

HOLISTIC LIFE FOUNDATION: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULA ENHANCING WELLNESS THROUGH SELF-
REGULATION OF THE BODY

By

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This study was designed to provide a Utilization-focused preliminary evaluation of a social emotional learning (SEL) curricula that promotes healthy life skill practices, physical activity (PA) and mindfulness training. The Holistic Life Foundation (HLF) in Baltimore, MD offers an evidence-based SEL trauma-informed curricula, with several peer reviewed articles demonstrating its initial efficacy (Ancona, et al., 2014; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Mendelson, et al., 2016; Semple, et al., 2017). The goal of the present study is to better understand how this program developed, participant outcomes, what makes this program successful and to identify challenges and opportunities for expanding it, aiding in dissemination of SEL curricula more globally.

Institutions committed to teaching through SEL techniques, bring together a community of learners that are taught the importance of focusing attention, exploring how to calm a wandering mind and offer tools to empower physical, mental, and emotional health. The HLF leadership are experts at bringing education and wellness to communities starved for greater wellbeing that they initiate through breathwork, stress reduction yoga, and SEL skills of positive youth development (PYD). Teaching children self-regulation methods contributes to their understanding of how to manage emotions and physical processes that affect wellbeing.

Silent reflection meditation and mindfulness practices change the structure of the brain, training the mind to focus on breathing, helping to calm the parasympathetic nervous system supporting physical mental and emotional regulation (HeartMath Institute, 2024; Holistic Life Foundation, 2024; Hrach, 2021; Raes, et al., 2013). Through this deep breathing focused mindful process, self-regulation of the physical body is a learned essential tool for wellness. It allows for a pause, helping us to examine what is really happening instead of the stories we may be telling

ourselves. Results have also shown that those participating in SEL self-regulation practices have a greater ability to resolve conflict and manage emotions, while systemically integrating the ability to learn and communicate more effectively, a translation of life skills (Pierce, et al., 2017).

The present evaluation was designed to contribute to the knowledge base through: (1) offering teachers information on how an SEL curricula can easily be incorporated into their daily lesson plans, with demonstrated efficacy, through research literature and, (2) connecting practical guidance in support of child development to traditions of mindfulness that have long been used in support of self-regulation. The success of the HLF program is connected to the firm grounding its founders have in the philosophy that drives them. Through greater understanding of self and others, SEL research demonstrates enhanced cooperation and communication that leads to self-realization and community harmonization.

The Utilization-focused evaluation framework provided a methodological structure to conduct interviews, assess curricular materials, review contextual data and provide an analysis. Interviews provided immediate feedback, both explicit and implicit, on the strengths and challenges associated with the HLF program. The evaluation results offer insight on strengths, challenges, opportunities and next steps in scaling the curriculum more globally. It provides insight into how the program was developed, what exactly the curricula consists of (e.g., three curricula and three programs that support youth development), and how it is delivered (e.g., in schools, community centers, meeting people where they are), how it is received by students, and what challenges the program administrators and implementers face in its original development. The evaluation was conducted over two years, the findings show preliminary outcomes obtained through teaching of self-regulatory techniques. The significance demonstrated improvements in stress reduction and enhanced emotional and behavioral responses, utilizing coping techniques.

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There is only one cause of unhappiness: the false beliefs you have in your head, beliefs so widespread, so commonly held, that it never occurs to you to question them.”

Anthony de Mello

“If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are -- if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time.”

Joseph Campbell

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world: indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ali Smith, Atman Smith, and Andrés González (A-Team)

Holistic Life Foundation (HLF)

Physical Activity (PA)

Positive Youth Development (PYD)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

CHAPER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Despite being among the wealthiest countries in the world, millions of children in the US live in poverty and doing so threatens their physical and psychological well-being. Poverty affects nearly 12 million of America's 74 million children, and more than one million children are living with no parent in the home (U.S. Census, 2024; U.S. Poverty Statistics, 2024). This highlights a fundamental challenge to developing a more just society, having implications for physical and psychological health. Physical inactivity often leads to high blood pressure, obesity, and greater health risks for hypertension and/or diabetes as the children age. Currently, 1/3 of all children in the United States (U.S.) are considered overweight, placing millions of children at risk for high blood pressure, mental health challenges, and related cardiac and chronic illnesses that result from sedentary behavior (Annesi, et al., 2015; Dudley, et al., 2015; Eime, et al., 2013; Guddal, et al., 2019; Janssen, et al., 2010; Kleppang, et al., 2018; Kohl, et al., 2013; Lubans, et al., 2016; 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2018).

Physical Activity (PA) provides a pathway for improving mental health and reducing health challenges that lead to chronic illness. By getting the body moving, it increases the flow of oxygen in the body and strengthens muscle tone, improving overall health. This simple action can greatly improve the wellbeing of young people. Children will learn what they observe and experience. The degree to which we let growing physical inactivity and related mental, emotional, and physical health challenges go untreated, it has important consideration for societal issues, including burdens on healthcare and related happiness factors that affect livelihoods.

Children that are raised in poverty are often exposed to the additional harmful influences of crime and violence, with few resources to support a pathway to resilience (Liehr, et al.,

2010). Each day, children living in poverty and in socially unjust environments experience stressful situations for which self-regulation skills would be invaluable. These self-regulation skills include social-emotional learning skills such self-awareness, which includes being able to recognize and control one's emotions and developing coping skills with resources to manage stressful situations equating to life challenges.

It has been demonstrated that when health and wellbeing are supported throughout childhood development, children thrive and evolve, forming belief systems that serve as a foundational core that sets the stage attracting greater health in life experiences as they grow and mature (Greenberg, et al., 2017). A physically healthy body is replenished through nutrition, water, breathing, sleep, love, movement, clothing, shelter, and exposure to light and time spent in natural settings. While all are essential, breathwork and PA are a focal point of this research supporting and maintaining psychological health (Zaccaro, et al., 2018).

Breathwork, as an area of study, has been included in texts from 200 BC (Patanjali, 1975).

Breathwork is defined as the techniques that incorporate the intentional use of the breath; used to regulate the flow of breath to balance the body and mind (Zaccaro, et al., 2018). Breathwork is incorporated into mindful and conscious breathing that focuses on transforming the energy in the body. Energy hygiene creates the space for balancing all components of what makes a body remain healthy and thriving.

Both researchers and practitioners have been developing programs that provide the positive developmental assets and skills children need for positive youth development (PYD) while working to minimize the risks and challenges that threaten health and development. Focusing on social emotional learning (SEL) has been one major component of many of these programs. SEL involves teaching children new strategies and techniques for improving their

self-awareness, controlling their thoughts and emotions, developing empathy and relationships and for enhancing responsible decision making. A considerable body of research has shown that SEL programs can better prepare children for adolescence and adult life, enabling them to make positive contributions to their communities (Durlak, et al., 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Greenberg, et al., 2017; Taylor, et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019). More generally, it has also been discovered that programs that contribute to PYD have common SEL characteristics which include: a physically and psychologically safe environment; consistent and clear structure accompanied by adult supervision; supportive relationships; opportunities to belong so no one is left out; positive social norms; efficacy for mattering- it is significant; skill building opportunities; and integration of family, school and community efforts (Search Institute, 2024).

Interventions that include SEL outcomes with a PYD foci often include movement, breathing, exercise, wellness techniques, self-regulation, self-efficacy, time spent in nature, rest and sleep, and dietary choices (Djernis, et al., 2019; Dudley, et al., 2015; Guddal, et al., 2019; Hagan, et al., 2014; Hall, et al., 2016; Korinek, 2021; Larson, 2000; Larson, et al., 2004; NCAA, 2019; Pearson, et al., 2014; Sharma, et al., 2006; Stathopoulou, et al., 2006; Vella, et al., 2017; Walker, 2017). One program that focuses on PYD with an emphasis on holistic development via SEL is the Baltimore, MD based Holistic Life Foundation (HLF).

The HLF was created in October 2001 to promote transformational PYD through SEL programs that support underserved children with positive emotional and physical health experiences. The founders of HLF come from the same neighborhood where they initially introduced the trauma-informed curricula in the local public schools, using means that might be considered non-traditional to achieve their success. The Mondawmin neighborhood of West Baltimore is impoverished (Sparrows Point or Turner Station near North and Pulaski Streets),

experiencing excessive violent crime from a breakdown of family and community stability. It's been described as one of the most violent neighborhoods in America, with open-air drug markets across the street, and three murders within one block radius over a single weekend, (Garrison Institute Class: People Who Care for People, Atman Smith on 10/26/21). The New York Times recently reported Baltimore, MD as the overdose capitol of the US, with fentanyl additives in drugs that reduce the effectiveness of the lifesaving opioid reversal drug, Narcan. Baltimore overdose drug challenges are compounded by public administration chaos in administering drug rehabilitation supportive programs (Zhu, et al., 5/23/24).

Adolescents that experience chaotic social and family relationships are more likely to be exposed to mental distress and a reduced quality of life (Comer, 1988; Hemez, et al., 2020). The HLF founders decided to advance the teachings SEL within their community using PA, stress relief through yoga and mindfulness to share tools of wellbeing with young people with the hope of evolving more peaceful conflict resolution through emotional self-regulation. The philosophy that feeds their processes originates in ancient wisdom teachings of yoga and mindfulness practices. HLF has evolved curricular programming to strengthen skills through daily practice promoting mental health, PA, and self-regulation of the body. Holistic in its orientation, the HLF program focuses on strength and flexibility development, breathing for stress reduction and health benefits, mindful movement through yoga, mental skills to promote attention, focus, and enhancement of compassion.

Several studies exist that examine the feasibility and qualitative outcomes of applying the HLF trauma-informed curricula in classroom settings (Ancona, et al., 2014; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Mendelson, et al., 2016; Semple, et al., 2017). For

example, in Mendelson, et al., 2010, the program reports findings from a pilot randomized controlled trial assessing the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary outcomes of implementing the HLF program in four urban public Baltimore schools. Stress responses were assessed at baseline, and post intervention. The program demonstrated effectiveness in reducing stress responses, depressive symptoms, and peer relationships while improving mental health outcomes and noted marked social changes after a 12-week intervention. Findings suggest that teachers benefited through managed classroom behavior improvements and administrators noted positive improvements in how students handled emotions and behavioral responses to stress.

Hence, there is some initial evidence showing that the program has been efficacious in achieving many of its specifically stated goals. SEL underpinnings guide the HLF trauma-informed curricula. The HLF program developers have also begun to share the curricula so that it could be implemented outside the original Baltimore community where it was developed. Teachers have been trained across the U.S. and around the world, with a satellite program now operating in NY and into Canada. Plans are underway to scale efforts and grow the program in new cities.

While the development of the HLF trauma-informed curriculum is exciting, especially given empirical support for some of its outcomes, implementing it in other communities will not be without challenges. This is especially the case when implementing it in underserved communities that often lack infrastructure and funds to support such programs. For this reason, it is important to provide a current holistic evaluation of the program. An evaluation that will lead to an understanding of how the program developed, what exactly the curricula consist of, how it is delivered, how it is received by the students, and what challenges the program

administrators and implementers faced in its original development. It is also important to identify strategies that were and were not effective in meeting challenges and implementing the program. Conducting a utilization-focused evaluation can help answer these questions.

Michael Patton has developed theoretical underpinnings for Utilization-focused Evaluation that concentrates on program outcomes rather than goals. His Utilization-focused Evaluation Theory states that “evaluations should be judged by their utility and actional use” (Patton, 2013). When considering an intended use, the stakeholder is the focal point, the purpose of the evaluation targets stakeholder values. Specifically, the evaluation should be judged on its usefulness to its intended users (in this case, teachers and educational teams considering the adoption of the HLF trauma-informed curricula as well as the student recipients and their families). A Utilization-focused Evaluation is often used in programs involving power dynamics, politics, and ethics, and is driven by the psychology of use to guide programmatic assessment (Patton, 2011). For this research, the tool is a practical choice, considering HLF’s pilot programming focused on underserved communities to implement its SEL curricula.

Given the above, this dissertation provides a utilization-focused preliminary evaluation of the Baltimore, MD HLF SEL trauma-informed curricula promoting holistic healthy life skill practices, PA, and mindfulness training. The goal is to add new data to existing scholarship through addressing challenges and opportunities, aiding in dissemination of SEL curricula more globally. It is hoped that this project will provide teachers and program implementors with a Utilization-focused assessment, adding to evidence-based literature, to improve SEL outcomes in children around the world.

The project represents the culmination of several years of study by the investigator, in consultation with youth leaders, participants, key policy makers, education officials, health

providers, community leaders, parents, children and people steeped in traditions of ageless wisdom promoting healthy living. In addition, the general rationale for the evaluation was designed to contribute to the knowledge base through: (1) offering program implementors information on how an SEL curricula can easily be incorporated into existing educational programs, with demonstrated efficacy, through research literature and, (2) to offer practical guidance in support of child development that is steeped in ageless wisdom traditions in support of societal progress. The success of the HLF program is connected to the firm grounding its founders have in the philosophy that drives them. Through greater understanding of self and others, SEL research demonstrates enhanced cooperation and communication that leads to self-love, self-realization and community harmonization.

Overarching Evaluation Questions

This program evaluation will focus on ten over-arching questions. These include:

- (1) What are the purposes of the HLF trauma-informed curricula? Why was it started/history? How has it evolved?
- (2) What does the HLF trauma-informed curricula consist of?
- (3) What is the evidence to support curricula effectiveness? (Examining research evidence as well as founder and staff perceptions of effectiveness.)
- (4) How are the curricula delivered? How are teachers trained? What is the method of delivery? What is the fidelity of the delivery?
- (5) How are the curricula received?
- (6) How are teachers affected (reducing stress and/or managing their classroom) while implementing the HLF trauma-informed curricula? Job satisfaction?
- (7) What were and are the challenges in setting up the HLF program?

- (8) Is the HLF trauma-informed curricula design adaptable to teachers more globally?
- (9) What lessons are available given the research already done?
- (10) What are recommendations for replicating the program?

These questions are explored by using a number of methods, including a review of the published research studies on the program, curricula document analysis (review of curricular materials, training videos, a book written by the HLF leadership, Ted Talks, interviews, podcasts, other media), observations of the program, and in-depth interviews, attending training programs with the founders, key staff members, teachers using the program, participants, and administrators, with the in-depth interviews being the primary data source.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation is designed to provide a Utilization-focused preliminary evaluation of the Baltimore, MD HLF trauma-informed curricula that addresses SEL healthy life skill practices, PA, and mindfulness training. It will examine HLF's work which employs many tools thought to help people - children and adults alike - advance in greater understanding of how to incorporate techniques for improved wellbeing. Specifically, it will seek to demonstrate how self-regulation of the body, especially breathwork, aids in reducing stress and anxiety and is instrumental for overall healthy functioning, a hallmark of successful SEL.

This review will begin by describing the Holistic Life Foundation and its SEL programming. A rationale for why the program was selected to be evaluated is also provided. While the HLF SEL program was established more than two decades ago, it is deemed important to lay the foundation for it. First, literature is briefly summarized that relates to health in the body, including essential functions and processes, and the tools that contribute to health maintenance and support key regulatory functions. This provides for bodies and brains that can learn more effectively. The chapter then examines literature advancing evidence-based SEL outcomes, targeting the development of personal relationships, empathy, emotional regulation, healthy identities, personal and community goal orientation and reasonability in decision making in children (CASEL, 2024; Durlak, et al. 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Jackson, 2012; Jones, et al., 2017; Kwon, et al., 2017; Taylor, et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019). Subsequently, research on social-emotional learning in youth, the relationship between PYD and SEL, and advancing social justice in youth development is presented. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory of self-regulation will then be discussed as well as literature on stress reduction and

holistic wellness. The chapter ends with a review of the research conducted on the curricula and the need for the present Utilization-focused Evaluation investigation.

HLF SEL Program

The HLF was created on October 10, 2001, to promote transformational PYD through SEL programs that support underserved children with positive emotional and physical health experiences. HLF has evolved curricular programming to strengthen skills through daily practice promoting mental health, PA, and mindful self-regulation of the body. By helping others develop a daily practice, the HLF empowers the integration of mind, body, and spirit by sharing a SEL behavioral curricula that encourages people of all ages to develop their inner lives through an empowering program that focuses on restorative practices, self-care, conflict resolution, and teamwork (HLF, 2024; Smith, et al., 2022). One stated goal is to advance the training through science, helping students learn through practical methods to test what may work best for each individual. HLF invites students to be a scientist as they experience the practice.

The organization is rooted in nurturing the wellness of children and adults in underserved communities. The HLF core principles demonstrate a long-standing commitment to social emotional behavioral learning, with a connection to the community and an understanding of stewardship to the environment. Their idea to create a wellness program was initially aimed at elementary school children, in response to the need for trauma-informed mental health services in their community. What started as an after-school program to teach football to 15 children in detention, turned into a scaled effort delivering a multi-faceted program that empowers youth by teaching them self-regulation of the body through using mindfulness, stress relief through the practice of yoga, mental skills training, PA, and breathwork. It evolved from

school classrooms into community gathering places and detention centers, as the program was scaled to meet the needs of all ages living in the city.

For K-12, the program provides direct services to students on site at the school. Three of the curricular programs, *Mindful Moment*, *Holistic Me*, and *Bridging Academics & the Mind* are built into the school day. The *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* curricula is specially designed and tailored to unique audiences. It includes the HLF's foundational work designed to support community-based organizations and help adults incorporate mindful practices in their out of school programs. Community organizations invite HLF to schedule trainers for the ad hoc curricular offerings. With a reciprocal teaching train-the-trainer model, HLF trains teachers to deliver the programs. A typical *Mindful Moment* program will have two instructors on site, with a designated space in the school, and students can use a resource period built into their school day to access it. "The program operates five days a week in the school setting, about six hours a day, 185 days each academic year. HLF trained instructors conduct classes for 3 weeks to educate students and teachers about *Mindful Moment*. After that, audio recordings can be played over the public-address system. Classroom practices include breathwork and usually end with a guided silent reflection. A typical *Mindful Moment* dedicated room in the school contains meditation cushions, yoga mats, soft music, artwork, plants, incense, fountains/waterfall sounds, inspirational posters, candles, comfortable lighting, and tea to provide a calm decor, a quiet space for students and teachers" (HLF, 2024; Semple, et al., 2017, p. 45). The *Holistic Me* curriculum is an after-school program, again implemented in the schools with a designated space and two instructors to cover the mindful movement, stress relief through yoga and breathing, PA program. *Holistic Me* also meets five days a week after school. The *Bridging Academics & the Mind* program was implemented during the pandemic to allow teachers to

reach students through an online learning forum. It is video-based and can be administered anytime throughout the school day. It has continued over time, allowing more teachers to incorporate the HLF trauma-informed curricula into their day-to-day teaching efforts.

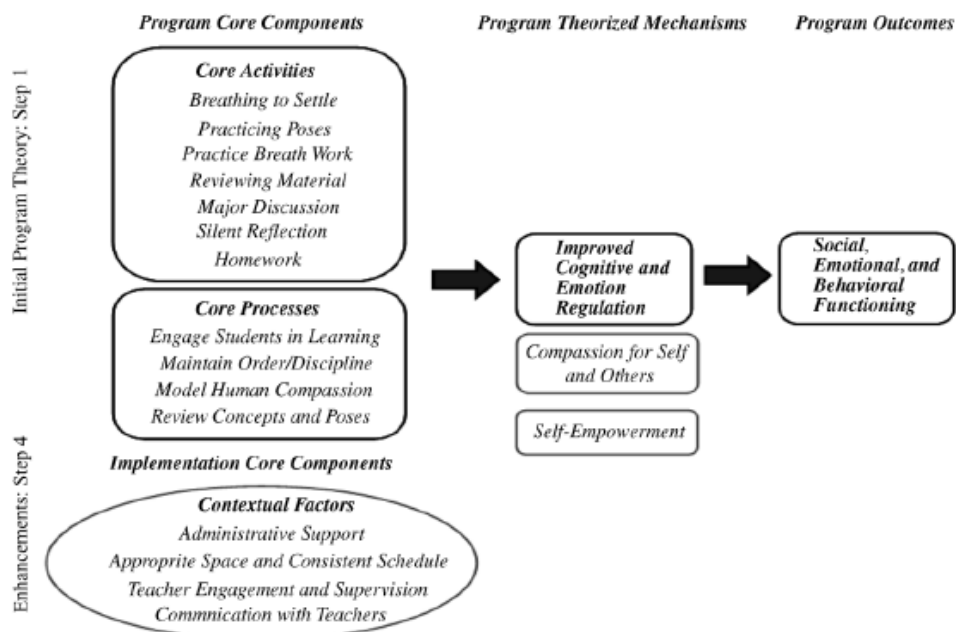
A *Workforce Development* program and *Holistic ROOTS* mindful ambassador program have been added to the curriculum after 2013. *Workforce Development* prepares the next generation of mindfulness teachers while reinforcing scholastic content; the programs are structured for 18–21-year-olds as they enter the workforce. *Holistic ROOTS* helps peers stay on track out in the world. As ambassadors, participants assist with mindful living outside of class.

HLF classes start with a centering exercise, followed by PA, stress relief through yoga, and mindful breathing exercises. The facilitator leads a mindful guided practice. The curricula are scripted and taught by trained HLF instructors.

Specific components of the HLF SEL trauma-informed curriculum were outlined in a logic model developed in 2014 as part of a preliminary program evaluation (Feagans Gould, et al., 2014). This logic model is contained in Figure 1 below, shows the core activities contained in the curriculum include breathing skills (breathing to settle), stress relief through practicing yoga poses, practicing breathwork, exercise, discussing events with teachers/instructors, silent reflection, and homework. Core processes focus on engaging students in learning, maintaining order and discipline, modeling human compassion, and reviewing concepts (e.g., evolving empathy for self and others, managing thoughts and emotions, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship-building, etc.) and stress relief through yoga poses. Contextual factors are thought to influence the core components and processes and include administrative support, appropriate space with a consistent schedule, teacher engagement and supervision and communication with teachers. The contextual factors deserve emphasis as they represent

institutional buy-in. Without them, the teachers’ efforts are not as effective. These factors are thought to influence the core components and processes and include administrative support, appropriate space and consistent schedule, teacher engagement and supervision and communication with teachers. These activities and program components and processes are predicted to influence the primary program outcomes of social, emotional, and behavioral functioning through the mechanisms of improved cognitive and emotional regulation, compassion for self and others and self-empowerment. Figure 1, below, graphically illustrates HLF program core components, theorized mechanisms, and planned program outcomes.

Figure 1
 Holistic Life Foundation Initial and Revised Program Theory



Note: This model was created by Feagans Gould, et al., 2014, p. 66.

Since its inception, HLF has served more than 100,000 youth with its school programs; HLF reports that “90% of its original mentoring cohort graduated from high school and 100% are in school or working” (HLF, 2024). Their curricula touches some 4,100 students a week in

their network of program offerings, 700 in Baltimore alone (HLF Annual Report 2023; Quarterly 2 Report 2024 Update to the Annual Report).

HLF has been recognized locally, nationally, and internationally with its work being the feature of a dozen peer reviewed journal articles, highlighted in SEL best practices more globally, and featured in TEDx talks, workshops at the Omega Institute, Garrison Institute, and the SHIFT Network among many other prestigious learning platforms. HLF leaders present in communities of practice that reach educators, healers, and creative entrepreneurs who are passionate about making a lasting positive impact in educating children and sharing wellness tools. HLF leadership is expanding its presence and presenting in new fora aimed at reaching more people with their wellness curricula. The HLF founders have presented at several universities to discuss their work with the academic research community: Arizona State University, Johns Hopkins, Naropa University, Pennsylvania State University, Piedmont Virginia Community College, Syracuse University, Tufts University, University of Richmond, VA to name a few. HLF has enjoyed important media coverage to talk about their successes. ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, and PBS News, and press outlets like The Washington Post, Upworthy, Univision (Spanish language TV network), Oprah's *O magazine*, *Mindful Magazine*, *Yoga Journal*, *Shambhala Sun*, Steven Spielberg's Discovery Channel Program *Why We Hate*, have all done feature stories to highlight the important work of HLF's reach into underserved communities. The work of HLF now extends into communities more globally. The curricula are being taught in public schools, detention centers, prisons, drug treatment centers, mental illness facilities, recreation centers, group homes, colleges, senior centers, and wellness centers across the U.S. with recent classes being broadcast to a partner organization in Malawi, Africa (HLF, 2024).

SEL delivered by HLF is especially important to youth in underserved urban neighborhoods as they may be at risk for a range of negative outcomes related to stress, including adverse social-emotional experiences that often lead to behavior problems, or coping with challenged academic pathways. Children from lower socioeconomic incomes are more often affected by physical and mental health challenges than are peers in suburban middle-class communities; economic limitations affect health quality, educational opportunities, and access (Dariotis, et al., 2016; Gould, et al., 2011). This is often accompanied by food desserts that contribute to poor nutritional choices and physical inactivity which further compounds psychological and somatic challenges that inhibit learning. Interventions that include SEL outcomes with a PYD foci often include movement, breathing, exercise, wellness techniques, self-regulation, self-efficacy, time spent in nature, rest and sleep, and dietary choices (Djernis, et al., 2019; Dudley, et al., 2015; Guddal, et al., 2019; Hagan, et al., 2014; Hall, et al., 2016; Korinek, 2021; Larson, 2000; Larson, et al., 2004; NCAA, 2019; Pearson, et al., 2014; Sharma, et al., 2006; Stathopoulou, et al., 2006; Vella, et al., 2017; Walker, 2017).

HLF has a Board that guides their strategy. Much of the work in planning has been formed around strategic plans that guide investment of time and implementation of new activities as the curricula are scaled. How do the founders of HLF establish continuity of its mission/ amidst growth? The logic model contained herein is one tool used to support greater program planning, implementation, management, evaluation, and reporting.

The Holistic Life Foundation curricula being examined in this dissertation empowers youth with tools for conflict resolution and instills life skills that contribute to upending the pipeline to prison which is a culture of incarcerating Black youth and other children of color, also deemed of a minority status. The teachers that HLF train look like the students they serve

in the community, a critically important feature to success of translating the HLF SEL curricula (HLF, 2024; Participant Interviews 1-3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15. See Table 7, p. 96 for background characteristics of interviewed participants included in the study).

Employing a targeted approach to PYD and SEL focusing on outcomes that address social justice, HLF provides new opportunities are provided to underserved communities. By strengthening SEL experiences and holistic child development, it advances understanding of wellbeing and supports higher-level life experiences (Durlak, et al., 2011; Jones, et al., 2017).

Scientific Bases Underpinning the HLF SEL Curricular Components

The HLF SEL program focuses on these holistic mind-body base activities: breathing, stress relief through yoga poses and mindfulness activities, mental skills, along with physical exercise. These are important because they are related to health in the body, the key functions and processes that support key regulatory functions of maintaining health, with self-regulation that comes from breathwork and mindful movement techniques. A detailed review of the literature relative to what these curricular components involve, highlighting how they are interrelated in a holistic medical approach with the scientific support for their inclusion in the HLF SEL program is contained in Appendix A. What follows is a brief summary of this literature.

Since 1991, The U.S. National Institutes of Health has been investing in research to investigate and evaluate promising natural therapies defined as alternative or complementary medicine (NIH NCCIH, 2024). The evolution of the research has evolved into the creation of the NIH National Center for Complementary and Integrative Medicine, whose mission is to “invest in rigorous scientific investigation, the usefulness and safety of complementary and integrative interventions and their roles in improving health and healthcare” (NIH NCCIH,

2024). The investigator has completed an extensive literature review of the physiological, neurological, and psychological studies of integrative medicine practices, through the lens of complementary and alternative medicine, with a particular interest in how SEL may affect changes in the body to produce enhanced health outcomes. This body of literature lays the groundwork to correlate the practice of slow and mindful breathing techniques as tools to increase relaxation and promote self-regulation in the physical, etheric body, mental, emotional and spiritual bodies; it is foundational in many forms of holistic health practices (Cox, S. 2022; Guarneri, 2019; Hastings, et al., 2018; HeartMath Institute, 2024; Jain, et al., 2015a; Jain, 2021; NIIH, 2024; NIH NCCIH, 2024; Peterson, et al., 2017; Redner, et al., 1991; Rubik, et al., 2015; Settersten, 2010; Zaccaro, et al., 2018).

There are numerous studies that examine neurological, physiological, and psychological effects of experiencing mindfulness practices to investigate if and how components of SEL affects performance, grades, etc., with translational affects into behavioral practices (Bakosh, et al., 2016; Banks, et al., 2015; Bridgeland, et al., 2013; Chiesa, et al., 2010; Cipriano, et al., 2023; Crescentini, et al., 2016; Deighton, et al., 2014; Diperna, et al., 2017; Dispenza, 2008; Durlak, et al., 2015; Hennessey, et al., 2019; Hölzel, et al., 2010; Hölzel, et al., 2011; Hrach, 2021; Iwamoto et al., 2020; Ramasubramanian, 2017; Rogers, et al., 2017; Semple, et al., 2010; Wager, et al., 2015; Weissberg, 2019; Young, 2013; Zope, et al., 2013). These studies can guide curricular design and development to support the implementation of normalizing SEL based methods in classroom settings. Implementing SEL stress reduction curricula has been identified to produce structural changes in the brain (Hölzel, et al., 2010; Hölzel, et al., 2011).

Mindfulness practices can lead to strengthening neural circuits in the brain believed to control

conscious behaviors of insight, empathy, self-regulation, and compassion (Dispenza, 2008; Hölzel, et al., 2011; Maté, et al., 2022).

HLF's practices of mindful movement through stress relief practices experienced through yoga, instills a calm in the students that helps them pause and reflect; and in that moment of quiet, they are given a space to regulate thoughts and emotions, which is central to SEL (HLF, 2024). The ancient wisdom of breathing techniques, mindful movement, mental skills aligning with higher energies to get in a state of flow while creating a space to not react, but to become self-aware, is built into the HLF trauma-informed curricula (HLF, 2024; Smith et al., 2022). It is also central to core SEL methods (CASEL, 2024; Weissberg, 2019).

While SEL in education may be considered initially for student enrichment, reduction in teacher stress and burnout is a benefit of implementing HLF trauma-informed curricula; the SEL practices support greater classroom management and emotionally managed children (Ancona, et al., 2014; Bridgeland, et al., 2013; Hamilton, et al., 2020; Roeser, et al., 2013; Zarate, et al., 2019). Reaching for compassion and understanding to reduce conflict and enhance wellbeing is the opportunity that is created every time an educator pauses to reflect, while inviting HLF's SEL curricula into their teaching space.

Evidence-based SEL Outcomes

Major SEL competencies have been identified and delineated; these include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. They are discussed here because they make up a critical part of the HLF SEL curricula (CASEL, 2024; Durlak, et al. 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Jackson, 2012; Jones, et al., 2017; Kwon, et al., 2017; Taylor, et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019).

Self-Awareness begins with learning about self in relation to another. It involves understanding what triggers behavior responses. Self-awareness requires one to feel, sense, and understand personal motivations, and evolve empathy for self and others (Greenberg, et al., 2017). As one becomes aware of oneself, and applies the knowledge learned to the world around them, it follows that he/she/they develop compassion. There is a sensing of emotional ripples. The consequence of an outburst receives a particular response; thus, the learning occurs.

Self-Management is taking responsibility for one's own behavior and care for self. It is how we regulate behaviors, thoughts, and emotions in a productive way (Corkindale, 2008). Self-management requires actions of pausing and reflection, to assess a response to the environment or to another person. With the rise of social media, self-management also includes an awareness that people create fictitious stories about their lives to impress, to gain popularity, and to influence others. Imposter syndrome is when one develops a belief that they are not good enough or feel inferior because of the barrage of media that has an impact on self-management.

Social Awareness is a key step in social emotional development, and forms the evolution of empathy toward others, including an awakening of a connection to others from experiences that differ from one's own, a greater diversity of understanding language, culture, religion, race, and ethnicity (Dweck, 1999). In this component of SEL, the individual demonstrates an understanding of diversity while interacting with other people (Deighton, et al., 2014).

Relationship Skills evolve through active listening and clear communication. Through SEL development, one begins to express one's needs and desires through a lens of compassion to evolve trust and respect (Gould, et al., 2011).

Responsible Decision Making involves learning how to make a reasoned judgement after analyzing information. It also includes problem solving for personal and social issues.

Through critical thinking, one addresses personal safety that also involves the well-being of others (Taylor, et al., 2016).

Educators of SEL techniques use self-regulated breathing and mindfulness exercises to contribute to greater focus, stress reduction, and improved attention, which brings greater resiliency and optimism, and improved executive functions. These, in turn, invoke a greater parasympathetic response in the body, thus advancing the physical, mental, and emotional receptiveness for greater learning achievements. SEL also leads to academic success, demonstrated through improved grades with better school functioning, pro-social behaviors, social competence, greater understanding of self-worth, and demonstrated understanding that mindful moments with regulated breathing bring a space for flow in creativity and attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Liehr, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Weissberg, 2019).

Through the teaching of proper deep breathing, students can learn to breathe away stress.

