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Introduction

This Fall issue provides readers with a variety of topics that include the impact that COVID-19 had on families and access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), how an approach called the "philosophy for children Hawai'i" can aid in social and emotional skill development among middle schoolers, how STEM experiences impact cognitive development, and the benefits and limitations of artificial intelligence in the classroom. Furthermore, interventions including filial therapy, adventurous outdoor play, and mindfulness are discussed. The International Journal of the Whole Child continues to be committed to promoting holistic learning and the development of the whole child.

Article #1:

Disparities in the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Families of Preschool-aged Children in Northern California

Yajuan Xiang, Ayumi Nagase, Chiara Bacigalupa

The authors of this article discuss the impact COVID-19 had on families and children from various demographic factors such as immigration status, gender, and ethnicity through a cross-sectional research study. The authors illustrate how the pandemic influenced parental access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), and other necessary intervention services for children. The findings highlight the role that the pandemic had on intensifying already present systematic oppression and explicates the importance of federal and state government policies to lessen the gaps in intervention services.

Article #2

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Yoko Kitami, Lois Yamauchi

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Article #3

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Simon Priest

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Disparities in the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Families of Preschool-aged Children in Northern California

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Dr. Nagase has an extensive academic background with advanced degrees from esteemed institutions, including the University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University. She is currently an Associate professor of Early Childhood Studies at Sonoma State University. Dr. Nagase's research focuses on parenting self-efficacy, family-school-community collaboration, sociocultural factors in parenting and child development, and preschool teacher well-being.

Dr. Bacigalupa is a professor of Early Childhood Studies at Sonoma State University. She has more than 35 years of experience in the field of Early Childhood Studies and 28 years of experience in higher education. Dr. Bacigalupa's current scholarly interests focus on the successful navigation of transitions by children and youth.

Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis and subsequent shelter-in-place orders caused unprecedented challenges for young children and their families. Understanding the scope and nature of these effects can inform federal and state policies and advocacy efforts to minimize disruptions to child development and well-being. This study aims to examine pandemic-related impacts and its potential disparities based on demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and immigration status. In this survey of 3,867 parents of preschool-aged children in Northern California, results indicate the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmingly restrained parents' access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and intervention services. Data describing gender, ethnicity and immigration status also exhibit divergent patterns of loss of access to ECEC and other necessities. Authors discuss how the pandemic and lockdown exacerbated some of the prolonged, structural inequities existing in the United States prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, ECEC closures, family well-being

Introduction

Beginning in 2020, the COVID-19 crisis disrupted all aspects of families' routines, resulting in unprecedented levels of social and economic distress. Additionally, the social distancing, isolation strategies, and country-wide lockdown measures to help reduce virus transmission created stressful experiences for families and children (He et al., 2021). Closures and other pandemic-associated challenges created a shortage of adequate and affordable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (United Nations, 2020; Weiland et al., 2021; Yoshikawa et al., 2020). Disruptions in routines and loss of high-quality ECEC programs may indicate short and long-term detrimental impacts on young children's optimal development. Consistent research describing the benefits for access to high-quality ECEC is also vital for parents with young children because it illustrates the balance between work and childrearing responsibilities which, in turn, leads to a family's financial stability to create a safe and nurturing environment for children's social, physical, emotional and cognitive development as well as family well-being (mental health) (Lee & Parolin, 2021; Tulsa SEED Study Team, 2020; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006).

Yet, empirical evidence reveals disruption in access to ECEC and how families coped with this challenge become significantly associated with sociodemographic characteristics such as ethnicity, immigration status and gender (Morales et al., 2021; Singletary et al., 2022; Park, 2021; van Leer et al., 2021). For instance, ECEC disruptions and the associated economic hardships show to be more frequent and significant for low-income households as compared with middle/upper-income families (Karpman et al., 2020). Parents were stretched to their limits as they juggled employment loss or disruptions, prolonged telecommuting, home confinement and compromised psychological well-being; all of which can negatively influence effects on children's growth and development (RAPID, 2022a; van Leer et al., 2021). Moreover, parents belonging to systematically disadvantaged communities were significantly less confident about meeting basic needs, especially providing an adequate quality and quantity of food to support their child's healthy development (Morales et al., 2021). As policymakers consider additional measures to mitigate the health and economic effects of the pandemic on young children and their families, it is imperative for researchers and practitioners to recognize and target unique needs correlating with different demographic characteristics (Patrick et al., 2020).

Literature Review

Early childhood development reflects a crucial role in establishing a strong foundation for optimal growth and development, including achievement, social/emotional competence and well-being (Lee & Parolin, 2021; Magnuson & Duncan, 2016; Zhang et al., 2022). High-quality ECEC arrangements featuring a safe and healthy environment, warm and responsive caregivers, appropriate materials and scaffolding experiences which provide stimulation and support necessary for mastering the central cognitive and social developmental challenges of early childhood become especially important (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2001; Votruba-Drzal et al., 2004). Earlier research overwhelmingly suggests that attending high quality ECEC services for one or two years leads to long-term benefits in educational attainment and economic earnings, despite any temporary decline in achievement skills during the elementary school years (Magnuson & Duncan, 2016; Yamaguchi et al., 2018). Felfe et al. (2015) describe

ECEC enrollment for young children of mothers with low educational attainment and report ECEC enrollment significantly helped the children catch up on language development and social/emotional development skills even after showing higher levels of inattention, aggression and hyperactivity when entering their ECEC programs.

Extensive studies consistently indicate both ECEC enrollment and access to high quality ECEC settings work together in promoting positive home environments, facilitating parents' positive adjustments to parental roles, and enhancing their overall well-being, all of which significantly contribute to positive developmental outcomes for children (Gelber & Isen, 2013; Gershoff, 2002; Yamaguchi et al., 2018). For example, Yamaguchi et al. (2018) discuss how ECEC enrollment helps mothers with lower educational levels by reducing their stress associated with raising a child; informing the mothers with good parenting practices may, in turn, improve their parenting quality. While the nature of the study programs may vary, these findings are consistent with theoretical evidence from developmental psychology regarding the effects of access to high quality ECEC on parental outcomes, including the Family Systems Theory (Broderick, 1993; Christian, 2006; Cox & Paley, 1997).

Conceptual Framework

A structuralist approach used in both the natural and social sciences, Family Systems model posits bidirectional relationships between individual family members and the functioning of the family as a collective entity (Broderick, 1993; Christian, 2006; Cox & Paley, 1997). This conceptual framework emerged in the field of family therapy to help explain how a family as a whole adapts to an array of rapid changes, demands, and stagnations in light of the role of family context in understanding individual and interpersonal dynamics. Rather than limiting focus to individual family members, the family systems model focuses on the complex web of individual, interpersonal and environmental or macrosystemic factors. For instance, applying family systems theory to their ECEC practices means not just focusing on individual children or parents, but rather looking at them in the larger context of their families, while educators and practitioners understand how to engage in meaningful interactions and care for the children and their families (Christian, 2006; Stanton & Welsh, 2012). In a similar vein, loss of ECEC access and disruptions in routines related to childrearing may be detrimental not only to young children, but as well to their parents, especially regarding their capacities to balance work and childrearing responsibilities, to offer a safe and nurturing environment for children's socioemotional, physical and cognitive development and finally, to provide for the overall family well-being (Lee & Parolin, 2021; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Guided by the Family Systems model framework and subsequent empirical evidence, the current study examines how those negative effects manifest in some communities disproportionately, in light of prolonged, structural inequities that had been present in the United States before the onset of the pandemic.

Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control measures, many ECEC centers closed their doors and/or switched to remote learning, compelling parents of young children to assume an increased role in children's education and to provide this learning without sufficient digital technology. During the pandemic, young children's ECEC participation declined from

61% to 8% (Barnett & Jung, 2020; Barnett, et al., 2020), 36% more parents reported difficulty finding ECEC in the year 2022 than previously (RAPID, 2022b), and 34% of parents indicated challenges in finding alternative ECEC arrangements (e.g., babysitters and relatives) (RAPID, 2022b). Among parents who have relatively promising access to ECEC arrangements, there was a 21% increase in childcare disruptions due to staffing challenges and/or COVID-19 exposures among both family members and childcare providers (RAPID, 2022b).

The closure of ECEC and intervention services resulted in the loss of resource materials and opportunities for young children and their families to learn important social and behavioral skills, as well as the loss of interacting with peers (Lee, 2020). Evidence suggests that while children are out of school, they are physically less active, experience longer screen time, and are more likely to have irregular sleep patterns and less favorable diets, resulting in weight gain and a loss of cardiorespiratory fitness (Brazendale et al, 2017; Wang et al., 2020). Such negative effects on health are likely to be much worse for children who do not receive training, therapy and other treatments (Singh et al, 2020). Extant work indicated some children become more vulnerable to the ECEC access crises, such as those with a neurodevelopmental disorder or disability (e.g., attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], autism spectrum disorder [ASD], cerebral palsy), chronic health condition (e.g., diabetes, obesity) or from families with financial concerns (Bussières et al., 2021). A recent literature review also suggests these children are at higher risk of being derailed from therapy sessions and special education programs in facing the effects of the pandemic and its impacts on access to health care resources and support networks while being confined to their homes without outdoor activities and interaction with same-aged friends during the outbreak (Singh et al., 2020).

California is one of the most ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse states in the nation. In this state, the pandemic created a crisis in access to adequate, affordable ECEC providers and illuminated persistent underinvestment in ECEC (Lee & Parolin, 2021; Tout, 2021). Although policymakers in California implement a plethora of measures to mitigate the health and economic effects of the pandemic, parents continue to seek ways to balance their work and childrearing responsibilities (Lee & Parolin, 2021; Tout, 2021). A recent state-wide parent survey indicated 90% of parents believe California should invest greater public funds to ensure infants and toddlers in California are healthy and developmentally on track at birth and throughout childhood (Education Trust-West, 2021). California evidences nearly the highest number of children in poverty of all states; households with an income lower than $50,000 a year become particularly at risk of losing adequate access to high-quality ECEC due to layers of systemic discrimination, including disparities in access to jobs that represent a living wage, high costs of living, lack of access to quality subsidized ECEC, exclusionary immigration policies, barriers to equitable housing opportunities and discriminatory criminal justice policies (Education Trust-West, 2021).

These earlier reports urge a nuanced, careful investigation toward more equity-based policies and early intervention efforts to help minimize the impacts of the pandemic-related crises on young children and their families regardless of their demographic background. However, minimal research findings shed light on potential disparities in life experiences and daily challenges of families with young children. In order to target this existing disparity in the literature, this current study examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent ECEC

closures on families with preschool-aged children in Northern California, in light of their ethnicity, gender and immigration status.

Purpose of Current Study

Guided by earlier work and Family Systems Theory, the current study aims to examine the associations between demographic factors and pandemic-related impacts as well as identify their potential disparities based on demographic characteristics among families with preschool-aged children. With the gathered survey data (N = 3,867 parents) of preschool-aged children in Northern California during a period of ECEC closure, data provide descriptive, demographic information and parent-reported challenges related to childrearing (i.e., access to quality ECEC, access to therapy and interventions for children) as well as reported overall well-being (i.e., physical health, life stress, and household financial stability).

Next, correlations describe how the pandemic-related negative effects associate with demographic characteristics (participants' gender, race/ethnicity, and immigration status). Finally, regression analyses describe the effects of the participants' educational attainment, household income, household size, the number of children in the household during the pandemic, living with at least one child with special needs and losing one's job during the pandemic. The results of this current study become relevant in light of evidence-based policy programs and early intervention efforts to minimize the impacts of the pandemic-related crises on preschool-aged children and their families.

Methods

Participants

The research team distributed an online survey targeting parents of preschool-aged children (three-to-five-year-olds) through local ECEC agencies across the Northern California region. The duration of the data collection period was from January 2021 to February 2021. In total, 4,017 participants responded to the survey. For the current study, the population included 3,867 participants. These participants completed all survey questions and currently live with at least one preschool-aged child (biological/step/adoptive). The survey was available in both English and Spanish. Participants were asked to choose one of the two survey languages that they felt most comfortable. A $10 electronic gift card was provided as remuneration for completing the survey. All procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board and all participants provided informed consent.

Descriptive statistics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Slightly over 50% of the participants identified female as their gender identity, and 49.7% identified as male. The majority of the sample was White (54.4%), followed by American Indian or Alaskan Native (15.5%), Black or African American (12.4%), Asian American (8.4%), and Latinx (6.6%). Also, the majority of the participants represented as U.S. citizens (88.8%). A total of 57.1% had a Bachelor's Degree or Graduate Degree, and 56.6% of the sample reported their income higher than $75,000, which is close to the median household income in California ($75,235) (United States Census Bureau, 2019). A total of 94% lived in a household with one or two children

during the pandemic and 44% reported living with at least one child with special needs. About one-third of the sample (30.7%) reported that they had lost their jobs during the pandemic. Researchers relied on the respondents' self-report of their demographic characteristics.

Measures

The survey consisted of several scales originally developed in English (Table 2). To assure linguistic and contextual equivalence of the variables relevant to the study and to standardize the administration of surveys across the selected languages, the research team worked with two separate bilingual Spanish native speakers who were fluent in English and educational research, one for translation and another for back-translation from Spanish to English, following recommendations to ensure validity and reliability (Foster & Martinez, 1995).

Life Stress

The 10-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983) was used; participants responded on a five-point scale (1= never and 5= very often) in describing how often they had experienced thoughts and emotions related to environmental stress during the previous month (e.g., "You could not cope with all the things that you had to do."). The extant literature indicates PSS demonstrates good internal consistency, a replicable factor structure and evidence of construct validity in the U.S. as well as other nations such as Europe, Mexico and the Russian Federation (e.g., Siqueira Reis et al., 2010).

COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Hardship

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of pandemic-related negative impacts and instability on families, survey questions explored the following dimensions: 1) access to childcare, 2) access to therapy and intervention for the child, 3) household financial stability and 4) overall physical health. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of disruptions in each domain by choosing one of four options (1= Not at all, 4= Great deal).

Predictors

Driven by the extant literature on family and young children, the analysis used these demographic variables as predictors; gender (1=female, 0=other gender identities) and immigration status (1= U.S. citizens, 0=not U.S. citizens), in addition to an ethnicity binary variable, Latinx (1=Latinx, 0= others).

Control Variables

Following the earlier work including the study on parental stress during the COVID-19 pandemic by Brown et al., (2020), researchers controlled the following variables: education attainment, household income, household size, number of children in the household during the pandemic, living with at least one child with special needs and losing one's job during the pandemic for performing multiple regression.

Analytic Strategies

First, researchers conducted the descriptive statistics and correlation to understand features of the key variables of this study; negative impacts on life experiences related to childrearing and basic needs (i.e., access to quality childcare, access to therapy and intervention for the child, household financial stability, overall physical health and life stress). Then, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) compared the mean differences in the broad dimension of the pandemic-related stressors. Before the regression analyses, the bivariate correlations between the study variables were examined. Finally, multiple linear regression analyses explored to what extent the variabilities would be statistically significant and furthermore, which pandemic-related negative impacts were exacerbated by the participants' demographic background; participants' gender, race/ethnicity and immigration status. All the above-mentioned analyses were conducted on SPSS Statistics version 26.

Results

Mean Comparison

Table 3 presents the results of descriptive statistics for the key variables and significance tests to show the mean-level differences of each of the predictor variables. The results reveal women were impacted harder by the pandemic and lockdown. The female participants report experiencing significantly higher disruptions in child therapy and intervention (t (3,831) = 2.84, $p < .01$), household financial stability (t (3,856) = 2.82, $p = .01$), physical health (t (3,853) = 3.07, $p < .01$) and stress level (t (3,861) = 3.08, $p < .001$), compared to their counterparts (male and the participants who declined to identify their gender).

Also, the preliminary analysis indicates differences among the participants' demographics such as ethnicity and immigration status. The Latinx participants report significantly higher disruptions in access to ECEC (t (3,848) = 3.21, $p < .001$), household financial stability (t (3,849) = 2.74, $p < .01$) and physical health (t (3,846) = 3.50, $p < .01$) as compared with the non-Latinx participants.

Finally, there were significant differences between U.S. citizens and other immigration statuses on two domains; the participants who were U.S. citizens report a lower level of disruption in household financial stability (t (3,849) = -.66, $p < .01$), but higher disruption on physical health (t (3,846) = .44, $p < .01$).

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix for the key outcome variables and the selected demographic variables. Access to ECEC significantly correlates with access to child therapy/intervention (r =.09, $p < .001$), household financial stability (r =.25, $p < .001$), physical health (r =.20, $p < .001$), life stress (r =.06, $p < .001$), being Latinx (r =.05, $p < .001$) and being a U.S. citizen (r =-.03, $p < .05$). Lack of access to child therapy/intervention significantly associates with household financial stability (r =.07, $p < .001$), physical health (r =.09, $p < .001$), being female (r =.05, $p < .01$) and being Latinx (r =.03, $p < .05$).

Household financial stability represents significant associations with physical health (r =.21, p < .001), life stress (r =.15, p < .001), being female (r =.04, p < .01) and being Latinx (r =.04, p < .01). Overall, physical health significantly associates with life stress (r = *.20*, p < .001), being female (r = *.04*, p < .01) and being Latinx (r = *.06*, p < .001). Finally, life stress significantly associates with being female (r = .05, p < .01), being Latinx (r = .06, p < .001) and being a U.S. citizen (r = -.05, p < .01).

Regression Analysis

Table 5 presents the results from the multiple regression analyses with the six dependent variables: participants' access to ECEC, access to child therapy/intervention, impact on household financial stability, their physical health and life stress. All the models added control variables: educational attainment, household income, household size, the number of children in the household during the pandemic, living with at least one child with special needs and losing one's job during the pandemic.

These results indicate that after removing the effects of the control variables, there were significant variations in the degree of the pandemic-related negative effects on families with preschool-aged children in Northern California. First, female participants describe experiencing significantly higher disruptions in child therapy/intervention (β = .05, p < .01), household financial stability (β = .04, p < .001) and physical and mental health (β = .05, p < .01 and β = .04, p < .001, respectively), removing the effects of the control variables (table 5). There was no significant difference in the disruption in ECEC access between the female participants and others.

Second, after removing the effect of the control variables, Latinx parents describe significantly higher disruptions on both of the two childrearing related outcomes: access to ECEC (β = .04, p < .01) and child therapy/intervention (β = .03, p < .05) compared to the non-Latinx participants (table 5). They also report significantly more disruptions on household financial stability (β = .04, p < .01) and physical health (β = .07, p < .001) compared to their non-Latinx counterparts (table 5). There were no significant differences on life stress between the Latinx and non-Latinx participants.

Third, results show (table 5) a significant difference in ECEC access based on the participants' immigration status indicating the U.S. citizen participants report a significantly lower level of disruptions in access to ECEC (β = -.05, p < .01) and a lower level of life stress (β = -.03, p < .05) compared to the non-U.S. citizen participants, removing the effects of the control variables.

Discussion

After the onset of the pandemic, countries and regions across the world took numerous steps to contain the spread of the virus, including closing ECEC and early intervention programs and other family support agencies. The state of California was not an exception; the state-wide Shelter-in-place orders warranted closures of ECEC programs, decreased security in employment and residential arrangements, and diminished overall well-being of young children and their

families (Education Trust-West, 2021; Lee & Parolin, 2021; Tout, 2021). Smaller ECEC providers and center directors serving young children and families in underserved communities were particularly severely impacted, having to assume the burden of increased financial risk in order to keep their programs afloat (Kim et al., 2022). These economic and social costs of the pandemic remain damaging and enduring in the next generations (He et al., 2021).

Guided by earlier work and Family Systems Theory, this study assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent ECEC closures on daily challenges of families with young children in Northern California. In particular, the associations between demographic factors and pandemic-induced impacts and their potential disparities based on demographic characteristics were explored. Using a comprehensive survey completed by 3,867 parents of preschool-aged children in Northern California at the beginning of 2021, the results demonstrate significant differences in negative impacts on female caregivers, parents with Latinx heritage and those who are foreign-born individuals, disproportionately impairing access to ECEC and intervention/therapeutic services for their children, as well as overall well-being, such as physical health, life stress and household financial stability.

First, female participants report they experienced more chronic disruptions in access to their children's therapy and intervention services, financial stability and both physical and mental health compared to their counterparts (male and the participants who declined to identify their gender), after removing the effects of control variables. This finding is consistent with a few extant studies on women with young children, indicating the pandemic represented prolonged gender inequity which imposes greater child-rearing responsibilities on women when compared with men, causing a significant risk for psychological distress among mothers of young children due to the inflexibility in their family-friendly working conditions and insecure employment arrangements (Hessami et al., 2020; Patrick et al., 2020; RAPID. 2022c; Yavorsky et al., 2021; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). To further augment this result, mounting evidence indicate the pandemic more severely impacted female caregivers with lower education attainment suggesting because they were more likely to work in sectors where remote work was not possible, as compared with their counterparts with higher educational attainment with greater access to distance work options and job security (Kochhar, 2020; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). Importantly, future analyses may investigate granular disparities within female caregivers across their socioeconomic characteristics.

Second, Latinx parents describe higher disruptions in access to ECEC services and therapy/intervention for their children and more disruptions in basic needs such as financial stability and physical health, compared with their non-Latinx counterparts when removing the effects of control variables. Aligned with earlier work, this finding contributes to the empirical evidence showing families of Latinx heritage and their children were more negatively impacted by pandemic-related disruptions and everyday hardships (Hawrilenko et al., 2021; Lee & Parolin, 2021). For instance, multiple studies with nationally representative data indicate post-pandemic poverty rates among Latinx children rose significantly more compared to the rates of their counterparts in other ethnic groups (Chen & Thomson, 2021). This trend could be due to the overrepresentation of adults of Latinx heritage in occupations and industries that were severely impacted by the pandemic, lower wages and limited access to governmental programs (Guzman & Chen, 2021). In Sonoma County, one of the Northern California regions included in

the current study, it was reported that three of every four infections countywide were in the Latinx population. One explanation for this finding is the greater likelihood that these families lacked physical space for quarantining alone (Espinoza, 2020). Along with this local data, current study findings illuminate layers of obstacles intersecting with lower income, lack of access to health care and inadequate, crowded housing conditions due to the high cost of living

Third, the current data describe how immigrant parents report higher disruptions in ECEC access and a higher level of life stress compared to their U.S. citizen counterparts (removing the effects of the control variables), highlighting unique challenges faced by this group. This finding is consistent with extant studies on mental health issues and COVID-19 stressors among immigrant adults with young children, indicating decline in mental health related to the pandemic is significantly higher in groups of foreign-born individuals and families with children, along with women and people of color (Clark et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020; Fortuna et al., 2020; Øverlien, 2020).

Increased disruptions in access to ECEC services could be partly due to long-term governmental underinvestment in smaller ECEC providers and centers without state contracts, when they were barely able to afford to continue to serve children, many of whom are children of color and from immigrant families (Fairlie, 2020; Furceri et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2021). Although the federal and state pandemic relief (e.g., California's CARES funding: Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Recovery [CARES] Act) offered some short-term aid to smaller ECEC providers (i.e., family childcare providers and unsubsidized programs, these programs still experienced greater financial and operational hardships, such as decreased enrollment, reduced income and higher costs, often being forced to pull from their reserves or rely on private donation or fundraising (Bergey et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Stavely, 2020).

