

OXFORD SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS 2025

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Reviewers

My appreciation goes to the professional reviewers whose thoughtful evaluations and constructive feedback helped ensure the academic quality of these papers.

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Foreword

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Sixth Proceedings of School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC) Oxford Symposium. Following the successful symposium held in August 2025, we are pleased to share the scholarly contributions. The symposium participants represent a rich cultural mosaic, reflected in the presentations and papers included in these proceedings. Together, they encompass a diverse range of interests, perspectives, and research contexts.

Three papers in this volume examine well-being and trauma from different perspectives. Derived from the ancient Greek word trauma, meaning “wound,” the concept refers in psychology to a deeply distressing experience that overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope and may have enduring effects on psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. Drawing on research conducted in diverse national and cultural contexts, these papers highlight the global vulnerabilities faced by children, adolescents, and families.

The first paper, *From Classrooms to Families: How AI Literacy Can Support Engagement and Well-Being in Ukrainian Schools*, provides a compelling glimpse into the lives of educators, families, and students in Ukraine during wartime. They explore how implementing the experience AI program may serve not only as a model for AI literacy education but also as a mechanism to strengthen school–family engagement during recovery and reconstruction. Within this framework, parents are positioned not merely as caregivers but as critical emotional role models who help children navigate challenging experiences, regulate emotions, and develop adaptive coping strategies and healthy behavioral patterns.

The second paper, *From surviving to thriving: School-based family counsellors as agents of systemic change*, outlines key implications for school-based family counselors in leading and implementing trauma-informed practices. Recognizing the barriers that often limit young people's access to mental health services, the author examines the role of school counselors in fostering school environments where all students feel safe, supported, and able to thrive.

The third paper, *Future Orientation as a tool for prevention and intervention for School- Based Family Counseling*, examines the development of future orientation within the framework of school-based family counseling, with particular attention to its manifestations in the contemporary Israeli context. The authors explore how current challenges, including rapid digital transformation, rising rates of internalizing symptoms

among adolescents, and ongoing security threats in Israel, shape young people's capacity to envision, plan for, and invest in their futures. The paper highlights the importance of fostering future orientation as a developmental and resilience-promoting resource for adolescents navigating complex and uncertain environments.

Two additional papers put the spotlight on socio-educational aspects of school and educational systems.

The fourth paper, *Parents' Perceptions Regarding Inclusion of Their Children with Special Needs in Mainstream School*, points out two major developments that have shaped the field of special education since the second half of the twentieth century. First, there has been a substantial increase in the number of students identified as having special educational needs. Second, growing recognition of the value of inclusion has led to expanded efforts to integrate students with special needs into general education settings. Against this backdrop, the study examines parents' perceptions of Israel's inclusion policy, which grants families the right to choose whether their child is educated in a specialized educational setting or within a mainstream school. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions regarding parental choice, educational equity, and the implementation of inclusive education policies.

The fifth paper, *Strengthening educational trajectories in early childhood through school-based interventions implemented by teachers: The experience in Mendoza, Argentina*, focuses on a program designed to reduce socio-educational inequalities by developing cognitive and socioemotional skills among young children. Particular attention is given to students who are most vulnerable to educational disadvantages, highlighting the program's potential to promote equity and enhance developmental outcomes during the critical early childhood years. The study underscores the importance of early intervention in fostering both academic readiness and socioemotional well-being.

The sixth paper, *Understanding the present and predicting the future: integral consciousness, geopolitics and geo-economics in School-Based Family Counseling and Therapy*, sheds light on the historical, economic, and political processes that contributed to the emergence and growth of family counseling and, subsequently, school counseling. Tracing these developments over time, the author identifies a series of transformative shifts that continue to shape the theory and practice of family therapy today. Against the backdrop of rapid technological change, including the growing influence of artificial intelligence, and the ongoing impact of armed conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine, and Russia, the paper

raises important questions about the future direction of family counseling. In doing so, it invites reflection on how the profession may adapt to emerging societal challenges while continuing to meet the evolving needs of children, families, and communities.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the authors for sharing their research, insights, and professional experiences in these proceedings. Their contributions enrich the ongoing dialogue in the field of School-Based Family Counseling and advance our collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing children, families, and schools.

I hope that readers will find the papers presented in these proceedings both informative and inspiring, and that they will stimulate further research in the field of SBFC.

Warm regards,

Editor,

Nurit Kaplan Toren

From Classrooms to Families: How AI Literacy Can Support Engagement and Well-Being in Ukrainian Schools

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EdCamp Ukraine NGO

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) literacy to support the goals of School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC), especially in contexts of trauma, displacement, and recovery. EdCamp Ukraine, in collaboration with the Raspberry Pi Foundation, is piloting the Experience AI program with a cohort of 20 educators. The program introduces students to foundational AI concepts – such as machine learning, algorithmic bias, and generative tools – while promoting critical thinking, ethical reflection, and digital agency. Initial observations suggest that AI education, when delivered through trauma-informed and community-rooted practice, can foster intergenerational learning and new forms of family–school collaboration. A supporting questionnaire distributed by participating trainers gathered responses from 69 educators, highlighting parental interest, concern, and preferred strategies for deeper involvement in AI-focused learning. These early insights align with the SBFC framework, which emphasizes shared responsibility for student well-being. To further integrate these values, EdCamp Ukraine featured AI as the 2025 theme for Global Dignity Day, connecting technology education to broader conversations about inclusion, compassion, and civic engagement. While the pilot is ongoing, this paper presents early insights into how AI literacy can function not only as a technical skillset, but also as a catalyst for psychosocial recovery and educational resilience.

KEYWORDS

Artificial Intelligence, EdCamp Ukraine, Experience AI, School-based family counseling, Social-emotional learning, Wellbeing

Introduction

Education in Crisis and the Need for Family-Centered AI Literacy

The full-scale war in Ukraine has profoundly disrupted the country's educational landscape. Thousands of schools have been damaged or destroyed. According to Save Schools (2026), 4,515 educational institutions have been bombed or shelled, and 423 have been completely destroyed. Families have been displaced across regions or national borders, while students and teachers continue to face chronic uncertainty, psychological stress, and fractured learning environments. In this context, educational recovery is not only a matter of rebuilding infrastructure but also of restoring well-being, trust, and adaptive learning systems within school communities.

Non-governmental educational initiatives have played a vital role in this process. EdCamp Ukraine NGO (EdCamp Ukraine, n.d.) has become a leading driver of pedagogical resilience and innovation. Known for its peer-to-peer professional development network, EdCamp has rapidly mobilized resources to support teachers during wartime, promote community cohesion, and create adaptive tools for learning in crisis conditions.

A core part of EdCamp's strategy is led by its Social-Emotional Learning Laboratory, which focuses on integrating the social-emotional paradigm, in particular Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning, into Ukraine's educational framework (SEE Learning, 2019). This initiative emphasizes the development of universal human values, civic engagement, and trauma-informed practices, including work with families as central actors in student development. Recent collaboration with the Disaster Healing Initiative (formerly Disaster Shock) has deepened this focus, particularly by recognizing parents as key contributors to student well-being and academic recovery (Elkin et al., 2025).

As Ukraine rebuilds its educational system, new digital challenges are also emerging. The rapid expansion of generative AI tools and algorithm-driven platforms raises important questions about how students, educators, and families understand and navigate these technologies. UNESCO (2023) has highlighted both the transformative potential and ethical risks of generative AI in education, emphasizing the need for critical literacy, human oversight, and equitable access. In Ukraine, broader digital transformation has already become a national priority through initiatives such as Diia.Osvita, a national digital literacy platform developed

by the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine (Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, 2026). However, while digital literacy efforts continue to expand, significantly less attention has been paid to AI literacy and the role of families in helping children critically engage with emerging technologies.

This study examines how implementing the Experience AI program in Ukraine may serve not only as a model of AI literacy education but also as a mechanism to strengthen school-family engagement during wartime recovery. Drawing on survey data, program observations, and document analysis, the study explores how educators perceive parental involvement in AI literacy and what opportunities and challenges emerge in building school-family partnerships around emerging technologies.

The study is additionally informed by the School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC) framework, which emphasizes the interconnected role of schools and families as primary systems shaping children's development (Gerrard, 2008; Gerrard & Soriano, 2013; Gerrard et al., 2019). Similarly, Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence highlights that student learning is strengthened when schools, families, and communities collaborate around shared goals (Epstein, 2011). These perspectives position parents not as passive recipients of school information, but as active partners in children's educational development.

Within this model, parents are not just caregivers but serve as emotional role models – helping children navigate feelings, regulate their emotions, and internalize healthy behaviors. Studies confirm that when parents actively model and reinforce social-emotional skills at home, it strengthens what children learn at school (Meyers et al., 2014; Morelen & Suveg, 2012).

Consistent communication and collaboration between schools and families also enhances the success of social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. Parental involvement promotes continuity between the home and school environments, reinforcing SEL practices in both spaces (Ndlovu & Makalela, 2023). Moreover, when parents trust and value SEL programs, their support becomes a driving force behind successful implementation (Daley, Murano, & Burus, 2022).

In conflict-affected settings such as Ukraine, the role of families becomes even more critical. Research from war-impacted regions like South Sudan and Syria has shown that trauma can severely disrupt a child's mental health, emotional regulation, and learning (Michalek et al., 2022; Mayai, 2022). However, community- and family-centered strategies have also proven to be powerful tools for fostering resilience and aiding recovery in such environments.

Context of the Study

Building on these broader efforts to strengthen family resilience and educational recovery, EdCamp Ukraine has partnered with the Raspberry Pi Foundation and Google DeepMind to pilot the Experience AI program (Experience AI, n.d.) in Ukraine. Originally launched in 2023, Experience AI provides free, research-based, and teacher-friendly resources designed for learners aged 11 to 14. It introduces foundational AI concepts such as machine learning, natural language processing, and algorithmic bias, while also inviting students to engage with the social and ethical implications of these systems.

What makes the initiative especially relevant in the Ukrainian context is its emphasis on critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and digital agency – skills that resonate deeply in communities navigating the aftermath of trauma and instability. Moreover, the program might position AI literacy as a bridge between schools and families, opening pathways for intergenerational learning, communication, and shared understanding around technology and its impacts.

To ensure sustainability and pedagogical integrity, the implementation of the Experience AI program in Ukraine follows a controlled scaling model. Rather than pursuing rapid or top-down expansion, the approach emphasizes deep engagement with a small group of well-prepared educators who act as ambassadors, catalysts for broader change. This model is grounded in motivation-oriented learning, prioritizing both the technical competence and the ethical commitment of those delivering AI education in classrooms. This model was used to ensure successful scaling during the national experiment on implementing soft skills and SEE Learning, conducted by EdCamp Ukraine from 2019 to 2025 (Elkin et al., 2024a).

Educators selected for the Experience AI pilot cohort received 150 hours of expert-led training, after which they immediately began teaching the materials to students in their home schools. The training was complemented by a comprehensive professional development ecosystem, including national masterclasses, online workshops, and regional presentations. A key feature of the model is its emphasis on community-building: beyond supporting teacher capacity, the program also seeks to engage parents and caregivers. In this way, AI literacy becomes a shared, intergenerational learning process, bridging the school-home divide and fostering collective digital agency.

The inaugural cohort included 20 educators, representing 14 regions of Ukraine, aged 24 to 57. This diversity in both life experience and teaching perspective was deliberately cultivated to support cross-disciplinary dialogue and localized implementation.

While approximately 42% of participants were computer science teachers, a significant 58% were from other disciplines, including history, mathematics, primary education, and ethics. This disciplinary spread reflected the program's foundational premise: that AI literacy is not solely a technical subject, but one that intersects with human values, social understanding, and civic engagement.

The cohort also reflected a balance between institutional memory and innovation. Around 63% had prior training in the SEE Learning framework, which emphasizes social-emotional education, and 52% had experience with the “Be Internet Awesome” digital safety program, also implemented by EdCamp Ukraine and widely researched internationally (Jones et al., 2024). Meanwhile, roughly 25% of participants were new to EdCamp Ukraine, bringing fresh perspectives and expanding the reach of the professional community.

This combination of technical readiness and pedagogical diversity made the cohort uniquely positioned to implement Experience AI in a way that aligns with the broader goals of post-crisis educational recovery – particularly those grounded in the School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC) model, which emphasizes the critical role of both the family and the school as primary environments influencing a child's development (see, for example, Gerrard, 2008; Gerrard & Soriano, 2013; Gerrard, Carter, & Ribera, 2019).

The Experience AI curriculum is structured around six core lessons, designed to be accessible to students aged 11–14 while also prompting deeper reflection on the role of AI in society. The lessons cover key foundational concepts: what is artificial intelligence; how computers learn through data; how bias can be introduced and reinforced in AI systems; the use of decision trees in structuring machine learning models; applying AI to practical, problem-solving tasks; model cards and career paths related to AI development. Crucially, the curriculum also teaches students to avoid anthropomorphizing AI, that is, using words or ideas that make AI seem like it thinks or feels like a human—by teaching them to recognize that AI only produces patterns based on data, not real understanding or intent.

The curriculum is grounded in the SEAME framework – Social & Ethical, Applications, Models, and Engines – which supports students not only in understanding how AI systems function but also in evaluating their implications and imagining responsible futures. Through

this lens, AI becomes not just a technical subject but a means of exploring ethical decision-making, ecological awareness, and human-centered innovation (Sentance & Waite, 2022).

Methods

Research design

This study employed a qualitative exploratory case study design to examine how AI literacy initiatives may strengthen school-family engagement in wartime Ukraine. A case study approach was appropriate because the implementation of Experience AI in Ukraine represents an emerging educational initiative situated within a highly specific socio-political and educational context. The study aimed to explore how educators perceive parental involvement in AI literacy and identify opportunities and challenges related to family engagement.

To develop a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, the study used multiple sources of qualitative data, including the “Bridging Schools and Families through AI Literacy” educator survey and document/content analysis of materials from parent engagement initiatives, including *Dignity Day 2025* and *Parenting Compass: Co-Creating Child Well-Being*.

Participants and procedure

The study involved educators participating in the first Ukrainian cohort of the Experience AI program. The cohort included 20 educators representing 14 regions of Ukraine. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 57 years and represented diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including computer science, history, mathematics, ethics, and primary education.

In addition, survey data were collected from 69 educators involved in AI-related training activities and implementation events. These participants provided perspectives on parental involvement, perceived challenges, and opportunities for school-family collaboration around AI literacy.

The “Bridging Schools and Families through AI Literacy” survey was based on educators’ perspectives on parental engagement in AI-related learning. Instead of surveying parents directly, it captured how educators describe parents’ attitudes, concerns, and levels of involvement based on their everyday interactions.

The survey was conducted in two phases. First, the questionnaire was disseminated to 20 trainers involved in the Experience AI pilot cohort, of whom 16 completed it based on their direct experience working with educators and parents. In the second phase, these trainers

distributed the questionnaire to educators who had participated in their training sessions. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on educators directly involved in the Experience AI training cascade. In total, 69 responses were collected. Thus, all responses reflect educators' reported observations and experiences of parental engagement, rather than direct input from parents themselves.

The questionnaire included open-ended questions designed to capture perceptions, challenges, and strategies related to parental engagement. The four survey questions were:

1. How do parents currently perceive artificial intelligence and the Experience AI program?
2. Should parents be involved in the program, and if so, how?
3. What challenges might arise when involving parents in AI literacy?
4. What strategies could effectively engage families and build stronger school–family bridges?

Additional Data Sources

In addition to survey responses, the study incorporated document and content analysis of materials generated through EdCamp Ukraine's parent engagement initiatives in 2025. These materials were included because EdCamp Ukraine had increasingly expanded its focus on parent-school collaboration as part of broader efforts to support children's well-being during wartime recovery.

This shift was informed by previous findings from the nationwide five-year pilot implementation of Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning (SEE Learning), supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019). During the final stage of that initiative, the SEL Laboratory team collected feedback not only from teachers and students but also from parents. Findings indicated that parents were actively applying social-emotional practices at home and that children frequently shared their classroom experiences with family members, highlighting the growing importance of school–family collaboration in supporting children's development (Elkin et al., 2025).

Building on these findings, EdCamp Ukraine launched several parent-focused initiatives in 2025, including partnerships with UNICEF and the NUMO digital platform (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2025), community resilience training programs

(Miller-Karas, 2023), and large-scale online events designed specifically for parents of school-aged children and preschoolers. These initiatives generated valuable materials related to parental concerns, communication patterns, and family engagement practices.

A particularly relevant source for this study was *Dignity Day 2025*, which focused on artificial intelligence and explored how emerging technologies influence learning, values, and relationships (EdCamp Ukraine, 2025b). This theme informed parent-focused programming that connected AI literacy with emotional well-being and ethical reflection. Materials analyzed in this study included event programs, presentation materials, participant questions, live poll responses, and communication resources related to these initiatives.

Data Analysis

The survey responses were analyzed using an inductive thematic coding approach. Initial codes were developed based on recurring patterns in the data and then grouped into broader categories (e.g., supportive, neutral, skeptical). The coding framework was reviewed collaboratively by members of the author team to enhance consistency and reduce individual bias.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, with participants receiving clear information about the purpose and use of the data. All responses were collected anonymously, ensuring confidentiality. The data were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes.

Results

Analysis of materials from the October 2025 parent event *Parenting Compass: Co-Creating Child Well-Being* revealed that artificial intelligence was not yet a primary concern among many parents. The six-hour online event, structured as a “Parent (un)meeting,” included expert-led sessions on digital safety, emotional resilience, body literacy, and attentional control, and created opportunities for dialogue between caregivers and professionals (EdCamp Ukraine, 2025a).

A dedicated session, “Will Artificial Intelligence Capture Our Children – and What Should Parents Do?”, led by an Experience AI cohort member, introduced parents to foundational AI concepts such as machine learning and algorithmic bias. Analysis of participant questions, live interactions, and session materials suggested that parents were less

concerned about AI itself and more focused on broader issues such as excessive screen time, reduced face-to-face communication, and unclear digital boundaries. Rather than expressing fear of artificial intelligence, many parents demonstrated uncertainty about its role in their children's lives and sought practical guidance.