This mindful exercise becomes essential to retraining the body. Too often, shallow breathing becomes the norm. Teachers often find that students move into auto pilot and that fight-or-flight mechanism is triggered so often that stress is the steady waking state. A teacher might suggest to the students a reminder to unclench the jaw, relax, drop the shoulders, and straighten the spine or sit or lie down in a comfortable position. With the body firmly planted on the ground, they can demonstrate alternate nostril breathing, imagine the breath reaching the bottom of the diaphragm, into the bottom of the feet filling every space throughout the body and into the top of the head. Another example is to teach square breathing cycles of several repetitions: breathe in for the count of four, hold for the count of four, breathe out for the count of four, hold for the count of four. Similarly, in the 4, 7, 8 breath cycle, the student can use nostril and alternative nostril breathing techniques to reset the body. Through practice, one

learns to reset the mind and body connection, bringing balance to the nervous system, entraining heart, and brain coherence (HeartMath Institute, 2024). Over time, this learned behavior gradually becomes a habit. A person can learn these self-regulation techniques to calm the body and increase the physical body's resonance to greater mental and emotional relaxation. The physical, etheric, mental, emotional, and spiritual bodies all benefit (Dispenza, 2008; Jain, 2021; Lipton, 2008).

SEL in Youth

The Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning, now called the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is a network of education professionals who have joined efforts through the creation of this professional organization to advocate for the beneficial outcomes related to social and emotional skill development. Decades of evidence-based research points to SEL improvements in attitudes about self, school, and civic engagement; social behaviors; problem solving; academic performance; and improved emotional management all result from developing skills across different contexts (CASEL, 2024; Weissberg, 2019). A meta-analysis of 213 SEL studies reported on competencies of children with follow-up effects that examined PYD through school-based interventions. It involved more than 270,000 students (Taylor, et al., 2017). The findings drew conclusions across studies demonstrating that, “many students lack social emotional competencies, and as they advance through middle and high school, the gap widens and the disconnect negatively affects academic performance, behavior, and health” (Blum, et al., 2004 cited in Durlak, et al., 2011). Risky behaviors in adolescence that might involve substance abuse, violence, asocial behaviors, aggression, and or mental health challenges, which further complicates chances for pathways moving forward in life (Hemez, et al., 2020).

Another recent SEL meta-analysis was conducted in 2023 by Cipriano, et al. in which the researchers examined 424 studies from 53 countries involving 575,361 K-12 students. Results reported, compared to controlled conditions, that students participating in SEL interventions experience “significantly improved skills, attitudes, behaviors, school climate and safety, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement” (Cipriano, et al., 2023, p. 1181).

Schools have a vital role in society; teachers in western cultures are increasingly relied on to provide social emotional skills and cognitive development. A supportive school environment structured with strong, positive relationships contributes to feelings of support and connection. Every part of the school offers opportunities to practice and reinforce SEL as students are observing and mirroring behaviors (Bandura, 1986). This is not in conflict with reading, writing and arithmetic, but in support of SEL contexts to emphasize greater life skills in which to advance the knowledge.

Over the past century, many educational programs evolved that incorporated SEL principles as ideal models of instruction to develop social relationships and experiences. Examples of global educational programs that incorporate(d) SEL programs include:

(1) The Montessori Schools. Dr. Maria Montessori opened the first Montessori school, Casa dei Bambine, in Casa de Lorenzo, in Rome, Italy in 1907 (Montessori, 1909; Montessori, 2024a; Montessori, 2024b). Montessori believed that by age 3, children needed to engage with other children to learn greater independence and realize that their actions benefit others. The goal was to instill concentration skills in children, to lay the foundation for subsequent social behavior. Montessori believed that when a child was loved and given a trusted environment, he/she/they would respond

with a sense of worth, security, and a means for emotional expression, leading to greater autonomy and independence (Montessori, 1909). Teaching cooperation to offer each other heartfelt connections instead of competition allows children to evolve peaceful resolution to conflict. These are foundations for social emotional wellbeing. The schools have now grown to more than 15,000 worldwide, with nearly 5,000 in the US alone (Montessori, 2024a; Montessori, 2024b).

(2) The Waldorf Schools. They were founded on the principles of teaching students with the values of responsibility, collaboration, inclusivity, diversity, and initiative. The educational curriculum was created in 1919 in Germany, based on ideas and teachings of Dr. Rudolf Steiner. His idea was to promote “whole child” development that considered the core principles which we now align with SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Waldorf Schools are present in 60 countries with more than 3,000 schools on six continents, with 130 such schools in the US (Waldorf Schools, 2024a; Waldorf Schools, 2024b).

(3) The Living Wisdom Schools. They were created in Ranchi, India in 1917 by Paramahansa Yogananda; the nonsectarian model has grown worldwide (Walters, 1986):

- Nevada City, CA, 1972
- Palo Alto, CA, 1992
- Portland, OR, 1997
- Nevada City High School, Nevada, CA 1997
- Nevada City College, Nevada City, CA 2003
- Assisi, Italy 2006
- Seattle, WA 2007

- New Delhi, India, 2010
- Jesi, Italy 2012
- Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2012 (Joyful education, 2024).

The curriculum was designed on foundational principles of teaching children to be successful people through focus on human needs and interests, teaching how to have a good relationship with others and with oneself, how to concentrate, how to be a good employee as well as a leader, how to create a harmonious life and acquire balance in all things (Walters, 1986). All of this evolved into the teaching of social emotional skills that are so essential to developing young people with frameworks for understanding life. SEL instills values in children to better navigate life, bring more joy, while balancing interests in healthy living, attracting calm, while drawing on positive psychological resources along the way.

(4) In the late 1960's, Dr. James Comer of Yale School of Medicine piloted an early childhood development program in New Haven, CT, called the Comer School Development Program (Comer, 1988; Glazer, 2005). His work considered a child's experiences at home along with experiences in school and examined how psychosocial development shapes academic achievement. In the 1970's, education and health experts collaborated on addressing academic and social programs that contributed to behavioral challenges in two impoverished, low achieving elementary schools in New Haven, CT (primarily attended by African American students). Over a decade of intervention programming in what would form early SEL programs, the performance at the schools was reported to have greatly improved (Comer, 1988; Glazer, 2005). Learning outcomes exceeded national averages as observers reported a decline in behavioral problems, absenteeism, and suspensions, launching momentum for SEL core

programs to become the new framework for CASEL to evolve in 1994 (CASEL, 2024; Comer, 1988; Glazer, 2005).

The work of Dr. Roger P. Weissberg was instrumental in evolving this SEL curricula in the U.S., with engagement on Comer's early projects. It led to the formation of a national agenda with strategies to innovate, design, implement and evaluate SEL curricula over four decades (Durlak, et al., 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Greenberg, et al., 2017; Taylor, et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019). Weissberg was also a co-founder of the CASEL organization described above (CASEL, 2024). CASEL now reports that 27 American states have adopted SEL standards for K-12 competencies, and all 50 states have adopted pre-K SEL competencies (CASEL, 2024).

These SEL school-based programs foster a space for relationships and skills to grow and flourish. To track success measures, SEL indicators are benchmarked each year to track schoolwide progress in learning outcomes. Through a systematic effort, educators have come together to work toward accountability in implementing programs that help achieve the greatest learning outcomes. Within a school system, these indicators are often used to track progress of SEL performance and results. School districts are working with stakeholders to address SEL implementation through these measures:

- (1) Explicit SEL instruction
- (2) SEL integrated with academic instruction
- (3) Youth voice and engagement
- (4) Supportive school climates
- (5) Authentic family partnerships
- (6) Focus on adult SEL

- (7) Aligned community partnerships
- (8) Supportive discipline
- (9) Systems for continuous improvement, and
- (10) A continuum for integrated support (CASEL, 2024; Durlak, et al. 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Jackson, 2012; Jones, et al., 2017; Kwon, et al., 2017; Taylor, et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019).

While fostering a supportive, caring classroom environment, teachers provide an important foundation that helps students to feel valued. The school climate is deeply impacted by these positive relationships. It forms the very basis for advancing scholarship in SEL.

Mindful Schools is another example of a non-profit organization that was formed to train educators in principles of SEL techniques. Its aim was to create a new generation of learners and to empower equity and compassion in young people. Created in 2007 in support of advancing social justice in the classrooms, Mindful Schools of Oakland, CA dissolved in April 2024 citing financial challenges (Mindful Schools, 2024). During its run, Mindful Schools partnered with University of California Davis in 2011 to conduct a randomized-controlled study, n=937, with 47 teachers, and 47 classrooms, in three public elementary schools. The results of a yearlong research program demonstrated statistically significant improvements in children's ability to focus, exert self-control, demonstrate empathy, and administer self-care with the dosage of four hours of mindfulness instruction from their teachers (Smith, et al., 2012). The study took place in Oakland, CA, a city noted at the time for the fourth highest crime rate in the U.S.

In a 2010 pilot study, Mindful Schools research showed a reduction in depressive symptoms among minority children, ages 8-11, in a randomized study at a summer camp (Liehr,

et al., 2010). Important SEL outcomes were reported, however the study did not achieve the expected outcomes noting additional subjects might have contributed to more significant findings.

The Wallace Foundation, a New York City based not-for-profit, has funded a six-year study into SEL outcomes, beginning in 2016, to evaluate SEL linked with success later in life (University of Chicago, 2024; Wallace Foundation, 2024). The Foundation has awarded six urban school districts (Boston, MA; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Palm Beach County, FL; Tacoma, WA; and Tulsa, OK) with grants upward of \$1 million leveraged by district resources and a commitment to apply SEL data for continuous improvement in student wellbeing. These six institutions agreed to collaborate on SEL teaching practices, with n=36,000 6th grade children in 76 schools (Wallace Foundation, 2024). This large experiment holds great promise in identifying system-level supports and will examine key out-of-school-organizations that contribute to SEL. The study is expected to report on what enables SEL progress, collect evidence on improvements in SEL, provide descriptive learning environments and adult practices, and offer other measures of success (Hamilton, et al., 2020; University of Chicago, 2024; Wallace Foundation, 2024).

These school systems serve to help children develop skills that will serve them throughout life. Ideas to support development of learning in ways where children can address their feelings, explain what they are thinking about, and begin to understand how feelings and thoughts impact their behavior- all of this is critical to their future success growing into adolescence and adulthood.

PYD Taking Root in SEL Curricula

PYD is defined as, “an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youths within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups and families, in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths” (Youth.gov, 2024). PYD requires the skills that come from SEL and extend this into community involvement. It would be hard for PYD to exist outside a context in which children do not either possess or are engaged in SEL. Positive experiences provide young people with opportunities to develop resilience and evolve protective factors that help children to overcome adversity. Programs that focus on PYD often provide youth with adult leaders who support activities over time. This offers pro-social development, bonding, positive emotions, and social emotional-behavioral learning.

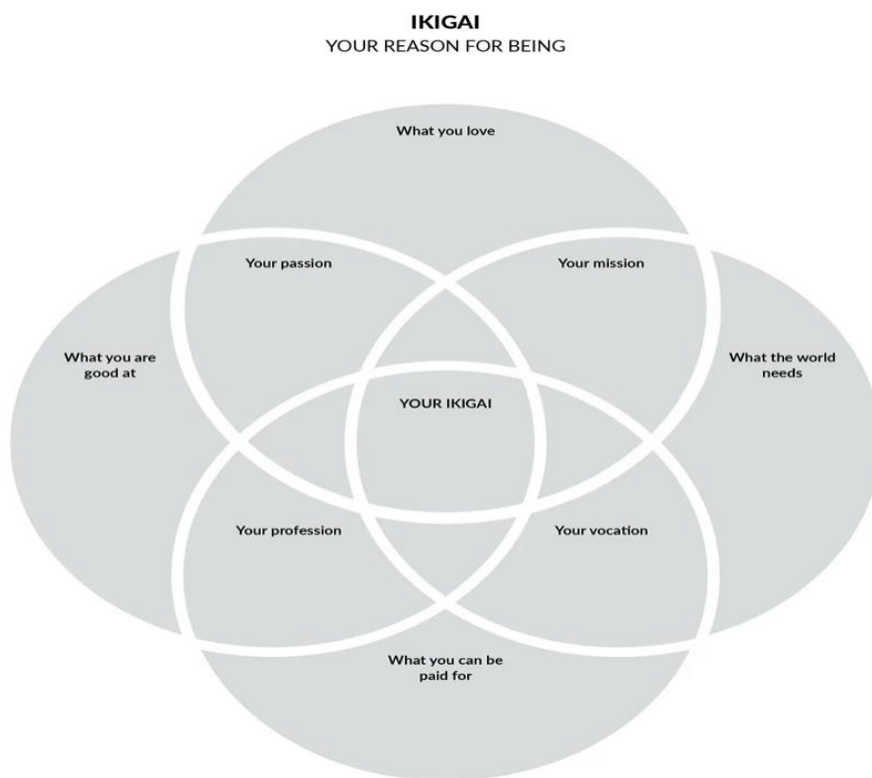
Both SEL and PYD, which is an extension of SEL, support social and emotional skills and attitudes that help youth evolve assets that have positive effects on their development and support pro-social outcomes (Search Institute, 2024). SEL offers knowledge through examining care for self and others while PYD takes this knowledge of responsibility and caring in relationships to promote healthy life skills, inviting leadership opportunities. These assets help children to grow in greater self-awareness and self-efficacy. Over time, the experiences offer transformative positive life changes. “Transfer (of PYD life skills) refers to the intermediary process that occurs at the crossroad between skill learning in one context and skill application in another context” (Pierce, et al., 2017, p. 12). SEL is a key component of reinforcing self-esteem and self-acceptance. We know the value of reinforcing the belief that a child is worthy.

Emotional resilience evolves when children are given tools to self-regulate, to think through actions and take a moment to consider self and others, evolve empathy, and focus their attention for a moment on a positive outcome. These positive mental skills support greater executive functions, enhance emotional regulation, and support greater academic success (Hölzel, et al., 2010; Semple, 2010). This repeated learning with trusted adults helps children to change the neuroplasticity in their brain, rewiring the brain for greater peace and contentment. This process can be described as evolving PYD in SEL skill-building efforts translated by the learner into action as the child develops and makes choices in behaviors about responding to stresses in life situation.

SEL curricula that involved PYD focused on creativity, leadership, altruism, and community engagement, which are tools to bring greater harmony to communities. In Japanese, the concept of *ikigai* (ee -key-guy) is a philosophy of what brings meaning to a person's life and blends the outcomes of SEL and PYD in a manner that helps an individual realize his/her/their place in the community. Figure 2, below, displays how Ikigai can be used as a positive psychology tool to examine the intersections of personal aspirations and strengths of what you are good at, what fuels your passion, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for doing. It aligns passion, mission, vocation, and profession.

Figure 2

Ikigai: Your Reason for Being



Note: Positive Psychology, 2024. Positive psychology tool. Open-source image.

Joseph Campbell echoes this sentiment in his expression of personal fulfillment, “It is a matter of identifying that pursuit which you are truly passionate about and attempting to give yourself absolutely to it. In so doing, you will find your fullest potential and serve your community to the greatest possible extent” (Campbell, et al., 1991).

When we teach children to be both self-aware and aware of others, they become sensitive to personal fulfillment and how that personal fulfillment can serve the community. Campbell articulates this blend of SEL and PYD in his description of “bliss.”

Now, I came to this idea of bliss because in Sanskrit, which is the great spiritual language of the world, there are three terms that represent the brink, the jumping-off

place to the ocean of transcendence: sat-chit-ananda. The word “Sat” means being.

“Chit” means consciousness. “Ananda” means bliss or rapture. I thought, “I don’t know whether my consciousness is proper consciousness or not; I don’t know whether what I know of my being is my proper being or not; but I do know where my rapture is. So let me hang on to rapture, and that will bring me both my consciousness and my being. I think it worked. (Campbell, 1991, pp. 113, 120).

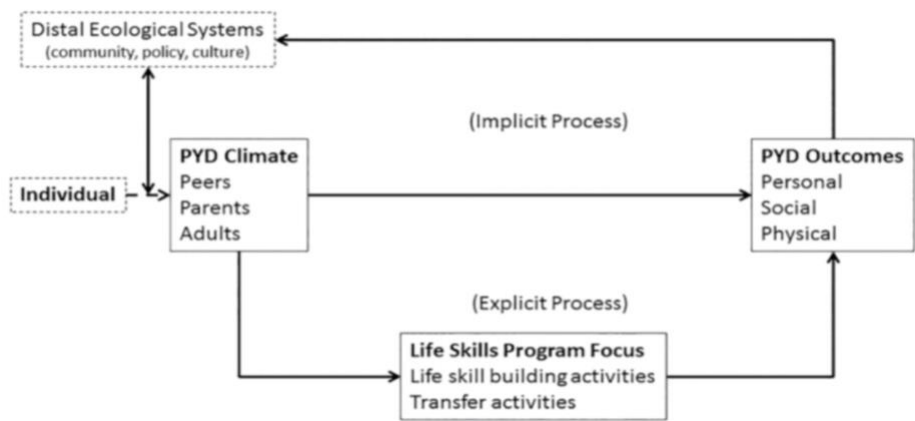
SEL offers a context to help children to pursue their passions, reinforce that they belong, and offer positive emotionality. As a result, they can challenge and discover new passions, develop a growth mindset, a prosocial orientation, and transcendent awareness, deeper connections beyond oneself. The Grounded Theory Model of PYD aligns the experience of translating life skills into practice. This model resulted from a qualitative meta review of 20 years of literature in PYD by Nicholas Holt, et al., 2017, and considers individual characteristics, sociodemographics, personality traits, dispositions, and influences. This theory of PYD considers the learning and translation of the skill into everyday life. The PYD climate is a social environment which includes relationships with parents, adults, coaches, and peers to enable youth to gain life-skills and positive developmental experiences. Transfer of skills, role modeling, and leadership all come into play as we focus on outcomes in personal, social, and physical learning (Gould, et al., 2008; Pierce, et al., 2017; Turnidge, et al., 2014; Weiss, et al., 2014). The longitudinal PYD work of Dr. Maureen Weiss demonstrates life skill learning and transfer of skills that directly support SEL; this includes how children manage emotions, resolve peer conflicts, provide support for one another, make intentional decisions, evolve greater self-esteem, develop with perceived social and physical competence, report feelings of positive connection to peers, demonstrate empathy, sympathy and respect for others and ultimately

contribute to community (Weiss, et al., 2009; Weiss, et al., 2014). These healthy behaviors stem from demonstrated improvements in social and emotional health (standing up for self and others), dealing effectively with peer pressure, maintaining a healthy body image, choosing strong core friendships, and increased PA levels. PA is shown to have a positive impact on our moods and results in far less sedentary behavior (Weiss, et al., 2014). This work is rooted in the Theory of PYD.

Theory of PYD

As an individual enters an experience, they are affected by the relationships in their macroenvironment of community, culture, and society. Parents, adults, and peers have unique roles in determining PYD outcomes in children. Nicolas Holt and a team of sport psychologists and exercise physiologists have undertaken studies to examine the explicit process of skill transfer through sport activities to demonstrate that the many skills learned through participation in sports translate to developing valuable leadership, communication, and broader SEL life skills. Figure 3, below, is a graphical representation of the Grounded Theory of PYD through Sport model that considers climate, outcomes, and life skill transfer.

Figure 3
Grounded Theory of Positive Youth Development Through Sport (Holt, et al., 2017)

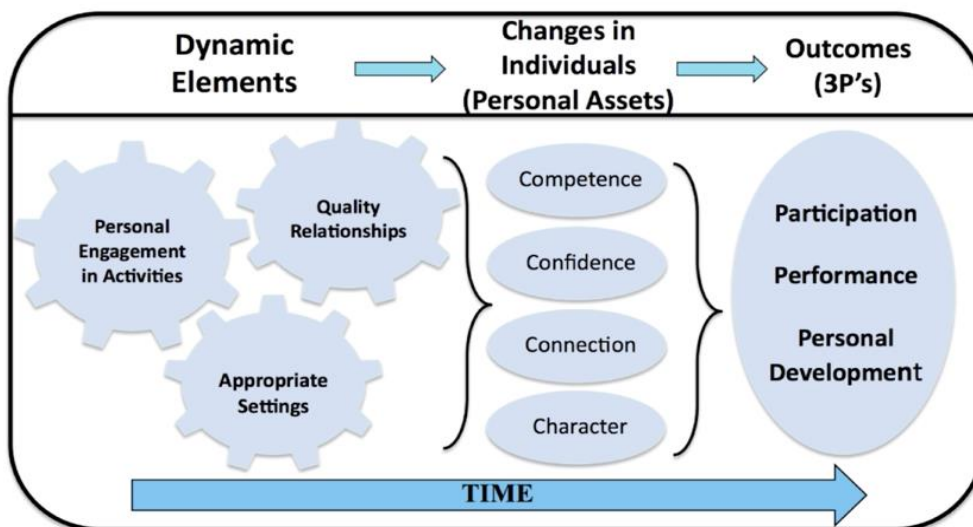


If intentionally included on the part of coaches, sports can instill many of the desired skills of SEL and PYD. The research demonstrates that the skills, learned through explicit and implicit transfer, have a profound impact on their quality of life moving forward. In the Holt, et al., 2017 meta-analysis, a model was created to demonstrate the importance of a PYD climate of parental and peer relationships, life-skill building with transfer activities, and PYD outcomes in other areas of life that teach personal and social responsibility. Personal skills (self-awareness, self-management) and positive interpersonal skills (communications, empathy, cooperation) are learned abilities that help children express their thoughts, feelings, and act in a productive way. Life skills involving decision-making, creative thinking, and psychosocial competencies in support of problem-solving are key to social emotional development. Few studies, however, cover longitudinal timelines to observe how the learning occurs or demonstrate how implicit learning is conveyed into new life situations.

In the Personal Assets Framework, Côté, et al., examine the dynamic elements of personal assets and describe how PYD evolves self-confidence, a connection to others, and personal character and builds self-efficacy as the individual begins to feel more competent in their experiences (Côté, et al., 2007; Fraser-Thomas, 2005). In Figure 4 below, it is demonstrated that the adoption of life skills is intended to carry on well into adulthood as individuals experience life through their own personal lens and learn to develop relationships that are meaningful (Côté, et al., 2014). Having a secure home setting is essential to PYD growth, with the continuity of practices and roles to help establish security.

Figure 4

Personal Assets Framework for Sport (Côté, et al, 2014)



Côté, et al., describe how PYD evolves self-confidence, a connection to others, personal character and builds self-efficacy as the individual begins to feel more competent in their experiences (Côté, et al., 2007; Fraser-Thomas, 2005). Discussing boundaries and expectations at every opportunity helps children to learn roles and responsibilities and with an emphasis on self-care. Many challenges encountered in life occur because of miscommunication and misunderstanding of expectations. Through enhanced SEL curricula that focus on PYD, children can experience greater security in their life lessons. In years to come, lessons structured around SEL outcomes focused on PYD may more easily be recalled as times of great happiness, enjoyment of a love for friendships and an understanding of foundational skills being developed with intention (Ryan, et al., 2001; Salzberg, 2011).

Sport lessons that focus on trust, teamwork, communication, connections, empathy, compassion, guidance, and practical skills about how the world works, give sport participants opportunities to enhance their own leadership skills, along with the pursuit of excellence

(Search Institute, 2024). Children may come to understand mistakes through observing others, with courage, to use these opportunities for teachable moments to experience self-growth.

PYD is especially important for underserved children and youth (Gould, et al., 2011). Children that are raised in poverty often experience situations involving crime and violence, with few resources to help them cope (Liehr, et al., 2010). The experience of poverty and the experiences of social injustice create life situations for which self-regulation skills can serve as a resilient tool to bringing greater inner peace. Livelihoods that include regular PA, with practiced mental skills utilized to self-regulate the body, consumption of nutritious foods, having mindful connections with time spent in nature, and enjoyment of positive adult relationships – are healthier in many aspects, mentally, emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually (Gould, et al., 2011; Greenberg, et al., 2017, Weissberg, 2019).

Characteristics of PYD include enhancing and nurturing supportive relationships with opportunities to belong, thriving in physically and in psychologically safe environments, with consistent and clear structures to impart skill building (National Research Council, 2002). Ultimately, these attributes are foundational for children to establish a sense of self-efficacy and support a curiosity for trying new things. Elementary age teachers can better support student development by understanding these characteristics that help children evolve discipline, confidence, and an understanding of teamwork (Roeser, et al., 2013; Weissberg, 2019). Teachers that create a space dedicated to reflecting on feelings and talk about how feelings influence behavior are providing responsive SEL classrooms.

Incorporating SEL in a classroom also benefits the teacher and student as the tools support a calming environment and enhanced classroom management (Weissberg, 2019). SEL research demonstrates that teachers need greater support to pursue their passion of instilling

knowledge and skills (CASEL, 2024; Weissberg, 2019). A feasibility study of a yoga and mindfulness intervention for schoolteachers, conducted in greater Baltimore in 2014, highlighted the beneficial reduction of stress and burnout that too often builds into a cycle of teacher emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and perceived lack of personal accomplishment, that eventually affects student compliance (Ancona, et al., 2014). Teacher health and wellbeing translates into the environment for student learning.

It is essential that teachers are supported in their efforts, avoiding burnout (Zarate, et al., 2019). Educators need professional development programs to remind them of the joy in teaching, why they chose the profession, and encouragement to expand their full potential. Teachers are expected to give of themselves daily, share ideas, guidance, behave as a role model, and impart knowledge all while nurturing children's emotional, mental, social, developmental, and personal needs. A career in teaching is truly a labor of love for all involved.

Advancing Social Justice in Youth Development

It is especially important to provide SEL from a social justice perspective. While equality means that students get access, equity means that students get what they need to succeed. HLF SEL curricula works with each child to provide tools for what that child needs. Teachers have a vital role in the classroom, assisting children with an understanding of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and helping accept children who have special needs (Kaplowitz, et al., 2019). Children are developing an understanding of themselves in relation to others, and teachers can provide critical viewpoints from the lens of SEL in support of social justice that helps with greater understanding. The application of social justice addresses how opportunities, wealth, rights, and privileges are shared in the greater community. It involves how people are treated with respect to economic, political, and social systems. Examples

include access to health care, income disparities, voting rights, food and job security, access to housing, equality in the application of laws (Thomas, et al., 2010). These factors trickle down to the classroom, and students quickly understand how their situation compares to others' situations. If parents are poor, they do not have the resources to provide for the needs of their children, which contributes to disenfranchisement on the part of the parents and students. This scenario makes SEL much more essential, and much of the instruction falls on classroom teachers.

Forces that oppose the status quo are finding strength in connections that demand greater social justice from governmental structures that have maintained societal order. Traditionally, schools were intended to prepare students for gainful employment, and there are those that maintain this strict role for schools, without regard for the students who arrive with varying resources to participate in the classroom learning. The restoration of justice, equity, and humanity is necessary to live at a level of being we are all capable of living. The recognition that the pursuit of money through competition cannot be the aim of human existence. Social injustice is an economic reality, resulting from 400 years of unfair laws in America; Black, Latino, and immigrant populations have not had access to economic, political, and social systems, nor have these marginalized groups been treated fairly under the rule of law (Adams, et al., 2007; Kaplowitz, et al., 2019). Generations of racial, ethnic, and religious minority Americans have not easily passed wealth through inheritance (Adams, et al., 2007). Dual systems of rule of law exist and the application of the laws are unfairly applied; inequity exists creating socioeconomic systems that favor a White majority (Adams, et al., 2007). Social injustice exists and many minority and poor communities especially require the benefits of SEL.

Educators must pay attention to race and social justice in the classrooms as students are observing the group dynamics (Thomas, et al., 2010; Zúñiga, et al., 2014). It starts with an adult demonstrating a high ethical practice of respectable community behavior. As the adult models the practice of kindness and ethics, children emulate the behavior and, in this way, are helped along in assimilating a society we want to create. These experiences provide opportunities for children to learn life-skills that support PYD through heightened experiences of SEL.

Positive role models are needed to help youth grow into contributing adults. When parenting or social environments fall short, children struggle to fit into societal systems that may offer tools, yet not provide necessary nurturing and guidance. Conflict and inequality contribute to critical challenges faced by children in the U.S. Once improved, it has the real potential to open doors to many possibilities for children to improve their livelihoods. Children will learn what they observe and experience. The degree to which we let social injustice simmer, it has important consideration for our own problem solving and resilience (Reisch, 2018).

Imagine a community where we build this kind of internal voice in the children, where they tell themselves stories of how good they are, that they can achieve anything if they set their mind to a goal, that they are smart, capable, and contributors. Everything is possible. Imagination is required. It would impact strengthening mental and physical health and create a local community of leaders who understand that being of service to others is the greatest gift one can offer.

Adult leaders must demonstrate best practices of understanding and compassion to teach the next generation to emulate the society we choose to create. This contributes to the fuel that drives creative energy to causes of social justice. Through a concerted focus on

SEL, life includes an awareness of others, drawing on creative passions they were born to share. John Lewis, the civil rights activist, and long-time member of the U.S. House of Representatives, articulates the promise of SEL:

“I ask you to reach down inside yourself and find the truth of your life compelling you to see. That is your road to true peace, and it is the beginning of the evolution of humankind. Because every change in the world starts within, it begins with one individual who envisions his or her micro-universe the way it can be and settles for nothing less. And as one individual moves toward the light, that light ignites more individual flames and eventually the revolutionary inner work becomes a transformative outer work that builds into a bonfire of light, the kind of light that can change the world. It starts from within, with one individual who seeks the way of peace. Will you be that person?” (Lewis, 2017 p. 145).

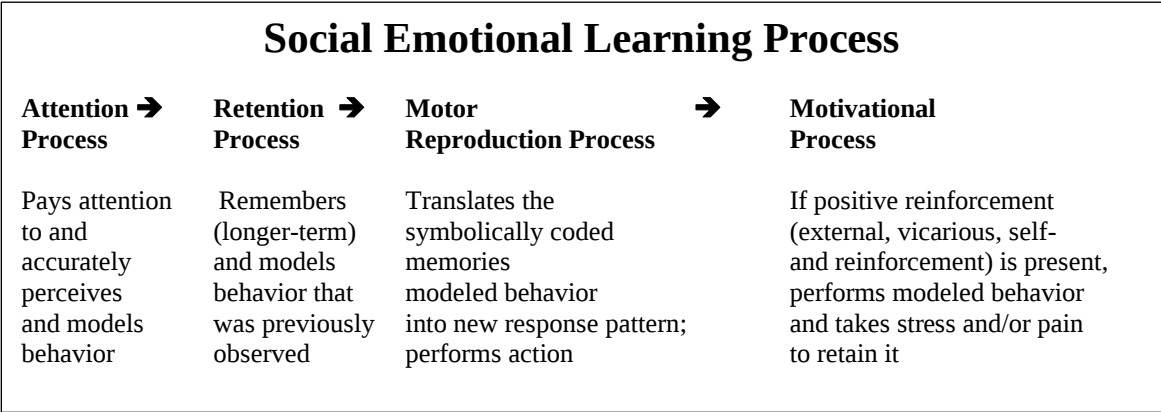
SEL requires that adults have positive adult role models to learn from as life unfolds. The Jesuits believed that if they were given a child to raise from infancy to about age seven, it would not matter if that child were born into families of wealth or impoverishment (Edlund, 2013). What matters most is that the child learns love, connection, norms of behavior and has role models to demonstrate life skills so the actions can be emulated. Consider the millions of lives that can be positively impacted with greater care, focused on nurturing and education of children. Also consider the impact these actions can have on improved health and educational outcomes. The health and wellbeing of an evolving society depends on the children we raise who will contribute and become the leaders of future generations. Life is meant to be joyful. There are many experiences awaiting young adventurers who can be well prepared to seek new challenges once they learn how to become positively influenced contributors, self-reliant, of service to others, and remember to help the next one in line grow to a higher potential.

Social Learning Theory – Theory of Self-Regulation – Bandura (1986)

Bandura’s social learning or social cognitive theory considers the process a person advances through to acquire knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes with respect to their social environment. This evolves into new ways of thinking and is critical to understand, especially if one is interested in examining SEL. Figure 5, below, displays these learning characteristics.

Figure 5

Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1986)



Effective SEL curricula includes psycho-social aspects of wellbeing and health, implemented through a lens of PYD working with children undergoing SEL experiences (de la Fuente, et al., 2022). As holistic child development contributes to healthy habits, these experiences provide pathways to greater PA. This includes better understanding of thoughts and emotions, evolving empathy, self-awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making. SEL programs help children balance their physical, mental, and emotional bodies, while considering the wellbeing of others. Theories are essential to intervention development for health behavior change. This research is grounded in Bandura’s Social Learning Theory as a construct given the evaluation assessment will focus on strategies that employ observing,

modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1986).

Studies have shown that social learning models deliver improvements in academic achievement; students are more connected to learning, they manage their emotions, and evolve empathy (DiPerna, et al., 2017; Durlak, et al., 2011; Greenberg, et al., 2017). This impacts children's mental health, academics, behavior, and focus in many areas of their lives, including exercise. The literature advances how SEL in early childhood development prepares a child for adolescent and adult contributions aimed at local community and broader society (Taylor, et al., 2017).