Mounting evidence suggests inadequate access to ECEC often transitions parents into heart-wrenching, difficult predicaments. They are often forced to choose between coping with financial damage due to job loss and struggling to secure a rare childcare spot (Gelber & Isen, 2013; Gershoff, 2002; Mauno et al., 2017; Yamaguchi et al., 2018). The situation is even more complex for non-U.S. citizens, including legal permanent residents, refugees and temporary visa holders, who do not have eligibility to an array of governmental support due to their immigration status (Clark et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020; Guruge et al., 2021; Kochhar, 2020; Øverlien,2020). The U.S. anti-poverty programs, including the Earned Income Tax Credit and Medicaid, are effective to alleviate challenges that children in poverty and their families face. Yet, those programs are inherently excluding vulnerable populations, because they tend to have immigration restrictions that strictly limit public assistance to non-U.S. citizens (Guzman & Chen, 2021). The Migration Policy Institute shows a significant access gap, indicating immigrant households are less likely to be eligible to much of the governmental support than U.S. born families even within the same income range, due to federal restrictions on lawfully present noncitizens' access to some programs like federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (i.e., food stamps) (Lacarte et al., 2023). Given looming impacts of the pandemic on adversity faced by immigrant households and their children for years to come, much effort is sought to implement anti-poverty assistance programs and mental health services that are inclusive of immigrant communities.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this current study illuminates the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated some of the prolonged, structural inequities existing in the United States, the results should be interpreted in the context of certain limitations. First, because the data utilized in this study is an online survey with self-reports, it is important to consider biases, especially the possibility that parents' emotional states can influence their assessment of the hardships that this study examined. To avoid such conflation, use of data triangulation may benefit future analyses by gathering information from both parents and from their children (Singletary et al., 2022).

Second, this study is cross-sectional, utilizing the data the authors collected on concurrent reports of family experiences at one time point rather than longitudinally. Thus, as researchers, we are unable to make causal inferences or identify the sequence of the relationships between family demographics, challenges related to their children's educational experiences and the parents' overall well-being. Further longitudinal research is warranted to understand causal relationships.

Despite these limitations, the current data demonstrate that sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and immigration status contribute to disparities in the self-reported impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with respect to access to ECEC, therapy/early intervention for their children and family well-being, such as physical health, life stress and household financial stability, adding complexities to prolonged inequities faced by those populations. The current data also provide direction for discussions of public investment, which critically include consideration of the disproportionate burden of hardships and limited access to governmental programs (e.g., anti-poverty programs, mental health services and smaller ECEC programs such as family childcare homes) borne by children and their families in systematically disadvantaged communities (Fortuna et al., 2020; Kerker et al., 2023).

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Appendices

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	1,919	49.7%
	Female	1,940	50.2%
	Nonbinary	5	.1%
	Prefer not to Answer	1	.0%
Race	White	2,087	54.1%
	Black or African American	555	14.4%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	598	15.5%
	Asian or Asian American	326	8.4%
	Latinx	253	6.6%
	Multiracial/ multiethnic	5	.1%
	Pacific Islander	34	.9%
U.S. Citizen		3,426	88.8%
Educational Attainment	12th grade or less	36	.9%
	High School or Equivalent	363	9.4%
	Associate Degree (2- year college)	534	13.8%
	Vocational Degree	720	18.7%
	Bachelor's Degree (4- year university)	1,930	50.0%
	Graduate Degree (Masters, Ph.D., JD, MD, etc.)	275	7.1%
Household Income	Below $75,000 (CA median HH income)	2,189	56.6%
	Above $75,000	1,677	43.4%
Household Size	2	116	3.0%
	3	2,111	54.6%
	4	836	21.6%
	5	477	12.3%
	6	198	5.1%
	7 and beyond	129	3.3%

Number of Children in the Household during the Pandemic	1	3.022	78.2%
	2	619	16.0%
	3	145	3.8%
	4	57	1.5%
	5 and beyond	23	.7%
Live with Child(ren) with Special Needs	Yes	1,726	44.6%
Lost Job during the Pandemic		1,179	30.7%

Note: Numbers and parentheses indicate, respectively, means and standard deviations for continuous variables and counts and percentages for categorical/binary variables. Due to some missing values, some counts do not add up to the total sample size.

Table 2. Summary of Measures

Variable	Measures	Number of Items	Note
Life stress	Perceived Stress Scale (5-point)	10	Reference: Cohen et al., 1983
Pandemic-related negative impacts and instability on families	Self-developed rating scale (4-point)	5	Dimension explored: • access to ECEC • access to therapy and intervention for the child • impact on household financial stability • impact on overall physical health
Predictors	Self-developed	3	Dimension explored: • gender (1=female, 0=other gender identities) • immigration status (1= U.S. citizens, 0=not U.S. citizens) • race/ethnicity (1=Latinx, 0= others).

Control variables	Self-developed	6	Dimension explored: • educational attainment • household income • household size • number of children in the household during the pandemic • living with at least one child with special needs • losing one's job during the pandemic

Table 3. Sample Descriptive Using t-test for Equality of Means on Key Variables

Variables		***N***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	***p***
Negative Impact on ECEC Access	Female	1,937	2.59	.83	.64	.219
	Others	1,920	2.57	.80		
	Latinx	253	2.74	.73	3.21	.000***
	Other Ethnic Groups	3,597	2.57	.82		
	U.S. Citizens	3,423	2.57	.82	-1.94	.138
	Other Immigration Status	427	2.65	.80		
Negative Impact on Access to Therapy & Intervention for the Child	Female	1,920	2.59	.88	2.84	.003**
	Others	1,913	2.50	.93		
	Latinx	251	2.67	.90	2.14	.605
	Other Ethnic Groups	3,575	2.54	.91		
	U.S. Citizens	3,399	2.55	.90	.77	.123
	Other Immigration Status	427	2.52	.94		
Negative Impact on Household Financial Stability	Female	1,936	2.62	.76	2.82	.01**
	Others	1,922	2.55	.79		
	Latinx	253	2.71	.71	2.74	.004**
	Other Ethnic Groups	3,598	2.57	.78		
	U.S. Citizens	3,420	2.58	.78	-.66	.003**
	Other Immigration Status	431	2.61	.71		
Negative Impact on Overall Physical Health	Female	1,936	2.59	.78	3.07	.002**
	Others	1,919	2.51	.82		

	Latinx	253	2.72	.73	3.50	.002**
	Other Ethnic Groups	3,595	2.54	.81		
	U.S. Citizens	3,417	2.55	.81	.44	.007**
	Other Immigration Status	431	2.53	.74		
Life Stress	Female	1,938	2.94	.34	3.08	.000***
	Others	1,925	2.91	.37		
	Latinx	253	2.92	.33	-.05	.563
	Other Ethnic Groups	3,603	2.93	.36		
	U.S. Citizens	3,425	2.92	.36	-3.18	.181
	Other Immigration Status	431	2.98	.33		

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$

Table 4. Correlations among Major Variables

Variables	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
1. Negative Impact on ECEC Access	--							
2. Negative Impact on Access to Therapy & Intervention Service for the Child	.09***	--						
3. Negative Impact on household financial stability	.25***	.07***	--					
4. Negative Impact on overall Physical Health	.20***	.09***	.21***	--				
5. Life Stress	.06***	.01	.15***	.20***	--			
6. Participant Gender (1= Female)	.007	.05**	.04**	.05**	.05**	--		

7.	**Race (1= Latinx)**	.05***	.03*	.04**	.06***	.06***	-.002	--	
8.	**U.S. Citizen**	-.03*	.01	-.01	.008	-.05**	.01	-.04**	--

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 5. Regression Results

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 2**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**
	Negative Impact on ECEC Access	**Negative Impact on access to Therapy & intervention for the child**	**Negative Impact on household financial stability**	**Negative Impact on Overall Physical Health**	**Life Stress**
Predictors	***ß***	***ß***	***ß***	***ß***	***ß***
Gender (1= Female; 0= Other gender identities)	.01	.05**	.04***	.05**	.04***
Race (1= Latinx; 0= Other race/ethnic groups)	.04**	.03*	.04**	.07***	-.01
U.S. Citizen (1= U.S. Citizen; 0= Other immigration status)	-.05**	-.004	-.02	-.003	-.03*
Adjusted R^2	.02	.02	.01	.02	.02

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

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Promoting the Social and Emotional Learning of Middle School Students in Japan Through Collaborative Classroom Inquiry

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Abstract

This case study focused on the influence of a collaborative classroom inquiry approach, called “philosophy for children Hawai’i” (*p4c Hawai‘i*), and involved the social and emotional learning of a class of 39 seventh grade middle school language arts students in Japan. This approach helps learners explore ideas with peers and their teacher. Research indicates Japanese middle schoolers have few opportunities to learn how to develop and maintain relationships, as they do not interact daily with many people. Data for this study included video and audio recordings of the *p4c Hawai‘i* sessions, students’ responses to a social and emotional learning survey, interviews with the teacher, a focus group interview with students and students’ written reflections. Findings indicated the *p4c Hawai‘i* approach afforded opportunities for students to improve socioemotional skills, such as self-awareness, awareness of others, development of relationships and responsible decision-making. Using the *p4c Hawai’i* approach, students expressed their opinions, even if they were different from others. At the same time, learners listened respectfully to peers to gain their perspectives, which cultivated positive relationships. Listening to different perspectives appeared to promote students’ decision-making skills. Different from traditional approaches, it is noted that teachers who use *p4c Hawai‘i* become facilitators. As facilitators, they assume a less hierarchical position, as they guide students and model how to share and

listen. This approach shows promise in helping teachers support positive social and emotional learning for children in Japan and may assist in reducing social reclusiveness and youth suicide.

Background and Rationale

Early adolescence marks a time of great change in youths' physical, psychosocial and cognitive development (Sawyer et al., 2018). Transition to middle school can be challenging as young adolescents simultaneously adapt to these individual changes as well as negotiate a new school setting. Middle school is associated with increased academic competition and social comparison that often results in loneliness, depression, and lower self-esteem and school achievement (Green et al., 2021). Bullying also tends to increase in middle school and then, decreases in high school (e.g., Waasdorp et al., 2017). Victims of bullying often become anxious, depressed and experience poor academic performance and connections to peers, with possible long-lasting effects (Halliday et al., 2021). Thus, middle school is an important time for students to engage in social and emotional learning (SEL), the development of self-awareness, empathy, positive relationships and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2015; Yeager, 2017). Likewise, middle school in Japan can be a difficult time for students (Mizuno et al., 2022). High school entrance examinations create stress and pressure for middle school students (Iimura, 2018), and Japanese secondary education is often described as passive, requiring students to memorize large amounts of information for college entrance exams that can determine career trajectories (McVeigh, 2002; Iulia & Niculina, 2017).

Bullying is a problem in Japanese middle schools (Akiba et al., 2010), and victims often cannot avoid peers who are bullying them. Japanese educators randomly assign middle schoolers to classes to take courses together for a school year (Mizuno et al., 2022). The students also attend field trips and other events with the same classmates and work together in small groups to complete chores, such as cleaning the classroom. Educators attribute these activities to the close relationships that students form with their classmates. However, some educators also point to the creation of a "class caste" or social hierarchy that can develop. Popular students tend to dominate the social dynamics, and students in lower positions become victims of bullying.

This current case study investigated the influence of a collaborative inquiry approach, called *p4c Hawai'i*, on Japanese middle school students' SEL. The *p4c Hawai'i* approach is an adaptation of Lipman's inquiry approach, Philosophy for Children (P4C)(Sharp et al., 1992). Whereas P4C was originally designed to improve reasoning, educators adapted the approach to promote self-expression and social skills within local contexts (Wartenberg, 2009). Jackson (2012) developed *p4c Hawai'i*, using lower case p and c to distinguish between the "Big P" of traditional academic philosophy and the "little p" of everyone's natural capacity for wonder (Makaiau & Miller, 2012).

Japanese Youths' Social and Emotional Needs

Compared to youth in 19 other countries, Japanese youth, ages 15-21 reported being the least happy, with only 28% stating that they felt happy, compared with 59% overall (Varkey Foundation, 2017). Suicide in Japan is the primary cause of death for 10- to 40-years-olds (Kawabe et al., 2016). Based on 40 years of research, Kawabe et al. (2016) speculated that youth

suicide was associated with the school calendar; its rates were highest at the start of school sessions and lowest during breaks. Analysis of suicide notes indicated that students who took their lives often blamed school pressure as the source of their problems (Lu, 2015).

The Japanese Government identified problems among middle schoolers, including bullying, stress from entrance exams and *hikikomori,* defined as social reclusion, in which individuals shut themselves in their rooms for months or years (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 1998). The Cabinet Office, Government of Japan (2023), released results of a 2022 survey on the attitudes and lives of children and youth. They reported that approximately 1.46 million people withdrew from society, including 2.05% of all 15-39 year olds. One of the characteristics of *hikikomori* (social reclusion) among children is their refusal to attend school, which affects 10.2% of Japanese middle schoolers. Some students arrive at school, but leave their classrooms to go to the nurse's or principal's offices. Some youth, who fear failure in Japan's success-oriented and regimented educational system, became social recluses (Sawa, 2013). Fear of failure, resentment for being forced to memorize large amounts of information and poor academic outcomes are associated with truancy and *hikikomori* (school reclusion) (Saunders, 2008; Sawa, 2013). The Japanese school environment can create intense competition and foster anxiety, rather than being a place where students feel nourished (Hisatomi, 1993).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is the process by which individuals develop abilities to understand, manage, and express their social and emotional experiences (CASEL, 2015). Worldwide, many schools administer SEL programs (Weissberg et al., 2015). Four meta-analyses of SEL school programs demonstrated such programs resulted in positive short- and long-term outcomes, including SEL skills, attitudes, social behaviors, academic performance, fewer conduct problems and less emotional distress (Mahoney et al., 2018). Most studies of SEL programs for secondary students focused on self-management and social skills and found positive effects, particularly for self and social awareness (van de Sande et al., 2019). Although SEL is an important aspect of middle school education, there is minimal research describing SEL in middle schools; additionally, middle school educators often need assistance in developing students' SEL (Main & O'Neil, 2018).

Social and Emotional Learning in Japan

Since the mid-1990s, the Japanese Government promoted educational reform focused on the philosophy of *ikiru chikara* (zest for living), the ability to learn, problem solve, think independently, work collaboratively with, and have empathy for others, exercise self-control and maintain a healthy body (MEXT, 2009). However, educators faced difficulties implementing the reform. The reform emphasized the development of SEL goals, particularly during "integrated learning time." During this time, teachers were encouraged to promote use of critical thinking for students to solve problems and reflect on their lives. Some educators believed that instruction during integrated learning time resulted in students being able to identify issues independently, express their ideas and collaboratively resolve problems (Oita Prefectural Board of Education, 2018; Robinson, 2011). However, some educators wanted more clarity about SEL goals, and students did not always understand the purpose of the SEL activities (Kato, 2020). Teachers

found it challenging to create SEL content and activities that were appropriate for specific grade levels (Takeda et al., 2018).

Koizumi (2005) translated CASEL's SEL documents into Japanese (CASEL, 2003; Elias et al., 1997; Elias, 2003), and defined SEL as the cultivation of skills, attitudes and values in interpersonal relationships that are based on awareness of oneself, interactions with others and responsible decision making. This Japanese definition of SEL reflects Japanese concerns about study pressures on their students. To outside observers, Japanese youth were polite and able to work collaboratively, but to educators and parents, the youth of the 1990s and early 2000s seemed to be out of control, bullying others and committing acts of random violence, seemingly unable to empathize with others.

Although Koizumi based his definitions of SEL skills on CASEL's frameworks (Elias et al., 1997; CASEL, 2003), his version differs slightly, reflecting cultural differences. For example, the CASEL definition of self-awareness emphasizes individuals' understanding that include growth and confidence, suggesting a future-orientation (Elias, 2003). Koizumi's definition focuses on individuals' understandings of who they are in the moment, reflecting the problem Japanese individuals sometimes have of deemphasizing their own thoughts and desires, amidst pressure to conform. Similarly, there are differences between CASEL's and Koizumi's definitions of "awareness of others."

The CASEL definition focuses on understanding those from diverse backgrounds and being able to empathize with them, reflecting the U.S. multicultural context. However, Koizumi's definition focuses on individuals controlling their emotions to deal with difficult situations, which is consistent with the Japanese concept of *gaman*–being able to control one's feelings in a social situation and to get along with the group.

These differences highlight the Japanese focus on *wa* (harmony) (Harumi, 2010; Reid, 2000). One of the ways in which Japanese individuals maintain *wa* (harmony) within a group is by exerting self-control of their emotions, thoughts and behaviors. Although *wa* is important in Japan, there is a concern it has overshadowed expression of individuals' emotions, which has led to problems among youth. Therefore, Koizumi's definition of SEL focuses on helping individuals maintain group harmony while understanding and expressing one's emotions. In this study, Koizumi's definition of SEL was used and *p4c Hawai'i* was applied as a means to cultivate Japanese middle schoolers' SEL.

philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4c Hawai'i)

philosophy for children Hawai'i (*p4c Hawai'i*) focuses on the development of thinking and classroom relationships (Leng, 2015). The "four pillars" of *p4c Hawai'i* include community, inquiry, philosophy and reflection (Jackson, 2012). The *p4c Hawai'i* students and teachers sit in a circle symbolizing interconnectedness, inclusivity and a lack of hierarchy (Makaiau & Miller, 2012). The *p4c Hawai'i* approach emphasizes intellectual and emotional safety for building trust (Jackson, 2019). Learners typically vote for a question that they would like to pursue and assume that no one, including the teacher, knows the answer or direction of the inquiry. Throughout the discussion, the group reflects on their performance as a community.

Jackson (2019) developed tools and protocols for *p4c Hawai'i* communities, including a community ball that is tossed, indicating who students choose to speak after them (Makaiau & Miller, 2012). The ball is similar to the "talking stick" used by Native Americans to designate who will speak (Baskin et al., 2008). Jackson also developed the Good Thinker's Toolkit for *p4c Hawai'i* discussions. The Toolkit consists of seven questions represented by the acronym WRAITEC:

W - What do you mean by that?
R - What are the reasons?
A - What is being assumed? Or what can I assume?
I - Can I infer ____ from _____? Or where are there inferences being made?
T - Is what is being said true and what does it imply if it is true?
E - Are there any examples to prove what is being said? And,
C - Are there any counter-examples to disprove what is being said? (Makaiau & Miller, 2012, p. 15)

In an increasingly depersonalized Japanese society (MEXT, 2018), *p4c Hawai'i* may have the potential to build communities and *kizuna* (social ties). Jones (2012) suggested that schools should aim to provide students with opportunities to collaborate and express their thoughts and feelings.

Educators used *p4c Hawai'i* in a school affected by the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami (Shoji & Horikoshi, 2015). Tōhoku was the strongest earthquake in the history of Japan and resulted in more than 15,500 fatalities, 4,500 missing people and 450,000 homeless individuals (Fujii et al., 2011; National Geographics Society, 2022). The tsunami also caused a meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant reactors, resulting in the release of toxic radioactive materials into the environment that forced thousands of residents to evacuate.

After the disaster, 10- to 11-year-old fourth graders from one Tohoku elementary school who participated in *p4c Hawai'i* demonstrated SEL to a degree not typically seen in Japanese classrooms (Shoji & Horikoshi, 2015). For example, one of the students who received the community ball initially did not say anything; and yet, he did not want to let the ball go. About 25 seconds later, he finally expressed his thoughts. Another student who had returned to school after a long *hikikomori* (social reclusion) absence said that he enjoyed the discussion and wanted to do it again. These examples show how *p4c Hawai'i* provided a structure to promote expression among children who struggled to interact with others.

Theoretical Frameworks

Dewey's (1915) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories provided the theoretical framework for this study. Dewey's (1915) theory is a foundation of *p4c Hawai'i*. Dewey emphasized the significance of experiential learning, believing that school should be a place where students discover what it means to be valued members of a group and learn skills and knowledge to be applied beyond the classroom. Consistent with *p4c Hawai'i*, Dewey recognized the importance of students becoming aware of their social significance.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that all thoughts, ideas and ways of thinking originate through social interactions. He referred to the Zone of Proximal Development, the distance between what children can do by themselves and what they can do with assistance from adults and peers. Across time, learners appropriate the assistance, such that those ideas become their own. Thus, the ways in which *p4c Hawai'i* social interactions in the classroom led to middle school students appropriating new ways of thinking and interacting was investigated. The research question was: How did *p4c Hawai'i* influence Japanese middle school students' social and emotional skills?

Methods

Design and Setting

A case study was conducted in the 2018-2019 school year in a public school in Kobe, the sixth-largest city in Japan. The school served students in grades seven-12, had a relatively small student population of about 375 students (Gaccom, 2019) and was popular among families. Students came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, but were relatively high achieving, scoring in the top 15% on entrance exams. The case study focused on a grade seven Japanese language arts (*kokugo*) class. This class was selected because the teacher was known to use *p4c Hawai'i.*

Participants

At the time of the study, Tanaka Sensei had been teaching for eight years, including four at the school where the study was conducted. Tanaka Sensei had a master's degree in psychology and was completing his doctorate during our data collection. For a decade, he had been learning about and implementing *p4c Hawai'i* . He heard about *p4c Hawai'i* from a professor at the university where he received his master's degree. Prior to the study, Tanaka Sensei implemented *p4c Hawai'i* in different middle and high schools, where he worked as a lecturer. He also visited Hawai'i and learned about *p4c Hawai'i* from Jackson (2012) in the years 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2019.

During the data collection for this study, Tanaka Sensei taught *p4c Hawai'i* once a week in the language arts classroom. Another teacher taught the class on the other days. When the class was not engaged in *p4c Hawai'i* while in Tanaka Sensei's weekly sessions, they read Japanese materials that were used as prompts for the *p4c Hawai'i* discussions. For this study, a signed informed consent form was collected from Tanaka Sensei.

Participants also included 39 seventh grade students (19 males, 20 females), ages 13- to 14-years-old. A subset of eight students (three males, five females), who Tanaka Sensei selected, also participated in a focus group interview. Tanaka Sensei said that he chose the particular students because he believed they would be honest when answering questions. For the focus group interviews, Tanaka Sensei collected assent and consent forms from the students and their parents. All of the students' parents also signed a consent form agreeing to Tanaka Sensei video recording the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions.

Data Sources

Video Recordings of p4c Hawai'i Discussions

From April to September 2018, Tanaka Sensei video recorded seven *p4c Hawai'i* sessions and shared these recordings with the researchers; however, two recordings were not audible, so they were not included. Tanaka Sensei regularly recorded his classroom when he conducted *p4c Hawai'i* discussions. He placed the camera near to him and at a distance from the students. Audio recordings were used to discern participants' speech and the video was used to analyze students' and the teacher's expressions and behaviors.