Survey findings showed that nearly half of respondents (48%) described parents as curious and supportive, recognizing AI as an important skill for the future. About 30% reported neutral or passive attitudes, often due to limited communication, while roughly 22% observed skepticism, mostly related to concerns about data privacy or academic dishonesty.

The vast majority agreed that parents should be involved in the program, noting that parental participation boosts student motivation and trust between schools and families. However, teachers highlighted barriers such as parents' lack of time, low confidence in digital topics, and the absence of clear engagement formats.

When asked about challenges, teachers noted that the most common obstacles were time constraints, low digital literacy, and confusion about AI. Some teachers also mentioned that their school role limited direct contact with parents. Still, when engagement occurred, it was positive and trust-based.

The final question asked for strategies to involve parents. Suggestions included joint parent-child workshops, short informational sessions, and accessible digital resources. Trainers also recommended flexible formats, parent-friendly learning modules, and community-based outreach.

Overall, the results show that AI literacy should be approached not just as a technical skill, but as a shared, intergenerational practice. According to respondents, parents are not rejecting AI – they are seeking clarity, ethical guidance, and support to help their children navigate an increasingly digital world.

Conclusions

In the context of war and large-scale displacement, artificial intelligence is not just a subject to learn about – it can also be a helpful tool for communication between schools and families. Involving parents in digital learning creates opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, in which children often help explain new technologies and parents bring life experience and ethical questions into the conversation.

During times of crisis, technology does not have to isolate people. Instead, it can support dignity, personal agency, and cooperation – all of which are essential for rebuilding education in Ukraine. This reflects the approach of School-Based Family Counseling, which focuses on restoring relationships and shared responsibility between home and school.

At the same time, this study has limitations. The findings are based on educators' perceptions rather than direct input from parents, which might introduce interpretive bias. Future research could build on these insights by including parents' voices more directly.

More research is needed on how children and adults can understand AI without fear. Ukraine could benefit from pilot programs that promote intergenerational learning, combining digital skills with ethical thinking and emotional resilience. It's also important to study how school culture changes when technology becomes a regular part of teaching – including how to build communities that use AI responsibly.

Artificial intelligence should be seen not only as a set of tools, but as part of a broader conversation about human values. When integrated thoughtfully, AI can help promote dignity, empathy, and social connection – especially in education programs that combine digital skills with ethical reflection and emotional support. In Ukraine's recovery, AI offers new ways to rebuild trust and foster meaningful school–family connections.

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From surviving to thriving: School-based family counsellors as agents of systemic change

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ABSTRACT

Schools are increasingly expected to respond to the complex adversity and harm experienced by young people, yet current approaches to trauma-informed practice often overlook how school systems, routines, and professional practices can inadvertently retraumatise students. While a range of trauma-informed models has been proposed, there remains limited attention to what it means for an entire school community to create conditions of safety, belonging, and cultural responsiveness. This paper examines the pivotal role of school counsellors as system-level change agents who lead and implement trauma-informed practices that reflect the contextual needs of students, teachers, and families. Drawing on the School-Based Family Counselling (SBFC) meta-model, the paper synthesises findings from recent qualitative studies (Brown, 2025b; Brown, in press) that explore how eleven Australian school counsellors navigate this work. Using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), six themes emerged. School prevention themes included: (i) school counsellors applying trauma knowledge to practice; (ii) school counsellors collaborating with others to implement trauma-informed approaches; and (iii) navigating enablers and barriers to implement trauma-informed practices. School intervention themes included: (i) working with trauma-impacted students; (ii) trauma-informed approaches to psychoeducational assessment; and (iii) the use of trauma-informed counselling practices. The paper outlines key implications for school-based family counsellors in how they lead and implement trauma-informed practices.

KEYWORDS

School-based family counselling, School counsellors, Trauma, Trauma-informed practices

Introduction

The global mental health landscape for youth is changing with the rising mental health concerns faced by youth due to experiencing a wide range of adversity, such as the impact of

colonisation, racism, bullying, childhood maltreatment, including family and domestic violence, war, and the impact of social media and Generative AI (Carvajal-Velez et al., 2023; Kaman et al., 2025). There can be barriers for youth to be able to access mental health services (Kourgiantakis et al., 2023; MacDonald et al., 2021) (e.g., availability of services), and school systems are under ongoing and increasing pressure to support the mental health and well-being of students (Barker et al., 2023; Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020).

School-Based Family Counselling

Through leadership and advocacy, school-based family counsellors are change agents within schools to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of students are being appropriately supported (Ault & Gibbons, 2025). To do this effectively, school-based family counsellors must adopt a holistic approach (Thomas & Texidor, 1987) to address diverse student needs and prevent retraumatisation. An important way for school-based family counsellors to do this is through leading and implementing trauma-informed practices using the school-based family counselling (SBFC) meta-model (Gerrard et al., 2020).

SBFC is an integrated systems approach designed to help children succeed academically and personally by addressing problems through both school and family contexts (Gerrard, 2008). It combines principles of school counselling and family therapy within a meta-model that views the child's issues in relation to interpersonal networks—family, peers, classroom, school staff, and community (Gerrard, 2008).

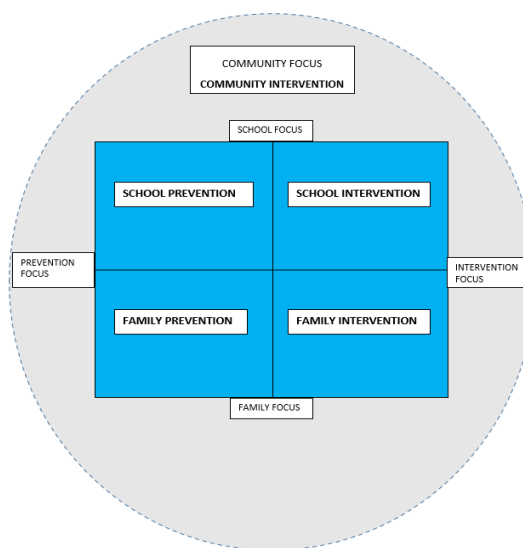
The SBFC meta-model consists of four quadrants: school intervention, school prevention, family intervention, and family prevention (Refer to Figure 1) (Gerrard et al., 2020).

- *School intervention* refers to the interventions put in place by school personnel when an issue has been identified, e.g. teacher collaboration, crisis intervention, student support groups, counselling (Soriano & Gerrard, 2018).
- *School prevention* refers to interventions that are implemented to prevent issues arising. For example, social skills training, classroom management, whole school approaches, staff wellbeing (Soriano & Gerrard, 2018).
- *Family intervention* refers to interventions that are implemented to promote change within the family when family issues are negatively impacting a student. For example, family counselling, parent consultation (Soriano & Gerrard, 2018).

- While *family prevention* refers to interventions provided to families to develop skills to prevent future issues. This may include parent workshops, family communication skills workshops, and family support groups (Soriano & Gerrard, 2018).

These occur within the broader context of the community in which the school-based family counsellor works with external agencies within the community to support schools, students and families (Gerrard & van Schalkwyk, 2020).

Figure 1: The SBFC Meta-model (Gerrard & Soriano, 2020, p. 10)



Trauma-informed practices in schools

There are different definitions of trauma-informed practices. For this paper, trauma-informed practices are defined as the “systemic supports designed to both address traumatic stress resulting from chronic and/or sudden trauma, and to promote students’ mental health and wellbeing” (Mullin et al., 2024, p. 2). To do this, everyone within the school system needs to be able to recognise the symptoms of trauma, realise the impacts of trauma, respond to trauma by implementing policies and procedures focusing on prevention and intervention, and prevent and reduce re-traumatisation of students at school (Mullin et al., 2024; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

However, the implementation of trauma-informed practices across schools varies. For example, trauma-informed practices have been suggested to be implemented through different approaches, such as the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) (Berger, 2019), and Positive

Behaviour for Learning (PBL), also known as Positive Behaviour Interventions and Support (PBIS) (Eber et al., 2020). There are also guidelines and models available to support schools in implementing trauma-informed practices. These include SAMHSA's (2014) principles of safety; peer support; trustworthiness and transparency; collaboration and mutuality; cultural, historical, and gender issues; and empowerment, voice, and choice. There are also the Australian National Guidelines for Trauma-Aware Education (Howard et al., 2022a) and the Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d.) to support schools in their journey to become trauma-informed. As well as a range of professional development programs provided by external agencies to support school staff in developing their knowledge of trauma and strategies for implementation in classrooms (e.g., Australian Childhood Foundation; Berry Street Education Model).

Despite these guidelines and training, the implementation of trauma-informed practices in schools is often piecemeal, and teachers and school counsellors report a lack of preparation in their programs to effectively implement these practices (Baweja et al., 2016; Brown, 2025; Gubi et al., 2019; Gubi et al., 2023; Wells, 2022).

The role of school counsellors in trauma-informed practice

Recent research into school counsellors' engagement with trauma-informed practice is limited, with only two studies published to date. Howard et al. (2022b) examined how Australian school counsellors contribute to trauma-aware education by asking them to rank key areas of their work. School counsellors identified five priority domains: direct work with students; collaboration with school staff; whole-school or systemic initiatives; partnerships with families and communities; and engagement with external agencies. In a related study, Grimes et al. (2023) explored the perspectives of school counsellors in rural areas of the United States. Their findings highlighted that school counsellors were managing substantial trauma-related caseloads and had few referral options in their communities, yet benefited from supportive school leaders and strong relationships with students. Collectively, these studies underscore the significant role school counsellors play in advancing trauma-informed approaches in schools.

The research question for this qualitative study was: How do school counsellors implement trauma-informed practices, and what factors do they consider effective for implementation? Semi-structured interviews were undertaken, and data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Lessons for school-based family counsellors: Experiences of Australian school counsellors leading and implementing trauma-informed practices

School counsellors are relied upon by school communities to support students affected by trauma. However, little is known about how school counsellors lead and implement trauma-informed practices in schools. This paper summarises key findings from a study of eleven Australian school counsellors who were asked about how they implement trauma-informed practices and what they perceive as enablers and barriers to implementing a whole-school approach to trauma-informed practices (Brown, 2025b; Brown, in press). The study was informed by the ecological model of professional school counselling (McMahon et al., 2014; McMahon & Mason, 2018), a framework that examines how school counsellors work within and across multiple systems to support student well-being. There are four functions of the professional school counsellor which include i) understanding students within their unique and multiple contexts; ii) working directly with students from an ecological perspective; iii) participate in an ongoing cycle of multi-level assessment and interventions; and iv) use leadership, advocacy, and collaboration to help create and maintain a healthy school system that promotes success for all students (McMahon et al., 2014; McMahon & Mason, 2018). This framework links well with the school-based family counselling meta-model as both are informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory.

The findings reported in this paper have been reported in full elsewhere (Brown 2025b; Brown in press). In this paper, a summary of findings is presented through the lens of the SBFC meta-model, in particular, the school intervention and school prevention quadrants.

Study context

All participants (n=11) were school counsellors from Queensland, Australia. The term school counsellor is used in this paper to describe the varied roles in school counselling in Queensland, including school psychologists, Guidance Officers, Guidance Counsellors, and school counsellors. Guidance Officers and Guidance Counsellors are registered teachers who have completed a Master of Education in School Guidance and Counselling (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). These two roles are unique to Queensland. School psychologists may hold a teaching qualification alongside their undergraduate and/or postgraduate qualifications to become registered psychologists (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). The school counsellors' work

focuses on supporting students' engagement in school, with a primary emphasis on student mental health and well-being, behaviour, and academic achievement (Kose et al., 2025).

Method

The ecological model of professional school counselling (McMahon et al., 2014; McMahon & Mason, 2018) underpins this study by situating school counsellors' engagement with trauma-informed practices within the broader dynamics of their school and community environments. Conducting semi-structured individual interviews provides detailed, context-rich accounts of school counsellors' lived experiences, while reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) supports a layered interpretation of how ecological processes influence and are influenced by the implementation of trauma-informed practice.

Recruitment

Prior to recruitment, ethics approval was obtained from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited through the author's professional and university networks. Participants identified for recruitment were to be working as school counsellors in Australia and who implement trauma-informed practice in their work. It is important to note that the participants recruited may reflect the author's bias. Eleven Australian school counsellors from metropolitan, urban, rural, and remote schools were individually interviewed by the author to identify their experiences in implementing trauma-informed practices and what they consider important for effective implementation. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and were on average 45 minutes in length.

Participants

All participants were female, with an average of 9.10 years of experience as school counsellors (range: 0.5-24 years). Of the participants, 7 worked in metropolitan schools, 1 in an urban school, 1 in a rural school, and 2 in remote schools. The school type that participants worked included 6 in primary [elementary] schools, 4 in secondary schools, and 1 in a Prep to Year 12 school. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1 *School counsellor demographics*

Participant	Region	School type	Experience (years)
Participant 1	Metropolitan	Primary	16
Participant 2	Rural	Primary	24
Participant 3	Metropolitan	Primary	20
Participant 4	Metropolitan	P-12	15
Participant 5	Urban	Secondary	5
Participant 6	Metropolitan	Primary	6
Participant 7	Metropolitan	Primary	6
Participant 8	Metropolitan	Secondary	0.5
Participant 9	Remote	Secondary	2
Participant 10	Metropolitan	Secondary	0.5
Participant 11	Remote	Primary	5

Data analysis

The data reported in this paper were participants' responses to questions about how, as school counsellors, they implement trauma-informed practices. Example of questions that participants were asked included how trauma presents in students they work with; how they collaborate with others, including teachers, families, and other professionals; and how they use trauma-informed practices in their work.

After transcription, which was completed through the university's transcription service, the author de-identified the data and analysed it using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. This involved 6 phases: i) becoming familiar with the data; ii) coding; then through an iterative process iii) generating initial themes; iv) developing and refining themes; and iv) refining, defining and naming themes to ensure themes were accurate, distinct and meaningful; and vi) write up (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Six themes emerged from the data analysis (Table 2) and are discussed below.

Trustworthiness of findings

Throughout the interview process, member checking was conducted, in which the author confirmed participants' understanding of the interview questions. Throughout the data analysis, the author engaged in peer debriefing with three experts in trauma-informed education to address potential biases and discuss the analysis, including the accuracy of theme development.

Findings and discussion

A summary and discussion of the findings from Brown (2025b) and Brown (in press) is presented through the lens of the SBFC meta-model's school prevention and school intervention quadrants. An overview of the themes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 *Theme description*

SBFC Meta-Model	Theme
School Prevention	Navigating the translation of trauma-informed knowledge into practice
	School counsellors collaborating with others to implement trauma-informed practice can be 'magic'
	Navigating enablers and barriers to implement trauma-informed practice
School Intervention	An individualised approach to supporting trauma-impacted students
	Reframing psychoeducational assessment practices through a trauma-informed lens
	Integrating trauma-informed practices into counselling

SBFC – School Prevention

School counsellors are regarded by school staff as leaders in implementing trauma-informed practices. Previous research has shown that school counsellors must be well prepared to implement trauma-informed practices, yet many report that their preparation programs do not adequately equip them to do so (Gubi et al., 2019; Gubi et al., 2023; Wells, 2022). However, little is known about how school counsellors lead and implement trauma-informed practices, or about the enablers and barriers to doing so. This is an important area to address within the school prevention quadrant of the SBFC meta-model, which provides interventions to prevent issues from occurring and underscores the importance of collaborating with principals (Gerrard & van Schalkwyk, 2020). For students impacted by trauma, it is important that teachers have the skills to implement trauma-informed strategies and create a safe classroom and learning environment. It is also important that the whole school be a safe environment for all students, including those affected by trauma, as well as staff. To undertake this work at the whole-school level, it is important that school counsellors collaborate with students, teachers, principals, families, and external agencies.

When viewed through the school prevention lens of the SBFC meta-model, which positions school counsellors as proactive agents supporting students and staff, findings indicate that school counsellors identified three key areas for effective implementation of trauma-informed practice: i) school counsellors applying trauma knowledge to practice; ii) school counsellors collaborating with others to implement trauma-informed practice; and iii) navigating enablers and barriers to implement trauma-informed practices. These themes are discussed below.

Navigating the translation of trauma-informed knowledge into practice

School counselors emphasized the need to understand contextual factors (e.g., intergenerational trauma, poverty, geography, and domestic violence) and their influence on behavior (e.g., internalizing and externalizing behaviors), as well as the impact of trauma on students' ability to form relationships and engage in learning. Having knowledge of trauma is not enough. It requires school counsellors to translate this knowledge into practical strategies within their unique school environment. This was explained by Participant 2:

It [trauma-informed practice] comes down to applying it [knowledge of trauma]. It's one thing to be getting it [knowledge], but how do you then apply it when working with the child, their families or staff so that you can better support their wellbeing and try to

minimise or reduce the risk of harm in the school environment so that we're not making matters worse for them by retraumatising them (Brown, 2025b, p. 9).

School counsellors collaborating with others to implement trauma-informed practice can be 'magic'

Effective trauma-informed practice requires school counsellors to collaborate with teachers, families, and other professionals to ensure that interventions are identified, implemented, and regularly reviewed. School counsellors highlighted the importance of shared responsibility and consistent approaches across the school community. To do this work effectively, participants shared their experiences of what needs to be considered when collaborating with others. For example, when working with school staff, a participant shared, "We're always championing the use of trauma-informed practices with classroom teachers" (Brown, 2025b, p. 9). When working with families, participants were aware that families may be experiencing "their own wounding [trauma]" (Participant 10) and that it is important to develop a strong working relationship with families as "it really puts us in a better stead to do more effective work at school" (Participant 10) (Brown, 2025b, p. 10). However, when working with professionals outside the school system, school counsellors had "varied experience" (Participant 8, Brown, 2025b, p. 10), however, when collaboration occurs, and each professional brings their expertise and works together, the outcome for students impacted by trauma is "magic" (Participant 3, Brown, 2025b, p. 10).