Stress Reduction

Gabor Maté, A Hungarian-born clinical psychologist, has written extensively about how western cultures receive high marks for health care systems but the global trend shows increased levels of chronic illness and general ill health. Prescription drug use and mental illness are a growing concern. Over four decades, Maté has tracked maladies of individuals, and he links this to a correlation of societal moral bankruptcy. Maté states that our understanding of “normal” is false, we neglect the roles that trauma and stress play in physical health, we disregard the pressures of modern day living and the toll it exerts on our bodies and minds, at the expense of good health (Maté, 2022). When trauma is experienced early in life, it impacts brain development and creates limiting beliefs about self-worth, which often leads to taking actions and or accepting behaviors that are not in one's own best interest. These traumatic memories get lodged into the electrical fields of the body (see Appendix A). It is possible through SEL self-regulation to rewire the brain and body to halt sabotaging behaviors that

contribute to the creation of chronic illness in the body. The HLF curricula centers on this context.

A 2014 study published in *Nature Neuroscience* demonstrated that parental traumatic experience could become an inherited trait, passed down generationally, even when the offspring did not have the physical experience of trauma directly. Researchers introduced a particular scent to a mouse before it was electrically shocked. The experiment showed that the next generation(s) of pups reacted to the scent, even when the offspring pups had no direct experience with the electrical shock (Dias, et al., 2014). This perceived effect demonstrates that trauma is stored and passed to subsequent generations through epigenetics; it has a profound implication for SEL challenges (Lipton, 2008; McKusick, 2021).

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that accumulated stress leads to depression in young people, and this accounts for the top five causes of illness and disability in adolescents worldwide (WHO, 2017; WHO, 2018). Children are more stressed than ever, as they struggle with social pressures. Often unaware of their own strengths as they discover themselves, the stress accumulates leading to depression and burnout (Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Peterson, et al., 2017; Rogers, et al., 2012). The lack of self-awareness creates greater anxiety, as children compare themselves to others creating an imposter syndrome (Corkindale, 2008). Often, this accumulation of pressure erupts into negative behaviors when one is unable to address the growing pressures in a healthy manner. With SEL self-management tools, children are more able to find solutions to adverse situations, addressing anxiety (Ramasubramanian, 2017).

Effective SEL programs include interactive sessions dedicated to improving concentration, goal setting, self-expression, confidence building, and empathy. Research shows

that beginning in grade six, self-confidence markedly declines so that by 10th grade, only 14% of females report that they believe in themselves (Bean, et al., 2015; see also Boyce, 2004; Corkindale, 2008). This figure may grow in the wrong direction as social media use increases (Corkindale, 2008). Several studies have demonstrated that females from low-income families have a greater risk of dropping out of school, enduring mental health problems, engaging in risky behaviors, and find themselves in trouble with the law (Bean, et al., 2015; Boyce, 2004; Hemez, et al., 2020). SEL PYD programming is shown to strengthen young people's behavioral competencies and supports the development of a healthy sense of identity, with an outlook for a positive future.

Holistic Wellness

Holistic health examines many aspects of wellness, that include examining the whole person with consideration for their physical, mental/emotional, environmental, social, intellectual, occupational, and spiritual health (AHMA, 2024a; Hastings, et al., 2018). The American Holistic Medical Association was formed in 1978, through the insight of Dr. Norm Shealy, MD, PhD, DSc, FACS, DABNS and Dr. Gladys McGarey, MD, MDH, together with physicians across the U.S.; it would evolve more globally in decades to come (AHMA, 2024a; AHMA, 2024b; Guarneri, 2019; Hastings, et al., 2018). Since the early work of Drs. Elmer and Alyce Green in Kansas, holistic medicine has attracted broad disciplines of natural sciences, social sciences, and spiritual arts and sciences, with engineers, education experts and agricultural scientists to develop integrative health, biofield and energy medicine. These fields examine whole person health, recognizing the interconnectedness of all aspects – body, mind, emotions, and spirit (NIH NCCIH, 2024).

In Hastings, et al., 2018, the authors share tools to address health from a lens of personal, familial, social, and environmental factors that encourage healing. Each person is recognized as an individual rather than a symptom-bearing-organism. In this way, a person is encouraged to participate in their own healing that brings about self-responsibility and mobilizes health capacity. Their approach encompasses health modalities that include psychological techniques and physical modalities beyond a medical doctor-led diagnostic and treatment. Many alternative medical practices are gaining acceptance (energy medicine, acupuncture, massage therapy, emotional freedom technique (EFT) of tapping acupuncture points, light therapy, sound therapy, mindfulness, Tai Chi, and Qigong).

The HLF was specifically created with the intention of addressing whole person health as they share their SEL curricula more broadly with communities around the world. Through semi-structured interviews, the founders described how they devised the name of the organization (Interviews with Ali Smith, October 13, 2021; Andrés González, October 7, 2021; Atman Smith, October 8, 2021). Their intention was to create an institution that was holistic in scope, to include everyone in developing a practice of improving health and wellbeing. An understanding of holistic wellness is important in the current study as the HLF SEL curricula is holistic in nature and based on the many premises of holistic wellness.

Research Assessing the Utility of the HLF SEL Trauma-Informed Curricula

A number of studies exist that examine the empirical feasibility and qualitative outcomes of applying the HLF SEL curricula in classroom settings. (Ancona, et al., 2014; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Mendelson, et al., 2016; Semple, et al., 2017). Table 1 (below) lists all of these studies. Nine studies were identified; eight appear in

academic peer-review journals. Research involving qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches were used in assessing findings. Program recipients (students and adult learners), teachers, educational administrators, stakeholders, and HLF program implementation staff were assessed. Most of the studies were conducted by 5 research teams, often publishing multiple papers. In addition to identifying the methods employed and results found, methodological strengths and limitations and future directions are noted.

One unique aspect of the HLF SEL curricula is that a number of studies exist that examine the feasibility and qualitative outcomes of applying the curricula in classroom settings (Ancona, et al., 2014; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Mendelson, et al., 2016; Semple, et al., 2017). Each of these studies are listed in Table 1 and will now be discussed.

Table 1

Studies Assessing the Utility of the HLF SEL Trauma-Informed Curricula

• Ancona, M. R., & Mendelson, T. (2014). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a yoga and mindfulness intervention for schoolteachers. <i>Advances in School Mental Health Promotion</i>, 7(3), 156-170. • Dariotis, J. K., Mirabal-Beltran, R., Cluxton-Keller, F., Gould, L. F., Greenberg, M. T., & Mendelson, T. (2016a). A qualitative evaluation of student learning and skills used in a school-based mindfulness and yoga program. <i>Mindfulness</i>, 7(1), 76-89. • Dariotis, J. K., Mirabal-Beltran, R., Cluxton-Keller, F., Gould, L. F., Greenberg, M. T., & Mendelson, T. (2016b). “The program affects me ‘cause it gives away stress”: Urban students’ qualitative perspectives on stress and a school-based mindful yoga intervention. <i>Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing</i>, 12(6):
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Table 1 (cont'd)

- Feagans Gould, L., Mendelson, T., Dariotis, J. K., Ancona, M., Smith, A. S. R., González, A. A., Smith, A. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2014). Assessing fidelity of core components in a mindfulness and yoga intervention for urban youth: Applying the CORE Process. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 142: 59-81.
- Klusmann, B., Sanderman, R., & Schroevers, M. J. (2023). Delivering mindfulness in the classroom via a technology-enabled approach: Feasibility and the potential impact on teachers' psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and mindfulness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 122,103950
- Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M. T., Dariotis, J. K., Gould, L. F., Rhoades, B. L., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(7), 985-994.
- Mendelson, T., Dariotis, J. K., Feagans Gould, L., Smith, A. S. R., Smith, A. A., González, A. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2013). Implementing mindfulness and yoga in urban schools: A community-academic partnership. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(4), 276–291.
- Mendelson, T., & McAfee, C. (2016). Mindful moment program evaluation report. Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.
- Semple, R. J., Droutman, V., & Reid, B. A. (2017). Mindfulness goes to school: Things learned (so far) from research and real-world experiences. *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(1), 69–81.

In Table 2, below, these same nine studies are listed, noting the measures used in each of the work which assesses the utility of the HLF SEL trauma-informed curricula.

Table 2

Measures in Studies Assessing the Utility of the HLF SEL Trauma-Informed Curricula

	<i>Dosage</i>	<i>Efficacy</i>	<i>Feasibility & Acceptability</i>	<i>Fidelity</i>	<i>Preliminary Outcomes</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>	<i>Quantitative</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Virtual / Online</i>
1. Ancona, et al., 2014			•		•	•	•		
2. Dariotis, et al., 2016a					•	•		•	
3. Dariotis, et al., 2016b					•	•			
4. Feagans Gould, et al., 2014	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
5. Klusmann et al., 2023	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
6. Mendelson, et al., 2010			•		•	•	•		
7. Mendelson, et al., 2013	•	•	•	•	•	•			
8. Mendelson, et al., 2016	•			•	•	•			
9. Semple, et al., 2017		•	•		•	•			

Ancona and Mendelson (2014) examined mindfulness-based strategies to reduce teachers' stress levels. In a randomized pilot study, feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a 6-session yoga and mindfulness program were assessed. Snowball sampling methods were used to recruit 43 elementary and middle school teachers at seven schools in Baltimore who completed pre/post-test measures. The schools were similar regarding student demographics, test scores in science, math, and reading. Teachers were randomly assigned to an intervention or control condition and ranged in age from 20 to 50+. They were assessed using a Teacher Stress

Inventory, a self-report instrument used in other studies to test occupational stress (Fimian, 1988). In addition, Teacher Burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey which is used in more than 90% of research assessing teacher burnout (Maslach, et al., 1996). This is a 22-item self-report instrument with three sub scales of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Exhaustion and a seven-point frequency scale. This instrument has demonstrated important psychometric properties in diverse teacher samples with a high measure of internal consistency for scale reliability.

Participants completed initial pretest self-report measures. The seven schools were then randomly assigned to intervention or control, rather than randomizing teachers, to reduce teacher's sharing intervention materials. A random group of intervention participants were interviewed after the study ended to explore their experience. The intervention was designed by HLF Founders, Ali Smith, Atman Smith and Andrés González; participants engaged in six sessions over three weeks. A focus on breath, postures, mindfulness practices around themes of breath, stress, anger, thoughts, energy, and love. The program is designed to improve self-regulation.

Given the small sample size, the team examined trends in the data and effect sizes for the test group differences. Findings revealed that 72% of intervention participants completed 4 of 6 classes, qualitative feedback from participants and from the instructors was collected. The mean pre verses post difference scores showed that intervention participants showed a pattern of greater reduction in perceived stress. Group intervention differences in stress reduction were significant at the .10 level, ($t(41) -1.80, p=0.08$) group differences in emotional exhaustion scores were not ($t(41) -1.39, p=0.17$). "When a Bonferroni correction was applied, neither test was significant. Effect sizes were of medium magnitude for group differences in pre/post-

change in stress and emotional exhaustion. ($d=.54$ and $d=.42$),” p. 164. Preliminary data indicates promise in reducing perceived stress and emotional exhaustion through implementing such a program with schoolteachers. However, these results need to be reviewed with some caution because results were not statistically significant when used with a Bonferroni correction test, addressing data [on schoolteachers] with a medium effect size at the .01 level. Results did not hold up when more significant measures were applied. This pilot study was designed to examine trends in an intervention response and collect preliminary data. Future research might assess a broader range of outcomes, and include measures such as cortisol levels, invite classroom observations, and consider social desirability biases, while some teachers may just not want to participate. An increase in sample size is also needed.

In the next study, Dariotis, et al., (2016a) conducted a 16-week qualitative evaluation of 5th and 6th student learning and skills for students engaged in the HLF mindfulness and yoga program in underserved students in three Baltimore elementary schools. Team leaders collected qualitative data through six focus groups comprised of 22 participants. Boys and girls participated in the six focus groups using a semi-structured interview guide from the three intervention schools with groups ranging from two to six participants. Students were asked about topics relating to how youth define stress and what adults should know about youth and stress. They were also asked about new skills applied to stressful situations. The HLF trauma-informed curriculum was adapted from 4x a week for 45 minutes given to 4th and 5th graders to 2x a week for 35 minutes for this intervention study of 5th and 6th graders. The curriculum included breathwork, physical postures and discussions to reduce stress and improve mindful behaviors.

Results revealed that youth defined stress as an intense negative emotional state synonymous with depression, anger, and frustration and three themes emerged across all schools. Theme 1 focused on a lack of differentiation between stress and negative emotions. Students equated this with feelings of sadness, pressure, and apathy, not being motivated to go to school or complete tasks, even ignoring physical hygiene. Theme 2 comprised responses focused on interpersonal conflict as a major source of stress. This was especially evident in relationships with family and peers, or inequitable treatment by teachers. The third theme focused on the use of mindfulness and yoga skills, promoting impulse control, and reducing personal conflict. Participants reported increased emotional regulation through cognitive control and reducing negative behavioral reactions when engaging in yoga postures and breathing/mindfulness techniques.

Limitations of the skill applications were reported by some of the participants who found it difficult to walk away from conflict and employ learned strategies. It was also suggested that these skills might be useful later in life when greater stress might arise. This study then showed that the students had difficulty differentiating stress and negative emotions and reported interpersonal conflict as a major stress source. It was encouraging that the students reported that mindfulness and yoga skills could be helpful in controlling their emotions. At the same time, they reported difficulty walking away from conflict.

Within the same year, Dariotis, and colleagues (2016b) initiated a second research study to examine how youth define stress, and in what ways, if any, is a mindful yoga intervention helpful to alleviating stress in their lives. Focus group research followed a 16-week mindful yoga intervention led by HLF in Baltimore inner city schools. Researchers conducted focus groups with 22 middle school students from underserved, low income, urban communities.

These three themes emerged: (1) Youth conflated stress with negative emotions; (2) Peer and family conflicts are common stressors; and (3) Youth reported improved impulse control, and emotional regulation following the intervention. Qualitative data was collected through focus group meetings at the end of the 16-week intervention involving 22 fifth grade (n=8) and sixth grade (n=14) students ages 10-13. Teachers were invited to identify a diverse set of participants based on grade, sex, and program attendance participation. Focus groups revealed what youth may have learned about stress and how it affects their emotions and behaviors with insight on how the children might apply new skills to help manage stress. This review uses inductive coding to condense qualitative data into themes based on patterns in the data. schools. Post-intervention focus groups revealed three themes, (1) Youth identify and relate stress to negative emotions; (2) Peer and family conflicts are common stressors; and (3) Children reported improved behavioral responses, impulse control, and emotional self-regulation, given the tools shared during the intervention program. However, findings are based on a single study, implemented in three different schools by different instructors, and may not generalize to other programs or students. Further, participants who receive parental consent may be more motivated to learn these skills. Conversely, the program may have been more likely to enroll youth with behavioral problems. The study did not select a random sample of intervention participants for focus groups due to logistical constraints.

The work has several strengths, however; this research included voices of elementary and middle school fifth and sixth graders, whereas previous studies included only highschoolers, and college-aged youth. Worth noting, teachers *not* included in the intervention program *were included* in the study as secondary informants, providing a separate perspective on evolution of life skills through observing changes that the children in their classroom had

learned and applied. Focus groups and interviews reported on processes rather than outcome data from children and their teachers, which supports literature on the exploration of what skill(s) participants recalled and whether lessons translated into "real life" actions at home and in the classroom.

In the next HLF study, Feagans Gould, et al., (2014) examined the core components of HLF's mindfulness and yoga program for inner-city adolescents and assessed feasibility and potential benefits, examining how these components should be delivered to have the greatest impact. Through a systematic study of fidelity of implementation, the authors research the intervention delivery, and how it adheres to the protocol of the program model as intended by the program developers. Accordingly, the team reviewed the program in individual parts and integrated the curriculum through coherent theory of change. They next developed reliable and valid measures to assess the fidelity of implementation and establish criteria for implementation integrity. Finally, the team examined whether changes in implementation of core components are related to particular outcomes across replication of the curriculum. Core components were explicitly outlined and integrated into a formal theory of change. The outcome was presented as a *plan, do, study, act* cycle to address development, testing, and refinement of program *CORE* components (*C*onceptualize, *O*perationalize/measure, *R*un analysis/review implementation findings and *E*nhance/refine).

To develop the assessment framework and recommendations, the research team partnered with the Holistic Life Foundation to evaluate components. The program begins with several minutes of quiet breathing, then progresses to active yoga-based movements, followed by breathwork. Sessions end with a guided reflection, following the breath through meditative skills, sending positive energy to others, while imagining calmness in everyday life situations.

Three fidelity of implementation measures were used: (1) session inventory forms completed by HLF instructors (attendance, engagement & disruption; as well as homework completion: (2) independent observations of HLF sessions; and (3) focus groups qualitative data coded themes from select study participants and school personnel. Evaluators established fidelity of implementation benchmarks by assessing measures, reviewing implementation findings, refining implementation successes and challenges, then revisited core components of the HLF program with its developers. Table 3, below, presents the procedures and measurements used in this study.

Table 3

Fidelity of Implementation Measurement Scheme and Results

<i>FOI Dimension</i>	<i>Data Source</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>Criteria for "High Fidelity"</i>	<i>Average across Schools</i>	<i>Range across Schools</i>
Dosage	Session Inventory Form	No. of lessons delivered	Not set	27	24–32
	Session Inventory Form	No. of lessons attended	Not set	15.7	9.2–27.5
Responsiveness	Session Inventory Form	0 = very negative to 4 = very positive	3—Responded positively	3.55	3.48–3.74
	Observational Rating	0 = poor to 4 = excellent	3—Good responsiveness	<i>Not reliable</i>	<i>Not reliable</i>
Adherence: <i>Core Activities</i>	Session Inventory Form	<i>Mean of seven items:</i> 0 = none to 3 = all	2—Most activities covered	2.45	2.31–2.74
	Observational Rating	<i>Mean of fourteen items:</i> 0 = none to 3 = all	2—Most activities covered	2.36	2.28–2.40
Adherence: <i>Core Processes</i>	Session Inventory Form	<i>Mean of four items:</i> 0 = not at all effective to 3 = very effective	2—Most processes delivered effectively	2.63	2.43–2.84
	Observational Rating	<i>Mean of four items:</i> 0 = not displayed at all to 3 = displayed throughout session	2—Process behaviors displayed most of the time	2.71	2.43–2.92
Quality	Session Inventory Form	0 = very ineffective to 4 = very effective	3—Effective	3.65	3.33–3.70
	Observational Rating	0 = poor to 4 = excellent	3—Good	<i>Not reliable</i>	<i>Not reliable</i>

↑ *Qualitative data from focus groups with select participants and teachers* ↑

Feagans Gould, et al., 2014, p. 68.

The results indicate a fair amount of variation in program fidelity across schools, particularly related to the dosage of the program. One school offered 32 sessions, of which

students attended on average of 27.5 sessions, while another school offered 24 sessions, of which students attended an average of 9.2 sessions. The adherence, quality, and responsiveness were also lower at this school. Key challenges to the implementation were reported which center around the lack of administrative support. Noted hurdles included getting participating students from academic classes to the HLF program room, offering a consistent and appropriate space for the HLF to administer their program, compounded by challenged communications with HLF instructors regarding classroom academic scheduling.

Two new HLF program mechanisms surfaced as the team reflected on results with HLF leadership: (1) Compassion for self and others; and (2) Self-empowerment. HLF CORE Activities and Processes are aimed at helping youth regulate their thoughts and feelings, empowering them to realize they have choices in thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviors. It was reported that HLF CORE *activities* were reliably assessed. However, it was reported that HLF CORE *processes* were not reliably assessed, particularly this focused on the teacher's qualifying skill set, as the mindfulness field is still working through how best to assess qualifying skills and competencies. There is no single certifying body. Differing programs have varied levels of expertise teaching mindfulness and yoga routines.

It was reiterated that administrative support for program must come from the principal in close consultation with the teaching staff. An important outcome of the study demonstrated that youth reported the ability to better regulate their thoughts and feelings, empowering them to recognize they have choices in the way they feel, act, and behave.

As a result of this study, two new HLF program mechanisms evolved with HLF founders: compassion for self and others and self-empowerment. Instructors use the words, “love” and “respect” and guide activities. Initially, children are often uncomfortable with these

words but as the experience unfolds and students feel what it is like to be treated with compassion, they begin to use these same words in their own vocabulary and begin to model the behavior themselves. This is the translation effect which is a powerful indicator of reported success.

In this study, researchers were challenged in their attempt to define and observe “quality” and “skill” of mindfulness instructors, especially in their coding of qualitative data examining when an instructor is responding mindfully in the moment versus when the instructor may be moving off topic in the curriculum. Real world trials are messy, this study attempted to test CORE program components and core implementation fidelity components concurrently. One affects the other to record higher levels of program fidelity in a particular school setting. Researchers state the need to empirically test the relationship between hypothesized CORE components and key adolescent outcomes, correlating effective core components. Over time and across trials, researchers state their intention to build a rigorous theory of common program elements and contextual variables needed for SEL mindfulness programs to demonstrate youth development more positively.

Moving forward, an important review of the HLF online curriculum occurred this past year in 2023. Klusmann and colleagues examined feasibility and preliminary effects of a HLF SEL mindfulness program being delivered *in a virtual online setting*. HLF created this curriculum during the COVID 19 pandemic, whereby classroom teachers could play pre-recorded yoga mindful movement practices to K-5 elementary students. This longitudinal study included 64 teachers. During the first four months, teachers reported significant improvements in student self-efficacy in classroom management, increased levels of mindfulness behaviors and lower levels of perceived stress.

Teachers also reported perceived changes and improvement in their own teaching skills, suggesting a calming effect in the classroom. A longitudinal pre-post design assessed teachers across three time points during one school year (beginning of the school year T0, then four months into the academic year T1, and at the end of the school year T2). The study design included four public urban elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods. A total of 64 elementary school teachers voluntarily agreed to enter the study, of which, 60 filled in the survey at two assessment points. A total of 43 teachers completed all three questionnaires. A subgroup of 17 teachers also filled in weekly logbooks throughout the first four months of the study. Logbooks were collected each week by researchers. Self-reported questionnaires were used to measure study outcomes.

Questions regarding feasibility invited insight into: (1) frequency of practices; (2) current implementation with use of practice materials and using students as role models, maybe even having students lead the practices; (3) the time/reason that a practice was delivered in class, (e.g., after a test, before the school day begins, at the end of the day, after long periods of concentration, when the class was restless, etc.); (4) whether they had followed the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* curricular practices (every time/almost always/sometimes/never); (5) whether the program interfered with delivering their given curriculum required by the state (using an 11 point Likert scale ranging from not at all - to completely); and (6) potential factors that helped them deliver content through open ended questions where teachers could discuss barriers that made it easy or difficult to administer.

Perceived stress was measured with a four-item Perceived Stress Scale. Professional burnout was assessed with two scales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey, a nine-item subscale assessing emotional exhaustion. Affects were assessed with the Positive and

Negative Affect Schedule, 20 questions about respective emotions in teaching situations. Self-efficacy was assessed using a Classroom Management of the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale, an eight-item subscale used to assess how teachers perceive ability to help students understand the rules and in turn, support the flow of classroom management. The researchers used the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, a 15-item observational tool to assess awareness of thoughts, actions, feelings, and experiences. Finally, an open-ended question was posted at the end of the questionnaire at T1 and T2 asking how the teachers perceived the impact of the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* curriculum was affecting their own lives.

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers one month into the school year (October T0). A second assessment took place four months later (February T1) and the third at the end of the school year (June T2). All participants signed informed consent and received a \$10 gift card for each completed questionnaire. After data was collected at each point, a thematic inductive analysis was applied to the survey's open-ended questions. SPSS was used to carry out all quantitative analysis. No imputation methods were applied. Sample descriptives were assessed at baseline. (n=64 teachers), sex (n= 58 female and n=6 male), age (mean =39.66 with a SD of 12.90), years of teaching experience (11.58 with a SD of 9.15), years at this school (mean =5.16 with a SD of 5.80). Correlations between demographics and outcome variables were assessed at baseline T0, age, cultural identity, teaching experience, years teaching at the school, class management abilities, perceived stress, positive effect, negative effect, burn out/exhaustion, burn out/accomplishment, and mindfulness observations of thoughts/feelings/experiences. Repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to compare the means of all variables across all three timepoint: self-efficacy of classroom management, perceived stress, positive affect, negative affect, exhaustion, accomplishment, mindfulness. Pairwise

comparisons examined the periods in which changes took place. Measures for perceived stress and self-efficacy in classroom management changed significantly over the first four months (T0-T1). In the second half of the year, however, perceived stress and self-efficacy in classroom management only slightly increased, resulting in no significant change over time in these outcomes across the whole school year. However, a significant gradual change in the measure of mindfulness was shown from the beginning of the school year through the end of the school year (T0-T2). Ultimately, evidence was found for the program's effectiveness in supporting both student emotional development and reduction in teacher stress.

This study presents the first insights into the feasibility and potential impact on teachers who offer mindfulness PA training through a pre-recorded online forum. This could be a powerful tool to improve education and well-being at elementary schools more broadly around the country and more globally. Across 64 teachers, 90% were female with a mean age of 40 years and about 12 years of teaching experience. About two-thirds identified as African American, one-fifth identified as Caucasian.

- Frequency: through questionnaires, teachers reported practicing the mindful movement curriculum about three times a week (observed at T1 and T2).
- Implementation: through logbooks, teachers reported distinct phases of implementation, some using practice videos after four months, while others had student leaders.
- Time/reason: teachers reported to use practices before transitions such as the start of the day, after recess, and when students were restless.
- Teacher preparation: of 17 teachers turning in logbooks, 11 described participating in the PA yoga and breathing practices themselves.

Researchers tracked key variables: (1) The first was interference: On a scale of 0 – 10, teachers reported low interference (2.2) with delivering the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* curriculum as a part of providing their required educational curriculum; (2) facilitators/barriers of the curriculum being delivered: Teachers described the ease of the video use to explain the program v. broken technology or slow/no internet to deliver connection. Results revealed that teachers described enjoying the content v. duration might make children fall asleep. It was voiced that times to use the curriculum and getting into a routine was important but might be impeded by noise in the building or time constraints. Finally, students reported asking for the breathing and mindfulness program and would remind teachers it was time to practice. The program invited behavioral changes to disruptive students who were perceived to be more on task after the program was delivered. Overall, teachers described the calming impact the curriculum had on their classes stating it improved emotional regulation of the students. The program functioned as a reminder to take a pause through exercises that included breathing and mindful movement. It further offered heightened self-awareness and was reported to have improved overall well-being and health as a point of positivity.

Limitations of the study were reported. Because the study was administered at the schoolwide level throughout the entire year, a control condition was not possible. Because teachers may have benefited from having a break during the school day while students participated in video-led exercises or other circumstances, this may have impacted results, and it was not measured. The researchers were unable to control for this variable.

The study provides preliminary results; utilizing more extensive and controlled trials might offer robust findings with a greater magnitude of effects. For example, examining available technology resources, program fidelity, student engagement or how to implement the

curriculum more sustainably might be considered in future studies. In conclusion, the researchers determined that the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* program can serve as an important SEL tool to promote psychological functioning in students, aid in teachers' perceptions of classroom management, and enhance mindfulness skills. The *Bridging Academics & the Mind* curriculum was shown to provide beneficial effects on teaching staff and students.

In the next study contributing to a review of HLF trauma-informed curriculum, Mendelson, and colleagues (2010) initiated the first pilot study to test elements of the HLF SEL curriculum. Utilizing a randomized control trial design these investigators assessed the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary outcomes of a HLF SEL school-based mindfulness and stress reduction yoga intervention. Four public inner-city Baltimore schools were randomized to an intervention or wait-listed control condition. Participants included (n=97) fourth and fifth grade students, 81 identified as African American and four identified as Latino, four identified as White and seven identified as mixed race. Of the 97 participants selected, 59 were female.

It was hypothesized that after a 12-week intervention the students would reduce involuntary stress responses while improving mental health outcomes and social skills. Participants at the intervention schools attended 45-minute sessions of a mindfulness program during school hours, four days per week for 12 weeks. Two HLF instructors per class provided the training in the school gym, to the 25 students with fourth and fifth graders combined. Stress responses, depressive symptoms, and peer relations were assessed at baseline and post intervention using quantitative assessments. At the end of the programming, focus groups were

convened to evaluate experiences and learn the extent to which life skills might be translated into everyday living stress relief.

Students reported that they had positive experiences with the program and that the skill(s) learned helped them in their daily lives. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there were no significant differences at pretest between students in the two study conditions on any psychosocial outcome variables. Researchers assessed the linear model separately for each outcome, controlling for gender, age, grade, and baseline score on that outcome and found that the intervention group reported significant improvements on the overall skill of Involuntary Engagement compared to the controls. Significant differences were found on three of five subscales (on the Involuntary Engagement Coping Scale): rumination ($p < .01$), intrusive thoughts ($p < .01$), and emotional arousal ($p < .01$). Groups did not differ with respect to changes in positive affect or in relationships with peers and teachers but a trend for control group members reported more trust in friends than intervention members ($p < 0.06$). Findings suggest a mindful-based intervention is feasible in urban public schools, especially those serving chronically stressed and disadvantaged youth. Further, findings show promise for children in reducing problematic physiological and cognitive response patterns to stress, making this program to be attractive to students, teachers, and administrators.

Of the 97 participants selected, 59 were female. They were recruited from four different Baltimore public elementary schools. In the informed consent letter, students were advised that only 25 children could be enrolled in the study per school, and that an additional 25 students would be randomly selected from among those who provided assent with parental consent. The final sample comprised 55 fourth grade students with an average age of 9.7 years, and 42 fifth grade students with an average age of 10.6 years.

Participants completed a Response to Stress Questionnaire, a 57-item self-report checklist assessing voluntary and involuntary responses to social stress in youth. Using factor analysis across three independent samples, researchers confirmed a factor structure (a correlated relationship between a number of variables said to measure a particular construct) for sex and for the type of stressor.

The researchers wanted to better understand intrusive thoughts, rumination, emotional and physiological responses, and impulse actions. The short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire for Children was used to assess depressive symptoms. It is a 13-item self-report scale, inviting responses over two weeks. The Emotional Profile inventory is a 24-item self-report scale used to assess children's positive and negative emotions. Using a four-point scale, ranging from not much to most of the time, researchers intend on capturing feelings of happiness and anger in the youth's daily experiences. Finally, a People in My Life survey was used to evaluate participants' relationships with peers, parents, friends, school, and neighborhood. It is also a self-report measure. Low reliability findings from two scales (Alienation/Dissatisfaction with Friends and the School Bonding) were omitted due to reliability challenges in the sample.

Participants at the intervention schools attended 45-minute sessions of a mindfulness program during school hours, four days per week for 12 weeks. Two HLF instructors per class provided the training in the school gym, to the 25 students with fourth and fifth graders combined. The class was taught during a resource period in which all students engage in non-academic activities. All questions were read aloud. Students then participated in the mindful movement yoga-based PA, breathwork, and stress reduction guided practices. At the end of the programming, focus groups were convened to evaluate experiences and learn the extent to which life skills might be translated into everyday living stress relief.

The intervention is secular and did not use religious terms or unusual content for this cultural context. The exercise trained the children to use their breath to calm their minds and enhance capacity for greater focus, offering awareness of cognitive, physiologic, and bodily states - teaching children how to regulate those states. Instructors helped students identify stressors and offered mental skills to respond. A focal point on how to keep the mind and body healthy was woven into mindful breathing practices, which was encouraged to continue outside of class. *This was the first randomized control trial of a school-based SEL mindfulness and stress reduction program using a yoga-centered PA intervention for urban youth.*

Five students did not complete the study, and other students did not complete all post-intervention measures, so sample sizes range from 42 to 47 in the intervention group and 40 to 43 in the control group. Researchers compared intervention and control group participants with respect to age, grade, sex, and baseline scores of all measures using ANOVA to determine differences between research results from three or more unrelated groups of continuous variables and Chi-square tests for categorical variables to learn whether there is a statistically significant difference between expected frequencies and the observed results. There were no significant differences between students in the two measures of study conditions on any psychosocial outcome variables. Researchers assessed linear model separately for each outcome, controlling for gender, age, grade, and baseline score on that outcome. Gender was entered as a covariate given psychosocial outcome measure at baseline. The intervention group reported significant improvements in the overall skill of Involuntary Engagement compared to the controls. Significant differences were found on three of five subscales on the Responses to Stress Questionnaire: rumination ($p < .01$), intrusive thoughts ($p < .01$), and emotional arousal ($p < .01$). A trend emerged in the predicted direction for measures on Impulsive Action ($p < 0.07$),

and Psychologic Arousal ($p < 0.07$). Patterns consistent with predictions for depressive symptoms were evidenced in the data responses. Groups did not differ with respect to changes in positive affect or in relationships with peers and teachers but *a trend for control group members reported more trust in friends than intervention members ($p < 0.06$)*.

Results suggest a mindful-based intervention is feasible in urban public schools, especially those serving chronically stressed and disadvantaged youth. Further, findings show promise for children in reducing problematic physiological and cognitive response patterns to stress, making this program to be attractive to students, teachers, and administrators.