Interviews

Interviews (students and teacher) were conducted in one of the school's meeting rooms, using Japanese, one of the researcher's and the participants' first language. Tanaka Sensei was interviewed before and after the semester began regarding his perceptions of *p4c Hawai'i* and its effects on instruction and students' SEL. At the end of the semester, a 90-minute focus group interview was conducted with eight students about their SEL skills and the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions. The video interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Memos and Reflection Sheets

The recordings of the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions and interviews were reviewed and memos were written. In the memos, one researcher's feelings, hunches and questions were recorded (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Tanaka Sensei developed and used the reflection sheet for his *p4c Hawai'i* classes. At the end of each *p4c Hawai'i* session, the students individually completed a written reflection sheet, evaluating the inquiry and describing how the discussion topic related to their lives.

Social and Emotional Learning Survey

At the semester's end, Tanaka Sensei administered to the students a modified version of the Social and Emotional Learning of 8 Abilities Survey (SEL-8S) (Koizumi, 2005). Written in Japanese, the 16-item SEL-8S asks students to respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 4 (very strongly agree). Table 1 shows the survey's SEL constructs and sample items. Japanese researchers have previously used the SEL-8S in K-12 schools (Koizumi, 2011; Kitano et al., 2012). The scale displayed adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha values ranging from .64 to .84 (Yoneyama & Koizumi, 2015). For the current study, the SEL-8S was adapted by adding 10 items that appeared after each question. These new items asked students to reflect on their abilities before the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions. For example, following "I know what I am good at and what I am not good at," section, an added question asked students, "How were you doing before you experienced p4c in class?" Students' responses to the second question were used to discern their' perspectives on their self-awareness of skills prior to the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions.

Table 1. SEL-8S Constructs and Sample Items

Construct	Sample Item
Self-awareness	I know my strengths and weaknesses
Awareness of others	I can tell when my friend is sad.
Self-control	I do not take out my feelings on someone even if bad things happen to me
Interpersonal relationships	I can cooperate well with people around me.
Responsible decision-making	I carefully consider what will happen when I decide something on my own.
Health-promotion and problem prevention skills	I try not to approach dangerous situations and scenes.
Coping skills and social support for transitions and crises	I can do well even if I transfer to a new school.
Active, Contributing Service Activities	I want to do something to help when I see other people in trouble.

Note. From Koizumi (2005).

Data Analysis

The data based on both the research questions and emergent codes were coded (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were continuously compared and organized, identifying themes by relating codes to each other and to the research questions. The data was coded in Japanese, themes were then translated into English, and the analysis was triangulated across the data sources. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the survey items (Field, 2009). Relationships between pairs of variables were considered and paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine students' perceptions of SEL changes after they engaged in *p4c Hawai'i*.

Results

p4c Hawai'i Sessions

For each 50-minute *p4c Hawai'i* session, the 39 students and Tanaka Sensei sat in a circle. In Video 1, the students introduced themselves. To introduce *p4c Hawai'i*, Tanaka Sensei asked students to discuss when in their lives they felt comfortable speaking. Students said that they could talk openly with friends and family and while they were riding in a car. In the other videos, the class generated questions based on class readings, voted on the topics and discussed them.

In the second video, the class pursued an inquiry based on the novel *Tale of Genji* (Suzuki, 1998). Genji's mother died, and Genji's father, the Emperor, married a woman who resembled Genji's mother. The class voted to discuss, "Is it okay to love someone who resembles the one you loved before?" In Video 3, the class pursued the question: "Would you choose a boyfriend or girlfriend based on personality or attractiveness?" The next discussion focused on a reading about Thomas Edison that suggested that he worked his assistants so hard that they did not get enough sleep (Mayama, 2017). The class pondered, "Can you work with a person who you admire if you don't get enough sleep?" In the last video, the class discussed Japanese *kamikaze* (suicide) Special Corps: "What do you think about the Japanese Special Corps during World War II?"

Social and Emotional Learning Through *p4c Hawai'i* Results

In the next sections, results from all data sources are presented to describe how *p4c Hawai'i* influenced students' SEL. In regard to the survey, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the original SEL-8S survey items was .89, suggesting high internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha for each of the 16 dependent variables was also high, ranging from .75-.93. Below particular items on the survey are described related to specific SEL skills, namely self-awareness, awareness of others, cultivating positive relationships, and responsible decision-making. The teacher's role when using the *p4c Hawai'i* approach is also described.

Self-Awareness

Student participants reported that they had more self-awareness after they engaged in the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions, compared to before ($t = -4.70$, $p < .001$). The *p4c Hawai'i* sessions appeared to afford opportunities for students to notice their emotions and evaluate their abilities.

In the video recording of the third session, for example, Kenichi reflected that he would prioritize personality over attractiveness when selecting a partner, quoting the proverb "*Abata mo ekubo:*" **"***Abata* means pock . . . sometimes on cheeks, but if you like the person, the pock seems like a small dimple . . . so it looks cute. Therefore, looks differ by how you feel towards the person." In the session about Edison, Erika evaluated her values and emotions, "I don't want to work in that kind of environment. Lack of sleep won't create any great ideas, and I would be disappointed if I saw that kind of side to my hero" (video recording).

Even those who did not speak during the sessions appeared to gain self-awareness, as suggested by their written reflections. Shoko did not say anything in the discussion about loving a person who resembled a previous partner, but on her reflection sheet, she wrote, "If the person you like has gone away and the relationship ends, it is okay to start looking for [another] loved one."

Awareness of Others

Current findings suggested students had opportunities to become more aware of others and to practice perspective-taking. On the survey, students reported how their awareness of others improved after they experienced the *p4c Hawai'i* approach ($t = -5.25$, $p < .001$).

The focus group participants described how *p4c Hawai'i* helped them understand others' feelings. When classmates suggested perspectives that were different from Chikaki's, she tried "to understand why they were thinking that way, and then expressed her own opinion." In another example, Yumi remarked, "I think of the people who are around me when we are doing p4c. I give my opinion while I'm observing and thinking about others" (focus group).

In the video recording of the third session, some students changed their opinions after they listened to classmates' perspectives. After hearing peers describe why they thought a partner's personality was more important than attractiveness, Sayaka stated, "Well, I changed my opinion! As another student mentioned . . . I think that people's character cannot change, so I think it is better to choose personality." In the focus group, Keiko mentioned, "It is good to hear others' opinions because there are students who think so deeply and give better perspectives that I change my view." As an example, Daichi changed his opinion after a classmate said that he thought it was okay to love a person who resembled someone you previously loved. Daichi shared, "I changed my opinion because, as another student mentioned, this is my life, so wouldn't it be good to do what I want to do?" On her reflection sheet, Yuki wrote, "accepting different opinions led me to find a different perspective."

Of course, not all students changed their perspectives after hearing opposing views, but most acknowledged that it was okay to have different ideas. After peers said that it was okay to fall in love with a person who resembled a previous love, Ryoichi stated, "What the other students think is okay, but I definitely feel I should not fall in love with another person" (video recording). Students said, "Woahhh!!!" to cheer him on. Another student wrote on his reflection sheet that hearing others' perspectives helped him to clarify his ideas. In the focus group, Takako expressed, "p4c discussion is different from our regular class, in that I can express my opinion and also hear others' opinions. It is fun."

The most serious topic that students discussed was about the Special Attack Corps. During the last months of World War II, the Japanese government, recognizing their inevitable defeat, enlisted pilots to crash their airplanes into US warships in an effort to force negotiations. This topic is rarely examined critically in Japanese schools (Oi, 2013). The following results come from the video recording of this discussion. Karina proposed the inquiry in relation to a book about an officer who opposed the Special Corps. Karina said that the Government recognized that they were losing the war "but they still kept sending special suicide squads . . . They wanted to send a message that 'We haven't lost the war, yet.'" Seika believed that sending the attack forces to commit suicide was not right. Kanon also opposed Japan using the Special Corps in this way, "The government thought the war was more important than their people's lives." In contrast, Kaito thought that "it was impossible to stop the suicide attackers." He noted that since people had died in the suicide attacks, stopping them could lose the war and dishonor those who already died, which Kaito thought was not appropriate, given their sacrifices.

Cultivating Positive Relationships

Student participants reported they were better able to build relationships with others after participating in *p4c Hawai'i* ($t = -4.37$, $p < .001$). In the focus group discussion, Yumi contrasted *p4c Hawai'i* with debates in elementary school, where "there is a pro and con, and you need to

decide which side you are on." She preferred *p4c Hawai'i* in that "We discuss, and everyone is in a circle and participates . . . We can listen to each other's opinion . . . You do not have to decide which side you are on."

In the video recordings, Tanaka Sensei told the students that it was okay to ask questions during their inquiries, as long as they were respectful. By the third session, students used words that reflected respect, such as, "I disagree with Ms. Sakai" (video recording). Use of the community ball also appeared to facilitate positive relationships. In the focus group, Ikuko mentioned: "When the ball is thrown . . . at that moment, I think about what my peer really said and try to understand what I am feeling." Kenji recognized that listening to the person with the ball facilitated the development of good relationships, "Only the person who has the ball can talk, so we pay attention to the person" (focus group).

Karina said that developing relationships skills in class was important because outside of school, "there is no opportunity to talk [with others]. I have become more and more busy since I entered middle school" (focus group). In his interview, Tanaka Sensei noted that students in *p4c Hawai'i* classes got along with each other and there were fewer issues with bullying than in other classes.

Responsible Decision-Making

Data suggested *p4c Hawai'i* afforded students opportunities to learn to make decisions responsibly. Students reported that they were better able to make responsible decisions after the *p4c Hawai'i* sessions ($t = -3.74$, $p < .001$). In the focus group discussion, Karina said *p4c Hawai'i* helped her decision-making, "There is no black and white answer. There are many answers that I like, so I take many good answers from my classmates and put them together to create my own opinion."

In a video recording, Kumi and Shinichiro reflected on what others said about whether they would work for someone they admired if that person did not allow them to sleep and decided that it was not a good idea to work in that situation. On the other hand, Daiki, reasoned aloud how he would work hard for someone he admired because of the potential for great accomplishments, "Isn't the reason why people look up to Edison is that he sacrificed his sleep and . . . worked that much to make great achievements . . . I thought about that, and I want to work hard" (video recording). Takeshi considered legal issues, "Well, for me, I would decide not to work with such a person, I think we must not work with him in that situation . . . because I think there are labor laws, long ago and now" (video recording).

The Teacher's Role

Tanaka Sensei appeared to support an environment that helped students understand their peers' intentions. In the first session, he said, "It's okay to say anything you like; however, be respectful to those around you" (video recording). In one video recorded discussion, a student stated, "Well, I'm a little against Ito-kun [Mr. Ito]." Other students appeared to think that the comment was too harsh and said, "Wow." Tanaka Sensei immediately said, "This feedback was not personal, but was directed at the comment only." After he said this, the students relaxed and resumed their discussion.

Tanaka Sensei helped to guide students in their thinking processes. In the video recording of the class discussing *The Tale of Genji*, he asked students to consider the nature of love, "Does love itself change?" He also provided feedback that promoted self-expression. His guidance of students' communication skills was helpful when they discussed the Special Attack Corps. Tanaka Sensei did not pressure students to reply quickly, perhaps helping students to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts.

In the video recordings, Tanaka Sensei demonstrated active listening, modeling both verbal and nonverbal skills to establish rapport and communication. Leaning toward students when they were speaking, he often put his hand on his chin to encourage students' input, which communicated his interest. Tanaka Sensei also modeled appropriate self-disclosure. When the class discussed the Special Attack Corps, the students in the video appeared interested and surprised when he shared that his great grandfather went to war and died during a drill practice.

When students discussed whether they would choose personality or attractiveness in a partner, they talked about characters in a Japanese cartoon titled "*Doraemon*." Doraemon is a robotic cat who aided a boy named Nobita. Giant is a huge, brutish and plain-looking boy. One of the students pointed out that in the TV series, Giant bullied Nobita often, but in the movie series, he helped Nobita. In a video recording of this discussion, Tanaka Sensei commented, "I think that many people think Giant is a cool guy, but . . . Giant has been called a gorilla." A few turns later, the teacher got the ball again and said, "I was called Giant when I was in middle school." All the students were surprised and said, "What? Wow!! (laughing loudly). The teacher assured the students that he did not bully anyone. In this discussion, Tanaka Sensei assumed a role more equal to that of the students. All of the students were smiling and laughing when he told them about being called Giant.

Discussion

The current study provides a detailed analysis of middle schoolers' reflections in academic conversations, achieving what Strahan and Poteat (2020) noted was missing in the literature on SEL for middle level education. In the following section, the findings are compared to research and theory as they relate to the areas of SEL: self-awareness, awareness of others, cultivating positive relationships, and responsible decision-making (Koizumi, 2005). Implications are discussed regarding practice and policy, the study's limitations, and future research.

Self-Awareness

Adolescents' senses of themselves change as they become increasingly concerned with others' opinions (Sebastian et al., 2010). Teens often compare themselves to peers and recognize judgments others make about them, influencing their self-concept. The structured conformity of Japanese classrooms encourages youths to follow the majority opinion (Mansur, 2016). Kono (2014) noted that P4C can create safe spaces that are free from pressures to conform.

According to Vygotsky (1978), social interactions lead to psychological development, including ideas about oneself. Having opportunities to discuss different views may have led students to develop new perspectives, incorporating both what learners initially thought and what others

shared. Vygotsky emphasized that the goals of development are culturally influenced. Culture influences perceptions and understandings of emotions (Poulou et al., 2018). Markus and Kitayama (1991) discussed the interdependent self-view, which is observed in many Asian cultures. This view emphasizes interdependence and a cooperative relationship between the self and others (Lee, 2018). Such a perspective reflects membership in cultures that value awareness of others' feelings and social systems minimizing conflict (Kitayama, 1994). In the current study, *p4c Hawai'i* reinforced these values, including self-fulfillment that encompasses the development of meaningful social relationships and living interdependently with others, aspects of education that Dewey (1915) also emphasized.

Awareness of Others

Yamada (2018) noticed that in Japanese classrooms, some students who were normally quiet, became easily upset. They were emotionally immature, did not know how to express their feelings and tended to become targets of bullying or became violent themselves. Developing students' understanding of others and accepting differences may help to mitigate aggressive behavior (Koda, 2015; Yamada, 2018). One skill involved in the awareness of others is perspective-taking (Fett et al., 2014). In the current study, *p4c Hawai'i* provided a structured framework for middle schoolers to learn perspective-taking. Students listened to others' ideas and responded respectfully. At times, a classmate's perspective influenced students to change their views, and at other times students listened to different perspectives and were empathetic, but disagreed respectfully. Other educators documented how Japanese students gained perspective-taking through *p4c Hawai'i* discussions (p4c Miyagi, 2017).

Cultivation of Positive Relationships

Students' awareness of others may have influenced the development of friendships. The Japanese Government reported that second to bullying, friendship problems were the most common reason that children refused to attend middle school (MEXT, 2018). Friendship problems in school can create stress for students (Ishizu & Ambo, 2013; Kudo & Nozu, 2012). In the current study, students noted that *p4c Hawai'i* helped them to develop their relationships. One student noted that *p4c Hawai'i* sessions were the only places, in and out of school, where she had time to talk with others. The focus of *p4c Hawai'i* on developing classroom relationships can be a means to promote middle school students developing skills, such as empathy and acceptance, and how to manage friendships and conflicts with peers.

Responsible Decision-Making

To promote life guidance to students, it is important for Japanese schools to provide opportunities for student decision-making (Kasaoka Board of Education, 2012). This is fitting for middle school, as adolescence is associated with greater independence and demands for self-guided decisions (Hartley & Somerville, 2015). One feature of competent decision-making is the ability to distinguish better options for dilemmas (Byrnes, 2002). Adolescence is associated with an increased capacity for reasoning (Steinberg, 2011). A decision-making model proposed for middle schoolers involves five steps: (a) identify a decision to be made; (b) brainstorm possible options; (c) identify positive and negative outcomes (d) decide and take action on the choice and

(e) reflect on the decision that was made (Colorado Education Initiative, 2014). In the current study, students applied these five steps. They identified the topics to pursue and brainstormed ideas and opinions with peers and the teacher. Hearing multiple perspectives led students to think about possible outcomes, and they reflected on the process orally and in writing.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Japanese educators indicate an interest in active learning (Yamanaka, 2018). To facilitate active learning, it is important to highlight students' perspectives, while educators put their own views aside (Robinson, 2011; Wang, 2016). Contrasting a teacher-centered approach, in which students often refrain from speaking and feel alienated (Ishikawa & Onuki, 2015), *p4c Hawai'i* facilitators focus on students' growth and learning. When students participate in *p4c Hawai'i,* their talk increases while teachers' speech diminishes. Howell et al. (2011) found that focusing on middle schoolers' talk, during class discussions, built students' sense of community and their appreciation of a diversity of perspectives, as well as greater understanding of the content being taught.

Tanaka Sensei demonstrated that facilitators remain active in *p4c Hawai'i* sessions. As facilitators, they provide guidance by drawing conclusions that students might otherwise miss and encourage students to speak freely by modeling respect for others' opinions.

The Japanese Government proclaimed goals that included middle school students developing compassion for others and valuing perspectives that were different from their own (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2021). In addition, the Government encouraged learning activities that included active discussions and promoted cooperation. All of these goals are consistent with the *p4c Hawai'i* approach. The current study found that through *p4c Hawai'i* sessions, students learned about themselves, while applying reasoning and decision-making skills. *p4c Hawai'i* can also develop students' social and emotional skills, and in Japan, this could help to reduce the troubling incidences of *hikikomori* (social reclusion) and suicide. The results of the current study indicate that *p4c Hawai'i* may provide opportunities for middle schoolers to learn these skills and provide an alternative to a teacher-centered approach that has typically dominated many Japanese classrooms.

Limitations and Future Research

As this was a case study, the intention was not to generalize findings to other settings; thus, the results may be limited to this particular setting. Future research can advance our knowledge by investigating *p4c Hawai'i* and SEL in other classrooms. This study was also limited by the use of a survey that is susceptible to social desirability (Kaminska & Foulsham, 2013). At one point in time, students in the current study reported on their SEL abilities before and after they experienced the *p4c Hawai'i* approach. They may not have been able to remember what they were able to do prior, and this recall bias could have challenged internal validity (Hassan, 2005). In addition, it is also recognized that students' SEL could have developed naturally in early adolescence, rather than because of their *p4c Hawai'i* participation.

Studying *p4c Hawai'i* participation and SEL among middle schoolers with a comparison group and across a longer period of time is recommended for future studies. Dewey (1915) believed that students discover what it means to be valued members of a social group and apply what they learn in school to interactions in the wider community. Following students into these broader contexts would be helpful in describing how learners use the skills from *p4c Hawai'i* sessions with their families and in the community. Further, research is also needed to clarify how *p4c Hawai'i* may dissuade youths from societal problems like *hikikomori* (social reclusion) and suicide.

About the Authors

Mari was raised in Japan and speaks the same dialect as the participants. She has resided in the US for over a decade and received her MEd in counseling and PhD in educational psychology. After taking a class from Jackson on *p4c Hawai'i*, Mari felt relaxed, safe and free to speak in class. She appreciated these positive interactions with classmates as friends rather than contenders and wanted to learn how *p4c Hawai'i* could be applied to education in Japan.

Born and raised in Hawai'i, Ann is a professor of educational psychology who has participated in p4c sessions and studies dialogic instruction. Her grandparents emigrated from Japan and Okinawa to Hawai'i; so, although she does not speak Japanese, she has engaged in Japanese and Okinawan activities. Ann has a relative in Japan who was *hikikomori*.

Both researchers recognize that they have a positive bias toward *p4c Hawai'i,* which could have resulted in their focusing on data that were consistent with its positive effects. To counter these potential biases, they looked for negative instances of themes, triangulated the data and reflected on their positionality (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

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Teacher Talk: Theory to Practice
Revisiting the Six Declines of Contemporary Youth: Considering Adventurous Outdoor Learning as an Intervention

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Simon Priest was a full professor of adventurous and environmental outdoor learning in Canada. Internationally, he has been a Dean, Provost, Vice-Chancellor, Senior Vice President, President, Commissioner, and Advisor to a Minister of Education. He has received numerous awards and accepted over 30 visiting scholar positions around the world in outdoor learning. Now early retired, he balances his time among traveling, hiking, bicycling, gardening, researching, teaching, and writing.

Abstract

This article discusses six declines of youth patterned after Kurt Hahn's similar declines from a century ago. Outlined as a theoretical construct, the author describes the role of adventurous outdoor learning experiences as positively influencing youths' emerging sense of "self." After describing an underlying theoretical framework for the six declines, the background and rationale are discussed for each separate decline. A summary of the various "selves" is presented for the declines, progressing from empty, through social, to healthy self. Finally, adventurous outdoor learning is identified as a potential intervention for youth with the potential to remedy some of these declines.

Background

In order to target the problems of German and British youth, almost 100 years ago, Kurt Hahn (1924, 1928) suggested the use of physical training, expeditions, project work and rescue services (James, 1990). He identified youthful declines in fitness, initiative/enterprise, memory/imagination, skill/care, self-discipline and compassion (Hahn, 1960). Based on these identified problems and recommended solutions, Hahn founded (with others): Schule Schloss Salem in 1920, Gordonstoun School in 1934, Outward Bound in 1941, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme in 1956, United World Colleges in 1962, Round Square Schools in 1967 and the International Baccalaureate program in 1968 (Veevers & Allison, 2011). Each school or program was revolutionary in its time, meeting the needs of society and remain highly relevant through today. The recent global COVID-19 crisis may highlight an opportunity and necessity to re-examine contemporary declines in youth (ages 13-19 and living in wealthy, well industrialized and/or economically advanced countries). The following points represent population generalizations and do not purport to assume all youth may exhibit these declines. Additionally, many of these declines may also be present in a significant portion of elders and other adults.

1. Worship of **Celebrity/Wealth**
2. Addiction to **Social Media/Technology**
3. Lack of **Critical Thinking**
4. Preference for **Consumption**, rather than contribution
5. Stuck in **Hopelessness and Self-centeredness**
6. Absence of **Compassion/Empathy**

Figure 1: The six declines of contemporary youth (author).

Theoretical Framework

These six inter-related declines, as illustrated in Figure 1, can be explained by Cushman's (1990) psychological theory of "the Empty Self" that builds on the "self psychology" work of Kohut (1971). Cushman (1990) defines "self" as an individual's concept of what it means to be human in the context of their own society or culture. Briefly, Cushman believes the self historically shifted from being restricted in Victorian times to becoming empty after World War II. He argues advertising and marketing to all age groups inappropriately advocate for a lifestyle solution to their emptiness and thus, force consumer products to quickly and easily become the solution to all of life's minor problems.

Cushman (1990) notes people with an empty self are "soothed and made cohesive by becoming filled up with food, consumer products, and celebrities" (p.599). Further, he describes the opportunity exists for their abuse "by covertly filling the empty self with the accoutrements, values, and mannerisms of idealized figures" (p.599). He sees the empty self as "a self that experiences a significant absence of community, tradition, and shared meaning [with] a lack of personal conviction and worth, and…absences as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger. The post-World War II [empty] self thus yearns to acquire and consume as an unconscious way of compensating for what has been lost" (p.600).

Background and Rationale

Three decades after Cushman, we can view the "empty self" as even more prevalent than just after the Second World War. Today, this manifests as: addictions to food, technology and substances (AACES, 2021); materialistic, convenient and compulsive buying (Reeves et al., 2012); unjustified enthrallment with celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2004) and chronic loneliness (Whitley, 2020). The empty self is driven by wealth and evolves into isolated narcissism (Twenge et al., 2014) as well as chronic depression (Mojtabai et al., 2016); an absence of shared communal values or relationship-based social skills exists (Ungar, 2020). Framed by an understanding of the empty self, the following discussion describes each of the six declines for contemporary youth.