Navigating enablers and barriers to implement trauma-informed practices

Participants reported both enablers and barriers to leading and implementing trauma-informed practice. School counsellors reported that an enabler was receiving support from their school principal to implement trauma-informed practices. For example, a participant shared, "I get a lot of support from my leadership team...I've found that most are supportive with a trauma-informed approach to supporting students" (Brown, 2025, p. 10). While the lack of collaboration with principals and school leadership teams was viewed by participants as a barrier to implementing trauma-informed practices, coupled with a lack of prioritisation of trauma-informed practices amongst competing priorities. This was shared by a participant who stated, "I know from individual conversations about students and at leadership team meetings that they [principals] wholeheartedly believe in trauma-informed practices, but I think the reality is that they don't see it within the top priorities" (Brown, 2025b, p. 10).

Additionally, the prevailing behaviour management framework in Queensland schools (as well as schools across Australia and internationally) is Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL). Participants (n = 6) described feeling dissatisfied with the way Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) was being applied in their schools, noting that it did little to meet the needs of students who had or is experiencing trauma. These encounters have shaped their overall perceptions of PBL, often leading them to question its relevance in trauma-affected contexts. As Participant 9 explained, supporting students impacted by trauma effectively requires schools “to move away from PBL, which is so reactive and behaviourist, to a far more proactive, trauma-informed approach around how we manage our students’ behaviour.” (Brown, 2025 b, p. 11).

PBL adopts a behaviourist approach, relying on external reinforcement to respond to student behaviour, which contrasts with trauma-informed practices grounded in neuroscience, safety, relationships, and co-regulation (Howard, 2022; Kim & Venet, 2025). PBL perpetuates deficit labelling and ableist notions of “normal” (Kim & Venet, 2025), creating philosophical tensions that must be acknowledged and addressed for successful implementation of trauma-informed practices.

SBFC – School Intervention

School-based family counsellors provide interventions to best support students experiencing difficulty (Gerrard & van Schalkwyk, 2020). When working with students impacted by trauma, it is critical that school counsellors implement trauma-informed practices. Key findings of i) working with trauma-impacted students; ii) trauma-informed approaches to psychoeducational assessment; and iii) the use of trauma-informed counselling practices (Brown, in press) are summarised below.

An individualised approach to supporting trauma-impacted students

School counsellors emphasised the importance of adopting an individualised approach to supporting students impacted by trauma, being culturally responsive, and engaging in ongoing self-reflection to ensure practices are sensitive to students’ diverse needs and experiences. The participants shared their views on what is important when working with students who have experienced trauma. For example, Participant 6 shared that when working with students impacted by trauma, it is important that “cultural factors need to be considered as well. It’s making sure you’ve got all that information in your mind and how to culturally support these students.” While Participant 10 emphasised that not only being culturally

responsive is important, school counsellors need to be self-reflective by being “aware of the stuff that we carry as well. You’ve got to be aware of your own history, our biases, our own culture, our privilege, and the way that intersects with the young people we work with” (Brown in press, p. 15).

Reframing psychoeducational assessment practices through a trauma-informed lens

Participants highlighted the need for critical evaluation of the purpose and relevance of cognitive testing for students impacted by trauma (Brown, in press). This is because cognitive tests may not provide a true indication of a student’s ability due to their behavioural responses and their inability to tolerate anxiety (Haywood & Tzuriel, 2002); and the testing environment may not be perceived as safe by a student impacted by trauma (Pham et al., 2022). Cognitive tests do not capture a holistic view of a student’s ability and do not consider the cultural and socio-economic background of students impacted by trauma, resulting in biased results (Hawyood & Tzuriel, 2002).

This was also the experience of participants in this study. Participant 2 shared that there is the “risk we run [if administering a cognitive test] of this student presenting with an intellectual disability or with a specific profile that’s not reflective of their true and actual strengths and difficulties, so we then can’t cater for them properly.” Participant 3 agreed stating that a cognitive test is “not going to give a fair measure, it’s not going to be valid. You’re only going to get the measure of the student at that point in time, which might not be a fair evaluation of what they [student] can actually do” (Brown, in press, p. 16).

Integrating trauma-informed practices into counselling

School counsellors stressed the importance of building strong relationships with students impacted by trauma, providing a trauma-informed counselling environment, and using counselling approaches that prioritise safety, trust, and emotional regulation for students affected by trauma. Participant 5 shared that they did this by showing “unconditional positive regard. Taking a real strengths-based approach” (Brown, in press, p. 19).

Counselling approaches identified by participants that they found to be effective with students impacted by trauma included sand play therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, and solution-focused brief therapy. Participant 3 described the power of non-verbal counselling approaches for students impacted by trauma, such as sand play therapy, “there are no words to sort of process the things that are going on or have been going on. So, where you can take the

verbal out of it can provide a really nice safe process in place for you and the student to work out what's going on" (Brown, in press, p. 19). However, participants were clear in their belief that there is no single counselling approach when counselling students impacted by trauma as shared by Participant 9 "It's really very different [counselling approach] depending on the need [of the student]" (Brown, in press, p. 20). Participant 6 agreed and further explained that the counselling approach undertaken "has to work for you as the counsellor as well" (Brown, in press, p. 18).

Implications for School-Based Family Counsellors

The findings presented, viewed through the school prevention and school intervention quadrants of the SBFC meta-model, have significant implications for school-based family counsellors. These implications highlight the need for school-based family counsellors to assume leadership roles, foster collaboration with all stakeholders, and engage in critical reflection on practice to ensure trauma-informed approaches are embedded across all quadrants of the SBFC meta-model.

Leadership in trauma-informed practice

School-based family counsellors are positioned as key leaders in implementing trauma-informed practices at both the whole-school and individual student level. This requires school-based family counsellors to move beyond knowledge acquisition and actively translate knowledge about trauma and its impact on students into practical strategies that influence school culture, classroom environments, and staff practices. Leadership also involves advocating for systemic change, particularly in addressing philosophical tensions between trauma-informed approaches and behaviourist frameworks such as Positive Behaviour for Learning.

Collaborative engagement

Effective trauma-informed practice cannot occur in isolation. School-based family counsellors must work collaboratively with principals, teachers, families, external agencies and the community to create safe and supportive environments for students and staff. Building strong partnerships is essential for overcoming barriers, such as limited prioritisation of trauma-informed practices by school leadership, and for ensuring consistent, whole-school approaches to trauma-informed care.

Critical reflection and cultural responsiveness

School-based family counsellors must engage in reflexive practice to examine their own assumptions and biases, ensuring culturally responsive approaches when working with students impacted by trauma. This includes recognising the influence of contextual factors such as intergenerational trauma, poverty, and cultural identity on student behaviour and learning.

Rethinking psychoeducational assessment practices

The findings challenge school-based family counsellors to critically evaluate the use of cognitive testing with students impacted by trauma. These standardised assessments may not accurately reflect a student's abilities due to anxiety, behavioural responses, and cultural or socio-economic factors. School-based family counsellors should prioritise creating safe assessment environments and consider alternative, holistic approaches that align with trauma-informed principles.

Trauma-informed counselling approaches

School-based family counsellors must ensure counselling environments and interventions prioritise safety, trust, and emotional regulation. Approaches such as sand play therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, and solution-focused brief therapy are recognised as being able to effectively support students impacted by trauma.

Conclusion

The findings of an Australian study of school counsellors' use of trauma-informed practices (Brown, 2025b; Brown, in press) have been summarised through the lens of the SBFC meta-model's school prevention and school intervention quadrants. This summary underscores the critical role of school-based family counsellors in leading and implementing trauma-informed practices. School-based family counsellors are not only expected to possess theoretical knowledge of trauma but also to translate this knowledge into practical strategies that foster safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments. Collaboration with principals, teachers, families, and external agencies is essential to overcome systemic barriers and ensure whole-school alignment with trauma-informed principles.

At the individual level, school-based family counsellors must adopt culturally responsive, reflexive approaches and critically evaluate assessment and counselling practices to meet the complex needs of students impacted by trauma. Addressing philosophical tensions between behaviourist frameworks such as PBL and trauma-informed approaches remains a key challenge for schools. Ultimately, these findings highlight the need for enhanced school

counsellor preparation programs, systemic prioritisation of trauma-informed practices, and ongoing professional learning for school-based family counsellors and school staff to ensure that schools become environments where all students can thrive.

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Future Orientation as a tool for prevention and intervention for School-Based Family Counseling

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ABSTRACT

Future orientation refers to how individuals think about, anticipate, and plan for their futures, encompassing the hopes, goals, and concerns that shape their developmental trajectories. This review synthesizes contemporary theoretical and empirical literature on adolescent future orientation, outlining its core components and developmental significance, and distinctive features in the 21st century. Particular attention is given to the impact of emerging societal challenges, such as rapid digital transformation and rising internalizing symptoms, and to the specific Israeli context on adolescents' capacity to envision and prepare for their future amid ongoing security threats. Particular attention is given to the implications for educational counselors and homeroom teachers, who play a central role in supporting adolescents' adaptive future orientation amid personal and collective stressors. Finally, we highlight the diverse ecological contexts in which future orientation develops and the need for context-sensitive professional practices.

KEYWORDS

Adolescents, Future Orientation, School-Based Family Counseling model, Trauma

Introduction

The aim of this review is to synthesize current theoretical and empirical knowledge on adolescents' future orientation. Toward this aim, we explore its components, developmental significance, and particular manifestations in the 21st-century Israeli context. Specifically, we examine how contemporary challenges, including digital transformation, increased internalizing symptoms, and the Israeli reality of ongoing security threats, affect adolescents' ability to envision and plan for their future. Drawing on this synthesis, we discuss the review's

highlights and implications for educational counselors and homeroom teachers who support adolescents in developing an adaptive future orientation amid personal and collective stressors. Future orientation develops in various contexts (e.g., family, school, and culture).

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, development occurs through interaction between the individual and their environment across multiple levels. The theory describes four environmental systems that influence development. The microsystem refers to immediate settings like family and school. For example, a parent who regularly discusses career aspirations with their adolescent, or a homeroom teacher who integrates conversations about future goals into weekly class time, creates the kind of ongoing, proximal process that shapes adolescents' future visions. The mesosystem involves connections between these settings. For instance, when a school counselor and a student's parents collaborate to align their expectations and support the student's academic and vocational planning, the adolescent receives a coherent message across contexts that strengthens future-oriented thinking. The exosystem includes indirect influences the adolescent does not directly participate in but nonetheless affect them, such as a parent's workplace policy that limits parental availability or local employment conditions that constrain which futures seem realistic. Finally, the macrosystem encompasses broader cultural and societal values. In the Israeli context, for example, the expectation of mandatory military service shapes how adolescents frame their near-term future, influencing the timing and content of their educational and vocational planning. A central concept in the model is "proximal processes," which are regular, ongoing interactions between the developing person and their immediate environment. These proximal processes are the main drivers of development, and their impact depends on the characteristics of both the person and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Future orientation refers to how adolescents think about and plan for their future, including their hopes and fears about what lies ahead. Seginer (2009) argues that Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective is particularly useful for understanding the development of future orientation. Accordingly, adolescents' thoughts about the future are shaped by multiple environmental influences. At the microsystem level, parents, teachers, and peers play important roles in helping adolescents develop future goals through everyday interactions and conversations. Ecosystem connections, such as collaboration between family and school, also influence how young people form their future plans. Additionally, broader cultural factors at the macrosystem level, including economic opportunities, cultural values,

and societal expectations, shape which life domains adolescents focus on when considering their future (Seginer, 2009).

Future Orientation

Future orientation is a psychological concept that describes how individuals perceive and prepare for anticipated future experiences. According to Seginer (2009), it refers to the ability to envision oneself in future scenarios, set goals, and organize behaviors to achieve those goals. This concept encompasses both cognitive and emotional dimensions, reflecting commitment to future outcomes. Lindstrom et al. (2014) emphasize that future orientation involves action-oriented thinking, a precursor to goal-directed behavior. Research indicates that, depending on personal and environmental factors, future orientation may vary across different life domains, including education, career, relationships, and personal development (Seginer, 2008).

The Three-Component Model

Seginer's (2009) three-component model provides a framework for understanding future-oriented thinking, comprising motivation, cognitive representation, and behavior.

Motivation: This component entails the importance of future domains (value), confidence in achieving goals (expectancy), and the belief in personal agency (internal control). It emphasizes that future-oriented thinking is rooted in an obligation to potential outcomes.

Cognitive representation: This component involves the images and scenarios individuals envision about their future, encompassing both hopes and fears. It underscores the realistic nature of future planning, which accounts for potential challenges alongside desired goals.

Behavior: This component consists of the concrete actions individuals take toward their future aspirations, including exploration (seeking information) and commitment (deciding on future paths). It distinguishes future orientation from mere fantasy by necessitating action.

The Thematic Approach

The thematic approach investigates the specific themes and concerns that individuals focus on in their future-oriented thinking. Adolescents often orient toward critical

developmental tasks relevant to late adolescence and early adulthood (Nurmi, 1991; Seiffge-Krenke, Kiuru, & Nurmi, 2010). Cross-cultural studies have identified four culturally common core domains: education, career, marriage and family, and self-concerns (Seginer & Halabi-Kheir, 1998). While these domains are universal, the priorities and meanings associated with them can differ significantly across diverse cultural contexts, highlighting cultural diversity in future-oriented thinking.

Future Orientation and Adolescence

Adolescence is a vital developmental period for future orientation, as cognitive maturity, identity formation, and social expectations converge to make future planning essential (Seginer, 2009). These relations are reciprocal: developmental changes enable advanced future thinking, while future orientation helps adolescents navigate challenges. Cognitive development allows adolescents to reason about future possibilities, consider multiple scenarios, and understand the connection between current actions and future outcomes (Steinberg et al., 2009). These advancements support complex planning and decision-making. Identity development is also crucial to future orientation. Seginer (2009) notes that envisioning future selves helps adolescents integrate their identities over time. Research shows that future orientation increases with age. Thus, older adolescents tend to demonstrate more long-term thinking and a greater belief in their ability to influence outcomes (Chen & Vazsonyi, 2013). Future orientation has been associated with protective outcomes, including lower engagement in risky behaviors, greater academic success, and better coping mechanisms (Stoddard et al., 2011). These associations may be explained by the role of future orientation in strengthening motivation, supporting decision-making, and enhancing resilience.

Future Orientation and Trauma

Exposure to trauma can significantly impact future orientation, with effects varying depending on the type of trauma and individual resilience. Trauma disrupts future orientation through several interrelated neurobiological and psychological mechanisms. At the neural level, exposure to traumatic stress impairs executive functions, including working memory, inhibition, and cognitive flexibility, all of which are essential for goal-directed planning and envisioning future scenarios (Op den Kelder et al., 2018). Elevated cortisol levels associated with chronic stress may alter the structure and function of the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, brain regions critical for future-oriented thinking and prospective memory

(Carrion & Wong, 2012). Furthermore, PTSD symptoms such as hypervigilance and re-experiencing redirect cognitive resources toward immediate threat detection and survival in the present moment, leaving fewer attentional and cognitive resources available for long-term planning (Aupperle et al., 2012). This shift from future-focused to present-focused cognition represents a fundamental alteration in temporal orientation that characterizes the traumatized state.

Research demonstrates that childhood maltreatment often results in reduced future orientation, though some youth manage to maintain a positive outlook despite adversity (Sasser et al., 2019). The social context also influences the impact of trauma. Supportive relationships and stable environments can help mitigate the negative effects on future thinking. Melkman and Sulimani-Aidan (2025) highlight that strong social networks enhance future orientation among at-risk youth.

While trauma can hinder future orientation, it may also become a context for recovery, as resilient adolescents can reconstruct positive future perspectives (Seginer, 2008). Indeed, future orientation may serve as a protective resource in the wake of trauma: adolescents with a stronger future orientation show reduced hopelessness and depressive symptoms even following victimization (McLaughlin et al., 2020), and a positive future outlook has been found to mediate the relationship between traumatic events and mental health outcomes (Zhang et al., 2009). Research on war-exposed youth reveals diverse patterns of future orientation following trauma, including optimism, determination to rebuild, and in some cases, inability to reconstruct life goals—demonstrating that trauma's impact on future thinking is neither uniform nor deterministic (Nyarko & Punamäki, 2020).

Recent studies emphasize the role of future orientation in shaping adolescents' educational experiences and outcomes. Future orientation is associated with higher academic achievement and better study habits (Pawlak & Moustafa, 2023). Achievement goal orientations serve as key mediators in this relationship, with mastery goals leading to positive outcomes and performance-avoidance goals increasing anxiety levels (Xu et al., 2024).

The school environment plays a significant role in shaping future orientation and its associated outcomes, thereby impacting students' overall academic experiences (Låftman et al., 2018). Altogether, by raising awareness of adolescents' future orientation, its components, and

its implications in the context of trauma, educators, clinicians, and homeroom teachers can better support its significance to individual growth and societal development.

Adolescents in the 21st Century

The 21st century is characterized by dramatic technological changes and rapid globalization that have transformed nearly every aspect of human life, including education, communication, and social interaction. Digital technologies and artificial intelligence are reshaping how individuals access information, learn, and collaborate across cultures and geographical boundaries (OECD, 2018; Voogt & Roblin, 2012). These developments demand new competencies such as critical thinking, digital literacy, creativity, and adaptability, skills essential for success in a complex and interconnected world (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Binkley et al., 2012). These changes are reflected in and directly affect the adolescent world. Working with adolescents requires viewing their development through a multidisciplinary lens, which raises important questions about the nature of adolescents' development in the 21st century.