Relative to Aim 1: Intervention feasibility and acceptability, student recruitment was easy to obtain; but only 18 students at one intervention school completed 75% of the classes. Under 40% completed sessions at the second intervention school. Three focus groups were conducted with three to seven intervention participants in each group. Students reported that they had positive experiences with the program and that the skill learned helped them in their daily lives.

Aim 2: Preliminary youth outcome results showed the program was effective in reducing problematic and volunteering engagement responses to social stress among intervention youth. Researchers decided that youth self-report measures of executive functioning (e.g., attention) may be influenced by social desirability and other sources of bias, thus not assessed. Future studies might include teacher reports of behavior, student grades, and test scores and physiological measures capture changes associated with mindfulness and stress reduction yoga (e.g., cortisol). Limitations include a non-randomized design, a small sample size which precluded rigorous tests of moderation or mediation and limited power to detect group differences. The team did not utilize hierarchical linear models given the small number of

schools in the sample (recommendations suggest 20 as a minimum, 50 as a preference, and 100 as very adequate) but this would present formidable challenges, randomizing by child or by classrooms within the schools. Recruitment methods also likely biased the sample toward highly motivated students and those with parents who could sign a consent form in a timely turnaround. Finally, youth self-report measures may be influenced by social desirability. In this pilot intervention study, implementation was not evaluated for fidelity and/or quality.

The final evaluation, however, supports previous research that suggests mindfulness-based approaches may be beneficial in improving stress responses in youth. Improving regulatory capacities and introducing stress reduction techniques has exciting potential to facilitate PYD and positive emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

“An important thing I learned in the program is that that it’s all different ways to deal with your stress, like instead of fighting and stuff.” – 5th grade boy.

“The program has helped me because now I know different routines and exercises that I can do at home that help me lower and reduce my stress. So, whenever I get stressed out, I can just do a pose and sometimes I can show my mother and my family.” – 4th grade girl.

Moving to the next study, Mendelson, and colleagues (2013) initiated an assessment of challenges and opportunities associated with HLF implementing mindfulness-based stress reduction yoga practices in an urban school setting, only this time, they included the HLF founders as co-authors in the research analysis. The HLF trauma-informed curriculum is aimed at improving strength and flexibility, coaching children in breathing practices for stress reduction and other health benefits, and teaches mindfulness-based interventions to enhance compassion, promote improved attention, focused awareness, and self-regulations of thoughts and emotions. Psychosocial interventions are more often developed in academic research

settings and tested in efficacy trials under optimal conditions before being evaluated in applied settings. The school setting is a real-world space which gives better insight into developing and accessing children's SEL, cognitive, and prosocial development. This paper uses a case study approach to reflect on experiences of a six-year community-academic partnership, conducting two school-based randomized trials on a mindfulness and stress reduction yoga program developed by the HLF and delivered to middle school students in an urban setting of public schools in the greater Baltimore, MD area. In the trial under study, HLF instructors deliver a mindfulness program to fifth and sixth grade students at two intervention schools during the school day (five days a week), twice per day, for 15-weeks. Assessments are conducted in all schools at baseline, post-intervention, at six months following the study, then finally at 12 months after completion.

One aim of the partnership is to develop a rigorous research agenda to evaluate the impact of HLF mindfulness and stress reduction yoga program – specifically to assess feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary outcomes to inform further intervention refinement. The final discussion explores challenges and opportunities of integrating mindful movement practices within the school context, to lay the groundwork for larger-scale trials and dissemination. “A growing evidence base highlights that implementation factors in a real – world context, have a profound impact on intervention outcomes” (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Researchers deemed community partnerships to be a valuable way to promote advances in prevention science.

Implementation critical elements reported for success include (1) Administrative support: principal, vice principal, and teacher support translate directly into greater teacher

involvement and youth engagement. (2) Logistics: affects consistency, and quality of program delivery. (3) A dedicated space: demonstrates its value to the school and the children. (4) Teacher involvement: ensures student success, attendance, and engagement. When teachers are supported and trained, it has a significant effect on outcomes. (5) Student engagement: developing interest is key to attracting students to actively participate.

Using personal and pop culture references, the team builds trust and helps connect with students as they confront life's challenges. Researchers advocated the timing delivery so as not to compete with other popular activities. The trial under study involved two classes per week offered during resource time when students have non-academic specialty classes like gym, art, and music that varied by day. It was important for researchers to identify the level of density at a rate high enough to produce skill acquisition and low enough to maintain student interest and avoid interfering with other school programming. In a previous trial, students met four times a week instead of twice a week and showed encouraging effects in the ability to self-regulate thoughts and emotions and response to stress. PYD can make a lasting difference with students who are too often facing challenges in their home lives, many have lost family and friends to neighborhood violence. Critical elements for successful school-based program research involves three-way communication between researchers, school personnel, and HLF intervention facilitators. Parental consent was needed for participation. A closed group format provided adherence to fidelity, training of teachers, and promoted better morale among students.

Key barriers associated with the program included securing consistent administrative support and teacher engagement. There often is a high turnover of principals and teachers in urban schools. Support at the beginning of the year may start out at a high level, but as demands on teachers advanced with the school year (especially around testing times), support may

diminish with competing demands so a high-level of communication and flexibility was needed to ensure quality control. The study reported that stress reduction yoga delivered during the school day offered unique benefits of promoting improved academic learning and student behavior, enhancing the school climate, and contributing to a more compassionate learning place with self-aware teachers and students. Finally, the curriculum was demonstrated to affect positive change in the livelihoods of students and teachers as the SEL curriculum was translated and applied to other areas of their lives. It is this change that was reported to be transformational; the HLF connected with the students and teachers through a lens of compassion.

In yet another study by led by Mendelson and McAfee, (2016) the researchers prepared an HLF evaluation to assesses core components of the *Mindful Moment* program as it was being implemented over a one-year period at both Patterson High School (with 1,100 students) and Robert W. Coleman Elementary School (with 350 students). Both urban schools are in Baltimore, MD. School climate data was reviewed, and qualitative interviews were conducted. Participants included elementary school students ages 5-12 and high school students ages 15-19. Data collection included total enrollment, number of suspension incidents, number of suspended students, students with multiple suspensions, at risk for chronic absenteeism, cumulative attendance rate. All interviews were conducted on school premises with researchers and subjects in private rooms and recorded with an audio recording and subsequently transcribed by the lead author. Interview transcripts were reviewed and coded.

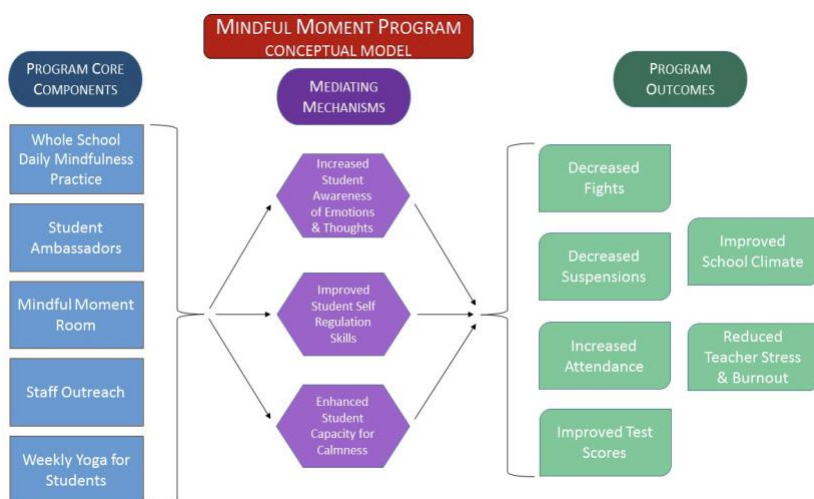
The key aim was to evaluate aspects of the HLF program that have been implemented at each school and explore program components that are perceived as beneficial for students and/or teachers. It was important to identify components of the program that were perceived as

less useful or requiring modification in the core curriculum. These components were aimed at stress reduction and mindful movement to improve self-regulation, self-awareness, self-management, emotional management, evolving empathy, conflict resolution, improved communication, relationship development and responsible decision making.

One particular outcome of this assessment was the creation of conceptual model of the HLF *Mindful Moment* Program; see Figure 6, below.

Figure 6

Mindful Moment Program Conceptual Model



Note: The *Mindful Moment* Conceptual Model was created by Mendelson, et al., 2016, p. 4.

This *Mindful Moment* program evaluation utilized HLF founders, community partners, educators, administrators, and students to ensure all stakeholders were considered in the refinement of the curricular programming.

The evaluation outcomes demonstrated improvements in students' ability to regulate their emotions and responses to stress by 72.7%. Stress reduction was reported by 63.6% of teachers. Implementation problems were reported by all who were surveyed, citing inconsistency in the program, needing greater organization and more of a presence in the

school, regular staffing, improved communication with HLF staff and teachers. Perceived personal benefits to students were reported by 63.6% of those surveyed.

Limitations included that not all students wanted to participate, students were prohibited from using the room for religious practices. Field trips and food were also promised and may have been perceived as incentives for program involvement. Suggestions for program improvement include increasing the variety of mindfulness practices, offering more training and refresher sessions, offering more work to the children not interested in participating in the *Mindful Moment*, providing consistent space.

“What made me interested is when we did an impromptu survey on how our children, experience, death, and the number of deaths that they experienced were alarming. I like it to having post – traumatic stress disorder as soldiers do however, our children is not post, because they are not removed from the situation... So, it came out of that” (Mendelson, et al., 2016, p. 6).

“Just awareness. Just awareness. I had a situation just about 20 minutes ago. A student was on 1000, and just because I reminded him of who’s talking to him, and that maybe now is the time that you can take a deep breath. When I say things like that, they know what I’m talking about. Whether they actually engage in the practice or not, they know what it means when I say, ‘This is probably a Mindful Moment time.’ If I mention that, then they’re going to know we’re talking about breathing, we’re talking about relaxing, we’re talking about settling yourself. I would say that just awareness has been the biggest change” (Mendelson, et al., 2016, p. 7.)

“Made positive changes. We see a lot less fighting...Kids are more calm and happy” (Mendelson, et al. 2016, p. 19).

“It’s definitely the place to go instead of, you know, being alone, you can be with somebody... That they’re not judgmental, they’re very welcoming, arms open, you can come talk to them about anything... You can go like I said, go and talk to – – anything about anybody and they don’t ask questions, you can just go to them and talk to them if you’re feeling like glum or down or something, it’s pretty nice. They’re some nice people” (Mendelson, et al., 2016 p. 20).

The next research to include HLF was conducted in 2017, when Semple, Drouman and Reid conducted a literature review to summarize how mindfulness practices impact stress reduction in youth through the examination of qualitative indicators of feasibility, acceptability, efficacy, and effectiveness. Their sample size included ten mindfulness-based programs being implemented in K-12 school programs, with HLF being included as one of the ten programs reviewed (see Table 4 below). Criteria for selection was set to illustrate variety and diversity of approaches. Authors pulled literature from PubMed, PsycInfo, ERIC using the internet. Inclusion criteria addressed: mindfulness as the primary focus of the program, in use for more than one year, conducted in more than one school, were replicable, had little or no published research support, and intended for conventional classrooms. Semi-structured interviews with at least one of the founders or developers of each program were conducted. Program materials were reviewed, and data evaluated. This chart below lays out a side-by-side comparison of each of the programs assessed.

Table 4

Comparative Youth Mindfulness Programs

Program	Began	Target Population(s)	Primary Program Aims	Instructional Format	Key Components	Duration	Resources
Mindful Moment (MM)	2014	Elementary & high school	Similar to SRMC	MM-trained-instructor-led classes, followed by a “whole school” curriculum, with audio recordings and a “Mindful Moment Room”	Similar to SRMC	15 minutes, twice daily, conducted throughout school year	http://hlfinc.org
Wellness and Resilience Program (WRP)	2008	Pre-K to 12	Reduce teacher stress; increase enthusiasm for teaching; teach children about their “inner experiences” through art and nature; learn mindfulness meditation for relaxation	Teacher-led “whole school” curriculum, supported by WRP-trained “mindfulness coaches”	Focused breathing, body scan, progressive muscle relaxation, music, tactile perceptual activities, mandala coloring, use of “snow globes” and “breathing buddies,” “peace corners,” and “time-in” spaces	Variable time depending on teacher’s familiarity with program, conducted throughout school year	www.talkaboutwellness.org MacNeil et al. (2011)
Inner Explorer	2007	Pre-K to K Grades 1–5 Grades 6–8	Strengthen self-awareness; promote self-management of emotions	Prerecorded MP3s	Mindfulness education, breath meditation, body scan, progressive muscle relaxation, personal journaling	5–10 minutes, daily for 10–18 weeks Pre-K to K has 50×5-minute segments Other two programs have 90×10-minute segments	www.innerexplorer.org Bakosh (2013) Bakosh et al. (2016)
Master Mind	2009	Grades 4–5	Mindfulness education; substance abuse prevention	Teacher-led curriculum	Mindful breathing; “mindful journeys” (e.g., body scan and mindful eating); mindful movement; everyday mindfulness; daily home practice	15 minutes, daily for 4 weeks	www.irtinc.us Parker & Kupersmidt (2016) Parker et al. (2014)
Moment Program	2010	Grades 6–7	Promotion of healthy peer relationships; improve academic performance	Teacher-led curriculum	Similar to Master Mind	15 minutes, daily for 4 weeks	www.irtinc.us Parker et al. (in preparation)
Mindfulness and Mind-Body Skills for Children (MMBS)	1999	Ages 3–13	Enhance self-awareness; improve self-efficacy and resilience; develop social-emotional skills; prevent risky behaviors; improve learning potential	MMBS-trained-instructor-led classes, which teachers then integrate into a “whole school” curriculum	Awareness of breath and body sensations, sounds, movement, thoughts, and emotions. Yoga, “loving kindness” practice, guided imagery, and “mindful circles”	45 minutes, once weekly for a minimum of 2 years	http://mindbody-il.com Limone (2011) Sheinman (2014) Sheinman et al. (2011)
Mindful Schools (MS)	2007	Grades K–5 Grades 6–12	Build attention, self-regulation, and empathy	Teacher-led classes, facilitated by teachers who have attended an MS training program	Breath and body exercises; mindfulness in sensory modes (e.g., listening and eating); mindfulness of thoughts and emotions. Teachers learn about neurobiology of mindfulness and communicating about mindfulness	15 minutes, 2 to 3 times weekly for 10–15 weeks K-5 program has 30 modules 6–12 program has 25 modules	www.mindfulschools.org Black & Fernando (2014) Fernando (2013) Smith et al. (in preparation)

Table 4 (cont'd)

Program	Began	Target Population(s)	Primary Program Aims	Instructional Format	Key Components	Duration	Resources
Resilient Kids (RK)	2009	Grades K–12	Teach self-regulation and emotional equanimity; improve self-confidence; improve focus and ability to transition between tasks; build stronger and healthier school communities; reduce behavioral problems, violence, and bullying	RK-trained-instructor-led classes	Yoga, breath work, mindfulness practices, discussions, journaling, storytelling, games, and drawing	30 minutes, twice weekly for 32 weeks	www.resilientkids.org
Still Quiet Place (SQP)	2003	Ages 5–18	Improve affective and behavioral self-regulation and general well-being	SQP trained instructor-led classes with pre-recorded CDs/MP3s for home practice	Breathing and feeling practices, body-scan, thought-watching practices, mindful eating, walking meditation, “love and kindness” practice	30–60 minutes, once weekly for 8 weeks	www.stillquietplace.com Goldin et al. (2006) Saltzman & Goldin (2008)
Stress Reduction and Mindfulness Curriculum (SRMC)	2010	Elementary & middle school	Improve affective self-regulation; social-emotional wellness; anger management; problem resolution; and interpersonal relationships	SRMC-trained-instructor-led classes	Yoga, meditation, breathing, tai-chi, centering, and other mindfulness techniques	45 minutes, 4 times weekly for 12 weeks or 2 times weekly for 24 weeks	http://hlfinc.org Mendelson et al. (2010) Mendelson et al. (2013)

Semple, Drouman, & Reid, 2017. Mindfulness Program Comparison, p. 33-36.

Questions that guided data collection included: “(1) What research is available for assessing the effectiveness of these programs? (2) What are the central components of the program? (3) How feasible are these programs to implement in school settings? (4) What program components may be essential contributors to the positive outcomes reported by the students, teachers, and parents? What components may be less essential? (5) What frequency, intensity, and duration of mindfulness training are necessary to achieve the desired aim? (6) What degree of teacher training and/or personal commitment is required to implement these programs? (7) What do all the programs have in common and how do they differ? (8) How sustainable are these programs for the long term? (9) What potential negative effects of mindfulness with youth are being considered or evaluated? and (10) What protections should be considered when working with potentially vulnerable child or adolescent populations?” (p. 31).

Researchers describe the program's aims and structure. The authors discuss program development, structure/aims/description, program evaluation, and strengths and limitations of each study included in the analysis. Program implementation, feasibility, dosage, assessment evaluative strengths and limitations are noted as all ten programs are assessed. Each program described in the study consists of components of mindfulness that cultivate attention and concentration with supporting theories and aims. The authors stated that none of these studies had been evaluated through rigorous, randomized control trials, conducted by researchers independent of program developers, nor are they sufficiently powered and controlled for implementation fidelity, and to control threats to internal validity. None of these studies have been evaluated longitudinally to examine long-term benefits or potential risks. However, most studies report positive outcomes, derived from self-report or observational data obtained from participants or stakeholders. The research is confounded by small sample sizes and weak research designs. Mindfulness programs being implemented in schools are reported as feasible to implement and acceptable to many school administrators, teachers, and students. The authors encourage researchers to evaluate programs using objective quantifiable metrics to examine psychological outcomes with rigorous attention to neurological changes, performance/success metrics, health outcomes, or observable behavioral changes. Future studies that combine controlled research methodologies with community – based program evaluations are a credible way to bring multidisciplinary perspectives into complex educational programming.

It is encouraging that several studies have been conducted on the HLF SEL curriculum. Results are encouraging as they have demonstrated some support for elements of the HLF SEL curriculum efficacy. Specifically, qualitative studies have found that students show improvements in managing emotional regulation, developing greater self-awareness and

empathy for others while evolving relationships. At the same time results have not always been significant and the bulk of the research is plagued by design issues such as small sample sizes, the inability to randomly assign participants, participants adherence over time with fidelity and dosage being a challenge.

Studies using qualitative methods have shown participants have demonstrated greater self-regulation of managing emotions, achieving positive goals, and showing empathy for others. School administrators have reported reduced detention and suspension from school, greater emotional management which has translated into reducing conflicts. This increased empathy has evolved positive relationships with peers and adults, helping students to improve responsible decision making. Qualitative studies have also allowed investigators to identify program facilitators (e.g., having a dedicated space for the program improves participation, with regular scheduling in the day accounts for improvements in structure, thus fidelity and dosage improve). Teacher involvement that models the HLF SEL curriculum, especially when teachers relate to the students they serve, demonstrate the importance of the work and increases student engagement, which aids in classroom management and reduces teacher burnout. So then, elevating teacher engagement brings many rewards to the classroom.

There are a number of barriers to HLF project implementation cited, these barriers include, but are not limited to: (1) availability of curricular time is limited, (2) workloads of educators challenge time available to participate, (3) teacher stress and burnout limits consideration of taking on one more thing to help the students succeed, (4) resource and budget limitations, (5) access to teacher professional development, (6) students not taking the curriculum seriously, (7) not having a dedicated space, (8) communications breakdowns between HLF staff and teachers/administrators.

Finally, several studies have looked at the effects of the program on teachers and found improvements in teachers stress levels when they incorporate mindful movement into their classroom schedule as the classrooms become more manageable, learning environment improvements are evidenced by increased focus of the students that results in improved behavior management and more positive relationships. This may also account for improved learning as evidenced by classroom attendance and grades. Reporting on overall improvements in the school climate are a key indicator of achievement.

While more outcome research needs to be conducted like the studies here that focus on specific aspects of the curriculum, there is also a need to more holistically examine the HLF SEL curriculum, especially since it is now being transported and used in other communities. Specifically, the HLF is showing promising results by teaching children the transferable life skill of mindful movement with breathing to self-regulate the body. The HLF curricular tools provide valuable life skills that enable students to better manage emotions and evolve empathy for themselves and others, which ultimately help the children create new patterns for improved livelihoods. There is so much more to curricula that transfers life skills to participants which is worthy of a deeper examination. For example, an evaluation investigation of the program led to a greater understanding of program development over time, noting what the curriculum consists of (different studies have tested different components in interventions that differ in their length), how it is best delivered, how it is received by the students, and what challenges the program administrators and implementers faced in its original development. It is also important to note strategies that were and were not effective in meeting challenges while implementing the program. Whom does the program work with, when, and for how long? Who fails? Why do they fail? A utilization-focused evaluation guided the assessment. Accordingly, this study

assessed the program from a holistic perspective, with a special emphasis on how it developed, challenges encountered in its implementation and how it was viewed by its users. For this reason, a Utilization-focused Evaluation of the program was conducted to support informed decision-making on improvements, and meaningful evidence to support effective actions moving forward.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Guiding Utilization Focused Evaluation Framework

"Program evaluation can be defined as “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, for use by people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions” (Patton, 2008, p. 39)." Program evaluation is a systematic assessment tool designed to help stakeholders improve social conditions that impact wellbeing. Social programs are intended to benefit a population or improve a condition as demonstrated in the following quote.

Educators, policy makers and philanthropists create programs to address social problems, inviting evaluators to apply social science research methods to provide answers on effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities, with intentions to provide stakeholders with ideas for improvement, growth, and replication of best practices. To be effective, a social program is focused on diagnosing the problem it is intending to address. It adopts a feasible design capable of improving the problem, it must be well implemented in a manner consistent with the design, and actually improve outcomes for population targeted by the program...Different domains of program evaluation address questions related to each of these aspects of social programs using concepts and methods appropriate to those questions (Rossi, et al., 2004).

This evaluation research was sought to better understand the significance of how the HLF SEL curriculum was developed and implemented and, in so doing, help other implementers develop similar programs for a broader group of students to achieve related specific goals.

Program evaluations often use qualitative data as the primary source of information. When we advance understanding through qualitative methods, it allows us to get a better sense of the data, with nuances becoming more apparent. Program evaluations assess effectiveness and goals, examining the extent to which a program has been implemented as expected. Did any unanticipated consequences result? What is the data showing us with respect to merits of the program? How were participant needs met and what benefits were derived? Noting strengths and weaknesses, what conclusions can I draw upon from the aggregate to the collective?

Theory-based evaluation is an analytical model, a concept framework used to undertake an evaluation. The Utilization-focused Evaluation model should be applied when the intended outcome is for discrete decision-making. I have identified stakeholders (future teachers/principals/educational leaders) as the end users of this study; these are the individuals who will have the most to gain from the evaluation and its results. The intended impact of this evaluation for teachers is utilize the information to improve classroom climates, while providing stress reduction techniques that enhance their own wellbeing and that of their students. By implementing the HLF curriculum in classrooms, teachers will be sharing a toolbox with children that offer pathways to pro-social behaviors, academic success, and perceived positive mental and physical health outcomes. The evaluation is intended to offer principals and educational leaders' insight into curricula that supports improvements in the school climate through conflict resolution techniques. The goal is to help reduce/eliminate suspensions and improve time to degree graduation rates, through a SEL PYD trauma-informed curricula implemented for more than 20 years. The overall intended impact of the evaluation is to provide information to educators and policy makers that are investing in the improvement of learning outcomes of children and community members. Since research has demonstrated that an SEL

curriculum can enhance student learning outcomes, improve mental health, and reduce stress in students and teachers/staff while supporting wellbeing in teachers, it is imperative that educational policy makers invest in supporting further research on professional development of teachers to increase teacher satisfaction/retention as well as student success. This will substantiate the impact of SEL curriculum on both students and teachers. Further study is critical to advancing learning outcomes, especially employing trauma-informed curricula.

Throughout this evaluation method, Patton refers to the “personal factor” in which he suggests engaging intended users at every stage of the process (Patton, 2012). The evaluator must reinforce utility through a connection to end-users, so they feel ownership of the process and its results. The work is then considered with the Theory of Change, how and why change is expected to happen in a particular context.

Michael Patton has developed theoretical underpinnings for Utilization-focused Evaluation that focus on outcomes rather than goals. His Utilization-focused Evaluation Theory states that “evaluations should be judged by their utility and actional use” (Patton, 2012). When considering an intended use, the stakeholder is the focal point, the purpose of the evaluation targets stakeholder values (in this case, teachers and educational teams considering the adoption of the HLF trauma-informed curriculum). To help guide those conducting Utilization-focused Evaluation Patton (2012) has identified the following 17 steps that should be followed when conducting any evaluation (See Table 5 below). These steps will guide this evaluation.

Table 5

Essentials of Utilization-focused Evaluation

- Step 1 Assess and build program and organizational readiness for Utilization-focused evaluation.
- Step 2 Assess and enhance evaluator readiness to undertake a Utilization-focused evaluation.

Table 5 (cont'd)

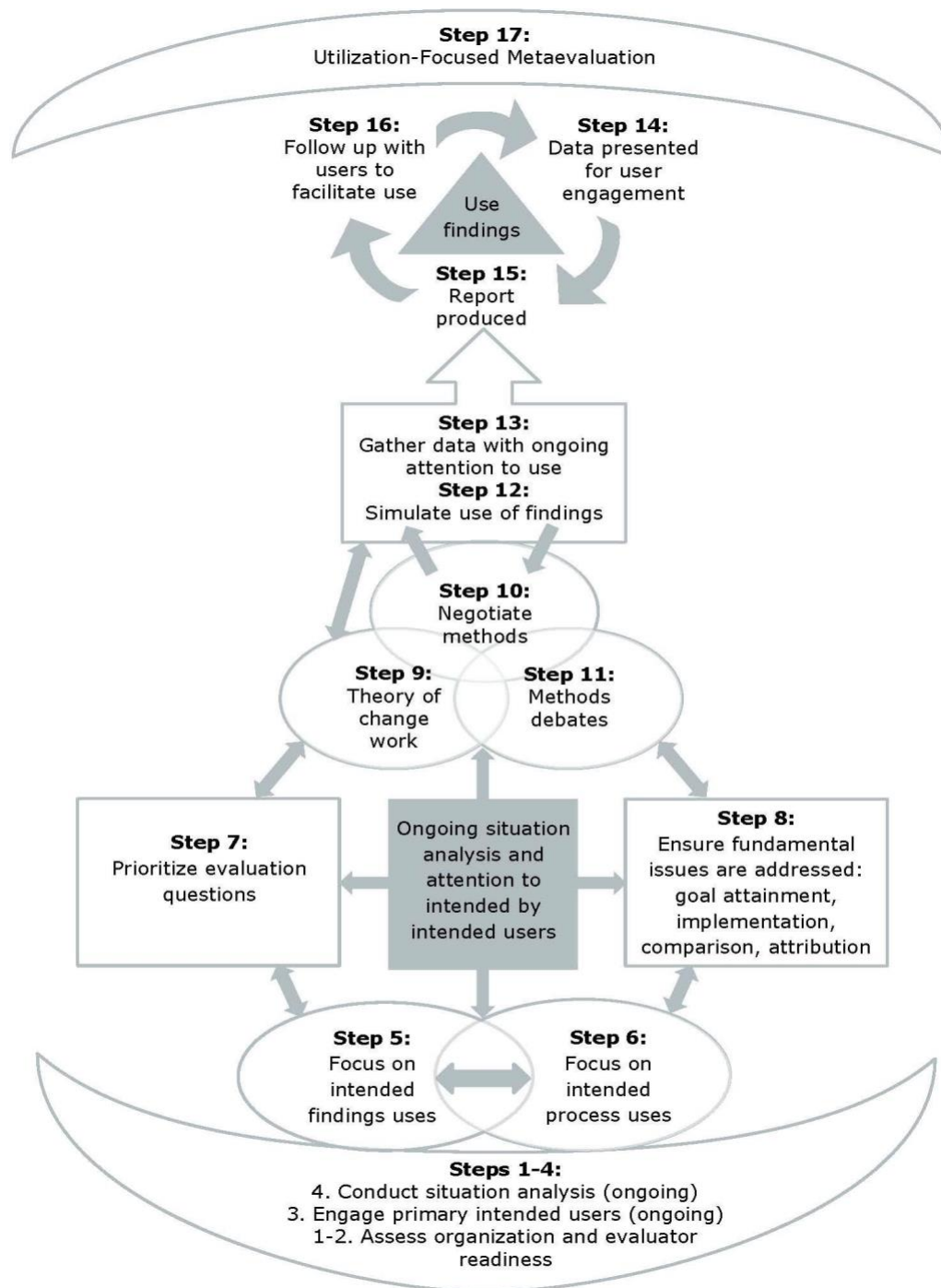
- | | |
|---------|---|
| Step 3 | Identify, organize, and engage primary intended users. |
| Step 4 | Conduct situation analysis with primary intended users |
| Step 5 | Identify primary intended uses by establishing the evaluation's priority purposes. |
| Step 6 | Consider and build in process uses if appropriate. |
| Step 7 | Focus priority evaluation questions. (Focus on overarching research questions.) |
| Step 8 | Check that fundamental areas for evaluation inquiry are being adequately addressed. |
| Step 9 | Determine what intervention model or theory of change is being evaluated. |
| Step 10 | Negotiate appropriate methods to generate credible findings and support intended use by intended users. |
| Step 11 | Make sure intended users understand potential controversies about methods and their implications. |
| Step 12 | Simulate use of findings. |
| Step 13 | Gather data with ongoing attention to use. |

Adapted by Western Michigan University Evaluation Center, 2012

Conducting a utilized focused evaluation is not just following these steps linearly. First, the 17 steps can be broken down into a sequence of sub-steps and processes. Second, as the following diagram depicted in Figure 7 shows, a Utilization-focused-evaluation is a process that unfolds in a dynamic and interactional fashion. For example, Steps 1-4 often occur simultaneously, each influencing each other. My dissertation research followed a similar process of evaluation interactions among all 17-steps.

Figure 7

Utilization-focused Evaluation of Complex Dynamic and Adaptive Systems



Note: This model was created by Michael Patton, 2012.

Specific Methods

Certain methods were used in this utilized focused program evaluation. First, a curricular document analysis (review of curricular materials, training videos, a book written by the HLF leadership, Ted Talks, interviews, and other media) took place. Second, a review of the published research studies on the program was conducted. Third, in consultation with the HLF team members, a detailed conceptual framework for enhancing program functions was developed. Fourth, in-depth interviews with a variety of program implementers and users were conducted. The interviews served as the primary data source. All people interviewed were asked about program history, program content coordination, program implementation and challenges, inviting insight into how the program is updated, requesting insights and recommendations. And fifth, field notes were also generated that include summaries of conversations with HLF community members, this includes correspondence with other academic researchers who have published studies on HLF, emails tracking snowball sampling recommendations, records of impressions from meetings with administrators and students.

Curricular Materials Analysis

After initial contact was made with the program founders and organizers in Baltimore, all curricular materials were located and collected. Materials were then assembled and summarized.

- **Handbooks:** The teacher training materials include materials to train teachers in how to deliver the HLF program. It includes yoga poses, breathwork, silent reflection meditations, mindfulness practices, mindful readings, exercises, stress reduction techniques, mental skills, other resources, and HLF history. The handbooks have been updated over 20 + years, as the program fidelity has been examined and the HLF creators have refined

programmatic requirements needed when delivering content. Particular curricula within the handbooks included:

(1) The ***Mindful Moment*** program is the oldest component of the curriculum. The students begin and end their school day with 15 minutes of breathing and movement exercises, to clear their heads, and set their positive intentions for the day. The curriculum offers lessons in stress reduction through yoga postures, breathing, exercise, and mental skills – trauma-informed mindfulness, conflict resolution, teamwork, restorative practices, self-care, emotional self-regulation, PA, as well as imparting an appreciation for the value of education, a connection to the community, and a stewardship for the environment. A *Mindful Moment* room is available in the K-12 schools during the day for self-referral if students need to take a moment away from stressors. This is known as the room which is also an alternative to suspension. Teachers and staff can invite a student to pause and reflect in the *Mindful Moment* room as well. Students can work with the HLF staff to work through their challenges and reset, refocus, and get on with their school day. HLF leaders are quick to say they are not trained counselors, instead they mirror back to the child what they are hearing and experiencing. It works to get the student to self-assess and understand why they are feeling their feelings, quiet the mind, and work through triggers and responses. Students then return to their schedule of classes and activities. This is the SEL program that HLF has evolved to replace detention with silent reflection meditation.

(2) ***Bridging Academics & the Mind*** is a trauma-informed, evidence-based mindful online curriculum that incorporates breathing, silent reflection meditation and

movement techniques that help students build a practice that serves to build self-confidence and leadership. *This chair-based practice took off after the COVID 19 Pandemic, and HLF began teaching its curriculum in an online format.* The work continues both online and in-person formats, the sessions can last 3 to 8 minutes, allowing for easier implementation with the regular curriculum of elementary schools. The SEL practice assists the children with increasing self-love and compassion, building practices that are integrated into everyday life. The program encourages families to spend more time together connecting, away from social media and technology. It teaches that to get what you want is to give what you can; life will give you more of what you give to others. The curriculum helps students understand that holding others in lovingkindness will give you results that benefit you, others, and the world around you. Through helping others, students learn that they more quickly get the things they want in their own lives. Receiving gracefully is a hard lesson for children to learn, they may not feel worthy.