1. Worship of **Celebrity/Wealth**

Worship is a second nature to humans as evidenced by our historic devotion to deities and idols, as well as our prehistoric reverence of seasons and nature. Today, some young people appear to worship the rich and famous among us. These musicians, actors and athletes make millions of dollars annually and allegedly exemplify the American Dream. No wonder some youth aspire toward such fame and fortune (Greenwood, 2013). Unfortunately, in many instances, celebrities tend to represent inappropriate behavioral role models and may have adverse impacts on youth. For example, in striving to attain the perfection that celebrities appear to embody, young people suffer eating disorders, in an effort to mimic celebrity body images and, as well, steal to pay for high-end fashion and elective cosmetic surgery (Maltby et al., 2005; Maltby & Day, 2011).

Celebrity worship exists on a spectrum from interest, through fascination, to obsession. Interest is characterized by a healthy curiosity for information. Examples include searching out: the song

lyrics of a musician, the other movie performances of an actor or the sports statistics of an athlete. Fascination is a reflection of the "social self" and often motivated by the need to form connections and establish role models or future aspirations. These parasocial relationships represent normal behavior in youth and examples include: hanging bedroom posters, talking about celebrities with friends and learning all they can from the press releases of public relations agents and the social media posts of the celebrity's assistants (Bond, 2016).

As the empty self grows, this can evolve into celebrity worship syndrome: a recognized psychological disorder where a fan is obsessively preoccupied with the details of a famous person's professional or private life. This leads into abnormal erotomania (a false belief that they both share a special friendship or loving relationship), causing the fan to stalk the celebrity (Maltby et al., 2003).

2. Addiction to **Social Media/Technology**

The advent of social media accelerated and accentuated youthful worship of celebrities (Zsila et al., 2018). However, today's youth are known to be more influenced on social media by peers than others, resulting in a new celebrity group, referred to as peer social media influencers. Social media refer to computer websites and applications that enable users to share ideas and information online within interactive communities or networks (Miriam-Webster, 2021). With a typically large number of followers, influencers are those users who promote products or services and advertise for a particular brand (Cambridge, 2021). Various content areas shared on social media include: peer opinions (Facebook & Reddit), blogging (Twitter & Tumblr), photos (Instagram & Pinterest), videos (YouTube & TikTok) and more.

Gaming is an additional concern overlapping and extending beyond social media. Bloom (2010) identifies the most common leisure activity, with the most time and money spent, among North American and European youth, as immersion in the imaginary worlds delivered by gaming and entertainment technologies (Internet, TV, movies, books, etc.). Youth seek parasocial relationships with fantasy figures and other participants in these imaginary worlds.

ADDICTION SIGN or SYMPTOM (I have...)	COUNTERACTIVE STRATEGY (I will...)
Craved technology use and/or time spent online, so much so that I often plan how to get more	Monitor and limit my time spent online; strive to control and decrease my usage rather than abstain
Felt extremely good inside when using technology to the point of being unable to stop or cut back	Enroll in a twelve-step or twelve-step related program that also addresses my underlying issues
Spent increasing amounts of time with technology and constantly thought about it when not online	Learn why I prefer technology (read about it) and begin to slowly reduce my time using technology
Found myself restless, irritable, moody, anxious, angry, or sad when away from technology	Substitute other activities and new hobbies that feel just as good or better than technology use
Lied about my particular use of technology, video games, apps, Internet access, programming code, computers, smart phones, and/or other devices	Not hide my use from others by being honest about my patterns of connection (time of day, location, duration, etc.)
Lost the ability to control my online behaviors	Get cognitive-behavior therapy from a professional
Neglected my job or studies due to technology	Regain wise technology use in my work or school
Ignored my friends or family due to technology	Find support group or group therapy opportunities
Lost interest in non-Internet activities or hobbies	Revisit one of my favorite non-Internet activities
Been called shy, reserved, introverted, or remote	Force myself to get out and meet people in person
Noticed a lack of support from friends or family	Re-engage with friends and family (without using)
Defied a parent or teacher, who demanded a "technology-free" zone for a specific time or place	Take a break from technology by leaving it behind for certain periods of time and places of restraint
Undergone recent changes in my sleep patterns, body weight, head/backaches, or general wellness	Exercise daily (walk, hike, bike, swim, run, lift weights, yoga, or similar activity)
Experienced serious problems in my life: issues of anxiety, depression, disability, or relationships	Acknowledge my addiction, determine triggers, resolve real problem (cognitive-behavior therapy)
Gotten bored with some technologies and go out of my way to find more exciting technologies	Practice a short period of time when I am away from technology (take a wilderness adventure trip)
Used technology to escape responsibilities and problems or to relieve my uncomfortable feelings	Recognize that the appeal stems from a sense of unlimited indulgence or absence of accountability

Figure 2: Technology Addiction and Countermeasures (author).

Youth demonstrate a strong affinity for social media and the technologies or devices used to access their social networks: laptops, tablets, smart phones, etc. A social self can readily develop behavioral dependence on social media. For the empty self, this connection can easily become addictive (Sharif & Khanekharab, 2017). In particular, some applications are designed to create habituation, dependence and addiction. The apps utilize a trigger-action-reward sequence. Trigger: users receive notifications that someone has positively commented on their postings for a social media site. Action: users immediately open the app for that site and read the comment. Reward: a Dopamine release in the brain causes a good feeling. This cycle repeats and becomes reinforced by receiving as many comments or likes as possible; this becomes the goal for an addict. The need for social approval encourages them to expand their network of friends. Figure

2 shows signs of possible digital (social media/technology) addiction and counteractive strategies.

As a result of dependence (social self) or addiction (empty self), some youth become unable to communicate without technology. They avoid interpersonal social situations by staring incessantly at their devices. Some even pretend to do so in order to escape public interaction. While these Weapons of Mass Distraction (WMDs) improved education, business and entertainment lives, they also created an iGeneration who evidence: difficulty applying language correctly, using online anonymity as a shield to offensive postings and drawing easily into destructive and divisive online debates. They remain unaware as to how these WMDs continue to transform their social, emotional and psychological lives.

3. Lack of **Critical Thinking**

Social media undermine critical thinking skills in youth by shortening attention spans and emphasizing sensationalism. Social media reduces empathy, disrupts identity and trains acceptance of false information, because of insufficient time to reflect, analyze, or imagine alternative ideas (Greenfield, 2014). The more time spent on social media, the less likely youth are to think critically (Ku et al., 2019). Critical thinking is essential in order to identify fact and avoid mistakenly accepting false disinformation in media.

Critical thinking is more about critiquing and less about criticism. Critical thinking critiques one's own thinking and the thoughts of others by subjecting those ideas to skepticism and scrutiny. For the purposes of this current discussion, critical thinking refers to the deep questioning, analysis and evaluation of thought structures, processes, evidence, conclusions and assumptions in a fair-minded manner that improves overall cognition and determines the precision and fallacy of thought (FCT, 2021). In the empty self, critical thinking makes the difference between standing for solid scientific truths in contrast with believing in ungrounded and/or speculative theories.

Critical thinking is not necessarily about reasoning for better problem solving or decision making. It is more about judging whether or not information is accurate or false and if evaluations are being made based on accurate data or personal biases. Reflection and humility become important elements of critical thinking. Reflection allows one to identify bias in thought, while humility supports change in personal opinions in the face of contrary evidence. Is news fake? Are politicians lying? Do scientists lack evidence? Are celebrities or athletes being paid for their endorsements? Figure 3 shows eight thinking components and a host of skeptical scrutiny questions, which become important elements when executing critical thinking processes.

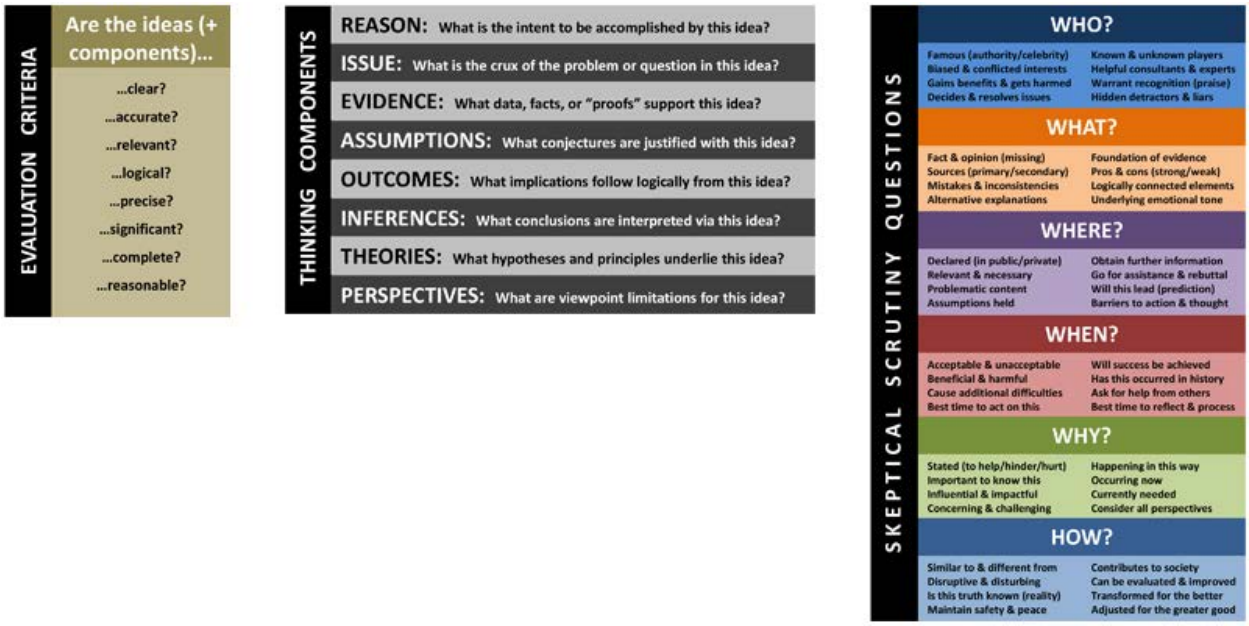

Figure 3: Critical thinking evaluation criteria, components and skeptical scrutiny questions (author).

Critical thinking is in short supply for all age groups, but is particularly absent in children, who take the word of adults as absolute. They are unable to understand the persuasion of advertising or infomercials. Teenagers without critical thinking begin to become more cynical and sarcastic than skeptical or dubious regarding the mixed messages they receive in the world. Even experienced elders without critical thinking become susceptible to conspiracy theories, con artists and charismatic cults.

Shortcomings can carry over through life, but may be eradicated through time with training (Ricketts, 2003). College students are frequently criticized for not gaining critical thinking skills during their four years of undergraduate school (Camarata, 2017). Millennials (born 1981-1996) perform poorly regarding critical thinking as compared with Boomers (born 1946-1964) across three years of study (MindEdge, 2019).

> *While college-educated Americans express a high level of confidence in their critical thinking skills, most could not pass a nine-question quiz designed to gauge their ability to detect fake news. Overall, 69 percent of survey respondents earned a failing grade on the quiz, correctly answering just five or fewer questions. The failure rate among Millennials – digital natives who've grown up with the Internet – was even higher, at 74 percent. Baby Boomers fared somewhat better on the quiz, but a clear majority (58 percent) still received a failing grade. On the positive side, 13 percent of Boomers received an "A" or "B" by answering eight or nine questions correctly – but only 5 percent of Millennials did likewise* (MindEdge, 2019, p. 1).

Finally, teaching critical thinking is difficult, but possible to limited extents (Abrami et al., 2015). This difficulty is partly due to the confusion of critical thinking definitions in contrast to solving problems or making decisions. The remaining difficulties associate with issues of

transferability: learners simply cannot connect the situations they face in life with the scenarios they learned. They are unable to apply the critical thinking skills they were taught (Belkin, 2017). A decade ago, critical thinking was one of the most desired skills in demand by employers and one of the least attained skills for pre-employment youth interviewing for North American jobs (Pace, 2012).

4. Preference for **Consumption**, rather than Contribution

North "Americans in the post-World War II era seem to have become a people who have a deeply felt need to spend money and indulge their impulses" (Cushman, 1990, p. 600). Again, the empty self is Cushman's explanation for consumer desire as evidenced by the common public statements: "we must have the latest trend" and it "must be delivered immediately!" We appear to want to fill our emptiness by collecting stuff and we must keep up with our neighbors, friends or peers, but only if doing so is as convenient as possible (Wilska, 2017).

Marketing, in the past and present, still remains aimed at filling the empty self and much of this is directed toward children. Not only do children provide their own unique target market, but they also influence future family choices and provide decades of customer loyalty. However, the vulnerability of children suggests the long-term effects of advertising contribute to a growing consumerism and consumptive compulsion for youth later in life (Lapierre et al., 2017).

Consumptive compulsion is acknowledged to contribute to a formative role in youth identity, self-definition and societal profile building (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2009). However, youthful consumption of goods (such as fashion, music and technology) or services (like entertainment, nightclubs and restaurants) are not only viewed as modes of self-expression or escape, but as well become experiential agents for social change (Miles, 2003). Some youth are known for supporting social justice issues and environmental causes through ethical and thoughtful spending (Reis et al., 2018). This improvement shows a hopeful shift from the empty self to the social self.

Aside from this ethical consumerism, what is the duty of young citizens in today's society? Do they have a responsibility to be producers instead of consumers? How can youth best contribute to a new world? These questions are at the heart of shifting further from social to the healthy self (Henley, 2002).

Youth represent an unmatched potential to facilitate community and global transformation through the articulate expression and inspired creation of future societies that are inclusive, sustainable and optimistic. Now, as earlier unfettered persons, youth assume the responsibilities to solve planetary issues such as the impacts of climate change or global pandemic diseases. Empowered youth can make their greatest contributions to society beginning with a commitment to service learning and servant leadership. Service learning is an excellent example of structured youth contributions that: serve a need, identify intentional learning objectives, create opportunities for reflection, include youth voice and servant leadership, foster civic responsibility, evaluate success, build partnerships, enable positive relationships and are conducted in accessible times and places (Naughton, 2000). Servant leadership places the needs

of others before the needs of the leader and makes a top priority of developing others' skills, while building their home community and personal independence (Grothaus, 2004).

5. Stuck in **Hopelessness and Self-centeredness**

Youth empowerment, however, is difficult and uncommon. Youth are often devalued and ignored by society. A lack of action by those in power marginalizes youth, teaches them to give up and thus, they remain pervasively hopeless about their collective futures. This continued anxiety brings a number of negative impacts to the health of youth (Leonard, 2018). On the physiological side, prolonged nervousness can cause: amplified stress hormones leading to inflammation, elevated heart rate leading to increased heart disease, hyperventilation leading to dizziness, impaired immune response leading to infections and blocked digestion leading to nausea, diarrhea or loss of appetite (Leonard, 2018). Regarding psychological aspects, long-term worry can result in: fatigue, obsessive thoughts, compulsive behaviors, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, depression, loss of libido, chronic pain and overwhelming fear or panic (Leonard, 2018). Unresolved, the outcomes of anxiety may include: post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, suicide, assorted phobias and substance addictions (Leonard, 2018).

If a self-centered perspective of entitlement is coupled with this sense of hopelessness, the empty self can easily become protracted or reinforced. The most common occurrence accentuating self-centeredness is parental rescue. Rather than allowing youth to solve their own problems, caregivers step in to take control. Helicoptering, bulldozing, or lawn-mowing parents seek to protect their youth in an overindulgent manner. They fight battles for their children with educational institutions, sport officials, job interviewers and others. Perhaps these parents fear dire consequences, worry about their own life experiences, were themselves neglected as a child or want to mimic other overly protective parents (Reed et al., 2016).

Despite the best of intentions, this parental rescue results in youth unprepared for life. They come to believe that a parent doesn't trust them enough to do something for themselves. Youth fail to learn coping mechanisms, since parents will reconcile the difficulties and/or prevent mishaps from occurring. When youth do not perform to perfection, they fear further parental interference. Further, they may become entitled and their anxiety can exacerbate, when they do not get their way. Finally, full of hopelessness and self-centeredness, the empty self becomes narcissistic (**Gruba-McCallister,** 2007).

6. Absence of **Compassion/Empathy**

Empathy is a necessary first step on the road to compassion. While sympathy is a general cognitive imagining of another person's feelings or emotions, empathy is a specific emotional understanding of those feelings (from having experienced similar sensations, but perhaps in slightly different situations). Once those shared feelings are mutually embraced through mindfulness and empathy, compassionate action can be taken to alleviate some of the person's emotional distress (Well, 2017).

As noted earlier, empty selves are often narcissistic and unwilling to empathize or exhibit compassion. Since they concentrate on themselves and have a need for self-protection against vulnerability, they are blinded to the needs of others or likely limit their freedom to express empathy (Gruba-McCallister**,** 2007). This is commonly observed in online or in-person arguments, where adversaries fail to consider the perspectives of others and instead, choose to personally attack. Harassment, threats, cyberbullying and trolling eventually become the norm or expected behavior for some youth (Milivojević & Ercegovac, 2015).

The absence of empathy means compassion is impossible, but also that trusting in others is difficult, avoiding emotional conversations is common and coldly manipulating relationships becomes familiar. Youth without empathy can become antisocial and humiliating to others. Their behaviors can spiral down into rumor gossiping, minor crime, or subtle violence.

Youth may not reflect on how their actions can impact themselves or others. They might show difficulty expressing emotions and thus, these youth might be unable to imagine how others feel. They may tend to misinterpret vocal intonation, facial expression or body language and therefore, may miss or misinterpret how others feel and/or react to their behaviors. Most of these youth succumb easily to peer pressure and, in doing so, may justify their behaviors with the support of their friends (Santor et al., 2000). In order to avoid facing their behaviors, some refuse to take any responsibility; others may lash out their unresolved confusion toward another; and a few may simply be victims of past abuse and neglect and do not care because their perpetrator did not care (Santor et al., 2000). Finally, getting away with negative actions can reinforce the power of malevolence and may lead to repetition (Santor et al., 2000).

Summary of the Self: Progressions

As shown in Figure 4, these six declines can be viewed in the context of three selves: empty self, social self and healthy self. **Worship of celebrity and wealth** may move from obsession through fascination to interest. An **addiction to social media and technology** can improve via habitual states to being free of dependence. A **lack of critical thinking** may mature from gullible or naïve via unsure to astute or certain. A **preference for consumption** could develop from compulsive buyer through ethical consumerism to altruistic producer. Being **hopeless and self-centered** could evolve from narcissistic or selfish through pessimistic to optimistic and self-less. The **absence of compassion and empathy**, where one is apathetic or oblivious to others, should shift via sympathy or concern to empathy and compassion for others. The positive self-progression from empty self through social self to healthy self will lead to the reversal of these six declines in contemporary youth. Yet, how do we best enable these progressions?

DECLINE	EMPTY Self	SOCIAL Self	HEALTHY Self
1. Worship of **Celebrity/Wealth**	Obsession	Fascination	Interest
2. Addiction to **Social Media/Technology**	Addiction	Habituation	Dependence Free
3. Lack of **Critical Thinking**	Gullible/Naive	Unsure	Astute/Certain
4. Preference for **Consumption**, rather	Compulsive Buyer	Ethical Consumer	Altruistic Producer

than Contribution			
5. Stuck in **Hopelessness and Self-centeredness**	Narcissistic/Selfish	Pessimistic	Optimistic/Selfless
6. Absence of **Compassion/Empathy**	Apathetic/Oblivious	Sympathetic/Concerned	Empathetic/Compassionate

Figure 4: Table of Progressions for the Self across six declines of contemporary youth (author).

Adventurous Outdoor Learning: A Positive Intervention

Cushman (1990) identified the transformation of advertising and marketing as a solution. Instead of seeking to satisfy the cravings and fill the empty self with substances (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, food, etc.) and lifestyles (shopping, gambling, sex, crime, violence, etc.), he felt that socially acceptable advertising and marketing could change toward caring and healthy living. Since advertising and marketing evolved to profit from or perpetuate the psychopathology of needing to fill emptiness, further solutions are needed.

One recommended solution to meet the needs of societal youth in filling the empty self was suggested by Hahn (1960). Based on his six declines of past youth in Germany and Britain, he recommended the solution of Erlebnistherapie (Experiential Therapy). This was the underlying philosophy of his many schools and, most notably, Outward Bound (James, 1990; Veevers & Allison, 2011). From Hahn's original list, the robust solution included risk taking and conflict resolution with reflection. Risk taking and conflict resolution are common components in adventurous outdoor learning, where youth experience intrapersonal or interpersonal gains from reflection on these experiences. Understanding one's self (intrapersonal) and how to get along with others (interpersonal) supports youth in maturing into new and healthier ways of knowing, being and relating.

Definitions

Outdoor learning is "an experiential process … which takes place primarily through exposure to the out-of-doors [where] the emphasis for the subject of learning is placed on … relationships concerning people and natural resources" (Priest, 2023a, p. 2). Those relationships are:

1. Intrapersonal – participant relating to oneself (self-esteem, resilience, confidence, etc.);
2. Interpersonal – participant relating to others (prosocial skills, trust, communication, etc.);
3. Ecosystemic – elements of nature interacting with each other (food chains or web of life);
4. Ekistic – humans and nature interacting reciprocally (pollution of drinking water) and
5. Spiritual – participant knowing their place or role in the world (Priest & Gass, 2018).

Adventurous outdoor learning impacts the first and second relationships: intrapersonal and interpersonal. Environmental outdoor learning influences the third and fourth relationships: ecosystemic and ekistics. A merging of both outdoor learning approaches potentiate the development of the fifth relationship of spirituality, which leads to understanding: "our place in the world, our search for satisfaction or serenity, why we were put here, and what role we were

meant to play with others and nature, during our brief time on the planet, with or without religion or transcendence" (Priest, 2023a, p.1).

> *Adventurous activities range from games and group problem solving initiatives, through low and high ropes/challenge courses, to one-day excursions or multi-day expeditions (snowshoeing, skiing, bicycling, hiking, climbing, caving, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, and more). Environmental activities range from sensory immersion in nature, through mindful meditation or contemplation, to scientific or artistic ecological exercises conducted outdoors in natural surroundings* (Priest, 2023a, p.3).

An example of socialization games is collaborative tag, where everyone who gets tagged remains "it" until the group has worked together to tag the last remaining individuals. An example of a group problem-solving initiative expects participants to help one another to climb over a thirteen-foot high wall barrier. Low and high ropes courses include walking across a three-rope bridge, swinging log, or suspended steps, while forty feet off the ground, suspended by safety ropes. One-day excursions might include ten hours of rock climbing on a single cliff, while multi-day expeditions might include ten days of journeying across the country by canoe (Priest & Gass, 2018). The outdoor activity alone is insufficient to provide more than recreational enjoyment. However, the addition of sophisticated facilitation techniques (with professionally trained leaders encouraging participants to examine, identify and transform their thoughts, behaviors and resistance to change by overcoming challenges and resolving group conflicts) enable adventure experiences to become educational, developmental and therapeutic (Priest & Gass, 2018).

