiencing limited social and community opportunities. Another important barrier generates from teachers, as Black students can be negatively impacted by teachers who hold racial biases (Lumpkin, 2008). Teachers maintain a critical role toward supporting the success of students. Because young people can be easily influenced, teachers serve as a significant educational guide for students.

History is replete with examples of the barriers that Black females face that are different from Black males or White females because of their double marginality of race and gender (Ford et al., 2018). This double marginality impacts Black females on many levels, including educational, social, and economic. Some of these barriers include institutional and structural barriers along with stereotypes, (Greenberger et al., 2014) and may involve exclusion based on race and class (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Antonio et al. (2004) and Tam and Bassett (2004) suggest that diversity within the school system aligns with the mission of schools by affording the opportunity for young people to grow cognitively which leads to learning and achievement. Increased racial and ethnic diversity can lead to a more positive attitude concerning a greater connection to school according to Goldsmith

(2004) while also promoting fewer feelings of isolation and maltreatment (Benner, 2011; Seaton and Yip, 2009). However, as schools become more segregated racially and ethnically, they are increasingly more segregated based on socio-economic status which leads to students who are low-income and who are minoritized racially and ethnically experiencing a dual disadvantage (Crosnoe, 2005). When gender is taken into consideration, these students experience a triple disadvantage.

There is evidence that the achievement gap is increasing along income levels and racial lines (Reardon, 2013). Moreover, Fryer and Levitt (2004) and Rothstein and Wozny (2013) point to evidence that the primary contributor to the achievement gap is the differences in race regarding socioeconomic status. Although the United States spent between 10 and 20 billion dollars on Head Start and nutrition programs for children during 1990 to 2000, the achievement gap remains (Barton & Coley, 2010). According to Alexander (2012), there are other sociological challenges such as few opportunities in early childhood education, the economic and social capacity of communities, and social forces that disrupt the structure of the Black family as possible factors for the sociological issues experienced by students. Moynihan and Barton (1965) discuss how these factors can maintain the disparity in the achievement gap.

The disparities in achievement start prior to the child beginning elementary school which aligns with research focused on how subpar early childhood education impacts low-income children's preparedness for school (Lee & Burkum, 2002; Duncan & Magnuson 2005; Duncan et al., 1994). Even though low-income students are half the student population, they are 28 percent of the first-grade students who are top achievers (Wyner et al., 2007). Economic barriers confronted by low-income students impede their achievement from the beginning of their formal education. Moreover, during their elementary and high school years, low-income students do not become high achievers as frequently as students from upper economic levels.

Efforts to make educational opportunities equal have not been successful in reducing the educational disparity as anticipated (Hung et al., 2020). Because the increase in spending is ineffective, it is critical that United States educators consider targeting inequality outside the classroom as an underlying issue. In addition to considering other inequalities, acknowledging the societal challenges that lead to achievement gaps provide a more complete picture of the lack of equity in education.

**Equity in Education During COVID**

According to Giannini (2020), in mid-April 2020, 191 government shutdowns of schools in the K-12 system affected more than a billion students. Such closures were implemented in schools across the United States as an approach for containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Li, Harries, and Ross (2020) reported that school-aged children across the United States were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with low-income students and others as most at risk for adverse effects to their well-being and education. Students belonging to more than one at-risk group, to include racially and ethnically minoritized groups, position them at even greater risk of learning and basic needs deficits during this time.

Having schools closed long-term can result in negative consequences for students, more so for those who are already disadvantaged. Significant learning deficits can take place when remote learning is used for long periods, as many low-income families may not have access to a computer in the home. Additionally, many students may experience food insecurity without access to free and reduced meals at school (Bauer, 2020). Using the COVID Impact Survey, Bauer (2020) also notes that 34.5 percent of the households with children under 18 experienced food insecurity as of the end of April 2020. Data reveal these high rates of food insecurity are not comparable in contemporary time. Moreover, parents who work not only depend on schools to educate their children but also as a resource for childcare.

Attending school provides children with opportunities for socialization and to participate in physical activity (Li et al., 2020). Schools also provide students with other services such as speech therapy and mental health counseling. Closing schools can prohibit access to many much-needed services but may also prevent the reporting of child abuse. In late March, half of the victims receiving assistance from the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network were reported as minors, which never occurred in prior data (Faden et al., 2020). Balancing these types of equity concerns against the possible spread of the virus can be a major decision-making challenge for families.

**Our Family's Experiences with e-Learning during COVID-19: A Personal Reflection**

For fall 2020, it was decided that the middle school student in our family would not attend in person classes. So, we joined the many families that opted for e-learning to keep everyone safe from COVID-19. Unfortunately, this option was laden with problems. Because most of the family members work during school hours, our student's learning environment was her grandparent's home, a grandparent who was not prepared to assist our e-learner in the online environment or troubleshoot technology issues.

On August 24, our middle schooler reached out to her principal in email using the school's learning management system and expressed confusion and a lack of understanding of what to do. There was no response from the principal to the request for help. In another email exchange between our middle schooler and one of the teachers, a request for help with the course content was made. This teacher used capitalized words in her response, indicating she was "yelling" at the student for not attending class via Zoom. Our middle schooler informed the teacher of the problems with gaining access to the platform. However, the teacher ignored this and told the student that access to the platform was required. Regrettably, these email exchanges were not discovered by our family until approximately two months later. The teacher was confronted about the inappropriate "yelling" and tone in the emails; the teacher apologized indicating that frustration played a role in the response.

When electing to participate in the e-learning option at this school, our family was led to believe that there would be minimal differences in direct instruction for those who were e-learners and those in the physical classroom, as all students would meet with their teachers each day. However, we discovered that this claim was not realized by the students using remote learning.

The teachers working with our middle schooler did not hold class via Zoom on a daily basis. Consequently, our student struggled and failed in providing self-instruction. Moreover, the new platform, heralded better and more student friendly, did not substantiate these claims. The bulk of the assignments were uploaded as PDF documents; this did not allow for many students without access to special software or a fillable document to access them. For our student, the PDF documents became an unnecessary barrier; a more accessible alternative could have been used such as Word documents.

Once we discovered that our middle schooler was failing many courses and had low grades in others, the family decided that attending class face-to-face would be the better option, essentially forcing the choice between the potential health risks for several family members and the education of our student. Unfortunately making the change from e-learning to face-to-face instruction was not a simple endeavor. One family member personally visited the school to ask when our student could switch to face-to-face instruction and was told that the school would contact parents in the upcoming weeks. This information was never communicated to our family. Therefore, another family member contacted the principal, who said that the district had to approve an e-learner's return to the classroom environment. Hence, a call was placed to the school district office resulting in more promises being made about allowing our student to return to face-to-face instruction. While these decisions were being made, our middle schooler continued struggling to perform in the online environment.

After numerous visits and phone calls to the school and the district, our middle schooler was allowed to attend face-to-face instruction. Unfortunately, this change did not happen before our student either failed or received low grades for the first quarter of school. Although the principal insisted that progress reports were sent to the family via email, the principal later admitted that no reports were sent for our student. With the first quarter in the rear-view mirror, our family committed to taking a more assertive approach to our middle schooler's education. Access to the school's portal allowed consistent monitoring of grades.

Additionally, teachers were encouraged to contact the family if there were any issues with our student. Frequent contact with teachers now showed the school that our student is not without support and the earlier treatment our middle schooler received during the first quarter is no longer acceptable. The same teacher who earlier "yelled" online at our student needed to be confronted, again. This teacher continued to require our middle schooler to do online work even after being informed that the student did not have consistent access to a computer or the internet. And even though the teacher knew how much our student struggled to complete work as an e-learner, the teacher gave grade recovery work to do online. These frequent battles against the marginalization of our student were exhausting but a vital necessity.

**Discussion**

As Crockett et al. (1989) noted, middle school children are in a period of transition, some on the cusp of being a teenager and everything that comes with this developmental period. Added to this challenging period has been the difficulties of attending school during the COVID-19

pandemic. For our family, navigating the school system's bureaucracy and experiencing the school's lack of concern for the success of our middle schooler were disappointing. Taxpayers trust school systems with their most precious gifts, their children, and based on the outcome of the first quarter for our middle schooler, our family's trust was not honored. Teachers and administrators ignored cries for help, "yelled" at our student, and shifted blame. It is hard to delineate the number of ways in which our middle schooler experienced educational harm. We had to apply pressure for the school to lay out a plan to mitigate the damage done to our student's educational progress and to remediate the knowledge deficits that may have impact beyond the current grade level. The family informed the administration that our expectation moving forward would be that teachers must do everything in their power to help our middle schooler make up the knowledge missed because of the school's failure to provide appropriate instruction, as anything less was wholly unacceptable. In the future, the family would take on a more proactive and intrusive role in our middle schooler's educational progress. It was imperative that our family forge a productive relationship with all stakeholders for the benefit of our student.

It is paramount that schools are aware of, and are sensitive to, the challenges that marginalized students are experiencing while attending school during COVID-19 and avoid placing unnecessary obstacles to their academic success. Schools can lessen some of these barriers by providing an online environment that is engaging and supportive with built-in flexibility (Garbe et al., 2020). Developing relationships with parents in addition to students, teachers can aid school systems in understanding the family struggles early and seek ways to assist them before the student fails a quarter or semester. Accessibility for parents can be improved by increasing their knowledge of content and pedagogical practices. Another way to target accessibility is to assign learning coaches for students to guide them through the learning process as well as to help them complete assignments. Borup (2016) suggests the use of scaffolding for students in the virtual environment. Some of these scaffolds (Garbe et al., 2020) include helping students create and maintain schedules, providing encouragement to students, and implementing appropriate instruction.

It is a most critical responsibility school systems bear in educating youths during the unprecedented and fluid Covid-19 situation. However, these systems must not allow the learning of our children to become casualties of the times. Everything must be done to mitigate knowledge deficits that are a result of thousands of students engaging in self-instruction. While families also have a responsibility to help their children with their education, teachers, administrators, and districts cannot abdicate their obligation to provide quality, equitable and accessible education to all students. To do so, will result in catastrophic consequences for our children and our society. Working with families instead of against them will be crucial in ensuring the success of all students, but especially those already marginalized by a system that may not be supportive of their unique needs.

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**Children and Families: Health and Wellness**
**Instances of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Among the Young in Turkey**

Simel Parlak[a] Azize Nilgün Canel[b]

[a]Okan University, Istanbul, Turkey; [b]Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey

Simel Parlak, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Okan University Guidance and Psychological Counseling Science Department. Her research focuses on planning psycho-educational works and nation-wide programs to prevent intimate partner violence targeting conflict resolution skills, communication skills, anger management, healthy romantic relationships, and gender equality with involvement of several bodies such as family, school, non-governmental organizations, and social media. She has publications in ~~N~~national and international journals and book chapters. She is working in the field of individual and group therapy. She is interested in psychodrama, narrative therapy, supportive therapy, EMDR, trauma and violence.

Azize Nilgün Canel, Assoc. Prof. Dr. She graduated from Istanbul Marmara University, Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance. She completed her PhD with her thesis on family and marriage satisfaction. She began her academic career as a research assistant at Istanbul University and is currently a faculty member at Marmara University. She has taken part in many national and international projects, has written articles for national and international journals, and has written three books on couple and families. She took part in the preparation of the Turkey's Fight Against Addiction Training Program (TBM). She also has several studies on modern and postmodern therapies and creative counseling. Canel is married and has one child.

**Abstract**
The aim of this research was to find out the origin and emotional and intellectual process of violence among young people. Interpretative phenomenological analysis method was used in the research. In-depth interviews were held with young adolescents and emerging adults that have committed violence to reveal their experiences of perpetrating violence, thoughts and sensations that could lay the groundwork for emergence of violence in this age group. The study group consisted of fifteen young adolescents and emerging adults. As a result of the interpretive phenomenological analysis using MAXQDA computer program, three study themes were obtained: 1) Childhood experiences 2) Relationship with partner and occurrence of violence, 3) Post-violence experiences. According to the young adolescents and emerging adults who have committed intimate partner violence; intimate partner violence was triggered by jealousy, mistrust, uncontrolled anger, and desire to control the partner's life.