HLF teaches children to leave a legacy of impact on others and the world through being of service. The true meaning of their lives is learned over time, as HLF leaders demonstrate that each individual is greater when they become part of something larger than themselves. *Bridging Academics & the Mind* has been studied and is shown to reduce stress in children, improve sleep, and encourage more peaceful interactions (Klusmann, et al., 2023). Teachers report that focused attention on children while displaying loving kindness behavior has produced wonderful improvements in the classroom climate. This combined with mindful movement and

breathwork offers the students translatable tools to learn how to steady their mind and respond to life's stresses with higher level behavioral choices.

(3) ***Holistic Me*** is HLF's flagship after-school program which just completed its 23rd year of service for elementary school children. The curriculum is offered five days a week in an after-school program. The program offers children the ability to improve their SEL skillsets and build cognitive social skills in a caring and safe environment. The children practice stress reduction yoga, mindfulness, self-care restorative practices, conflict resolution, advocacy, entrepreneurship, writing, the arts, PA, teamwork, and civic engagement. The children are invited into environmental stewardship connections to help bring greater balance in their lives. *Holistic Me* operates after-school and during summer break. The program has an average daily attendance of 85% (HLF, 2024). Students often return to volunteering as tutors and stress reduction yoga instructors after they move on in their own education. The SEL environment creates a positive influence on wellbeing and leads to improved learning outcomes (Greenberg, et al. 2017). HLF has tracked the impact on their Baltimore community which has included creating gardens and greening projects, even in the students' homes, and clean-up projects in the neighborhoods surrounding the schools. HLF leaders help students to measure their lives in every mindful moment, understanding the degree of experiencing positive emotions like joy, gratitude, love, and empathy. The children can discuss their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors and realize they have choices in responding to stress in their lives.

(4) ***B.R.E.A.T.H.S.*** is a curriculum adapted to community-based programs, taking key components of the HLF trauma-informed work, and sharing the material with

people of all ages. It is offered in community centers and out of school venues which include corporations and universities, detention centers, jails, homeless shelters, police and fire stations, and broader community spaces.

(5) The ***Workforce Development*** program was created in 2013 for students who had moved into high school and beyond, after having SEL experiences working with HLF programming in the elementary and middle school grades. *Workforce Development* training includes ten weeks of intense workshops, four days each week with a focused six hours on each of those days (totaling 240 hours of training). It includes academic content ranging from anatomy and physiology with HLF's stress reduction yoga and mindfulness practices to practical life skills of managing finances, resources, and relationships. Participants are offered HLF's youth engagement philosophies in a safe and caring environment. The mentoring evolves into assistantships as teachers, for which students are paid. Some students go on to engage with the Omega Institute and/or other related organizations. *Workforce Development* students evolve into the leadership that trains the next generation of HLF teachers. This reciprocal teaching model builds sustainability into the organization by preparing future generations of compassionate leaders, guiding them into the workforce. Trained teachers have gone on to work with Boys & Girls clubs and provide the HLF trauma-informed curriculum in underserved communities around the country. It is important that the teachers look like the students they serve to best facilitate success.

(6) A **satellite program in Akwesasne, NY** was initiated in the summer of 2020, at the initial stages of the COVID 19 pandemic. This experience served as an

opportunity to adapt the curriculum with a new underserved population, making it culturally relevant. HLF sent two senior staff members to work with territory leaders to create a satellite program for HLF in this region and begin the curriculum with children, young adults, and community members. Akwesasne means “family” in the native American dialect of the Mohawk tribe. The language was adopted to incorporate more local traditions and understandings of the curricular content. It serves as an important connection to a community that shares a common history of oppression, intergenerational trauma, and a commitment to community healing and wellness. This team also partnered with local community educators to provide mental health training and professional development life skills that focused on financial literacy, public speaking, resume writing and conflict resolution work. The program increased from four schools in 2020, to nine schools in late 2021 demonstrating a demand for services, but now remains at five schools, given decreased funding support post-pandemic in the native American territory.

(7) *Holistic ROOTS* developed as a mentoring program for graduates of the *Holistic Me* curriculum, with the idea of fostering greater numbers of teachers, taking the practice out into the world. They become known as *Mindful Ambassadors*.

- **Videos:** The HLF founders and staff have created informational materials for community members to view on YouTube. Numerous public interviews, TEDx Talks, and professional presentations are also catalogued here. The ***Bridging Academics & the Mind*** curriculum includes pre-recorded videos.
- **Teacher training** materials that were shared demonstrate an intensive effort that drives the success of the overall program. Each of the curricular offerings requires

varying levels of training. The primary teacher training effort to staff *Mindful Moment* and *Holistic Me* includes ten weeks of intensive classroom training, six hours a day for four days each week (10 x 6 x 4=240 hours total) in stress reduction yoga and mindfulness, body and trauma, leadership, and career readiness skills. After completing direct training, participants move into a shadowing program with senior staff at HLF sites to receive additional on-the-job training. This helps trainees identify demographics and age groups with whom they best connect and further learn how best to use the practices to facilitate situational classes (HLF, 2024).

The *Bridging Academics & the Mind* and *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* curriculum teacher training programs could be as little as 2 -16 hours a week over 6 weeks, as this program includes administering pre-recorded online mindful breathing and movement exercises delivered by HLF trained teachers. Teachers provide a workbook to students to help note the learning experiences incorporated through multiweek lessons. Classroom teachers are encouraged to participate with students when doing the online video exercises. This facilitates buy-in and participation from the students; teachers often know more about the school environment and needs of the children than an external educator. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness programs delivered by trained schoolteachers have delivered considerable stress reduction, emotional regulation, and behavioral improvement benefits affecting students' mental health, (Dariotis, et al., 2016 a, Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Greenberg, et al., 2017; Klusmann, et al., 2023.)

- **Review of Published Studies:** Published studies regarding the efficacy of specific program components were located in a literature review and also found on the HLF website. In addition, more extensive literature searches were conducted to ensure

all studies were identified and located. These studies were then summarized in a narrative review which provided an overview about what is known about empirical support for the program with gaps in the literature and future directions identified (see Chapter 2).

Conceptual Map

An initial business framework was created by the HLF team when the organization was created in October 2001. An HLF logic model (Figure 1) was then created as an outcome of the 2014 study led by Dr. Laura Feagans Gould and colleagues. They advanced an assessment examining fidelity of core components and applying a CORE process (see p. 116) to refine our understanding of how mindfulness-based programs for adolescents may or may not work (Feagans Gould, et al., 2014).

A detailed conceptual map was created as part of this assessment, shown in Table 6 below. It contains a working level of specificity of inputs that affect HLF programming. It was developed after conducting interviews with key HLF leadership and stakeholders; transcribing interviews and performing a reflexive thematic analysis; completing a thorough document review of HLF teaching materials, handbooks, their published book *Let Your Light Shine* (Smith, et al., 2022) and website content; reading all published studies relating to the HLF trauma-informed curriculum; examining extensive written and recorded interviews and podcasts with the HLF founders, reviewing training related videos and carrying out a rigorous literature review. This conceptual map is designed to give a more detailed picture of all of the inputs that helped shape the HLF trauma-informed curricula over time whereas the logic model created in 2014 addresses program processes, core components, and contextual factors affecting social emotional behavioral functioning.

Table 6

Conceptual Map of HLF Implementation

Resources	Program Mission	Direct Products / Benefits of Activities			
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES			IMPACTS
		Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term	
What we invest	What we do Who we reach	Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes	Action:	Results:	Effects:
-HLF teachers provide time and experience in support of SEL mindfulness outcomes of children, tools of breathing, stress reduction, yoga postures, enhanced self-regulation, movement, exercise. Community leaders also contribute time and experience in support of SEL mindfulness curricula.	-Instruct PreK-12th students, teachers, adolescents, and adults; SEL mindfulness self-regulation tools of health are taught in 47 of 50 states and 12 countries. -Teach wellbeing, life skills, workforce development, leadership development through SEL trauma-informed mindfulness exercises, connection to nature, PA to support mental health, prevent obesity and promote healthy lifestyles.	-Students, teachers, adolescents, and adults of all ages are given: -Experiences, education, and opportunities to support health, mental health, and wellbeing in a safe environment for children and families. -Improved self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-regulation, self-awareness for managing and sustaining a healthy lifestyle. -Improved knowledge and increased awareness supporting SEL PYD student learning outcomes through experiential learning, developing a practice, and experiencing the practice.	- Students, teachers, adolescents, adults of all ages engage in fun new experiences; adopt or improve skills to support a healthy lifestyle, moderate unhealthy behavioral practices, experience social interactions with peers and adults. -Parents and family/ community members develop greater awareness and understanding of self-regulation practices, youth development, and healthy lifestyle choices. -Students, teachers, adolescents, adults, coaches, school staff and community members improve knowledge and understanding of PreK-12 self-regulation, trauma-informed youth	- Students, teachers, adolescents, adults, of all ages adopt leadership roles in school and community, evolve a reciprocal teaching model and perpetuate the learning in the community. -Social networks are engaged to advance SEL mindfulness, self-regulation, mental health, and wellbeing. -Experience provides opportunities to focus on trust, teamwork, communication, connections, empathy, and compassion. Guidance offers practical skills on how the world works, gives them	-Improvement in physical and behavioral, mental, emotional, social, spiritual healthy lifestyle practices, life skills eventually become habits, ability to resolve conflict, manage and regulate self and emotions -Increase in knowledge of SEL PYD skills. -Increased awareness of wellbeing practices -Change in beliefs and social norms regarding the importance of self-regulation of the body, physical exercise, nutrition (food is medicine), environment, energy hygiene, sleep hygiene,
-Community relationships and networks	-After school # of youth and community members				
-Materials and equipment for assessment and intervention.					

Table 6 (cont'd)

Resources Program Mission Direct Products / Benefits of Activities

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES			IMPACTS
		Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term	
-Exercise and yoga equipment. -Dedicated space to teach and receive students needing a <i>mindful moment</i>.	-Community Centers -Senior Centers -Drug Rehab Centers -Detention Centers -Prisons -Homeless Shelters -Police and Fire Stations -Corporations -Universities -Sport organizations -Churches -NGOs -Weekend participating # of youth and community members -Exposure to new activities through SEL mindfulness leadership, teacher training. -Engage teachers, staff,		development, healthy lifestyle behaviors in children, workforce development and community engagement.	practice and learn how to teach others.	- mental health and Wellbeing. -Increased knowledge of SEL PYD in community. -Parents spend more time with children to talk, exercise, play, cook, engage in healthy habits of how the household is managed. -Families are more connected; often leads to greater harmony in the household. -Children take on more responsibilities, express themselves and begin goal-setting. -Actions demonstrate respect for self and others; -self-efficacy improves. -Adults include youth in decision-making

Table 6 (cont'd)

Resources Program Mission Direct Products / Benefits of Activities

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES			IMPACTS
		Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term	
	parents, administrators, coaches, other adults to openly communicate SEL mindfulness curricula and relate it to mental health.				and children feel a part of something greater than themselves. Creates a positive outlook for the future. -Children identify stressors w/ tools to resolve anxiety, evoke empathy, settle conflict. -Improved prosocial actions with classmates positively affecting classroom dynamics. -Boosted resiliency & optimism. -Academic success. -Self-regulatory capacities enhanced with emotional functioning, greater focus.

Table 6 (cont'd)

Resources	Program Mission	Direct Products / Benefits of Activities			
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES			IMPACTS
		Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term	
					-Increased healthy habit choices (PA, nutrition, responsible decision-making, etc.) -Heightened self-worth.

Assumptions: Children will participate along with teachers, staff, administrators, adults, parents, families, and community leaders; may also support the SEL PYD programming youth educational and health activities.

External Factors: Home, schools, neighborhoods and community spaces, sport organizations, churches, corporations, universities, and associations.

In-depth Interviews

The primary data source for this investigation was an in-depth semi-structured interview. These interviews will center around the following probes and expand on responses using open-ended questions:

1. What are the purposes of the HLF trauma-informed curricula? Why was it started/history?
2. What does the HLF trauma-informed curricula consist of?
 - Documents analysis
 - Content
 - Interviews
3. Why are the curricula effective?

4. How are the curricula delivered? How are teachers trained? What is the method of delivery? What is the fidelity of the delivery?

5. What are the challenges in setting up the program? Is the HLF trauma-informed curricula design adaptable to teachers more globally? What lessons are available given the research already done? What are recommendations for replicating the program?

Appendix B contains the full interview guide used in this investigation. However, it should be noted that depending on the person being interviewed, not all questions were appropriate to ask (e.g., asking a student user how the program got started versus the founders), and questions flowed based on responses of participants.

Participants

Triangulation of key stakeholders was used to provide more in-depth information and a more holistic view of what is happening in the HLF program. Interview participants in this study include HLF curricula creators, HLF staff, teachers, students, school administrators, and community leaders. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with participants who have experienced SEL benefits. Factors that influence the opportunities and challenges of delivering the SEL curricula with a range of learners, ages PreK-adult, were also a focus of the interview. Participants were selected through snowball sampling procedure. The program founders and program directors were interviewed first, then based on their recommendations (and the recommendations of subsequent individuals interviewed), other participants were identified. Interview names were not published in an effort to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 7, below, contains a listing of 15 individuals who consented to participate in a semi-structured interview, discussing effectiveness, strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities in evolving the HLF curricula.

Table 7

Background Characteristics of Interviews

	Participant	Date
1.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Parent	Interview 10/13/21
2.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Parent	Interview 10/8/21
3.	HLF Staff & Teacher	Interview 10/7/21
4.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Former Student	Interview 10/22/21
5.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Former Student & Parent	Interview 11/3/21
6.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Parent	Interview 10/28/21
7.	HLF Staff & Teacher	Interview 10/25/21
8.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Parent	Interview 10/26/21
9.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Parent	Interview 10/19/21
10.	HLF Staff & Teacher & Former Student & Parent	Interview 10/7/21
11.	HLF Staff & Teacher	Interview 11/3/21
12.	HLF Board Member	Interview 1/9/24
13.	Community Leader	Interview 11/14/21
14.	Policy Maker	Interview 2/3/22
15.	Principal & HLF Staff	Interview 4/5/24

Theme Identification and Analysis

Over the past few years, semi-structured interviews have been undertaken with HLF team members, educators, parents, students, and community leaders. A reflexive thematic analysis was used to gain an interpretive, inductive understanding of the role of HLF trauma-informed curricula, addressing challenges and opportunities of scaling the curricula more globally. To be accepted as trustworthy, the data analysis was conducted precisely and consistently through recording, systematizing, and interpreting textual data. (Guba, et al., 1989; Lerner, et al., 2002; Newcomer, et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun et al., 2006; Durlak, J. A., et al., 2008).

A reflexive thematic analysis was used to gain a greater understanding and interpret the data through inductive reasoning, drawing conclusions by going from specific to general information in a review of mindfulness SEL practices in educational programs. In line with the

general guidelines for thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2006; Braun et al., 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2019), this process was structured and thorough to carefully review material, yet flexible to provide a nuanced account of the participants' perceptions.

First, following the completion of all interviews, the author transcribed the data verbatim and compiled the individual interview transcripts. To further enhance familiarity with the interviews, the researcher then read and re-read the interviews along with the interviewer's reflections and identified meaning units. These meaning units were semantic codes to answer the major interview questions asked (e.g., How did HLF get started? Tell me how this came about...? What strategies worked to gain trust in the public school system? What are the keys to making it work so well? What did not work so well? What are the challenges? How did you overcome challenges...? Little data exists on creating social emotional learning outcomes in children using mindful movement, stress reduction through yoga, and silent reflection meditation techniques. Let us talk about outcomes...what is working well for the students, over time? Why do you think/believe the HLF organization is so effective, or not? How does the HLF team function? Tell me the story of how HLF has grown over time? What makes it effective? Others have demonstrated HLF trauma-informed curricula works with the children, but for every 10 teachers that start, how many deliver the program as HLF intended? How do you maintain curricular inputs? Of all the research published on HLF SEL interventions, how do you utilize this to demonstrate effectiveness?).

Codes were then grouped to generate the common themes to explain how each individual participant experienced personal development from the SEL mindfulness with stress reduction yoga, mental skill training, and PA. Specifically, the researcher aimed to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and concise summary of

key results by generating central themes and relationships running through each participant story. Importantly, the researcher continuously revised and edited the themes throughout the data analysis process to ensure accurate representation of the participant stories. The researcher then looked at the themes for each participant and generated a list of lower-order themes, higher-order themes, and dimensions across the participants. Transcripts were read and reread, to discern meaning units that helped focus on logical codes to answer key interview questions (What makes the curricula successful? What works well? What are the greatest challenges? How do you work to overcome the challenges? How does the work bring career satisfaction?).

Each theme was named and described in detail. The researcher then reviewed the analysis with her advisor and another graduate student and articulated descriptions of each theme to capture the specific content of the reflexive thematic analysis. Relationships between themes were also described and wider interpretations of the thematic content were organized. The researcher engaged critically with the stories and existing theory, confirmed the theme descriptions, and identified latent concepts and over-arching responses that captured the key content of the participants perceptions and experiences in an engaging and insightful manner.

Field Notes

Field notes captured communications with community members affiliated with HLF programming; notations on snowball sampling recommendations and related follow-up reminders were also recorded. Notes from interviews were also recorded here. Summaries of conversations held with other researchers who have studied HLF in the past were recorded in field notes. Finally, class observations were outlined, noting perceptions of experiences shared by students, teachers, staff, and perceived by the researcher.

Reflexive Process

To enhance the rigor of the interviews the investigator recorded her reflections after each interview, encouraging interviewer reflexivity (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The investigator made a concerted effort to question the generated of themes by not only looking for confirming evidence for the program but evidence that would not support it. To help the investigator to become more aware of any implicit biases the investigator developed a positionality statement that identified her background and thoughts and potential biases that could arise while conducting the study and analyzing the data. This positionality statement follows.

Throughout my career as an international development thought leader, social justice educator, and senior international officer with the US Agency for International Development and Michigan State University, I sought greater insight on what brings wellness and how to create wellbeing in populations around the world. With more than two decades of practice in energy medicine, I turned to a deeper study of Kinesiology to examine PA and how breathwork through exercise and mindful movement influences the brain which in turn, improves physiology, self-regulation, self-healing, learning, sleeping, and flow of higher insight. I wanted to understand if the peak flow experienced by runners and triathletes could more easily be experienced by active children. Through this dissertation, I sought to examine effective tools of SEL and expand the implementation of best practices. Specifically, through a Utilization-focused Evaluation study of HLF's curricula, I examined challenges and opportunities for replicating the SEL tools more globally.

Potential biases that could be present include the investigator's beliefs about the efficacy of holistic health and her positive view of the HLF program. It is important that the investigator recognizes how these beliefs might potentially influence the types of questions asked and

interpretation of the data derived. Besides developing this positionality statement that helps make potential implicit biases explicit, when conducting the interviews and analyzing the data, the investigator will make a concerted effort to look for data that refutes the program's effectiveness as well as supports it.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The HLF has evolved over 23 years; the organization has served more than 100,000 youth with its school programs. Their curricula touches some 4,100 students a week in their network of program offerings, 700 in Baltimore alone (HLF Annual Report 2023; Quarterly 2 Report 2024 Update to the Annual Report). The current evaluation took place over a period of more than two years. A snowball sampling technique was used to select participants for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted. Beginning with the HLF founders, recommendations were requested of additional participants to meet with and interview. The goal was to get specific critiques of the program. Most responses were positive as HLF has increased the awareness and effects of SEL programming; participants felt that the curriculum was working to their benefit. However, some participants may not have responded with candor or with honest critical insight since the investigator was an external evaluator.

The results are organized by the 10 over-arching research questions forming the basis of this evaluation.

- (1) What are the purposes of the HLF trauma-informed curricula? Why was it started/history? How has it evolved?
- (2) What does the HLF trauma-informed curricula consist of?
- (3) What is the evidence to support curricula effectiveness? Or not? (Examining research evidence as well as participant perceptions of effectiveness.)
- (4) How are the curricula delivered? How are teachers trained? What is the method of delivery? What is the fidelity of the delivery?
- (5) How are the curricula received?

- (6) How are teachers affected (reducing stress and/or managing their classroom) while implementing the HLF trauma-informed curricula? Job satisfaction?
- (7) What were and are the challenges in setting up the HLF program?
- (8) How is the HLF trauma-informed curricula design adaptable to teachers more globally?
- (9) What lessons are available given the research already done? What constructively be improved?
- (10) What are recommendations for replicating the program or not?

The HLF Trauma-Informed Curricula: Its Purpose, History, and Development

Purpose

The purpose of “HLF’s socio-emotional behavioral curricula encourages youth and young adults to develop their inner lives through yoga, mindfulness, conflict resolution, teamwork, restorative practices, self-care, and to appreciate the value of learning, community, and stewardship of the environment” (HLF, 2024). The program is used to support students and train teachers to elevate SEL practices in educating the next generation.

The HLF was created by its three founders, (Ali Smith, Atman Smith, and Andrés González – later labelled the A-Team) as they were invited to an elementary school in Baltimore to help 15 children assigned to detention from an after-school football program to work through social emotional behavioral challenges. The mother of the Smith brothers had been working at the elementary school and suggested to the principal that the work of the A-Team might serve as a solution to the detention problem faced by the schoolteachers and administrators. The A-Team approached the situation with specific goals: (1) to teach social emotional self-regulation tools and PA stress reduction yoga practices to help people of all ages

better manage their emotions, energy, and behavior - promoting health and wellbeing; and (2) to build trust with the students, educators, and community stakeholders to scale the health practices. Their early success in this effort encouraged the A-Team to focus its energies to create a more formal approach to helping at-risk children and community members. Since their initial experience teaching 15 children in 2001, and with decades of developing their own self-practices, the founders transitioned their post-college pathway into an entrepreneurial opportunity to develop a unique educational curriculum supporting SEL practices. This was built on years of exploration with mentors Uncle Will (Joyner) who had a deep practice in yoga and ancient healing techniques; dad Mark “Smitty” Smith, a Kinesiologist PA teacher who guided the young men in health and wellbeing practices with lifelong social and emotional learning experiences; with their mom, Cassie Sifford-Smith, an ayurvedic vegan health practitioner modeling healthy nutrition and guiding the men with global life experiences. These mentors all supported the founders’ greater quest to understand the benefits of mindfulness, silent reflection meditation, and yogic teachings steeped in centuries of health, healing, wellness, education and higher community living practices handed down over generations.

HLF shares tools with students to recognize stress, understand how the breath can move the body into a parasympathetic mode of calm, heighten an understanding of self-love, self-regulation, and empathy. The curriculum is powerful as the teachings are demonstrated to stay with students beyond their school years, (Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2016).

Why the Program was Initiated and Its Growth

The interviews with key stakeholders and adults conducting the program revealed that the trauma-informed SEL program evolving through HLF since October 2001 was perceived to

achieve important outcomes with the elementary school children in Baltimore's Windsor Hills Elementary School (Teacher, Former Student, Board, Administrator Participants 1-6, 8-10, 12). The founders organized a curriculum to replicate and scale the program throughout Baltimore public schools, into the community, and beyond. The children in the Baltimore neighborhoods where HLF initiated its curricula are contending with challenges of poverty, food insecurity, high crime rates and victimization, family conflicts, limited access to public services, unsafe neighborhoods, health disparities, and under-resourced schools (Joughin, C., 2017; Smith, et al., 2022; U.S. Poverty Statistics, 2014).

The Smith brothers, (two of the three HLF founders) imprinted by their upbringing in a household where ayurveda, vegetarian foods, PA, training in mental toughness, along with the practice of yoga and silent reflection meditation were common, had been offered a pathway to explore self-realization at a deeper level. Together with Andrés González, whom they met in college, the A-Team spent time working on themselves, reading, researching, healing, exercising, practicing meditation and stress reduction through yoga. After years of practice and with a push from the Smith parents, the trio began sharing their knowledge and stress reduction tools with elementary children at the invitation of the Windsor Hills principal. "One cohort of 20-fifth grade students attended the program 4-days a week for 4 (academic) years. A second cohort of 20 was then started, that continued for another 4 (academic) years. In 2010, the community program became an after-school program. About 40 kindergarten-5th grade students were enrolled until 2014 when the program expanded to accommodate 90 K-5 students" (Semple, et al., 2017 p. 45).

Over the years, the programs have grown to support K-12 schools throughout the greater Baltimore area and serve the community at large. HLF's expanded training has grown over time

expanding beyond public schools with programs delivered in community centers, detention centers, jails, homeless shelters, police and fire stations, elder care facilities, universities, corporations, and through private organizations like Omega Institute, the Garrison Institute, and dozens of related organizations. HLF created a satellite in 2020 in the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation of Northern New York and into Canada. With trained teachers in 48 states plus provinces in Canada, and another 12 countries expanding across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, HLF's training has scaled to reach broader communities. Their curricula touches some 4,100 students a week in their network of program offerings, 700 in Baltimore alone (HLF Annual Report 2023; Quarterly 2 Report 2024 Update to the Annual Report). Other HLF sites include: Boulder, CO; Denver, CO; Boca Raton, FL; Chicago, IL; Baltimore, MD; Boston, MA; Helena, MO; Buffalo, NY; Rhinebeck, NY; Harrisburg, PA; Lancaster, PA; Montgomery County, PA; Dallas, TX; Charlottesville, VA; Richmond, VA; Madison, WI; Milwaukee, WI; Jackson Hole, WY and the Akwesasne Mohawk territory spanning New York into Canada, with virtual sessions held in Malawi, Africa (HLF Q2 2024 Update; Teacher/Administrator Participant 9 on 6/3/24).

Given recent investments from the Clinton Global Initiative, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Unlikely Collaborators Foundation, and the Trauma Research Foundation, HLF is cultivating new talent to launch simultaneous start-ups next fall in: Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Denver, CO; Madison, WI; Milwaukee, WI; Richmond, VA; and the Akwesasne Mohawk territories are planned to expand into Akwesasne Mohawk territories into Canada (HLF Q2 2024 Update; Administrator Participant 15, Line 141 on 4/5/24.)

The Curricula and Its Components

HLF curricula has evolved over 23 years, maintaining core components while making modifications to address different targeted community needs. The mindfulness, stress reduction yoga, breathing exercises, silent reflection meditation, centering, PA, and mental skill curricula are offered through several programs led by HLF. The trauma-informed practice has teachers gently guiding the exercise, breathwork, and poses. Often, the silence accompanying these activities invokes a traumatic response, so teachers count down so others know when the practice will end. The practice invites emotions to the surface. Teachers are trained to work through the empty spaces in the breath holds by counting aloud, guiding the practices by way of speaking quietly to the group, and supporting students through the experiences. Key curricular components are delivered through implementation of the following programs.

(1) *Mindful Moment* is a K-12 school-based curriculum in its 23rd year, uniquely structured. The students begin and end their day with 15 minutes of mindful movement and breathing, and a *Mindful Moment* room is staffed during the day if children need to connect with a teacher and regroup. This program is the focus of several research studies (e.g., Ancona, et al., 2014; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Mendelson, et al., 2016; Semple, et al., 2017) dedicated to examining the efficacy and effectiveness of teaching mindfulness, mental skills, with stress reduction techniques offered through yoga movement and PA.

(2) *Holistic Me* is an after-school curriculum working with children to reinforce self-regulation, social awareness, building trust and cohesion, peer and community support, responsible decision making, among other many other SEL PYD attributes. Table 8, below, identifies a sample schedule for the after-school program offered in participating schools.

Table 8

Example of *Holistic Me* After-School Program Schedule

Daily Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
2:25 - 2:50pm	Dinner Homework Help Cafeteria	Dinner Homework Help Cafeteria	Dinner Homework Help Cafeteria	Dinner Homework Help Cafeteria
2:55 - 4:05pm	Academic Hour Classroom (2:15)	Academic Hour Classroom (2:15)	Academic Hour Classroom (2:15)	Academic Hour Classroom (2:15)
4:05 - 4:10pm	Transition	Transition	Transition	Transition
4:10 - 5:00pm	Yoga Gym (2:15)	Yoga Gym (2:15)	Yoga Gym (2:15)	Yoga Gym (2:15)
5:00 - 5:05pm	Transition	Transition	Transition	Transition
5:05 - 6:00pm	Enrichment Classroom (2:15)	Enrichment Classroom (2:15)	Enrichment Classroom (2:15)	Enrichment Classroom (2:15)
6:00pm	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal

Note: HLF Q2 Update to the Annual Report, 2023, p. 8 snapshot.

(3) *Bridging Academics & the Mind* is an online video-based pre-recorded curriculum that evolved during the pandemic and has since expanded to reach more students universally. The teaching is offered by trained HLF instructors who have experienced the benefits of the practice of mindfulness, stress reduction through yoga and PA with demonstrated evidence of its effect in improving mental health and wellbeing.

(4) *Workforce Development* advances the HLF trauma-informed curriculum into mentoring and leadership opportunities through high school aged students through age 21, especially for those having participated in mindful movement experiences in elementary and middle school. This curriculum is focused on building future generations of compassionate leaders. The program starts with a retreat, building in anatomy and physiology with HLF's stress reduction yoga and mindfulness practices, accompanied by safety and HLF's youth engagement philosophies. Mentoring is key to the program, HLF *Workforce Development* students receive summer assistantships as teachers in training. This HLF *Workforce*

Development program builds sustainability into the organization by hiring these newly trained teachers to staff growing programs, preparing future generations of compassionate leaders.

(5) *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* adapted key components of the HLF trauma-informed curriculum, sharing the material with people of all ages in the greater community. It meets people where they are and provides the HLF curriculum in mindful movement exercises that help community members manage ruminating thoughts that affect our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. It also gets people moving to strengthen joints and muscles, and helps individuals to build a practice of mindfulness, stress reduction through yoga and PA exercise into their daily lives.

(6) *Holistic ROOTS* engages the alumni of HLF that were involved in the *Holistic Me* program and invites mentoring of this mindfulness and PA stress reduction yoga as students move into the world. These alumni become *Mindful Ambassadors* of HLF, sharing wisdom of wellness practices out in the world, and help peers stay on track.

It is important to note that while all of the above components are part of the HLF curricula, they are not all implemented simultaneously. Some sites use only part of the program.

HLF Teacher Training Program and Requirements for teaching the curricula are noted in Table 9 below. This includes the number of educational hours needed to teach the trauma-informed curricula which is customized for the individual teacher(s).

Table 9

HLF Teacher Training Programs and Certification Requirements

Grade	Program	Details
Pre-K to 12th Grade	<i>Mindful Moment</i>	Engages students in mindfulness activities and practices, foundational for early personal development. Students can participate in the Mindful Ambassador program at their site.

Table 9 (cont'd)

Grade	Program	Details
Pre-K to Rising 6th Grade	<i>Holistic Me</i> (After-School)	An afterschool/summer camp program that focuses on holistic development, available through the end of 5th grade. *Summer before 6th grade transition to Holistic ROOTS. Prepares rising 6th graders for the mentoring program. Focuses on building relationships and readiness for middle school.
6th Grade to 12th Grade	<i>Holistic ROOTS</i>	A mentoring program that supports students from middle school through high school with a focus on holistic growth and preparation for future opportunities. Includes a transition program from middle school to high school. (Summer after 9th/10th Grade Employment opportunities for students starting the summer of 9th grade or at age 14, leading into 10th grade if not previously eligible). Participants are paid through the YouthWorks program within the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Youth Services Division.
Post-High School	<i>Workforce Development Program</i> (Summer and Year-Long)	After graduating from high school, participants enter a summer workforce development program, followed by a year-long engagement aimed at preparing for long-term employment opportunities.

Mindful Moment

Participants learn about *Mindful Moment* program, training to lead and facilitate programming.

Facilitated by: A-Team, Nicole Humphreys | Cost: \$225

Eligible staff: ALL Test out: Yes Prerequisite Training: Yoga/Mindfulness

Skill	Objective	Time
Lead Trauma-Informed Practices	Participants will be able to facilitate chair class, deep breath, breathing exercises, and silent reflection meditation (breath meditation, loving kindness, next thought) express themselves clearly and with confidence, in a variety of speaking situations.	4 hrs.
Mirroring and Active Listening	Participants will learn the techniques that allow them to effectively listen to students.	1 hr.
Reciprocal Teaching	Participants will be able to explain the benefits of reciprocal teaching and model it.	1-2 hrs.
Engaging Youth	Participants will understand how to engage youth based on their age.	1-2 hrs.
Data	Participants will be able to use various data collection tools, analyze data collected and use data to create Action Plans	1-2 hrs.
<i>Mindful Ambassador Program</i>	Participants will learn how facilitate the <i>Mindful Ambassador</i> program	3-4 hrs.