The adventurous outdoor learning process works through seven steps (Priest, 2023b). Consider risk taking as an example with rock climbing or whitewater paddling. First, a dissonance occurs when participants hold two opposing views in their minds at the same time. With a normal human reaction to fear, they (frozen in mid-activity) believe two relatively equal possibilities to be simultaneously true: I'm safe (due to the safety gear and risk management procedures employed), but I'm also going to die (when I move forward up the cliff or into the rapid). Second, practice tries or mastery attempts are an effort by participants to resolve the unpleasant distress of their dissonance through **action**. Sometimes encouragement is necessary from peers and/or a facilitating leader. Either participants pass without incident or they fall/capsize, but quickly recover. In both outcomes, they experience feelings of pleasant eustress, a positive form of stress, since they endure and eventually succeed through repeated efforts after each setback (Priest, 2023b).

Third, carefully facilitated **reflection** (in group discussion and/or solo isolation) has participants examine and compare their feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Fourth, they identify new ways of being that led to their success. Fifth, this results in learning and, if properly facilitated (often through the use of metaphoric connections), these lessons are **integrated** by participants into their daily lives. Sixth, change comes, when they act differently in the next activity or in the same activity with a different effort. This reinforces their transformation and **continues** their journey. Seventh, they pledge to practice these new ways of being and acting back at home and school (Priest, 2023b). This cycle of **action – reflection – integration – continuation** repeats

many times during an adventurous outdoor learning program, across a myriad of activities and for other elements: conflict resolution, adversity endurance and more (Priest & Gass, 2018).

The Benefits

Individual practice at overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges, followed by mindful reflection, develops self-efficacy, confidence and resilience. Self-efficacy is the certainty of internal belief that one can accomplish a task by knowing the limits of one's personal abilities under the precise circumstances faced (Bandura, 1977). Confidence generally involves a feeling of assurance that a chosen course of action will succeed due to correctly perceiving one's personal competence (Needham, 1890). Resilience is the ability to recover and bounce back undamaged from the stress of losing something of value and therefore, demonstrate the ability to shield against future adversities (Werner, 1971). Taken together, these three (and other benefits arising from challenge – self-esteem, locus of control, persistence, self-discipline, etc.), are likely indicators of the same construct: the personal self or intrapersonal aptitude (Judge et al., 2002). These seemingly insurmountable challenges include common elements of adventure such as taking risks (climbing to great heights, spelunking into deep dark caves, traversing/descending slippery slopes or passing through turbulent waters) that develop an accurate self-perception and such as enduring adversity (going further, faster or harder than initially thought possible) that develops grit and resilience (Priest & Ritchie, 2024).

Group practice at resolving conflicts without resorting to aggression, followed by mindful reflection, builds teamwork and pro-social skills. Teamwork means working together to achieve mutually acceptable goals and cooperating on a foundation of trust and communication, while maintaining healthy relationships (Cohen & Levesque, 1991). Pro-social skills, used to help others in the context of a group, family or community, are exhibited through caring behaviors of compassion, appreciation, respect, empathy and safety expressed toward others (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). Blended in combination, these (and other benefits from conflict resolution – learning to lead, ask for or accept help, offer help, deal with anger, negotiate, apologize, solve problems, make decisions, use judgment, etc.) indicate the same characteristics as social self or interpersonal aptitude (Allen et al., 2007). These natural conflicts arise organically from living in tight quarters and under primitive conditions. Examples include arguments related to navigation decisions, sharing pack loads and requiring chores. In learning to avoid escalation and resolve the tensions arising, participants practice their cooperative pro-social skills (Priest & Ritchie, 2024).

Literature reviews, review syntheses and meta-analyses provide clear evidence that adventurous outdoor learning improves the health related intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships of participants (Priest & Ritchie, 2024). Adventurous outdoor learning events positively impact academic attainment, confidence, self-esteem, social skills, leadership potential and environmental responsibility (Malone, 2008), as well as physical fitness, motor skills, mental health, emotional regulation, environmental knowledge and enduring pro-environmental attitudes (Gill, 2011). Critical important, the intervention has been applied to both advantaged and disadvantaged youth populations (Bowers et al., 2019; Ellison, 2013; Linver et al., 2023; Nichols, 2012).

Due to adventurous outdoor learning's potency to change feeling, thinking, behaving and resisting change, it is frequently applied in therapeutic settings for youth "at-risk" of substance abuse, impulse control and personality disorders, as well as delinquency and criminality (Gass et al., 2020). These practices are based in a solid foundation of scholarship that has clearly shown improvements for self-efficacy (Fang et al., 2021), self-concept (Bedard et al., 2003; Fleischer et al., 2017) and a locus of control shift away from externally attributed to others and toward internally attributed to self (Hans, 2000) in adventure program participants. Further research demonstrates substantial gains in self-esteem, locus of control, behavioral observations, personal effectiveness, clinical measures and pro-social measures (Bettmann et al., 2016) from program engagement. Compared to other treatment programs, outdoor participants represent lower recidivism rates (Gillis et al., 2016; Wilson & Lipsey, 2000) as well as remarkable efficacy improvements and lasting change in academics, behavior, clinical, family development, self-concept and social development with older youth showing greater gains than younger ones (Bowen & Neill, 2013).

This means, participants in adventurous outdoor learning are purposefully placed in situations that create new opportunities to overcome challenges and resolve conflicts. Competent leaders and facilitators deliberately seek out remote locations, great heights, dark caves, rough waters, steep hills and slippery snow slopes, because these settings carry high perceived risks for participants, while staff can maintain the real dangers at a minimum level (Priest & Gass, 2018). Encountering the hardships, coupled with intense living in a small group, create dynamic conflicts in the form of arguments, disagreements, struggles and, in some instances, potential violence, all of which competent leaders and facilitators mediate. However, staff remain neutral and are careful not to be drawn into the conflict. The challenges and conflicts emerge naturally by virtue of the place; forcing these episodes would be considered unethical. How individuals deal with the challenges and how groups cope with the conflicts will eventually determine their growth, from reflection on their own or as a group (Priest & Gass, 2018).

The Importance of Reflection

Experience-based learning or "learning by doing" become truly experiential, when key elements of reflection and transfer are added before, during or after the activity or action experience (Leberman & Martin, 2004). The most common approach to this reflective phase is facilitated group discussion in a sharing circle after completing the challenges or resolving the conflicts (Seaman & Rheingold, 2013). However, individual reflection during solo time or writing in journals can also be useful as a standalone reflective process or in silent preparation for the group circle (Gray & Pigott, 2018). Solo reflection time and facilitated discussion during debriefing can enable learning and change resulting from the individual challenges and group conflicts.

At the same time, challenge and conflict can also be generated through competitive team sports and other physical activities, but these often lack the reflection process. This means, without discussion or reflection, participants are obliged to sort out the learning for themselves. In addition, competitive physical activities also lack the unique restorative properties of nature. By intermittently immersing participants in nature, between episodes of challenge and conflict, their distress may be alleviated. A meta-analysis of regular time spent in nature or greenspace clearly evidence physiological health benefits such as diminished cholesterol, cortisol (stress-related

hormones), heart rate, blood pressure, heart rate variability (relaxation indicators). These benefits were linked to reduced risk of type II diabetes, stroke, general mortality, asthma, hypertension and coronary heart disease (Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018). In addition, two meta-analyses confirm the value of sensory nature immersion to well-being (Djernis et al., 2019) as well as support treatments of mental health disorders (Kotera et al., 2020).

Adventurous Outdoor Learning: Impacting the Six Declines

How can adventurous outdoor learning aid in stopping or even reversing the six declines of contemporary youth? The following describe individual components that have made and continue to make the difference.

1. The worship of **celebrity/wealth** can be countered by forming and developing a complete self-identity (Richards, 2003) and self-identity also helps strengthen the next five responses to the declines. Self-identity is developed through overcoming perceived risks (Bruyere, 2002; Mills & Pawson, 2012; Priest & Ritchie, 2024).

2. Addiction to **social media/technology** can be reduced in the short term, simply by diminishing screen time (Gass et al., 2020; Priest & Ritchie, 2024). Importantly, nature-based outdoor adventure and "green time" demonstrate an "antidote" to excessive screen time in preschoolers (Hinkley et al., 2018), adolescents (Mutz et al., 2019; Oswald et al., 2020) and college students (Deyo et al., 2023). Further, the pro-social skills and interpersonal relationships that develop from adventure are useful in the next four responses.

3. **Critical thinking** is developed through skepticism and problem solving. Solving problems is at the center of all group initiative activities (by definition) and most adventure activities (by default). In order to evaluate solutions, critical thinking skills remain of paramount importance and consequently, develop through full participation in these outdoor adventure activities (Ampuero et al., 2015; Priest & Ritchie, 2024; Setambah et al., 2019).

4. The human preference for making a contribution, rather than **consumption** is exploratory at best. Outdoor adventures indicate some impact on consumerism and ecological action, but more environmental education integrated with outdoor adventure is warranted. Nevertheless, outdoor learning is known to reduce consumption to sustainable levels (Hadjichambis et al., 2015; Velasco-Martínez et al., 2020) and as well as increase contributions in the form of action and conservation (Palmer, 2002; Priest & Ritchie, 2024). However, more research is needed.

5. Extrication from stuck states of **hopelessness and self-centeredness** requires a powerful shift in personal mood and perspective. Nature immersion with or without adventure is known to provide both shifts in abundance (Brooks et al., 2017; Browning et al., 2020; Neill et al., 2019; Opper et al., 2014; Priest & Ritchie, 2024). The setting of nature is well known as a treatment for depression and anxiety in youth (Corazon et al., 2019; Coventry, 2021; Kotera et al., 2021). When nature is coupled with the aforementioned elements of adventure (such as risk, conflict and adversity), hopelessness becomes aspiration and ambition (Bacon & Kimball, 1989; Norton, 2010), while self-centeredness gives way to social cohesion and harmony (Crisp & O'Donnell, 1998; Nault, 2000).

6. Improving **compassion/empathy** is accomplished through the use of service learning. Service learning, where participants voluntarily help others and/or the environment, is an occasional element of outdoor learning, and was so important that Kurt Hahn (1960) made service learning a requirement of all his schools and programs. Service learning is known to increase reflective capacity, mediate self-examination, inculcate empathy and promote compassionate behavior (Dass & Bush, 2011; Horst et al., 2019; Priest & Ritchie, 2024; Saltmarsh, 1997).

Conclusion

Adventurous outdoor learning is a method used sparingly in schools, because of the public fear of injury and an administrative lack of awareness. In reality, correctly facilitated activities are statistically safer than driving a motor vehicle (Priest & Gass, 2018). Nevertheless, youth are missing out on one beneficial opportunity to mature and avoid the six declines mentioned here.

Just as in Hahn's times, a hundred years or so ago, adventurous outdoor learning still holds the keys to turning around the six declines of contemporary youth and moving the self from empty to healthy. Perhaps, this continuing need exists because society failed to intervene with widespread application of these methods in the past. Now, more than ever, when climate is a concern, disease spreads planet-wide and war is how some nations settle disputes, the world is ready for adventurous outdoor learning as a mainstream treatment intervention for our current youth in order to combat the six areas of possible decline. While this is obviously needed, the uncertainty becomes whether or not society can accept and provide this adventurous outdoor learning approach and whether the professions can effectively intervene with challenges in nature.

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Tech Talk
AI and Academic Integrity: Guiding Educators Through the Evolving Challenge of Student Plagiarism

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Abstract

The arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education brings exciting opportunities and significant challenges. This article explores educators' concerns about AI's role in the classroom, particularly the potential for AI-assisted cheating. Based on personal experiences, conversations with educators, and professional research, we highlight the ethical issues posed by AI tools like ChatGPT, which students may misuse for assignments and exams. Surveys show a troubling trend: many students admit to using AI for schoolwork, raising questions about academic honesty and integrity. We discuss ways to reduce AI misuse, such as redesigning assessments, encouraging open discussions about ethics, and using AI detection tools. The article stresses the need for ongoing dialogue, adaptive policies, and collaborative efforts among educators to maintain academic integrity in the digital age, ensuring that AI supports rather than hinders educational success.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has opened the door to many fantastic educational opportunities, from virtual assistants to platforms that assess, provide feedback, and tailor learning to generate content and experiences. Unfortunately, there are also risks (Caukin et al., 2023). AI encompasses technologies capable of simulating human intelligence, like those that use language learning models to generate responses, like ChatGPT (Hetler, 2024; OpenAI, 2023), and virtual

personal assistants like Pi, Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant, among others (Aisera, 2024; Inflection, 2023). These tools are designed to assist learning, improve productivity, foster creativity, and generate ideas. Some of these tools, however, can be misused by students to produce assignments and exam answers that simulate human effort.

We teach. So, we understand the challenges that teachers face in the classroom and the concerns regarding AI in education. We also offer professional development to educators on several topics. Most recently, PD has been provided on the emerging subject of a new frontier termed Artificial Intelligence (AI). Meeting with educators confirms their concern and, perhaps, trepidation about exploring this territory. Their fear is rooted in thoughts of plagiarism and dishonesty, as students may rely on AI platforms inappropriately when creating their assignments. As Dehouche (2021) noted, "One challenge with using [Artificial Intelligence] for assessment in higher education is the possibility of plagiarism. AI essay-writing systems are designed to generate essays based on a set of parameters or prompts. This means that students could potentially use these systems to cheat on their assignments by submitting essays that are not their work" (p.20). And we know they do.

We understand. We, too, have experienced students who have used AI to plagiarize work. AI is here, and as it continues to evolve and reshape education, it presents both opportunities and challenges for educators. One significant challenge Dehouche (2021) mentioned is the existence of AI-assisted cheating, where advanced technological platforms enable students to disregard academic integrity standards.

We offer hope! Addressing AI-assisted cheating is crucial for educators. It is about upholding academic standards and fostering a culture of honesty and ethical behavior among students. Understanding how AI can be misused for cheating, implementing effective preventative measures, and utilizing AI to promote integrity are essential steps in this endeavor. This article serves as a guide for educators, as it focuses on understanding, preventing, detecting, and responding to AI-assisted cheating.

What Does the Research Say?

Studies indicate a rising trend in AI-assisted cheating across educational levels. Best Colleges reported on a survey fielded by Pure Spectrum and administered to 1,000 undergraduate and graduate students in the fall of 2023, about one year after the release of ChatGPT. Students were asked about their thoughts on AI in higher education. Of the students surveyed, 56% admitted to using AI on assignments or exams. It should be noted that 53% of students surveyed reported using AI as part of their course requirements, and 79% indicated that their professor discussed the ethical use of AI (Nam, 2023).

A similar survey of college students from Intelligent.com determined that 90% of students were aware of ChatGPT, and 89% of those survey respondents reported using the platform to help with a homework assignment. Slightly less than half of the students admitted to using ChatGPT for a take-home test or quiz, 53% had it compose an essay, and one-fourth of the students had it write an outline for a paper (Westfall, 2023). Using AI to assist with or produce academic assignments is attractive to students. Access to these platforms is easy, and the cost associated with its use is minimal, if anything at all.

Study.com researched the perceptions of AI in early 2023 from the teacher's perspective. Of the 203 K-12 teachers they surveyed, they found that 80% had heard of ChatGPT, 43% felt like ChatGPT would make their job more difficult, 26% had caught a student cheating using ChatGPT, 72% had not received any guidance for the use of ChatGPT in the schools, and 67% do not think ChatGPT should be banned in schools (ChatGPT in the Classroom, 2024).
The reality of AI suggests that teachers should consider the ethical considerations and impacts it can have on students' academic integrity. The moral implications of AI-assisted cheating are significant. AI is here to stay, so it must be recognized and addressed. Cheating undermines the trust between educators and students, gives dishonest students unfair advantages, and impedes the development of essential skills needed for academic success and future careers. With AI, cheating becomes more effortless and instantaneous. This is appreciated by a generation of students who are used to having answers to questions literally in the palm of their hand.

Help Afforded

First and foremost, the dependence on AI can be mitigated. To do this, educators can implement several preventative measures. For one, teachers can focus on the way they design their assignments. Cotton, Cotton, and Shipway (2023) discussed that educators can develop assessments that compel students to showcase their problem-solving, communication, and higher-level thinking abilities by engaging them in group discussions, presentations, or various interactive exercises where they can apply their skills, understanding, and expertise.
Promoting open discussions with students about ethics to emphasize the importance of academic honesty is another way to minimize the abuse of AI. Openly discussing AI detection tools such as plagiarism checkers and specialized AI-detection software can be helpful and insightful for students. Learners need to understand that there are ways to identify AI-generated content. This could help reduce its misuse.

Now, an example. A sixth-grade teacher asks his students to respond to the following question: "In the novel "Walk Two Moons," how does Sal's journey to find her mother help her understand and cope with her feelings and experiences? Identify and explain key moments that illustrate her emotional growth." Here is a student's response:

"Sal's journey to find her mother in "Walk Two Moons" is a transformative experience that helps her understand and cope with her emotions. As she travels with her grandparents, Sal reflects on her memories and the stories she hears, which allows her to confront her feelings of loss and abandonment. Key moments, such as learning the truth about her mother's departure and coming to terms with her death, are crucial in her emotional growth. Through these experiences, Sal gains a deeper understanding of herself, her mother, and the importance of accepting life's challenges and changes." (ChatGPT, 2024).

As a teacher, ask yourself these questions when assessing this student's work. "Does this sound like a typical sixth-grade student response?" "Is the language typical of a sixth-grade student?" "Is it written with grammatical errors?" and "Does it resemble the student's previous work?" If you answer "no" to these questions, then the likelihood of AI assistance is high. For the record, this answer was 100% produced by AI.

As such, educators can identify AI-generated content through various indicators. Knowing how students write without assistance is essential to identifying misuse. Once a baseline of student work is established, it is easier for educators to recognize stylistic inconsistencies or student use of overly sophisticated language. Encouraging peer review and collaboration can also aid in detecting indiscretions in assignments and projects.

Establishing clear policies with defined consequences for AI-assisted cheating ensures fairness and consistency in educational practices. Educational interventions, workshops on academic integrity, and supportive measures for students who cheat can help educate students about ethical behavior.

A notable example of a university that has successfully implemented a plan for AI detection is the University of California, Berkeley (University of California, Berkeley, 2024). It has adopted a multi-faceted approach to detect AI-generated content and ensure academic integrity. Key components of the plan include:

- **AI Detection Software:** The university uses advanced AI detection tools like Turnitin's AI writing detection technology, which can identify text generated by AI language models.
- **Faculty Training:** Instructors are trained to recognize signs of AI-generated content and understand the capabilities and limitations of AI detection tools.
- **Student Education:** Students are educated about the ethical use of AI and the consequences of academic dishonesty. Workshops and resources are provided to help students understand how to properly use AI tools for learning without violating academic policies.
- **Policy Development:** Clear policies are established regarding the use of AI in academic work, outlining what is permissible and what constitutes misconduct.
- **Ongoing Research and Updates:** The university continually researches advancements in AI and updates its detection tools and policies accordingly to stay ahead of new developments.

This comprehensive approach has allowed UC Berkeley to effectively manage the challenges posed by AI-generated content and maintain academic integrity. Discussing the appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI with faculty and students is critical to learning how to navigate its use and mitigate potential issues.

Apart from having a solid policy in place to guide the use of AI, sharing lessons learned is another way that educators can begin to manage AI-related challenges effectively. Creating and recommending best practices that encourage a collaborative approach to tackling AI-assisted cheating across educational settings is a necessary step. Continuous dialogue, adaptation, and flexibility within the academic community are imperative for staying ahead of developing challenges.

Addressing AI-assisted cheating is crucial for maintaining academic integrity and ensuring a fair learning environment at all educational levels. Educators are encouraged to stay informed, proactive, and collaborative in navigating the complexities of AI in education. By understanding the tools, implementing preventative measures, detecting dishonest practices, and fostering

ethical behavior, educators can uphold the fundamental values of education in the digital age. By sharing knowledge, experiences, and strategies, we can collectively support academic integrity and promote genuine learning experiences for all students, ensuring that AI enhances rather than undermines educational outcomes. We teach. We understand. We offer hope.

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Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics: STEAM Creek Play: A Gateway to STEM and Citizen Science

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I grew up in the hills of Northwest Arkansas during a time when children were expected to play outside from sunup to sundown. I was lucky enough to live on the top of one of the rolling Ozark Mountains. My backyard was both steep and endless. At the bottom of the mountains were a series of forest creeks fed by free-flowing cataracts after a good rain. These valley brooks were a fertile playground for my older brother, my younger sister, and me. We imagined forest homes on the moss-covered outcrops. We spent hours hiding from the summer sun wading, flipping rocks, catching crawdads, and constructing our knowledge of the creatures that called these seasonal waterways home.

Figure 1. Just below the rocks smoothed by years in the river one can find an entire world of creatures that spend most of their lives tucked away in the crevices at the bottom of a creek bed. The Buffalo National River at Steel Creek Campground, Ponca, Arkansas.

These informal explorations laid the foundation for my love of science and the outdoors and continue to inform my commitment to water education for both children and adults. Creek play is a natural way to hone science process skills, to model or integrate STEAM practices, and to initiate children and adults into citizen science.

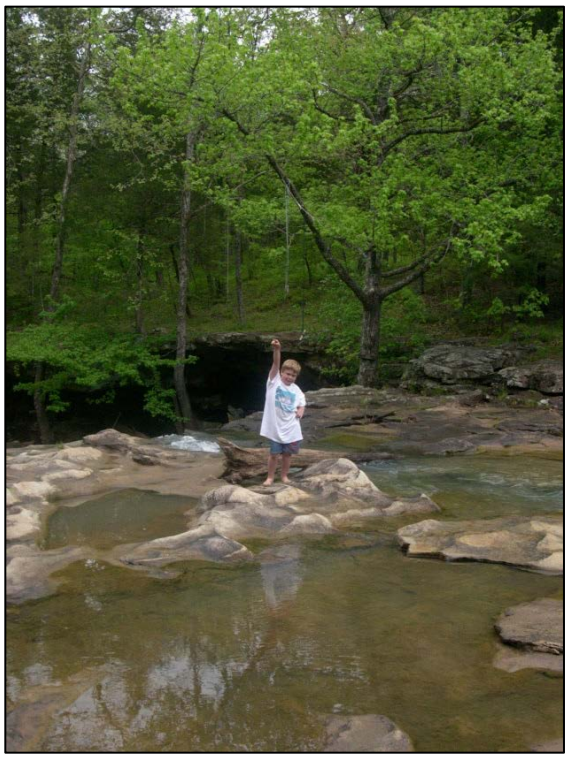

Figure 2. Five-year-old Orion looks for macroinvertebrates in the pools left during low water season at Falling Water Falls, Sand Gap, Arkansas.