**Key words:** Intimate partner violence, young adolescents and emerging adults, domestic violence.

Intimate partner violence appears in physical, psychological, or sexual context or in the form of stalking (CDC, 2006). This research particularly discusses physical violence in dating relations. Foshee et al. (2007) describe physical dating violence as scratching, slapping, pushing, biting, strangling, burning, or beating. Feminist literature defines intimate partner violence as a coercive behaviour performed to gain control and power over the partner (Mitchell & Magdalena, 2009). The World Health Organization (2012) has declared that aggression has a continuing course from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood, conducing to a permanent pattern of violence. In Turkey, the Adolescent Profile 2008 survey has revealed that 21.2% of adolescents have perpetrated physical violence, 33.3% have perpetrated verbal violence, and 2.9% have perpetrated sexual violence (Ministry Directorate General of Family and Social Research, 2010). In research conducted on university students by Hatipoğlu, (2010), 94.0% (205/218) of the participants reported perpetrated violence in their previous dating relationships. In a study conducted on 3153 young adolescents and emerging adults by the Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, it has been found that 44% of the youth have experienced dating violence (Öztürk, Karabulut, & Sertoğlu, 2018). In Turkey, dating violence is increasing daily and is also occurring among high school age youth (Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, 2018). In the study conducted in Turkey on young people by SEKAM (2013) it is seen that 44% of the young people have applied physical violence to their friends, siblings, partners and 60% approve of the judgments sentence of “The right of those who do not listen and follow one's nose is beaten.” (p. 201). In the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which was conducted on 9900 students, 20.9% of the female students and 10.4% of the male students stated that they were exposed to partner violence (Vagi, Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor, 2015). In Fidan and Yesil’s (2018) research carried out in Turkey, school girls normalized the violence they experience by referring to the social environment, the character of the partner, and their own attitude. Male students consider violence they use as ownership.

According to The Grand National Assembly of Turkey Parliamentary Research Commission (2007), when the statistics of the world and regions are examined, young people are among the disadvantaged groups affected by violence. Studies show that youth violence is an ongoing and increasing problem. It is observed that the death rates related to violence are high among young people in the world. There are children who died in the 5-14 age group due to suicide and violence, and this rate increases even more in the 15-29 age group. Agents encouraging dating violence have been listed as drug abuse (Offenhauer & Buchalter, 2011), sociodemographic structure (Foshee et al., 2004), being raised in a young family, lower socio-economic level, education level of the family (Foshee et al., 2009), witnessing or exposure to domestic violence (Foshee et al., 2004; Offenhauer & Buchalter, 2011), and peer influence (Chase, Treboux & O’Leary, 2002). In Turkey, researchers (Avcı & Güçray, 2013; Haskan, 2009; Özgür, Yörükoğlu & Baysan-Arabacı, 2011; Şen, 2011), showed that young people witness or are exposed to violent acts within family besides the larger social environment, education is not sufficient, and

lower socio-economic level and unsatisfactory parental love and interest add to likeliness of appearance of violence. According to the World Health Organization (2012), the factors leading to violence in the youth period include individual (biological and psychological-behavioral), relational (family and peer influence) communal (gang, possession of arms, substance use, social integration) and social (demographic and social changes, income inequality, political and cultural) factors.

Violence can be figured out as it is, only by examining its roots and nature (Arendt, 2006). Revealing the sources and so-called justifications of violence is considered to have an important place in breaking this cycle (Lucas, 2013). Dating violence during youth is such an assault that it may lead to physical and psychological injury, developmental deterioration, suicide, low academic performance, drug abuse, involvement in crime, and domestic violence in later years.

Since young people are at a critical stage of identity development, it seems essential for future preventive studies to explore culture-specific facts as to the source of violence by means of qualitative interviews if it is intended to break the cycle of violence. It should be noted that although violence occurs everywhere in the world and in different forms and areas, it also has culture-specific aspects. This research was conducted with a phenomenological approach with the purpose of uncovering perpetration experiences of young people but also their thoughts and emotions that might have paved the way for violent acts.

**Method**

In this research, interpretive phenomenological design, which is the qualitative research design used with the aim of studying in detail young adolescents' and emerging adult's experiences of perpetrating violence against their partners and revealing the basic characteristics that are common to some or all the participants.

Interpretive phenomenological research was particularly useful for this research as it allowed a detailed examination of the experience, the effect of the participant's interpretation of the experience on her/himself, how the participants made sense of the experience, and how they form their perceptions about their personal and social worlds (Jeong, & Othman, 2016). In this regard, interpretive phenomenological framework seems important in obtaining information about the experiences of young individuals who perpetrated violence on their partner (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Jeong, & Othman, 2016).

**Participants**

In this research, participants were selected by using criterion and snowball sampling methods among purposeful sampling methods, which allow in-depth study (Creswell, 2015). The basic understanding in criterion sampling is to study all situations that meet a set of predetermined criteria. The criterion mentioned here can be set by the researcher (Patton, 1990). The criteria here included perpetrate violence on the partner, signing the informed consent form for taking part in the research, and being unmarried young people from both genders. In snowball sampling, one individual is determined as a reference considering the subject of the study and

contact is made with other participants through this person (Creswell, 2015). Many of the people interviewed in this research stated that they were exposed to violence but did not perpetrate violence. During the selection of the participants, it proved relatively easy to reach the abused persons, while it was quite a challenge to access young people who have committed intimate partner violence. In addition, the latter avoided accepting their violent acts unless such acts were in police records or there were legal actions against them. It was seen that during the interviews, female participants spoke out that they acted as abusers, but male participants had difficulty uttering the same. It is thought that there is less social stigma around women perpetrating violence against men. On the other hand, the males avoided doing so because they were probably concerned about being criticised harshly for perpetrating violence on someone weaker than themselves. Therefore, the researchers had difficulty in reaching the male participants. In general, due to the focus on personal experience of the individual in phenomenology, homogeneity of the study group consisting of a small number of participants allows a thorough study of circumstantial similarities and differences (Chawla, 2006; Smith, & Osborn, 2008). The sample size was determined against these criteria in the current research. The variables related to the participants' sociodemographic characteristics are given in the tables below.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

| Participant | Age | Gender | Education | Medical or psychological condition | Previous attempt for self-harm |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | 16 | Female | At high school | Difficulty in controlling anger and thus receiving psychological support | Slitting wrists/ Suicide attempt |
| P2 | 16 | Female | At high school | Startled by azan (sounds of prayer calls) for one year, believing that supernatural beings are bothering her, not receiving psychological support | Throwing a fist on a wall, breaking her finger |
| P3 | 17 | Male | At high school | None | Suicide attempt |
| P4 | 17 | Female | At high school | None | Slitting wrists/ Suicide attempt |
| P5 | 16 | Male | At high school | None | Throwing a fist on a wall, breaking the little finger |
| P6 | 17 | Female | At high school | Was on medication for 2 years due to anger problem | Slitting the arms with glass |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P7 | 18 | Female | High school graduate | Was on medication for 2 years due to anger problem | Drug intake / suicide attempt at the request of her boyfriend |
| P8 | 17 | Female | At high school | None | None |
| P9 | 24 | Male | High school graduate | None | Self-mutilation Scars left on the body |
| P10 | 24 | Female | University graduate | Was on medication for 2 years due to anger control and neurologic problems | Drug intake/ suicide attempt |
| P11 | 21 | Female | At high school | Psychiatric treatment and antidepressant drugs at intervals of 2 years | Drug intake/ suicide attempt |
| P12 | 22 | Male | High school graduate | None | Verbal reference to suicide but no attempt |
| P13 | 23 | Female | University graduate | None | None |
| P14 | 23 | Female | University graduate | Therapeutic support for 2 years | None |
| P15 | 24 | Female | Master's degree | Was on medication for a short period in psychiatry clinic and therapeutic support for 2 years | None |

It can be seen in the tables above that most of the participants have a history of psychological and psychiatric support, self-mutilation, and suicidal attempt; they are at close ages with their partner, they have not used drugs during or after the violence; and some participants have reported ending of their violent romantic relationship, while some others have reported the opposite.

**Data Collection**

In this research, the semi-structured interview was used as a type of interview commonly used within qualitative research. The questions were first used in a pilot study on one female and one male. As a result of the feedback obtained from the pilot study, the interview questions were revised, some items were omitted if they did not help explore the phenomenon properly. Also new questions were included for valuable data on the phenomenon, the questions were put in order, and the wording of the questions was finalised by taking the opinion of a psychological counselor who specializes in domestic violence. The sample questions about the interview were as follows: 1) When you look at the violence experienced during the relationship, what happened

before the violence appeared? 2) If you had the chance to go back in time and go back to that day of violence, would you behave differently? 3) What would be the reason for you to behave differently? The interviews were held by the researcher face to face and voice-recorded using a digital voice recorder with the permission of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from the participants approving their voluntary contribution, and the interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted by the first author of the study at a time and place convenient for the participants.

The research was carried out in the biggest city of Turkey, and the participants were contacted using the researchers' professional networks, social connections, and the participants' recommendations. It was identified that the interviewees who perpetrated violence against their partner often had difficulty talking about it and tended to justify and legitimise their violent acts. Another observation during the interviews was that the female participants could speak of perpetrating violence with ease unlike the males.

**Data Analysis**

The research data was analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) proposed by Smith et al. (2009) in the MAXQDA program. The researchers chose IPA to understand how participants perceive the personal and social world and to provide insight into how a particular person makes sense of a particular phenomenon in a particular context. Moreover, IPA brought researchers as close as possible to the perspective of participants experiencing a particular phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The stages involved in the interpretive phenomenology analysis are realized in the following order (Willig, 2001). The audio records of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and transferred onto MAXQDA. The text obtained from each interview was read repeatedly. At the same time, the audio recordings were replayed to make sure there was agreement between the audio and written records. Also, notes were made on the text of each participant.

At the next stage, focus was placed on the notes and themes that were created. The themes were created for each participant separately. Next, the themes obtained from all participants were listed and the ones that were compatible with the phenomenon were determined. As a result of the comparison of the themes obtained from all participants, the main themes that were seen common and reflected the experience of the participants were obtained. Apart from that, the resulting main themes, sub-themes, and codes were reviewed by three independent experts who have taken qualitative research courses. They were found to be consistent at a great extent and thus finalised by the researcher following the experts' opinions. Furthermore, the researcher went through training on trauma and violence for a more fruitful analysis process. The validity of the research was provided by making exact quotations from the opinions of the participants.

**Findings**

The main themes and sub-themes which were obtained from interviews are outlined in this section.

**Childhood Experiences**

This main theme, which defines the background of the participants and social composition of the neighborhoods, emerged with three sub-themes: *self-description, family relations* and *experiences of violence*.

**Self- description.** This sub-theme consists of four codes: *low tolerance to errors, getting angry easily, being compliant and jealous.*
P15: "*I don't get angry easily, but once I get angry, something too bad comes out of me…I don't remember what I did when I was angry. At that moment I can do anything, you know."*
*P12: "I am very jealous… I am extremely sensitive and emotional."*

Strangely enough, some participants described themselves as "compassionate, easy-going, too tender-hearted to hurt other living things". Yet, in the course of the interview, they said that they perpetrated violence because of not being able to keep their temper; however, they seemed to be unaware of their violent acts.

**Family relations.** This sub-theme consists of three codes: *father says the last word, mother says the last word* and *close relation with mother but distant relation with father*. It was worth noting that the participants outlined the mother as the parent, which is easy to communicate with, shouldering the household responsibility, and warmer in relations, while they overall attributed a distant figure of communication to the father.
*P8: "Mom was good. But my father and I sometimes don't get along. Because he, you know, gets mistrustful. For example, he never lets me out of the house. He's always putting pressure… Yeah, but mom's not like that. She is listening to all what I tell. She's trying to understand. Rather, dad is approaching with anger."*
*P9: "My father used to drink all the time, he always had these problems. Lastly, they got divorced... Well, of course, we weren't brought up with the love of parents...."*

The participants stated that the last word belongs to the mother in their family. As another finding about their *intrafamilial* relations, they stated that the father is often away from home, and they have only weak relations with the same because of imprisonment or heavy workload of him as applicable. In the case of others, the father was reported to be an active member of the household, often having the last say. The relevant participants presented this by using expressions such as "like in all households" or "father is the breadwinner", which suggests that such participants readily consent to this situation and do not see it as unacceptable.

**Experiences of violence.** This sub-theme consists of three codes: *exculpating violence against children, exposure to domestic violence* and *violence in the social circle.*
*P1: "Well, there isn't usually a calm person around me… when people around me usually fight. There is an iron stuff called knuckle ring that is put on fingers. With it, with a chopping knife, etc."*
*P3: "When I heard the words he said... I jumped from the desk and put down one punch. I remember it…"*

*P9: "In front of our eyes, you know 3-tined forks which are big and wide, (he) heated it up on a camp cylinder and, I can remember clearly, he put it out on my mother's belly."*

As an example, physical violence against children was excused for mischief as a child and recalled by remarking, "*I haven't been exposed to that much violence, she just pulled my hair, slapped my face or something, I deserved it*" *(P13).* In addition, it was understood that participants became eyewitnesses to violence perpetrated by the father to other family members, they were exposed to violence from the mother and father during childhood, and they do not have warm or close kinship relations.

Moreover, it was inferred that violence perpetrated by the father to other members of the family (mother or sibling) was widespread in the families of the participants. The participants tended to normalise violence, underestimate it with expressions like "*not something extreme*", and exhibit the same attitude regarding violence against their social circle with comments like "*just for fun to deliberately hurt (others)*".