Adolescents develop physically, their brains mature, their relationships with others change, the way they are viewed and treated by society changes, and their hopes and plans, their fears and anxieties, and their questions and concerns change as they grow into adulthood (Steinberg, 2008). In the 21st century, adolescence is also characterized by: (1) biological and environmental factors. One example of biological and environmental factors among adolescents in the 21st century is a shift in sleep habits. Later bedtimes and inadequate sleep (e.g., short, disrupted sleep patterns, insomnia, and daytime sleepiness) have become increasingly common (Shochat et al., 2014). Inadequate sleep is associated with adverse outcomes in several areas of health and functioning, including somatic and psychosocial health, school performance, and risk-taking behavior. (2) Pace of development. Adolescents in the 21st century are characterized by low engagement in adult activities such as having sex, dating, drinking alcohol, working for pay, going out without their parents, and driving, suggesting a slow life strategy (Twenge & Park, 2019). These trends may be linked to increased Internet use. (3) Internalizing psychopathology. Internalizing conditions, including depression and anxiety, as well as psychological distress, suicidal thoughts and self-harm, and fatal suicide, are considerably increasing in adolescent populations. Studies have identified several risk factors (e.g., age at pubertal transition and stressful life events) as well as novel risk factors such as digital technology and social media (Keyes & Platt, 2024).

In sum, in light of the novel risk factors that characterize the 21st century, adolescents are more vulnerable and exposed to mental harm.

Israeli Adolescent Distress

The Israeli context presents a unique blend of personal developmental challenges and collective national stressors that shape adolescent distress in notable ways. While navigating typical developmental tasks such as identity formation, peer relationships, and academic pressures, Israeli adolescents also confront ongoing security threats and mandatory military service (Laufer & Solomon, 2006). This transition to military service at age 18 adds significant pressure to their identity exploration and future planning (Mayseless & Scharf, 2009). National distress is evident through collective trauma that impacts adolescents via direct exposure to violence and vicarious traumatization from media, peers, and parental anxiety (Slone & Mann, 2016). This pervasive environment can lead to personal vulnerability, affecting mental health (Canetti et al., 2017). Gender differences are also notable, with girls reporting higher anxiety levels while boys display more externalizing behaviors (Laufer & Solomon, 2006). Proximity to conflict zones also influences distress levels, with those in border areas exhibiting more severe symptoms than those in central regions (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2014). During acute crises, adolescents must manage their own fears while often taking on caretaking roles, leading to increased psychological burden (Klingman, 2002). Despite these challenges, research shows notable resilience among Israeli adolescents, supported by family cohesion, community solidarity, and frameworks that provide meaning to national service (Kimhi & Shamai, 2004). Understanding these dynamics between distress and resilience is essential for informing school-based interventions that support Israeli youth as they develop and maintain adaptive future orientation amid ongoing personal and national challenges.

School Setting: Educational Counselors and Homeroom Teachers in the Israeli Context

In the Israeli school setting, two key figures are primarily responsible for students' well-being: the educational counselor and the homeroom teacher.

A school counselor's role is broad and aligns with the school's needs. Educational counselors identify the school's objectives and purposes, evaluate students' needs, guide teachers within the school system, and communicate with parents. They help individual students or student groups with various needs (e.g., self-image, values, self-assurance, and peer

and family interactions). A school counselor assists students in resolving or adapting to developmental modifications (Khansa, 2015). They also mediate between family and school. In adolescence, students assess their skills and power and start planning for their future. During that time, counselors may help students improve their decision-making about their future.

Homeroom teachers (HTs) in the Israeli school context serve as both pedagogical and administrative "managers" of their classrooms. HTs' roles include multiple areas of responsibility: managerial-organizational (administrative), including the educator as a classroom manager; individual-emotional support; the classroom leader as a social group; promoter of social-emotional learning; trainer of future citizens; and a coordinator (Gutman, 2021). Furthermore, the HT is also responsible for interactions with students' families (Kaplan Toren et al., 2023). One example of this role's significance is the impact of teacher-student communication on adolescents' resilience during war (Rosenberg et al., 2018).

Tools for Assessing Future Orientation

Future orientation is examined by two open-ended questions:

People often think about the future. In the lines below, please write down the hopes you have for the future. On the right-hand end, please write the age you believe you will be, or the year when these hopes will come true.

Now we would like you to think about fears concerning the future and write them down in the lines below. On the right-hand end, please write the age you believe you will be, or the year when these may happen.

Or, by a multiple-choice questionnaire that addresses various areas of the adolescents' lives.

One variant is Seginer's Prospective Life Course Questionnaire. It employs a three-component framework assessing motivation (value, expectancy, internal control), cognitive representation (hopes and fears), and behavior (exploration and commitment) across core life domains such as education, career, and family (Seginer et al., 2004). This domain-specific approach demonstrates strong structural and measurement invariance across diverse populations (McKay et al., 2018). Another is Nurmi's tool. Underlying it is a three-stage model that operationalizes future orientation through motivation, planning, and evaluation processes,

using structured interviews to examine goal complexity, knowledge, and likelihood estimates (Nurmi, 1989).

School-Based Family Counseling Model and Adolescents' Future Orientation

School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC) is holistic and ecological in nature, focusing on the school and family as the two most impactful environmental factors on a child's development. Operating across two levels within the school context—preventive and intervention-oriented—SBFC delivers counseling within the school setting that focuses on strengthening relationships and collaboration among students, their families, and school staff (Gerrard & Soriano, 2013).

School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC) has significant potential to foster adolescent future orientation by empowering families and schools, the two most critical contexts for youth development. Research demonstrates that connectedness to both family and school predicts more positive future orientation through direct and indirect pathways (Crespo et al., 2013). Future orientation encompassing expectations, aspirations, and planning requires interventions that address contextual properties alongside individual competencies (Lindstrom et al., 2014). SBFC's integrative systems approach (Gerrard & van Schalkwyk, 2020) aligns with these developmental needs by mobilizing family-school resources, potentially enhancing adolescents' capacity to envision and plan for their future.

In the Jewish Israeli context of ongoing warfare, adolescents face profound challenges in constructing a coherent future orientation amid persistent trauma and uncertainty. However, research on Israeli youth during the Second Intifada revealed moderately optimistic future orientation despite high exposure to political violence and post-traumatic symptoms (Solomon & Lavi, 2005). This resilience demonstrates how future orientation development during armed conflict becomes intensified and value-driven, shaped by existential urgency and national events (Knafo-Noam & Segal, 2025). Theoretical frameworks suggest that the effects of threat on future orientation are mediated by hope and moderated by cultural orientations, developmental periods, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal characteristics (Seginer, 2008). For Israeli Jewish adolescents navigating contemporary warfare, integrated interventions combining family-school partnerships with mental health support may prove essential in fostering resilience and enabling youth to maintain future-oriented perspectives despite overwhelming collective trauma.

Given the understanding that looking to and preparing for the future fosters resilience, we suggest that teachers and educational counselors who develop prevention and intervention programs consider the benefits of meaningful discourse about the future, especially in times of crisis. A discussion about the future will give adolescents hope. It will broaden the range of topics for discussion at home and at school. It will connect adults with adolescents and allow adolescents to pursue their developmental tasks.

In sum, future orientation can serve as a tool for understanding adolescents' world. The activity regarding future orientation can raise questions about whether and to what extent the adolescent relates to the future, in which areas the adolescent engages with the future, and what their hopes and fears are. These questions, when explored within a collaborative school-based family counseling framework, can inform targeted prevention and intervention efforts that support adolescents as they build the resilience and adaptability the future requires.

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Parents' perceptions regarding inclusion of their children with special needs in mainstream schools?

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ABSTRACT

In 2018, the Israeli parliament passed a law broadening the inclusion policy. This legislation allows parents to choose their child's placement either in a special school or a mainstream one. Their child's needs should be fulfilled regardless of placement. Although many parents then chose to send their children to mainstream schools, current research shows that many want their children to return to special schools. The study investigated the perceptions of parents whose children were assigned to mainstream schooling, following a Characterization and Eligibility Committee (CES). It examined their satisfaction with the extent to which their child's needs were addressed, as well as their perceived involvement throughout the entire process, from the initial referral to the CES, to at least one year after the child's placement in the mainstream setting. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 parents of diagnosed students, who underwent a CES when the child was in 3rd-9th grade. Of the interviewees, eight were parents of children diagnosed on the autistic spectrum, five were parents of children with learning disabilities, two were parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, one mother of a child with a mild intellectual disability, one mother of a child with a physical disability, and one mother of a child with a mental disorder. Content analysis revealed four themes: Complicated bureaucracy; A complicated situation in the school; Parental authority versus the educational system; Positive aspects of inclusion. These results highlight the loneliness parents feel during the process and the importance of improved parent-school collaboration, and they are discussed in relation to the school-based family approach.

KEYWORDS

Inclusion, parent-school relationships, special education

Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century, there were two dramatic developments in the field of special education. First, there was a significant increase in the number of students diagnosed as having special needs (Blass, 2022). Another development was the increase in awareness of the importance and the need for inclusion in the general education systems - both educationally and socially, as was stated in The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994).

In Israel, too, there is a broad consensus on the importance of including children with special needs in mainstream schools, as reflected in legislation and teachers' views (Bar, 2025; Kimhi & Bar Nir, 2025). However, about 40% of all children with special needs in the education system are not included in mainstream schools, but study in separate settings. This is a high rate compared to other countries worldwide and indicates the deficient performance of the Israeli education system in this area (Blass, 2022; Shapira, 2025).

In 2018, to promote the inclusion policy, the Israeli parliament passed an amendment to the special education law. One significant change in the new legislation was that parents now had the opportunity to choose their child's placement (Huri & Shoshana, 2023). Before the new legislation, parents participated in the placement committees and explained their opinions, but the final decision regarding the child's placement was made by the professionals. The new amendment established a new committee, the Characterization and Eligibility Committee (CES), that allowed parents to choose their child's placement – either a special school, or a mainstream one. Their child's needs should be fulfilled regardless of the placement (Huri & Shoshana, 2023). This decision is in line with theories and research that highlight the importance of parents' involvement in school (Epstein, 2001; Smith & Sheridan, 2019), especially regarding the inclusion process (Balli, 2016; Šukys et al., 2015). Parental involvement in school has been found to contribute to children's achievement (Boonk et al., 2018; Sujarwo & Herwin, 2023) and well-being (Wang et al., 2019).

However, despite the new legislation and the parents' ability to choose their child placement, although many parents initially chose to send their children to mainstream schools, current research by the Israeli Ministry of Education indicates that a significant number of parents now wish for their children to return to special schools (RAMA, 2023). These results can stem from several reasons. First, international studies show that parental perceptions regarding inclusion differ across disability categories and the child's functioning needs. Studies show that parents of children with social-emotional disabilities and acquired disabilities had

less positive perceptions regarding their child's inclusion, compared to parents of children with physical or sensory disabilities (Bopota et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022). Also, parents of children with mild disabilities were more likely to support inclusion of their children than parents of children with severe disabilities (Layser & Kirk, 2004).

Second, previous studies in Israel have shown that parents' experiences in the CES were predominantly negative. Parents described the process as alienating and bureaucratic, and the CES members as unsensitive to their needs (Gindi et al., 2021). Also, parents expressed distrust in the CES members and felt that they were motivated by extraneous motives or a hidden agenda, such as a desire to save on expenses by placing the children in mainstream schools (Huri & Shoshana, 2023). Parents reported feeling alone and in a constant battle to meet their child's needs, whom they knew best, but they lacked information about how the system worked and therefore did not know what to demand of the committee (Gindi et al., 2021; Huri & Shoshana, 2023). These parents' experiences contradicted their need for information, guidance, advice, and support from the education system (Gindi et al., 2021).

Another reason for the decline in parents' willingness to include their children in mainstream schools was a lack of resources. In practice, despite legislation that declares the child eligible for the same support, regardless of the educational setting in which s/he is placed, fewer resources are allocated to students in mainstream schools. Therefore, one can argue that there is no real choice for parents who want the best for their child (Bar, 2025). A previous study indicates that parents perceived the special education setting as "a golden cage." They pointed out the many resources given to their children in special education, compared to the lack of resources in mainstream education (Huri & Shoshana, 2023).

In addition to the growing negative attitudes among parents toward inclusion, teachers' willingness to include children with special needs in mainstream schools in Israel has also decreased (RAMA, 2023). Although teachers accept the principles of inclusion, they express reservations about the education system's ability to support it and report a low sense of competence, which is often linked to negative attitudes toward inclusion (Huri & Shoshana, 2025; Shauli et al., 2023). 46% of the teachers believe that inclusion contributes to a child's academic development, and 54% believe it contributes to a child's social development. Most teachers claim they lack the pedagogical tools to address the social and emotional challenges of inclusion. Another cause for the teachers' negative attitudes was the workload that prevented them from providing a satisfactory educational service to the included students (RAMA, 2023). Recent research found that although teachers fully embraced the value of students with

disabilities participating fully in society, they were at times at odds with its implementation. That elicited feelings of shame and a need to conceal them (Shoshana & Huri, 2025).

In light of the negative attitudes and experiences of parents and teachers regarding the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, the study aims to examine the perceptions of parents whose children were integrated into mainstream schools about the entire process - from preparations for the CES, to the implementation of decisions and the manner of inclusion at school, in hope to better understand what can be done to improve the inclusion process. The main study questions were: What are parents' insights into the implementation of the new inclusion policy and its impact on their child? How do the parents experience school-parent collaboration in the process?

Method

Participants

Participants were 18 parents (16 mothers and two fathers) of diagnosed students who underwent a CES when the child was in 3rd-9th grade. Of the interviewees, eight were parents of children diagnosed on the autistic spectrum, five were parents of children with learning disabilities, two were parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, one mother of a child with a mild intellectual disability, one mother of a child with a physical disability, and one mother of a child with a mental disorder.

Instruments and Procedure

Data collection was performed via semi-structured interviews. The interview included 13 questions regarding three main aspects: (1) Parents' perceptions regarding their participation in the CES, e.g., What do you know about the CES? What was your experience at the CES? (2) Parents' perceptions regarding the inclusion process of their child, e.g., How do you perceive the inclusion program that was set for your child? What are the benefits of the inclusion process for your child? What would you like to improve in the process? (3) Parents' relationships with the education system, e.g., Describe your relationships with your child's home teacher. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data was analyzed for this paper using qualitative thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, in the first stage, the two researchers read and reread the interviews separately and generated initial codes for the data, identifying potential categories. In the second stage, the connections between the initial categories were examined, and the categories were classified into different levels of categories and subcategories, creating a thematic map. Throughout the process, the researchers revisited the data to discuss disagreements until agreement was reached.

Results

Content analysis revealed four themes: 1) Complicated bureaucracy; 2) A complicated situation in the school; 3) Parental authority versus the educational system; 4) Positive aspects of inclusion.

Complicated Bureaucracy

The inclusion process requires many multi-professional team meetings with the parents, including preparation meetings at school before the CES, the CES itself, and ongoing meetings after the CES, to plan how to respond accurately to the child's needs. However, 12 of 18 parents reported not receiving any preparation from the school prior to the CES, resulting in confusion. For example, one parent said: *"I felt they were talking over our heads, about things that I didn't understand"*. Another parent described how the fact that the parents were not prepared created negative feelings:

When a parent comes to such a committee, he doesn't know what he's going to meet. He comes to the committee, and suddenly they're all piled on him... between six and ten professionals, he's not aware of it... They don't tell him who's on the committee and why, what each person's role is, and then the parent feels attacked...

One mother described how she acted in order to be prepared for the CES, despite the reluctance of the education system to help her prepare:

Luckily, I was guided by someone who knew me... Without her guidance, I wouldn't have been able to handle it... I didn't receive any preparation, I didn't receive any information; on the contrary, I felt like I was disrupting the system.

The complicated bureaucracy creates uneasiness not only at CES meetings, but also at professional meetings that are part of the school's inclusion process. For example, one mother described her exhaustion from the ongoing meetings: *"I can't get used to the fact that once in three months, so many people are asking questions regarding my parenthood or my relationships with my partner"*.

Those results suggest that the combination of multiple meetings with many professionals, alongside the feeling that they are not fully prepared for those meetings, creates frustration and confusion for parents, who are sometimes exhausted by the process.

A Complicated Situation in the School

11 out of 18 parents described barriers to successful inclusion. One significant barrier was the lack of knowledge among mainstream teachers about inclusion and its teaching practices. This created negative feelings for teachers and parents alike, as one parent described:

"We encountered insensitivity and irrational anger, as well as blunt statements. The child deteriorated because they did not believe in him. The teachers are not qualified, and their emotional intelligence tends to be zero".

Another barrier was a shortage of professionals, including therapists and teachers' assistants, which resulted in the parents' feeling of helplessness because the school's inability to satisfy the child's needs as was defined by the CES: *"I didn't have any control... because what I thought he needed to receive, and what he was supposed to receive, they simply don't have the means to provide."* Another mother described how this shortage affected the students and the teachers at the same time:

"If my son had received more resources... his teacher is excellent and really wanted to succeed. Still, she couldn't anymore... physically she couldn't anymore, physically and mentally, and I completely understand her".

The school's complex situation was also reflected in the relatively large and complex classes, which added a burden to the inclusion process. With many children with different needs in the same class, it is hard to attend to every child: *"There were 36 children in the class, and Sara was very quiet; she didn't have the motivation to learn, and even when she tried, she failed".*

As can be seen from the parents' description, the reality in schools, where many children with different needs are taught in large classes, led by teachers who lack proper knowledge and support from professionals, is that teachers, parents, and children are all frustrated.

Parental Authority versus the Educational System

The new amendment states that the parents are responsible for choosing their child's placement. However, sometimes parents lack professional knowledge, yet they still have the responsibility to choose the school. This can create frustration, as can be seen in the following example:

The signs were there, but we didn't know how to read them. You can also say that we as parents pushed it away... I have a lot of responsibility here, of course, but I really had no knowledge of learning difficulties, knowledge that I have today.

