From the Editor

In this issue, we have only one key thing in mind – focusing on our young preschoolers, being aware of their needs and learning, and keeping an eye on developments outside of Singapore by learning and leveraging on knowledge being shared.

Read the Book Review on 'Purposeful Play: A Teacher's Guide to Igniting Deep & Joyful Learning Across the Day'. A fantastic write up! That is exactly what we aim to develop in our journal, to ignite a deep and joyful experience as you read the articles by fellow practitioners.

Then you progress to all the other articles. Wonderfully written, from SUSS undergrads to classroom practitioners, they bring you right into the heart of the matter. You will find yourself nodding your head, agreeing and echoing much of what they share. You can even take some of the ideas and introduce them into your classrooms. Perhaps you can even think about sharing your own classroom experiences with an article for *Early Educators*. Over the years, we have had many writers from the field and who share their reflections and practice. Our field has certainly grown, thanks to many of you who have put your thoughts to paper. Keep it up!

Warm wishes

Ruth Wong
Editor

Editorial Team

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The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

Front Cover: "*The Flying Shark*" by Mohamed Hurairah Shawqi Bin Mohamed Hamzah (K2A), Al Iman Mosque Kindergarten @ Bukit Panjang.

Caption: "*The flying shark likes to eat fish. The wave is strong. The shark wants to go home*."

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The Role of Stay-Play-Talk in Strengthening Peer Relationships: An Opportunity for Professional Growth and Development

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Introduction

Teacher inquiry, a systematic, informed and purposeful reflection of 'wonderings' in one's professional practice, facilitates making well-informed decisions, supporting children's wellbeing and improving pedagogical practices, and thus a critical tool in one's professional growth and development (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009). Set against this context, we present an overview of a teacher inquiry project, primarily descriptive in nature, that investigated the role of *Stay-Play-Talk (SPT),* an evidence-based peer-mediated instructional practice in facilitating social interactions between 5-year-old Ken and his peers in a kindergarten setting in Singapore. In addition, we also present how teacher inquiry can assist novice educators' professional growth and development.

5-year-old Ken, from a Singaporean Chinese intact family attends a local kindergarten. Periodic observations conducted by both the kindergarten teacher and the pre-service teacher showed his repeated engagement in parallel play with minimal interaction and/or cooperation with his peers. These observations were not aligned with typically developing 5-year-old children who generally engage in cooperative play, forming friendships, understanding social cues and adhering to social norms such as having eye contact when communicating (Cook et al., 2014; Denham et al., 2009; Dosman et al., 2012; Petty, 2016). Some of his behaviours included taking toys away from his peers, mumbling repetitively and showing minimal eye contact with his peers and teachers when working in the same space. Such behaviours often led to negative responses from peers that included disregarding him and excluding him in play. It is noteworthy that even though Ken displayed delays in his social interactions with peers, he was not clinically diagnosed with any form of disability. Efforts to support friendliness and play between Ken and his peers through ways such as giving regular prompts to the children to be patient with Ken and using language to remind him appeared insufficient to support quality interactions between the children. Social relationships are critical for young children's ability to succeed in life as they contribute to one's mental well-being and improved adjustments in school and academic achievements (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016; Zhang & Wheeler, 2011).

The preschool settings provide an excellent platform to develop these relationships, and therefore *SPT,* a more sustainable method was adopted.

SPT, an evidence-based peer-mediated instructional practice, includes multiple interventions consisting of three steps for the carefully-selected mature peers to execute – (1) staying near the child, (2) playing with the child, (3) talking to the child about the play (Ledford & Pustejovsky, 2021; Milam, 2018; Osborne et al., 2019). In this approach, as shown in Figure 1, the pre-service teacher plays the role of a facilitator and conducts peer training at the beginning for peers to become familiar with the three steps of *SPT* through role-play, instructions and social stories. These steps aim to facilitate peers' understanding of Ken's emotions and equip them with practical ways to interact with him. During the intervention, both verbal and visual prompts were given to the peers and slowly faded out as they become independent in the use of *SPT*.

Figure 1. Visual prompts used during peer training.

Methodology

Data for this study was collected over a 12-week-period during which 16 observations of interactions between Ken and three typically developing peers in a classroom setting were conducted. Children's interactions were observed for a duration of 20-minutes during their scheduled learning corner time when they were at the dramatic, construction and table toys corner. The three peers were chosen based on the teacher's recommendations as they were a part of the same group as Ken during small group activities and had more opportunities to interact with Ken. These observations were used to record the frequency of peer interactions with Ken. A 4-point Likert scale was utilised to assess Ken's social skills before and after the intervention. The A-B-A single-subject design was broken down to five sessions for baseline observations (A) where no treatment was used, followed by an intervention that lasted for six sessions (B) where visual cues and prompts were given to the peers, and maintenance (A) was observed across five sessions where the intervention was slowly faded out, measuring the sustainability of the intervention without external prompts (American Psychological Association, 2020). Data was further strengthened with pre- and post- interviews with Ken's peers to understand the quality of friendship with Ken and assess its progress after *SPT* (Rubin et al., 2013).

Findings

Ken's social skills

The findings clearly demonstrated a significant increase in Ken's social skills rating on a 4-point Likert scale across all subcategories of *communicating, interacting and building relationships with others* as adapted from Nurturing Early Learners Framework (Ministry of Education, 2013). The most significant increases were present in *building relationships with others* and *communicating thoughts, ideas, feelings effectively with others through words, gestures and actions*, i.e. from 1.5 to 2.5 and 1 to 1.8 respectively in subcategories (Figure 2). Data from this study demonstrated the positive role of *SPT* in nurturing Ken's social skills through peer-mediated strategies. Ken also showed an improvement in his ability to communicate and label his emotions. He was proactive when playing with his peers.

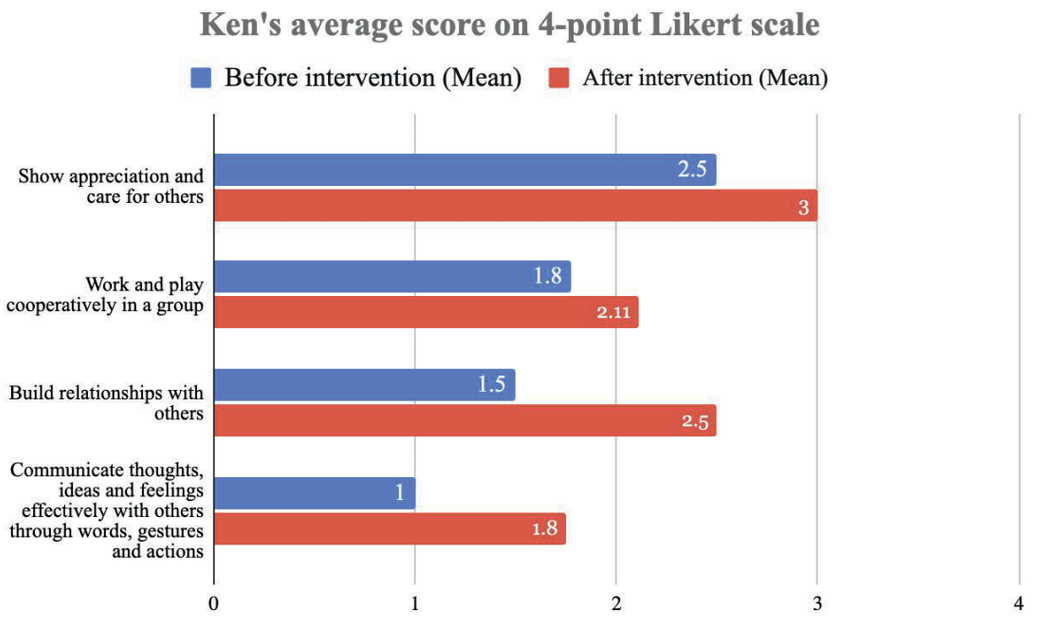

Figure 2. Ken's average score on a 4-point Likert scale

Frequency and quality of peer interactions

In the study, the peer frequency interaction units increased from a mean of 37.5% to 65.0% (Figure 3). Their overall increased interactions and the post-interviews revealed that peer-mediators developed a more positive perception towards Ken. To elaborate, a positive perception suggests viewing them as close friends or have the feeling of helping or enjoyment with them (Rubin et al., 2013). Evidently, together with the increased peer frequency interaction, it was clear that the peers showed more enjoyment when playing with Ken. For example, they made outward proclamation of loving Ken, labelled him as one of their close friends and were eager to continue helping Ken by using the *SPT* even after the intervention. Peer 1, who was initially not very keen to play with Ken showed significant changes in his response towards Ken. He stated Ken's favourite toys explicitly which revealed his attentiveness towards Ken's interests during play. Likewise, Ken showed enjoyment when playing with his

peers as well. In sum, data from this study clearly suggested the positive role of such an approach with multiple typically developing peers in strengthening young children's social relationships through peer mediators.

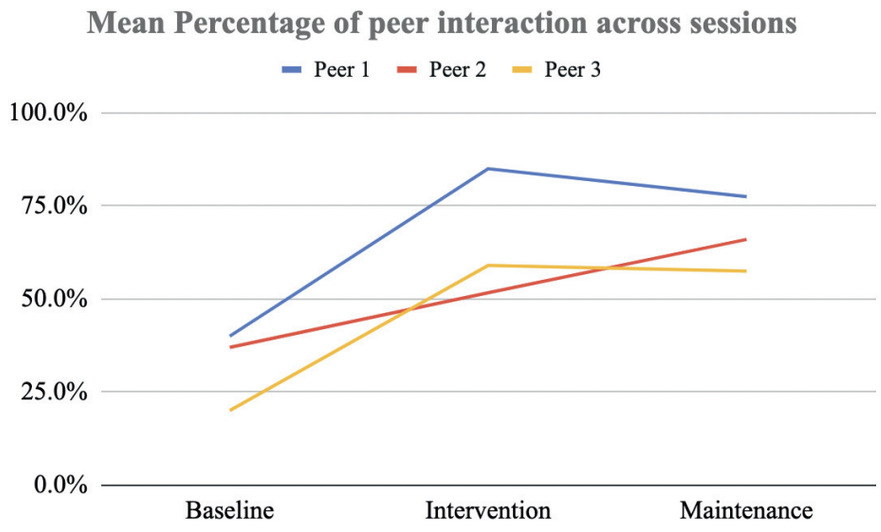

Figure 3. Mean frequency of peer interaction across sessions (%)

Discussion

The results indicated that *SPT* is effective in promoting social skills in children like Ken with social delays, aligning with research studies that promote *SPT* as an effective intervention (Laushey & Heflin, 2000; Maich et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2003; Zhang & Wheeler, 2011). It strengthened friendships through regular and intentional interactions, thus suggesting that *SPT* could be a sustainable measure to strengthen relationships between children in early childhood settings. These results were built on existing evidence of past studies that demonstrated that friendships could be effectively strengthened by offering sufficient time for play. In addition, the pedagogy of friendship theorises that children tend to build connections with one another when they become familiar with one another and share common interests together (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016). Thus, practitioners are encouraged to offer more time for play and facilitate shared interests in order to promote mutual liking and strengthen friendships between typically developing peers and children with social delays.