Science process skills can be defined as a set of skills that can be transferred to many different science disciplines and that reflect how scientists engage in their disciplines. These skills are used by scientists regardless of their area and can be used by students both in and out of the classroom. Table 1 lists both basic and integrated process skills. Children of any age can practice their process skills while tromping through the waters of a nearby creek. Students can observe the changing seasons. They can sort a variety of artifacts found while exploring. These may include living and nonliving items to the classification of rocks or aquatic macroinvertebrates. My son, Orion, and I love sorting freshwater snails. Gilled snails open to the right while lunged snails open to the left. We were always delighted when we found gilled snails as they require well oxygenated water and indicate a much cleaner stream. Children can count the number of different creatures found from crane flies and dragonflies to water striders and water boatmen. We can make predictions about rainfall and water levels as well as inferences based on our previous visits to the creek. Encourage both children and adults to create models by making diagrams of the creatures they find, maps of the rivers and creeks they explore, or drawings of the artifacts they discovered. Keeping a nature journal is a great way to include modeling and communicating as well as collecting and interpreting data.

Table 1
Process Skills

Basic	Integrated
Observing	Making Models
Classifying	Defining Operationally
Measuring	Collecting Data
Inferring	Interpreting Data
Predicting	Identifying & Controlling Variables
Communicating	Formulating Hypotheses
Using Number Relationships	Experimenting

Source: The American Association for the Advancement of Science

STEAM education refers to the teaching and learning of multiple disciplines in an integrated fashion. These disciplines include science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A common misconception regarding STEAM is that all five disciplines must be present and in equal amounts. Another misconception regarding STEAM education is that technology must be something fancy, rare, sophisticated, or expensive. Technology can be defined as the "application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes" (Britannica.com) or the equipment or tools used by scientists in their various fields. When investigating a stream, we may use items like hand lenses or magnifying glasses, bug viewers, and kick nets. If we wish to take it further and collect data on water chemistry we may include items like thermometers, dissolved oxygen tablets and vials, Ph strips, and Secchi disks. Some of these items may sound fantastical but are often available locally. Secchi disks are a circle divided into quarters with alternating black and white sections. This can be printed and laminated and allows us to estimate the turbidity of the water.

Figure 3. A juvenile smooth softshell turtle found at the confluence of Town and Lytle Creeks in the heart of Murfreesboro, TN.

Citizen science is known by many names. It has been referred to as crowdsourcing or community science and even participatory science. It is quite simply, when the public participates voluntarily in the scientific process by collecting and analyzing data for scientific projects. Citizen science projects regarding freshwater and water monitoring have become increasingly popular across the globe. National Parks, environmental agencies, and state and local agencies have been relying on volunteers for data collection, data analysis, and water health monitoring.

As mentioned earlier, gilled snails indicate a cleaner water source than their lunged cousins who are able to breath by pocketing air in their shells. Aquatic macroinvertebrates can be used as bioindicators of stream health. Learning to identify and report these creatures can help scientists identify streams that are in good health or that may be at risk of being compromised. The Izaak Walton League of America has phenomenal resources for learning which macroinvertebrates are pollution sensitive (gilled snails and caddisflies) to those that are pollution tolerant (lunged snails and tubifex worms). They also have several opportunities to become engaged as citizen scientists.

Citizen science projects can vary from short term to long term projects. Participants can be anyone from individuals and families to classrooms or entire schools. Citizen sciences offers participants hands on, real life, opportunities to engage in science process skills and STEM. The benefits of engaging in citizen science are multifaceted. Benefits to the agencies engaging in research include volunteers to assist, increased data collection, and data analysis and monitoring. A benefit to participants is that we have firsthand experience engaging in the processes of science. Participating in citizen science has shown to increase scientific knowledge, awareness, and stewardship among volunteers. If you are interested in learning more about engaging in citizen science either as an individual, family, or classroom, consider investigating some of the ongoing projects listed in Table 2.

Table 2
Citizen Science Opportunities for Schools & Families

Izaak Walton League Stream Monitoring
https://www.iwla.org/water/stream-monitoring
Help ILW collect data on stream health through simple chemistry checks or through a survey of creek critters.

FreshWater Watch
https://www.freshwaterwatch.org/
Help monitor freshwater resources across the globe!

Project Hero
https://herofortheplanet.org/mnquest/teach/extending-your-quest/
Whether or not you live in Minnesota or are just visiting, there are a dozen different citizen science projects you can help with. From zebra mussel monitoring to lake level and lake ice reporting. You can find a list here!

CitizenScience.Gov
https://www.citizenscience.gov/catalog/#
Here you will find a list of 503 citizen science projects from gardening to stormwater management. With over 200 active projects across the United States, there are plenty to choose from. You can filter by agency (e.g., National Parks, NASA), by field or topic (e.g., Archeology, Biology), or status (e.g., active or complete).

National Phenology Network
https://www.usanpn.org/nn
Discover and document changes in nature near you!

Environmental Protection Agency
https://www.epa.gov/participatory-science/participatory-science-water-projects
Citizen science projects at this site are listed as "participatory science projects". You can find projects related to air and water quality as well as other environmental issues.

Figure 4. Eight-year-old Orion checks his live trap for small fish including darters, shiners, and chubs. The Buffalo National River at Steel Creek Campground, Ponca, Arkansas.

Regardless of whether or not you choose to engage in citizen science or to model science process skills I encourage you to visit a local creek for exploration. Playing in a river or creek can have many benefits to young children. Walking on the uneven gravel of a creek bed promotes stability and balance. Rivers are a cornucopia of sensory opportunities from the slippery, silty mud to the rocks tumbled smooth by the moving water. Children are drawn to water and they are naturally curious and the experiences and conversations they have while investigating a riparian habitat can be foundational to their future endeavors in STEAM.

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Families and Children: Health and Wellness
Filial Therapy for Children with Autism and their Caregivers: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of Filial Therapy (FT) as a potential treatment modality for connecting caregivers and their children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The article first discusses ASD, focusing on children who experience it and their caregivers. Then, it explores the benefits of play therapy for children with ASD, followed by an explanation of how FT can be used as a form of therapeutic play to facilitate connection between caregivers and their children with ASD. Finally, the article suggests future directions and recommendations for research on FT as an accessible and effective treatment option for supporting children with ASD.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Filial Therapy, children, caregivers, parents

Filial Therapy for Children with Autism and their Caregivers: A Literature Review

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder conceptualized through behavioral, developmental, and relational expressions that can include rigid and repetitive behaviors (RRB), deficits in communication, and reciprocal social interaction (APA, 2022). The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (AADM) Network conducted active surveillance monitoring to provide an updated prevalence rate among 1000 school-aged children across 11 network sites in the United States (Maenner et al., 2020). These methods included having diagnostic statements, ICD codes, and special education classification. Findings from the AADM Network indicated a remarkable increase in ASD from 6.7% in 2000 to 27.6% in 2020, concluding one in 36 children are classified with ASD (Maenner et al., 2020). Maenner et al., (2020) found that 37.9% of the children classified with ASD were present with an intellectual disability. In addition, learning disabilities and psychiatric comorbidities, including depression, traits of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorders, and general "emotional and behavioral problems," are reportedly more common in children with ASD than typically developing children (Spain et al., 2017). Collectively, these findings point to an overall increase in the prevalence of children experiencing ASD.

Behavioral, Developmental, and Relational Expressions of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Rigid and Repetitive Behaviors

RRB is a core feature in ASD classified as common behaviors characterized by a desire for sameness in one's environment, or use of objects, or speech, repetitive motor, and high frequency (APA, 2022). Although children with ASD have common RRB, each child is unique, and their fixed interests and repetitive behaviors may manifest differently. However, these challenges cause extreme distress in day-to-day functions by interfering with social interactions, shared interests with others, and limiting flexibility. These behaviors can often lead to challenges related to social rejection, self-esteem, academic achievement, and independence while affecting their family/community interactions (Shiloh et al., 2023).

Communication Needs

Children with ASD have a unique set of challenges and strengths varying by severity and frequency through communication, interaction, and RRBs. An important concern in children with ASD is their impairments in functional receptive and expressive communication skills. Researchers examining intervention studies to improve expressive communication in children with ASD suggested that highly verbal and minimally/nonverbal children encompass a diverse group with varied symptomology and found that a third of children will remain minimally or completely nonverbal (Koegal et al., 2019). The researchers' literature highlighted children with ASD produced their first words at an average age of 36 months compared to typically developing children who produced their first words between 10 and 18 months (Koegal et al., 2019). These verbal difficulties may create barriers by hindering children with ASD to limited vocabulary, delayed language development, or difficulty effectively conveying their thoughts and needs. Throughout their lifespan, their functioning may be negatively affected by the quality of their

verbal language; some instances may include academic performance, socialization, and employment.

Reciprocal Social Interactions

Children with ASD have implications with social communication and interactions through various contexts recognized in their second year of life (Reichenberg & Seligman, 2016). Children with autism may struggle to grow socially and emotionally in a pattern like their typically developing peers. They frequently have difficulties initiating and joining in play, understanding turn-taking, building friendships, and generally enjoying reciprocal social interactions (Salter et al., 2016). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2022), notable characteristics contributing to social implications include a lack of emotional reciprocity, a lack of seeking to share interests or achievements with others, and an impairment with many nonverbal behaviors, including face-gazing behavior, a lower incidence of smiling, and body posture. These contribute to lifelong difficulties for children with ASD by reciprocating social interaction, communicating with others, and creating meaningful relationships (APA, 2022).

Caregivers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The extent of ASD impairments widely varies by its foundational characteristics with severity based on social communication impairments and RRB. There are three severity levels of ASD: Level 1- requiring support, Level 2- requiring substantial support, and Level 3- requiring very substantial support (APA, 2022). Depending on the level of severity and impairments for children with ASD, it can impact relationships with family members, create stress and frustration, and lead to problem behaviors that might progress to difficulties throughout the lifespan (Spain et al., 2017).

While there is substantial variability in the expression of ASD symptoms, many children with ASD need lifelong assistance in daily life, usually provided by family members, especially parents (Musetti et al., 2021). The complicated nature of this disorder disrupts the balance and work routines in the family, impacting the intensity of parental stress (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Moreover, parents of a child with ASD may perceive their child differently than other children with disabilities and create assumptions that their child is less attached based on their relational expression (Rodriguez et al., 2021).

Play Therapy

Play is a child's natural means of expression and the vehicle through which children make sense of the world, cope with their stresses and difficulties, improve their developmental skills, model new behaviors and understandings, gain mastery, and develop interpersonal skills (Ginsberg, 2012). Child-centered play therapy has been recognized as an essential evidence-based intervention for supporting children and adolescents with various social, emotional, and behavioral challenges (Ray & Bratton, 2010). Multiple published meta-analytic reviews have assessed the effectiveness of play therapy. For example, Bratton and colleagues (2005) administered a meta-analysis of 93 play therapy studies between 1942 and 2000. These researchers found that

participants who received play therapy significantly increased appropriate behaviors while reducing the number of unwanted behaviors.

An evaluation of 42 play therapy studies found that participants who received play therapy increased their peer relationships, classroom issues, and overall functioning (Leblanc & Ritchie, 2001). Researchers who studied the impact of play-based interventions on mental health outcomes from children with ASD found a decrease in deficits and problematic behaviors with a significant increase in social interaction and language skills (Francis et al., 2022). The examiners suggested that play increases receptive and expressive vocabulary, and a strong link has been found between symbolic play skills and functional abilities of children with ASD (Francis et al., 2022). Considering research supporting the reduction of unwanted behaviors, a strong case could be made for using play therapy for children with autism. However, within the area of research regarding how to increase parental connection with their younger children who have been diagnosed with ASD, there is limited research identifying the benefits of play therapy, specifically filial therapy.

Filial Therapy

FT was developed in the early 1960s by Bernard and Louise Guerney (Topham & VanFleet, 2011). The Guerneys were familiar with the effectiveness of play therapy in treating children's behavioral, social, and emotional challenges and presumed parents could be instructed to conduct special play sessions with their children, like a play therapist (Topham & VanFleet, 2011). A central assumption of FT is that the most important relationship in cultivating a child's adjustment is the primary caregiver.

FT is an innovative outgrowth of child-centered play therapy in which parents receive training, supervision, and support as they embark on learning how to conduct therapeutic play sessions with their children (Cornett & Bratton, 2015). This comprehensive approach also integrates several theoretical orientations, including attachment, developmental, humanistic, interpersonal, psychodynamic, behavioral, and social learning theories (Topham & VanFleet, 2011). FT was created to treat a wide range of childhood presenting problems such as attachment, anxiety, aggression, chronic illness, and disabilities.

Implementing Filial Therapy

The Topham and VanFleet (2011) model of FT offers interrelated techniques for caregivers to support children. These techniques include structuring, empathic listening, child-centered imaginary play, and limit setting. Structuring involves teaching caregivers how to initiate and conclude play sessions, drawing attention to the importance of managing transitions for children. Empathic listening involves motivating caregivers to temporarily suspend their thoughts and feelings to fully attend to a child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors through the therapeutic skill of reflection. Child-centered imaginary play involves encouraging caregivers to engage in pretend play with a child, initiated and led entirely by the child. Limit setting supports caregivers in maintaining safety and boundaries during play sessions, which involve communicating in a firm tone of voice and maintaining an empathic presence. Together, these skills can help caregivers cultivate an environment of therapeutic play that invites children to openly express their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a safe environment.

Evaluating Filial Therapy

Ginsberg (2012) concluded that FT was a powerful intervention that increased "parental acceptance, self-esteem, empathy, positive changes in a family environment, and the child's adjustment and self-esteem while decreasing parental stress and the child's behavioral problems" (p. 9). This integrated approach empowers parents to engage in playful interactions with their children, beginning in the playroom and later transferring learned skills into daily interactions and experiences, improving the parent-child relationship (Griffin & Parsons, 2023). Examiners conducted an experimental control group using pre/post-test assessments for the evaluation of parent-child interactions using FT with their children who have ASD (Kiyani et al., 2020). The researchers discovered strong empirical support for concluding positive parent-child relationship characteristics by accepting their child's need for autonomy and independence, which decreased parental stress (Kiyani et al., 2020). These findings are congruent with Cornett and Bratton's (2015) findings of experiences for participating children and parents with FT, particularly in decreasing child behavior problems and increasing parental awareness of and sensitivity to children's feelings and needs. These findings support the vital role families have in a child's healing journey.

Implications

Researchers suggest play therapy to be a culturally sensitive approach that includes a client's age, gender, and presenting problems (Bratton et al., 2005). Therapists utilizing CCPT techniques within FT offer a nondirective, warm, and genuine approach to utilize the therapeutic relationship as the focus toward healing (Bratton et al., 2005). This approach gives clients the space to process their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors safely. Additionally, the fundamental principles of CCPT provide clients with unconditional positive regard and support for their autonomy within the therapeutic process.

The parent-child relationship is a unique bond that can nurture one's emotional, physical, and social development throughout a lifetime. This interaction process is established biologically or adoptively between a parent or caregiver and a child. According to Roy and Aneesh (2022), the parent development theory noted how parents can serve as active agents in strengthening the parent-child relationship through parental awareness of their child's developmental changes and needs. Mowder (2005) states, "The parent role is partially an individual creation in that people conceptualize parenting based on their own prior experiences in a parent-child relationship, their thoughts and feelings about being a parent, and their child-rearing expertise and understanding" (p. 46). However, the parenting role and responsibilities for those who have children with ASD may look different than typically developing children when presented with challenging behaviors.

Researchers conducted a meta-synthesis to explore parenting strategies with children diagnosed with ASD, resulting in the severity of problematic behavior, including extreme irritability, aggression, inappropriate behavior in public, persistent non-compliance, challenging behavior, and anxiety (O'Nions et al., 2017). The findings of this study suggest significant parental stress can be associated with the targeted problematic behaviors and efforts of parenting strategies resulting in having to accommodate their children by following the child's unique routines

sameness, planning activities to reduce the risk of problem behavior, and adjusting expectations based on their child's moods (O'Nions et al., 2017). Therefore, children with ASD often depend on their family members for high levels of support with daily living and self-sufficiency skills, leading to an increase in extreme distress. Spain and colleagues (2017) conducted an extensive review containing 3273 records for the effectiveness of family therapy with individuals with ASD. They found parents exhibiting higher levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and fatigue symptoms than those reported for parents of typically developing children (Spain et al., 2017). Across these studies, higher levels of parental stress associated with children diagnosed with ASD were noted compared to those of typically developing children, which may negatively affect the parent-child relationship. These researchers who focused on the quality of life in children diagnosed with ASD and their families collected extensive literature within one year, suggesting that parental involvement in family-focused interventions can positively impact the parent-child relationship (Musetti et al., 2021).

Future Directions and Recommendations

The importance of identifying effective treatments for children who experience ASD is a growing concern. Currently, an evidence-based approach used most frequently for treating ASD is applied behavioral analysis (ABA), which focuses more on behavior and stimuli (Hillman, 2018). Although researchers demonstrated ABA to be effective in altering one's behavior, there is a demand for addressing the whole child through relational dynamics for the betterment of the well-being of children experiencing ASD (Hillman, 2018). Within FT, the therapist uses the therapeutic relationship as the guide for teaching parents how to target and modify behaviors while children control the content, pace, and direction (Ray et al., 2012). Due to the nature of FT heavily influencing communication through play, neurodivergent children who exhibit more acute symptoms, such as partaking in repetitive behaviors that interfere with overall functioning or hardly initiating interactions and minimal responses to social approaches, may have a more difficult time engaging in treatment (Hillman, 2018). With a limited review of research, the effectiveness of FT is unclear with children presenting with severe symptoms. Therefore, an intriguing question to examine is comparing the effectiveness of FT in children with more acute symptoms to children with less severe symptoms. In addition, counselors and children can benefit from further research regarding the need to narrow the gap between FT as an effective treatment intervention in increasing their interpersonal dynamics and social-emotional well-being for children with ASD.

Most importantly, the benefit of FT encourages children and parents to advance effective social skills, enhance openness, create a safe environment for expression, and develop secure attachment in the parent-child relationship. Researchers can further explore the concept of play for all children, regardless of their developmental or special needs. Play is a child's most natural means of communication. Through play, young children learn about reality and their world. They experiment with pretend roles and come to know themselves, specifically their abilities and strengths (Smith & Landreth, 2004). The improved parent-child relationship fosters greater collaboration, reducing conflict and negativity while improving family stability. Although there is no cure for ASD, combinational treatment interventions such as reducing the impact and effects of core ASD symptoms and supporting parents by enhancing their knowledge of skills throughout their lifespan with FT can enhance a meaningful quality of life.

Contributions to parental stress, societal factors, and emotional and psychological distress in families with ASD need to be further examined. Over the lifespan, children's needs develop, and parenting strategies are consistently adjusting. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the impact of parental stress throughout these changes to better serve families with children who experience ASD.

Conclusion

This review provides insight into how FT can be taught as a complementary intervention with families of ASD children. FT teaches caregivers new skills and a deeper understanding of their children to become therapeutic agents. Furthermore, the parent-child relationship plays a vital role in both attachment and the development of social and emotional competencies and is emphasized in FT. Based on existing literature, FT shows promise for supporting healthy caregiver interactions for children on the autism spectrum (Ashori et al., 2021).

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Play Therapy: Development, Learning, and Therapy
Classroom Calming Corners: Peaceful Spaces for Times of Transition

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Abstract

In a school environment, it is important to have a response strategy when students experience dysregulation of their emotions. Promoting social and emotional learning assists students in developing these skills. Mindfulness is one practice that helps students de-escalate when their emotions begin to elevate. One strategy, a classroom calming corner, is an area of the room equipped with soft furnishings and soothing materials to help students return to equilibrium so that they are able to remain in the learning environment. Data from the findings reveal that calming corners in one elementary school classroom and one middle school classrooms were successful and valuable for students returning to a state of equilibrium. Overall, students and teachers reported satisfaction with using the calming corners.

Keywords: Classroom calming corner, emotional regulation, mindfulness, social and emotional learning

The rapid expansions of social and emotional learning (SEL) research and interventions that Jones & Bouffard (2012) noted over a decade ago has since only accelerated. In the wake of the positive findings from Durlak et al.'s (2011) sweeping meta-analysis, major developments on the SEL front include the integration of disparate SEL viewpoints (National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2018) and the implementation of our growing knowledge of SEL by policymakers (Dusenbury et al., 2019). To verify the findings of Durlak et al.'s (2011) seminal study, Cipriano et al.'s (2023) follow-up meta-analysis confirmed that the subsequent progress has continued a trend of SEL programming's positive, far-reaching impact. Although the effectiveness of these programs, which focus on addressing students' emotional and interpersonal skills and social problem-solving abilities, are dependent upon the quality of their implementation and interventions, Cipriano et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 424 experimental and quasi-experimental studies found that, compared to control groups, participating students were more likely to have improved attitudes, relationships, academic achievement, and positive school-related behaviors.

Background and Evidence for SEL's Effectiveness

In what is considered one of the most significant documents in the history of SEL education, Elias et al. (1997) pointed out the universal desire for schools to go beyond academics and provide children with a foundation for becoming caring and responsible citizens. To do so, the authors espouse the importance of helping young people develop social-emotional competence, which they define as "the ability to understand, manage, and express social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development" (p. 2). These competencies have since been further defined and categorized; Jones et al.'s (2021) framework places SEL skills within three broad domains: social/interpersonal skills, emotional processes, and cognitive regulation. They further posit that SEL fosters a set of beliefs within the learner, all pertaining to their identity, perspectives, and values.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning's (CASEL; 2024) more established framework organizes SEL competencies across five interrelated domains: *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills,* and *responsible decision-making*. Collectively referred to as the CASEL 5, each area encapsulates the necessary proficiencies and attitudes for identity development, emotional regulation, healthy relationship building, goal setting, and empathic understanding. These broad conceptualizations allow for SEL to serve as an umbrella term for many subfields of psychology and neuroscience—each with a particular focus on emotion regulation, prosocial skills, and aggressive behavior problems—and many educational interventions, such as bullying, character education, conflict resolution, and social skills training (National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2018).

SEL skill development begins in the earliest years and continues throughout childhood and adolescence, influenced by relationships and social environments through informal interactions as well as structured programs (Meland & Brion-Meisels, 2023; Pacheco & Xiong, 2023). As widespread awareness and the resulting policymaking have caught up with the research, the CASEL 5 have been implemented as part of learning standards from preschool through high school (CASEL, 2024). Self-awareness, in the context of the CASEL 5, involves our ability to recognize our cognitions and emotions as they occur. Self-management helps us regulate these inner feelings and thoughts, allowing us to more readily navigate stressful experiences. Social awareness involves an understanding of and empathy for others, and then our relationship skills help us with our ability to communicate effectively, cooperate, and resolve conflicts. Finally, responsible decision making involves our evaluation of meaningful information and the subsequent choices we make with consideration of our impact on the well-being of others.

According to Jones et al.'s (2021) evaluation of what are considered leading SEL programs, the most effective SEL programs have five things in common. First, they incorporate elements of SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. Second, these programs occur within supportive contexts. Third, they build the competencies of the adults who are administering the programs. Fourth, SEL programs are equitable and sensitive to trauma. Finally, they set reasonable short- and long-term goals.

SEL programs by design are in a natural alignment with concerns surrounding multiculturalism and social justice, which have seen a resurgence in recent years (Jones et al., 2021). SEL curricula are conducive to the principles of inclusion, with program emphases on identity development, perspective taking, and celebration of people’s differences. Some programs go a step further, providing culturally relevant pedagogy to help students make connections between SEL and their cultural background, considered particularly relevant for ethnically-diverse or low socioeconomic status (SES) students (Crain, 2022). From a neurodiversity perspective, students with cognitive disabilities such as autism have also been found to benefit from these practices, particularly with helping teachers better understand these students based on the training they receive for teaching SEL (Kim & Ballin, 2023). The trauma-informed nature of SEL interventions has proven especially beneficial for students who have had adverse childhood experiences (Jones et al., 2021).