**Relationship with Partner and Occurrence of Violence**
This main theme, which focuses on the experiences before and during violence emerged with four sub-themes: *internal factors that trigger violence, external factors that trigger violence, description of the act of violence,* and *violence fantasies.*

**Internal factors that trigger violence.** This sub-theme consists of four codes: *anger, jealousy and desire to control, disappointment* and *self-protected.* Basically, participants had difficulty managing their anger. They reported a heavy desire for hurting the other, but they resorted to physical violence because they could not perform it in speech, as they were unable to express themselves verbally.
*P7: I wanted him to suffer. Because I was suffering tremendously at the time ... But I couldn't upset him with my words ... So I acted that way ... I think people resort to violence when they are helpless. I see I can't do anything with words. Nothing. … It is the way I do when I cannot do it by speaking."*
*P4: "I'm being beaten, you know, my body, and I have a say on my own body. He can't simply touch me. If he touches me, I will touch him, too. I have to protect myself."*

It was seen that intervention in the partner's clothing and behaviours was perceived as normal and jealousy was taken as a sign of strong emotions and an indicator of love. Love was described to be correlative of intervention in the partner's life, keeping her/him under control, jealousy, and owning.
*P11: "It's wrong. The wrong thing is that he goes with girls. Why does he go? I am not going with men, why is he going with the opposite sex?"*
*P14: "At that moment, I wanted to beat him. I wanted to rub his head against the wall. I was extremely angry at that moment. I was too jealous."*

Anger and inability to control anger seem to have considerably triggered violence among the participants in this research. The participants were seen not to remember the moment just before

the occurrence of violence and there are missed moments including emotions, thoughts, and behaviors during the violent acts. It was predominantly said, *"I do not know what I was talking about, I do not remember what I did, I just passed out"*. In short, it was found that they felt intense anger and could not think of anything other than harming and hurting the other person. Based on their statements like *"nervous breakdown, passing out"* and their failure to identify the cause of the anger in some cases, it was concluded that they failed to keep their nerves under control.

**External factors that trigger violence.** This sub-theme consists of four codes: *physical violence perpetrated by partner, frustration, boredom of quarrels* and *being cheated*. In participants, partner's behavioural patterns and cheating were noted as external triggers of violence.
*P10: He kept me waiting for an hour and then I was angry, and he would accept it normally. That was what triggered me... And that's when he voiced that it was ridiculous for him to be angry, it's triggering me... After saying that I was exaggerating ... I said that everything is permissible…"*

As one exception, physical violence and psychological pressure exerted by the partner were found to be an outstanding variable for some participants unlike the others.
*P6: "I hardly ever hit him because if I hit him, the result is usually too big against me. My arm was quite bruised for a while… I stopped seeing my boyfriend. Then he came and beat me (laughing)"*

It is inferred that violence was not a one-time occurrence, the abused persons were exposed to violence in different times and places. They justified the violence with the partner's family problems, so they tried to sympathise with the partner, and they expected the violence to gradually disappear. It was understood that the partners intervened in the participants' everyday life, clothing, and behaviours; they made them feel valueless, they did not recognise their right to decide for their own life, and they tried to keep the participants' life under control. It was added that physical and psychological violence by their partner somehow motivated them to apply physical violence, too.
*P5: "Oh, jealousy. Texting someone else, talking with her/him. You know, as I love her so much, I don't talk to anyone else, she says she loves me very much but talking with others. It made me mad..."*
It can be deduced that cheating and lies were recurrent throughout the relationship and the young people who have committed intimate partner violence resorted to violence as the last choice in readiness for coming of the relationship to an end. The participants attempted to rationalise the violent acts by saying "*How come does he do that although I love him?" (P2)* In addition, intolerance and violence were noticed when a new romantic relationship was started by the other party, with the fear of rumours even when the romantic relationship discussed here had ended earlier.

**Description of the act of violence.** This sub-theme consists of four codes: *not describing the act as violent, physical violence, self-destructive behaviour,* and *self-defence*. When the participants'

statements were examined, they tended to recall the anger they experienced at that moment rather than the act, and they had difficulty in remembering their feelings and thoughts experienced at that moment. There was a lack of awareness of violence and self-destructive behaviours that took place.
*P1: "There I started hitting him. Because I was hurt. I slapped him and kicked him. I mean I hit a lot in that way. I had a stick with me, and I hit with the stick. You know I wasn't able to satisfy my anger..."*

Moreover, the participants seemed not to develop insight about the violence they perpetrated, and they did not call it violence.
*P8: "No, I am usually quite against fighting, so I can't beat… I used to shout or hit. Okay, I've pushed but I haven't beaten anyone at the extent of hurting a lot…"*
Apart from these, most of the participants reportedly exhibited self-destructive acts at the time of anger, especially punching the wall in anger.
*P2: "But I realise later that I have already hit the wall. I notice it after my hand swells like this."*

**Violence fantasies**. This sub-theme consists of two codes: *wishing to kill* and *dreaming of harming more.*
*P1: "At that moment, I just wanted her/him to die. I said, God, kill her/him so that s/he can't go out with anyone except for me. Suppose that s/he is dead, and I am done. I wished that s/he cannot to go out with someone else than me."*
*P8: "…I wanted to scream. I wanted to beat him to death. I was getting so mad."*
*P10: I wished if I had had a knife at that moment, I could have stabbed the knife. Because I went blind."*

**Post-violence Experiences**
This main theme focuses on perception after perpetrated violence, emerged with three sub-themes: *perception of others' judgement, perception regarding the consequence of the violence* and *perception of violence.*

**Perception of others' judgement.** This sub-theme consists of two codes*: positive impression* and *negative impression.*
*P4: "If one watched it all along, he would think I was doing self-defence, but he would wonder why we went that far. Why we had to fight. You know, in general, those who fight outside are lovers or something like that."*

Participants believe that men perpetrating violence against women would be judged unfavorably by others because of perpetrating violence to someone weaker than them. Participants expect some people to approve the violence and others to reject it. Again, the majority of the participants were found to expect others to have a negative judgement of them and consider them as insane.
*P9: "They would think I was a weak person. I'm hitting the girl after all."*

**Perception regarding the consequence of the violence.** This sub-theme consists of two codes: *persisting in certain behaviours* and *wish of changing certain behaviours*. Participants insisted on their violent behavior as long as the reasons did not change. The participants grounded their violent acts on their partner's certain behaviours and intense affection felt for her/him.
*P5: "…You know the other side must have thought, look at what he did, what sort of a man he is. He hits someone weaker than himself. But that thought is not right for that moment, I believe, because it is a girl, why should I beat unless she does something (bad)? Because I love (her) so much. I used to in fact."*

Again, the interviewees explained that they wanted to stop their violent acts on the grounds that violence is not remedial at all. They indicated their preference for negotiation and listening to the other party rather than violence. Nevertheless, though intention for changing that behavior was reported by both groups, they sounded unsure about being able to control their anger.
*P7: "I left my course after that incidence because my friends there saw that and so on. That's why… And my mother figured out. Mom got angry with me. That's why I didn't have to experience these. I mean if I had known then what I know now, I wouldn't have done such a thing."*

**Perception of violence.** This sub-theme consists of three codes: *incapability, can be used depending on the situation, it arises anywhere and suddenly.* Looking at the statements of the interviewees, violence was commonly interpreted as incapability, harmful, and arising from desperateness.
*P13: "I don't think it makes anyone superior or anything like that. What would you gain when you hurt a person? I believe that's even more incapable. I don't think it's power, I think it's desperation."*

Some of the participants said, "*There is something like that at school. No one can harm whoever is powerful*" (P4). It suggests that such participants recognise violence as an instrument for behavioural change specific to the surrounding conditions.
It was also stressed that violence can break out suddenly and, in any place, and that violence exists in every sphere of life.
*P5: "I've been exposed to violence at home, just occasionally, not so much albeit. I compare it to the family because I've seen a few times. Because it happens in every family. I don't think it never happens. Actually, violence is the world, so I tell you. Because there is violence in the parliament. It's in place in school. It's in place in the family. It is in place among friends. Even in nature. It is even in place among animals."*

As another finding, some of the participants, referred to the provoking part played by the other party in occurrence of violence as understood from the statement "*they similarly provoke people. This is how violence takes place*" (P12). It was implied that violence breaks out as a result of provocation.

It is assumed that violence is enjoyed as a means of higher status in their schools and violence is functional for social acknowledgement. It is equally noteworthy that the woman was referred to as the weaker person in the generalisation about not perpetrating violence to a weaker person.

**Discussion**

In this research, three major themes were obtained, and the results were discussed associatively. The first main theme of the study "*childhood experiences"* describes how anger was evident as a part of self-description in participants. Anger was described as a trait which is not a behavior that needs to be corrected. Another interesting finding is that low tolerance was exhibited against errors and jealousy emerged as an important construct in the case of anger. Anger was termed as a feeling aroused by the other party's provocation and no responsibility was taken by the participants in this regard. On the one hand, the participants did not see being angry as a mistake; on the other hand, they sounded unaware that they perpetrated violence, or they were reserved to disclose such facts. In a research study carried out on those perpetrating intimate violence, Wilkins (2011) found that the young people who have committed intimate partner violence considered themselves non-violent. There is also evidence in the literature that lower self-esteem increases bullying and aggressive acts (Paulson, Coombs & Landsverk, 1990; Russell & Hudson, 1992). Drawing on the reported views, it was understood that negative attributions such as being angry, jealous and their behaviours are overshadowed by such perception being manifested in perpetrating intimate partner violence.

In terms of family relationships, establishing a closer relationship with the mother while the father is in distance appeared as one of the most visible common characteristics of the participants in our case. In a research conducted by the T.R. Ministry of Family and Social Policies (2013), intrafamilial ill-communication has been noted as an important area of problem. It is a widely accepted fact that the father is liable for the household subsistence. Due to his working hours and working regime, he is often the secluded member of the family. While close and intimate relationships are established with the mother, the father often embodies authority offering only a distant relationship. Similar results were obtained in the present research. As inherent in traditional gender roles; while the mother is considered responsible for rearing children and taking charge of the house, the father oversees maintaining the livelihood of the family and assumes the role of a remote communicator who avoids sharing his feelings.

If an individual experiences affectionate relationships with family members during childhood, secure attachment takes place. On the contrary, domestic relationships based on denial or rejection give rise to avoidance as a style of attachment. In the middle, those who experience a blend of denying and loving relationship with their parents adopt the style of anxious and unstable attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Our findings revealed broken intrafamilial relations and distant non-family relations, frequent appointment of the mother as the model parent, searching for a figure of affection outside the family because of the lack of domestic affection, and existence of intrafamilial problems and violence. The participants in this research might have adopted the anxious-unstable attachment style due to the reasons in the literature as mentioned above. Therefore, they might have been tied to their partners with intense fear of loss

and preoccupied attachment, and such attachment might be the driver of the jealousy and violence.

Although participants remarked that domestic violence does not exist in their families; they continued the interviews by mentioning violent happenings, they underestimated and excused violence they were exposed to during their childhood, and they accepted it as a deserved punishment for their misbehaviour. In other research conducted on the agents of intimate partner violence, violence by parents has also been dealt with tolerance (Barış, 2015; Watt, 2011). The fact that the participants regard parents' violence as a means of discipline or rearing children seems to pave the way for them to take violence in the same way.

The findings of this research showed that the participants were exposed to domestic violence, they witnessed domestic violence, such violence was mostly perpetrated by the father, and violence is commonplace in their social circle. Similarly, previous research studies have asserted that violent individuals experienced domestic violence considerably (Barış, 2015; Haskan, 2009; Şen, 2011), the father was the family member that perpetrated violence more often than any other (Şen, 2011; T.R Ministry Of Family And Social Policy, 2013), witnessing violence in the social circle increased incidence of violence (Avcı & Güçray, 2013; Özgür, Yörükoğlu & Baysan-Arabacı, 2011; Şen, 2011), and dating violence occurs in part due to the presence of violence in the social circle, school and peer relationships (Chase, Treboux & O'Leary, 2002; Offenhauer & Buchalter, 2011). Much in the same vein, we found out that the interviewees perpetrated violence to solve their problems with their partner. They said, "only if I can talk or I can express myself, I won't do it", and that violence was seen as a path to social recognition.