However, some factors that might have affected the outcomes of *SPT* that includes children's temperament and personality, the measurement of which would be significant in determining the overall effectiveness of the intervention (Horner et al., 2005; Ladd & Sechler, 2012). Furthermore, the study included a small number of children, and thus lacks generalisability. Further research is recommended to evaluate the transferability and thus the need for multisite studies to determine the validity and

representativeness of the study (Burchett et al., 2020; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Horner et al., 2005; Huberman & Miles, 2002). For example, a replication of the same study across several kindergartens could derive a more comprehensive and conclusive data from a larger sample size such as having multiple groups of peer mediators and children with social delays to evaluate the role of *SPT* in supporting social skills and strengthening friendships (Huberman & Miles, 2002). It is noteworthy, however, that representative data should be complemented with richer qualitative narrative accounts to understanding the perspectives of the children (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Implications for professional development

While professional development can be achieved through formal education such as webinars, conferences and courses, engaging in such projects clearly showcases inquiry learning on the ground, a significant component of one's professional development (Mizell, 2010). Projects like these serve as a powerful tool that aids novice educators to direct their own learning, work out sustainable solutions while attending to the needs and interests of children in their early childhood settings.

Asking questions about one's teaching and learning practices, and children in our classroom settings is an excellent start to this journey. Working with young children is multifaceted and perplexing as there are no absolute solutions to the challenges we experience. It is therefore critical that teachers become seekers involved in continual inquiry (Stremmel, 2002). Working on wonderings and engaging in a quest for solutions to issues in one's own contexts enables teacher educators to become reflective practitioners. The questions we ask can challenge our perspectives not merely as teachers but teacher learners on the ground to seek areas of improvement and address challenges in one's settings (Hyun & Marshall, 2003). These questions challenge us to move out of our comfort zones, observe children in early childhood settings, and address issues that require sustainable solutions. In the case of this study, examples of some questions were:

- *Why did Ken's peers leave him out?*
- *How to support Ken's social skills?*
- *Are there sustainable solutions that work even without the presence of the teacher?*
- *What strategies can help Ken?*
- *Would the peers become mediators to support Ken's social skills?*

Such questions are useful as they help one to move out of his/her comfort zone. While such questions can be uncomfortable as they test existing practices, they facilitate and challenge one to refine teaching practices to further support the development of children (Castle, 2012).

Asking questions about Ken and his peers allows seeing conflicts between them as something not destructive, but rather as opportunities to develop young children's autonomy. If the conflicts were seen as destructive, quick fixes would have been adopted; i.e., the teacher would have actively intervened when they occur, resulting in children's growing reliance on the teacher. The wonderings about children aided in working towards sustainable solutions with children as a community of learners, and thus creates an encouraging classroom that benefits children in the long run (Gartrell, 2014).

Conclusion

The study clearly showcases that *SPT* is useful in supporting social skills between children in early childhood settings. Regular and intentional interactions strengthen friendships thus suggesting *SPT* as a sustainable measure to foster relationships between young children. These results suggest the need for more time to play and build connections to increase familiarity and promote mutual liking between peers in the classrooms. The study thus adds to the literature on young children's social competence and the benefits of peers as meditators who are able to support one another's growth when facilitated by a teacher. In addition, this study also shows the value of teacher inquiry that allows novice educators to be introspective about one's capabilities and teaching practices (Buysse et al., 2003). Data from the meticulous approach provides a convincing experience, thus assisting novice educators to reflect on their ongoing work and understand children's competency, and respect the child's voice, thus establishing a form of theory-practice link (Carter & Roe, 2013).

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Supporting Children's Social Emotional Development Through Guidance Interventions During Slow-motion Animation Projects

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In the past decade, increasing attention has been placed on children's social and emotional development – a shift away from subject areas such as language and literacy and physical development. Children with better social and emotional abilities tend to perform better in school, are more cheerful, and develop more positive dispositions towards learning (Kostelnik et al., 2014).

Goleman (1995) believes that schools have a responsibility to facilitate social and emotional competencies for children since they are not innate abilities but learned capabilities. Based on my observations during group activities in the classroom, there were conflicts between children which were often unresolved, resulting in built-up tension and unhealthy relationships amongst them. A possible reason could be due to the lack of guidance on how to resolve such conflicts independently, leading to a common scene of apologizing without internalizing the situation.This study aims to explore the use of 'Guidance Interventions' (Gartrell, 2014) in supporting children's social and emotional development, and focusing on the competency areas of social awareness and relationship management (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Social and emotional learning has been established to be a vital element in young children's holistic development and thus, it is crucial to understand the varying support and interventions that will hone these skills, through the provision of guidance in early childhood classrooms. Prior studies described the increasing significance of children's social emotional development and the various factors that are associated with it (Greenspan, 2003). When children are equipped with appropriate skills and are given the opportunity, they are capable of conflict resolution (Arcaro-McPhee et al., 2002). Studies have also identified that children's behaviours and strategies have been assumed to handle conflicts, but it may not necessarily mean they are able to resolve them independently (Yang et al., 2021). Moreover, children may have shown attempts to engage in conflict negotiation, yet they still require more facilitation, practice and time to be able to resolve it peacefully (Ng & Bull, 2018; Yang et al., 2021).

Technology has been recommended to be integrated within early years' curriculum and the nature of the technological tool should be interactive allowing for hands-on engagement (NAEYC, 2012). This project focuses on the use of "Slowmation" which

derived its name from “Slow Animation”. It is a simplified tool that allows for both teachers and children to co-construct, integrating object animation and digital storytelling (Fleer & Hoban, 2012). Considering the strategies to facilitate children to resolve conflicts independently as they engage in Slowmation projects, this study adopts the guidance interventions through a five-step procedure as outlined by Gartrell (2014) (see Table 1 in methodology).

Research aim

Research has shown the importance of children’s social and emotional development during their early years and its effect on the later years (Landy, 2009). Further research has proven how the integration of digital technology in early years classrooms has brought about benefits, especially in the area of children’s social skills (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2009; Lindahl & Folkesson, 2012). Thus, the focus is on the usage of guidance interventions to promote children’s social and emotional development through stop-motion animation, a technology tool that promotes opportunities for collaboration among children. To further narrow down to the sub-skills of social and emotional development, I have decided to focus on children’s relationship skills and social awareness since they are related within the setting of group projects which requires collaboration. My research question is:

> How can guidance interventions foster children’s social emotional development during stop-motion animation sessions?

Methodology

Data was collected through video recording as well as a teacher journal record and an observation checklist. Over the course of six weeks, six children aged 5 to 6 years old participated in the study. Pre-intervention and post-intervention observations were conducted in the first and final week, while the intervention strategy was implemented within the four weeks in between. The four stop-motion animation sessions, ranging from an hour to an hour and a half, were video recorded on a weekly basis. The instances of Gartrell’s (2014) guidance interventions (Table 1) were coded and categorised according to the nature and setting of the conflicts.

Table 1. *The five-step procedure of Guidance Interventions*

Gartrell’s Guidance Interventions
1. Help all parties cool down enough to talk
2. Ask the children to each tell their side and work towards agreement on what each thought happened
3. Encourage children to come up with possible solutions
4. Guide the children to select and try a solution all can live with
5. Facilitate and monitor the resolution process. Include a follow-up guidance talk with one or both children as she sees fit

To understand how guidance interventions fostered the development of children's social and emotional development, child observation checklists were utilised in relation to two specific sub-skills – conflict negotiation and social awareness. This checklist is adapted from the California Department of Education's developmental milestones checklist for young children (Desired Results Developmental Profile, 2015). The adapted checklist included the dispositions or behaviours that indicate development in these domains (conflict negotiation and social awareness). In Figures 1 and 2, the numbers on the left column represent the level of competency of each emotional skill, with descriptions stated. The numbers are arranged in ascending order, which indicates an increasing competency for each emotional sub-skill, with 1 being least competent and 6 being the most competent.

This checklist was completed for each child during each stop-motion session weekly. In addition, the teacher journal had also promoted meaningful reflective thinking as I was able to review the entries and look out for patterns and/or make amendments when coding the observation instances (Castle, 2012).

Figure 1. *Description of number index (Conflict Negotiation). Numbers are arranged in ascending order, displaying an increasing competency for each emotional sub-skill.*

Conflict Negotiation	
Number	**Description**
1	Takes action to get needs or wants met without considering the impact on others or self
2	Responds emotionally and often impulsively in conflict situations, requiring adult assistance to resolve conflict or reduce distress
3	Uses words or gestures to express desires in some conflict situations, but requires adult assistance to communicate constructively and resolve conflict
4	Uses appropriate words and actions to express desires in some conflict situations, often seeking adult assistance to resolve conflict
5	Uses appropriate words and actions to express desires in response to conflict situations, and suggests simple cooperative solutions based mainly on own needs
6	Considers the needs and interests of others when there is a conflict; *Or a*ttempts to negotiate a compromise

Figure 2. *Description of number index (Social Awareness). Numbers are arranged in ascending order, displaying an increasing competency for each emotional sub-skill.*

Social Awareness	
Number	**Description**
1	Follows simple group expectations with occasional adult reminders, but needs specific guidance when wanting to do something else or having to stop a preferred activity
2	Carries out group expectations during extended activities, needing adult reminders to follow expectations from beginning to end
3	Follows through with group expectations on own during extended activities
4	Communicates about group expectations; *and c*ooperates with others in carrying group expectations

Research findings

During the pre-implementation observations, I noticed that while children were working in small groups, conflict arose due to their differing views with parties who were not willing to compromise. As a result, children often argued among themselves which resulted in the intervention of a teacher and both parties apologising to each other. However, the underlying issue may be the fact that children were unable to internalise the reason for their apology which led to unspoken misunderstandings and future similar arguments.

Following the implementation of Gartrell's (2014) guidance interventions over four weeks, it was observed that children were capable of conflict negotiation which fostered their *relationships skills* as well as *social awareness*. This was illustrated through children's interactions with each other as observed in the video recordings and shown in the results from the checklists.

Based on the checklist (pre-implementation and post-implementation), there was a general increase in the number of times children resolved conflicts independently, indicating that Gartrell's (2014) Guidance Interventions were helpful in facilitating children's conflict resolution.

This current study yielded an interesting finding that children were able to *independently* resolve conflicts using elements of Gartrell's (2014) Guidance Interventions, nearing the end of the study (as illustrated by the excerpts taken from the post-implementation). A segment from each group's discussion was selected to illustrate the prominent features of conflict negotiation and social awareness. In the excerpts provided below, pseudonyms were applied to protect children's identity.

Photos 1 and 2: Children filming their stop-motion animation projects

Conflict negotiation

Children were observed to initiate solutions to resolve conflicts and to compromise. These skills allowed children to problem-solve and reach a resolution which were essential to developing and maintaining relationships with others. Children in both groups displayed the ability to resolve conflicts among themselves and reach a solution that was agreeable to all (See Photos 1 and 2).