Although the implementation of SEL programs is a school-wide effort, it is the classroom itself in which SEL lessons have the opportunity for the greatest impact (Cipriano et al., 2023). Interventions that are considered most effective involve coupling an explicit lesson on an SEL concept, such as self-regulation, with concrete, practical strategies, such as regulating one's emotions by recognizing when it is time to walk away from a contentious situation (Lin, 2021). Other strategies taught through SEL lessons may include feelings check-ins with the teacher, journaling about emotions, or creating imaginary umbrellas as protection from hurtful words. Children may also be taught to identify the strategies that they know work best for them, such as a recognition that an activity such as reading helps them feel calm. SEL interventions, particularly the ones designed to improve self-regulation and self-awareness, appear to share either explicit or implicit connections to the now well-researched concept of mindfulness (Ewert, 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Lawlor, 2016; Lin, 2021).

The Mindful Element to SEL

Mindfulness is a nonjudgmental, non-elaborative awareness of the present moment, acknowledging and accepting feelings, thoughts, and sensations as they arise (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness can be attributed to the regulation of attention on "experiences in the present moment, an orientation or curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al, 2004, p. 232). Proponents believe that the conscious awareness of the present that we build through mindfulness practice improves our emotional regulation and the compassion we have for ourselves and others (Siegel et al., 2016).

Unsurprisingly, given the large degree of overlap between purported mindfulness benefits and SEL programmatic aims, mindfulness-based interventions have found their way into SEL curricula (Semple et al., 2017; Siegel et al., 2016). Mindfulness's focus on improving our conscious awareness and emotional regulation aligns with the CASEL (2024) domains of self-awareness and self-management, respectively (Siegel et al., 2016). Further, the self-oriented nature of these two domains may make them ideal starting points for SEL curricula to target, especially in light of Cipriano et al.'s (2023) research suggesting that SEL programs were more effective when they taught intrapersonal skills before interpersonal skills. When appropriately emphasized, self-awareness and self-regulation may help counterbalance the "herd instinct" that emerges in primary school-aged children, allowing them the opportunity to engage with the interpersonally-focused CASEL domains by first knowing themselves better, allowing them to become less reactive and more conscious of how they respond to the actions of others (Association Montessori International [AMI], 2024; CASEL, 2024; Cipriano et al., 2023).

Jones et al. (2021) aptly noted that SEL's incorporation of mindfulness techniques can help foster a sense of calm and focus. Interventions may take the form of mindful breathing, focusing on bodily sensations, and even forms of meditation (Lawlor, 2016). Contemplative practices like yoga, tai chi, and even listening to the birds on a nature walk are particularly helpful for sustained attention, and they are considered useful for developing both self-awareness and self-regulation. Stated benefits are not just anecdotal: randomized-controlled trials testing the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions have been found to lead to improvements in cognitive and emotional control and regulation, attention, optimism, and executive functioning broadly, among other benefits (Andreu et al., 2023; Flook et al., 2010; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

A Calm Space in the Classroom

One such mindfulness-related intervention that has gained traction for promoting a sense of calm and focus in the classroom is the calming corner (Ewert, 2023). A calming corner is a quiet area of the classroom, typically equipped with soft furnishing and soothing materials that are expressly designed to allow students to practice mindfulness-based strategies to help them return to and maintain a sense of calm when they become overwhelmed or upset (Crain, 2022; Skinner, 2020). Whether referred to as calming corners, calm down or cool down corners, regulation or relaxation stations, peace corners, or calming or calm down stations, the overall goal is the same: give students time away to identify and manage their emotions, practice calming strategies, and prevent further emotional escalation so they can better focus on classroom instruction (Action for Healthy Kids, 2024; Crain, 2022; Dixon, 2016; Dumitrescu, 2023; Jefferson Center, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Lin, 2021; Maich et al., 2019; Pacheco & Xiong, 2023).

Since Lantieri's (2008) pilot of one of the first calming corners, the concept has risen in popularity, even finding its way into popular media such as television shows and social media reels (Fielder, 2023; @variahaworth, 2023). Besides the positive impact on students, teachers may also stand to benefit. One study's utilization of calming corners improved teachers' perspectives toward problem behaviors in students when their emotions were better managed, helping teachers become aware that "students were not the problem but that they may sometimes have a problem…." (Kim & Ballin, 2023, p. 11).

There is no shortage of instruction and opinions on how calming corners may be designed and implemented (Maich et al., 2019; Plastino, 2024; Sager, 2024; Watson Institute, 2019), and premade kits are even available for purchase to help jumpstart the process (Amazon, 2024). Balancing safety and privacy with the need to monitor potentially-distressed students, all while working with the existing infrastructure of the classroom, serves as a challenge that leads educators to different conclusions as to what their classroom's calming corner may look like (Maich et al., 2019). However, creating entry and exit procedures, providing soothing tools, and fostering a general atmosphere of relaxation are some practical guidelines for incorporating a calming corner in the classroom. Further, calming corners are never used as punishment for misbehavior, only presented as an option for any student who needs some time away from classroom instruction to work through difficult emotions before returning their focus to the lesson (Craig, n.d.). Calming corners, in combination with other SEL interventions, have been shown to be effective for promoting a sense of calm in children who have historically had to bear the brunt of society's most emotionally dysregulating experiences, including children who are racial minorities, living in poverty, neurodiverse, and trauma-inflicted (Craig, n.d.; Crain, 2022; Kim & Ballin, 2023).

The Present Study

As more research is conducted on this mindfulness-derived SEL intervention, little has been said regarding its application for children at age or grade-specific transitional periods in their lives, a time in which children are likely at a relatively higher risk of experiencing emotional dysregulation as they adjust to a new environment. Lawlor (2016) promoted mindfulness

strategies more broadly for transitional periods during the day when children were going to and from the classroom and switching between classroom activities. Diaz (2022) made specific mention of calming corners as an important addition to classrooms as children were returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, a tumultuous period in the lives of many children who likely benefitted from increased attention to calming strategies.

However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no studies have narrowed their research to focus specifically on grades that are heavily associated with major transitions in the lives of children. First grade is considered especially important for developing literacy skills; inadequate development of foundational skills have been found to lead to continued reading challenges through fourth grade (Mader, 2021). It is also a time of significant change when first graders often face new routines and expectations, as well as classrooms that often look very different than that of kindergarten (Breiseth, 2024). Given that first-grade children are already at a time in their lives when emotions often run high, the need for self-regulation is particularly critical to avoid disruption of their scholastic experience and the classroom climate as a whole (Wilson, 2011).

Another period of major change in a child's life is the transition from elementary to middle school, which is often a milestone they reach when going into the sixth grade (Morin, n.d.). Developmentally, sixth graders are engaging in the early stages of identity formation and establishing some independence, but they may also experience more emotional lows at this time in their lives (Healthwise, 2020). These mental and emotional changes occur alongside their bodies' physical changes as well, all while students are navigating what is typically a brand-new environment with many new and unfamiliar people (Gilewski & Nunn, 2016). Compared to first graders, students at this age are at risk of becoming overwhelmed by these sudden changes; therefore, a mindfulness-based SEL intervention may be especially impactful and sorely needed.

The present study sought to add to the existing research on calming corners by further examining their effectiveness for two grade levels marked by major transition periods in the lives of children: first and sixth graders. We hypothesized that consistent with previous findings, students and teachers would rate their subjective experiences with calming corners positively and consider its utilization a success for their well-being and the classroom climate as a whole.

Methodology

This research was performed at an elementary school and a middle school operated by a large public research university in the southeastern region of the United States during the 2021-2022 school year. The materials for two classroom calming corners were purchased with a $1000 grant awarded to the first two authors by the university's research consortium (see Appendix A for inclusion of materials), the purpose of which was to provide seed money to obtain preliminary findings to apply for larger research grants. Although calming corners can be used across all ages, both at school and at home, this study focused on first-grade students who are new to a more structured learning environment and sixth-grade students who have recently transitioned to middle school. The classrooms selected were based on teachers' self-nomination and school administration approval to ensure that they would be placed in classrooms with teachers who wanted to utilize the intervention. Before beginning the study, the teachers were provided with

an introductory video explaining the purpose of the classroom calming corners, how to implement them in the classroom, and the assessment instruments.

Assessment Instruments

This study utilized a self-report survey based on identified surveys to collect first-hand information from students in middle and elementary school students. Data was collected through surveys that utilized statement items with rating scales: Student Self Report Self-Regulation Questionnaire (pre and post), Child Intervention Rating Profile (post), and Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (post). Additionally, within the calming corners, students measured their subjective unit of discomfort (SUD) on their individual log sheets.

After parental consent and student assent were obtained, students completed the Student Self Report Self-Regulation Questionnaire: Fast Track Project Child Behavior Questionnaire, which is a 20-item questionnaire designed to measure the self-regulation skills of children and adolescents (Bandy & Moore, 2010). Students completed the same questionnaire at the conclusion of the project.

To enhance the use of the Calming Corner intervention, teacher and student social validity measures were obtained from the participants. Student and teachers' perceptions of the intervention were obtained through a post-intervention survey known as the Child Intervention Rating Profile (CIRP; 8 items) and the Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (TIRP; 12 items). The CIRP and TIRP were adapted from the original Intervention Rating Profile (IRP) developed by researchers Witt and Martens (1983). The CIRP and TIRP were adapted to work as a measure for this study to extend research in treatment acceptability to classroom-based mindfulness treatments from both the student and teacher perspectives. These subjective measures were obtained through student and teacher self-report about their perceptions of the intervention and how helpful it was for supporting student wellness, emotional regulation, and mindfulness in the classroom setting. This form of assessment is known as social validity. Social validity measures may help us to identify common features of procedures that are likely to be adopted and persist in a specific environment overtime by being deemed acceptable by the participants (Common & Lane, 2017).

Participants' ability to communicate and utilize learned self-regulation skills from the calming corner intervention was obtained using Subjective Units of Discomfort Scales (SUDS), or Feelings Thermometers, administered throughout the classroom-based intervention. This scale, developed by Joseph Wolpe (1969), is a self-assessment tool rated on a scale from 0 (low discomfort) to 10 (high discomfort). The SUDS is a subjective tool the clinician uses to evaluate student progress and the success of the student's current treatment and intervention. Although the data for SUDS is not reported in this study, it provided students with the ability to self-reflect on their SUDS before and after each use of the calming corner which may have impacted their other survey responses.

Results

First, the researchers reviewed the pre/post test data from the Student Self Report Self-regulation Questionnaire. Students ranked each of the 20 items on a scale of 1-4: 1 = all of the time, 2 = most of the time, 3 = some of the time, and 4 = none of the time. Items 4, 5, 15, and 19 were reverse scored and recoded before data analysis. Lower scores indicate an ability to self-regulate. Most questionnaire items showed a decrease in scores for both first-grade and sixth-grade students, which indicated an increase in ability to self-regulate. However, first graders' scores changed more, especially for items related to coping and personal control (1, 2, 5, 6, and 10). Table 1 below summarizes the results from pre and post-tests.

Table 1

Student Self Report Self-regulation Questionnaire

	Campus Middle (*N*=80)			Campus Elementary (*N*=19)		
Items	Pretest *M*	Posttest *M*	Change	Pretest *M*	Posttest *M*	Change
Q1: I wait my turn during activities.	1.75	1.63	-.12	2.00	1.39	-.61
Q2: I cope well with disappointment or frustration.	2.54	2.56	+.02	2.65	1.94	-.71
Q3. I accept it when things do not go my way.	2.15	2.06	-.09	2.06	1.73	-.33
Q4: My feelings get hurt.	2.36	2.36	No Change	2.11	2.00	-.11
Q5: When I get upset, I whine or complain.	1.63	1.64	+.01	2.22	1.71	-.51
Q6: I control my temper when there is a disagreement.	2.49	2.24	-.25	2.44	1.78	-.66
Q7: I stop and calm down when I am frustrated or upset.	2.49	2.34	-.15	2.22	1.84	-.38
Q8: I think before I act.	2.41	2.18	-.23	2.22	1.76	-.46

Q9: I do what I am told to do.	1.71	1.74	+.03	1.72	1.63	-.09
Q10: When I want something, I am patient when waiting.	2.08	1.91	-.17	2.39	1.75	-.64
Q11: I follow the rules.	1.76	1.62	-.14	1.71	1.50	-.21
Q12: I stick with an activity until it is finished.	1.95	2.01	+.06	1.67	1.35	-.32
Q13: I can concentrate and focus on one activity at a time.	2.12	1.99	-.13	1.89	1.94	+.05
Q14: I ignore kids who are fooling around in class.	2.22	2.23	+.01	2.11	1.64	-.47
Q15: I fight to argue with adults.	1.51	1.45	-.06	1.82	1.50	-.32
Q16: I tell new kids my name without being asked to tell it.	2.48	2.41	-.07	2.28	2.06	-.22
Q17: When people are angry with me, I control my anger.	2.34	2.33	-.01	1.94	2.00	+.06
Q18: When someone tells me a rule that I think is unfair, I ask about the rule in a nice way.	2.29	2.30	+.01	2.00	1.93	-.07
Q19: When I disagree with my parents, I yell and scream.	1.47	1.39	-.08	1.78	1.46	-.32
Q20: I ask friends for help with my problems.	2.37	2.38	+.01	2.00	2.44	+.44

At the conclusion of the project, students who utilized the calming corner were asked to complete a satisfaction survey. This eight-item form is an adapted version of the Child Intervention Rating Profile. Students ranked their agreement with the statements on a scale ranging from 1-6, with 1 = "I agree" and 6 = "I do not agree". The lower the score, the higher the rate of satisfaction, with the exception of higher scores on items 3 and 4, indicating a higher rate of satisfaction. The lowest scores (highest satisfaction) for both grade levels concerned the usefulness of the calming corner for themselves and other students (items 5 and 6). Table 2 below shows the results of the survey.

Table 2

Adapted Child Intervention Rating Profile

Items	Campus Middle (*N*=55) *M*	Campus Elementary (*N*=17) *M*
1. The calming corner support program was useful.	2.25	3.24
2. I think the calming corner intervention helped me.	2.42	3.53
3. Using the Calming Corner intervention caused social problems with my friends.*	5.13	5.19
4. There were better ways to teach me how to address my social-emotional needs in the classroom.*	3.30	3.56
5. This program could help other kids, too.	1.75	1.41
6. I liked the calming corner intervention we used.	1.85	1.59
7. Being in this calming corner intervention helped me to regulate and interact more appropriately in the classroom when upset.	2.76	2.82
8. Being in this calming corner study helped me feel more connected to my teachers, classroom, and peers.	3.24	2.31

*Reverse scored-Higher score indicates greater satisfaction for these items.

Students were able to leave comments about the calming corner on this form. Some students commented that they never used the calming corner, and those forms were removed before analysis. However, several students who did not attend also commented that they thought the calming corner was a good idea, observed it helping their friends, and thought it would help others. Themes in students' comments that used the calming corner include overall satisfaction and liking the materials (playdough, stress balls, slime, and fidgets). A few students mentioned that there needed to be more than one because often, when they wanted to use it, it was already occupied. Another student commented that she wished there was a way to use the calming corner

without having to explain why. Below are some student comments about calming corners (all from middle schoolers):

"The [calming] corner was very useful and helped me with some of my emotions and how I was feeling."

"The calming corner made me more happier when I came out."

"The calming corner helped me to relax when I got frustrated or angry. I loved the stress balls and the slime."

"I think it was very helpful and it really made me calm down when I had a big project due soon."

Additionally, at the end of the intervention, teachers completed the Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (TIRP), a 12-item survey instrument regarding teachers' satisfaction with the intervention on a 6-point scale, with 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. The higher the score, the greater the satisfaction. The results indicated that these two teachers were generally satisfied with using the classroom calming corners. One teacher also mentioned that she enjoyed using the calming corner herself. Due to the larger standard deviation in item number 7 ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.4$) as compared to the other items, the researchers wondered if the teachers understood this item or if the double negative was confusing. Means and standard deviations for the TIRP are included in Table 3.

Table 3

Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (N = 2)

Items	*M*	*SD*
1. This integrated classroom support would be an acceptable intervention for the community for supporting mental health and SEL needs of children in classrooms.	5.00	0.00
2. Most people and participants would find this classroom support appropriate for supporting knowledge, awareness, and the SEL needs of children within classroom setting.	5.00	0.00
3. The classroom calming corners should prove effective in changing in the school beliefs about embedding SEL into the classroom environment.	4.50	0.71
4. I would suggest the use of the calming corner supports within other classrooms.	5.00	0.00
5. This school's children's needs related to SEL are significant enough to warrant use of the calming corner intervention.	5.00	0.00

6. I would be willing to use the knowledge I obtained in this project moving forward in my classrooms.	5.00	0.00
7. The calming corner supports in the classroom did not result in negative side effects for me as a participant/teacher.	4.00	1.41
8. The calming corner intervention would be appropriate for other teachers and classrooms in this school.	5.00	0.00
9. The calming corner intervention for classrooms is much needed intervention.	5.00	0.00
10. I liked the procedures used in the calming corner program and intervention.	4.50	0.71
11. The calming corner intervention was a good way to handle the multiple SEL needs of children in the classroom.	4.50	0.71
12. Overall, this classroom support intervention model would be beneficial for the school/district at large.	5.00	0.00

Discussion

Based on the data gathered and presented in this article, calming corners at these laboratory schools appeared to be successful and useful for students. Overall, students and teachers reported being satisfied with the calming corners. For future studies, other methods of gathering data might be considered, such as different assessment forms, student, teacher, and caregiver focus groups, or surveys. Additionally, implementing the calming corners with more students, teachers, and schools will allow for more advanced statistical analyses and generalizability.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the small sample size, sample setting, and survey method of data collection, which impacted the data analyses of this study. Due to the small sample size, the data analysis in this exploratory study leaned toward descriptive statistics. Implementing the calming corners with more students and teachers would allow for more advanced statistical testing rather than simply descriptive statistics. A laboratory school is created and backed by a university or an institution to train teachers. Their goals are three-fold: education, training, and research. This structure provides a natural link between education and research to develop and test new approaches to model best practices. Data collected from different settings may produce a different result than laboratory schools due to how they are set up and their overall goals of educating, training, and research (Wilcox-Herzog et al., 2013). Surveys were used to gather data from a predefined group of participants. The survey method is one of the most effective and trustworthy methods to collect data; however, it has limitations, such as survey errors, constraints, and survey-related effects (Wright, 2014). For future studies, other methods of gathering data might be considered, such as student, teacher, and caregiver focus groups to gain rich qualitative data.

Future Directions

For future studies, other methods of gathering data might be considered, such as different assessment forms or student, teacher, and caregiver focus groups or surveys. Additionally, implementing the calming corners with more students and teachers will allow for more advanced statistical testing rather than simply descriptive statistics. Utilizing other school settings would provide greater generalizability to populations outside of teacher training laboratory schools.

Implications

Utilizing SEL methods in the classroom has proven beneficial for students' socio-emotional, behavior, and academic outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023). Calming corners can provide a student-initiated method of providing services to students when they become dysregulated. They can be created in educational settings with materials and supplies that may already be in the school or purchased (see Appendix A).

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Appendix A

Creating and Using a Calming Corner in Your Classroom

- Find a corner in your classroom that can permanently act as your new calm-down corner. Designate the space as a special area where your students can spend time on their own when their emotions are running high.

- Like calm down corners at home, fill the space with soft, plush seating options and options for books, quiet toys, art and journaling supplies, blankets, and stuffed animals. Set up the partitions to provide enough privacy for the student while still allowing visibility by the teacher. Post a set of visual calming strategies in the area to provide self-managing reminders for the student. Information about specific materials are provided below.

- Students must be taught how, when, and why to use the calming corner materials. Let the students know that they are allowed to go to this area at the first sign of becoming distressed. Tell them they can ask for access to the calming corner by holding up a break card, or you may prompt them to take a break. Also, remind the students that they only stay in the corner for five minutes and must use a timer. Once the five minutes are over, meet them back at their desk for a brief check-in. This reinforcement may help the student repeat this desired behavior in the future.

- Utilize the calming corner with all students in your classroom as needed. If you believe that the student is beginning to use this area frequently and suspect the student is possibly avoiding work, you may decide to provide a limited number of break cards the student can use in the morning and in the afternoon to curtail this behavior (Author, 2021).

Materials Needed

- Bean bag chair(s) or floor cushions/large pillows
- Soft rug
- Relaxation CD and player
- Headphones
- Books and magazines
- Playdough/puddy
- Bubbles
- Fidgets
- Art materials/ coloring books
- Partitions/dividers for privacy
- Visual calming strategies
- Visual timer

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Education by the Numbers
Post Secondary Education

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The Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) recent released data showing how school districts are recovering from the pandemic effects are sobering and discouraging. These data show that the pace of recovery for all students is slow; however, for low income and diverse groups the pace is not only slow but long-term.

Many schools have been successful with programs such as tutoring, high-quality curricula, extending learning time and improving communication with parents. Some schools are making these strategies a permanent part of the school experience. Tutoring and small-group instruction are some of the most powerful tools schools have at their disposal.
What do the numbers say about recovery strategies?

How many Students are behind grade level at the end of the school year?

Average percentage of schools behind grade level at the end of the 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 School years by region

All Public Schools	June 2022	33%
	June 2024	32%
Northeast	June 2022	26%
	June 2024	31%
Midwest	June 2022	30%
	June 2024	31%
South	June 2022	34%

	June 2024	29%
West	June 2022	37%
	June 2024	39%

What strategies have schools used to support learning recovery?

Percentage of public schools by strategies used to support learning recovery (June 2024)

	All Public School	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Extending class time spent on targeted subject areas during school day	38%	37%	40%	39%	37%
Extending the school day	23%	20%	19%	28%	20%
Extending the school week	5%	4%	2%	8%	5%
Extending the school year	25%	21%	29%	26%	24%
Family engagement/outreach activities	42%	38%	37%	44%	48%
Family workshops to provide techniques and guidance	20%	18%	14%	24%	23%
Hiring additional educators to provide more instruction	38%	32%	35%	39%	43%
Identifying individual needs with diagnostic assessment data	88%	92%	86%	86%	89%
Identifying individual needs with formative assessment data	85%	89%	85%	84%	85%
Professional Development on learning recovery	60%	58%	56%	64%	59%
Remedial instruction	82%	85%	81%	86%	77%
Tailored accelerated instruction	61%	57%	58%	67%	59%
Other	7%	6%	7%	5%	11%
Have not implemented any strategies	1%	No data	1%	1%	No data

How effective have strategies been in supporting learning recovery? (Extremely effective/Very effective)

Strategies	All Public School	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Extending class time spent on targeted subject areas during school day	4% / 31%	% / 41%	3% / 32%	3% / 30%	6% / 27%
Extending the school day	3% / 19%	% / 28%	/23%	4%/15%	/19%
Extending the school week	% / 22%			20%	

Extending the school year	4% / 22%	/22%	4%/20%	3%/21%	/24%
Family engagement/outreach activities	2%/16%	/19%	/19%	2%/16%	3%/11%
Family workshops to provide techniques and guidance	2%/12%	/10%	/14%	/9%	/16%
Hiring additional educators to provide more instruction	14%/41%	14%/44%	14%/39%	14%/40%	12%/42%
Identifying individual needs with diagnostic assessment data	8%/41%	6%/52%	6%/41%	9%/40%	10%/37%
Identifying individual needs with formative assessment data	7%/49%	5%/46%	3%/41%	10%/39%	6%/38%
Professional Development on learning recovery	4%/32%	4%/36%	3%/32%	4%/32%	5%/30%
Remedial instruction	3%/26%	/31%	3%/22%	3%/29%	3%/24%
Tailored accelerated instruction	4%/34%	4%/36%	4%/38%	4%/31%	5%/31%

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Education: Words and Meanings
Exploring Piaget and Vygotsky: Two sides of the Same Coin

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The Words and Meanings: Piaget and Vygotsky

The words, thus the names of *Piaget* and *Vygotsky,* elicit strong beliefs, impressions, and thoughts regarding two men who have greatly influenced educators in their understandings of child development as well as impacting educational practices. Interestingly, both were born the same year, 1896. Piaget (1896-1980), was born in Switzerland and lived 84 years, whereas Vygotsky (1896-1934) was born in Russia and lived 37 years. Both were creative and important thinkers in the realm of understanding child development. The individuals, Piaget and Vygotsky, brought meaning to understanding how children cognitively develop.