The second main theme of the study, *relationship with partner and occurrence of violence*, proved the domain where expectations from partner and disappointment breed a hostile meaning loaded on the partner, ultimately being a vital agent in incidence of violence. Like in previous studies (Avcı, & Yıldırım, 2014; Berkowitz, 1990; Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008; Watt, 2011), the young people who have committed intimate partner violence in our research were convinced to apply violence by a blend of numerous components including anger, jealousy and desire to keep the other under control, disappointment, desire to protect oneself, intention to end the relationship, incapability of expressing oneself verbally, psychological violence by partner, frustration, weariness of quarrels, lies, and being cheated. According to DeWall et al. (2012), behaviours become vulnerable to the impact of scenarios, beliefs, expectations, attributions, and observational learning. Specifically, hostile attribution onto the other party plays a remarkable instrumental role in occurrence of violence. There are some studies showing that romantic affairs founded on owning the other person and altruistic and passionate love are associated with negative emotions, and these features constitute a substantial predictor of the end of the relationship (Bugay & Tezer, 2008; Lee, 1973). Hazan and Shaver (1987) studied projection of attachment styles on adults and found out that adults who developed anxious-unstable attachment were worried about being let down by their partners, they were jealous and went through ups and downs throughout the romantic affair. In addition, among participants who confessed perpetrating violence to protect themselves, a positive attitude towards dating violence was noted

like in the previous research (Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008; Hatipoğlu, 2010; Yumuşak, 2013). The literature suggests that individuals apt to perpetrate violence exhibited higher levels of loneliness but weaker social support networks (Avcı & Yıldırım, 2014). Some of the participants here initially approached their partner as a source of affection, which is supposed to originate in family; they experienced intense feelings of happiness but showed signs of depression including difficulty in eating and sleeping upon ending of the relationship. Apart from that, the participants perpetrated violence so abruptly that they could hardly remember that moment and they almost experienced loss of consciousness. According to some participants, the harshness of quarrel sometimes reached a higher level soon leading to complete loss of control. But in some cases, violent acts were planned beforehand.

As for the participants, they regard it as a given right to steer the partner's life and actions and to interfere with her/his life. This finding seems to be consistent with many other research studies (Hyden, 2005; Yumuşak, 2013). They further hold the other party's attitude and behaviours responsible for the breaking out of violence. Love was described as an equivalence of intervention in the partner's life, controlling her/him, jealousy, and owning her/him. It proved as a marked reasoning among participants that they were expecting to be exposed to violence as a response to their certain acts and they deserved it just because they kept acting in the same way. Loue (2001) argues that in evolutionary psychology, if the principal value in a community is obedience and children are expected to behave accordingly, obedience might come into view as a major value in intimate relationships alike. In that context, violence can be abused to maintain obedience. Given that the child's unconditional obedience to parents and adults prevails as an established cultural behaviour in the whole nation, this phenomenon may significantly account for occurrence of violence. In this research, participants did not show tendency to regard certain acts of them as a sign of violence. Consistently, other research conducted indicated that the agents of intimate partner violence were ready to underestimate their violent acts (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2008; İlhan, 1992; Foshee, et al., 2007; Watt, 2011). It is an interesting finding that the participants condemn others for violence, but they display poor discernment in identifying their own violent acts. The interviewees stated that anger did not fade away despite their perpetrating violence and they found themselves dreaming of further hurting the partner as a reaction to the intense anger. The adolescents even indicated their wish for the death of the partner/killing her/him beyond hurting. It seems that an individual transforms her/his anger at both parties into dreaming of murdering the partner when s/he cannot manage the relationship embedding mutual violence.

The third main theme of the study was noted as *post-violent experiences.* Participants articulated concern about being criticised harshly for perpetrating violence on someone weaker than themselves. Moreover, although both groups mentioned their wish for stopping violent behaviours, they were not confident about controlling their anger. In a study by Eatough et al. (2008), participants reported experiencing a flow of multiple feelings rather than one single feeling following the embodiment of anger. The justifications were given as being cheated, jealousy presented as an indicator of intense love, lack of explanation by the partner, provocation

by partner, and being treated unjustly. It was added that intense love might cause violence even though such reaction should be ideally avoided.

The participants shared views about violence. They hold the view that violence is a sign of incapability, it is detrimental, and it replaces the right reaction as a remedy to desperation. According to the report by the The Grand National Assembly of Turkey Parliamentary Research Commission (2007), young people resort to violence because they are unable to solve problems they face in any other way. The current research also showed that the participants perceived violence as a scene of incapability or weakness; still, they hinted at sustaining violent acts and associated emergence of violence with provocation by the other party. According to our participants, violence can be used to gain power and respect, or discipline someone else. Support in the literature exists that reflect violence is not disdained for the sake of enforcing discipline (Şahin, Dişsiz, Sömek, & Dinç, 2008). This study examined how violence is exercised as a means of higher status and social acknowledgement in school and social life, respectively. It is particularly interesting that the woman is placed in the target when referring to not abusing violence against a weaker person in that the woman is considered as a weak or vulnerable entity. There is an argument that if violence is to be performed, it should be between the members of the same sex. The participants regarded abusing women as a sign of weakness but a sign of power in the case of perpetrating violence against men. This perception nurtures gender inequality and is based on perceived difference of power (Dökmen, 2012).

**Limitations**

The limitations of the research are as follows. The purposive sample for this study came from within the largest city in Turkey. The participants were also well educated, and participant characteristics may vary depending on the level of education. Limited numbers of male participants were reached. Also, it has been observed that women express their violence experience more easily and men have difficulty in expressing this. Therefore, the responses of male participants to the interview questions may have differed.

**Conclusion and Implication**

Violence was legitimised and justified from the participants' point of view in our research. In addition to this, acceptability and abusability of violence is introduced by an incentive perception which argues that violence can be performed as an instrument of discipline like in all areas of life and it can be a well-deserved punishment for certain behaviours. As another aspect worth noting, the male participants spoke too discreetly about their violent acts at the beginning of the interviews owing to the fact that abusing a weaker person has negative connotations in society; however, females sounded more relaxed in the role of perpetrator. Based on the data obtained here, it is proposed to investigate the perceptual loadings that determine acceptance levels of the agents of intimate partner violence in future research. It is also recommended to plan psycho-educational trainings on conflict resolution skills, communication skills, anger management, healthy relationships, and gender equality in governmental and non-governmental organizations. When we look at the international programs on intimate partner violence (IPV) in adolescents, examples are seen at the national scale and studies are tailored to particularly assess those

programs. In Turkey, also, it seems crucial to design nationwide programs to prevent intimate partner violence. Also, it is seen that most of the women participants in adolescence are exposed to violence and use violence to protect themselves. The participants stated that they need psychological support. For this reason, it is recommended to establish mental health units that will support violence prevention.

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**Education by the Numbers**

Donald Snead[a]

[a]Middle Tennessee State University

Donald Snead (B.S.in Natural Science, M.A. Teaching in Curriculum & Instruction, Ed.D. Curriculum & Instruction in Science Education) is the Interim Department Chair and Professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Middle Tennessee State University. Committed to a social constructivist philosophy, he teaches courses in curriculum, leadership, and research methods. Dr. Snead is an inductee into the Kentucky Distinguished Educators Cadre. His research interests focus on improving learning for all students.

It is not difficult to hear or engage in a debate on the influence that a celebrity, politician, or an athlete have in society. However, outside of the immediate home environment, a teacher is the most influential person in the life of a person. They act as role models and offer guidance to our children. Teachers are the backbone of society. Teachers are the people responsible for social and economic development of a society.

What do we know about teachers in our public schools? According to the most reliable data, there are approximately 3.7 million (3.2 million public and 0.5 million private) full-time and part-time elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States. Teacher characteristics are often associated with other variables related to student's success.

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Teacher Characteristics: Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Teachers

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Teachers

| | | Percent of Teachers by Race/Ethnicity | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |
| Type of Schools | | Hispanic, regardless of race | White, Non-Hispanic | Black or African American, Non-Hispanic | Asian, Non-Hispanic | Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic | American Indian, Alaska Native, Non-Hispanic | Two or more races, non-Hispanic |
| All Schools | | 9.1 | 80.0 | 6.3 | 2.2 | 0.2 | 0.5 | 1.7 |
| | All Public Schools | 9.3 | 79.3 | 6.7 | 2.1 | 0.2 | 0.5 | 1.8 |
| | Traditional | 9.0 | 80.0 | 6.5 | 2.1 | 0.2 | 0.5 | 1.7 |
| | Charter | 15.6 | 68.0 | 10.4 | 3.0 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 2.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Community Type | | | | | | | |
| | City | 14.0 | 68.5 | 11.8 | 3.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 2.1 |
| | Suburban | 9.8 | 79.6 | 5.5 | 2.7 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 1.8 |
| | Town | 5.8 | 86.8 | 3.7 | 0.9 | 0.3 | 0.9 | 1.7 |
| | Rural | 3.8 | 89.7 | 3.6 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 1.0 | 1.3 |
| Private | | 97.2 | 85.1 | 3.2 | 2.7 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 1.3 |
| | Community Types | | | | | | | |
| | City | 8.0 | 80.9 | 4.9 | 3.8 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 1.9 |
| | Suburban | 8.2 | 85.8 | 2.4 | 2.3 | | 0.2 | 1.0 |
| | Town | 3.3 | 92.5 | # | # | # | # | 1.1 |
| | Rural | 3.1 | 93.8 | 1.2 | 0.8 | # | # | 0.6 |

# No Credible Data

Note: Teachers include both full-time and part-time teachers

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**STEAM**
**STREAM into Online Play Groups**
**How Children Adapt to Play in a Rapidly Digitized World**

Rebecca Horrace[a]

[a]University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Rebecca Horrace graduated from Northern Arizona University with her Bachelor's in Elementary Education in 2007. She earned her Master's in Continuing Education for Elementary Education from NAU, as well as her Reading Specialist Endorsement and Structured English Immersion Endorsement in 2011. Rebecca taught 3rd grade in the Sierra Vista Unified School District in Sierra Vista, AZ. She is now a Lecturer of Literacy Methods at University of Colorado in Colorado Springs and homeschools her two children. Rebecca is currently in her second year of her doctoral program with Indiana University in the Literacy, Culture, and Language Education program. Her research interests include play, literacy, and media.

**Abstract**
The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between technology integration and play from a whole child perspective, specifically through online play groups. As play continues to decline and vanish from our schools completely, the author believes we must reexamine the countless benefits of play across STREAM education. With current digital advancements, children will adapt to online play and continue to develop their creative and analytical skills. The author suggests that with continued support from parents and educators, children who are encouraged to have a say in what and how they learn can use online play to build a solid STREAM foundation.

**Key Words:** online, play, play group, STREAM, technology, toys

## Introduction

Due to the ease of accessing technology, devices such as television, tablets, and online games have become increasingly present for today's youth. Access to the ever-expanding digital frontier is changing the way in which children play, incorporating several different modes, and creating multimodal forms of play. As Kress states, "multimodality can tell us what modes are used" as we question "how does it work" (2010, p. 1). The multimodal nature of play in the

digital world has led to increasing opportunities for children to engage in meaningfully integrated play across the subjects of STREAM (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics). Furthermore, children naturally build upon their modes, drawing from familiarity while mixing content, material, and cultural awareness to create their comfort of expression. For example, as children create a dance to music, bring in toys to spin and swing as the beat continues, and sing with all their might, they are participating in multimodal play. Although multiple dominant discourses situate children's interactions with technology as dangerous, when examining what children do with technology, those dominant assumptions become complicated and are often challenged and disrupted in the literature (Gottschalk, 2019). By observing what children do with technology and media in their play, evidence suggests that they often build upon stories and create their own spin-offs with malleable characters and plot points as they incorporate media and technology into their imaginative play. In a study about "Princess Players," Wohlwend (2011) discusses how children use toys as text: "toys associated with children's popular animated films or television programs encourage children to play and replay familiar scripts and character roles" (p. 79), which create limitless opportunities and elevate social boundaries based on children's beloved media characters. As children play, they put their favorite characters above all others and even recite statements made from media as factual. This type of behavior can be described as children displaying media authoritarianism, when children give power to media for the simple fact that it is media and holds power. Toys encourage play, construction, and dialogue long after the media element has ended. Children have opportunities to interweave digital and non-digital modes to create their own authentic play and literary journeys. Furthermore, digital integration with play presents opportunities for children to utilize scientific inquiry, engage with engineering concepts, and build logical mathematical understandings through explorations and investigations. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between technology integration and play from a whole child perspective, specifically through online play groups. As a result, when children have the opportunity to play online with friends, they are able to utilize their imagination and creativity, creating the occasion to embark upon explorations that involve STREAM content through digital, imaginative play.

**A Changing World**

Within this new digital frontier, toys based on children's favorite movies and television series are important artifacts that can be used to support learning and build interest in topics through the integration of technology and media. Similar to a favorite stuffed animal that comforts a child at bedtime, children have developed a deep connection to these characters and stories that become part of their daily lives. Technological tools and resources, including online play groups, can be used to support learning and build relationships and connections among children. For instance, when a child makes a new friend who exists only in their cyber world because they share similar interests in toys and media, it showcases the limitless potential of technological advances with regards to children's play.

Adding to our already technology-driven culture, our country entered into a pandemic and forced schools to move to remote instruction, which required children to rely on computers and tablets

for daily educational instruction. State mandates kept playgrounds closed and limited social gatherings, forcing online classes to be the only social outlet for children. In turn, a new approach to play emerged, online play groups, where children meet with friends through online platforms sharing their toys, discussing the plot of their favorite television shows, participating in multi-house scavenger hunts, and so forth. Sometimes these play groups meet when children staying online after class, when the majority of others have logged off, including their teacher. Other times, parents coordinate with one another to set up specific times when children could meet to chat, share, and just be kids. These new digital play groups open a whole new "playground" for imaginative play, "providing a natural, social context for experts and novices to interact" (Stone & Stone, 2015, p. 13). The only difference is that it is solely online.