Excerpt 1. *Children's interactions in demonstrating conflict negotiation.*

Conflict Negotiation[1]

Xuan:	I want NuNu and Dolphy to have a horn like Sparkles.
Amy:	They are not unicorns so they cannot have a horn.
Xuan:	But we can imagine that other animals also have.
Amy:	Like that they will look like unicorns.
Xuan:	I want NuNu to be special and have something on her head.
Edeline:	How about you put a crown?
Amy:	*(Looks to Xuan)* You can put a crown but no horn.
Xuan:	Ok, but can I colour it *(referring to storyboard)* like the horn on Sparkles?
Amy:	*(Nods her head)*

In excerpt 1, Xuan voiced her comments when it came to conceptualising the looks of each character. Edeline suggested having a crown instead, an idea that consisted of both Xuan's comments and also considered the concerns of Amy. Within the above excerpt, it was evident that children considered the needs and interests of others while resolving a conflict and there were attempts to reach a compromise. Children were able to accept the final outcome, which was a combined effort to examine the various options first. They were able to adopt steps 3 and 4 of Gartrell's (2014) Guidance Interventions, whereby children are able to come up with various solutions and select

[1] Explanations of ongoing actions and activities observed are included in brackets

one to try it out independently without the teacher's intervention. They were able to balance their personal rights, needs and wants with those of others as they exercised choice and decision-making by juggling with different perspectives. This is an illustration of how teacher interventions were not required in this instance since children were able to manage these conflicts well as a result of previous lessons.

Social awareness

This refers to children's ability to take on the perspectives of others and consider the impacts of their actions. Children at this age start to develop the ability to identify their feelings, managing them and reacting appropriately. In the instances observed, children displayed the ability to *self-regulate* and engage in *active listening*, two skills needed to manage emotions and reactions.

Excerpt 2. *Children's interactions that showcase self-regulation*

Mich:	*(Pointing to Ryner)* But you always want that character to be a boy.
Giselle:	Ya, it is not fair!
Ryner:	But you also never say cannot.
Mich:	Everything also needs to follow you.
Ryner:	*(Keeps quiet, and walks over to a corner in the classroom and sits down)*
Teacher:	*(Walks over to Ryner)* Hey, are you alright? Why did you leave your friends like that?
Ryner:	I am angry, and I want to be alone, later I go back.
Teacher:	I know that you must be feeling upset because you can't seem to reach an agreement with your friends. It is great that you know when to step out when you feel angry and not continue the argument. When you feel better, how about you head over and talk about it again with Giselle and Mich?
Ryner:	Okay, I just hope that they will listen to me too.
Teacher:	I am sure they will listen to you if you also give them a chance to share their thoughts.

Excerpt 2 portrayed an instance observed in relation to the area of self-regulation within social awareness. When Ryner was faced with difficult and targeted questions, he decided to remove himself from the situation instead of remaining in it. When asked why he decided to do so, his response reflected self-awareness and the ability to self-regulate through verbalising his feelings and demonstrating his own understanding of his personal threshold. The teacher facilitated this conversation by acknowledging his emotions and teaching him to reflect on his behaviour which supports him in making

appropriate behavioural choices. This aligned with steps 4 and 5 of Gartrell's (2014) Guidance Interventions, where the teacher is a facilitator and monitors the resolution process after the child had rationalised his choice. This instance illustrates how a child demonstrated coping mechanisms to self-regulate his emotions with skills which were introduced earlier during the interventions, such as verbalizing emotions.

Photos 3 and 4: Children working on their storyboards

Aside from self-regulating emotions, Excerpt 2 also demonstrated children's ability to engage in active listening. Before the implementation took place, Mich was only concerned with his ideas and how he could contribute to the group. While his peers were sharing their ideas, he was distracted and not involved in the discussion process (Photos 3 and 4). Thus, there were frequent disagreements since the children had different starting points and opinions. However, I implemented a lesson that had an emphasis on 'Active Listening', using a book entitled 'Whole Body Listening Larry' by Elizabeth Sautter. Subsequently, the children were more aware of their body language and how to pay attention when the speaker was talking. This was evident in the stop-motion animation sessions when children were listening intently to their peers' ideas and were able to provide constructive feedback.

Discussion and recommendation

The findings from the current study provided examples of how intervention strategies supported children's social and emotional development in the areas of relationship skills and social awareness. The excerpts showed that children were able to resolve their conflicts with minimal teacher intervention over the weeks, as a result of prior interventions in accordance to Gartrell's (2014) strategies. This is aligned with literature which asserts that children are capable of conflict resolution without adult intervention when given time and equipped with the necessary skills (Roseth et al., 2008). The idea of adopting this intervention guideline is for teachers to use as a tool to mediate conflicts. One of the possible explanations could be that children have been observing how the teacher facilitates conflict resolution, aiding children to pick up skills related to social and emotional competencies and regulation. This is also aligned with Bandura's (1986) socio-cognitive perspective whereby children were able to learn through direct experiences with their environment. The goal of the guidance approach

is to enable children to choose to act thoughtfully and responsibly so that their behaviour is acceptable and appropriate. This action research project further reiterates the role of the teacher in guiding development, by equipping children with tools to understand and engage in ethical decision-making and considerations (Gartrell, 2014). When teachers are able to model acceptable behaviours and provide strategies for self-regulation, children will learn to resolve their own problems and be responsible for their actions. These skills can be inculcated through the stop-motion animation project, which was noted by Myck-Wayne (2010) to promote pro-social skills such as turn-taking, collaboration, conflict resolution and showing empathy (Photo 5). A shift from the current academic driven scene (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003) should be advocated for, where children's social and emotional skills support as it promotes children's school readiness and well-being. As such, policymakers can consider providing more resources, such as introducing various strategies that could be implemented in the classrooms and integrated into the daily curriculum and activities, promoting children's holistic development.

Photo 5: Wall display of children's work

Conclusion

This action research project aimed to build awareness of the benefits and process of implementing Guidance Intervention strategies to support children's social and emotional learning. In this project, the children were positively influenced by the intervention process, honing their relationship skills and social awareness through facilitating their conflict negotiation and self-regulation. Apart from that, this has deepened my understanding of teaching and taught me to be more self-critical through this inquiry project, consistently seeking ways to improve. Applied research gives empowerment to both the children and teachers and it serves as a form for professional development, improving various teaching and learning practices.

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Media Portrayals of Childhood Trauma

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Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to see the progression of the media throughout the years in relation to the accuracy of its portrayal of childhood trauma and closing the gap between the true realities faced by trauma survivors versus what is shown to the public. Much research has been conducted regarding childhood trauma and the lasting effects it leaves on the individual. However, rarely does the media accurately portray the harsh truth of childhood trauma and the life changing effects left on the individual. The media is a wide range of platforms where a multitude of individuals gather their information and understanding from. This concept of media is broad, ranging from social media, television shows, movies, books, newspapers, and video streaming sites such as YouTube. The extent to which the media displays childhood trauma does not cover the true depth of trauma experienced and can leave those who have experienced trauma to feel oppressed and undermined in opposition to those who have not experienced trauma, leaving them with a false reality of the truth.

Research question

To what extent does the media accurately portray childhood trauma in the real world, and how has this portrayal progressed through the years?

Review of literature

An extensive amount of research has been done regarding childhood trauma and the effects it has on the individual. Much of this research includes the different types of traumas one experiences, and the lasting effects on the individual. The National Survey of Children's Health (2011-2012) found that "nearly 35 million of US children have experienced one or more types of childhood trauma." This equates to nearly half of the population of children in America that have had at least one type of traumatic event happen in their life. This statistic displays the overwhelming number of children that are affected by trauma and how prevalent of an issue it is. Childhood trauma is defined as the experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful or distressful, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects. The way trauma

affects each person is different in relation to the type of trauma experienced and changes the actions and livelihood of individuals in their way of life. At an early age, children are still developing, so when trauma occurs, they "survive unthinkable abuse by "accommodating" to the abuse in a way that changes them developmentally" (Shore, 2019). When analyzing how this relates to the average American, childhood trauma seems to be a trend among America's children, who will grow up later to be the foundation of our country. Research has shown that many of these children have not been given the proper tools to cope, because many people are not aware of the extent their children are struggling. This can lead to farther serious issues down the road, like behavior and substance abuse, along with depression and anxiety. With change, comes awareness, and awareness is needed to combat the growing number of struggling children in America. Also prevalent in America is the consumption of media, which is where most Americans gather their information on important topics. Although childhood trauma has been displayed in media throughout the years, there is a gap between the portrayal of trauma and truth.

The impact of childhood trauma

Childhood trauma is a painful experience a child has that leaves lasting emotional, mental, and physical damage on a child. Examples of this trauma could be bullying, abuse at home, general neglect, the death of a parent or loved one, divorce of parental figures, etc. Many studies report the lasting impacts childhood trauma have on a child. The importance of relationships to a child cannot be underestimated in relation to a child's emotional development. Through positive relationships with an important loved one or parental figure, children become emotionally equipped; they learn how to regulate their emotions, trust others, and understand their own value to society as individuals. When a relationship with an important attachment figure is unstable or broken, children are conditioned to think that they cannot trust anyone but themselves. Because of this, traumatized children will have difficulty forming healthy attachments and will have a hard time expressing and regulating their emotions, which makes them more prone to stress and reacting violently or inappropriately.

The administrative office of the courts discusses how "in a sense, the child's developing brain is being adapted and wired to help the child survive in a traumatic and stress-filled environment" (Tyda, 2014). The word adapted shows just a glimpse of the effect trauma leaves. Children's brains are having to adapt to new ways of life; learning and navigating through their struggles that forever change their perceptions of the world they live in. These children then grow up into our colleagues, friends, teachers, and parents of the next generation. Knowing the truths of childhood trauma and bringing awareness to our surrounding communities can leave lasting effects of the ways we view and treat one another.

Research also shows that victims of childhood trauma also tend to internalize their stress, as they feel they do not have anyone to turn to, which can lead to significant problems with depression and anxiety. (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014). These children might also be vigilant and guarded, which can cause them to be overwhelmed at even the slightest inconvenience, or, on the other hand, they might be emotionally numb, which causes them to disregard potential threats and makes them more prone to revictimization. Cognitively, these children also struggle. When their whole life has been under constant threat, they rely strictly on survival. Because all their energy is focused here, they find it difficult to take in new information, which causes deficits in language comprehension and reasoning skills. (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014) It also causes them to be forgetful or have problems maintaining attention, which makes not only their personal life a struggle, but also their academics. Lastly, physical issues can arise because of childhood trauma. Dr. Eshelman (2020) researched the specific physical ailments linked to trauma and stress, and the results were shocking. “Researchers found high levels of a protein S100B in the brains of children who had experienced emotional trauma. S100B is linked with potentially damaging brain inflammation.” Along with these damaging proteins, researchers also found elevated stress hormones consistently in the bodies of these children, which can also lead to inflammation in the body and further health risks. Studies have also shown that children who have experienced trauma have sleep difficulties and lower general immune function. These startling conclusions prove that children, despite surviving a traumatic event and potentially moving past it, will continue to be haunted by its affects as they develop.