Piaget developed the constructivist theory which describes how children build or construct their own knowledge based on their own experiences with the world and with people. Piaget (1962) outlined a theory of children's intellectual development which is listed as four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (birth – 2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years) and formal operational (11-15). Piaget noted how these patterns for thinking varied by ages: Sensorimotor and preoperational were prelogical stages, and concrete operational and formal operational were logical stages (Labinowicz, 1985). Piaget proposed that all children go through stages of intellectual development in the same sequence, but every child is unique in his/her rate of development, therefore there are differences in children's time and speed of development.

Piaget presents children's learning as a 'constructing' process, which is a process of 'adaptation' (Johnson et al., 1999; Labinowicz, 1985; Piaget, 1952, 1962). Accordingly, a child's learning is an *adaptation* in the learning process which the child balances between complementary processes of *assimilation* and *accommodation* (Johnson et al., 1999). In assimilation, the child takes in new information from the real world and may change or 'bend' reality to fit his/her own understanding or cognitive structures; the accommodation process is the child changing, modifying, or conforming his/her cognitive structures to what he/she has observed in the real

world (Piaget 1962). As Labinowicz (1985) notes regarding Piaget's view of cognitive development, "Rather than passively copying knowledge that exists 'out there,' we actively construct our knowledge of the world internally through continuous interaction with the environment" (p. 5). The construction of knowledge is personal, a person's own interpretation and understanding as he/she constructs and reorganizes his/her thoughts (Piaget & Inhelder, 1971).

Piaget's stages of cognitive development are aligned with children's play. Piaget asserts that not only does play reflect a child's cognitive development level, but play also contributes to the child's development (Johnson et al., 1999). Children *practice* through symbolic play the assimilative process to use objects to stand for other objects, a process of abstract or representational thought (Pellegrini, 1985; Piaget & Inhelder, 1971; Stone & Burriss, 2016; Stone & Stone, 2015). According to Piaget, play is an important factor in children 'practicing' and 'consolidating' new skills or understandings.

Vygotsky (1976) also believes that play has a critical role in a child's cognitive development. Particularly, Vygotsky considers symbolic play a crucial and essential role in a child's development of abstract thought. Stone & Burriss (2016) note how "symbolic play initiates the development of representational thought" (p. 60). Young children are not born with the ability to symbolize; this means they are unable to hold thoughts and the meanings of objects within their minds. Symbolic play facilitates a child to gradually represent objects and events in his/her mind. For example, a child can represent a car in his/her mind by using a block during play. The block becomes a 'symbol' for the car (Stone & Burriss, 2016; Stone & Stone, 2015). As Stone & Stone (2015) note, "the key importance of representational thought is that the child is now able to represent objects and events symbolically in his or her mind" (p. 4). The child's brain is developing *abstract thought* through the process of symbolic play.

Both Vygotsky and Piaget consider how children engage in the *personal* process of developing abstract thought through play. However, Vygotsky (1976) expands and explains the process by offering a more in depth understanding of what is happening within the child during the accommodation process.

Vygotsky suggests that abstract thought cannot occur in a child's early years because the child must have sight of a horse to think about a horse, because meaning and objects are fused together (Johnson et al., 1999; Vygotsky, 1976). However, engaging in make-believe play, the child is able to use objects to stand for other things such as a stick can now stand for a horse. This process supports the child in separating meaning from the object. Vygotsky sees the stick as a substitute object for the horse, "separating the meaning of 'horse' from the horse itself" (Johnson et al., 1999, p. 10).

The commonalities between Piaget and Vygotsky are complementary in their understanding of how children develop cognitively. Both see the child as an active participant in the process of making sense of the world. Both see play and symbolic play as critically important for a child's cognitive development. Making sense of the world would be impossible without symbolic representation with or without language. Symbolic play is essential for a child to develop cognitively for without symbolic play a child would be limited to the sensorimotor stage of

Piaget's cognitive development organization. Without symbolic play, a child would be limited to simply interacting with objects, but would not be able to use objects as symbols to stand for other things such as a block for a car, or a piece of toast, or a house, or a stick standing for a horse. Vygotsky, thus, expands on Piaget's important understanding of how children develop cognitively by developing a framework for children's development of abstract thought through symbolic play.

Piaget and Vygotsky also agree on how language plays an important role as a medium for children to make sense, not only to one's self but to others as well (Bohannon & Warren-Leubecker, 1989; Stone & Burriss, 2016). Language is a symbolic system for representing one's thoughts, ideas, and intentions. As Stone and Burriss (2016) note, "Cognitively, the knowledge is not in the symbols, but rather the knowledge capacity produces the symbols. Symbolic representation through symbolic play, is the enabling factor for language to represent objects and actions" (p. 64).

Symbolism beyond language progresses, according to Vygotsky, from first-order symbolism through play and drawings, which then leads to second-order symbolism in writing (Dyson, 1983, 1990; Stone & Burriss, 2016; Vygotsky, 1976). As Schrader (1990) explains, one can see the "process of development of written language as one which leads from oral language through symbolic play to written language (p. 81). As Piaget (1962) emphasizes, play is the means, the primary vehicle, for thought within the child. The role of symbolic play cannot be disregarded; it is the action that "paves the way for representational thought" (Stone & Burriss, 2016, p. 64).

From Piaget's perspective, children acquire meaning from their *sensorimotor* interactions with the environment where the meaning of the object or event is bonded with the object/event through the process of assimilation. As children play, understanding through *accommodation* eventually proceeds. Play, particularly symbolic play, provides the opportunities for children to go through these stages of representational development which is the essential precursor for children to develop not only language, but literacy (Stone & Stone, 2015). Children are learning how to 'think' within the process of playing.

Another important contribution by Vygotsky is his expansion of Piaget's inclusion of 'others' as part of the child constructing or building his/her knowledge of the world through active participation in the world and with others (Stone & Burriss, 2019). Vygotsky (1978) puts forward his social learning theory called the *Zone of Proximal Development*. In this theory, Vygotsky explores how adults and more capable peers can enhance a child's level of potential development, especially, in the case where children learn from other children who differ in ability as one sees in mixed-age groupings (Feldman & Gray, 1999).

Vygotsky described this process as a space like a "bud" or "flower" that eventually develops into fruit and likened this process to the space or zone where a child's learning is in this "embryonic state" that can be nurtured or enhanced by other such as adults or more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). For example, in mixed-age social interactions such as in play, "expert children can encourage novice children to use more sophisticated approaches to tasks through the process of scaffolding" (Stone & Burriss, 2019). Capitalizing on Piaget's "with others" understanding of cognitive development, Vygotsky provides a framework for how children, particularly mixed-

age children, provide a social context, where expert children provide prompts, such as advanced solutions and leading questions, to novice children which cause novice children to think and, in the thinking, to defend or alter their own understandings (Gray & Feldman, 2004; Katz et al., 1993). As Stone (2004) notes, "The process of constructing knowledge of the world is not done in isolation but rather within a social context" and the child as a social being when interacting with expert and novice children has a natural framework for interpreting experiences (p. 15).

Both Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1976) understand that play, and play with other children, provides all children the social dynamics for each child to develop cognitively, not to mention the social and emotional learning as well. Piaget emphasizes how for a child to gain *understanding*, the child must construct the *understanding* himself/herself. In doing so, what he/she discovers will stay with the child for a lifetime (Piaget, 1950). As a child interacts with the environment *and people*, the child constructs his/her own knowledge of the world. Piaget emphasizes how no one can give knowledge to the child, rather, the child must construct it for himself/herself and this construction is personal and unique (Stone, 2004).

Vygotsky (1976) does not disagree with Piaget's views, but simply adds more concrete description to how children construct their own knowledge when socially interacting *with others*. Learning, construction of knowledge, can be enhanced, particularly with mixed-age children (experts and novices), as the range of possible enhancement is more in line with where novice children are understanding (Stone & Burriss, 2019). Scaffolding learning within Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' in mixed-age groupings is a naturally occurring temporary framework or support. As Gray (2013) describes in "mixed-age play, where abilities differ considerably, scaffolding occurs continuously and naturally, often unconsciously, as a way of pulling the younger children up to a level that makes the game fun for all" (p. 186).

Johnson et al. (1999) share how "research on play and cognitive development in the 1970s and 1980s was quantitative in nature and influenced by Piagetian theory (linear and analytical) . . . and tend to emphasize child's play and other symbolic behaviors independent of the social context. In the 1990s, there has been a trend toward qualitative research, inspired by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (interactive and holistic)" (p. 29). Thus, Vygotsky explored the *social* component of children's interactions on cognition during play. He saw the importance of an *interpersonal* scope for cognitive development stimulated during the *Zone of Proximal Development* as children socially interact with each other. The *interpersonal* experiences advance the *intrapersonal* where the child's personal thinking is set in motion (Johnson et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2005). The *Zone of Proximal Development* is created when children are engaged in experiences whether with adults or children that they normally would not do on their own. Play with others affords children with many opportunities for the *Zone of Proximal Development* to unfold.

Vygotsky provides a setting during play where children engage socially with others in interpersonal experiences which can advance the process of personal thinking. Hence, a child's construction of knowledge is initiated in personal interaction with the world and *with people*, as understood by both Piaget and Vygotsky.

Play sets the stage, a condition for learning to occur, according to Piaget. For Vygotsky, play also provides a natural context for children to socially scaffold learning for each other. Piaget and Vygotsky complement each other in their understanding of how children think and learn.

In essence, both Vygotsky and Piaget are constructivists (Jaramillo, 1996). Piaget sees the value of both the individual learning from his/her interaction with the environment and with people, whereas Vygotsky, while embracing experiential learning, focuses on the nature of learning in the *Zone of Proximal Development* with others in a social setting such as when children play together to "socially negotiate meaning" (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 136).

Conclusion

Both Piaget and Vygotsky pursued an understanding of child development; both valued children's play as contributing to this process. Piaget focused more for understanding what the child is cognitively thinking inside and how that thinking develops, while Vygotsky focused more on the nature of social engagement for what is happening cognitively inside the child and how others contribute to that inward process. Although Piaget acknowledges that children pull from the environment and from others, both Piaget and Vygotsky would agree about the importance for children to engage actively within a rich environment and with a diverse grouping of children and others which will provide the productive environment for them to actively construct their own knowledge – direct experiences with the real world and with people. Together they are a powerful team for understanding the learning that takes place in a child's personal, cognitive development -two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Piaget and Vygotsky constructed two influential theories which provide an extensive foundation for educators to create enriched, enhanced, and social environments for children's dynamic, productive learning.

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Pictures for Reflection
Books: A New Technology?

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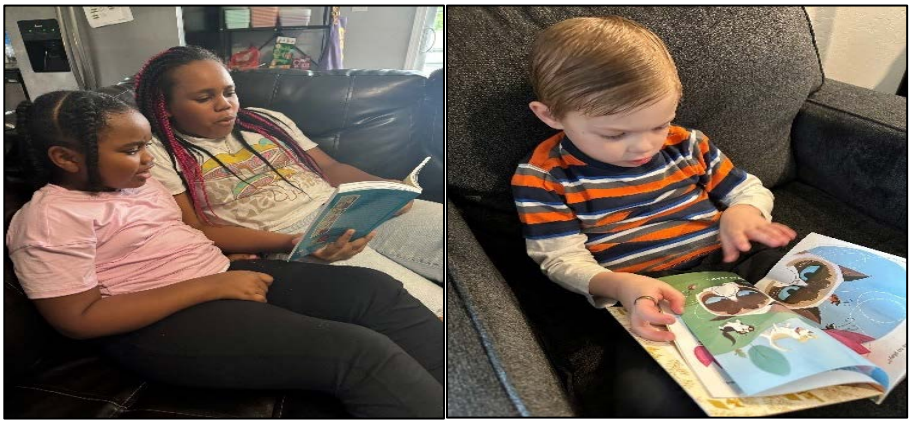
We don't often do product reviews here, but I thought you might be interested in something I read about in a couple of newspapers recently. It's called the "Built-in Orderly Organized Knowledge" device, better known as a "Book."



It's a revolutionary breakthrough in technology; it needs no wires, electric circuits or batteries, and has nothing to be connected or switched on. And you don't need to remember a password to use it.

In fact, it's so easy to use a child can do it: just lift its cover and you're there! Compact and portable, the "book" can be used anywhere - even sitting in an armchair by the fire - yet it's powerful enough to hold as much information as a megabyte disc drive.

Here's how it works: Each "book" is constructed of sequentially numbered sheets of paper, usually recyclable, each capable of holding thousands of bits of information. These pages are locked together with a custom-fit device called a binding, which keeps the sheets in their correct sequence.

Opaque Paper Technology allows manufacturers to use both sides of the sheet, doubling the information density and cutting costs in half.

Experts are divided on the prospects for further increases in information density; for now, "books" with more information simply use more pages. This makes them thicker and harder to carry, and has drawn some criticism from the mobile computing crowd.

Each sheet is scanned optically, registering information directly into your brain. A flick of a finger takes you to the next sheet. The "book" may be taken up at any time and used by merely opening it. The "book" never crashes and never needs rebooting, though like other display devices it can become unusable if dropped into water.

The browse feature allows you to move instantly to any sheet and move forward or backward as you wish. Most come with an index pinpointing the exact location of any selected information for instant retrieval.

You can also make personal notes next to "book" text entries with an optional programming tool called a "Portable Erasable Nib Cryptic Intercommunication Language Stylus," also known as "Pencils".

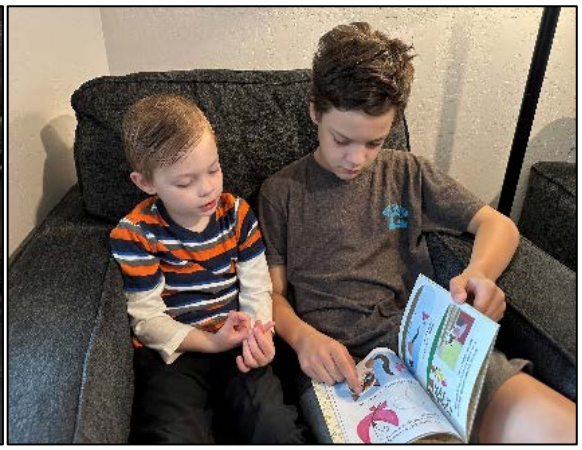
An optional "bookmark" accessory allows you to open the "book" to the exact place you left it in a previous session - even if it's been closed. "Bookmarks" fit universal design standards, so a single one can be used in "books" by various manufacturers. Conversely, numerous bookmarks can be used in a single "book" if the user wants to store numerous views at once.

The number of bookmarks is limited only by the number of pages in the "book." The medium is ideal for long-term archival use; several field trials have proven that "books" will still be readable in several centuries, and because of its simple user interface it will be compatible with future reading devices.

Portable, durable and affordable, the "book" is the entertainment and educational wave of the future. The "book's" appeal seems so certain, thousands of content creators have committed to the platform.

Look for a flood of new titles coming to your favorite store soon. (adapted from http://crysa.fzu.cz/ondra/documents/book.html)

Reading: What's Really Happening?

Comprehension
Sense of Protagonist
Archetypes
Good and bad
Heroes and heroines
Character development
Compare and contrast
Plot
Theme
Sequence
Events/episode
Expectation
Anticipation
Surprise and Twist
Ponder and Puzzle
Mystery
Pride
Deceit
Historical Context
Geographical Context
Cultural Context
Different Family Context
Fluency
Cadence
Pacing
Inflection
Dialect
Phonemic awareness

Metaphor
Simile
Alliteration
Persuasion
Fiction
Non-fiction
Fantasy
Anthropomorphism
Futurism
Dialogue
Phonics
Vocabulary
Nouns and verbs
Adjectives and adverbs
Rhyme
Numeracy
Prosocial behavior
Kindness
Leadership
Humor
Science
Biology
Visual imagery
Interpretation
Imagination
Context of print
Poetry
Enjoyment…and so much more!

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Page Turners: Books for Children

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

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The Artist
Written and illustrated by **Ed Vere**
Doubleday Books by Young Children, 2023
ISBN: 978-0525580874

The Artist is an inspiring tale of the role that art can play in igniting our imaginations and coloring our world. Behind the art is the artist who uses their creativity as inspiration to bring their ideas to life and brighten their surroundings. Author and illustrator, Ed Vere, writes about being asked, "what is an artist?". The ensuing tale shows a young artist who leaves home to brighten the world. Along the way she learns valuable life lessons about the power of making mistakes, coloring outside of the lines, and the importance of carrying on. This inspirational tale will inspire young artists and serves as a reminder for all of us about the power of continual learning and the beauty we can bring to the world. Ages 3-7.

Call Me Roberto: Roberto Clemente Goes to Bat for Latinos
Written by **Nathalie Alonso**
Illustrated by **Rudy Gutierrez**
Calkins Creek, 2024
ISBN: 978-1-63592-811-2

Roberto Clemente's legacy looms large in this compelling biography of his life. Alonso's well-written text highlights his amazing baseball achievements alongside the tension between his proud Puerto Rican heritage and the discrimination he faced here at home. The inclusion of Spanish language within the story is powerful and draws the reader into Clemente's presence in these dual worlds. Colorful and dynamic illustrations by Gutierrez depict Clemente's life in motion. This wonderful biography would be a fantastic read-aloud to generate rich discussion about the historical context of Roberto Clemente's accomplishments as a baseball player and humanitarian. Ages 7-10.

The Dictionary Story
Written and illustrated by **Oliver Jeffers and Sam Winston**

Candlewick Press, 2024
ISBN: 978-1-5362-3550-0

From a partnership (including the creator of the beloved *The Day The Crayons Quit*) comes a humorous and playful tale about how Dictionary created a story. Tired of her endless lists but no plot, Dictionary is delighted when her many words begin to romp across the pages, bringing her story to life. Unlike a traditional pairing of an author and an illustrator, here the two creators worked together with typeset, image, and the written word to visually bring this reimagining of genre to life. While even the youngest children could enjoy this book, older elementary students learning about alphabetizing and the dictionary as a resource, as well as developing knowledge about genres, will really appreciate the humor and fun of this picture book. Ages 5-10.

Follow Your Heart
Written and illustrated by **Emma Dodd**
Templar, 2024
ISBN: 978-1-5362-3493-0

This heartwarming picture book features a parent and baby dolphin duo as they explore many aspects of life in the sea. At every turn the parent stays close and continuously affirms that the baby dolphin is becoming competent and capable; that it will be ready to take on a world of challenges and joys when the time is right. Readers are encouraged, "So follow your heart/ and soon you will see,/ it will always take you…/ where you were meant to be." A new and delightful addition to the *Love You* series, this book includes engaging animal illustrations, highlighted by Dodd's characteristic pops of luminescent foil. Ages 2-5.

Gray
Written by **Laura Dockrill**
Illustrated by **Lauren Child**
Candlewick, 2024
ISBN 978-1-5362-3546-3

Days bring different types of feelings with them. Some are warm and bright, while others are not. In this picturebook poem, a child conveys her feelings of experiencing a "gray" day; gray like a scribble, or a puddle, or cold tea… a day when she doesn't feel like herself. A wise caregiver appears, reassuring the child that she is always loved–even when she is feeling a deep shade of gray. She also reminds her that new days will come when she will feel different colors inside her, too: sunshine yellow, bubblegum pink, lullabye blue, and more. With scant text and evocative illustrations, this gentle book affirms the many different types of feelings we all experience. This would be a good conversation starter for morning meetings or other venues that encourage self reflection and expressions of feelings. Ages 3-8.

I'm Gonna Paint: Ralph Fasanella, Artist of the People
Written by **Anne Broyles**
Illustrated by **Victoria Tentler-Krylov**
Holiday House, 2023
ISBN: 978-0-82345-006-0

This vibrantly illustrated biography of Ralph Fasanella tells the story of a self-trained artist from humble beginnings who found success depicting the real lives of working Americans and historical events of the time. This book thoughtfully conveys the intersection of Fasanella's activism and art by highlighting the historical moments that most influenced his work, such as the McCarthy era and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. His paintings have been displayed all over the world and this biography includes images of his art, along with a detailed author's note, a timeline of Fasanella's life, suggestions for further reading, and a bibliography of sources, making this text not only an interesting book to share with children, but also a compelling catalyst for future reading and research. Ages 4-8.

Under the Blanket Sky
Written and illustrated by **Tim Fischer**
Doubleday Books for Young Readers, 2023
ISBN: 978-0593645918

The soft, whimsical and sweeping illustrations in Under the Blanket Sky by author and illustrator, Tim Fischer, add to the dreamlike feel of this tale of an unexpected summer friendship. As the summer unfolds a boy and an owl are inseparable sharing long, quiet summer days doing all the things the boy loves. Their friendship grows with a shared love and the boy wonders if they can be together forever. The owl wisely shares that he is unsure but they can enjoy the time that they have together. As the weather changes and the first day of school looms, the owl must move on leaving only memories of their wonderful summer adventures. From this book, we can all learn about friendship, love and the inevitable reality that time marches on and that change is inevitable but that our memories are forever. Ages 3-7.

When We Gather (Ostadahlisiha): A Cherokee Tribal Feast
Written by **Andrea L. Rogers**
Illustrated by **Madelyn Goodnight**.
Harpers Collins Children, in partnership with We Need Diverse Books, 2024
ISBN: 978-0-06-307679-2

This lovely picturebook, written by a Cherokee author and illustrated by a Chickasaw artist, offers a window into the Cherokee spring feast that celebrates the arrival of the wild onion, an early spring crop. The book's words and images celebrate the diversity of the Cherokee community, as well as the blending of ancient and modern traditions. Following a young girl and her family as they prepare for the feast and then celebrate with their community, the book interweaves English and Cherokee phrases. This text is a celebration of joy and community and would be a wonderful addition to any early elementary classroom, especially when learning about celebrations of spring's arrival. Ages 3-8.

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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. The submission deadline for the Spring 2025 is March 15th. The Spring 2025 issue will be published in May 2025. Thank you again for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you in Spring 2025.