Table 9 (cont'd)

***Bridging Academics & the Mind* (School-wide assembly)**

Participants learn how to lead and facilitate the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* assembly

Facilitated by: A-Team | Cost: \$105 | Eligible staff: 3 years min experience at HLF

Prerequisite Training: Yoga/Mindfulness | Test out: No

Skill	Objective	Time
Public Speaking	Participants will be able to express themselves clearly, with confidence and power, in a variety of speaking situations.	2 hrs.
<i>Bridging Academics & the Mind</i>	Participants will be able to use and explain how to access and use the online platform as well lead featured practices	3 hrs.
Youth Engagement	Participants will understand how to engage youth based on their age.	1-2 hrs.

Engaging Youth (Early childhood, elementary, middle and high school)

Participants learn about youth development and how to facilitate classes based on age.

Facilitated by: A-Team, Nicole Humphries | Cost: \$30 | Eligible staff: ALL

Prerequisite Training: Yoga/Mindfulness | Test out: No

Skill	Objective	Time
Youth Development	Participants will learn about the various stages of youth development and the tools and techniques to properly engage them.	2 hrs.

Yoga/Mindfulness

Participants will learn how to lead HLF mindfulness and yoga practices

Facilitated by: A-Team. | Cost \$60 | Eligible staff: ALL

Prerequisite Training: None | Test out: Yes

Skill	Objective	Time
Lead practices	Participants will be able to facilitate chair class, deep breath, breathing exercises, and silent reflection meditation (breath meditation, loving kindness, next thought) express themselves clearly and with confidence, in a variety of speaking situations.	4 hrs.

Table 9 (cont'd)

Professional Development for educators and other instructors that work with youth

Learn to facilitate HLF's Professional Development for educators and other professionals that work with youth. Participants will learn about public speaking and how to facilitate the practices featured in *Bridging Academics & the Mind*

Facilitated by: A-Team | Cost \$615

| Prerequisite Training: Trauma-Informed

Eligible staff: 3 years min experience at HLF, 2 years in a *Mindful Moment* program

Skill	Objective	Time
Public Speaking/Effective Communication	Participants will be able to express themselves clearly, with confidence and power, in a variety of speaking situations.	6 hrs.
PowerPoint Training	Participants will be able use Microsoft PowerPoint to facilitate class	1 hr.
Trauma-Informed Yoga	Participants will be able to explain how trauma impacts the body and how yoga can help.	8 hrs.
<i>Bridging Academics & the Mind</i>	Participants will be able to use and explain how to access and use the online platform as well lead featured practices	3 hrs.
<i>Mindful Moment</i>	Participants will be able to explain the mindful moment program components and lead teachers through foundational practices used in MM program	4 hrs.
Self-Care	Participants will be able to explain the importance of self-care for different audiences	2 hrs.
Residency	Participants will be able to explain the Residency program and lead teachers through foundational practices used in the residency program	2 hrs.
Breathwork/Meditation		8 hrs.
Mock Professional Development	Participants will be able to lead the various PDs offered by HLF	2 hrs.
Shadowing	Participants will shadow A-Team	10 hrs.
Karma Professional Development	Allowing them to practice	10 hrs.

Table 9 (cont'd)

Residency Program (5-day and 2-day)

Participants will learn the components of the Residency programs that support leading and facilitating classroom teaching. Facilitated by: A-Team | Cost: \$195 | Test out: No
Eligible staff: 3 years min experience at HLF | Prerequisite Training: Yoga/ Mindfulness

Skill	Objective	Time
Lead practices	Participants will be able to lead and facilitate chair class, deep breath breathing exercises, and silent reflection meditation (breath meditation, loving kindness, next thought) express themselves clearly and with confidence in a variety of speaking situations.	4 hrs.
Conducting an assembly	Participants will be able use Power Point and facilitate class.	2 hrs.
Reciprocal Teaching	Participants will be able to explain the benefits of reciprocal teaching and model it.	1-2 hrs.
Engaging Youth	Participants will understand how to engage youth based on their age.	1-2 hrs.
Residency structure	Participants will describe the structure in detail and facilitate class.	2-3 hrs.

Situational classes

Participants will learn how to facilitate classes based on the audience in front of them.

Facilitated by: A-Team | Cost: \$240
Eligible staff: ALL Test out: Yes | Prerequisite Training:

Yoga/Mindfulness

Skill	Objective	Time
Lead practices Review	Participants will be able to facilitate chair class, deep breath, breathing exercises, and silent reflection meditation (breath meditation, loving kindness, next thought) express themselves clearly in a variety of speaking situations.	3-4 hrs.
Senior Citizen	Participants will learn chair-based movements and light standing stretches to increase mobility. Breath work and silent reflection meditation practices will be based around relaxation and reducing anxiety initially, then begin to be geared towards increasing strength, energy, and mobility.	4 hrs.
Mental Illness	Participants will learn chair-based movements and light standing stretches to increase mobility. The focus will be on breathwork and silent reflection meditations. Build-up from basic breathing exercises and guided meditations to more advanced breathing techniques and visualizations. Practices will be based around relaxation, reducing anxiety, and quieting the mind.	4 hrs.
Drug Treatment		

Evidence of Curricular Effectiveness

Program Evaluation Research Study Summary

As part of the evaluation, this investigator participated in classes delivered by HLF teachers, in addition to engaging in document reviews, examining handbooks and manuals, reading training materials, watching videos, and reviewing interviews with media organizations, listening to podcasts, with immersion into the community connected to HLF programming. The field notes communicate a story of an educational program offered through a shared commitment of improving the lives of others. Here is summative example coming from a teacher delivering the program, *“You have to do the work consistently. The proof is in working with the children on this HLF curriculum over time. I see how it has changed me. And I see how it is affecting children coming from the same home life situation with drug and alcohol abuse. They’re given tools to deal with unhealthy living situations that are so traumatic.”*

Some evidence for program effectiveness comes from a review of literature. Across nine specific studies that included HLF curricula, *all nine reported evidence supporting various elements of the program, although most had methodological limitations.* A review of broader mindfulness literature also showed a number of encouraging results (Banks, et al., 2015; Cipriano, et al., 2023; Comer, 1988; Deighton, et al., 2014; Diperna, et al., 2017; Djernis, et al., 2019; Durlak, et al., 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Greenberg, et al., 2017; Hagan, et al., 2014; Hennessey, et al., 2019; Huber, B., 2019; Iwamoto, et al., 2020; Jennings, et al., 2013; Jones, et al., 2017; Kwon, et al., 2017; Liehr, et al., 2010; Lutz, et al., 2008; Raes, et al., 2014; Ramasubramanian, 2017; Roeser, 2013; Rogers, et al., 2012; Semple, et al., 2017; Smith, et al., 2012; Smith, et al., 2022; Stapleton, et al., 2020; Taylor, et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019; Zaccaro, et. al., 2018). This is important as mindfulness training is a bedrock of this program. Qualitative

studies have also demonstrated the effectiveness of the program relative to social and emotional measures and formed the basis for developing social and emotional measures, with feelings, experiences, and attitudes measured through validated and reliable survey instruments.

Of the nine published studies of the HLF program and curricula, (See Table 1 on p. 45) the focus has been on examining SEL behavioral and health outcomes of curricula that involves mindful movement practices, breathwork, mental skill training, and self-regulation of the body, all attributes of PYD. In each case, the principal investigators were seeking to examine how stress reduction yoga and mindful movement techniques shared through SEL mental skill training promote an improvement in wellbeing. Sometimes the focus of the studies were on effects on the teachers delivering the program and at other times on the children and youth participating in them. The findings of each study demonstrate improved knowledge and health benefits; however, most of the studies have design weaknesses or other methodological problems. This points to the need to continue the research through longitudinal studies that examine SEL behavioral and health outcomes over time, tracking student development to provide evidence that students exposed to the HLF mindful stress reduction yoga curricula are improving health and learning outcomes compared to mainstream K-12 students nationwide.

The first study, Ancona, et al., (2014), examined the feasibility and preliminary outcome examination of HLF's stress reduction yoga and mindfulness intervention work on schoolteachers who delivered the program. Findings revealed that teachers, as essential figures in children's personal and academic development, benefitted from the HLF mindful movement curriculum. An important highlight of this mixed-methods study was that teachers could reduce their stress and improve wellbeing through stress reduction yoga and mindfulness which serves to strengthen their ability to meet the tasks of a demanding job, especially in under-resourced

settings and with vulnerable populations. This shows that mindful movement of yoga holds promise in support of reducing teacher stress and potentially, burnout. It is important to note that this study included small sample sizes, used volunteer samples, and had no active control conditions. Further, self-report measures were utilized with no inclusion of objective instruments to assess stress responses and/or outcomes. Also, fidelity of implementation was not assessed. Though financial resources dictated the small sample size of the study, issues were noted that contributed to study limitations.

In the second study (Dariotis, et al., 2016a), Dariotis and her team designed a qualitative study to evaluate student learning and skills using HLF trauma-informed curriculum. Focus groups were utilized over a 16-week period in three urban schools to get at deeper understanding of (1) what students learn, retain, and utilize after experiencing HLF trauma-informed curriculum, and (2) what changes classroom teachers anticipate and observe from participating students. Findings showed that student retention, utilization, and sharing of skills with others, along with the ability to emotionally regulate and reduce stress improved with these assets being evident in social emotional behaviors of students, post-intervention. Teachers noted classroom skills and behaviors that served to de-escalate negative emotions, promoting calm, acknowledging that students spoke in more optimistic terms about future impacts. Teachers also expressed interest in being involved in programmatic delivery to ensure students integrate these HLF-learned practices into everyday life. Again, this was a small sample size, only testing HLF trauma-informed curriculum and no other variables, there was no random sample of focus group participants due to logistical constraints, and an increased likelihood of parental enrollment of their children with behavioral problems.

In that same year, Dariotis, et al., created a third study (Dariotis, et al., 2016b), to investigate how youth define stress, and then assessed whether the HLF stress reduction yoga and mindfulness intervention might serve to help youth during stressful experiences. The population primarily consisted of urban African American elementary and middle school children who were exposed to high rates of violence in their communities. Results revealed that youth equated stress with negative emotions, identifying peer and family conflicts as triggers. The outcome of this small single intervention qualitative study demonstrated that there was consistency in outcomes with both student and teachers across three inner city schools showing that children were able to improve impulse control and regulate emotions. A limitation of the study is the single intervention may also show bias in that all participants were focused on stress reduction through yoga. Parental consent was required so this further honed the study group to only include students with more attentive parents. Measures can be used to help identify intervention mechanisms, better explaining variability in what it is that impacts youth stress.

In this fourth study of HLF programming, Laura Feagans Gould, et al., (2014), assessed the fidelity of implementation of HLF's core curricular components using a program evaluation model, applying a particular CORE process (**C**onceptualize core components, **O**perationalize and measure, **R**un analyses and review implementation findings, **E**nhance and refine data). One outcome of this study was the creation of a logic model, a program theory that helped HLF consider inputs and outcomes that affect program implementation. This scholarly work revealed the importance of being aware of overlapping components of other types of related programming affecting children and that may contribute to interactive learning approaches. For example, research from other fields (school-based drug-use prevention, education, mental health, social services, program evaluation, etc.,) can inform fidelity of implementation

measures and are variables relevant for mindfulness programs (Feagans Gould, et al., 2014, p. 76). Program and implementation components must be assessed together, testing hypothesized core components and key outcomes affecting SEL in children and adolescents. The key finding of this study identify that the CORE process being used over time and across trials builds a more coherent theory of common variables needed to show causation and correlation of mindfulness programs affecting positive outcomes.

Klusmann and colleagues (2023) advanced a mixed-methods study of the newest addition to the HLF trauma-informed curriculum, the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* program, examining how online delivery of this mindfulness program might affect feasibility and impact teacher's psychological wellbeing. In this study of HLF programming, researchers reviewed four public urban elementary schools, studying HLF's pivot to the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* series that enabled a video technology approach to reaching children and families during the COVID-19 outbreak and post-pandemic. A significant barrier presented noted that the 43 teachers surveyed in this study were delivering online video instruction and *were not trained HLF instructors* although the instructors in the videos were trained; this posed no barrier to effective learning. The new online format, however, opened many opportunities to bring the HLF curriculum into a classroom throughout the day, for quick mind and body resets.

Results from the mixed methods qualitative components of self-reported data demonstrated that teachers felt the HLF *Bridging Academics & the Mind* chair-based yoga stress reduction videos were a useful tool for managing the classroom, controlling disruptive behaviors, calming the noise, allowing teachers to be more relaxed in how they handle the classroom flow. If teachers experienced high amounts of stress and/or self-awareness of negative emotions, they reported the ability to respond and regulate them more effectively. This

Bridging Academics & the Mind program was used to facilitate breathing, reminding teachers to take a pause, especially in stressful classroom situations. This video alternative curriculum is perceived to be a cost-effective alternative to the 30-to-50-minute HLF trained teacher-led programs offered by HLF.

The authors noted the positive side effects on students, teachers and the school climate are worth pursuing. “A key finding includes the feasibility of the program. Teachers who *did not* receive extensive mindfulness-based training could incorporate pre-recorded breathing and movement exercises within their classrooms during regular school hours for several times a week” (Klusmann, et al., 2023, p. 8). Reduction in teacher’s stress levels was recorded, along with a report of increased self-efficacy and confidence in classroom management skills.

This research was conducted during the COVID 19 outbreak and served as a preliminary study with no control group. The study revealed no significant changes in how teachers reported “positive effects,” and, or “personal accomplishments” (Klusmann, et al., 2023, p. 8). The researchers believe this may have resulted from mindfulness exercises having more of an impact in reducing stress than in creating increased feelings of joy. Some teachers may have benefitted by simply having a break from their day while the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* video was being delivered to students, an alternative explanation for significant detected changes in teacher outcomes.

One final comment on this study: relationships among study variables were interesting. “Results of repeated measures-analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated significant changes overtime in several indicators of psychological functioning (i.e., negative affect, perceived stress, exhaustion), self-efficacy in classroom management, and mindfulness. When controlling for teaching experience and cultural identity, results indicated that changes over time remains

significant for perceived stress, self-efficacy of classroom management and mindfulness. Changes in exhaustion and negative affect were no longer significant” (Klusmann, et al., 2023, p. 5). These outcomes could be highly correlated with teachers' years of teaching experience for which analysis was controlled. In short, the more teaching experience, lower stress was reported.

In 2010, Mendelson and colleagues prepared a feasibility and preliminary outcome report of their study of HLF trauma-informed curriculum. Four schools with 97 participating students ages 9-10 years old took part in the assessment over a 12-week period. Intervention classes included approximately 25 students for a 45-minute session with two HLF instructors. Data collection included these surveys:

- Involuntary Stress Responses - *The Responses to Stress Questionnaire*
- Depressive Symptoms - *The Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire*
- Relations with Peers and School - the *People in My Life Survey*.

Researchers administered the Involuntary Engagement Coping Scale with subscales assessing Rumination, Intrusive Thoughts, Emotional Arousal, Physiological Arousal, and Impulsive Action. Focus groups were also conducted at three locations to evaluate student experiences; three to seven children participated. Teacher focus groups also gathered at each of the four school locations with four to five teachers participating. This small randomized controlled trial reported that the HLF trauma-informed curricula helped both students and teachers alleviate stress; the translation of this life skill taught in a classroom setting was reported as shared with family and friends at home. From the classroom to home settings, translation occurred when *the techniques were shared with family and friends – for the greatest*

outcome of self-regulating emotions. Children teaching others what they have learned exemplifies HLF's reciprocal teaching model.

This pilot study focused on enhancing capacity for cognitive and emotional regulation, supporting previous research suggesting that mindfulness-based youth PA with mindful movement of yoga may be beneficial for improving stress responses in youth.

The intervention findings of Aim 1 on Feasibility and Acceptability of the program were encouraging. The findings indicate the program is of interest to students and teachers, but student absences were noted and monitored with follow-on engagement to improve school attendance. The creation of a handbook manual to help teachers promote the use of HLF skills in the classroom was a result of this effort.

The intervention assessment of Aim 2, Preliminary Youth Outcomes, demonstrated the HLF trauma-informed curriculum was effective in reducing social stress among intervention group, reduction in involuntary stress (rumination, intrusive thoughts, emotional arousal, impulsive actions, and physiologic arousal). To assess intervention effects, the researchers "estimated general linear models separately for each outcome, controlling for gender, age, grade and baseline score on that outcome" with the intervention group reporting significant improvements on the overall scale of Involuntary Engagement compared to controls ($p < 0.001$), Mendelson, et al., 2010, p. 990. Significant differences were found on three of five subscales: Rumination ($p < .01$), Intrusive Thoughts ($p < .05$), and Emotional Arousal ($p < 0.01$) with a trend in the predicted direction for Impulsive Action ($p = 0.07$) and Physiologic Arousal ($p = 0.07$). Typically, the (.05) level is used to judge significance. The researchers used (.10) levels to exemplify trends. "Post-intervention means displayed a pattern consistent with predictions for depressive symptoms (7.02 in intervention group versus 7.62 in the control group," Mendelson,

et al., 2010, p. 990. Their logic model predicted that self-regulatory capacities mediated the impact of intervention effects on certain domains of mood and peer-relations and may take longer to show improvement than involuntary stress responses (noted above), thus future research calls suggest follow-up assessments to observe group differences over time in both students and teachers. The small sample size again challenged the rigorous tests of moderation and mediation, with limited power to detect group differences. The researchers do not know the Type I error rate. Though findings are consistent with a causal intervention effect, but because of the small study, the team did not utilize hierarchical linear models and cannot infer data. Again, in this study, parental signed consent forms were required, possibly including students who had more attentive parents or students that had greater behavioral problems. The findings are not generalizable to students who did not volunteer to participate. Other theoretical outcomes were not measured, such as student attention, academic performance, or teacher ratings of behavior in the classroom.

In this seventh study of HLF programming (Mendelson, et al., 2013), included the HLF founders Ali Smith, Atman Smith, and Andrés González as co-authors in assessing the community-academic partnership. Youth self-report surveys, neuro-cognitive tests, and teacher reports of student behaviors were conducted in all schools. The research examined physiological and neurological outcomes of children experiencing the practice. A neurocognitive test along with teacher reports of student behaviors were conducted at baseline, post-intervention, 6-and 12-month follow-ups. Ten Baltimore schools participated. This particular study advanced the work started by Mendelson, et al., in 2010, with an intervention held during the school day, twice per week for 15-weeks.

Study results for the cognitive tests and neurocognitive tests reported no significant differences between the treatment and control conditions for cognitive tests (Stroop test reciting word color, not the word itself as well as backward counting task) nor for the 12-month follow-up. However, the research team reported multiple significant implementation challenges in that study that make it difficult to determine whether the intervention did not have an impact versus the intervention may not have been delivered as intended, (Walker field notes with Mendelson, June 17, 2024). Ultimately, the study concluded that these critical elements must be included in mindful movement SEL programming: (1) administrative support, (2) program promotion by administrators to remove logistical obstacles that affect consistency and quality, (3) a dedicated teaching space, (4) teacher involvement, (5) student engagement, and (6) consistent dosage and fidelity of implementation.

Challenges and recommendations were also noted: (1) funding – the length of time required for implementation must be uniform because grant periods are inconsistent; (2) support from administrators and teachers is off to a strong start at the beginning of the year and diminishes as school-year responsibilities pile on; and (3) evaluation of school partners to ensure common goals and open communication lines. This study demonstrates that the real-world school classroom is a messy place to implement a lab-based hypothesis.

In the eighth study of HLF (Mendelson, et al., 2016), a qualitative program evaluation report on the *Mindful Moment* trauma-informed curriculum delivered in Baltimore’s Patterson High School (1,100 students) and Robert W. Coleman Elementary School (350 students) was undertaken. HLF *Mindful Moment* core components and *Mindful Moment* implementation were assessed with implications for future programming. “The evaluation consisted of obtaining selected academic indicators at each school for current and prior years (e.g., school attendance,

suspensions) and conducting qualitative interviews with each principal and with 10 teachers and 10 students at each school to explore their experience with the Mindful Moment Program. The report concludes with qualitative interview findings, identifying common themes regarding the program and its impact, aspects of the program that were perceived as successful implementation then discussing challenges with suggestions for improvement” (Mendelson, et. al., 2016, p. 2).

The evaluation reported HLF’s contributions to PYD with benefits to students: *all* participating teachers reported some program benefits for students; most noteworthy, 72.7 % acknowledged an improvement in students’ abilities to regulate their emotions and responses to stress (Mendelson, et al., 2016, p. 19). This led to improved student behavior and evolving more positive relationships that created a more peaceful school climate. Teachers reported how participating students enjoyed the *Mindful Moment* program, starting and ending the day with 15 minute breathing exercises, evoking greater relaxation and referring oneself to the *Mindful Moment* room if the day becomes difficult and the student needs to reset and breathe through an experience, knowing that thoughts will pass, and the *Mindful Moment* room can provide a trained expert to help the child work through the challenge.

Program challenges were highlighted that align with earlier studies: Lack of structure and consistency (54.5% reported), understaffing (36.4%), inadequate communication between HLF staff and teachers (27.3%) Mendelson, et al., 2016, p. 36). Perceived barriers to program implementation included lack of teacher buy-in, or student non-participation.

Reported factors that facilitate program implementation: (1) patience, and (2) appropriate investments in time and resources for longer-term gains. In the end, 100% of teachers reported positive impressions of the *Mindful Moment* program (Mendelson, et al.,

2016, p. 25). One teacher reported going off a sleeping aid medication as she was able to practice *Mindful Moment* mental skill techniques that assisted her sleep through stress reduction (Mendelson, et al., 2016, p.11). In the end, the assessment includes recommendations for improvements and future research. The qualitative data provided an overview of how HLF *Mindful Moment* trauma-informed curriculum "...leads to better behavioral outcomes with positive implications for learning" (Mendelson, et al., 2016, p. 34). Reliable metrics for assessing core components are needed. The report suggests the creation of measures that address student emotional awareness, stress management/calming, self-regulation of emotions and behaviors, connectedness with others and perceived emotional support. My own assessment was strengthened by this team's foundational study thorough the awareness of strengths and challenges, with outcome data reported in this important evaluation study.

In the ninth study reviewing the HLF program, Semple et al., (2017), examined several mindfulness-based curricula implementing K-12 across the country. HLF's *Mindful Moment* curriculum was one of the many programs observed. Investigators summarized research support for each program and reviewed qualitative indicators of feasibility, acceptability, efficacy, and effectiveness. Strengths and limitations are discussed. An important finding in the Semple, et al., review reveals that,

"None of these studies have been evaluated through rigorous, randomized control trials, conducted by researchers independent of program developers, nor are they sufficiently powered and controlled for implementation fidelity, and threats to internal validity. None of these studies have been evaluated longitudinally to examine long-term benefits or potential risks. The research is confounded by small sample sizes and weak research designs" (Semple, et al., 2017).

As Semple, et al., note, for the efficacy of the HLF trauma-informed curricula to move from “promising” to “proven,” randomized control studies are essential. Worth noting, randomized control studies, especially longitudinal in design, require significant financial and human resources. Such studies are especially challenging in under-resourced, underserved communities. HLF programming was included in one of the first, if not the first, randomized control trial intervention study of feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a mindfulness with stress reduction yoga educational program in 2010 (Mendelson, et al., 2010). In the literature review (Chapter 2), many K-16 mindfulness programs were studied through an array of research designs. Most reported positive health outcomes, derived from self-report or observational data obtained from participants (Ancona, et al., 2014; Bakosh, et al., 2016; Banks, et al., 2015; Benson, 2006; Benson, et al., 2011; Chiesa, et al., 2010; Cipriano, et al., 2023; Comer, 1988; Crescentini, et al., 2016; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Deighton, et al., 2014; de la Fuente, et al., 2022; Desbordes, et al., 2012; Diperna, et al., 2017; Djernis, et al., 2019; Durlak, et al., 2011; Fegans Gould, et al., 2014; Fegans Gould, et al., 2016; Goldstein, et al., 2020; Greenberg, et al., 2017; Hagen, et al., 2014; Hennessey, et al., 2019; Jones, et al., 2017; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Liehr, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013; Mendelson, et al., 2016; Peterson, et al., 2017; Raes, et al., 2014; Rogers, et al., 2012; Semple, et al., 2010; Semple, et al., 2017; Smith, et al., 2012; Smith, et al., 2022).

In summary, nine studies have focused on the HLF SEL program, assessing the curricula, students, teachers, and schools. Results reported promising outcomes for improving the wellbeing of participants, although substantial methodological and design issues were noted and suggest that while these results are encouraging, they need to be treated with some caution.

With this in mind, it is clear the curriculum is viewed by the key stakeholders as playing a vital role in supporting teachers who have many demands on their time. Mixed methods small studies have demonstrated that HLF's programming is adaptable, feasible to implement, and acceptable to many school administrators, teachers, and students. Some caution is needed in interpreting and extending the findings from these studies, given the methodological and design issues involved in many of the studies.

Interview Results

Additional evidence examining HLF curricula effectiveness comes from examining the qualitative data generated from the semi-structured interviews conducted in the present study. Before doing so, it is important to return to the methodological process of the Utilization-focused Evaluation of Complex Dynamic and Adaptive Systems (Patton, 2012), charted on pages 93-95, with key steps 3-13 noted again here. These are the steps followed that guided the interview process.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Step 3 | Identify, organize, and engage primary intended users. |
| Step 4 | Conduct situation analysis with primary intended users |
| Step 5 | Identify primary intended uses by establishing the evaluation's priority purposes. |
| Step 6 | Consider and build in process uses if appropriate. |
| Step 7 | Focus priority evaluation questions. (Focus on overarching research questions.) |
| Step 8 | Check that fundamental areas for evaluation inquiry are being adequately addressed. |
| Step 9 | Determine what intervention model or theory of change is being evaluated. |
| Step 10 | Negotiate appropriate methods to generate credible findings and support intended use by intended users. |
| Step 11 | Make sure intended users understand potential controversies about methods and their implications. |

- Step 12 Simulate use of findings.
- Step 13 Gather data with ongoing attention to use.

As interviews moved from Step 3 to Step 4 and through Step 13 in the evaluation process, the focus was on soliciting insight as to how the students and teachers experienced the program practices to learn how the HLF curricular teachings affected both students and teachers and may have ripple effects into the community. Interviews led to independently coded transcripts using thematic analysis. The interview results are organized by specific themes regarding first how the students experienced the program. Three former students affiliated with the HLF trauma-informed curricular programming were interviewed. This report is followed next by the themes that emerged relative to the effects of the HLF program on the teachers who deliver the programming, as told by the 8 teachers interviewed, with many more perceptions shared through field engagement with teachers.

Effect on Students

As a result of interview data collected from three former students, six major themes emerged that focus on program effectiveness. The data from these three students is weighted because all three have moved through the HLF *Mindful Moment*, *Holistic Me* and/or *Workforce Development* program and two of three are currently serving as HLF teachers. A total 15 interviews, along with field notes, were used to summarize the findings. It is not surprising that responses centered around themes that align with SEL since the curricula are rooted in SEL PYD practices. The themes include:

- (1) Valuing relationships,
- (2) Employing self-regulation,
- (3) Heightened self-worth,

- (4) Understanding how better choices lead to improved experiences,
- (5) Peer and community support is elevated, and
- (6) Social learning in translation.

Each of these themes will be summarized below.

Interviews with former students (N=3), described how the SEL curricula contributes to their own wellbeing and enhances life in their school and community. A few of the students reported that they did not participate in the physical practice when the HLF *Mindful Moment*, *Bridging Academics & the Mind*, *Holistic Me*, or the *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* program was/were being implemented; however, their teachers reported that the students observed the program and described neutral or positive benefits of the observations. No negative effects were reported. When asked why the curricula are effective, (Purpose 3 of the Study), the researcher identified 2,817 meaning units which were identified and studied, which led to identifying key emerging themes and subthemes (See Table 10 on p. 139).

We will begin with definitions of the coded themes and then outline examples of each theme from the interviews.

(1) Valuing relationships. Observing HLF in action, evolving relationship skills was a key component of the curriculum taught to students to help improve wellbeing. One of the identified effects of the program by *Mindful Moment* Participant 10, *Workforce Development* Participant 4 and *Holistic Me* and *Workforce Development* Participant 5 was that it helped them identify conflicts in relationships with others as a source of stress. In doing so, participants were able to value personal relationships with family and chose to develop positive relationships with others as a way to minimize stress. It was reported that participants learn how to resolve conflict and work through challenges with peers and adults to improve relationships. Value is defined as

the moral, social, or aesthetic principle accepted by an individual or society as a guide to what is good, desirable or important (APA Dictionary, 2024).

It was reported that the HLF self-regulation techniques that are taught give students the ability to manage themselves and their emotions to make decisions about their lives. “I want to say, like, yeah, I was in a place in my life, just definitely crossroads where I’d say I was not doing the most positive things. But the good thing with them is that they’re always there for me, like, you know, whoever, whether it’s me, whether there’s other kids in the after-school program, of giving that outlet” (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-114). Stories unfolded of how relationship conflicts led to anxiety, depression, compromised immune systems, and illness that all contributed to reaching for poor choices to soothe the pain. This *Mindful Moment* student spoke at length about cycles of complications in life that made it difficult to improve life circumstances. HLF turned things around for him by helping him to better take control of his life story.

Interviews with former students and teachers revealed how HLF uses a reciprocal teaching model to create new student teachers, that lead to a greater connection to peers and others in the community. (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-125 on 10/7/21; *Holistic Me* and *Workforce Development* Student Participant 5-27 on 11/3/21; Founder/Teacher Participant 1-460 on 10/13/21; Founder/Teacher Participant 2-293 on 10/8/21; Founder/Teacher Participant 3-172 on 10/27/21). One teacher reported he had sprained his ankle and needed the children to step up and lead the practice. The students were becoming teachers through greater awareness of sharing the practices. “These youths were taking my spot... They sounded like me!... We are teaching mindful movement, the breathwork and the meditation, and when they lead their peers, we can hear and see our teachings as they lead...It was a really beautiful moment just to see

that” (Teacher Participant 11-185 on 11/3/21). These anecdotes provide compelling evidence of efficacy as the students broaden awareness of self and others and the impact this can have on their community, as they make meaningful connections to peers and others.

(2) Employing Self-regulation (of the mind and body) was perceived to be an important key to the effectiveness of HLF curricula. The APA dictionary defines “self-regulation” as the ability to control one’s behavior through self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-control; understand and manage your own behavior and actions. A number of ways to manage emotions and control impulses were identified like confronting adversity and controlling one’s emotions.

An experience was shared by a student wherein a school-based psychologist could not get a particular student to talk about a problem unless an HLF teacher was present, (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-209 on 10/22/21). This demonstrates that the HLF program has built trust with students. One 10-year-old student was utilizing the *Mindful Moment* room. She entrusted the HLF staff with the pent-up trauma she had been carrying. “Kids make fun of me; they say my mother’s a prostitute. She sells herself. She is on drugs. I seen my mother stabbed in front of me” (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-587 on 10/22/21). The girl was disruptive in school. Over time, she continued to pursue the *Mindful Moment* room, and within a year, she was *leading* the stress reduction yoga and mindfulness classes with her peers! This is quite a growth experience to observe - from fighting and suspensions to self-awareness, self-management and into a leadership position demonstrating responsible decision-making. The trauma that children face in their young lives is intense, (Founder/Teacher Participant 3-133 on 10/27/21). HLF founder Andrés González shared results from work at nearby Fort Worthington Elementary School in Baltimore. The school reported 108 suspensions in the first year of

implementing the HLF program, which dropped to fewer than 100 in the second year and fewer than 10 suspensions in the third year. “We like to say that we are here to provide techniques to help people help themselves. It’s about using your breath, taking a moment and focusing on the now. Work through what you’re going through” (Andrés González in interview with Michael Vyskocil on 10/1/21).

Prioritizing one’s own wellbeing and evolving impulse control is one of the proposed effects of the HLF mindfulness curricula. In a story shared by the former Principal of Patterson High, an experience was shared about a student who was having a difficult morning. He had gone to the *Mindful Moment* room in the high school, but it was not staffed at that moment. The stressed-out student sat down outside the door and began to breathe deeply and employ the mindfulness training he had been taught. He knew he needed to be present there, he did not allow his anxiety to boil over nor did he want to have a disagreement with anyone. He chose to be there; he had not been sent by his teacher. The bell rang signifying the change of periods and the lunch hour arrived. Hundreds of kids were emerging from classrooms into the hallway. It was chaos. The most important observation from the principal was that as other students walked by this young man, they did not bother him. They did not holler out; they did not touch him, they just kept walking. They did not do anything to disrupt him. The principal recalls in that moment, being sold on the HLF program. The scene was part of their new normal day, and “whether they did it themselves or not, they respected what he was doing. And I think subconsciously, they figured out there must be a reason he got here doing this. And they just kept it moving. Nobody bothering him...others passing in the hallway may have lowered their voices when they passed him too...and that is when I knew...,” it was my ‘aha’ moment that this program is having an impact (Administrator Participant 15-404 on 4/5/24). In the program,

students are taught to recognize conflict as a source of stress and work through it, self-regulate with breathwork, mindfulness, and mindful movement, taking steps to pause and change ruminating thoughts. According to the former principal of Patterson High, this student was practicing the stress reduction methods he had learned from HLF and was reaching for tools to help improve the stress he was experiencing, seeking help from *Mindful Moment* teachers in the process.