Media consumption

Media is perhaps the most important outlet of information in our society today. Although the use of newspapers and magazines is slowly declining, the prevalence of social media, TV and movies is growing. It is a way people all around the world gather and spread information and is incredibly influential to its consumers. Dueze (2011) explains how “today we have to recognize how the uses and appropriations of media penetrate all aspects of contemporary life.” Statistics show that in terms of average time spent each day, digital formats of media, such as online newspapers, magazines and social networking, take up the majority of the US adult’s daily media consumption time. Following close behind that is the consumption of TV, with adults spending almost 4 hours per day watching TV (Kohl, 2021). The consumption of movies is also high and on the rise, thanks to streaming platforms. Statistics show “Around 19 percent of Americans claim to stream or watch movies every day, while an additional 26 percent claim to watch or stream movies several times per week.” (Navarro, 2021) Because of sites like Netflix and Hulu, consumers now have more access to movies than ever and can enjoy them in their own home, which has also caused the consumption of this form of media to increase in recent years.

Why is this important? Because media is so prevalent in our society today and so accessible, people can access information at the push of a button for information that they might have no prior knowledge of before. Exposure in the media means that a topic will be broadcasted to the public on a wide scale and more people can become aware of the issue, even if it makes the audience uncomfortable. Analyzing these media trends and the connection to childhood trauma could be beneficial to the bulk of Americans consuming the same form of media. However, while media can be beneficial in some areas, it can also come with harm. Many forms of media include subjective opinions that are conveyed to a vast majority of people and "comes to shape our sense of reality" (Dueze, 2011). This idea of reality "could be manipulated, fast-forwarded, panned, scanned, and zoomed in on" (Dueze, 2011). This reflects the hidden truth that the media can avoid. Media is extremely easy to manipulate to project what it wants to its consumers and can leave trauma undergoers feeling oppressed and misrepresented.

Timeline of media over the years

Over the years, the media has become more inclusive towards showing the realities of mental illness and the internal battles of humanity, like anxiety, depression and OCD. Because of the normalization of these topics in the media, the stigma around these mental illnesses has declined, and the conversation about the true struggle of the mind has come to light. However, the media has not always been this way. In the past, the media was "so focused on selling the news that they sensationalize stories to provoke public interest and excitement" (Brown, 2013). This resulted in people with mental illnesses to be portrayed as crazy and irrational, leaving them looked down upon with an increasingly negative view of themselves. Brown (2013) depicts modern media's portrayal of mental illness and shows how in the past just "because negative stories tend to be more interesting to the audience, they are the ones that get reported the most often, and they are the ones that shape the public's view, depicting the mentally ill as having violent, delusional and irrational behavior." This further reiterates how in the media what is seen as more interesting or convincing is what is deemed as more believable, leaving the truth obstructed. In previous years, the media portrayed characters who struggled with mental illnesses to be deemed as crazy, often playing the role of a murderer or inflicting harm, far from the reality. This in turn leaves the community of viewers to form biased and discriminating opinions, and push those who face illnesses farther away. Stuart (2006) argued that "studies consistently show that both entertainment and news media have provided overwhelmingly dramatic and distorted images of mental illness that emphasize dangerousness, criminality and unpredictability." However, Stuart (2006) goes on to say in more recent years, "the media has been an important ally in challenging public prejudices, initiating public debate, and projecting positive, human-interest stories about people who live with mental illness." This shows the timeline of the media, once portraying the mentally ill to be the bad guys to now projecting a positive image of the mentally ill.

If the media in past years has been portraying mental illness negatively, has it been doing the same for childhood trauma? Like Stuart (2006) stated, has the media become better about this as the normalization of sensitive topics becomes popular? The aim of this research is to fill this gap. The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scale is a tally of different types of abuse, neglect and other hallmarks of a rough childhood. According to previous studies using the ACE scale, a higher score, the rougher the childhood, and the higher the potential that you develop health issues later in life. One of the largest research studies using the ACE scale is the CDC-Kaiser ACE study. These researchers wanted to research the relationship between health risks later in life and exposure to childhood abuse and household dysfunction. According to researchers, "Seven categories of adverse childhood experiences were studied: psychological, physical, or sexual abuse; violence against mother; or living with household members who were substance abusers, mentally ill or suicidal, or ever imprisoned. The number of categories of these adverse 10 childhood experiences was then compared to measures of adult risk behavior, health status, and disease." (Felitti, 1998). Ultimately this experiment found a strong relationship between exposure to childhood abuse and dysfunction to multiple risk factors for several leading causes of death in adults. As shown many times, an implication of childhood trauma is repeated health concerns that can even result in death. This study using the ACE scale once again shows the power of trauma, and the consequences people afflicted with abuse and dysfunction will carry with them. Using the ACE scale, the current research aims to discover correlations between the real-life effects of childhood trauma and its media portrayals to the public.

Methodology

Participants

To evaluate how accurately childhood trauma is portrayed in the media, an experiment was conducted where the researchers watched 10 movies that had characters with backgrounds of childhood trauma and used the ACE scale to assess the character's trauma and how accurate this portrayal is in the media over time. Because of ethical concerns regarding childhood trauma, the researchers conducted this research using movies, movie characters specifically, as the participants. The characters portrayed in the movies that went through the trauma on screen were substitutions for the human trauma victims in this research. Ten movies were utilized, five from the time period 1940-1980 and five from the time period 1990-2020. These movies were selected from the website IMDb (Internet Movie Database) which is an online database in relation to movies, television shows, video games, and streaming content using the keyword search, childhood trauma. The background information was then observed to see if the movie was a good fit for the study. Movies that fit the background were then selected, one from each decade excluding the one movie selected in 2005. The researchers chose to disrupt the decade gap with the one five-year gap because the time period 1990-2020 does not encapsulate 5 decades, and there were no movies made before 1940 where the main character underwent childhood trauma that the

researchers could access. From the movies selected, the movie's main characters were vastly different from each other, with varying ages, ethnicities, and genders, but they all shared history of trauma and abuse, whether it was ongoing throughout the duration of the movie, or a previous hardship that drove their actions in the movie.

Instruments

The instruments used to collect data included a television or screen to view the movie and media platforms such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime to access the movies. Copies of the ACE scale were printed out, used, and filled in while watching movies. These materials aided in finding sufficient research and data corresponding to the time period and accuracy of childhood trauma portrayed. The ACE scale is a tally of different types of abuse, neglect and other hallmarks of a rough childhood. Exposure to one type (not incident) of ACE qualifies as one point. An ACE Score of 0 (zero) indicates no exposure, while an ACE score of 10 indicates exposure to all trauma categories. This scale was useful in the assessment and interoperation of trauma experienced in the main character and the extent to which one experienced it. Numerical data was produced from this scale, giving the researchers a set number corresponding to the character's ACE score received.

Procedures

The procedure for this experiment was as follows: Before the researchers sat down to begin each movie, they reviewed the ACE scale and the criteria needed for a high score versus a low score on the scale, which in terms of this research, would mean more childhood trauma for a character versus less childhood trauma for a character. After this review, the researchers began to watch the movies. They watched one at a time over a two-week period. Throughout the movie, they took notes and analyzed the main character. At the end of the movie, the researchers completed the ACE scale. On the ACE scale, there are 10 questions that ask the participants if they have been abused, neglected, etc. by a loved one. For each of these 10 questions, the participant will answer yes or no to the question. If they answer yes, they receive 1 point on the scale, and answering no gets no points. At the end, these points are tallied to determine the score the participant receives on the scale. An average score would be 5/10 points meaning the participant is average. Average, in this research, is defined as experiencing trauma, but not a copious amount nor an insignificant amount. A score below 5 would be defined as having little to no trauma, and a score of more than 5 would be defined as having a more than average amount of trauma. The researchers collaborated to score each character from the 10 movies individually and determine their ACE score. The researchers then divided this data into the two time periods, 1940-1980 being "older movies" and 1990-Present being "newer" movies.

Results

Using the ACE scale, data was collected to form a correlation between childhood trauma experienced on two different time periods, 1940-1980 and 1990-2020. From here, the data showed the researchers which time period more accurately portrayed childhood trauma. If the character from a certain movie scored lower on the ACE scale, the researchers concluded that the movie did not accurately portray childhood trauma, and likewise, if the character scored higher on the ACE scale, it was concluded that the movie did accurately portray childhood trauma. For further clarification, the table below shows the time period, movie title, director name, and overall ACE score of that character. This is crucial in the data analysis of our research and shows a direct representation of how the researchers scaled these characters for further statistics.

Table 1: *Movie Title, Time Period, and ACE Score*

Time Period	Movie Title	Director	ACE Score
1940	“Shadow of a Doubt”	Alfred Hitchcock	4
1950	“The 400 Blows”	Francios Truffat	4
1960	“Marnie”	Alfred Hitchcock	6
1970	“Hatchet for the Honeymoon”	Mario Brava	3
1980	“The Wall”	Pink Floyd	2
1990	“IT”	Tommy Wallace	9
2000	“Antowne Fisher”	Denzel Washington	8
2005	“Monster”	Patty Jenkins	9
2010	“Chained”	Jennifer Lynch	7
2020	“Perks of Being a Wallflower”	Stephen Chbosky	2

Table 1 shows the organization of the 10 movies chosen by the researchers. The movies were organized by the specific time-period, movie title, director and ACE score they received. This table was created for the researchers to organize and directly categorize each movie into its respective category alongside the others.

Table 2: *1940-1980 Descriptive Statistics*

1940-1980 Time Period

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
ACE Score	5	0	3.800	1.483	2.000	6.000

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for movies from the time period 1940-1980 and their corresponding ACE score. A mean score of 3.80 shows little to no trauma experienced in the corresponding movies from this time period and concludes that the movies from this time period less accurately portray childhood trauma. A standard

deviation of 1.483 shows little differentiation between the ACE scores and the movies from this time period.

Table 3: *1990-2020 Descriptive Statistics*

1990-2020 Time Period

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
ACE Score	5	0	7.000	2.915	2.000	9.000

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the movies from the time period 1990-2020 and their corresponding ACE score. A mean score of 7 shows more than an average amount of childhood trauma experienced in the corresponding movies from this time period and concludes that the movies from this time period more accurately portray childhood trauma. The standard deviation of 2.915 shows moderate variation between the ACE scores and the movies from this time period.

Discussion

The evidence produced from the research provide evidence which concluded that childhood trauma is not accurately portrayed within the media in relation to the true depths' individuals endure. However, regarding the ACE scale, childhood trauma was shown to be prevalent within every movie watched. Statistical evidence was produced from the research to conclude that the movies from 1990-2020 more accurately portray childhood trauma than the movies from 1940-1980.