The example above shows that those parents had no direction or support from the school in understanding their child's special needs. In 9 out of 18 interviews, parents reported feeling they are facing the educational system alone and need professional support. In some cases, the

parents feel that not only are they alone, but they are at war with the educational system to get their child's needs met:

"We fought to have two assistants in the class. With all due respect to the committees, I always like to prepare myself...I think parents know what's best"; "They didn't want to. But this year I didn't give up! I'm glad I managed to make an impact, because if it had depended on external factors..."

Those results show that, at times, parents feel alone and even lonely, in a battle to manage their children's care and support their needs.

Positive Aspects of Inclusion

Parents described two positive aspects of inclusion. First, although the situation is complicated, in some cases, parents showed satisfaction with the educational staff's commitment to the child's success:

"Even though the relationship with the educator wasn't good, we had an excellent relationship with the principal and the counselor; they embraced him despite everything".

The second positive aspect of inclusion was the social advantage for the child:

"It is very integrated. Wonderful. Less in the academic aspect. More in the social aspect"; "He has things that he has a harder time with, but he has friends, and they love him".

These findings indicate that the inclusion process can be successful. A key factor in achieving this goal is a strong collaboration between school staff and parents.

Discussion

The present study aimed to understand parents' insights regarding the implementation of the new inclusion policy and its impact on their child. The results show that parents are facing several challenges, including complicated bureaucracy, limited knowledge, and significant responsibility in their child's inclusion process. Often, parents feel they face these challenges alone, without sufficient knowledge, and sometimes they even feel they need to fight the educational system. Practically, the parents become the child's case manager, a situation that creates an emotional and operational burden. These results are in line with a previous study in Israel on parents' experiences in CES (Gindy et al., 2021) and show that the loneliness parents felt during the CES - persists during the implementation of the inclusion process.

Sadly, the feelings of loneliness and lack of knowledge are not unique to parents; teachers who struggle to include children with special needs in their crowded, complex classes also report them (Huri & Shoshana, 2025). In the present study, parents described how the lack of best practices for inclusion led to teachers' anger and frustration, even among those who tried hard to succeed. This suggests that teachers' education programs should prepare teachers

for the diversity of their students' needs regarding attitudes and practices, as previous studies in Israel have suggested (Kimhi & Bar Nir, 2025).

Despite the challenges, the study indicates that collaboration between parents and school staff can exist. Parents expressed empathy for the teachers who try to meet the child's needs accurately, despite the complex situation in school. Some of them described positive relationships with school staff, which led to a better experience for parents and better outcomes for their children. Epstein and colleagues (2018) highlight the importance of building partnerships between parents and schools regarding the students' needs. According to Epstein, when teachers, parents, and students see each other as partners in education, a caring community forms around students, enabling them to thrive.

It is important to note the diversity in parents' perceptions in the current study. Although most of the parents have described barriers to inclusion, some of them perceived the inclusion of their children as successful. As in Layser and Kirk's study (2004), parents of children with mild disabilities were more likely to view the inclusion of their children positively, compared to parents of children with more severe disabilities. However, unlike previous studies (e.g., Bopota et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022), there were no differences in parents' perceptions based on the type of disability in the present study. This finding might stem from the small number of participants and the limited variety of disabilities in the present sample. In future research, it is recommended to further investigate this interpretation.

These findings highlight the importance of staff-parent collaboration, and the necessity to institutionalize it so parents do not feel at war. It seems there is an increasing need for an accompanying person within the education system to coordinate the child's inclusion process, and support parents and teachers in addressing challenges stemming from the Israeli education system's complexity and limited resources. One such person, can be a school-based family counselor (SBFC). According to the school-based family counseling approach, the child's problems should be conceptualized in the context of all her/his interpersonal networks – school, family, and community. The SBFC needs to help bring about the necessary changes within the school system, to realign the school with the child's needs (Soriano & Gerrard, 2013). Therefore, in the case of inclusion, the SBFC can be the one to coordinate the child's special needs, and work with parents and school staff to achieve this goal, since the SBFC defines counselor-parent-staff collaboration as critical in supporting the child (Gerrard & Soriano, 2020; Soriano & Gerrard, 2013). Since SBFC are advocates for the child, the family, and the school, they can ensure that parents and teachers are not alone in the process. However, since

parents reported a lack of knowledge about special needs, it seems important that the SBFC has this knowledge.

Conclusions

The study highlights parents' perceptions regarding the complexity of inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools in Israel. Parents pointed out three key obstacles: heavy bureaucracy, teachers' and parents' lack of knowledge, and the emotional burden of managing their child's case. These obstacles might contribute to the low percentage of included students in Israel (Blass, 2022; Shapira, 2025) and the significant number of parents who wish for their children to return to special schools (RAMA, 2023). Policymakers should be attentive to the field in order to address those obstacles. It is recommended to 1) appoint an SBFC counselor, who can support parents, teachers, and the child; 2) improve teacher education, enhancing new teachers' knowledge and practices that can support inclusion; 3) follow up the study with a larger and more diverse sample, in order to examine possible differences in parental perceptions regarding the inclusion of their children according to their children's disabilities.

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Strengthening educational trajectories in early childhood through school-based interventions implemented by teachers: The experience in Mendoza, Argentina

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education is one of the most important spaces for reducing inequalities of access to the school system, fostering interactive experiences, contributing to student autonomy, and promoting the development of motor, linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Children's experiences during early childhood could enhance the development of all the aforementioned skills, thus mitigating socio-educational inequalities. An important concept used to establish this is the innovation of the School-Based Family Counseling approach (SBFC). Since 2018, the Initial Level Pilot Project (PINI) has been underway in the province of Mendoza, Argentina. This project brings together three institutions: two academic-scientific, and one governmental institution. The objective of this particular study, carried out during the 2024 school year, is to analyze an evaluation conducted by teachers regarding the PINI implementation process and the changes observed in their students after the implementation of the program for strengthening cognitive and socioemotional abilities (PHCSE). In 2024, 50 pre-school teachers from the province were trained and implemented the school intervention with more than 900 children. The implementation of PHCSE proved a useful strategy for strengthening cognitive and socioemotional skills among early childhood students, especially those who needed it most. Helping to create the conditions that support the educational trajectories of all children, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, is a priority, and this is the focus of this work.

KEYWORDS

Early childhood,
School-Based
Family Counseling,
School-based
interventions,
Strengthening
cognitive skills,
Teacher training

Introduction

One of the most significant challenges facing the contemporary education system is reducing the socio-educational gaps persisting among students. These inequalities, closely linked to socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic factors, are expressed in differential access to pedagogical, technological, and material resources, as well as to opportunities for learning and integral development. Overcoming these gaps involves not only guaranteeing equal access to school but also ensuring equity in educational processes and outcomes, providing differentiated support according to the needs of each context and each student. In this sense, education is committed to generating inclusive policies that promote equal access, equity in teaching processes, and educational continuity through strategies that consider the specificities of each territory and school population (UNESCO, 2020).

Working to achieve equity in education involves considering how to carry out this process, taking into account the diversity of sociocultural and economic realities in different contexts. Thus, equity involves considering educational practices and teaching-learning strategies aimed at strengthening teacher competencies and actively involving families in their children's education to ensure that students have equal learning and development opportunities (OECD, 2018; Epstein, 2018; Sheridan et al., 2019). Thus, education is configured as an essential tool for ensuring equal opportunities from the earliest years of life.

Considering this, the Childhood-Youth Development Psychology Group, made up of CONICET researchers and professor-researchers from the Research Institute of the Faculty of Psychology (UDA), along with the Directorate of Initial Education (DIE) of the province of Mendoza, Argentina, have been working as an inter-institutional team, with three important aims: first, planning together a work-agenda for articulating actions for promoting successful educational trajectories for students of 4 to 5 years; second, setting out a significant increase and improvement of the schoolteachers' and principals' methodologies in their teaching practices; third, encouraging parental involvement in their children's education. Thus, this project was developed following the School-Based Family Counseling approach (SBFC), an integrative systemic approach, for helping initial level children in their academic trajectory, linking school and family (Gerrard & Soriano, 2019).

Thus, this project is called the Integral Project for the Initial Level, called PINI in Spanish, which is based on the approach proposed by SBFC, which states that the two most important institutions in a young child's life are the family and the school, and that an effective

way to help children is by mobilizing resources from both the family and the school (Gerrard et al., 2023).

PINI began in 2017, but it was not until 2024 that a Tripartite Agreement was signed among the three participating institutions, such as DIE, CONICET and UDA, in order to continue coordinating their work together. This was necessary to provide a formal and legal framework for the activities carried out by researchers from the University of Aconcagua and CONICET. This collaborative work between the three institutions involved around certain concepts, such as: a) Promoting learning and development of children, as subjects for rights as members of a family and a community; b) Promoting the development of motor, linguistic, cognitive and socioemotional abilities through playful activities; c) Trying to reduce inequalities in children at entry to school; d) Favoring interactive experiences and respect for oneself and others; and, e) Contributing to student autonomy. Due to very satisfactory results, this project continues as an institutional policy of the province of Mendoza, contributing to the training of teachers and principals to strengthen the educational trajectories of their students, as well as promoting parental involvement in their children's school activities.

The objective of this study, of work carried out during the 2024 school year, is to analyze an evaluation conducted by teachers regarding the PINI implementation process and the changes observed in their students after the implementation of PHCSE.

Description of PINI

PINI is a naturalistic intervention project in which the entire educational community is involved in the program. PINI, following the approach proposed by SBFC, aims to reduce barriers that interfere with well-being and learning, strengthening protective factors and creating emotionally safe and inclusive educational environments, promoting the development of socio-emotional skills, self-regulation skills, and collaborative links between school and family (Gerrard & van Schalkwyk, 2020). To this end, the three institutions work together for coordinating actions for promoting educational trajectories in students of 4-5 years and for generating improvements in the link between family and school.

This inter-institutional cooperation involves holding different responsibilities and playing different roles. The educational government organism is in charge of paying one extra hour of the teachers' salary. In fact, the teachers voluntarily accept taking part in this project, and have to implement PINI in all classroom activities, including Physical Education and Music classes.

Our research team is in charge of: a) Coordinating activities among the research team, the principals, and the teachers of specific areas; b) Training all staff in theoretical-practical tools regarding cognitive and socioemotional functions of initial level students at the schools; c) Designing a program for strengthening cognitive and socioemotional abilities (PHCSE); d) Evaluating and Following-up of the program for strengthening the children's abilities; and, e) Empowering teachers for both the implementation the naturalistic intervention program with their students and the engagement of parents in strengthening their children's cognitive and socioemotional skills.

As different studies have revealed, the intervention program that have shown greater efficiency are those that present characteristics, such as: a) over time, permanence, as a policy of the educational institution; b) pedagogic activities incorporated into the study curriculum, c) fidelity and quality in the implementation of the program; and, d) implementation of the program by the teachers themselves (Bardack & Obradović, 2019; D 'Agostino et al, 2023; Diamond & Ling, 2020; Souza et al., 2024; Traverso et al., 2019). Thus, teachers play a fundamental role as mediators of knowledge to promote and enrich the learning potential of children (Alesi et al., 2021; De Simone, et al., 2023; Ison et al., in press). Based on these considerations, our research team had the responsibility of designing the naturalistic school intervention based on previous research, centered on promoting mental health, that is focused on potentialities and maintenance of psychological wellbeing in accordance with the full community. This naturalistic intervention, called PHCSE in Spanish, means "program for cognitive and socioemotional abilities".

Naturalistic intervention involves procedures of learning abilities and behaviours occurring within the children's natural environment, and are delivered by significant adults, who implement them as part of children's daily routines and activities. Children in Initial Education have varied learning rhythms and diverse sociocultural experiences, so it is fundamental that teachers adopt "effective scaffolding strategies for learning". In this naturalistic intervention, our group focuses not only on teacher training, but also on program monitoring and assessment (Dubin et al., 2020; Frost et al., 2020; Tiede & Walton, 2019).

Implementing PINI involves following a 3-step sequence. The steps are: first, training teachers and principals; second, monitoring the implementation of the PHCSE carried out by teachers; and third, evaluating the results.

The first step, training teachers and principals, consists of 8 theoretical-practical sessions that support a series of practical activities. Each session addresses one different function, the functions being: Attention and Perceptual Organization, Working Memory,

Cognitive Flexibility and Problem-solving Abilities in the Classroom, Planning and Organization, Skills for Thinking before Acting, Recognition of Emotions, Resilient Attitude, and Strengthening Emotional Resources in School Contexts. In each teacher training session, a brief definition and description of each function is highlighted, as well as the development trajectory expected in children at the initial level, its interrelationship with other functions, the reasons to promote its development, and how to do so through recreational activities. All sessions are conducted via virtual meetings and last 2 hours each.

The resources used in these training sessions are a series of pedagogic material written by the research group depicting recreational activities involving the organization of various cognitive and socioemotional skills into practice. These activities are in an increasing order of difficulty, with the intention of both generating cognitive challenges and respecting the development of each child's individual trajectories. This process is in a working guide for teachers. In addition, short videos are used to support what is explained in the online meetings. Also, a series of podcasts are included, in order to explain the purpose of the program to families and how to support their children at home. Finally, a website called "Digital School", where teachers can find recorded training sessions and all the resources uploaded to the platform.

The second step is monitoring the implementation of PHCSE carried out by teachers. Our research group monitors the intervention through monthly online meetings. Each session reviews how the project is being implemented, especially focusing on the fidelity of implementation, whether the sequence, duration, and objectives of each session are respected, as well as the adaptations made according to the group or individual needs. In addition, other topics of interest related to early childhood education are introduced each month. Thus, topics developed are in titles called: Motor and Psychomotor Development at the Initial Level; Socioemotional and Cognitive Skills in Education: Key Tools for Resilience in Schools; Building the Scaffolding of Thinking: The Power of Cognitive Stimulation in Early Childhood; How to Make Children Relaxed through Playful Breathing Exercises; and, How Teachers could Contribute to Strengthening Self-esteem in School Environment. The last session consists of different presentations of experiences on the application of PINI done by different teachers, shared with other teachers from different school contexts. Once the monitoring phase is completed, the third step is concluded by the research team analysing the results observed by the teachers after the application of the program.

Method

The design is non-experimental and cross-sectional. It has a descriptive scope (Hernandez-Sampieri & Mendoza-Torres, 2018).

Participants

The total sample consists of 50 initial-level teachers, who are in charge of 4- and 5-year-old classrooms. All teachers belong to public schools in the province of Mendoza. Teaching experience ranges from 5 to 15 years. Teachers complete an online questionnaire after the implementation of PHCSE.

Instruments

For teachers, an online questionnaire is administered after the implementation of PHSCE. This questionnaire was developed specifically by the team members to analyze the teachers' adherence, also called "Fidelity", to PHSCE implementation. In addition, it explores teachers' opinions on the effectiveness of the training provided by the research team. The questionnaire consists of nine questions, rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "never" and 5 means "always." Specifically, the six fidelity items explore how well teachers implement games, strategies, and other specific PHSCE program activities, respecting the pedagogical intent as outlined in the training sessions. Moreover, three questions reflect teachers' opinions on the usefulness of the training sessions, the relevance of monthly meetings for monitoring program implementation and the support provided by the research team.

For parents, a brief online interview is conducted with families to explore their perception of changes in their children's cognitive and socio-emotional performance. The interview asks if parents have perceived changes in their children's cognitive and socioemotional performance after the program, and in which functions or aspects of school life changes are noticed.

Ethics Statement

The selection of participating schools was agreed on between the DGE and the directors of each educational establishment. In turn, each teacher gave their free consent for the application of the program in their classroom, taking into account the needs of their students. Before the application of the program, parents were informed of the objectives of the work in order to obtain their authorization for their children's participation in this study. This authorization constituted a *sine qua non conditio* for the participation of their children. Both

the informed consent, as well as the administration of PHCSE, followed the CONICET guidelines on ethical conduct in Social Sciences and Humanities.

Results

To analyse the evaluation carried out by teachers after the implementation of the PHCSE intervention program, the percentages corresponding to the items considered in the online questionnaire were obtained. They observed significant improvements in their students in both socioemotional abilities and cognitive functions. As shown in Figure 1 in Cognitive Functions: 84% of teachers perceived improvements in Attention; 76% in Working Memory; 68% in Inhibitory Control; 54% in Visual Motor Coordination; 48 % in Cognitive Flexibility; 38 % Organization in Tasks; and 12 % in Planning. Regarding Socioemotional Abilities: 52% of teachers perceived improvements in Emotional Recognition; 50% in Group Work; 48% in Verbal Expression; and 44% in Social Relationships.

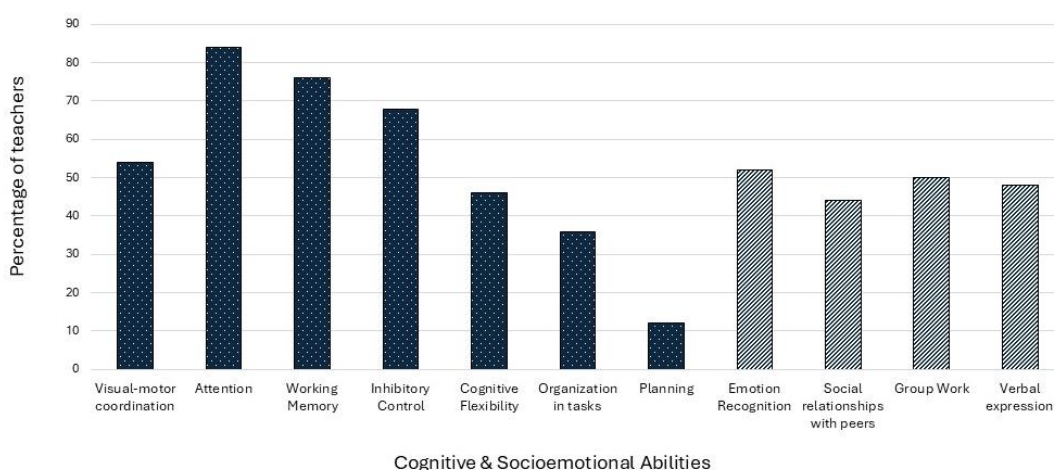


Figure 1. *Percentage of improvements in different functions perceived by teachers*

An important aspect of analysis was the Fidelity in program implementation. Fidelity refers to how well teachers implement strategies or playful activities in line with the pedagogical intentions described in the training sessions. First, it is important to know if they change the program's content. Ideally, they cannot change it or they can make only minor changes. Figure 2 shows that about 30% of teachers made no modifications, nearly 50% made minor modifications, while 12% made significant modifications. Secondly, we analysed whether they used the digital website's resources, such as the playful activities from our

guidebook or the podcasts, short videos, or recorded training classes. Figure 3 shows the resources used by teachers on the “Digital School & Website”. The pie chart on the left shows that about 20% of the teachers responded that they “always” use the book, and about 50% of them said “most of the time”. Only a low percentage of the educators answered “rarely” or “never”. A similar situation is shown in the graph on the right, regarding the uses of podcasts and short videos for helping in the application of the program. Podcasts and short videos are used by teachers “always” (24 %), “most of the time” (40 %) and “sometimes” (36%).