The HLF curricula are trauma-informed; the commitment of the HLF organization to work within the community to build foundational practices devoted to healing trauma and manage emotional responses to stress are demonstrated in interview after interview, with investigators interested in studying how the process may be working, with a desire to share the findings so others may benefit from the same tools.

(3) Heightened Self-worth: a sense of one's own value as a human being; self-esteem, (APA Dictionary, 2024). HLF curricula was perceived to help participants develop a sense of identity and confidence to improve themselves. It is through this self-worth they evolve empathy toward themselves and others.

The students really feel the love of HLF teachers according to teacher, student and administrator's interviewed (Participants 4, 5, 10, 11). Students are reported to depend on HLF staff as if they are all part of an extended family. "HLF has their foundation, they're founded on love, that's what I would say...love for the people" (Teacher Participant 11-310 on 11/3/21). This sentiment was repeated in anecdotes through each of the interviews. "The A-Team are excellent together, they move as a unit, totally chill. When they are presenting, the energy is undeniable—it is not an act. It is just how they are in life...When you are just hanging out with all this love, man, like some of the most loving people on the planet, love zombies" (*Holistic*

Me and Workforce Development Participant 5-208 on 11/3/21). The teachers teach students to love themselves; this is the central tenet for success of the program. It is the program developer's contention that once people learn to love themselves, they are more able to love others with empathy and understanding.

The practice is empowering. HLF staff remind the students that no matter what situation they find themselves in, one can always tap into using the breath and calm down. There may be difficult moments in a day, trauma puts you on an island and isolates you; but breathing and yoga help calm the mind and body and resets the entire perspective so that any person can realize they can work through challenges to understand the difficult moment will pass in time (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-619 on 10/22/21). HLF curricula teaches children that when the heart rate starts picking up, when they change their breathing from nasal breathing to mouth breathing, that's the body's way of telling you you're stressing out. You have the ability to change your breath and move back into a parasympathetic relaxed state. But most of the world lives in a higher stress sympathetic nervous state. HLF teaches children the scientific terms of what is happening in their bodies, explaining the physiology of the central nervous system (Founder/Teacher Participant 3-459 on 10/27/21). After the breathwork, the children do a silent reflection meditation practice, understanding the concept of unity, oneness, love, and how we are all reflections of one another. Children start understanding their self-worth and start loving themselves. That helps them to evolve empathy and see from the experiences of other people (Founder/Teacher Participant 3-465 on 10/27/21).

(4) Understanding How Better Choices Lead to Improved Experiences: Responsible decision making, the cognitive process of choosing between two or more alternatives, ranging from relatively clear cut to the complex, (APA Dictionary, 2024). The HLF trauma-informed

curricula builds in practices of learning how mindful outcomes to choices are made in everyday life through practicing a pause and breathing thoughtfully before responding to whatever is happening in one's surroundings. Examples of subthemes making up this theme include: 1) taking a mindful breath and counting down so as not to lose emotional control when agitated, 2) pausing before responding to a stressful situation, which may lead to clearer thinking after doing repetitions of the stress breath exercise, 3) self-referring to the *Mindful Moment* room to get support and remove self from stressful situation.

Students reported benefits of increased self-regulation which improved their emotional management. Increased self-regulation also influences out of school activities through improvements in SEL. One student at the age of 14, reported when he was first introduced to the program, he did not want to participate. He “thought it was stupid and wanted to shoot basketball instead” (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10 - Line 40 on 10/7/21). He said he did not want to try it; HLF leaders never force anyone to participate. One day, something happened in this student's life where assistance from HLF founder Ali Smith served to change this student's perspective toward the practice of yoga and related mental skill training. The student had developed an “unbearably painful earache and needed relief” (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-46 on 10/7/21). Ali Smith showed the student how to do a particular practice of 45 seconds of alternate nostril breathing which opened the ear canal, removed a blockage, and alleviated the intense pain. The student reported being grateful and more open-minded toward what HLF was teaching. “Okay, now it's kind of like some Mr. Miyagi like, you know, like Karate Kid. Like you had to pass the test” (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-50 on 10/7/21). Until this moment, he said he had been focusing on everything around him, but not looking at what was going on inside him, not knowing how he was feeling on the inside (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10-60

on 10/7/21). He reported that he was slow to fully adopt a stress reduction yoga and mindfulness practice, but as the interview continued, he stated that he cannot imagine his life without this practice.

One teacher told the story of a troubled former student whose father had been in prison, and then murdered. HLF began working with the student; the student is now grown and works as an HLF teacher himself. Andrés González had said to the young man, “You will always be you, no matter what. No one can change you but yourself.” It gave the student much to think about. “The work is changing lives” (*Holistic Me and Workforce Development* Participant 5-125 on 11/3/21). “Mindfulness helps you get better at whatever you want to do, no matter what it is” (*Workforce Development* Participant 4-260 on 10/22/21).

In another example, a student said he had made bad choices and realized he needed to make changes in his life. HLF’s program helped him to turn things around so that the teachers accepted him and showed him how to teach others. “I don’t think that was like who I truly am, it was just kind of me going through my environment at the time and me having to adapt and survive” (*Mindful Moment* Participant 10). A final compelling story from a student reported that “HLF changed my life 100 percent. I would be dead or in jail without mindfulness or yoga” (HLF, 2024).

There were examples of the successful HLF work spread beyond K-12 teaching spaces and into the community. I was told a story of local kids that were terrorizing their Baltimore neighborhood, so the A-Team connected with the ringleader and invited the kids to shoot basketball at the local YMCA. They took the kids upstairs to the dance room and emphasized the physical part of the breathing exercise, telling the kids it was a way to beat the other guy at sports. The A-Team made the teachings relatable, showing how the breath could be used to find

internal peace (Garrison Institute Class: People Who Care for People on 10/26/21). In this example, it was conveyed that former bullies and troublemakers were being converted into leaders. SEL PYD programming practiced by HLF is profound (Participant Interviews 1-15). It is in observing how the A-Team and HLF teachers relate to students that makes this work lifechanging for participants. Specifically, the students respond to the caring attitude with kind words woven into the teaching of the curriculum. The students report that they feel respected by the teachers. The HLF teachers are consistently present. They show up day after day; this is one key to their success. They are also relatable; they have a lived experience with which students identify. And complementing all of this, the students appreciate the way their teachers talk to them in the same urban slang the students use to talk to one another. The teachers are present wearing comfortable attire (tee shirts and jeans). All of these factors appear to contribute to helping the students develop a trusting relationship with the HLF teachers, understanding that better choices lead to improved experiences.

(5) Peer and Community Needs are Elevated: “Altruism” is defined as the unselfish behavior that provides benefit to others at some cost to the individual (APA Dictionary, 2024). Elevating needs of others was viewed as a program outcome as students explored what it means to empathetically see through the eyes of another and support one another as they seek to improve their own lives, school, family, and surrounding community, by putting the needs of others in front of their own needs. Subthemes making up this theme included: 1) humanistic loving care, 2) caring attitudes, 3) unselfish behavior with no expectation of reward.

A powerful indicator of transformational change is the report of peers engaging in community development after successfully completing HLF training programs. Teacher Participants 1-3 described shifts in the Baltimore community neighborhood during the 23 years

that HLF has been administering its programming. The *Workforce Development* program is a proving ground for engaging children to act within their communities. A number of greening projects have evolved from students awakening to their abilities to lead change within their communities. Community gardens and park spaces are being restored or created by HLF students, as they become aware that they can have an impact on their neighborhood spaces.

(6) Social Learning in Translation: Social behavior is learned by observing and imitating the behavior of others (Bandura, 1986). Through the examination of PYD psychosocial development, we often look at life skill transfer. This category is the closest to analyzing how the HLF trauma-informed curricula profoundly affects the evolution of life decisions as students move forward from adolescence into adulthood.

HLF has taught the children the benefits of every practice, how to use them, the benefits, how to teach them and the next thing, they are out in their homes, community, showing others the practices (Founder/Teacher Participant 1- 465 on 10/13/21). One particular interview echoed the reinforcement taking place when students practice the HLF curricula. “The ‘problem kids’ are now the ones that are leaders. They’re breaking up fights and being respectful to the teachers, telling other children to get themselves together. The children are using the same principles being taught in the *Mindful Moment* program to teach others” (Founder/Teacher Participant 3-141 on 10/27/21). The HLF program encourages the students to go home and teach family members what they are learning, especially as the work has both anecdotal and evidence-based research supporting its work to create greater harmony in the school, which is passed along to the family units and within the community at large, to help others with their own life lessons. (Ancona, et al., 2014; Dariotis, et al., 2016a; Dariotis, et al., 2016b; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, et al., 2013;

Mendelson, et al., 2016; Semple, et al., 2017; Smith, et al., 2022). In another experience, a parent stopped a teacher outside of school and said, “You’re the guy that got my child coming home, asking me to breathe and do this every day” (Former *Holistic Me* and *Workforce Development* Student now Teacher Participant 5-119 on 11/3/21). The teacher was amazed, as this child had not been participating in classes, he would sit back and watch. The effect here is to note that the children are watching and learning, even if they are not fully engaged in the practice. This sentiment was repeated in many of the interviews.

It was also reported in the interviews that the program is especially effective when the children have started with HLF programming in elementary school, and the SEL mindful movement and stress reduction yoga teachings are carried all the way through their high school years. The personal stories are felt more intensely than demonstrated quantitative data shown through positive increases in test scores and reduced school suspension rates.

These sub themes also emerged which factor across some of the themes:

- Gaining new knowledge and skills: participants shared stories of how the HLF training was providing insight into little known social constructs about the value of stress reduction yoga, breathwork, exercise, mindfulness, silent reflection meditation, and developing a practice in which many were eager to share with others in their family and within the community. This was the dream of Ali and Atman’s Uncle Will (Joyner) and carried out through the A-Team (Ali, Atman, Andrés) as they created the HLF to teach the practice to generations of teachers to come. Gaining new knowledge and skills is a crosscutting subtheme of employing impulse control, understanding how better choices lead to improved experiences, and social learning in translation.

- Motivation to continue, experience exceeds expectations: participants exposed to HLF reported a general desire and willingness to proceed with the program. Motivation to continue is a crosscutting subtheme of valuing relationships, heightened self-worth, understanding how better choices lead to improved experiences, and social learning in translation.

The several themes and sub themes identify the key findings that emerged from my research of Purpose 3, investigating whether the HLF trauma-informed curricula is an effective learning tool. Children as young as five are reported as able to identify stress, and then reach for a tool to resolve anxiety, settle conflict, and see through the eyes of another (Teacher Participants 1-3). It is incredibly impressive for a child to self-regulate with this skillset, and it lends insight into greater understanding of the perceived program impact of the HLF curricula teaching resilience to students who come with a willingness to learn.

Themes with subthemes drawn from interviews are organized in Table 10 below.

Table 10

SEL Life Skill Translational Behaviors and Experiences Reported by Theme

Valuing Relationships	Employing Self-regulation	Heightened Self-Worth and Self-Awareness	Understanding How Better Choices Lead to Improved Experiences	Peer and Community Support Elevated	Social Learning in Translation
Favorable prosocial actions with classmates, positively affecting classroom dynamics	Identify stressors with tools to resolve anxiety, evoke empathy, settle conflict	Feeling helpful; feeling as if they are making a difference	Good judgements increase prospects for greater harmony in life	Developing awareness of larger community / social issues and taking action to support improved community efforts	Feeling like a part of “something bigger than self” and wanting to share that feeling of belonging with others

Table 10 (cont'd)

Raising peaceful connection awareness in families	Self-regulated emotions and behaviors; stress reduction	Can feel the changes in their own bodies	New opportunities are presented	Promoting wellbeing of others out of a desire to help	Model teacher behavior, learn skill(s) and teach others
Choose to work in a positive environment with others	Confronting adversity and taking control	Can see a positive future for self	Building trust to know my choices affect me	Feeling supported by the organization and having respect for what they do	Coping skills demonstrated and shared with others (stress and emotion)
Sustained connections that remain uplifting in life	Increased healthy habit choices (PA, nutrition, exercise, managing self-needs and self-care, etc.)	Appreciating personal gains/improvements	Role as a thought leader is rewarding		Moving out of school and into the world as community-contributing adults/citizens
Improved peer and adult relationships		Increased self-confidence			Adapting the program to the local community
Valuing personal relationships (family, school and community)					Ability to articulate needs and develop solutions

Sub themes of gaining new knowledge and skills and motivation to continue the practice were found in all interviews of teachers, administrators, and students (1-12, 15). *Workforce Development* student (4-261) summed up his openness to new knowledge and skills which in turn, ignite motivational aspects of the curriculum. He stressed that HLF is effective because it is science that you use in everyday life. He's often learning new things about himself, how his mind works through self - study and practice. "And you feel better after doing the practice, so you keep doing it; that is motivational." Another *Holistic Me & Workforce Development* student shared that he is now a teacher with HLF and that he keeps in touch with many students and their parents. Over the years, as he runs into HLF families, they tell him that their children still

do their practices. He finds this both beneficial and motivational (Former *Holistic Me* and *Workforce Development* Student now Teacher Participant 5-126). He closes his interview by stating, “it’s hard to deny the benefits once you try it” (5-195).

Effect on Teachers

Returning to the interview methodology, Patton’s Utilization-focused Evaluation of Complex Dynamic and Adaptive Systems (Patton, 2012), on page 78, Steps 3-13; interviews with teachers presented interesting qualitative findings. Using this qualitative interview instrument, the researcher reviewed all Steps for each interview, however Steps 7-11 were especially focused upon, inviting responses to assess teacher burnout, examining how the HLF curricula might support and reinforce job satisfaction. Open-ended questions were aimed at what worked and what did not work so well in administering the program. Questions also probed into why people chose to participate, how they experienced a difference in themselves, their students, and in the classroom/school climate over time.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Step 7 | Focus priority evaluation questions. |
| Step 8 | Check that fundamental areas for evaluation inquiry are being adequately addressed. |
| Step 9 | Determine what intervention model or theory of change is being evaluated. |
| Step 10 | Negotiate appropriate methods to generate credible findings and support intended use by intended users. |
| Step 11 | Make sure intended users understand potential controversies about methods and their implications. |

Utilization-focused Evaluation of Complex Dynamic and Adaptive Systems, Patton, 2012.

When teachers were asked why the curricula are effective Purpose 3 of the study, these emerging themes became apparent in interviews. The overarching themes from the interviews

regarding HLF's SEL programming effects on teachers included these four coded themes: (1) stress reduction and relaxation, (3) gratitude, (4) and positive thinking. We will start with definitions.

(1) Stress Reduction and Relaxation. What is stress? Stress involves mental and emotional worry or tension caused by life challenges. It comes from thoughts and events that make you feel anxious frustrated, or angry, it is the body's reaction to a challenge or demand. Stress affects nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave, causing mind-body changes; stress contributes directly to psychological and physiological disorder and disease, affecting mental and physical health, reducing quality of life (APA dictionary, 2024). *Stress reduction* is the process of minimizing or eliminating anxiety and tension through effective mind body techniques that enhance relaxation. Methods of stress reduction include use of coping tools to remove stress and its negative effect on our lives.

The eight teachers interviewed indicated that the HLF curricula helps classroom teachers deal with secondary trauma and stress, to alleviate the classroom tensions and foster a learning space where children can focus on creative scholarship, (Founder/Teacher Participant 1-269 on 10/13/2021). Training teachers is essential to the success of the HLF model of SEL through mindful movement. "We realized we needed to teach people this practice, to, you know, help them out, you know, to strengthen the mental, physical, and emotional..." (Founder/Teacher Participant 2-100 on 10/8/21). HLF founders all state that their teacher, Uncle Will (Joyner), taught them that to advance the practice in the world, they needed to promise to teach teachers, (Teacher Participants 1-54 on 10/13/21; 2-85 on 10/8/21; 3-64 on 10/27/21).

Over the past 20 years, there has been an emphasis on healing trauma. HLF's work with communities has demonstrated the effectiveness on both urban youth and teachers. The school

climate survey in the Baltimore County Public School district addresses how schools' function and benchmark attendance, test scores, referral rates to detentions, etc., among many other measures. (Baltimore County Public Schools Climate Survey, 2024). Principals are often rated on these measurables affecting school climate. For the HLF team to be successful, they needed to demonstrate the benefits of the “practice” to administrators and teachers, with the long-term goal affecting positive change in the school climate; this begins with teachers. The HLF team was given their first chance to teach others what they had learned from Uncle Will (Joyner), beginning in west Baltimore in October 2001.

Throughout the decades, the curricula came together as a plan to: (1) model what it was to be a caring, present, human-being; (2) put together content that included yoga postures that had the greatest impact on releasing stress and trauma carried in the body (‘we went with a physical body warm up, a physical workout, and then breathing practices’); (3) As trauma gets stored in the body, the physical practice is helpful to allow people to sit down and actually do the breathing work which can clear the mind and help them to receive the benefits of meditation, (Founder/Teacher Participant 2-169 on 10/8/21).

This is a demonstration of one of the stress reduction processes that is shared with HLF practitioners. Teachers reported beneficial stress relieving outcomes from engaging in the practice of mindful movement, yoga, and PA (Teacher, Student and Administrator Participants 1-11, 15). For example, teachers shared how the energy in the room shifted after completing the practice with the students who became more focused and quieted, ready to learn. Also, teachers reported how moving the body and engaging in deep breathing exercises helped the teachers reset and let go of a number of tasks ruminating in their minds (Participants 1-8).

Teachers experience high rates of burnout and fatigue from heavy workloads, often experiencing secondary trauma as they contend with the social emotional challenges of their students (Teacher Participants 1-7, 11). In one case, teachers were holding a class in a juvenile detention center for girls. Students were not interested in participating; none of them. The educators refocused the lesson, beginning with mindfulness exercises, instead of physical movement or yoga poses. The students opened a conversation with the teachers in a way that they could talk deeper, form greater bonds of understanding, and build trust over time. The class ended up being one of the most rewarding experiences for the teachers, and perhaps for the students too, (Teacher Participant 6-414 on 10/28/21). The effect here was on adaptive behaviors and relaxation that resulted in stress reduction. Teachers began working with the students where they were, to initiate trust and share tools that may help both students and teachers alike. The teacher reported her enjoyment of this class in particular as an example of how the practice of a guided meditation helped her to unwind and relax. With regular practice, teachers reported less depression, less ruminating thoughts, lower anxiety. This helps lessen secondary traumatic stress experiences that the teachers often take on from their students (Participant 1). Other examples reported include that when teachers take a few minutes to engage in stress reduction activities, it contributes to improving the classroom/school climate. Students and teachers alike are reported to display more empathetic behaviors after self-regulating, which in turn has consequences for the classroom learning.

(2) Gratitude is a sense of thankfulness and happiness in response to receiving a gift, either a tangible benefit (e.g., a present, favor) given by someone or a fortunate happenstance (e.g., a beautiful day) (APA Dictionary, 2024). Gratitude is an emotion, a mood, and a trait, it

encompasses a feeling of appreciation with a perspective of choosing appreciation for an experience or event.

One of the teachers described how students who had HLF training evolved relationships with him over time, which helped him feel more rewarded in his own work, developing a greater practice of gratitude that brought a deeper sense of peace to his career, (Teacher Participant 11-40 on 11/3/21). He went on to describe a unique experience, “I had like five people come out to me this week, so I thought that was beautiful for them to share their pronouns...I am in the LGBT community myself, so letting the others know this is a personal risk,” and demonstrates a great trust in the student teacher relationships, (Teacher Participant 11-274 on 11/3/21). Inclusive of ethnicity, race, and gender, sexuality is another important connection of modeling teacher similarities in the practice, so that students can see someone like themselves leading the class. The teacher expressed gratitude for the practice of stress reduction yoga, silent reflection meditations, and mindful movement being shared with students.

The teaching of the HLF practices was described as helping other teachers and students to improve themselves; it brought great satisfaction in a career that had been marked with years of stress in teaching careers, overall, the gratitude was shared for receiving tools that helped manage the daily stress load and overcome life challenges (Teacher Participant 6 on 10/28/21). Another teacher talked about his past demons with addiction. He was filled with gratitude at being given second chances, and that his current career pathway was rewarding as he could see how he was helping others grow into a more peaceful existence (Teacher Participant 11 on 11/3/21).

(3) Positive Thinking is defined as an increase or progression, perceiving the best and approaching circumstances with a productive outlook (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2024).

It starts with self-talk. Ways of practicing positive thinking include a focus on the present moment, use of affirmations, surrounding yourself with others that share uplifting perspectives, and focusing on the good in any given situation.

Many teachers discussed positive thinking as an outcome of their participation in the program. One teacher shared a bit about a day in her life, explaining why scheduling downtime, practicing mindfulness with positive thinking is so important:

I think of the impact of trauma ... People need to be able to self-regulate and to provide self-care ... We offer compassion and hope for the future and to be able to understand and be mindful of each moment ... I think the mindfulness will make us more aware of each moment and more aware of ourselves and our emotions and our field...To look at how students that are extremely aggressive in school and are hard-wired to their phones--they need to be able to self-regulate and to be in control of the emotions and their aggressive behaviors. It is not just students you know; we can look at adults now because it is affecting adults too at this point. Because of the pandemic, some students just do not like to come to school because of all the trauma and the steps they have to go through to get there...not having what they need at home...Not having the parents, not having the food close... (hard) just to get to school. And then you get to school and -- their teachers wonder why the children are acting the way they do because they are hungry. They may not have gotten the love, care, and kindness that they needed at home or because of the communities that they go through to be able to get to (school), you know the drugs, the trafficking...and the gangs that are in community...This has an impact on all of us. We need uplifting thoughts and *mindful moments* just to carry us through the day (Teacher and Administrator Participant 8-16 on 10/26/21).

And she went on to say that participating as an HLF teacher has allowed her to do this. Teachers need to schedule breaks where they are unplugged, away from the day-to-day responsibilities that consume their lives (Founder/Teacher Participant 1 Line 290). Positive thinking offers mental skill training to move the mind into a gentle, more compassionate space to bring about greater peace. Utilizing the breathing and mindful movement practices of HLF, with guided silent reflection meditations, in turn produces more positive thoughts and calming energy. Participating teachers have shared that these techniques offer a peaceful outlet to manage stress in their daily lives.

Participants have shared stories about their lives and the impact of these holistic healing practices, for example, adding stress reduction yoga, mindfulness, and PA to improve mental clarity, which ultimately improves relaxation and their ability to learn new material. The goal for teachers and administrators is to educate healthy, happy, peaceful, students, which aids in improving the school climate, and supports a more enjoyable educational experience. The bonus is that conflict resolution techniques and improved relationship skills support degree completion, reduce suspensions and most importantly, help people develop a life practice of mindful movement and meditation. This is the longitudinal data missing from the story (Founder/Teacher Participant 1-480 on 10/13/21).

Mindful movement and stress reduction yoga with PA have been shown to generate positive thinking and greater harmony in life. Having a practice may bring stress relief; helping to teach others the practice ensures the scheduling of relaxation time, with the reward of helping others to build skills that improve wellbeing. Implementing the curriculum in a busy workday, however, is not without challenges.

Summary of HLF Programming Effects on Students and Teachers

The work of HLF was visible and demonstrated results over time, thus it caught the attention of key academics who then pursued research on the effectiveness of the program. With important connections to a Penn State researcher, the HLF gained visibility for its notable work with academics at Johns Hopkins, University of Baltimore, University of Cincinnati, University of Groningen Netherlands, University of North Carolina Greensboro, University of Southern California and government agencies in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The peer-reviewed research reported in journals and in-conference proceedings has further strengthened the position of HLF to scale its programming, touching the lives of more people with the goal of bringing healing and wellness to communities. Success of the program is dependent on interactive components of curricular delivery, fidelity, dosage, and teacher training.

Curricular Delivery

The program is delivered through K-12 programs that include *Mindful Moment* rooms in schools, *Holistic Me* after-school programs, *Bridging Academics & the Mind* pre-recorded videos in classrooms, with some teachers coming to buildings and meeting students in assigned locations. The HLF *Workforce Development* program is offered to 18–21-year-old young adults. Community programs are supported in locations across neighborhoods in towns and cities. HLF utilizes teachers and alumni of its programs to engage in program related efforts and community outreach. Based on interviews with teachers, administrators, students and key stakeholders, plus the sheer number of schools adopting the curriculum, the program is well received with most participants (90%) choosing to engage in the practices led by a trained instructor, (Teacher/Administrator Participant 9). This was not always the case. Early on, few participants joined in the practice; HLF does not force anyone to participate. Over time, younger students

more fully engaged, older participants began to demonstrate a willingness to learn. It matters that the teachers look like the students (Smith, et al., 2022 p. 107). Middle and high school-aged students seem to care deeply what others think of them and may be slow to adopt the teachings. With older students self-referring themselves to the *Mindful Moment* room, it demonstrates an awareness of judgement-free zone for receiving support and being offered tools to resolve mental challenges and conflict.

Teacher Training

Teachers are invited for training through HLF programming. The HLF Director of Training Programs organizes the training classes, which are usually 5-weeks in duration, though some can be longer. Training is individualized based on levels of experience. (See Table 9 on p. 108 for certification requirements.)

The *Workforce Development* Program structure is set up to advance 18 to 21-year-old former students with HLF experiences through a training program lasting six hours a day, four days a week, over ten weeks (240 hours of intense training). This teacher training is conducted year-round, with the most concentrated effort held over the summer months. These newly trained teachers then must pass a practicum before they are sent out into the world to teach and staff *Mindful Moment*, *Holistic Me*, *Holistic ROOTS*, and *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* programming. They also serve as *Mindful Ambassadors*. The summer *Workforce Development* program is sponsored by YouthWorks, which pays the teacher trainees for their job training efforts. *Workforce Development* students are trained and retained to serve as the next cohort of teachers in HLF programming.

The *Bridging Academics & the Mind* curriculum teacher training programs could be as little as 4 hours a week over 6 weeks, as this program includes pre-recorded online brief

mindful breathing and movement exercises with an extensive curriculum and workbook to help incorporate multi week intensive programs. There is a training fee required to learn the curriculum necessary to implement the program.

For classroom teachers, training includes 2-10 hours or more wherein teachers learn how to lead situational classes through the practice. There is also a training fee required to learn how to best teach the HLF curriculum.

Teacher training occurs at scheduled training sessions, camps, retreats, and workshops. On average, for every 10 teachers that begin the training, about 7 remain teaching the HLF curriculum over longer periods (Interview with Founder/Teacher Participant 1, on 10/13/21). In some cases, like when HLF took on the satellite program in the Akwesasne territory around 2020, the teacher training rate was greater than 7 out of 10 (Interview with Founder/Teacher Participant 3, on 10/27/21). The community was eager for this SEL program to be delivered in their community. Important to note, the Akwesasne teachers adapted the curriculum to the local audience and were encouraged by HLF to do so. For example, while the breathing practices were consistent, the teachers adopted the four directions of north, south, east, and west, into the program, linking local culture and customs of the Akwesasne Mohawk tribe to the practice. They have many built in connections to the natural world too. Teachers are also given handbooks guiding the practice, which include demonstrations of many yoga poses, breathing methods, exercises, and mindful silent reflection meditation practices. HLF leadership offers teacher training workshops in many cities throughout the year and with varying durations of time, including at places like the Omega Institute, among many other venues. Primary teacher training is accomplished through the 10-week summer camp organized through the *Workforce Development* program. With the current launch of several new cities in an initiative sponsored

by the Clinton Global Initiative, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Unlikely Collaborators Foundation, and the Trauma Research Foundation, teacher training will be expanding to offer regular HLF curricular programming and strengthen more schools in: Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Denver, CO; Madison, WI; Milwaukee, WI; Richmond, VA; and the Akwesasne Mohawk territories will expand beyond New York into Canada, (HLF, 2024; Administrator Participant 15, Line 141 on 4/5/24).

Fidelity and Dosage Delivery

Fidelity of implementation is important to understand to accurately assess whether a program is being delivered as intended. Once fidelity is established, a researcher can measure how and why an intervention works, or not, and report on any outcomes that might be improved.

The HLF *Mindful Moment* program is recommended to be offered during the first 15 minutes of the school day and again for 15 minutes at the end of the school day, five days a week. Teachers interviewed reported that the schools and programs that adhere to the recommended offerings of programming, demonstrate improvements in stress management for participants (Teacher participants 1-7, 11). This finding aligns with reports in the literature (Ancona, et. al., 2014; Dariotis, et. al, 2016b, Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Klusmann, et al., 2023; Mendelson, et al., 2010; Mendelson, T., et al., 2016).

Schools with a *Mindful Moment* dedicated space arrange to have staff on site for up to six hours a day, during the school day, so children can self-refer themselves to the room, or students may be invited by teachers and/or staff to take a few minutes in the *Mindful Moment* room with HLF staff and catch their breath, perhaps to counter something stressful happening during their day. Programs with dedicated schedules delivering the program as intended by the

founders, The HLF *Holistic Me* and *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* are offered as scheduled after school or in community centers with prearranged offerings. The best time reported to deliver the curricula is when the students or participants first gather, to get the students to focus, and set a structure in the place of learning.

The HLF *Bridging Academics & the Mind* prerecorded videos are usually offered in the morning or after lunch, to help the students relax, regroup, and reduce stress. The effect, this often helps the teacher better manage the classroom climate. HLF has not yet prescribed fidelity and dosage of the *Bridging Academics & the Mind* curriculum (Klusmann et al, 2023, p. 9). Educational and behavioral interventions must have a time quality adherence to measure effectiveness and know that the intervention is having the intended effects.

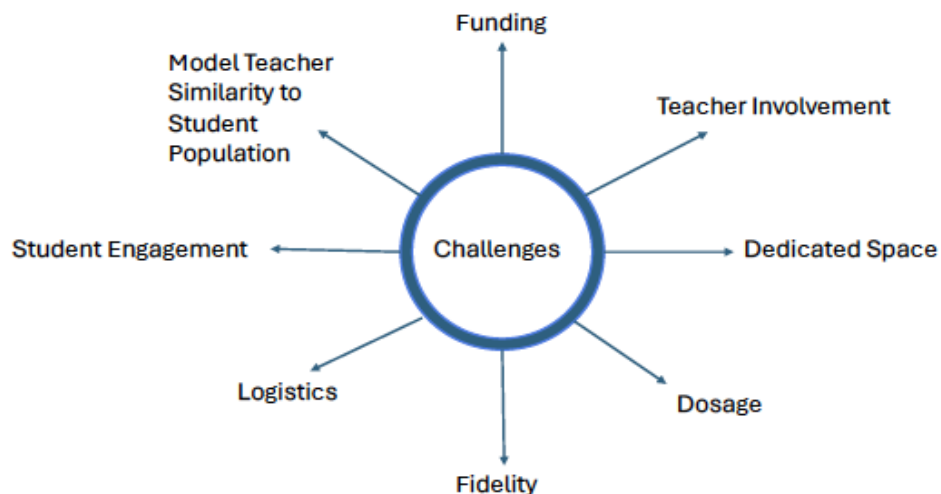
Ending the day with a mindful breathing and stress reduction yoga exercise routine has been demonstrated to set the tone for after-school events and/or community learning, as people reflect on the day, reset the physical, mental, and emotional bodies to prepare for what lies ahead and create a more focused experience.

Challenges

As an evaluator it is important to not only look for positive characteristics of programs, but to document challenges and concerns as well. For this reason, all participants were asked to discuss program challenges. It was found that challenges to program delivery were consistent with expectations for a non-profit educational organization working in an inner-city public education venue, serving urban underserved communities. Figure 8, below, indicates the challenges reported.

Figure 8

Challenges to HLF Program Delivery



As challenges mounted over the years, HLF founders identified roles and responsibilities, and later hired appropriate staff to focus on roles and responsibilities addressing key problems so that multiple founders/teachers/staff were not duplicating efforts. This was learned early on in the HLF operations (reported by Teacher Participants 1-3). As the program has grown over the decades, key program managers have been hired to manage challenges so that the founders can continue to work on engaging students, communicating with teachers and administrators to address logistics, fidelity, dosage, dedicated space, teacher involvement, and build grant support and broader investments. Each of the challenges will be addressed individually.

Funding Issues

When examining the HLF challenges, *each of the 15 participants interviewed mentioned funding challenges*. This was the biggest issue reported by all HLF affiliated participants, especially noting the challenge of consistent funding. Programs might be operational with trained personnel, yet unsteady funding with no regular contract makes it complicated for

teachers to plan livelihoods. This affects every level in creating, implementing, and receiving the curricula. Maintaining trained staff then complicates logistics since funding impacts job security. With important research backing the work of the HLF, consistent grant funding has improved over time, (Founder/Teacher Participant 2, Line 247 on 10/8/21).

Dedicated Space

Having a dedicated space was another identified impediment to overcome. When the *Mindful Moment* program was sharing a classroom space or utilizing the gym, it was often interrupted for other school programs.