From the observation and analysis of all ten movies, it was interpreted that while prevalent in both time periods, childhood trauma was never truly accurately portrayed because the media reflects more on what is enticing for viewers rather than explicating the truth. While the media does include and portray forms of childhood trauma, the plot line is made to entice viewers rather than share the truth. This brings to light the gap associated in the media's portrayal of childhood trauma, showing how this portrayal is skewed to produce a more enticing movie, obstructing the truth.

Childhood trauma from the 1940-1980 time period was more widely associated in the Thriller/Horror category of movies, depicting the characters who experienced trauma to lash out, have villainous characteristics and who become involved with crime and murder. Out of the five movies selected from the earlier time period, three were classified as thrillers, one as a horror film and one as a drama film. Movies from this time period would also enhance the view of the mentally ill in films portraying their character to have similar traits to "rotting teeth and unruly hair, and utilized inharmonious music, atmospheric lighting and scene juxtapositions throughout their

presence" as previously recognized as a recurring theme in movies from this time period (Brown, 2013). This representation of childhood trauma alludes to a negative perception of what childhood trauma is and the truth of the effects left on an individual. Viewers who have not experienced childhood trauma are then left with an altered interoperation of childhood trauma's true effects and those who have experienced childhood trauma are misrepresented and misunderstood.

While statistical evidence shows that the more recent time period from 1990-2020 more accurately reflects the truth of childhood trauma, it still does not fully portray the true depths to what individuals endure. However, it was found that this time period corresponds more with what researchers Downey and Crummy (2021) found, and how "traumatized people can learn to build a stable character to mask their vulnerability, suggesting feelings of depression and worthlessness are held by victims," which provided more insight into the characters' emotions rather than just emphasis on their actions, and this helps to bring awareness to the internal battles faced by childhood trauma victims. This idea was portrayed more in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* when the main character Charlie endured sexual assault, bullying, suicidal thoughts and actions, and struggled to form attachments. The audience was then let into aspects of the character's mind and emotions; they were able to see better the direct correlation between trauma, emotions experienced as a result, and new thought patterns formed because of trauma; something more accurately felt in real world trauma survivors.

Limitations

One way in which this research was limited was using movies in the study conducted. The researchers originally planned to conduct this research using human participants, but because of ethical concerns and guidelines, the researchers had to conduct this research through the analysis of movie characters. The use of movie characters limited the research because the researchers were analyzing and observing rather than speaking one on one with participants. The researchers had to watch and form a conjoined evaluation of the main character. This personal analysis could present bias from the researchers, through their interoperation on what a character endured and the ACE score they received. This bias could be seen based on the main characters' experiences and connections that were made to the audience. However, when filling out the ACE score, the researchers answered the questions to the best of their ability regarding the movie character and the childhood trauma they experienced in the movie. Another limitation in the research was found when analyzing childhood trauma through the lens of the ACE scale. While the ACE scale provides ten questions regarding adverse childhood experiences, it does not fully encapsulate all adverse childhood experiences. A major form of trauma the researchers found not listed was the loss of a loved one, along with environmental trauma such as war, natural disaster, and health or diseases. These specific types of traumas were experienced by multiple characters but were not listed so it resulted in a lower ACE score.

Future implications

The study conducted by the researchers was done with an exceedingly small sample size, so a suggestion for future studies would be to include a wider number of media that is analyzed. Other ways to conduct this research could be using documentaries, autobiographies or biographies only. Since most movies are fictional, using strictly fact-based nonfiction could allow for the research to be less interpreted, but more so like working one on one with an individual. Another way in which this research could be done would be to broaden the category of media included and move from strictly just movies to including books, and television shows from each time period. This would allow for the research to be conducted involving a wider variety of media that is produced to the public. Gender was another difference seen among the movies from both time periods and something the researchers would suggest being looked at more in depth for future studies. The researchers observed that men were more widely associated with inflicting harm and being involved with crime to prove themselves, while women were more associated with sexual fantasy and pleasure to gain validation.

Childhood trauma is prevalent within the lives of a vast multitude of people in the world, and this trauma leaves lasting impacts on the ways in which individuals live their lives. The present study worked to bring to light the gap associated within the media and its portrayal of childhood trauma.

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Moving Away from Passive Learning Towards Active Learning

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PRACTICE

Teachers and children as collaborators in the learning journey

28 June 2021 marked the start of Semester 2. After the long June holidays, I was raring to return to work and began to make plans on what I could do with the children in the new semester. Semester 1 had gone fairly well on the whole. Having engaged the children in a wide plethora of activities, I had grown closer to and understood them better in the process. However, there were days when I had a gnawing feeling that I could be doing too much of teaching in my fervent attempt to boost the children's literacy skills in the shortest time possible. As a result, the children became passive in their learning journey. Adopting a new approach in Semester 2 seemed timely and appropriate.

Observation and Reflections: Situation before change

I observed that the children were more engaged in certain segments of the FLAiR session which they had greater autonomy over. At the beginning of Semester 1, I explored a variety of books with them to understand their preferences in books in terms of storyline and comprehension level. Of the many books I had read, the children demonstrated keen interest in the Three Little Pigs and appeared visibly excited when I suggested acting out the various characters in the drama. For that entire week, they requested to act out the different roles in the story and I rode on their enthusiasm by adopting fairy tales as our theme for those few weeks. Throughout the period, the children looked forward to the drama segment each day. These sessions gradually evolved into a reader's theatre where the children were taught to recite simple scripts pitched at their level and we would also prepare props together for the drama sessions. In the process, the children's confidence in public speaking, oral skills and expressive language improved and the props making sessions also offered an outlet for their creative expressions (Photo 1).

Photo 1: Props created by the children for our reader's theatre sessions.

When it came to the other aspects of the FLAiR session, they often did not appear as enthusiastic and engaged although they were mostly cooperative. On some days, one or two of the children required much re-direction and re-engagement leaving me feeling defeated and exhausted as I struggled to execute the detailed lesson plans which I had painstakingly prepared.

The impetus for change came when it dawned on me that the children did not have sufficient ownership in their FLAiR learning journey. While the lesson plans were made in consideration of their learning needs and interests and choices were offered wherever possible, I was the main protagonist in this journey pushing them along towards the learning goals and by a process in which the children had little say over. This could possibly explain the enthusiasm they demonstrated for some activities versus their disengagement on some days and my exhaustion from trying to re-engage them with even more teacher-directed activities.

Implementing the change towards active learning

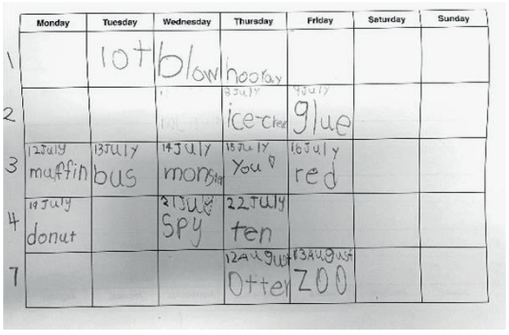
The first step involved a major shift in mindset when planning for my lessons. Instead of viewing the children as passive recipients of my lessons, I regarded them as collaborators/partners in this learning journey. For a start, I decided on fewer goals to achieve in the weekly lesson plan which would take up at most half the session. For the other half of the session, I left it largely unplanned and flexible to allow room for discussions and more self-directed learning.

Next, the children were empowered with greater autonomy. For the more teacher-directed and structured activities, the children were involved in the implementation of the activities as much as possible. For example, the children were encouraged to suggest changes to the rules of the game we were playing and to try them out.

Lastly, one of the key changes I had made to veer towards active learning was to intentionally provide more open-ended situations and activities which promote the development of higher order thinking skills such as creativity and problem solving. Previously, the language experience activities centred mostly around a sample of the prop we were making for our drama sessions. Whilst the children were given full autonomy to design the props such as the Billy Goat Gruff paper bag puppet or the cardboard Gingerbread Man and I would always emphasise that the sample was strictly for their reference, the activities tended to be driven mostly by the teacher (myself) and overly structured. As a result, we had not tapped much into their higher order thinking skills.

Learning unfolds: Situation after change

The change towards a more child-directed learning had a ripple effect on various aspects of our FLAiR sessions. Here are a few examples on how the sessions changed during this period:

<table>
<tr><td>S/N</td><td>Before</td><td>After</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>We did not set any classroom rules as a group. I would remind the children of the expected behaviour as and when the situation called for it. Sometimes, I had to repeat myself a few times during each session on the same issue, such as wearing their masks properly.</td><td>As a group, we discussed classroom rules and each decided on a rule. For example, Child A suggested that everyone drank their water before the commencement of the session to minimise disruptions. That became ‘Child A’s rule’.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Children’s Response
The children were very keen to follow the rules as they wanted the friends to follow theirs and looked visibly pleased when their rules were being enforced. In addition, my (only) rule which was to don the face mask properly for safety reasons was adhered to with minimal resistance. Overall, they required less re-direction from me and the level of co-operation improved.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Before</td><td>After</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Each week, I would select three words from the story books which we read, as sight words. They would read and tap the words like a passcode to exit the FLAiR session as our goodbye routine.
 
</td><td>I let the children decide on the words they wish to learn by choosing their favourite word from the story book of the day and they would then write the word into their exercise book.
 
</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Children’s Response
The children looked forward to a seemingly mundane academic activity. They would request to flip through the story book we read each day to search for a word they liked. When we revised the words written in their book, they had tremendous fun recalling the stories the words came from, the reasons why they were picked them and their favourite part of that particular story.</td></tr>
</table>

3	**Before**	**After**
	When we played games, we followed strictly the prescribed rules of the game.	The children were encouraged to suggest changes to the rules and to try them out. For example, for a syllable in the Snake and Ladder game, the children started by creating number cards and moving forward according to the number displayed on the drawn card. Child A suggested that they could continue to move forward in the same turn by the number of syllables in the word which they land on after drawing the number card.
	Children's Response	
	Child A was the first to propose a revision to the rule and his excitement to try it out inspired the others to suggest changes to the rules especially if they perceived it to be in their favour. For example, for a letter sound popcorn game which we played, the person with the greatest number of popcorn cards would win the game and miss a turn when he/she drew a pop card. Child B, who lost in one of the rounds as she kept getting the pop cards, suggested that the person who drew the greatest number of pop cards should be the winner instead.	
4	**Before**	**After**
	We focused primarily on more structured language experience activities like a map for the bear hunt or props for the stories.	We ventured into more open-ended activities such as creative writing where the children were given full autonomy to write about topics that required them to think more creatively, solve problems or make predictions.
	Children's Response	
	Children had always been very engaged in the book activities. However, giving them full autonomy triggered the most significant change. The children often requested for time to work on their projects and could spend days working on them independently.	

Example 1:
After reading the series of “what if we give a mouse a cookie” books by Laura Numeroff, the children embarked on writing something similar beginning with “What if I give <u><a subject></u> <u><an object></u>, <u><the subject></u> will _____.”.