Children learn technology skills, how to navigate the internet and share their screen; they learn to engage patiently as one person speaks, perhaps making adjustments to their own toys, yet listening to the speaker's story; they learn how to connect and play together even though they are miles apart, creating bonds, sharing jokes, and looking forward to these online play groups as much as if they were physically together.

**Moving into Digital Landscapes**

Not only has there been an increase in our media use from a young age, but the types of technological devices that we have at our fingertips is wider and continues to grow and adapt (Marsh et al., 2016). Children have access to televisions, smart phones, and tablets, as well as toys that interact across several of these networks. These "smart toys" connect electronically to electronic devices and/or the internet (Marsh, 2017). The digital and physical realms of play become connected through the "Internet of Toys" crossing virtual and physical-world boundaries (Marsh, 2017). Children are able to seamlessly move from non-digital to digital realities expanding their previous content knowledge and background.

Children have powerful imaginations, thus enabling them to move across realities in their imaginative play, whether through digital or non-digital play. Many toys, such as certain small, colorful building-block sets have digital, interactive features. Once a child tediously builds their block set, they scan a QR code and are able to watch their newly built toy come to life. Children can then choose to interact with the app and let the digital stories and characters guide their physical play demonstrating "converged play, in which traditional play with toys converges with newer forms of digital play" (Marsh, 2017, p. 2). These scenarios provide opportunities for children's spatial reasoning, engineering concepts, and even number concepts as they follow instructions, construct their sets, and try new formats. Then they are integrated with computer coding as they bring their objects to life.

Through these new domains of play and digital toys, new classifications of play are developing to help identify and explain the nature of children's play. Current literature has suggested, "that it is not so much the types of play that have changed as a result of new digital contexts as the nature of play" that has changed (Marsh et al., 2016, pp. 1-2.). A revised framework of Hughes' (2006) taxonomy of play was adopted and reviewed by Marsh et al. (2016) to include their

digital adaptation. The sixteen play types are included along with Hughes' definition and the researchers' adapted definition for digital play. This is a helpful tool to show the changing ways in *how* children play, unchanging the *types* of play they demonstrate across digital and non-digital realities.

**Table 1**

| **Play Types** | **Adapted Definition from Marsh et al.** |
| --- | --- |
| Symbolic Play | Occurs when children use a virtual object to stand for another object, e.g., an avatar's shoe becomes a wand. |
| Rough and Tumble Play | Occurs when avatars that represent users in a digital environment touch each other playfully, e.g., bumping each other. |
| Socio-Dramatic Play | The enactment of real-life scenarios in a digital environment that are based on personal experiences, e.g., playing house, shopping. |
| Social Play | Play in a digital context during which rules for social interaction are constructed and employed. |
| Creative Play | Play that enables children to explore, develop ideas and make things in a digital context. |
| Communication Play | Play using words, songs, rhymes, poetry, etc. in a digital context. Can include text messages, multimodal communication, and so on. |
| Dramatic Play | Play in a digital context that dramatizes events in which children have not directly participated, e.g., TV shows. |
| Locomotor Play | Virtual locomotor play involves movement in a digital context, e.g., child may play hide and seek with others in a virtual world. |
| Deep Play | Play in digital contexts in which children encounter risky experiences or feel as though they have to fight for survival. |
| Exploratory Play | Play in a digital context in which children explore objects, spaces, etc. through the senses in order to find out information or explore possibilities. |
| Fantasy Play | Play in a digital context in which children can take on roles that would not occur in real life, e.g., be a superhero. |
| Imaginative Play | Play in a digital context in which children pretend that things are otherwise. |
| Mastery Play | Play in digital contexts in which children attempt to gain control of environments, e.g., creating a virtual world. |
| Object Play | Play in which children explore virtual objects through vision and touch through the screen or mouse; or play with the virtual objects. |
| Role Play | Play in a digital context in which children might take on a role beyond the personal or domestic roles associated with socio-dramatic play. |

| Recapitulative Play | Play in a digital context in which children might explore history, rituals and myths and play in ways that resonate with the activities of our human ancestors. |
|---|---|

Marsh et al. (2016)

Using the adapted digital play definitions, it is evident that the digital landscape is impacting the types of play taking place when for example, children manipulate blocks on a screen, work together with an online partner to build a city, or maneuver a camera to record a newly created science experiment to then share with friends and family through online streaming. Furthermore, “Mediated actions are made meaningful when they are categorized as social practices (e.g., chatting, clicking a link, scrolling, browsing) within the local network of practices valued in a particular context” (Wohlwend & Kargin, 2013, p. 3). Children’s minds do not stop inventing, creating, and imagining when they move online; their thinking adapts to the new online environment.

Wohlwend and Kargin’s (2013) study observing children in an afterschool program who were interested in playing online games and creating their own virtual worlds, showed the power of *affinity groups*—people who share the same play interests with similar goals and common materials (Fernie et al., 1995). Children participated in several online games, were seated in the same room, and often used their avatars to communicate. They were novice gamers and learned how to collaborate with one another to develop strategies, build creations, and play successfully in these virtual worlds. Expanding on the concept of “flickering” (Wohlwend, 2017) when children move in and out of real versus imagined digital landscapes, the ease of movement between realities is increasingly important to gauge a child’s digital literacy between multimodal play and different realities.

**Into Non-Digital and Digital Play**

With rapid technological advances and the early introduction of media, children’s exposure to and experience across content areas (e.g., science, math, literacy) are constantly changing. Children’s knowledge of utilizing technology is tested at a young age and in many cases, children are surpassing their grandparents’ tech-knowledge with their know-how of making devices function almost effortlessly. Favorite cartoons and characters come to life during children’s creative games and imaginative play propelling their bonds with other children over similar interests.

Millennials have experienced first-hand the shift from computers only in public places and computer labs that had no internet connection to multiple devices in households that stream movies and games through Wi-Fi. With the change in access and normalcy of media and technology, comes changes in schools as well as children’s development and background knowledge creating a “natural bond between today’s children and technology” (Plowman & McPake, 2013, p. 28), which effects their learning, language, and play. With these transformations, positive outcomes arise as students with low or no writing abilities include themselves in productive play using dialogue from movies or a tablet to “read” a story.

Collaboration among children supports students struggling with ideas to participate through the sharing of stories and dialogue (Husbye et al., 2012). Groups are formed through shared interests surrounding favorite characters or while peers exert themselves as leaders to show others how a device is worked allowing "children to deliberately and thoughtfully take up roles that interest them" (Wohlwend, 2013, p.38). Robots and coding are becoming part of children's everyday education, demonstrating an understanding in the shift of technology, and showcasing the broad opportunities children have to explore integrated engineering topics.

Of course, "technology and media should not replace activities such as creative play, real-life exploration, physical activity, outdoor experiences, conversation, and social interaction that are important for children's development" (NAEYC & FRC, 2012, p. 5), but rather become integrated into children's play. Children need the freedom to explore and discover using the familiarity of loved characters and stories drawing upon "literacies and their own identities as multimodal literacy users and media producers" (Wohlwend, 2013, p.23). However, schools' rules often create barriers to what (if any) type of media is allowed in classrooms. These "power relations in educational discourses make some materials and meanings unavailable…to say that popular media play themes are developmentally inappropriate, that children should be writing and not playing in school" (Wohlwend, 2013, pp.1-2). Although this type of mentality is present in many schools, children still find a way around the rules through their "hidden play." Playing a character from a show or movie, using characters to recreate stories, taking inanimate objects to use as props to reenact their favorite media, creating drawings of media characters, and pretending a cardboard box is a computer are examples of ways in which children go around the acceptable classroom and school discourse in order to bring their interests into their play. It is with this incorporation of media that unity is created among students, clubs are formed, and children choose friends based on their commonality. The nexus of practice with media familiarity and technology knowledge instills a sense of belonging and enables children to "just know how to do" certain behaviors, movements, and dialogue pertaining to their joint play (Wohlwend, 2013). Regardless of the rules in place, students find ways to play cooperatively on the playground with baby dolls that become princesses, using sticks as weapons, and mimicking dialogue from their favorite movies all while staying under the teacher's radar (Wohlwend, 2013).

As play continues to decline and vanish from our schools completely, leading to behavioral problems and children who lack the knowledge and desire to create, explore, and imagine, we must reexamine the true benefits of play across STREAM, socio-emotional, and cultural development among children. Removing adult views and biases from approaches meant to enrich the whole child are needed to fully understand that not all learning should or can be tested by a standardized instrument. We need to put ownership back into our children's hands, allowing them to have a say in *what* and *how* they learn.

**Online Play Groups**

"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood." -Fred Rogers

Adapting to our current situation and current technological advances, we must honor children's desires to advance their forms of play because it is after all, their true work. In doing so, we must not only acknowledge—but also encourage—online play groups as an appropriate way to meet with friends, share stories and toys, and develop meaningful relationships with peers. We need to "value the practices that play uniquely provides: improvising with new technologies and practices, inventing new uses for materials, and imagining new contexts, spaces, and possibilities" (Wohlwend, 2011, p. 127).

Children who play with small, colorful building-block sets through online meeting platforms are able to enhance a multifaceted learning experience. If they want to share previous builds, they must figure out how to move their creation without destruction and if that occurs, how to fix it quickly to present to others. Once they have their set ready to share, they use their technology skills to figure out the camera angle and the background lighting so their creation can be seen fully. After children share their builds, they converse using insider knowledge about the set itself or specific media franchise the set is modeled after. These discussions can then lead to further inquiry regarding specific sets or shows, directing children to take on further research by perusing the internet together, all while figuring out technological aspects of sharing a screen and reasoning with one another as one child guides and one child observes. After much observation and research, children may decide they want to build a set they recently saw. They build alongside one another, sometimes asking what color will be used, or asking for advice on what piece would fit nicely, building upon their social and spatial skills. After the building, children play with their creations, although miles apart, interacting with their toy artifacts and one another through the screen. It is then decided a background is needed. Children jointly agree on colorful artwork and create two distinct backgrounds for their playsets. Sound effects can be heard, as well as voice pitch changes as different character figures move back and forth in front of the camera to talk with their online counterpart. It is as if the screen does not matter. The children are together, and they are engrossed in playing, establishing a solid STREAM foundation, as elements of technology, literacy, engineering, art, and even math are present in their play. Instances of play groups like the one stated above are becoming children's "new normal" in regard to their peer interaction and play. A seamless integration of technology and media with play can be accomplished when "the use of technology and media becomes routine and transparent—when the focus of a child or educator is on the activity or exploration itself and not on the technology or media being used" (NAEYC & FRC, 2012, p. 8). The new technologies, media, and "Internet Toys" available to a vast array of children coupled with the importance of play and STREAM education, gives strong justification on where future opportunities are headed and how we can continue to expand on children's science, technology, reading, engineering, art, and math development through online multimodal play.

Children's creativity will continue to expand and grow with the changing eras of new toys—it is up to educators, parents, and researchers to grant children the opportunity to play without rigid restrictions and inspire imagination through all modes of play. Through this adult support, children find safe spaces to "just be kids," building on their development of lifelong friendships

through shared commonalities, igniting their desire to perform science experiments, play with technology, read about a favorite character, engineer with blocks and gadgets, create unique artwork, and compute mathematical equations—all in the name of play.