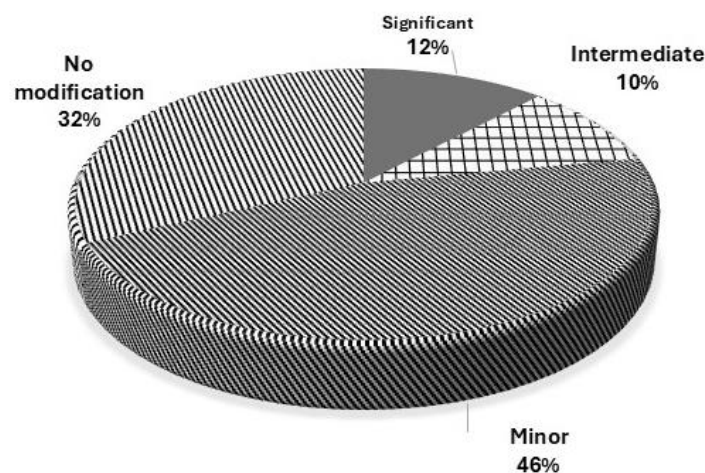


Figure 2. *Modifications made to the content of PHCSE to stimulate cognitive and socioemotional functions*

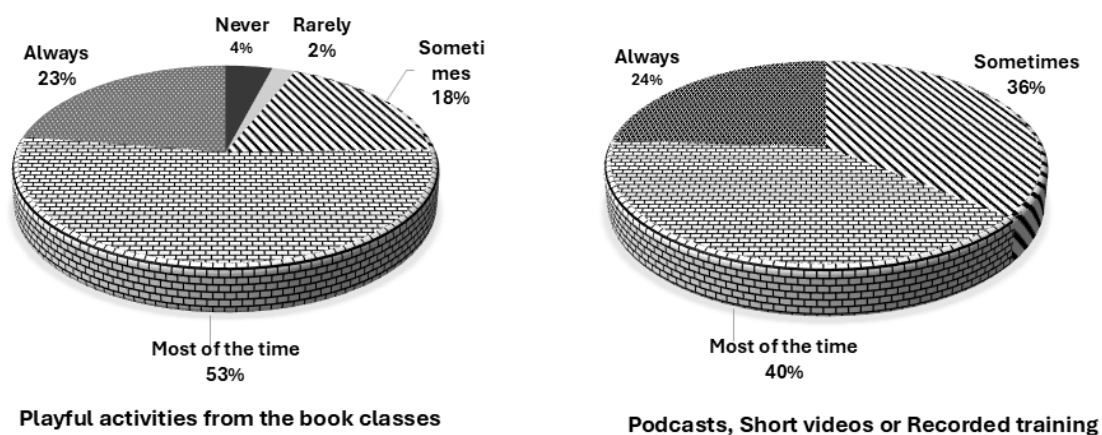


Figure 3. *Resources used by teachers on the “Digital School” Website*

The final three questions of the questionnaire are used to investigate teachers' perceptions of the training and support process provided by the research team. Regarding

teachers' perceptions of the training sessions, 52% of them perceived it “relevant and useful”, 34% “most of the time”, 10% “some” of the sessions were useful and 4% were “not very relevant”. Related to monthly follow-up meetings, 68% of teachers considered them “very useful” in supporting them during the program implementation process, 28% perceived “most” of the meetings were relevant and 4% found “some” of the meetings interesting for continuing the program's implementation. Regarding how the support by the PINI group was, 72% of the teachers thought it was “very satisfactory”, 26% “satisfactory” and only 2% “somewhat” satisfactory.

Finally, 78% of families perceived “significant” improvements in their children's cognitive and socioemotional performance, while 22% perceived improvements in “some” skills after the program's implementation. Furthermore, all parents “agreed” that the PHCSE program should continue.

Discussion

PINI began in 2017 and is still ongoing. Over the years, PINI has been part of the educational community, where most teachers and parents state that the program produces beneficial changes in children, following the SBFC model (Gerrard et al., 2019). Each year, more schools have joined, and more children have been in the program. At the beginning, in 2018, 232 children took part in the program, and, currently, approximately 2,700 are participating. In addition, a great increase in teachers' participation in the program is observed. In 2018, just 20 educators joined the program, while in 2025, nearly 200 of them are taking part.

The results obtained in our studies provide empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of intervention programs aimed at reducing initial disparities among school groups. These initiatives, focused on providing equitable opportunities for achieving academic goals, demonstrate that the systematic implementation of targeted pedagogical strategies can foster the holistic development of students from their earliest years of schooling (Alesi et al., 2021; D'Intino, 2023; Gerrard et al., 2023; Souza et al., 2024).

Within this framework, teachers play a central role by committing to sustained and intensive work that promotes the stimulation of cognitive and emotional functions in authentic learning contexts. These practices not only strengthen individual capacities but also create more inclusive teaching conditions that are sensitive to the diversity of educational trajectories.

The success of these interventions depends largely on the training and active participation of the teaching staff. Ongoing professional development enables the acquisition of theoretical and practical tools that facilitate the implementation of evidence-based strategies to foster new skills in students. Consequently, teacher training is a strategic pillar for promoting equal educational opportunities, as well as for building fairer and more equitable school environments.

A key aspect emerging from the results obtained relates to teachers' mediating roles in the quality and effectiveness of the interventions. Beyond the specific content of the programs, educators' abilities to create an atmosphere of enthusiasm and enjoyment during the activities appears to be a determining factor in the achievements (Diamond, 2020).

The evidence suggests that children's emotional engagement increases when the activities are presented in a playful and attractive way, and when teachers convey confidence in their students' abilities and resources (Calderón Togra et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the sense of personal relevance that activities acquire —by being linked to children's experiences, interests, and contexts— contributes to strengthening their intrinsic motivation and commitment to learning. From this perspective, effective pedagogical intervention depends not only on the program's structure, but also on the quality of teacher-student interaction and the educators' abilities to foster meaningful connections among participants (D'Intino, 2023). In this sense, teachers' roles are consolidated as a key agent in creating emotionally resonant and socially inclusive educational experiences. Asimismo, se necesitan docentes altamente capacitados para afrontar el reto de trabajar con un número cada vez mayor de estudiantes afectados por diferentes dificultades tales como el impacto de la pandemia, los desastres naturales, la incidencia del abuso infantil y la violencia doméstica, y los problemas de salud mental.

The involvement of families, and particularly parents, emerges as an essential component in the implementation of programs aimed at strengthening the cognitive and socioemotional development in early childhood (De Simone et al., 2023). The results observed in this study suggest that active collaboration between teachers and families enhances the effects of interventions by promoting the continuity of learning experiences beyond the school setting. When parents commit to the goals and dynamics of the program, there is greater coherence between home educational practices and classroom pedagogical strategies, contributing to a more comprehensive and sustained development of children's skills.

Furthermore, parental involvement not only reinforces cognitive learning, but also expands opportunities for socioemotional development. Adult participation in shared activities,

emotional support and recognition of individual achievements all foster feelings of security, self-esteem and autonomy in children. From this perspective, the family-school partnership is a protective factor that directly impacts the quality of early educational experiences.

However, for this collaboration to be effective, educational institutions must create systematic spaces for communication, guidance and joint reflection. Training and support for families are essential for strengthening their role as co-educators, promoting a shared understanding of the program's objectives and active participation in its development.

These findings align with previous research highlighting the positive impact of parental involvement in early childhood education (Epstein, 2018; Sheridan et al., 2019), and reinforce the idea that the most effective interventions are those that integrate the family context as an integral part of the educational process. In this sense, collaborative work between teachers and parents is a key pillar for promoting meaningful and sustainable learning in early childhood.

The results of this study are consistent with the guidelines proposed by international organizations, such as UNESCO (2020) and ECLAC (2020). Such guidelines have emphasized that reducing educational gaps requires early interventions that integrate the cognitive and socioemotional dimensions of learning, thus ensuring quality education for all. To achieve this, work must be done on training programs for school counselors to adequately prepare them to lead and implement trauma-informed practices, which creates a gap between what is expected of their role and the competencies with which they graduate (Brown, 2025). Family Based Counseling in Schools is a way to strengthen the training and development of school counselors and teachers in practices based on various traumatic situations, allowing them to apply them effectively with students and their environments (Brown, 2025; Deb & Deb, 2025; Gerrard & Soriano, 2019).

Following the SBFC model, the priority of our research has been to contribute to creating the conditions that support the educational trajectory of all children. This is especially so for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusions

The findings of these studies support the possibility of applying early interventions within the school context that could reduce sociocultural and performance gaps, strengthening the educational trajectory of children in the initial level.

This study contributes to increasing evidence of the importance both of training and teacher involvement in scaffolding the development trajectories of their students and of the innovative

search for strategies optimizing the functioning of the cognitive and socioemotional processes within the teaching-learning context. Teacher involvement in the promotion of resources could lead to creating conditions of equal opportunities, to promoting socioemotional well-being and to generating learning benefits for all students and their families.

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Understanding the present and predicting the future: integral consciousness, geopolitics, and geo-economics in School-Based Family Counseling and Therapy

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ABSTRACT

In 2025, we see around us and hear from those we are trying to help that life is becoming harder. In so-called “advanced countries”, along with economic well-being, civic harmony, and political consensus, life expectancy has ceased increasing and is reducing, while economic and day-to-day anxieties and frustrations are growing. This paper argues that these ongoing changes WILL impact the practice of School-Based Family Counseling and Therapy by shaping both the nature of the need for services and the necessity for creativity in devising new solutions for new times. This paper presents its rationale, offering specificity both in its predictions and in its orientation to seeking remedies. While the history and context presented here are Euro- and US-centric, the concerns expressed are for the whole planet, and the principles discussed are advanced as having cross-cultural validity.

We at the height are ready to decline.
There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

Julius Casear by William Shakespeare. Act IV, Sc ii, lines 269-276

Keywords

Conformity and individuality;
Geopolitics and hyperreality;
Integral consciousness;
Narcissistic family structure;
Predictive psychology;
Societal change

Introduction

Post WWI Vienna: the un- or underfathered child, and the creative mind of Adler

About a century has passed since Alfred Adler noticed, in post WWI Vienna, that problems with school students were spiking in families who had suffered more greatly—many losing the father—as a result of the War. His solution was as ours: *systemic*, seeing the child's behavior as an *understandable sequela of the child's familial predicament*, to be addressed by *working with the various systems of which the child forms part to ease the pressure on the child*, and by a *focus on school and community*

Post WWII United States: the “democratization of psychotherapy” and the creative minds of Carl Rogers, Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis and Bill Glasser

In the US, the very great numbers of GIs returning home from the theaters of war put pressure on such service systems as then existed. Psychoanalysis, then as now, was expensive in terms of both money and time, and its practitioners were seen as archaic and elitist. Out of this ground were born the psychotherapies of Carl Rogers and Aaron Beck and their contemporaries, and the visit to the therapist, or in languaging seen as more democratic and accessible “counselor”, became normalized as an affordable weekly *conversation* oriented to healing and self-development.

Later postwar period: systemic macroeconomic pressures on family life and the emergence of “latch-key kids”

In 1971, US President Richard Nixon suspended the convertibility of the US Dollar into gold to prevent the (further) outflow of gold from the US. The postwar “consumer economy” had developed in such a way as to place an impossible strain on the financial system. The following decade saw, in the US, economic stagnation, relentlessly rising prices (“inflation”), and the beginning of a generational cycle of corporate bankruptcies and restructurings, ultimately resulting in the closure of much legacy industrial infrastructure and cementing the change in the Great Lakes and Mid Atlantic regions of the United States from “factory belt” to “rust belt”.

The impact of these devastating changes on American families, their children, and their home towns, was profound. The principal, immediately visible, result was a deep economic

hardship that killed the postwar “American Dream” according to which a young man with a lifetime factory job could buy a house and feed a family of four, in which the man’s wife was the “homemaker”. As chronicled by then Harvard Law Professor, former speech pathologist and now US Senator Elizabeth Warren, paying the mortgage and family living expenses now required *two* incomes, and the “breadwinner’s” job lost its “lifetime” descriptor (Warren and Warren Tyagi, 2003). The public domain reframed this adverse economic change as a virtue, inasmuch as women and girls were encouraged to think of themselves as completely on a par with men and boys in terms of being *outward-looking* from the family and able to command a career and an income stream.

But “women’s equality” came at a price, one that is inexorably continuing and with no end in sight and that continues to be paid by society as a whole. As the 1970s turned into the 1980s, the impact of these socioeconomic-familial changes on these families’ children became first noticeable and then an acute concern in the schools: teaching became harder as many students were failing and average test scores were plateauing, if not declining, while behavioral problems were increasing and becoming less tractable.

The emergence of school-based family counseling

In the schools, teachers, principals, school secretaries and other staff all dutifully noticed both the changes in child behavior and the surrounding family circumstances. As in Adlerian Vienna, the more creative-minded observers devised ways to use the school site as a center for bringing developmental gain to both child and family as well as, to the extent possible, the wider school-system.

The longest-lived program in School-Based Family Counseling is of course *The WISR Center for Child and Family Development* pioneered in 1984 by Brian Gerrard and Emily Girault in California, and in which this writer served.

At this point, we perhaps ask ourselves *why* it’s better for children to have more available parents, an inhabited home to return to from school, and an interactive parent (or grandparent) with time and enthusiasm to discuss the child’s day, including any concerns and any homework, as well as put hot food on the table, and eat with the child.

Fortunately, the answer is clear, undisputed, and indisputable. As previously comprehensively set out by many authorities including this writer, children *need to be parented*. The specific and instinctive parental function/contribution that the theorist Heinz Kohut and

his followers call *Mirroring* needs to occur *sufficiently* in the degree the child needs to accrue *self-structure*: more self-structure allows the child to build, from within, the “coping skills” necessary for the transition from home to school and for the ever-changing, ever-growing demands of the school environment as child development, and time, advance.

Kohut (1971) talked about the parental function as being the “provision of narcissistic supplies”. The cumbersome expression is a throwback to an arcane, elite psychoanalytic writing style. For avoidance of doubt, Kohut does not mean that the parental function is designed to confer upon the children the building blocks of a narcissistic personality; he means rather that the “supplies” are needed to allow the child to emerge, age-appropriately, from the “primary narcissism” of the maternal relationship and, increasingly, “self-soothe”. It therefore follows that, if the child is insufficiently Mirrored, if the provision of narcissistic supplies is insufficient, the child has more difficulty emerging from primary narcissism, is less adept at self-soothing, and becomes someone who, fitting in less, demands more from the environment than do her or his peers.

The Internet, "Devices" and "Screen time"

a. the loss of family and community

What began in the late 20th century with the decline in the purchasing power of the US Dollar was accelerated in the early 21st century by the rise in the mesmeric power of the internet-enabled device. Noteworthy data, well conveyed in Figure 1, chronicle the effects of our spending an ever-increasing amount of time online, whether on the computer, or staring into the mobile phone.

In the 1930s and 1940s people spent a good two thirds of their time in face-to-face interactions with *people*, these being (i) friends, (ii) family, (iii) school, and (iv) neighbors. Time spent online, almost entirely absent before 2000, accelerated exponentially from around 2008-2009 and now occupies a full two-thirds of North Americans’ time, with live interactions with friends, family, school and neighbors relegated to fight for scraps of attention at the bottom of the list. While Kohut rightly emphasizes the formative nature of parental *Mirroring*, self psychology theory notes that *Mirroring* remains an ongoing need of the developed adult self, and is obtained not only from parents or parental figures but also from friends and significant people in the wider community with whom the person is in relationship (Geiger, P. B., 2017). The question before us is whether the Mirroring afforded us by our screens and within our screen-dependent lives is a like-for-like ongoing developmental substitute for the Mirroring

traditionally obtained both as children and as adults via in-person relationships. The evidence before our eyes and in our consulting rooms is that this is not the case.