Child B, who was a reluctant writer, was so motivated by the idea of sharing the completed story with the friends that she asked to work alone to keep her friends in suspense and came up with a way of writing the answer on the flipside of the page so that her friends could not peep at the answer.

Child B’s question

Child B’s answer on the flipside

Example 2:
After reading the book titled “The End (almost)” by Jim Benton, the children were invited to come up with their own version of the story. In the process, they learnt about the essential components of a story: the cover page, the characters and the plot.

In the past, Child A often made comments that he was not good at drawing and constantly asked for help or rushed through his work quickly to finish it fast. But for this project, he was very keen to get started on it given the freedom he had on all aspects of the assignment. He drew enthusiastically and even came up with long sentences on his own.

Reflections after implementation

After the shift towards active learning, the children demonstrated a zest for learning which I did not witness previously. Often than not, I could tell they were thinking hard as to how to get better at what they were doing. For example, Child A could be thinking of ways to modify the rules to win a game. Child C would ask to change the characters in the book that he was working on as he was not satisfied with the storyline or drawings.

In addition, when the children were given the autonomy to decide on what and how to learn, I noticed how their thinking skills were enhanced as they tried to build upon what they had previously learnt and developing them in greater depth. A simple activity like choosing a word a day to learn created an opportunity for them to recall the story I had just read and subsequently to decide whether to learn a completely new word or try to spell a word they were familiar with.

By moving away from structured activities to more open-ended activities which required predictions (the “what if” questions), the children had also demonstrated their abilities to go beyond following instructions to complete a task. Most importantly, it was heartening to witness the transformation of the reluctant readers and writers who were now keen to embark on their writing projects.

The change had also enriched my professional and personal growth. As I cut down on the goals to be achieved each day and transferred the autonomy to the children, the results were almost immediate. For a start, I felt much more relaxed and less exhausted. After the children had adapted to the new arrangement, I also felt more successful than before as the children became more self-directed and independent. Instead of attending to the children’s frequent requests for help or re-directing them to what I had set out to do, I spent more time facilitating their learning and hearing them share what they were working on.

What I did not quite expect to achieve from the change project was the deepening of the bond with the children. Prior to the change, I was glad that the children and I shared a good relationship although there were a couple of challenging moments along the way. However, as I spent more time with the children working together as collaborators in the learning journey rather than pushing down knowledge from the pedestal, things took an unexpected upward turn. With a close relationship between the teacher and learners as the backdrop, learning occurred naturally and delightfully.

Model Environments

The Italian Makerspace

Nandita Gurjar
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In the spring of 2020, I had the opportunity to attend a five-day workshop at Reggio Emilia in Italy. The workshop took place at the Remida center, which supplies materials to local public schools in the area and plays a critical role in the sustainability efforts of the making experience. A passion and enthusiasm for making was palpable throughout the program. I visited with a group of learners eager to learn, engage in making, and participate in subsequent discussions and reflections with the pedagogistas (expert teachers).

On our first day, we bonded, talked, and took a tour to see where materials and tools are kept and how they secure a steady supply of materials to donate to the local schools.

Our hosts eagerly shared their passion for what they do and the immeasurable benefits of the approach for children. We personally engaged in the making experience in the subsequent days—rejoicing in free exploration, like delighted children. We explored, investigated, discussed, and engaged in expressing our identities as we engaged with materials without a fear of failure.

The stress-free environment of exploration was respectful of each person, as there was no predetermined product to make. Instead, inquiry drove the next steps in the making. Attending to observations and making the next decision to choose an approach from various options was an important part of the process, experiencing failure as an opportunity for growth and reiteration as an inevitable step in the design process.

Unknowingly, we were building a growth mindset, a disposition of patience, and a sense of grace with ourselves—all aspects important to cultivate in ourselves and our students. The following provides a conceptual analysis of the Italian makerspace approach, principles governing the approach, benefits, and considerations for implementation.

The Third Teacher

Italian makerspace is based on the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach founded by Loris Malaguzzi, in which the environment plays a critical role in children's development. Malaguzzi believed that the makerspace is the third teacher[1] (joining family and classroom teachers), and children express themselves through a "hundred languages" of creativity. The hundred languages approach is reflective of the multiple ways of expression that individuals have at their disposal; this expression of identity occurs naturally through exploration of materials and tools in the makerspace.

The physical Reggio Emilia makerspace is distinctive, with the use of natural, recyclable materials. Recyclable materials of various textures, colors, and patterns are used; various tools are available for exploring the materials. The Reggio approach positions classroom teachers as active listeners and "researchers alongside children,"[2] who construct a flexible curriculum based on individual interests.

Developing a maker mindset and designing a learning environment conducive to makerspace go hand-in-hand. The learning environment provides a source for "provocations" or material offerings for individual and collaborative investigations. As children work with the materials, they learn engineering and STEM concepts with verbal reasoning while gaining self-esteem and self-confidence in their abilities. The Reggio maker approach views children as competent and active contributors in their own learning.

Certain areas of makerspace juxtapose the digital and the physical. Children code with Scratch to create a digital world, which they can project on a screen. Then, they can create a physical world using Legos, which combines the digital with the physical. Along the way, children learn valuable skills in negotiating meaning and making decisions while engaged in iterative problem-solving alone or in collaboration with others.

Making and Becoming

Use of recycled materials that are environmentally friendly is very important in an Italian-situated makerspace. Individuals explore and examine the properties of materials, using various ordinary, scientific, and technological tools that are neatly organized in the makerspace for ease of navigation and accessibility. Process is more important than product, and individuals are encouraged to express themselves through the materials as the end goal, rather than as a means to an end. The iteration and refinement of the artifact follows a design process unique to the individual. Tinkering in makerspace involves persistence and patience on the path to creation: "The process of becoming stuck and then unstuck is at the heart of tinkering."[3] The benefit that accrues to the individual is letting go of the fear of failure and focusing instead on enjoying the experience of creating. Thus, this approach honors the creative dignity of individuals.

As individuals construct, deconstruct, remix, problem-solve, analyze, and iteratively work with the materials to make meaning, they are exploring their innate creativity. The educational benefits of makerspace for children in terms of developing agency and self-confidence are well-documented in research.[4] The makerspace encourages iterative problem-solving and computational thinking in terms of seeing connections among elements, patterns, meaning and logic, and unique properties of materials. Further- more, it fosters empowered thinking, agency, growth mindset, and informal learning through tinkering and figuring things out. Therefore, engaging interested stakeholders in a makerspace context is relevant professional development.

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In Reggio Emilia, the culture of making and expressing identity through materials is deeply ingrained and situated in the Italian socio-cultural, educational context. The makerspace is structured to facilitate exploration, inquiry, and examination of materials with a variety of tools that encourage computational thinking and creativity.

Creating and Maintaining a Makerspace

In order to create a sustainable program, cost-effective procurement of materials and tools is important. Using recyclable materials and connecting with non-profit organizations and major companies to receive discarded or oversupply items can address the supply chain needs for a sustainable program at a large institutional scale.

The learning space we explored in Italy is structured and organized for order and accessibility. A variety of materials with different textures and forms are arranged and categorized for ease of access. Educators carefully attend to arrangement of the room, availability of materials, and aesthetics to enhance children's learning. Tools of exploration include both technological as well physical ones. A magnifying microscopic lens connected to the computer allows for projections on a huge screen.

The Socio-Emotional Connection

The teacher is a co-inquirer in the quest for knowledge during the making process, scaffolding by asking for children's opinions, acknowledging their input, and asking questions to facilitate the making process. Each child receives one-on-one attention, as the teacher interacts in the learning space even though the agency and decision making comes from the child.

The Reggio Emilia philosophy addresses the whole child by addressing socio-emotional learning and expression of identity through material use. Children are valued as "competent and deserving of respect, while valuing different cultural funds of knowledge as equally worthy."[5] There is a strong emphasis on active learning, risk taking, and problem solving through free exploration, with a high correlation between early social-emotional functioning and children's wellness.

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Learning is social and embedded in play and exploration. With the scripted curriculum used in most school districts, children are falling behind despite interventions. The devaluing of play and free exploration is hindering children's development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to a World Economic Forum 2020 report, The Ten Skills You Need to Thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution,[6] complex problem- solving and critical thinking are necessary to function effectively today and into the future. Furthermore, children coming from trauma, disadvantaged backgrounds, and lower socio- economic levels particularly benefit from exploration and inner expression through the 100 languages, such as music, embodied learning through play, art, sculpture, and so on. As they play and explore, they learn to empathize, self-regulate, and cooperate.

Designing Spaces for Optimal Learning

The learning environment becomes the children's "third teacher." Therefore, it is important to examine how learning spaces are designed. Makerspaces, which are "characterized by a playful, experimental, iterative style of engagement, in which makers are continually reassessing their goals, exploring new paths, and imagining new possibilities,"[7] offer great potential for children's learning, socio-emotional and identity development, and agency.

PRACTICE

Notes:

[1]Biermeier, M. A. (2015). Inspired by Reggio-Emilia: Emergent curriculum in relationship-driven learning environment. Young Children, 70(5), 72-75.

[2]Gandini, L. (2011). Play and hundred languages of children. American Journal of Play, 4(1), 1-18. p. 3

[3]Honey, M. A., & Kanter, D. (2013). Introduction. In M. A. Honey & D. Kanter (Eds.), Design, make, play: Growing the next generation of STEM innovators (pp. 1-6). Routledge. p. 54

[4]Jones, W. M., Cohen, J. D., Schad, M., Caratachea, M., & Smith, S. (2020). Maker-centered teacher professional development: Examining K-12 teachers' learning experiences in a commercial makerspace. TechTrends, 64, 37-49.

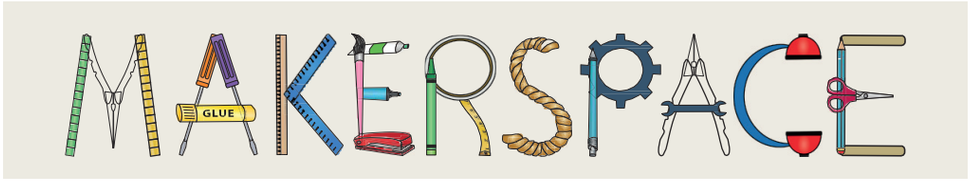
[5]Curtis, D., & Carter, M. (2013). The art of awareness: How observation can transform your teaching (2nd ed.). Redleaf Press. p. 9

[6]Gray, A. (2016). The ten skills you need to thrive in the fourth industrial revolution. World Economic Forum.

[7]Resnick, M., & Rosenbaum, E. (2013). Designing for tinkerability. In M. Honey & D. Kanter (Eds.), Design, make, play: Growing the next generation of STEM innovators (pp. 163-181). Routledge. p. 164

Benefits of Makerspaces

- Opportunities to innovate through hands-on experimentation
- Personalized learning strategies that allow students to develop their own ideas, methods, or products.
- Real-world applications for classroom concepts
- Acceptance of failure through an approach of experimentation, testing, evaluation, and modification
- Development of a wide range of 21st-century skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving skills, flexibility, collaboration, adaptability, oral and written communication, information literacy, technology literacy, productivity, social skills, leadership, initiative, and more.