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**Page Turners: Books for Children**

Maria T. Genest[a], Katrina Bartow Jacobs[b], Carla K. Meyer[c], Michelle J. Sobolak[d], Patricia A. Crawford[e]

[a]La Roche College, [b]University of Pittsburgh, [c]Duquesne University, [c]University of Pittsburgh, [e]University of Pittsburgh

**Picturebooks**
**The Box Turtle**
Written and illustrated by **Vanessa Roeder**
Dial Books, 2020. ISBN 978-0-735-23050-7
In this charming story, the box turtle, just like many of us, is trying to gain confidence in who he is while feeling the pressure to fit in. Born without a shell, this story chronicles a box turtle's quest to find the perfect shell. Along the way, the box turtle tries out many shells often with hilarious results. Ultimately, and with a little help from his friends, he settles on the shell his parents first gave him. Children will certainly be able to relate to this tale of friendship, coming to accept ourselves and learning that we do not have to always "fit in" to find happiness. Ages 3-5. (MJS)

**The Brain is Kind of a Big Deal**
Written and illustrated by **Nick Seluk**
Orchard Books, 2019. ISBN 978-1338167009
This nonfiction picture book is all about our amazing brains. Seluk uses comic book style illustrations and humor to teach young readers how the brain controls everything we do from our thoughts, movements, senses, and feelings. Young readers will surely be pulled in by the illustrations and humor that Seluk uses to complement the text as they learn about the many functions of the brain and how it controls all other parts of the body. The sidebar graphics and text go into more detail about the brain and augment the reader's learning. Ages 6-8. (MJS)

**Counting Creatures**
Written by **Julia Donaldson**. Illustrated by **Sharon King-Chai**
Dial Books, 2020. ISBN 978-0-593-3453-0
This stunning picturebook offers a lift-the-flap counting game experience, while also introducing readers to a host of animals and their babies. As children count their way through the text, they will learn that baby sheep are called lambs, baby foxes are kits, baby hares are leverets, and so much more. In addition to these solid math and science connections, along with a predictable, yet engaging storyline, the book also offers a veritable visual playground. The colorful, profusely illustrated pages are punctuated with peek-through windows and interactive flaps, just right for

exploration by little fingers. This book will keep young children coming back for more, as they discover the many different layers of material within it. Ages 3-8. (PAC)

**Julián at the Wedding**
Written and illustrated by **Jessica Love**
Candlewick Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1536212389
Julián, and his love of magic and make-believe, are back. In this follow-up story to *Julián is a Mermaid*, Julián and his abuela are invited to a wedding, where Julián meets Marisol, a new friend. Together the two imagine, create, and get into a bit of trouble. But through it all - the truth remains that, as the text tells us, a wedding is a party for love. Jessica Love continues to celebrate gender diversity and equal rights in simple, loving stories that come to life with her vivid and emotional illustrations. Ages 3-8. (KBJ)

**Me and My Sister**
Written and illustrated by **Rose Robbins**
Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN 978-0-8028-5542-8
*"Uh-oh, here comes my sister…"* This light, but insightful, picturebook offers readers a glimpse into the world of two siblings who have both similarities and differences. Although the word "autism" is never used in the text, it becomes quite clear that this is the issue at hand. Big brother narrates gently worded descriptions of the challenging behaviors of his sister, providing an empathetic yet realistic perspective. The tone is loving and compassionate. This text could serve as a powerful discussion starter. Ages 4-8. (PAC)

**The New Neighbors**
Written and illustrates by **Sarah McIntyre**
Penguin Books, 2019 (first published in the U.K. in 2018). ISBN: 978-1-52478-996-1
When Mr. Pigeon stops by the apartment roof to tell the young Bunny family that their new first-floor neighbors are rats, the exuberant young rabbits rush off to tell their sister. As the bunnies bounce down the stairs to inform all the neighbors in Pickle Lake, excitement turns to fear and even anger as unpleasant stereotypes and rumors about rats emerge. By the time they reach the Rats' front door, nobody even wants to knock. But once the door opens, a warm welcome awaits, as the tenants realize that nobody should be judged by their appearance alone. This fast-paced tale seems simple, but reminds us all to think before we judge. Ages 4-8. (KBJ)

**Saturdays are for Stella**
Written by **Candy Wellins**. Illustrated by **Charlie Eve Ryan**
Page Street Kids, 2020. ISBN 978-1-62414-921-4
George loves Saturdays because these are the days he spends with his Grandma Stella. He loves everything about her and the special times they share. Their days are filled with fun and George knows he is loved deeply. One day, George awakes to learn that Stella has passed away. In his aching grief, George mourns his grandmother and comes to hate the emptiness of Saturdays. Life changes when his family gets a new addition. Baby Stella is born! George embraces his new little sister, finding a joy and love reminiscent of that of his grandmother. Suddenly, Saturdays are redeemed and once again set aside for Stella. This warm and poignant story highlights the power of intergenerational relationships and conveys a hopeful reassurance for even the most difficult times. Ages 4-8. (PAC)

**Graphic Novels**

**It's Me. (Catwad #1)**

Written and illustrated by **Jim Benton**

Scholastic, 2019. ISBN 978-1-33856-603-1

*It's Me. (Catwad #1)* is the first graphic novel in a new series by New York Times bestselling author, Jim Benton. This series features two cats who are complete opposites in their outlooks on life. Catwad is a pessimist who sees the world as terrible in every way. His overzealous friend, Blurmp, sees the world as amazing in every way. Their opposite perspectives on life make for a very amusing friendship. Young or reluctant readers will find the slapstick humor engaging. The novel is presented in short chapters that make reading the full text manageable for even the most reluctant of readers. Ages 8-12. (MJS)

**Class Act**

Written and illustrated by **Jerry Craft**

Quill Tree Books, 2020. ISBN 978-0062885500

On the heels of his Newbery Medal winning graphic novel, *New Kid*, Jerry Craft again hits a homerun with the second installment of the series, *Class Act*. The graphic novel explores the opportunities afforded (or lack there off) to a student of color, Drew, the main character, who comes from a poorer community in New York City and attends the elite Riverdale Academy Day School on scholarship. Using his craft, the author/illustrator continues to unabashedly address the everyday racism and microaggressions children of color face in white spaces. Craft's illustration and humorous writing style will capture the attention and respect of middle-grades readers. Ages 9-14. (CKM)

**Young Adult**

**A Light in the Darkness**

Written by **Albert Marrin**

Albert A. Knopf, 2019. ISBN 978-1524701208

An exceptionally well-written and researched work, *A Light in the Darkness,* recounts the tragic fate of Janus Korczak and his orphans in Nazi controlled Poland. The author uses a unique approach to storytelling which contrasts the ideologies of Hitler and Korzack. Marrin's approach poignantly introduces readers to World War II and to Warsaw. The author leaves no stone unturned and unflinchingly gives testament to the horror of the Holocaust through Korczak's story. The book requires critical thinking and reflection, yet is an extremely important work that illustrates how easily humans can be corrupted by hate and bigotry. Ages 13+. (CKM)

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**Emerging Scholar**

# The Impact of Emotional Intelligence among Children with Disabilities and the Role of Professional Educators and Caregivers: A Literature Review

Peri Munday[a], Dr. Christan Horton[b]

[a-b] Winston Salem State University

Peri Munday is recent graduate of the May 2021 class from Winston-Salem State University with a degree in Rehabilitation Studies and a minor in Biology. Ms. Munday has worked directly with children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, both through private, contractual services and an internship at an intermediate care facility. Ms. Munday strives for the best outcomes in rehabilitation practices for all persons, regardless of their ability. Ms. Munday has also served as a parent liaison for special education services for elementary-aged students where she has advocated for student needs and progressive outcomes for student learning using trauma-informed practices. Ms. Munday aspires to enter a Physician Assistant program and further increase her knowledge and skills in person-centered care and wellness. Ms. Munday's research interests include emotional intelligence practices and medical implications in rehabilitation studies.

Dr. Christan Horton is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Counseling at Winston Salem State University. Dr. Horton is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Associate. Dr. Horton has experience as a mental health and disability case manager, advocate for the aging population, as well as a transitions coordinator with NCDVRS for the state of North Carolina. Dr. Horton's research agenda is fourfold and includes (a) trauma and trauma informed care, (b) best practices in rehabilitation education, (c) maternal mental health and disability, and (d) self-care and wellness. Dr. Horton earned a Master of Science degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and a Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation Counseling and Rehabilitation Counselor Education from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Dr. Horton is a titan in supporting individuals to reach their maximum potential through trauma-informed practices, access, and the development of skills to promote self-advocacy and empowerment.

**Abstract**
Throughout the process of child development, emotions evidence a vital role. This conceptual analysis focuses on the significant position of emotional intelligence and children with disabilities and other special needs. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a concept that describes the

ability to recognize personal emotions and how emotions trigger behaviors. Many educational settings, including kindergarten through 8th grade and post-secondary institutions, and health care facilities remain as the forerunners of 1) providing age-appropriate learning, highlighting child development, 2) training the next generation of professionals to work with individuals with disabilities, and 3) promoting continuity of care in facilities tailored to guide and promote effective growth and development for persons with disabilities. Many post-secondary academic programs involve foundational EI techniques that focus on quality-based service delivery and preparing graduates for practice in diverse settings. In addition, an increasing number of graduates advance into alternative therapies such as physical or occupational therapy, speech therapy, and respiratory therapy to implement their acquired skillset to further support persons with disabilities. This premise assumes that a degree from a program that places emphasis on the foundations of EI instills graduates with an increased capacity for empathic relationships, a broad spectrum of understanding mental connections to physical conditions, and an insightful understanding of the world and how significant issues may be affecting individuals through an EI lens.

*Keywords*: Emotional intelligence, disability, special needs, alternative therapies, children

> "Emotional Intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing
> our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves,
> and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships."
> (Goleman, 1998, p. 317)

Just as the significance of life, emotions remain equally important in the development of children (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Through emotions, children can think, process, and behave accordingly within the environment (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). According to Gupta et al. (2020), exceptionally emotional intelligent children often have higher levels of motivation and emotional competence compared to other individuals. Inter-personal relations become especially valuable when considering the aspect of emotional intelligence. The purpose of this conceptual analysis is to explore four central ideas of 1) the general concept of emotional intelligence, 2) the impact of EI on children with disabilities, 3) the benefit of emotional intelligence for educators and parents, 4) and the potential for complementary disciplines and their application of EI with children. Disability care professionals in various disciplines can promote emotional regulation practices among young children and adolescents with disabilities through the foundations of EI. The current conceptual analysis considers the development of emotion regulation practices fostered by academic settings, human service professionals, and other allied health professionals. This discussion explores the benefits of emotional intelligence for the positive development of children across the diverse span of disabilities.

**Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

First popularized in 1990, the term Emotional Intelligence is described by Salovey and Mayer as the ability to recognize, manage and understand emotions within oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1998) suggests that 80% of an individual's life success relies on the

concept of emotional intelligence, whereas IQ reflects 20%. In theory, emotional intelligence is the collective blend of emotion and intelligence. EI, harmonizes individuals with the self and environment (Stanescu & Tasente, 2021). When an individual is emotionally intelligent, their behaviors afford the ability to effectively regulate their emotions (Sekhri et al., 2017). As this concept has become increasingly studied, it is apparent that skills of emotional intelligence may serve as a foundational undertone for enhanced student academic achievement and in society, along with the skills necessary for workplace success (Sekhri et al., 2017).

During infancy and early childhood years, children can build social and emotional skills (Bălaș-Baconschi & Dobrican, 2020). Emotional intelligence is also critical in the child's environment (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). As children rapidly grow, they experience increased complex emotions (Slusniene, 2019). Feelings of happiness, satisfaction, anger, sorrow, and worry or nervousness are some of the common emotions experienced by individuals (Slusniene, 2019). Around the ages of five and six, children typically have the capability to label their emotions and classify the source of the emotion (Slusniene, 2019). Emotions often uncovered among preschool aged children are pride, guilt/shame, and embarrassment or humiliation. A specific level of development and awareness of relationships is needed for children to effectively conquer challenging emotions (Slusniene, 2019). Attunement to another individual's thoughts and feelings are what emotions allow us to achieve (Sekhri et al., 2017). Emotions gives us insight to the behaviors of others, their intentions, and the personal ability to feel emotions prompted by the emotions of others (Sekhri et al., 2017). As children start to label their emotions, they begin to understand their meaning and reasons for occurring within their respective environments (Slusniene, 2019).

Panneerselvam and Sujathamalini (2014) suggests that three primary skills of emotional intelligence are 1) the effective use of emotions, 2) appropriate identification of emotions, and 3) proficient emotion regulation. When children indicate emotional intelligence, they can identify their inner emotions as well as those within relationships, in addition to the ability to effectively interpret situations (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). When children discover how to interpret the emotions of self as well as others earlier in life, the better they will effectively manage life challenges and proceed in the direction of success (Gupta et al., 2020).

It is suggested that children's academic success begins and is influenced by healthy emotional development (Rohaizad et al., 2014). Nisa et al. (2020) indicated elementary students' character and personality is highly impacted and developed by their level of emotional intelligence. Sekhri et al. (2017) also revealed that emotional intelligence is an emerging skill necessary for elevated achievement, positive actions, and the overall enhancement of success in life. Children who are in the transition-age endure many psychological changes (Nisa et al., 2020). Of the various changes, emotional change is the most vital. While the experiences are common and typical, they are essential to observe as many individuals operate with various levels of emotional intelligence (Nisa et al., 2020). To encourage the development of social, emotional, and academic interaction and development among children during the primary academic years, it is essential for

communities, families, and the school system to incorporate empirical methods (Payton et al., 2008).

The four dimensions of emotional intelligence include 1) perceiving emotion, 2) using/reasoning with emotion, 3) understanding emotion, and 4) managing emotion (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Effectively decoding others' emotions in pictures, faces, voices, and culture illustrate examples of perceiving emotion. Reasoning with emotion involves problem solving abilities and spontaneous thinking (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Understanding emotions occurs when individuals can understand the evolution of emotions and the general understanding of emotional languages (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Lastly, the regulation or management of emotions becomes the most valuable element in emotional intelligence (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Children who can manage emotions respond properly in their state of emotion (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Sakhri et al. (2017), also highlighted that emotional intelligence produces individual capabilities that promote control of oneself.