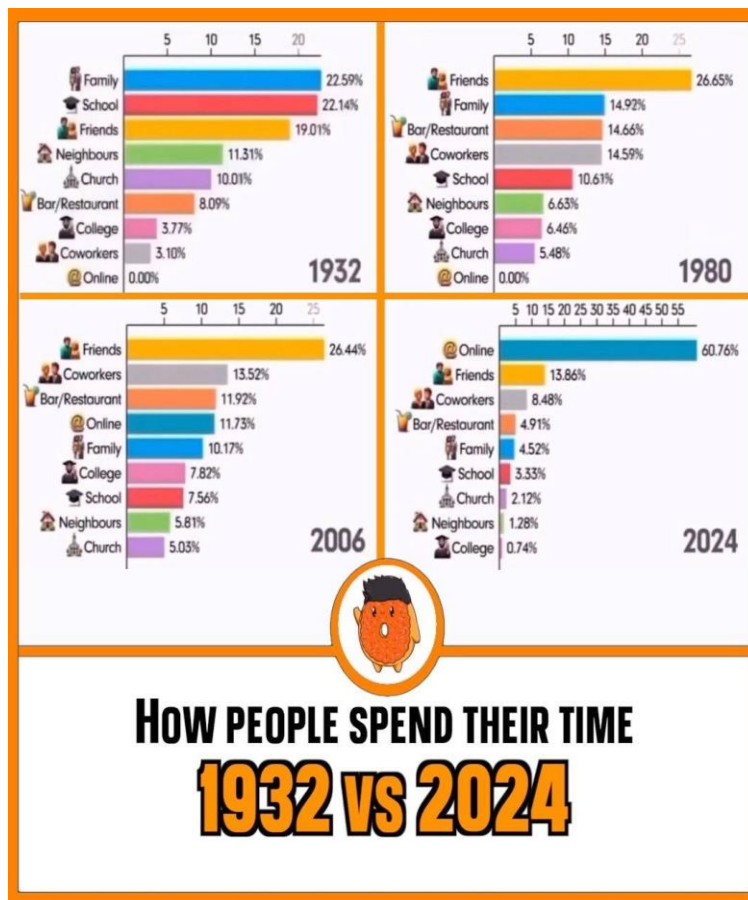


Figure 1

retrieved December 21st 2025 from https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1137942745010724&set=a.691288206342849&type=3&from_lookaside=1

b. the loss of sex, love and companionship

Reduced socialization brings with it, unsurprisingly, further adverse behavioral and societal changes. There is a growing body of evidence on the difficulties experienced by young people in forming stable and productive romantic partner relationships. Tropes, such as that of the “INCEL” (an acronym for “involuntarily celibate” and mostly, but not exclusively applied to males) abound on the internet. Unfortunately the growing body of literature describing these people and their travails is directed at exploring not, as does this paper, the evolutionary and cyclical cause of the phenomenon, but rather at using the phenomenon of the incel to fan the flames of the relationship and societal fractures discussed below.

Trends

a. narcissistic personality traits and their effects

As has been well-documented in the comprehensive body of work authored or co-authored by San Diego State University professor Jean Twenge, the generations of under-Mirrored children turn into college freshmen who, questioned every year since the 1980s, score ever higher in endorsers of narcissistic personality traits (Twenge, 2009). It cannot be a coincidence that the time-spent graph's upturn since 2008-2009 duplicates Twenge's graph showing the acceleration, over the exact same period, of the rise in college freshmen's narcissistic traits; the "financial crisis" of 2008-2009 intensified what began in 1971 and people had to work even harder and spend even less time with family. For many people, the scramble for jobs meant relocating far from home, a move that deprived their children of grandparental Mirroring, and consigned the grandparents to a future in the retirement home. Again the public domain reframed these adverse socio-familial trends as a virtue, citing expectations of a rising economic tide from the "new industries", and normalizing both the cross-country moves, and the retirement homes.

To return to parsing Kohut's languaging, the outcome and therefore our understanding is that the more "narcissistic supplies" afforded the child by the parental system, the *less* "narcissistic" the adult personality. While individual outliers exist, taken as a whole, and employing a public health perspective, *more* parental—and grandparental—involvement is clearly *better*. For everyone.

More correctly, we should say it *was* better, inasmuch as the trend continues to take each successive generation in the adverse direction, and seems unlikely to reverse as the world enters a new era of economic instability. The school students of the 2020s are now the second "post-rust-belt" generation. Their parents were the children served in the early years of SBFC&T after their mothers left them with their own latch-keys. The parents of today's school students are all too often in couples therapy, as they struggle with the legacy described above: their problems include an unspoken competition as to which of the parents is allowed to be more outward-facing in terms of allegiance to job or career and postponement of tending to the home, the children, and their emotional lives as a couple and as a family.

The perspective advanced by this paper is of use, therefore, not only to the SBFC&T professional working with the student in primary, secondary, or tertiary education but also to the couple or family therapist working outside of, or in parallel with the educational establishment. This writer routinely asks his patients in adult outpatient psychotherapy: “how is your child reacting to the pressures you are (both) talking about?” Today’s PWNTs—persons with narcissistic traits or, in Kohut’s languaging, “self disorders”—are defined by the following presentations in therapy:

- full of, but largely cut off from feeling, and *alexithymic*
- preferring to talk about *things* and not about feelings
- believing everything would be just fine if *others* would only act sensibly by doing/not doing certain things
- asking for “tools” to achieve their goals of changing another’s behavior, or being exempted from certain tasks [tools avoid feelings and authentic communication]
- blaming, mutually, their spouse for “lack of empathy”

The syndrome here described is both common and highly resistant to therapeutic change. An adult with these behaviors can *Mirror* neither his partner nor their children, and often presents clinically as unable to tolerate the notion that a decision or action may be felt to be necessary in one set of circumstances and not in another, as this endangers his lodestar of what is “right”.

While creative-thinking clinicians have sought to bring new treatment styles and “tools” into this space, it is not clear to this writer that these newer methods provide the self-development required to overcome, rather than temporarily mask, the primary problem of lack of self-structure and empathy.

b. societal fractures and their effects

As if the geoeconomically-driven tendency to a population-wide decrease in self-structure and empathy weren’t bad enough, the past forty years have seen the rise of a dangerous comorbidity: the fracturing of the polity. In the United States the Red and Blue political parties hate, fear, distrust and despise each other in a manner that David Betz, Professor of War in the Modern World at King’s College, London, describes as a “polar factionalism” (Betz, 2025), and where *every single thing* done or said by the other side is

experienced as a heinous crime. The antagonistic viciousness has analogs in the days of the Roman Republic in the first century BCE, as well as in seventeenth-century England, both eras of violent civil war. To this witches' brew is added the advent of partisan social media content, much of it now AI-generated: on any simple search online on any single issue, it's possible now to find twenty or forty postings of varying kinds arguing for the side you like, and denigrating, or "othering" the side you don't. An immediate, systemic problem is that SBFC&T professionals are, *overwhelmingly and proudly*, on one side of the civic divide, a situation implying, at least theoretically and if polar factionalism is in play, risk of countertransference prejudice curtailing the ability to understand the client's predicament.

A *yet more* serious and fundamental problem emerges from the social media space. The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard uses the term *hyperreality* to describe it, saying: "the real [is] now functionally out of grasp. We have lost the ability to determine what's real to begin with" (Baudrillard, 1994). In hyperreality, therefore, the feeling is that everything is at the same time completely, utterly true...but it also might turn out to be in some way different, even not-true. As Irish author and podcaster Alexander Beiner writes:

"[Baudrillard] argued that as our symbolic representations of the world become more abstract, eventually our symbols stop referring back to anything real. Instead, they refer back to themselves in an endless loop we can't get out of. [Hyperreality] is driven by 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality.'" (Beiner 2025)

Hyperreality is also manifested within the self, as within the following client transaction: "...he identifies as an art dealer; but he shows no interest at all in talking about or acquiring art".

It is self-evident that polar factionalism and hyperreality feed off each other, creating in the political discourse the phenomenon of "rage-baiting" messaging that constantly stokes the tensions; thus the era of hyperreality brings with it a sense of *imminence*, as well as of *emanence*, leaving many with a sense of cliff-edge do-or-die. This is, as Betz argues, very dry tinder for painful and tragic outcomes of the kind seen in the eras of civil war.

But before any such outbreak—and this author *fervently* hopes Betz' fears are not realized—another, different outbreak is already manifesting itself under the dual influence of factionalism and hyperreality: *the acute pressure to conform*.

c. conformity vs individuality

The more narcissistic society is also more vulnerable to stress occasioned by incidental and randomly occurring disharmony or disagreement. People with a solid sense of self, afforded them by sufficient parental (and then ongoing societal) Mirroring and “narcissistic supplies”, are internally strong enough to extend self to imagining how it is for someone having a different experience and worldview; they may also be strong enough—though this requires more internal strength—to hold the duality of liking someone, yet believing something the person does, thinks or votes is (at best) highly misguided.

For people with a deficit in parental Mirroring—by definition in self psychology any recipient of therapeutic services—the manifestations of an internally strong self are difficult to attain and, as a result, the pressure to conform is overwhelming. Such people present as clients across the age spectrum and may be seen by the SBFC professional in either the school setting, or in private practice.

American author, conspiracy theorist, film producer and political lecturer Ted Griffin writes:

“It may surprise you to learn that most of the great political debates of our time—at least in the Western world—can be divided into just two viewpoints [...] Typically, the focus [of the debate] is on whether or not a particular action should be taken; but the real conflict is not about the merits of the action; it is about the principles, the ethical code that justifies or forbids that action. It is a contest between the ethics of collectivism on the one hand and individualism on the other. Those are words that have meaning, and they describe a chasm of morality that divides the entire Western world. (Griffin 2003)

The environmental pressure of Griffin’s “chasm” on the more individualistically minded “outlier” is, essentially, “anti-Mirroring” and therefore *self-diminishing*. Such anti-Mirroring, self-diminishing assaults are energetically absorbed by the psyche; but this does not necessarily mean all is well. Depending on the level of self-development achieved, the outlier may store up such insults within the psyche as evidence, along with earlier narcissistic wounding, that he is a bad person, and the insults may re-emerge as behaviors in *retroflexion*. An example might occur within a professional interest group of SBFC&T professionals. As discussed earlier, this group may be expected overwhelmingly to agree on issues in politics and current affairs, making it uncomfortable for anyone who is even somewhat understanding of or curious toward the other side to remain, comfortably and functioning fully congruently, in the group.

Retroflection

Seattle, Washington counselor and therapist Michael Schreiner writes:

“The Gestalt resistance between the stages of mobilization and action in the *needs satisfaction cycle* is retroflection. This occurs when a person turns his stored up, mobilized energy back upon himself instead of out into the environment. Like all of the resistances, retroflection often serves an important protective function for a person and is *sometimes necessary for survival*.” [italics added]

Schreiner continues:

“Sometimes unhealthy power relationships exist where the weaker party knows that an aggressive action would be met with more violence or other psychologically dangerous consequences. So instead of summoning up the energy to physically leave the relationship, fight back, or get help, a person engages in *self-destructive acts*. These might include *self-harm like cutting or hitting one’s head against a wall over and over*. Retroflection might manifest itself in less obvious ways like *getting sick all the time, constantly hurting oneself in accidents, or doing poorly in school or at work*.” [italics added] (Schreiner, 2012)

The first prediction of this paper is that the chasm between conformity and individuality will become a predominant presentation in clients of counselors and therapists in the educational and in any setting and we should be on the lookout for retroflective behaviors in our clients, be understanding of the conflicts underlying these behaviors, and be able, unfettered by obstructive countertransference (should we happen not to agree with the client) to give the client the self-building therapeutic Mirroring necessary to emerge from, or otherwise manage, the “unhealthy power relationship” Schreiner describes.

In *Intentional Intervention in Counseling and Therapy: goals and process in client engagement*, a book informed and impelled mostly by the centrality of interpersonal empathy in the theorizings of Kohut, Freud and Rogers, this writer discussed *inter alia* the “psychotherapy culture wars” of the past half-century, interpreting these as a *dialectic* between, on the one hand, *more goals-based* and, on the other, *more process-based* methods and modalities of counseling and therapy, and going on to posit certain clinical implications and signals of client need for the therapist, at times, to shift away from the one set of methods and closer to the other (Geiger, 2017).

The second prediction of this paper is that the “psychotherapy culture wars” will be perpetuated and renewed, the two opposing sides regrouping under the banners of, on the one hand, *conformity* [goals] and *individuality* [process] on the other. The new iteration of the dialectic will be, at least initially, every bit as misunderstood, and fought every bit as fiercely as was the old.

a. This *time IS different*: the challenge of pre-war

The premise of this paper, that creative minds in SBFC&T have in the past decades and century demonstrated the ability to rise to the demands of treating changing mental health challenges consequent to geoeconomic and geopolitical trends, accords with one of the central tenets in Integral Philosophy. California Institute of Integral Studies founder and professor Haridas Chaudhuri taught that each time and place presents its own unique challenges—and that its own unique solutions must inevitably in due course emerge out of the ongoing *Evolution of Integral Consciousness*. Chaudhuri’s integral philosophy emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between humanity and the cosmos to address evolving issues effectively (Chaudhuri 1977-1989). A disturbing observation is that the examples, discussed above in *Section I*, of the field’s ability to rise to the demands of treating changing mental health challenges consequent to geoeconomic and geopolitical events each occurred in a *postwar* period. To borrow a notorious expression from macroeconomics: *this time IS different*. It is with a profound and *personal* sorrow that this writer observes we are now in a *prewar* period, a factor contributing to the intense factionalism and pressure to conform with the views of the faction.

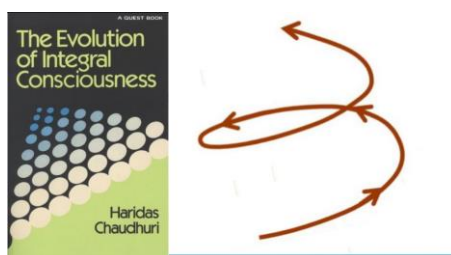
Hebrew University of Jerusalem history professor, writer, and public intellectual Yuval Noah Harari advances the argument that the exigencies of this first half of the 21st century require us now to *discard wholesale the idea of liberal freedom*, the foundational concept of the modern West over the past quarter-millennium (Harari, 2018). The felt-sense of the dangers of the coming war(s), and of the exponentially-increasing opportunities, whether analogue or digital, for causing harm, mayhem and horror will suggest to many that Harari is correct.

The new generation of SBFC&T professionals has grown to maturity in parallel with the increase in time spent online. Viewed through the lens of generation theory, they are, as discussed above in *Section Va.*, the children of the generation of children first impacted by the decline in the purchasing power of the US Dollar after 1971. As is the case, of course, with each generation of therapists, they suffer from the same relationship issues as their clients. Like

their clients, they have grown up more developed in the *Doing Style* and less developed in the *Feeling-Sensing Style* as posited by this writer (Geiger, 2017), presenting as full of, but often cut off from feeling, and tending to alexithymia; preferring to talk about *things* and not about feelings; believing everything would be just fine if *others* would only act sensibly by doing/not doing certain things; and believing in finding “the right tools” to achieve their goals of changing another’s behavior, or their own experience. In the new dialectic between conformity and individuality, this cohort of clinicians will be inclined to steer clients more to the former, thereby tending to perpetuate, rather than to resolve, any client tendency to retroflection.

California integral theorists following Chaudhuri often use a spiral graphic, as in Figure 2, to aid our attempt to conceptualize the unconceptualizable; for some of us, the evolutionary spiral, like the known universe, and our planet within it, has a distinct *tilt*. This extension to the visual metaphor explains those times when, although the world continues to advance “up” the evolutionary spiral as integral consciousness *inevitably* evolves, it can nevertheless at times feel like we are (to borrow an expression from astronomy/astrology) *in retrograde*, a word meaning, in Latin, “stepping back”. A useful analogue is afforded by walking up the Campanile at Pisa, Italy, the tilt of which is (more than) sufficient to cause the passenger to *descend* when walking “up” the tower’s spiral stair on the side closest the ground. This writer refers to the phenomenon and the times we are now in as the *evolutionary downcycle*.

Figure 2



b. revisiting the Feeling-Sensing Style of cognitive-emotional processing

While Harari’s point is well taken, it articulates just the single thesis in the new iteration of the dialectic and is impelled by the fear of the dangers of unbridled individuality. But unbridled conformity also has its (to echo Freud, 1930-2014)) “discontents”. In Aldous Huxley’s novel *Brave New World*, *Soma* is the drug used by citizens to escape discomfort and maintain equilibrium in their *controlled*, conformist society; *Soma* acts as a narcotic tranquilizer, promoting euphoria, but is also harmful in large doses and can create a dependency, the characters’ relationship with the drug well illustrating the problems in a society

steering too close to Harari's thesis (Huxley 1932-2010). This portrayal is *not* of the evolution of integral consciousness; it is rather evidence of a controlling regime's fearful and lop-sided management of the dialectic, the regime believing, perhaps with Harari, that the retroflective behaviors it imposes on those who may have more independence of mind is a price well worth paying. We can and *MUST* do better, finding ways of embracing the swing of the cosmic pendulum back toward conformity after a quarter millennium of individuality, but *without* causing the anguish and psychic damage previewed by Huxley and that we either now see all around us, or shortly will. There *IS* a tide in the affairs of men.

This writer has previously posited the linkage between, on the one hand, interpersonal empathy and, on the other hand, what may be described as the individual's intuitive and empathic awareness of wider systems and "bigger picture". Discussing the Feeling-Sensing Style, and building on the theoretical framework of University of Massachusetts, Amherst Emeritus Professor Allen E. Ivey, this writer (Geiger, 2017; Ivey, 2005) has explained how the more a person is able to access, process, and communicate in this Style, the greater the person's ability to navigate, manage, and assimilate complex environmental challenge. A fractal universe of jostling theses and antitheses competing cacophonously in Baudrillard's hyperreality in our dangerous, anxiety laden prewar era, now calls us forth as a population to accelerate development in Feeling-Sensing; and *in particular* in the quadrant identified by Ivey as the Dialectic-Systemic Style, where we "pick out and put together the encoded messages in the patterns of patterns in the available evidence" (Geiger 2017, Ivey 2005). Ivey's developmental theory holds that an environmental challenge of a more complex, more traumatic nature, is best addressed and only fully resolved when the person responds from within the Dialectic-Systemic Style (Ivey 2005, Geiger 2017).

Following Ivey, this writer advocates (when appropriate) "Style-shifting" (Ivey, 2005; Geiger, 2017) the patient into the Dialectic-Systemic Style, the Style of cognitive-emotional processing and communication that allows for an holistic, "in-the-round" or "bird's eye" perspective of plurality. Sufficient developmental achievement in the Feeling-Sensing Style, which is composed of Ivey's *Sensorimotor Style* and *Dialectic-Systemic Style* quadrants, allows persons to free themselves from a mindset of *It's broken, and it can't be fixed*, and to enter a stronger-selfed more evolved consciousness, more tuned into the universe and the bigger picture, a consciousness bringing with it the very simple, profoundly freeing realization that *It is what it is*. Operating within the Dialectic-Systemic, we are capable of a different kind of empathic consciousness, one in which we become attuned to the entire macrosystem.