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Mindfulness in an Early Childhood Classroom in Singapore

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In 2020, many of us realised our struggle with mental health when we were forced to make changes to our lives and the way we did things. I explored mindfulness practices together with the four-year-olds I was working with.

Background

"Mindfulness isn't difficult. We just need to remember to do it."
(Salzberg, 2010)

Mental health and self-care were topics that were emphasised when COVID-19 forced us to isolate and change our routines. This included us parting ways with stress-relieving activities that involved socialising and being outdoors. This sparked my interest in participating in mindfulness activities and was one of the reasons why I wanted to implement this in the classroom.

Mindfulness is associated with self-regulation (Dewhirst & Goldman, 2020; Flook et al., 2013), controlled by the prefrontal cortex of the brain that develops most rapidly from ages two to six years (Siddiqui et al., 2008). With the demands that we often see in the early childhood classrooms in Singapore, we sometimes forget that children do not yet have the skills to regulate their own emotions. We need to remind ourselves, as teachers, that the children need our help to develop these self-regulating skills.

In my inquiry project, I implemented some mindfulness activities with 11 four-year-olds, over five 30-minute sessions across two weeks. The activities included meditation, yoga, dance and breathing exercises. At the same time, during regular curriculum time, I would emphasize my regulation practices, like modelling breathing exercises when I was upset. I also conducted pre- and post-implementation observations to better understand the behavioural changes of two focal children, who were at different stages of development of self-regulation.

Reflection on mindfulness practice in the classroom

Child C: "Teacher Julie, is there mindfulness today?"

This was a common question the children would ask me when they saw me in the morning. If the answer was "no", they follow up with "why" questions. On the other hand, if the answer was "yes", they would give me a high-five (our morning greeting ritual) and move on with their morning routine.

The biggest takeaway for me was the realisation that the children looked forward to these half-hour sessions. Looking back, I too looked forward to these sessions with them. The likely reason was that there was no pressure or expectations for both the children and I to produce a certain result at the end of the day. As an adult who loves children, it was the time of day to relieve stress and for all of us to enjoy ourselves in a safe and controlled environment. The "results" of the mindfulness sessions were seen when the children put into practice these mindfulness strategies in situations where they had to practise self-regulation.

As time progressed, I found myself spending less time addressing disruptive behaviours in the classroom and during transition times. Emotional outbursts by the children were also reduced in the time that the children spent with me. In the beginning stages, I engaged in co-regulation with the children, where I addressed the children's feelings and helped them make sense of the situation. To do so, I used deep breathing to help calm the children's strong emotions and I practised thinking aloud to demonstrate to the children what I did to regulate my own behaviour; this is illustrated below:

Teacher: I am getting a little upset because the children are getting loud, and I cannot begin my lesson. I will count and breathe to calm myself down. [*Proceeded to count on my fingers as I breathed.]

Child A: Teacher Julie, your finger looks funny.

Child B: So funny!

Even though I was not directing this behaviour at anyone, this conversation was evidence that the children were watching me. My modelling and verbalising of my thoughts gave them an authentic view of how I regulated my emotions which provided them with a learning opportunity without the need to teach them this strategy explicitly. Towards the latter part of the study, I observed children helping their peers facilitate breathing.

Child A's eyebrows were furrowed and his arms were crossed, these were his signs of being upset. I raised and lowered my hands as I took big breaths, gesturing him to take deep breaths. About a metre away, Child B was also looking at Child A, mirroring my actions, directing it towards Child A, even though he was not looking at him.

To observe co-regulation among the children in the short space of five weeks that I had with them seemed to suggest the potential of the positive impact that mindfulness practices can have on the children. We learned that child development should be viewed holistically, but often, the area of social and emotional development is less

emphasised in our classroom practices. It is a tricky developmental domain to teach to children because feelings and emotions are abstract and difficult to explain unless these appear during our shared moments. In addition, when children encounter emotional outbursts, it may not be the easiest time to introduce these strategies. As suggested by Albrecht (2018), teaching children mindfulness requires some level of understanding and practice such that the teacher becomes a role model for the children. I found it easier to reinforce mindfulness practices with the children as I was intentionally regulating my own emotions during class instruction.

Moving forward

As a future early childhood educator, one of my greatest fears is teacher burn-out. Teacher burn-out is something that many of my practitioner friends seem to face, especially in this trying COVID-19 period we are now in. With this inquiry project, I hope to continue implementing mindfulness strategies in the classroom and make emotional moments in the classroom manageable for both the children and me. By doing so, I will be able to better manage my mental health while making sure that the children are growing in a safe and conducive classroom environment.

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Purposeful Play: A Teacher's Guide to Igniting Deep & Joyful Learning Across the Day by Kristine Mraz, Alison Porcelli and Cheryl Tyler

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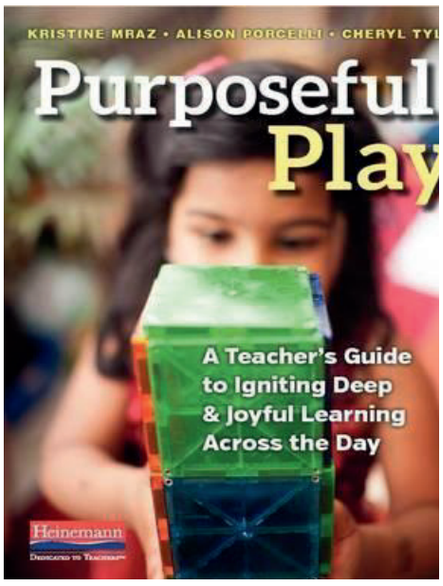
Purposeful Play: A Teacher's Guide to Igniting Deep & Joyful Learning Across the Day is an easy-to-read book that guides teachers to inspire and encourage playfulness and curiosity in children. The 167-page letter-sized practical book is neatly categorised into three sections.

- Section 1 explains *All About Play* through research and resources about play;
- Section 2 dwells on *The Work in Play* and provides teachers with relevant and user-friendly strategies to foster children's social and emotional growth through play; and
- Section 3 expounds on *The Play in Work* where teachers can tap into the children's interests to support meaningful goals with playful tools and charts, and leverage on inquiry as a play mindset to make the whole day feel playful for the children.



BOOK REVIEW

The book also includes appendices to enhance teachers' knowledge about the stages of fantasy play, recommended time frames for choice time and various types of games. There are useful readings and a template to observe and record individual child's interests or choices during play. In addition, there is a list of questions for teachers to consider when observing the children's interests or ask when talking with them so as to learn more about and understand them more deeply.

To make for light reading, there are authentic photographs throughout the book which augment the authors' explanations to enable teachers to recognise children's play matter throughout the curriculum. The user-friendly book has tabulated possible teaching sessions that teachers might want to teach the children to achieve specific learning outcomes. There are also note-worthy boxed-up snippets such as what may be provided in outdoor play spaces, book choices or tools to support children to work

and think with more independence. These nuggets of information will enable teachers to confidently plan their own activities and equip the environment to meet and support the individual learning needs of the children in their own classrooms.

What I like about the book is that the authors have involved a preschool principal and her teachers who had created joyful and playful classrooms. The practitioners had shared their candid experiences, practical strategies and inspirations of how the children had taught them the importance of making time for play each day and how to infuse play in every interaction.

I particularly enjoy reading the vignettes that offer glimpses into how teachers test out practices such as letting children lead, and growth mindsets through play where children reap the opportunities to problem solve creatively, extend their play, consolidate their explorations to understand the root of the problem and address it by themselves. These vignettes, in yellow background, are supported by inspiring quotes of famous people who had made a positive impact to the world, and end with succinct key takeaways for teachers. They reduce the need for teachers to reinvent the wheel and to consider what is relevant and workable in their classrooms should they wish to try out some of the practices.

Furthermore, the *Peek Inside the Classroom* in each Section provides valuable insights into how teachers can 'notice how' the different stakeholders in the classroom co-share the environment when specific pedagogical strategies such as direct instruction, coaching, storytelling and inquiry, using students' interest to drive instruction or using playful tools to promote big thinking are put in action. Through these narratives, the authors gave in-depth insights into how teachers can enhance their capabilities in making observations and reflections to improve their effectiveness to engage the children, adapt their resources, modify the classroom environment and consider appropriate strategies to create joyful and meaningful learning experiences through play.

All about play

The authors' reminders that 'play isn't a luxury but it's a necessity' sets the context for them to explain *All About Play*. They made observations of how children demonstrate powerful learning through play, whether they were onlookers, communicating, negotiating, expressing emotions, arguing, asking questions, solving problems, making decisions, assimilating information, scribbling or planning. They validated that play is an essential pillar of school and of childhood through research and theory, classroom practices and applications, and practical suggestions to infuse play throughout the day, regardless of the level, and while meeting the many standards that preschools need to adhere to.

The authors successfully debunked the stoic belief of teachers who think that teachers should teach and children should not play but engage in teacher-directed learning activities to attain academic performance by addressing the typical decisions that teachers need to navigate daily.

They succinctly shared findings and theories to answer the questions below, to enable every teacher to reflect on how to best teach their children.

1. Why choose play?
2. How does play fit with meeting the school or curriculum goals or licensing or quality standards?
3. How can there be time for play when there is such an emphasis on academic rigour?
4. What about my students who need extra support? Wouldn't their time be better spent engaged in small-group discussion?
5. How much time in the day do children really need to play?
6. Can't children just play when they are finished with their work?
7. Isn't play just fun?

The authors suggested that teachers define what academic rigour actually means and identify how each child is expected to learn and be supported to demonstrate learning. They emphasised that play is the natural environment for children, and it is something that the children have been doing even before they are enrolled in preschool. And because play is safe and familiar, children feel at ease to take risks and try out new learning. They added that academic rigour gives children the skills such as imagination, negotiation, collaboration, empathy and flexibility that are necessary to be successful in the twenty-first century workplace.

The authors explained that while small group work is a powerful instructional method and an important intervention for children who need additional support, it should not replace play because play gives access to content and higher levels of thinking for a variety of learners.

Teachers are encouraged to look at play from a different perspective to build children's strengths as advocated by Lev Vygotsky, and to allocate sufficient time for children to develop ideas, take on and assign roles, collaborate, create the environment and decide when to change it, develop and negotiate rules, and be active listeners instead of insisting children work on desk work which they may be struggling with. The authors challenged teachers to think about how they can infuse an abundance of play and the principles of play across the curriculum. They reiterated that the official 'play' time will then be an impetus for children to 'work' which is essentially active engagement toward achieving a learning goal.

To answer the question: Isn't play just fun? the authors referred to *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* where Brown (2010) pointed out that play has an essential role in fuelling our happiness and intelligence throughout our lives and that it is essential to our health as sleep and food. Brown's advocacy is supported by Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky and Einstein who all agreed that play is not frivolity but essential for development of the mind and human spirit. I feel that this certainly can change the mindsets of teachers who still do not subscribe to play as a connector to the world and offers limitless possibilities.