Billings et al. (2014) found that academic and emotional growth is highly significant for students, their parents, and educators during the phase of pre-adolescence. In addition, the period of adolescence, which is also considered a vulnerable developmental age, often involves a period of modification within their academic settings, social environment, and familial life (Mansy, Halim, & Wahab, 2017). With effective and appropriate supports through the periods of developmental transition and modification, emotionally intelligent children can progress to live happier, stronger, empathic lives that continue to manifest through adulthood as well (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). An additional element is that emotional intelligence has the potential to infuse elements of order and peace into ones' lives (Rohaizad & Kosnin, 2014).

**EI in Children with Disabilities and Child Development**

Emotional intelligence is beneficial for the positive development of children across a diverse span of disabilities. Emotional intelligence is a significant factor that allows persons with disabilities to maximize their abilities which can allow them to develop a clear understanding of self and others (Al-Tal et al., 2017). Societal integration can be mediated with the presence of EI for persons with disabilities as well as effectively managing barriers that exist (Al-Tal et al., 2017). Children who are diagnosed with hyperactivity, learning disabilities, Autism, Intellectual and developmental disabilities, social difficulties, and those who are disadvantaged are situated within the classification of special needs (Gupta et al., 2020). Children who are impacted by such conditions are usually considered to have low levels of EI (Gupta et al., 2020).

The way children with special needs adjust and interact with their environment may rationalize the need for training in emotional intelligence (Kumar, 2013). Children have a unique and individual method to comprehending and navigating the outer world (Gupta et al., 2020). The environment is often interpreted by senses. When individuals lack specific essential senses, the common way of adjusting or interpreting the environment is different (Gupta et al., 2020). Typically, individuals can follow the model of others through observation. This task is not as

easy for others (Gupta et al., 2020). A variety of advances in resources in the past years cater to children with special needs. While these resources are specific to children with special needs, it is critical these resources also support emotional intelligence practices (Kumar, 2013). A few of the challenges children with special needs experience consist of aggressive behaviors, disability frustrations, self-esteem concerns and decreased levels of motivation (Kumar, 2013).

Kumar (2013) suggests children with special needs require motivation and empowerment to cope with their life course with a disability. Emotional intelligence is significant for the internal and external quality of life of the child with special needs (Kumar, 2013). Emotionally intelligent children with special needs display characteristics of elevated academic motivation and success, improvements in their effective organization and problem-solving abilities, capacities to develop strong bonds, capabilities to appropriately comprehend consequences and conflict resolution, and maintain optimistic outlooks on learning (Kumar, 2013). Kumar (2013) describes several examples illustrating the effects of empowering children with special needs to become emotionally intelligent. Table 1. below displays an overview of the outcomes highlighted by Kumar (2013).

**Table 1. Outcomes of Emotionally Intelligent Children with Special Needs**

| Understand their own emotions |
|---|
| Take responsibility for the excellence of their life. |
| Respect others' emotions and to see both pleasant and unpleasant emotions as important feedback for keeping them on course. |
| To accept the reality and face the life with positive attitude |
| Consciously choose the content of their consciousness, thinking and speaking more positively about themselves, others, and their world, thus creating an experience of greater optimism, joy, and happiness. |
| Avoid emotional hijackings, thus persisting in the face of challenges and setbacks due to their disabilities. |
| Learn how to create more "flow" or peak experiences in their lives. |
| Improve relationships through empathy for and an understanding of the emotions of others |

(Kumar, 2013, p. 64)

The concept of empathy provides a significant element when supporting the emotional intelligence of children with special needs (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). The emotional variable of empathy holds space for individuals to obtain insight into the feelings and thoughts of others (Sakhri et al., 2017). For example, children with Autism demonstrate challenges with social perception and grasping a general understanding of others. Their focus on other areas often impedes their ability to maintain a sense of consideration for others (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). In addition to the importance for children with special needs to receive empathy training, it is equally significant to consider empathy in relation to the social behavior of individuals without disabilities towards those with disabilities as well (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015).

Feelings of belonging and inclusion become essentially important among children with special needs especially considering inclusive classrooms. Given this fact, it is recommended that persons without disabilities participate in trainings that support best practices on how to effectively interact with persons with disabilities (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). This perspective is highly important in younger children, as their peers often lack an understanding of disabilities (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). Bratitsis and Ziannas (2015) highlight the existing disparity in the research concerning social training of persons without disabilities on the proper interaction with persons with disabilities. Therefore, trainings with a focus on empathy confirm benefits in supporting both children with special needs and those without. Empathy is a fundamental element of emotional intelligence and the agent of growth that can promote social interaction (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015).

***Learning Disabilities***. EI and the learning acquisition of children is receiving increased attention in education. Two reliable indicators of achievement among all children are the presence of social and emotional skills. Included within the category of "all children" are children with learning disabilities (Singh, 2017). Research reflects that children with learning disabilities have lower levels of emotional intelligence (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). For example, Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini (2014) note common EI issues among children with learning disabilities such as how these children show difficulties with emotion expression both internal and external. More specifically, children experience the stigma associated with the emotional difficulties from anxiety, anger, frustration, etc. (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014).
Singh (2017) indicated that children with learning disabilities may experience intense levels of frustration. Frustration from the disability and low self-esteem are other challenges children with low EI encounter. These challenges can be further reflected within the academic setting, causing difficulty with calming, awareness of non-verbal cues, lack of motivation, and relationship development (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Similar challenges were also identified within the research by Singh (2017) with the addition of challenges with children's ability to calm oneself and interpret nonverbal cues. While these difficulties exist, parents and other support persons can play a major role in mediating the impact of experienced challenges (Singh, 2017). These challenges may be offset by highlighting the child's growth as an individual versus only emphasizing academic accomplishments. Good emotional habits will be supported as well as the outlook for future success (Singh, 2017).

Using a remedial approach, educating children with learning disabilities may be expressed as an intervention method (Singh, 2017). A variety of instructional tools and strategies to mediate the difficulties experienced by the child must be incorporated. It is suggested that educators make efforts to decrease difficulty through an inclusive curriculum (Singh, 2017). Table 2 provides a few common strategies based on Kirk (1963) to support children with learning disabilities to best conquer the challenges associated with emotional concerns.

**Table 2. Strategies to Overcome Emotional Challenges among Children with Learning Disabilities in the Academic Setting**

| Strategies |
|---|
| Identify the specific needs of the child |
| Develop yearly goals and short-term objectives |
| Determine teaching style |
| Maintain instruction at the child's level |
| Provide extended time |
| Choose an effective reward system |
| Evaluate teaching tasks |
| Create opportunities for student success |

(based on Kirk,1963)

Panneerselvam and Sujathamalini (2014) emphasize how EI impacts_children's learning disabilities. Employing an integrated instructional approach tailored for learning and emotions, has the potential to meet the needs of children with learning disabilities and increase their capacity for academic and life success (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Incorporating emotional learning within the academic setting, supports children with special needs to feel empowered and able to regulate emotions effectively. In academic settings, teachers intentionally incorporate strategies that promote an all-inclusive setting. Seven effective strategies from Panju (2008) as cited in Kumar (2013) are highlighted for educators to utilize. These seven strategies are reflected within the acronym 'ELEVATE.' The acronym is outlined below:

- "(E) environment for learning
- (L) language of emotions
- (E) establishing relationships
- (V) validating feelings
- (A) active engagement
- (T) thinking skills
- (E) empower through feedback"

Incorporating the strategies and techniques of ELEVATE within academic classrooms provides educators with tools to transition from the consistent position of conduct management to more meaningful interaction with student learners (Kumar, 2013). Emotionally intelligent classrooms reflect an environment where the educator can 1) mediate only when required, 2) ensure time is provided for students, 3) develop clear and concise objectives to distribute to students, 4) foster innovation and personal growth, and 5) incorporate laughter and fun within the classroom environment (Kumar, 2013).

***Hearing Loss.*** In children with hearing loss, issues with their social, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral abilities may exist because of difficulties with their ability to listen which is often

accompanied by communication issues (Yasin et al., 2012). These concerns remain also challenging and stressful for their parents/caregivers as well (Pujar & Patil, 2019). Pujar and Patil (2019) describe a significant effect identified in age, socioeconomic status, and ordinal position on emotional intelligence among children with hearing loss. Compared to children categorized as typical, those with a hearing loss are at a higher risk of experiencing behavioral challenges, encountering emotional disturbance, and performing lower academically (Pujar & Patil, 2019). Children's inability to communicate feelings effectively to parents and other individuals ultimately impedes development of high emotional intelligence (Pujar & Patil, 2019). When considering the presence of bullying in the school setting and the inclusion of children with a hearing loss, emotional intelligence can assist with such issues in the academic environment (Al-Jawaldeh, 2012). The development of educational programs along with EI specific interventions offer families and educators the tools necessary to influence higher levels of emotional intelligence in children with a hearing loss (Pujar & Patil, 2019).

Al-Tal et al. (2017) offer several recommendations for individuals with sensory disabilities in which to engage to enhance their levels of emotional intelligence. One specific recommendation is for individuals to freely express their emotions through practices of drawing, acting, and using music as avenues to enhance emotional intelligence (Al-Tal et al., 2017). It is important to offer encouragement for the EI roles family members play in helping the child as well as other natural supports. In order for individuals with sensory loss to develop feelings of security and psychological satisfaction, it is necessary to acknowledge and take account of the assistance afforded these students. This adult support provides the potential to elevate children's levels of emotional intelligence (Al-Tal et al., 2017).

***Vision Loss.*** Anxiety is highly present during adolescence among children with vision loss. During this period, adolescents navigate both developmental difficulties as well as the challenges associated with vision loss (Huurre & Aro, 2000, as cited in Mansy et al., 2017). Visual ability is a critical component to gathering information about the world. When an individual's visual capacity is diminished, their opportunities to experience the world become restricted or eliminated (Mansy et al., 2017). Given the nature of vision loss, an individual may face stressors to include intense social and emotional effects that extend beyond the individual into external factors such as family and the individual's community (Mansy et al., 2017).

Adolescents diagnosed with vision loss may endure maladjustment, peer isolation, lack of peer communication, and low self-esteem (Mansy et al., 2017). Compared to peers without vision loss, those with diagnosed vision loss evidence difficulties with social interactions and indicate spending considerable amounts of time isolated (Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2011). Parween (2015) revealed individuals who were blind (not congenital) received higher scores on the EI scale versus those individuals whose visual loss is congenital. These results validate the importance for early intervention efforts in supporting the development of emotional intelligence earlier in life among individuals with congenital vision loss (Parween, 2015).

**Emotionally Intelligent Educators and Parenting**

***Emotionally Intelligent Educators.*** Over the years, the concept of emotional intelligence has gained momentum, particularly, in education (Marti et al., 2020). Sakhri et al. (2017) acknowledged that educational institutions are electing to integrate the concept of emotion intelligence with the systemic intention to enhance academic and social outcomes. As it is important to promote emotional intelligence among students with disabilities, it is equally important to train emotionally intelligent educators in the classrooms.

Daniel Goleman highlighted the need for educational settings to aim for increased development of emotional intelligence (Gupta et al., 2020). According to a study by Allan (2016, as cited in Slusniene, 2019) it is equally significant for children to learn how to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions just as it is imperative to attain the educational goals of effective reading, writing, and mathematics. To best implement strategies and techniques to efficiently increase EI among children and adolescents, efforts towards recruiting competent and empathic support professionals are vital. Characteristics of an emotionally intelligent educator include: "Infectiously optimistic, a good listener, demonstrates commitment, validates other's feelings, and emotionally resilient" (Kumar, 2013, p. 64). These characteristics are essential to develop and maintain as Kumar (2013) explains emotional intelligence as a dynamic process that allows individuals to become aware of strategies to meet personal needs as well as to consider the perspectives of others. Thus, such characteristics and individual skill level are significant in the academic setting.

To incorporate creativity and promote student engagement and empowerment, educators consider available applications to support efforts to create social and emotional learning (SEL) environments. Examples of applications include: The Social Express, Middle School Confidential, IF (emotional IQ game), GoNoodle, Emotionary, Avokiddo, and Touch and Learn Emotions. Weissberg et al. (2015) describe how SEL interventions evidence the capability to influence the development of five competencies regarded as significant for academic and life success. The five competency areas include: 1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, 4) relationship skills, and 5) responsible decision making. Previous research studies suggest the resources embedded within SEL interventions promote positive development (Taylor et al., 2017). To further the efforts of creating emotionally intelligent children in the academic environment, the home environment also provides a role in the development of emotional intelligence in children.