An example is in the words of former long-serving UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, famously ousted by a cabinet coup in 1991 by some key ministers who wanted accelerated financial conformity with the (then) European Community; Thatcher's emollient words to reporters from the front steps of her new Dulwich home were: "Now it's time for a new chapter to open, and I wish [my successor] all the luck in the world" (ITN News, 1990). Thatcher instinctively recognized that, however sure she was of the direction in which she might have, if continuing in office, taken her country, and however much she might have preferred that outcome, the fundamental law of the universe, *dike* to the ancient Greeks and *karma* to the civilizations of the Indus Valley, meant that the cosmic pendulum, having for twelve years swung her way, was now swinging the other way. *Inevitably*. The rhythm of the universe cannot be denied and, crucially, need not be experienced as an assault on the self. *Tragedy* strikes only when one does not realize this, and continues the doomed fight.

Thirty years after Thatcher's departure, a white, elderly, female professor at a California institution was discussing her retirement, which was being "encouraged" by the institution's desire to replace her with a much younger woman of color; again came the exact same words as Thatcher's: "It's time".

Our two exemplars, and this is key, each looked deep inside and, finding no assault in the self, discovered they *didn't need to fight*: it *was*, simply, just time, and the rhythm of the universe. They continued with their lives, and with no inner struggle, or retroflection or embedded grievance. Processing from within their Feeling-Sensing Style they *understood how it is and must be*.

The third prediction of this paper is that the theory and methods of Allen Ivey's *Developmental Counseling and Therapy* [DCT], long eclipsed by the concurrent emergence in the 1980s of *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* [CBT], will at last receive the recognition they deserve. The 2020s now call urgently, and clearly, for methods of intervention based on conceptualizations in DCT: the evolution of integral consciousness *now requires* persons to develop a quantum further (much, much further than Ivey foresaw) in Ivey's Dialectic-Systemic Style and this writer's Feeling-Sensing Style; only here can the synthesis occur, and here only can the societal bombs be defused, and only by the recognition that *It's time to cede, empathically, and to wish well to those whose time has come*.

The fourth prediction of this paper, is that this *synthesis* of the emergent iteration of the psychotherapy culture wars, and, with it, a calming of societal fractures, will occur:

- within a reframing of the basic dialectic between goals-conformity and process-individuality
- via a revised appreciation and understanding of the Feeling-Sensing function of the *right brain* and therefore of both *process* and *individuality*
- via a recognition of the necessity of corresponding changes to all aspects of the public discourse, including, significantly, education, including the education of clinicians

Authorities as diverse as Plato, Nikola Tesla, and Carl Jung have written and talked, in Chaudhurian terms, about the “right brain” as being *a receiver for tuning into and receiving messages from the universe*, while the “left brain” exists to *process such information and integrate it into action*. Encouraged by the Western education system, many in today’s world shut down their innate ability to tune into the universe and understand its signalling, and seek to live as much as possible within the “left brain” (cf. also Ivey, 2005; Geiger, 2017). Operating here, generosity is harder to manifest, pain, along with boredom and the syndrome reified as “ADHD” is imminent, and empathy is something the person likes to receive in abundance, yet can give only in miserly fashion. This is where the ousted Prime Minister declares martial law, the ousted professor files a lawsuit, and others make other tragic decisions.

The fifth prediction of this paper is that those whose attunement with the universe allows them to yield in the ways described will find their reward in the recognition and gratitude of those to whom they have yielded, and in the discovery that life has become better/easier. Whether in the couples therapy room, or in the wider societal and political discourse the seeds will be sown of a deeper, more satisfying, mutual understanding.

Addressing George Washington University freshmen on August 24th 2022, American author and former political speechwriter Daniel H. Pink took pains to distinguish between two forms of motivation/reasoning. *Instrumental reasoning* is a form of reasoning where someone decides to take a course because it will look good on a resume; *fundamental reasoning*, on the other hand, is where the person takes the course because she is drawn to it and thinks it is interesting. In his speech Pink referenced a study of United States Military Academy students who:

“listed their main reasons for choosing the school. He said the results of the study showed students who chose West Point for fundamental reasons, like wanting to serve their country, were more likely to be successful in about a decade.

“The least successful people, promotions, awards and job satisfaction were those with the instrumental reasons’, Pink said.

“‘Fundamental reasons are about the thing itself, not where it will take you’, Pink said. *I’ll take this class simply because it sounds interesting, and I might learn something. I’ll apply to that internship because the mission is important and I could work with some cool people*” (Pink, D., quoted in Suter, T., 2022).

Anchored in Doing-Style markers such as “reasons” and “successful”, Pink’s discourse is nevertheless an intentional, and congruent, “Style-shift” to Feeling-Sensing and “following the heart”. Following the heart is, however, antithetical to the “Prussian Model”, from which most educational systems in the world are derived.

British engineer, aeronaut and homeschooler Delphine Ryan describes the Prussian Model as:

“introduced in the early 1800s for producing obedient soldiers [...] Shortly after several crushing defeats by Napoleon at the beginning of the 1800s, Prussia’s political and military elite came to the bizarre conclusion that the independent thinking and the individualistic spirit among Prussian fighters and soldiers was in fact a root cause and major contributing factor to their defeat. Consequently, the Prussian elite began a programme aimed at reducing the ‘aliveness’, intelligence and independent thinking in the majority of the citizenry. The goal was to make the bulk of the population compliant servants rather than free individuals who could think for themselves, and create and enrich the Prussian culture. Such a perverse goal could only be accomplished via the mechanisms of education. (Ryan 2003)”

Ryan’s contribution prompts us further to consider in **IX** below the premise that the dialectic between conformity (“obedience”) and individuality (“aliveness”) has been of interest to governments concerned, with Harari, to temper the latter for *at least* two hundred years. There *IS* a dialectic in the affairs of men.



Figure 3 retrieved February 25th 2026 from <https://www.thegamesshop.com.au/user/images/11273.jpg?t=2310311406>

The dialectic is everywhere, including in new board/party games for children and families. Widely advertised with the slogan *Think like the herd to win!*, Herd Mentality was first marketed in the UK by Big Potato Games in July 2020. The aim of the game is for each player to align with the majority's thinking in response to subjective questions: players succeeding in matching their answers with the majority of other players gain points. The game's publicity material portrays it as popular for its engaging gameplay and social aspects.

a. Mirroring, alignment, conformity, “nudging”, and misinformation

Generally speaking, we feel better when we participate solidly in a majority consensus. As this writer has elsewhere noted (Chabon, 2009; Geiger, 2017):

“Michael Chabon, author of *The Pleasure, Regrets of ‘Manhood’* observes: *Everyone wants to be loved and to be understood by someone who loves the things that he loves. We want our spouse to under-stand and Mirror the passions animating our life—our golf, our yoga, our unpaid work for the charity we believe in fervently and the way we like to vacuum the cat hair off the sofa*”.

From about 1950, as the Cold War and its nuclear arms race became entrenched, Western psychologists began in earnest to research the phenomenon of adaptation to conformity. Polish-American Gestalt psychologist Solomon Asch's “conformity experiments” looked at the extent to which peer pressure provokes the behavior described in common parlance as *going along to*

get along, discovering this to be both significant and persistent, and (in post-test interviewing) prompted by a spectrum of characterological attitudes. Asch's own comment is said to have been: *That intelligent, well-meaning young people are willing to call white black is a matter of concern* (Asch, S., 1951).

A team led by Jonas De keersmaecker of the Department of Developmental, Personality and Social Psychology, Ghent University, Belgium investigated this *illusory truth effect* as to “robustness”, the authors concluding:

“In line with previous work, we found that individuals tend to believe repeated information more compared to new information. Across seven studies, this tendency was not reliably and substantially related to cognitive ability, need for cognitive closure, experiential thinking, and both self-reported and performance based measures of analytic thinking. The absence of an association between these key individual difference variables in judgment and decision making and the illusory truth effect is theoretically intriguing, and raises the question about which alternative factors may underlie the observed variance of the illusory truth effect. Given the ease by which repetition can influence the perceived truth, and the potential power of misinformation, we hope that the present contribution will inspire other scholars to further examine the potential role of individual differences in the illusory truth effect, and we especially encourage them to also publish non-significant findings since the added value of these ‘non-relationships’ are highly underestimated in the literature. (De keersmaecker, J., *et al.* [2019])”

Misinformation, that is to say perpetrating it via “nudging”, is of interest to governments and supranational bodies fearing the dangers outlined above in **Section VIII a** and to whom Harari is an occasional advisor. In their paper reflecting on UK government attempts to nudge the public to “comply with government guidelines”, using “loss aversion replication” and other means, King's College, London Policy Institute Director of Evaluation Susannah Hume and collaborators found, via their experiment carried out in April/May 2020, that

“...social norms and portrayal of the victim do not work on their own in increasing intentions to comply with the guidelines, but when the victim is combined with the more reflective task of writing to a relative there is an impact. After two weeks, however, these intentions do not persist. The implication is that there still much work to do in designing nudges in the context of COVID-19 and other public health pandemics, yet reflection as a

behavioural device can encourage individuals to think more responsibly in a world-wide pandemic”. (Hume, S., John, P., Sanders, M. & Stockdale, E. [2021]).

In spite of the messaging and “nudging” toward conformity, the UK government’s response to the Covid pandemic remains a continuing point of contention: discussing the report of the UK’s Covid inquiry, BBC News reporter Nick Triggle and colleagues observe that “The report says that rule-breaking by politicians and their advisers undermined public confidence in decision-making and significantly increased the risk that people wouldn't stick to the measures being put in place.” (UK Covid enquiry 2025)

One does not have to be a “conspiracy theorist” to notice the temporal correlation between the UK Covid lockdown and the publication of Herd Mentality.

Similarly, on December 2nd 2024 the US Congressional Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic concluded its two-year investigation into the COVID-19 pandemic and released a final report titled “After Action Review of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Lessons Learned and a Path Forward.” This writer now selects three points from the report’s “summary of the information” that discuss misinformation by government:

Social distancing: The “6 feet apart” social distancing recommendation — which shut down schools and small business across the country — was arbitrary and not based on science.

Mask mandates: There was no conclusive evidence that masks effectively protected Americans from COVID-19. Public health officials flipped-flopped on the efficacy of masks without providing Americans scientific data — causing a massive uptick in public distrust.

COVID-19 misinformation: Public health officials often spread misinformation through conflicting messaging, knee-jerk reactions, and a lack of transparency. In the most egregious examples of pervasive misinformation campaigns, off-label drug use and the lab leak theory were unjustly demonized by the federal government. (US Covid enquiry 2025)

This writer’s objective in presenting this information is not so much to side with “conspiracy theory” as to misinformation by government as it is to highlight the immense and real difficulties faced by those in authority in the present era.

b. Government leadership and the “180-degree solution”

Many schools of family therapy employ the so-called “180-degree solution”. The essential feature of this path is to stop doing behaviors in caring/worrying/trying to make someone act or not act in a certain way. In relation to the Covid interventions just discussed we, as students of systems and ministers of intentional intervention to systems, must conclude, in the languaging of Intentional Intervention in Counseling and Therapy, that over-reliance (Geiger 2017) by the UK and US governments on the goals-based thesis of “stop the spread: save lives” provoked (sometimes flagrant) under-reliance on presenting accurate, harm-avoiding information to the public. In this case, the 180-degree solution would involve (i) presenting information accurately, as in “we wonder whether, but we do not *know*...” and, most crucially, (ii) *trusting to the wisdom of the individual, as mediated within the Feeling-Sensing Style*.

The example, during the Covid response, is in the Kingdom of Sweden. As discussed on August 12th 2022 on theconversation.com by Emma Frans, Senior research specialist, C8 Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet at:

“Although Sweden was hit hard by the first wave, its total excess deaths during the first two years of the pandemic were actually among the lowest in Europe.

“The decision to keep primary schools open also paid off. The incidence of severe acute COVID in children has been low, and a recent study showed that Swedish children didn’t suffer the learning loss seen in many other countries.

“Swedes were not forced to take action against the spread of the virus, but they did so anyway. This voluntary approach might not have worked everywhere, but Sweden has a history of high trust in authorities, and people tend to comply with public health recommendations.

“The commission did, however, state that the no-lockdown strategy was fundamentally reasonable, and that the state should never interfere with the rights and freedoms of its citizens more than absolutely necessary. The commission also supported the decision to keep primary schools open (Frans, E., 2022)”.

c. further revisiting the Feeling-Sensing Style of cognitive-emotional processing

Put simply, people make better *local* decisions than governments. “Herd mentality” *might* work better, or less well for us at different times and in relation to different issues. And *why* this should be so is something each of us can easily *feel* and *sense*. Because we, each of us, are more deeply, *instinctively* knowledgeable about our individual lives than is the government, we can better appraise the risks within our own systems and circumstances.

We may very well imagine—again from within our Feeling-Sensing Style—a world uncontaminated by the ills reviewed in this paper; a world in the evolutionary “upcycle” that has shrugged off the grip of hyperreality; and where immense effort by governments to nudge/control behavior, and followed only by immense efforts in the subsequent investigations into what went so horribly wrong, is absent. Building this world means building systems that harness the achievement of synthesis. it means working, integrally with Chaudhuri and, with Ivey, intentionally, toward the evolution of integral consciousness by further development in our Feeling-Sensing Style.

a. laying the groundwork for a new age

The two-hundred-year swing of the cosmic pendulum that gave the world the Prussian Model is stalled and poised to reverse. The titanic task ahead is to avert, or at least blunt the impact of the coming war(s). This means building systems that promote the achievement of synthesis. It makes intuitive sense that the world of eight to nine billion souls *must* have conformity in order for all of us to survive. But it’s clear that legacy models of conformity often coerce, control, suppress, and fail, and that we must evolve a new model for the new times, and provide new tools.

b. the “no-solution solution”

The no-solution solution is a therapeutic approach grounded in self psychology and systems theory and pioneered and taught by this writer. The therapeutic goals of the approach are:

- to foster client **congruence** (Geiger 2017)
- to build client competency in **remonstrations**, a conversational skillset developed by this clinician out of Ivey’s enjoinder to therapeutic creativity, confrontation and perturbation (Ivey

2005, Geiger 2017) and informed by the principles of **nonviolent communication** (Rosenberg, M. B., 2003), and thereby

- to expand the communicants' horizons and appreciation of viewpoint divergence and multiplicity by, with Ivey, Style-shifting them into the Dialectic-Systemic Style, thus
- bringing them not (so much) an agreed solution but rather a meeting of minds in recognizing that the kind of concrete solution each may previously have had in mind is, to their new joint and several awarenesses, neither necessary, nor at issue

In the *no-solution solution* we discuss our point of view WITHOUT devaluing the opposing stance, and WITH a genuine effort to understand why our view is seen differently by our interlocutor. The synthesis is when the inner switch flips and we can simply move on, telling ourselves, *It is what it is...and it's not an issue*. Like the wife who said, beaming: "He's a curmudgeon. But he's *my* curmudgeon".

The reader will immediately recognize that, to the extent the field is able to lean into the direction here outlined, and obtain the kind of results here touted by this writer, so may the fractured polity of the 2020s be brought to a sustainable coexistence.

c. specific proposals in education

(i) Education of clinicians and other SBFC&T professionals

A *Red and Blue as a phenomenon in cross-cultural misunderstanding*

The cross-cultural awareness and competence component of the education program *MUST* contain a segment in political spectrum awareness. The segment should include a project: Blue and Red supporters should be interviewed, and a paper written, using a systems perspective, discussing how the predicament has arisen that, in spite of a fundamental alignment as human beings, the two sides hate, despise, fear and mistrust each other to the degree they do. *Critical thinking* should be taught the students, to help them with their overall developmental task in consciousness evolution.

B *The mechanism of projection*

Projection is at once the most primitive defense mechanism and the most primitive form of human communication. Yet many of today's mental health professional training programs give scant attention to the work of the psychoanalysts of the 20th century, including Mahler and Winnicott. This writer believes that most of the fundamental disagreements between

persons cannot be understood without a basic theoretical and phenomenological understanding of the projection of feared and disavowed parts of the self.

C “Artificial Intelligence”

The mis-named “AI”, used on a daily basis by many, including this writer, is of particular concern because it *may reinforce* the shutting-down of the person’s innate ability, using the (so-called) “right brain” to tune into the signalling of the universe. The solution to this problem is to revert, as hinted in A above, to the educational style of 4th century BCE Athens, in which the most important component was “philosophy”, the skills in Socratic-method exploration needed to interpret the universe, and the behavior of other people, more accurately.

D Politics and cycles

The cross-cultural awareness and competence component of the education program *MUST* contain a segment in political spectrum awareness, as well as in awareness of cycles and “tides in the affairs of men”. The segment should include a project: Blue and Red adherents should be interviewed, and a paper written, using a systems perspective, researching the extent to which most ordinary people understand that most ordinary people want the same things.

E The Feeling-Sensing Style

The above tasks can be successfully completed, and successfully brought into habitual, everyday use, with Chaudhuri, in the evolution of integral consciousness only if the educational program, with Daniel Pink, consciously and intentionally fosters the students’ cognitive-emotional-perceptual development in the Feeling-Sensing Style as described above and elsewhere.

(ii) *The wider systems: the school system, the educational system, and beyond*

When School-Based Family Counseling was first done and promulgated, its pioneers did not know where their work would take them, or where they would take the field as a whole. As discussed above, they were responding to the need of the moment. The inner structure and mechanism of the universe, and therefore of the evolution of consciousness, is fractal. You will begin somewhere, perhaps (or not) as discussed above, and go on from there to write the next chapters of this history.

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