The authors explained that play takes on a myriad of forms and for children, play is a furnace in which much of their brain development is forged. According to Lester and Russell (2008), the emerging evidence from the brain sciences suggested that playing, as a spontaneous, flexible, and goalless 'as-if' behaviour gives rise to emotional and physical health, well-being and resilience, as well as lay the foundations for cognitive functioning and social competence.

It is interesting to note that the authors are of the opinion that teachers can allow children some types of play such as playing with guns, mimic characters in pop culture that use violence or rough and tumble that make us uncomfortable. They explained that play is children's way of sorting out complicated messages that they absorb every day, and when teachers impose their personal, adult opinions on children's worlds created in play, teachers send the message that certain children do not belong because the desires and questions they bring to play are uncomfortable to the adults, and denying children a space to play in certain ways means they are left believing school is not a place for them.

The authors encouraged teachers to continually reflect on their own beliefs and values and the impact their perspective has on the children they teach and provide balanced play to make children's lives better. They suggested collaborative whole-class and small-group conversations to help children understand feelings and ideas that are confusing to them or conflict with the values of the classroom community.

While I concur with the authors that children need outlets for fantasy and physicality, construction and cooperation and time to grow – to create, innovate, explore and optimise their potential – allowing children 'uncomfortable' types of play is certainly food for thought.

To summarise *All About Play*, the authors leveraged on the Reggio Emilia approach which highlights the environment has to be flexible, must undergo frequent modification by the children and teachers, and teachers should be responsive to the children's needs.

Teachers can draw on a wide range of fundamentals of building a playful environment, rules and ways to teach children from the book. To begin, the authors invited teachers to ask: 'Does the classroom belong to the teacher, or does it belong to the children?' This is because how the teacher designs the classroom shows if he/she values children's agency and right to play, while teaching into the concept of organisation, including considerations of space, materials and routines to enable children to adapt to the classroom and to meet their needs and welcome their voices.

Teachers can refer to the authors' extreme makeover list should they need to make over their classroom space so it invites play. In addition, the authors offered some guiding principles for teachers to strengthen the relationship between community and play.

I like the reminders about rules to set the stage for community and caring – to build a play-friendly emotional environment.

- Make rules that work
- Rules are positive statements
- Rules are guidelines
- Rules mean specific action

The authors suggested that teachers should set the tone of the classroom environment if they truly want their classrooms to be places of joy, laughter and vigour where children can be children and hopes and dreams are fulfilled.

The work in play

The authors pointed out that play, with its emphasis on peer interaction, is the perfect place to develop children's empathy.

This section serves as a tutorial of sorts to help teachers think about when to focus on empathy in the classroom, what to teach to help children develop their perspective taking and enrich their vocabulary of feelings, and how to sustain this across the day.

To address the twin aspects of empathy, understanding emotions and perspective taking, teachers can focus on two instructional areas:

1. studying faces and bodies to understand emotions (my own and others) and
2. taking on roles to build perspective taking.

<u>Focus Area 1: Studying faces and bodies to understand emotions</u>

To help children understand what their emotions feel like, what they can do to manage their feelings, and how to use this knowledge to read faces and understand what others might be feeling, teachers can tweak the guidelines found in the book to address the particular needs of their children.

They can also determine the length of time needed to work on skills such as understanding a range of emotions, helping children calm down or change feelings from negative to positive, or how to 'read' and react to others 'faces' and bodies while playing.

Focus Area 2: Taking on roles to build perspective taking

In teaching children to take on roles, we need to teach them to stretch outside of themselves, sample the world from another's point of view and see how it might be different. Teachers can implement the suggested teaching sessions to support children to talk like other characters or help children transform their appearance or actions to better understand another's perspective through fantasy play, to lay an essential foundation for children's perspective taking in everyday life.

The authors pointed that the more support we give to children to fully embrace a role as another person, the more deeply children will experience the feelings that lead to empathy. They added that children may work on empathy during choice time but empathy has its tentacles in all aspects of the school day. Hence, it is equally important for teachers to include social and emotional learning opportunities in reading, writing and social studies and teach children to collaborate and negotiate while they play together to also learn to self-regulate, communicate, work and think together to tackle basic problem solving, practise sophisticated conversational skills such as listening, clarifying, disagreeing politely and collaborate within a play area.

The authors gave insight into how the improvisational nature of play makes it a natural partner to a growth mindset (Brown, 2010). They explained that flexibility and innovation are rewarded with the pleasure of playing which teaches children what we want them to know about life at large. Failures and frustration happen but an ability to adapt and improvise often brings unexpected rewards to the children.

Dweck (2006) explained that most individuals tend to adopt one of two mindsets – a fixed mindset or a growth mindset – or a mixture of both. Teachers can guide children who adopt a fixed mindset to have a growth mindset so that they can develop their intelligence and embrace challenges and seek feedback from others to become successful.

To explore growth mindsets through play, Mraz & Hertz (2015) had identified several effective strategies to help children become more persistent, resilient, empathic, optimistic and flexible. Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities to children to tell and retell stories, teach them to self-talk, do reflections and set attainable goals to address challenging situations, recover from mistakes, try something new or stick with a challenge.

The play in work

This section explores the possibility that the whole day can feel like play. The authors advised teachers against 'play is over, time for work' mentality. They reiterated that there is play in work and work in play.

I am sure that teachers will agree that a classroom environment filled to the brim with their personality leaves little room for the interests and growing passions of each child. I concur with the authors that teachers have their homes to fill up with the posters and trinkets they love but classrooms are for children to design and develop. And teachers are not teaching 'students' but when they connect to each student, truly and personally, they build relationships essential to teaching and learning. Therefore, learning what makes children tick, from learning styles to their loves and pet peeves, enables teachers to tailor the curriculum accordingly.

When teachers use children's interests to drive instruction, children keep learning playful and engaging. Why should that matter? This matters because engaged and joyful learners become engaging and joyful people in the world around them and how teachers teach is as important as what they teach. In addition, it matters teachers acknowledge what children love because through that we acknowledge that they count, that they are valued and that they are valuable. Truly, it matters because our children matter.

Consequently, incorporating children's interests in teaching instruction is also one of the simplest and most accessible ways to achieve a play mindset while, ostensibly, doing 'work'. The deep engagement children achieve while playing 'supermarket', for example, can be accessed and leveraged throughout a whole day of learning. For teachers to inch towards this ideology, they will find the list of questions when observing for children's interests in the book useful.

<u>Power of tapping into children's interests</u>

Knowing the children's interests can help in planning activities that incorporate interests in meaningful ways. The key to teaching children, however, is remembering what it was like to be one. When planning instruction, teachers can ask:

- Can I make an analogy to something I know my class enjoys?
- Can I use a visual or story from a topic my class enjoys?
- Is there a prop, a tool or a movement I can use to make this more engaging?
- Is there a way to incorporate the materials I know my children enjoy using?

<u>Supporting meaningful goals with playful tools and charts</u>

Sometimes, the thing that helps a child achieve a playful state of mind during an admittedly non-playful task is a tool, prop, chart, mini-chart, splash card or photograph. To design playful supports, teachers need to understand why they make the tools and

charts, how goals support children and how to subsume their own ideas of what 'work' looks like for what children really need to be successful, independent and joyful.

It is important that teachers set goals that match the individual child, make the goals with, not for, the child, and make goals memorable. Teachers need to have in mind that play taps into the brain's ways of remembering things: it is visual, it is physical, it is fun and it is repetitive. Teachers can use the qualities inherent in play to make the goals memorable for the children so that children will invest in the goals and carry on independently. Furthermore, making of playful tools should involve the children because children are the experts. The authors gently reminded teachers to get to know and really listen to the children because no matter how cool or playful they think their idea may be, if it is not deeply connected to the world of the children and not reflective of their understanding and expertise, it will not help them grow as people and as thinkers.

Inquiry is a play mindset

Play invites inquiry and inquiry accepts that invitation. In play, children can linger, examine, wonder, notice, look closely, ask why things are the way they are and share their thinking. By giving children space and time to play, teachers can observe what they know and what they want to learn about. Through play, children explore and express their ideas, interest and passions with inquiry as a natural and authentic partner in the process. Play brings inquiry but does inquiry as an instruction method bring play?

The authors confirmed that inquiry injects a play mindset into all learning because it is a process that occurs when playing. And in the classroom, inquiry is an approach to instruction that mimics the process by which humans naturally learn. As a methodology, inquiry begins in curiosity, moves forward with a spirit of playful experimentation, and is not a top-down textbook approach.

How do the principles and processes of play and inquiry intertwine? Inquiry and play jointly create a joyful partnership that is fundamental when teachers reflect on their beliefs about the children whom they teach and how they learn. Research has shown that children learn best when they have choice, collaborate, ownership over learning, experiences are open-ended, they know it is OK to take risks, can develop their own wonderings and questions, experiment with newly developed ideas, share insights and learning with friends, replicate their learning and construct new meaning with words, stories, drama, building, drawing, painting, sculpture, music and play, and when learning connects to their passions, hearts and imagination.

With this understanding, teachers can jumpstart the inquiry process – to provide a provocation to generate curiosity, observe, ask questions to stimulate thinking and extend play, develop theories, test theories and discover new concepts, support

children to synthesise their learning and collect and share findings with the larger learning and teaching community.

Summary

Teachers' mindsets shape how they see the world, make decisions and confront challenge. They can bring optimism, enthusiasm and improvisation of play to all aspects of what they do with the children in the classroom. As advocates and champions of childhood, teachers are encouraged to choose joy, engagement, hope, inquiry and play for every child, every day.

I strongly encourage both preschool leaders and teachers to read this book. All in all, the nine chapters of the book provide nuggets of knowledge and practical strategies to engage children to work in play and learn through play. The book also nudges leaders and teachers to rethink what play is about, reflect on their current practices and consider how they can infuse play into the curriculum and create more supportive environments to support the children to learn through play.

Teachers can take tiny steps to make changes to create ample opportunities for children to learn through play. Leaders and teachers can jointly brainstorm and decide on adaptations that can contribute towards a happier preschool experience and healthier physical and mental well-being of the children.

And to master the art of igniting deep and joyful learning across the day, teachers can identify the actions to create opportunities for children to 'work' hard at play and enjoy 'working at' what they have created for the children to slowly, but surely, pave the path for them to develop holistically.

If advocating play is a challenge in your preschool's philosophy, it's time to start advocating for the children who have limited time to really 'play' in preschool to enjoy childhood. You can start by embracing children can learn through play. Next, you can visualise how you would like to infuse 'play' in your learning activities and equip the classroom to be the 'third teacher' to support the children's exploration, discovery, evaluation and construction of new knowledge. You'll be enlightened by how easy it is to adopt strategies that can dramatically ignite deep and joyful learning across the day in a preschool.

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