***Emotionally Intelligent Parenting.*** To support the development of emotional intelligence in children, it is important parents coach children to formulate positive satisfactory responses to emotions in the presence of unpleasant feelings (Katanani & Mas'oud, 2017). Katanani and Mas'oud (2017) recommend avoiding punishment when their child makes a mistake as it may result in the child developing an understanding that all mistakes are treated in that manner. It is important to provide opportunities for creative expression and leisure time while focusing on positive child attributes (Katanani & Mas'oud, 2017).

Of the many parenting styles, the authoritative and emotion-coaching styles remain a popular method used to boost emotional intelligence in children (Segrin & Flora, 2019). The authoritative parenting style allows the parents to be highly responsive to their children along with mild to high-level demandingness (Segrin & Flora, 2019). Parents engage with their children and show appropriate affection. Parents outline clear expectations for the child and offer rich justification for children to become aware of significant values (Segrin & Flora, 2019). In the emotion-coaching style, parents intentionally address negative emotions expressed by the child through acts of validation and mindfulness of the expressed emotions. Next, parents use verbal communication to support the child in understanding how to best navigate the adverse emotion while, at the same time, identifying appropriate problem-solving skills to determine alternative behavioral responses (Segrin & Flora, 2019). Research suggests that parenting styles grounded in the emotion-coaching style for a portion of the time allows children to develop increased levels of emotional intelligence and improved social functioning (Segrin & Flora, 2019).

In addition to the academic environment tailored for younger children (e.g., K-8), other areas prove beneficial in promoting emotional intelligence. For example, a variety of academic disciplines exist at the post-secondary level responsible for training the next generation of human service professionals to provide comprehensive services grounded on targeting the whole person. Emotional intelligence can be a foundational component to guide a diverse set of disciplines within their curriculum as well as other settings such as health care, counseling, and other allied health professions. The following section provides an overview of alternative disciplines and settings where incorporating emotional intelligence principles is assumed beneficial and supportive in the development of the whole child.

**Complementary Disciplines and Their Application of Emotional Intelligence Interventions**

Many disciplines, regardless of mental or physical focus, often share the common goal of individual wellness, ranging from heart health to emotional awareness. Employment in the human service profession is comprised of a variety of job titles, roles, and responsibilities (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). A few job titles include: educators, counselors, social workers, nurses, and other human service and allied health professionals (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Experienced emotions clearly correlate with employment within the human services profession (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Intrapersonal and interpersonal skills evidence two key components human service providers are expected to implement within their style of service provision (Morrison, 2007). Individuals providing supports within the human services and overall helping profession often experience emotionally charged work circumstances that call for the skill of emotional intelligence for personal control and regulation (Leslie & Davis, 2015).

Many academic collegiate human service programs focus on a variety of learning outcomes and objectives to best prepare students to navigate the workforce post-graduation. For example, undergraduate rehabilitation education (URE) programs focus on a variety of disabilities and other related issues and concerns. Due to the various URE programs across the globe and different areas of focus, one can assume that several URE programs have embedded components that prepare students to utilize and practice EI across many professional disciplines. Known

skills taught in URE (respective to the author's location), specifically EI practices, enable aspiring disability care professionals to assist individuals in reaching optimal emotional and physical wellness goals. URE endeavors to meet the needs of individuals in need through advocacy, empowerment, and individually tailored supports. The goal is to support individuals to reach their maximum potential and enhance their overall quality of life. Emotional intelligence is essential in supporting professionals in this role to best meet the needs of the population served.

It is important to support individuals through an emotional intelligence lens. Alternate disciplines such as pediatric IPC (Integrated primary care) and ICF-IID (Intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities) care also strive to navigate clients toward a degree of wellness, both mentally and physically, thus linking all disciplines to the benefit of EI and emotion regulation practices. Proficiency in EI instills graduates with an increased capacity to foster emotional regulation practices for their young clients with disabilities, their families, and the larger community. Because of the relevance to the advantages of the EI curriculum and the direct correlation to emotion regulation implementation, literature that generally discusses the expectations, performances, requirements, tasks, and functions of certain disciplines remain also included within this analysis.

Continuing with a post-secondary context, students may matriculate into for example, an integrated pediatric primary care setting to work directly with children with disabilities. These care professionals are in a unique position to promote emotional well-being practices with their young clients, while also monitoring and treating their diagnoses. IPC involves both medical care specialists, such as physicians (MDs or DOs), physician assistants (PAs), and family nurse practitioners (FNPs), as well as behavioral health specialists. Some types of behavioral health specialists working in IPC settings may include professional counselors (LPCs/LCMHCs), marriage/family therapists (LCMFTs), and clinical social workers (LCSWs) (Reitz, Fifield, & Whistler, 2011). Together, these providers can identify potential emotional barriers and employ a preventative emotion regulation plan (Lines, 2019).

Children with disabilities may demonstrate increased difficulty verbalizing their feelings and emotions (Genik et al., 2020), which can lead to increased stress regarding the reaction to and expression of their emotions. It is because of this stress that the promotion of emotion regulation practices be implemented in pediatric patients with disabilities. Emotion regulation techniques may be taught in a myriad of ways, although some methods may prove more beneficial for some children than others. The 'RULER' approach, for example, may be especially advantageous for school-aged children. The 'RULER' approach utilizes an acronym for five key emotional skills. Those skills include *recognizing* emotions, *understanding* cause and effect of emotions, *labeling* emotions, *expressing* emotions effectively, and *regulating* emotions (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

While the RULER approach is generally utilized and taught in school settings, children with disabilities may benefit from direction from a member of their health care team specializing in behavioral health. It is critical that the behavioral health specialist with experience with EI be adequately prepared to anticipate emotional needs of clients, as EI focuses on the triggering of

behaviors via emotions (Lewis, 2004). When children, especially those living with disabilities, experience unfamiliar or unpleasant emotions and lack the ability to respond effectively, the child may become increasingly frustrated and feel misunderstood. Emotion regulation skills can equip children with the tools they need to become familiar and comfortable in dealing with new emotions, and care providers in IPC settings may have one of the best opportunities to enhance a child's life with emotion regulation skills.

Graduates may also seek positions in direct care facilities for those living with disabilities. Some children live in Intermediate Care Facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ICF-ID). ICF-ID is an option for Medicaid beneficiaries that allows individuals to reside in facilities that provide comprehensive and individualized care to meet all medical, behavioral, and interpersonal needs, as well as promote independence and functional skills (Waldman et al., 2014). Generally, children with intellectual disabilities living in ICFs represent limited cognitive capacities, significantly reduced adaptive skills, and evidenced communication deficits (Friedman & Kalichman, 2014). Due to these accompanying factors, it is understandably difficult for these individuals to cope with their emotions. Berg et al. (2015) provide an analysis indicating children with disabilities become twice as likely to suffer from clinical depression in comparison with their counterparts without disabilities.

Children residing in ICF-ID settings could substantially benefit from emotion regulation practices being implemented with methods tailored to the ability-level of the individual. Emotion regulation can be exceptionally difficult for children with sensory processing disorders and executive functioning delays (Morin, 2021). Therefore, the mode of delivery and instruction may require increased time and effort on the part of the support professional. It is important to note that approaches generally used to foster emotion regulation in other settings may not be effective or appropriate for children living in ICF-ID settings. There remain many areas to target before ICF-ID residents can reach any level of emotional awareness.

Supporting emotion regulation in this setting can involve providing structure and consistency, to avoid unexpected emotions (Foothills Academy, 2018). It may also involve modeling self/emotion regulation in guiding each child through new sensory experiences and introducing calming strategies, such as grounding activities (i.e., deep breathing, visual imagery, etc.), social supports, and mental breaks, which can consist of familiar and enjoyable tasks, such as coloring and listening to music. It may also prove beneficial to use positive reinforcement and praise. Immediate and specific feedback can also evoke positive learning experiences as well as interpersonal growth. It is important for the support professional to focus not on the overall result, but rather the level of effort the child applies to recognizing and expressing their emotions (Foothills Academy, 2018). By implementing a safe emotional space for residents and encouraging self-awareness in emotions, ICF-ID staff and behavioral support specialists can develop emotion regulation techniques using subtle, yet constructive methods.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

It is important that educators, clinicians, and other human service and health care providers consider the discussed factors within this analysis. This information may be especially beneficial when instructing individuals to communicate with students and/or clients, and in perceiving their own emotions in educational and clinical situations. The authors of the current analysis recommend future areas of research that include exploring the effect of emotional intelligence among a more diverse disability community. For example, research on emotional intelligence and physical disabilities, along with mental health may contribute greatly to the current body of knowledge. Additionally, Mansy et al. (2017) motioned for educational programs to be tailored to influence the development of protective factors that stimulate problem-solving abilities, positive coping mechanisms, and a realistic outlook that further motivates resiliency among both persons with and without disabilities.

As continued emphasis is placed on enhancing the development of EI in children, an additional recommendation is to implement psychoeducational programs for parents and educators that highlight the challenges confronting adolescents during the entry into the adolescent period. During this time, emotional challenges can present as adolescents may be facing the pressures of finding and navigating their way within society, in addition to encountering physical and emotional changes that are influenced via puberty (Peres et al., 2020). It is not only important for parents and educators to learn about adolescents' experiences, but it remains equally important to learn techniques and skills to support and empower adolescents, along with procedures for the support persons to overcome any stressors that accompany the point of providing supports (Mansy et al., 2017).

The inclusion of emotional intelligence principles within curriculum will support and strengthen pedagogical aims and create a comprehensive curriculum that embodies the foundational principals of EI (Parween, 2015). Critically, the intentional inclusion of EI in the curriculum to enrich teaching practices to effectively meet the distinct needs of diverse students with disabilities is a primary goal (Parween, 2015). This can be assumed to be effective at the post-secondary level as well. Additionally, the various health care, counseling and other professional providers and practitioners offering supports to children with disabilities and other special needs can benefit from adapting practices to include more EI centered processes.

## CONCLUSION

The helping profession plays a major role through advocacy, empowerment, and effective strategies that bolster positive development of many individuals' overall quality of life. Emotional intelligence is a concept that has gained tremendous momentum within the helping profession and is an essential skill for many, especially children and adolescents. While it is important for professionals to acknowledge the value of the emotional intelligence of children and adolescents, children with disabilities are also a worthy focus area to promote inclusivity in strategies for academic success for all children and adolescents. The disability population is often underserved and greatly benefit from the advocacy and empowerment efforts of many human service professionals.

Educators and other professionals within the helping profession can also benefit from personal training in emotional intelligence as they are in roles that often inspire positive child progression, success, and overall development. The trend of emotional intelligence is being identified across a range of academic disciplines and alternative settings. Examples of disciplines that may benefit from EI application consist of (not an exhaustive list): schools, pediatric IPC (Integrated primary care) and ICF-IID (Intermediate care facilities), hospitals, behavioral health agencies, counseling, and social work. As the concept is known to be addressed across various disciplines, emotional intelligence is a premier topic among many mental health professionals who work with adolescents (Adibsereshki, et al., 2019). Academic disciplines such as URE also provides future disability (and other alternative human service areas) generalists the skills needed for self-awareness instruction, appropriate emotional expression guidance for young clients with disabilities, emotion management, and social awareness in clinical practice settings. Generally, an idea is to support the next generation of leaders to not only thrive, but also support others in their own development of positive emotional intelligence.

The education system plays a vital role in supporting children and adolescents to develop positive and healthy emotional intelligence. Furthermore, educators have a major charge to self-reflect on their own emotional intelligence in addition to nurturing that of the children and adolescents they serve. Emotionally intelligent educators are often able to motivate their students and enter the classroom with an enhanced understanding of their diverse students. Together with families, communities, and other sources of natural supports, educators can imprint on the early childhood experiences of emotional intelligence among children and adolescents. In addition to the role of educators and other human service professionals, parental involvement may have a huge impact on bolstering positive child emotional intelligence by creating a parental/caregiver support system that concentrates on the whole child and not merely academics alone. Parental responses and the overall parenting style play a role in child development of effective EI. Of the many parenting styles, the authoritative and emotion-coaching styles continue as a trendy method used to enhance emotional intelligence in children (Segrin & Flora, 2019).

Overall, emotional intelligence is a critical factor in an individual's ability to experience academic success and professional growth and accomplishments (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). In the presence of the many societal pressures on children of all abilities, their families, the community at large, emotional intelligence is a key ingredient that has the potential to create opportunities for future success. The role of emotional intelligence in the professional development of educators, disability care workers, and other allied health and human service professionals is highly significant, particularly, how its principles translate into promoting the positive development and outlook of the whole child, especially of children with disabilities.

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**Updates**

Thank you for your continued support of the International Journal of the Whole Child and our commitment to holistic learning and to the development of the whole child. To improve the efficiency of the journal, we have updated our submission and publication dates. Beginning Fall 2021, submission deadlines for the Fall will be September 30th. The submission deadline for the Spring will be February 28th. The Fall issues will be published in December and the Spring issue will be published in May. Lastly, our journal has officially moved to the APA 7th edition. We ask that all authors adhere to this edition when submitting your manuscript for review. Thank you again for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you in Fall 2021.