Challenges with Fidelity and Dosage

Having its own space is key to supporting the fidelity and dosage of the curriculum, as well as offering children a place to go to calm themselves when the day becomes overwhelming. Maintaining fidelity and dosage is a stand-alone challenge, and the HLF team reported on their daily work with administrators to support consistent effective programming.

Adapting the Program to the Local Community

Adapting the program to the local community is key to securing buy-in from teachers, administrators, and students. This is another challenge to overcome, and it affects scalability. There must be a relatable motivation to engage participation. This was especially true for the Akwesasne start-up. HLF presented the curriculum and encouraged teachers to use local culture to assimilate the program for the native American audience. They utilize the four directions and other connections to the natural world, like having smoke envelop them, which makes it more relatable for the students. For urban, suburban, rural, and global audiences, it is important that teachers make the curriculum relatable. An Akwesasne HLF teacher shared, “We have incorporated and adapted some of the HLF concepts, like the five little breaths, which is a yoga

concept. In our culture, we do a guided practice...having each breath coming from a different direction in the heart and having a different property or being for a specific purpose.

Referencing the top of the heart will reference sky world north-south-east-west. Mindfulness instructors we've hired have taken ownership of the curriculum and concepts" (Teacher participant 7-85). She went on to say that they do not deviate too far but they're focused on making the practice resonate more clearly with the student population.

Model Teacher Similarity to the Student Participation

Another important hurdle to overcome is to model teacher similarity. The HLF teachers reported the importance of having teachers that looked like the students to engage participation, especially over the longer-term. Students must be able to see themselves in the context of the work. This segues into the challenge of teacher involvement. If a teacher is off grading papers and preparing lesson plans while others in the class are engaged in the practice, the program is not as effective. Teachers must engage. Further, it is reported that the teacher's race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are also important considerations for students to be able to relate to the teachers.

Student Engagement

Student engagement was perceived to be the key to making the program work (Participants 1-3,). They must be motivated to do so. What motivates students may vary by age, demographic, or other considerations. They want to have fun and look cool in front of their peers. The benefits of stress reduction yoga may not be commonly understood, so motivation is important to engage students in stress reduction techniques. For teachers, the reported motivation is a demonstrated behavior change of students and improved classroom dynamic that leads to improved learning and peaceful students which was evidenced over time. For

principals, motivation is an improved school climate with less conflict. School suspensions were reported to have decreased; test scores were also reported to have increased, with more students graduating on time with their cohorts, (Administrator Participant 15- Line 64 on 4/5/24).

Logistics

Logistics is another challenge that was identified by the participants. Coordination of class operations (e.g., classroom location, appropriate staffing, time and date confirmed with classroom teachers when students are to be attending HLF programming in another part of the building, etc.) and administrative support can be significant challenges to overcome. Without principal/teacher/admin buy-in, the program will not be as successful as it could be, school, admin cohesion is key. Other challenges to administering the HLF curricula (having enough trained teachers on staff when new contract were awarded) were mostly resolvable once the programs were evaluated and administratively attended to by the HLF leadership team.

Administrative Support

The HLF created its curricula after years of study and practice. It was reported that someone within the Baltimore school district borrowed heavily on HLF's curricula, causing the non-renewal of several HLF school contracts and usurping HLF materials. Mentoring was available to HLF at just the right time by Dr. Mark Greenberg, Penn State University; Dr. Phil Leaf, Bloomberg School of Public Health; Karen Webber in Baltimore Schools; Dr. Sharon Salzberg, Garrison Institute; Charlie Hartwell; Achariya Peter Donner Swami Shankarananda; Sat Bir Singh Khalsa; Omega Institute leadership; and program officers helping the HLF A-Team administer grants. This complemented the lifelong learning provided by Smitty, Cassie, and Uncle Will, along with numerous teachers and friends. Professional mentoring was provided early on to the A-Team, when they most needed coaching about copyright and

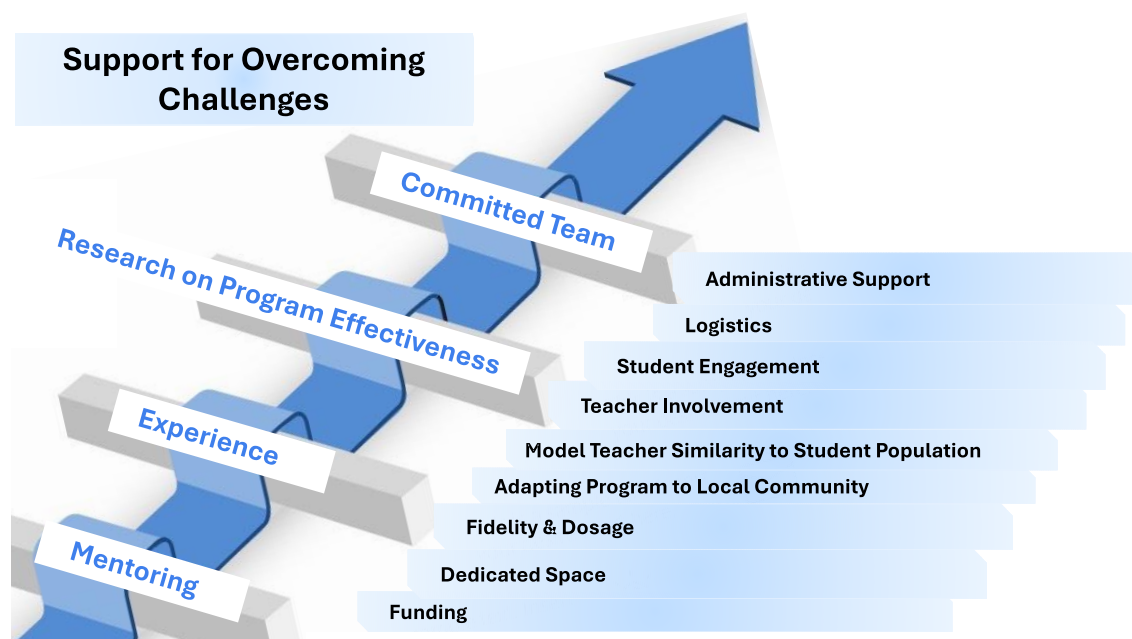
trademark practices, developing higher level strategic and business planning to strengthen the business aspects of the program and support the growth of the organization. These were important learning challenges to overcome. The experience and commitment of HLF staff through years of trial and uncertainty have also served to strengthen the organization. One tactic utilized by the HLF leadership team to meet administrative challenges has been to hire graduates of its program through the *Workforce Development Program*. These team members are reported to serve as the very best teachers and ambassadors in the community. In 2023, the HLF hired its first Chief Operating Officer, assuming the executive director functions, realigning roles and responsibilities of several staff. This led to changes in key personnel. The past Training Director departed; key responsibilities were picked up by the HLF Program Director. Other administrative responsibilities shifted to the new Chief Operating Officer.

Support for Overcoming Challenges to HLF Program Implementation

Solutions to many of the related challenges were also shared. Figure 9, below, represents support for overcoming the biggest implementation challenges reported. Explanations follow.

Figure 9

Support for Overcoming Challenges to HLF Project Implementation



Mentoring

Through discussions with the founders, it was clear that having successful mentors from the beginning was important to success over the longer term. Mentors provided insight into many challenges that confronted the A-Team as they started their HLF in a public education venue.

When someone with the Baltimore school district co-opted components of the HLF functional program without attribution or permission, mentors guided the A-Team through copyright and infringement protocols. It served as an important business lesson. HLF lost anticipated funding support from within the District. Mentoring took on a much larger role, however, as the A-Team worked through the best way to present their curricula to public school administrators. The HLF reported being expertly guided on grant development and reporting on fiscal expenditures to their donors.

Experience

The founders had worked for many years on pursuing their education and deepening their own practice of mindful movement, stress reduction yoga, silent reflection meditation, and related psychological skill development. In 2001, the founders described not having a business plan, other than knowing they wanted to teach the next generation a set of tools to support stress reduction; build academic success; heal trauma; develop self-love, empathy, and compassion; create positive mental health outcomes; support resiliency and optimism through advancing contemplative practices with autogenic training. This formed the basis for their curricular offerings. They had become experts, there were few certifying bodies that had more expertise than they themselves had evolved.

Research on Program Effectiveness

The founders, teachers, administrators, community leader, and policy maker each commented on academic research pointing to SEL program effectiveness that is recited when advocating for investment and/or demonstrating SEL behavioral outcomes. In most every public media interview or workshop held, the founders discuss neurological effects, physiological effects, and improvements in the school and community climate over time. (See related Figure 10 below). With nine studies directly focusing on HLF programming, they help to provide important data for continuing and future investment.

Committed Team

The student, teacher, administrator, and board member interviews reported on the overwhelming love and support generated by and for the HLF. The founders have hired many former students, and highly trained staff, empowering them to serve others through the HLF. Several interviews discussed the deep connections the HLF team enjoys and carries out into the

community; it was stated that people love what they do, and they are able to support their families and inspire friends (Teacher Participant 3-272). Another teacher said, “One strategy that works well for HLF is that their personalities just ooze love... we’re showing them how to love each other and have compassion for one another; we’re showing them how to love people. I think that just doing that and them going out to society, it changes things” (*Holistic Me and Workforce Development* Student now Teacher Participant 5-81 through 98). The staff often hug when they greet each other hello and goodbye for the day. One teacher reported that the HLF team is effective because they are providing love and compassion to their students and the community (Participant Teacher 11-246). In summary, the HLF has a committed team that support one another in everyday challenges, making it a highly effective business operation.

General Evidence for Program Effectiveness

The qualitative data presented in Chapter Four are reported for administrators and teachers that may adopt the HLF curriculum in the future. Practical applications of the HLF program are provided through (1) examination of how urban youth and adults identify stress and cope, heal, and teach others through resilience; and (2) augmentation of the literature in support of scaling of intervention techniques.

A surprising comment was shared in one of the interviews. One of the world’s most recognizable figures is aware of the HLF program. When asked about the HLF mindfulness program, the Dalai Lama advised one of the HLF Board members to make sure they (HLF) were teaching the kids to breathe, (Founder/Teacher Participant 2-509 on 10/8/21). “The secret recipe of success is to continue to invest in teaching (the practice) to the children” (Founder/Teacher Participant 1-585 on 10/13/21). With the stated goal of making the

curriculum more adaptable to teachers, these examples exemplify the effect HLF is having on some participating students. The HLF SEL PYD program demonstrates that:

(1) It enhances self-worth.

(2) The breathing exercises help refocus the mind and bring about greater relaxation.

(3) Breathwork has been shown to help an individual gain clarity, focus, and bring about a sense of calm, inner-peace, and connection. The ujjayi breath (ocean sound breath) recalibrates the central nervous system, moving the body and mind into a more coherent heart synchrony with brain, parasympathetic state (Founder/Teacher Participant 3-Line 400 on 10/27/21). Kapalabhati, breath of fire, and nadi shodhana, alternative nostril breath, are foundational breathing techniques that help the mind and body to reset from stress (*Mindful Movement* Participant 10-Line 52 on 10/07/21). The founders report that teaching the stress breath practice (fog in the mirror, make it audible – like a Darth Vader breath-, then hold and lock) is one particular exercise that seems to stay with the children for many years; it calms stress and heats up the body; it resets the mind and body. The audible sound vibrates the vagus nerve, shifting the autonomic nervous system from the sympathetic stress response into parasympathetic mode, providing a restorative balance in the body.

(4) In the pause of breathing through mindfulness, a person learns to control emotions. This can help with stress management, depression, anxiety, emotional management, post-traumatic stress disorder, managing blood pressure, and alleviating pain in the body and mind.

(5) The PA and yoga exercises serve to strengthen the body's joints and muscles and improve coordination. It also increases oxygen flow and moves the blood circulation in the body, removing toxins from cells. Breathwork can help shift the brainwave state from alpha waves (logical thinking, anxiety) to beta waves (a meditative state). Trained breathing aids in

the flow of oxygen throughout the body, moving the body into a parasympathetic state, affecting heart and brain coherence, supporting blood circulation, and sustaining the movement of energy in the body.

Participating children reported an improvement in feelings of empathy, ability to reduce conflict in their lives and develop critical skills needed for problem solving. This is a crucial point not to be overlooked. In addition to feeling calmer with positive self-talk and behaving more peacefully toward others, the PYD translational effects of resilience are reported in the family/school/community. Neighbors, shopkeepers, and people in the community know the “yoga dudes” and reported on neighborhood improvements that have occurred over time. The goal of HLF was “to seed communities all over the country, and eventually the world, with techniques that will empower them to thrive and blossom in a way that conventional society, education, policing, and government policies actively squash...highlighting the talent and energy and potential already in these local communities,” (Smith, et al., 2022). Their seeds are taking root; the program appears to be achieving its intended purposes.

The following will summarize the data on how the curricula were received, and why those interviewed indicated that the HLF program is effective and why they think it works.

Why does the HLF curricula work? There are several dimensions to assessing why it works. Indirect evidence comes from multidisciplinary expert reports that have demonstrated over decades the benefits of SEL in developing young people through PYD (Bridgeland, et al., 2013; CASEL, 2024; Weissberg, 2019).

In the present study, more than 15 participants were asked about the quality of the curricula. Many responded with anecdotal stories of positive benefits, even if the students were not listening or participating (e.g., Teacher Participants 1-3, 7, 11; *Workforce Development*

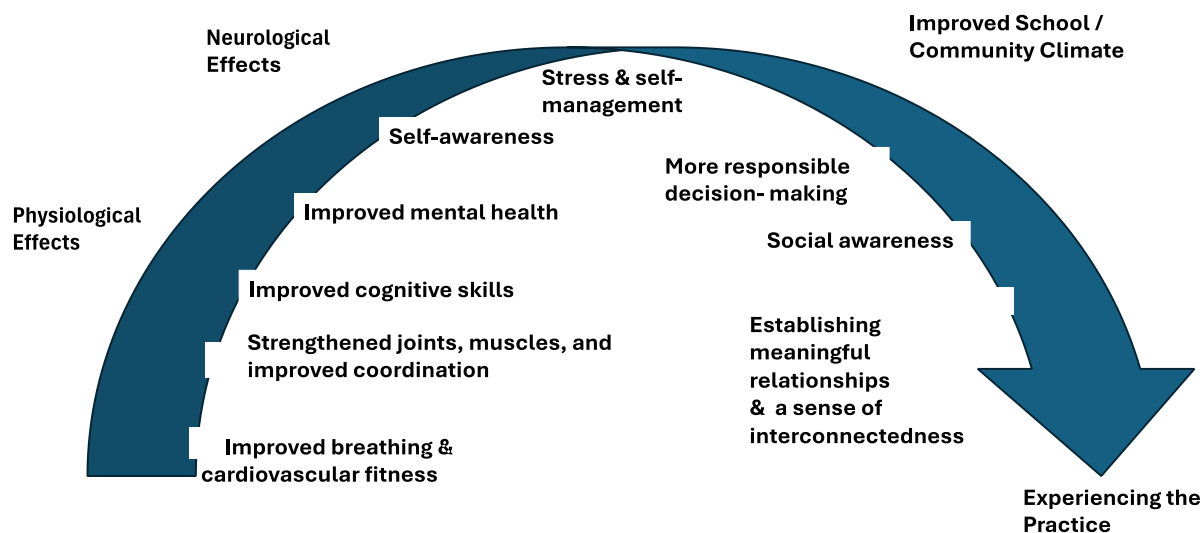
Participant 4, *Holistic Me* and *Workforce Development* Participant 5). Some current teachers pointed to evidence-based research about how the work has changed their professional lives. Other teachers shared insight on the lifechanging work of their past and present students. But note that all persons interviewed were affiliated with the delivery of the HLF curricula and its implementation throughout the community, suggesting there may be bias in the reporting.

Through snowball sampling, the investigator attempted to find people who were less affiliated with the program, but all mentioned some degree of helpfulness when discussing the program. The study results indicate perceived benefits from the combined practice of breathwork with stress reduction yoga, PA, and mindfulness silent reflection meditation. Figure 10 summarizes evaluation findings with notable highlights from qualitative semi-structured interviews, conversations with community members affiliated with the HLF program, and from data pulled in the HLF curricular materials, documents, and research literature.

Figure 10

The Science Behind Breathwork, Mindfulness, Yota, & Physical Activity: Effects on the Body & Mind

The Science Behind Breathwork, Mindfulness, Yoga, & Physical Activity: Effects on the Body & Mind



The HLF organization, students, teachers, and administrators utilizing the curricula recognize stress, and are sharing lifechanging emotional management tools to take care of people in their communities. Participants reported the program starts with self-love and self-care. This kind of self-awareness opens possibilities to become more compassionate towards others. “Compassion is a state of moving forward and being able to connect with someone else’s needs, without getting overwhelmed. It implies a sense of boundaries or limits and compassion for oneself... you must have a sense of limits” (Garrison Institute Class, 2021). One of the founders said that as their work progressed, “...we recognized that everyone was suffering. It just looks a little different depending on where you are” (Atman Smith, Garrison Institute, 2021). The science behind breathwork, mindfulness, stress reduction yoga, and PA holds important clues to living life from the perspective of wellness with greater happiness, as

one deepens a practice of creating health through making time for mindfulness, movement, stress reduction yoga, PA, and silent reflection meditation, the tenets of the HLF curricula.

The HLF curricula are delivered through trained teachers, organized within a Foundation that demonstrates high ethics, investing in its employees and in the communities it serves.(Participants 1-15). With 23 years of operations securing (private, local, state, foundation, university, and corporate) financial investments contributing to sustained growth, the HLF team has established proof-of-concept success with SEL learning outcomes reported in peer reviewed journals and related publications. The operating budget is now more than \$1 million annually. The HLF Satellite program in Akwesasne is in its fourth year of operation and exhibits independent expertise, having five schools administering HLF programming (Teacher Participant 7 on 6/17/24). Through adaptation and localizing of the HLF model, Akwesasne leadership plan to expand into more schools throughout tribal territories into Canada, (HLF, 2024). This SEL PYD program displays depth, sustainability, and adoptability. HLF utilizes strategic business planning practices through its invested leadership. It is supported by a highly credentialed Board, with an expressed dedication to mentoring. This expertise fuels the motivation that will aid in scaling the HLF curricula more globally.

Lessons Learned and General Recommendations

What lessons were learned in the process of implementing the utilization-focused assessment method and what recommendations exist for replicating the program? The report addressed how the program developed, what exactly the curriculum consists of (different studies have tested different components in interventions that differ in their length), how it is and best delivered, how it is received by the students, and what challenges the program administrators and implementers faced in its original development.

The reviews of the HLF program were generally positive. Through an in-depth literature review, document assessment, media/video analysis, examination of curricular handbook materials and manuals, participation in classes, and extensive interviews with community members from educational communities utilizing HLF programming, the data demonstrates effective learning in self-regulation techniques. These techniques have been shown to promote prosocial behavioral characteristics that flow from improving physical, mental, and emotional health. The researcher searched for community viewpoints that might share alternative views, those with results that may have shown no effect or even a negative effect. While there are students that do not participate (10% depending on the program and venue, Teacher/Administrator Participant 9), and some classroom teachers report that there is not always enough time in their day to implement the curricula, more than two years of research on HLF curricula reported perceived effects, such that students and teachers that choose to actively participate in the program are experiencing positive benefits (90%) (Teacher/Administrator Participant 9; Smith et al., 2022, p. 192). Recall in the literature review in Chapter Two, the discussion of two recent SEL meta-analyses: the first review included analysis of 424 studies (from 53 countries) with interventions affecting 575,361 students (Cipriano, et al., 2022); the second review included 213 studies which included 270,000 students (Taylor, et al., 2017). The amassed data of these findings drew conclusions across studies demonstrating that the promise of SEL interventions support healthy lifestyles and improved school and community climates. The present evaluation adds additional constructive qualitative data to the research literature. It is therefore concluded that HLF SEL trauma-informed curricula are shown through both qualitative and quantitative research to be positively associated with positive SEL effects. Based on this data, it is recommended that the curricula be implemented in other settings.

Recommended enhancements are needed to support administration and continued growth as the curricula is scaled. Senior administrative staff changes occurred in the past year to add more experienced personnel in a newly created Chief Operating Officer position. HLF hired a former high school principal, Dr. Vance Benton, who had been utilizing the curriculum at Patterson High School in Baltimore for nearly a decade. Staff operations were slightly restructured. During the past 2024 academic year, the *Holistic Me* after school efforts were reduced and suspended in Baltimore to focus HLF staff efforts more strategically into strengthening other programming (Administrator Participant 15). *Holistic Me* is planned to be reinstated at full capacity in the fall semester 2024.

Historically, the founders reported that they quickly learned to organize roles and responsibilities as HLF was growing; program officer mentoring also guided the development of key functional administrative roles. Ali Smith had been handling more of the executive director functions, Andrés González was managing the marketing details and communications while Atman Smith was focused on programming and funding responsibilities. The three founders continued to invest in people in their community, which Ali Smith reported has been one of the many secrets to their success. They hired five students to help them administer the program in the early days. As they grew into more focused management positions, the organization started operating more efficiently and could expand operations through grant funding and early mentoring by their Board colleagues with extraordinary credentials, (notable Dr. Mark Greenberg) and mindfulness leaders like Sharon Salzberg, and Barry Boyce. With the current addition of an experienced Chief Operating Officer, the organization is prepared to function and scale more effectively, advancing revenue and visibility, capitalizing on viral media views from many past successes.

The director of programs in Baltimore shared that HLF plans are underway to enhance teacher training for all components of the curriculum beginning with the summer 2024 *Workforce Development* training camp. Extensive hours of training required to implement the key training programs may make it prohibitive for classroom teachers to explore adding the curriculum to their school day, however adding *Bridging Academics & the Mind* online programming is a feasible solution, until principals and school districts make needed investments to add *Mindful Moment* rooms and invest in HLF's SEL PYD pathways. Continuing education programming for classroom teachers was also discussed as a matter of maintaining and incorporating new curricular inputs.

The COVID-19 pandemic deeply affected HLF operations and staffing resources. Numerous program closures occurred globally, with HLF programs affected in the U.S. and in Canada. Business planning, grants and related investments are serving to stabilize operations with HLF alumni prepared to undertake teacher training in the *Workforce Development* program this summer. External funding is supporting *Workforce Development* student paid internships with and through HLF.

Research has demonstrated that SEL curriculum can enhance student learning outcomes, improve mental health, reduce stress in both students and teachers, while supporting wellbeing in school populations for both teachers and students. Further investment is critical to advancing SEL learning outcomes, especially in schools employing SEL trauma-informed curricula.

Reviewer general recommendations also include:

- (1) HLF might prepare a proposal on its website outlining the demonstrated learning outcomes in which educational agencies can invest. Specifically, it is recommended that the agency investing in HLF program:

- (a) Encourage educators to engage and provide feedback from their students and administration teams;
 - (b) Report on skills that are retained, sustained, and evolved over years of teaching and learning;
 - (c) Capture testimonials of school administrators who can report on behavioral changes affecting overall school climate and statistics relating to time to degree, test scores and learning measures;
 - (d) Identify gaps and show how HLF fills those spaces with productive leaders; and
 - (e) Highlight the data noting when these students have overcome structural inequity challenges via socioeconomic disadvantaged households to achieve leadership positions.
- (2) Create a list of talking points to share with interviewers, so that key figures which are likely to be asked in every interview, are commonly shared rather than referring people to your website or to your director of programs:
- (a) Approximate # of HLF programs operating in approximate # of schools;
 - (b) Key locations implementing HLF outside of Baltimore, MD;
 - (c) Approximate # of students trained;
 - (d) Approximate # of teachers trained;
 - (e) Approximate # of Alumni and where some are in the world today;
 - (f) Many success stories noted in the literature and from anecdotes of your staff who are loyal to you for 20+ years. But what students fail and why?

(g) Where do you, HLF, see areas for improving to allow for greater access and scaling?

- (3) Consider suggesting a recommended fidelity and dosage of the *Bridging Academics & the Mind and B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* curricula for classroom and staff teachers;
- (4) Recommend collecting email addresses to stay connected with students as they graduate and move into the world, especially to invite alumni to keep current with their practices. Suggest a login to your website where students can keep their contact information updated. This will be especially helpful to advance a longitudinal study to investigate HLF SEL PYD outcomes, tracking experiences and how students cope using HLF stress reduction tools over time.
- (5) Of the 90 % that participate in HLF curricula, what has happened to the 10% that do/did not participate, and where are they today? One suggestion to consider is to track alumni and learn how the HLF program affected them in the longer-term. Examine where current and past students are today through email contacts. Of the 100,000 trained over two decades, who has the program worked for? Who has been lost to the system due to a myriad of life challenges outlined earlier? It would be interesting to learn who made life choices and did not use the HLF methods to self-regulate before acting on impulse that might have been detrimental to their wellbeing.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Perceived HLF SEL Program Impacts

This study assessed strengths and challenges of implementing the HLF SEL trauma-informed curricula with the aim of providing qualitative evidence-based research for scaling the curricula more broadly (through demonstrated depth, sustainability, and adaptation). Interviews revealed that the program is appreciated and well received by intended recipients (Participants 1-15). Preliminary data suggests that the program has important potential for reducing stress and providing support for managing emotions and self-regulating the body. This discussion and conclusion section will focus on the perceived HLF SEL program impact; translational effects; supplemental initiatives that support SEL; disconfirmation bias and limitations; and conclusions.

The efficacy of the work is rooted in the results with participants reporting how the work is positively affecting their lives. Findings from interviews and data analysis indicate that children are listening even when teachers do not think they are - children are taking the information home and teaching parents and family members. Children are encouraged to be as they are, after opening exercises, they are encouraged to move slowly and consciously, and explore new yoga poses, experiment mindfully. “Inhale in deep; exhale and out.” The participants know this phrase by heart, and they stop talking and get focused when one of their peers is helping the teachers lead the practice. The participants are then invited to use their imagination! This is a key component of helping participants to learn that they create their physical experience with their thoughts. HLF also gives the participants insight on the physiology of what is happening in their bodies. “An estimated 35,000 pints of blood go through the capillaries of lungs in 24 hours...a human takes about 21,600 breaths a day!” (HLF

Yoga and Mindfulness for Youth Training Manual: Level 1 Introduction & Authenticity, Breathing and Body Systems, pp. 37-38; Smith et al., 2022, p. 190). The curriculum is based in science and references anatomy and physiology, psychology, and health related content as the students are experiencing the practice.

The HLF program is reported to help teachers with job satisfaction and aids in managing stress from experiencing the secondary trauma of their students' lives plus dealing with chaos from within the community. A number of teachers learning to belly breathe reported how this helps with the experience of getting into a state of relaxation in their home lives. Engagement in the HLF program is reported to have stimulated personal interest in exercise, nutrition, and silent reflection meditation.

Based on literature review and interview data, the feasibility of the HLF trauma-informed program is shown to effectively deliver an intervention response, responding to needs articulated by the K-12 school systems and greater community (Ancona, et al., 2014; Feagans Gould, et al., 2014; Feagans Gould, et al., 2016; Mendelson, et al., 2010; NRC, 2002; Interviews 12-15; see also Table 1 p. 45). Obtaining reliable measures from multiple valid informants is critical. The work has been going on for more than 23 years, many of the children that started with the program in their early years now have children of their own. As adults, they now pass the teachings onto their own children (*Holistic Me* and *Mindful Moment* Participant 5; Teacher Participants 1-3; 11). "Our environment is chaotic, so it really gives people a tool and especially kids a tool during this chaotic time with cyber-bullying, with the pandemic and all that stuff they need with as many tools as possible. As we do, as we all do" (Ali Smith, Mindfulness for Families: A Workshop with Sharon Salzberg and the HLF, 1/26/22). The program evaluation findings demonstrate that participants may adhere to an intervention that

improves wellbeing through learning stress reduction techniques and translate these teachings into adopted practices as life skills.

Fidelity and dosage of core components being implemented through the *Mindful Moment* offering showed promising SEL outcomes when adhered to as prescribed in the curriculum. Implementation fidelity, the degree to which an intervention is delivered as intended, was reported to be highly effective, especially in the Akwesasne programs. Reasons for this finding might include that the program in the Akwesasne Mohawk territory: (1) adopted the curricula to its local culture making it highly relevant, (2) they have five participating schools in 3 counties with a fewer number of teachers delivering the same *Mindful Moment* - focused curriculum with greater consistency (Teacher Participant 7 Line 273 on 10/25/21). Across all programs, however, delivery of HLF programming with fidelity and dosage remains a constant focus to ensure curricula are meeting the needs of intended users. As the program scales into new cities, it is imperative that the consistent fidelity and dosage of core components remain a focal point to ensure successful SEL outcomes.

Despite challenges, teaching mindful movement with PA has potential to improve learning outcomes and enhance the school environment in meaningful ways. Modeling life-skills and non-judgmental awareness with compassion through teaching is so important to human development. This is especially true in lower socioeconomic income communities where resource-poor urban schools are fulfilling needs for teachers and students that have elevated levels of chronic stress, high dropout rates, and contend with low rates of literacy and challenges to academic competency. CASEL supported studies have demonstrated that consistent communication, incentives for teachers and students, and sustained programming,

serve to benefit SEL learning, while opening relationships among community stakeholders to reduce intervention implementation barriers (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Translational Effects

Is the HLF trauma-informed curricula design adaptable to teachers more globally?

The goal of this assessment work was to take a deep dive into a curriculum of SEL and research the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and successes that could help the program scale more globally into the world filled with physical, emotional, and mental health challenges. Through the examination of the HLF trauma-informed curricula, an extensive literature review revealed other SEL programs are being implemented in the US and around the world (Montessori, 2024b; Waldorf Schools 2024a; Walters, 1986; CASEL, 2024).

Teacher participant 3 provided rich examples of translational effects he observed when teaching the program: (1) Changes he witnessed in himself and others were described as his perceptions of seeing himself, other teachers, and students feeling calmer, happier, with noticeable mood improvements (Teacher Participant 3-124). (2) Teaching the breathing, mindful movement and stress reduction yoga skills had an observable impact on teachers, administrators, and students. This same teacher described his observation of seeing stress reduction benefits trickle down through the school, positively affecting the culture and climate of the school (Teacher Participant 3-486). (3) The translation effect was tangible when he observed how he gave students a bunch of tools and saw them teach others; he believed they would remember and use these tools for the rest of their lives (Teacher Participant 3-914, 935). This same Teacher Participant mentioned a notable translation effect of SEL, observing how children he taught experienced life skills transfer over time, “We have helped people help

themselves over two decades and that has helped to transform the community,” (Teacher Participant 3-810).

The translation effect of learning stress reduction techniques and sharing the practice with others is the central mission of HLF. Their stated goal is to have a mindfulness practice in every home by 2030 (HLF, 2024). The global needs are immense. WHO data cited above (p. 42) calls for urgent action, with the provision and dissemination of greater programs involving mental health for children, with one in five children reporting mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders (WHO, 2017; WHO, 2018). The A-Team have all stated that the way to change the community is to create teachers, and their reciprocal teaching model is reported to have had an impact on their Baltimore community, (Ted Talk Transcript, Line 140).

Supplemental Initiatives that Support SEL

The HLF *Workforce Development* efforts support the transition of young people into the world with essential skills for any future career path like how to manage finances, develop confidence in public speaking, present oneself in both written and spoken word, build a resume, and learn how to resolve conflicts through empathy and compassion, with cultural insights shared, (HLF, 2024; Smith et al., 2022). Life-skills needed to advance into adulthood are key, and students expressed gratitude for such teachings. The *B.R.E.A.T.H.S.* curriculum is designed to meet people where they are in the community, offering stress reduction, relaxation, and mindfulness techniques to be used at any time. HLF leaders would say, “your breath is always with you.” The fact that HLF curricula are being offered throughout communities in gathering places such as police and fire stations, mental health facilities, homeless shelters, elder care dwellings, juvenile centers, etc., demonstrate that the curricula match the needs of the population. Everyone is experiencing stress on some level and can use the HLF tools to improve

physical, mental, and emotional conditioning. The adult programs teach exercise and breathing to help people reset and manage their emotions. HLF works to provide mental health and physical health so that communities can thrive. The HLF work focuses on the breath and body, shifting the focus from the outcome to mindful presence in the body, with movement, bringing awareness into the present moment, making it more enjoyable for participants. Enjoyment encourages participants to remember the practice and take a deeper dive, wanting to experience more wellbeing in their own lives. Through the program, participants learn more about the science of wellbeing referred to in Figure 10 above. The curricula are being scaled to help more people develop greater self-regulation of the body, enhance learning, and promote greater wellbeing through mental health and exercise.

The HLF *Mindful Ambassadors* program takes the curricula into the world and encourages more access, using their reciprocal teaching model of training trainers to be teachers. This reciprocal teaching model is promising and demonstrates a positive return on investment with specific aims to ensure reinvestment of teacher training and expansion of SEL PYD curriculum growing in communities around the nation and in the world.

Disconfirmation Bias and Limitations

There are several limitations and caveats to note about this work. As a researcher, I was constantly checked. The educational curricula offered by the Holistic Life Foundation appeals to my internal values and beliefs; accordingly, I had to constantly reflect on my evaluation research and make sure to ask myself daily to look for areas of the program that were not working well or did not support positive program effects. For example, there are many children that come to school with social emotional developmental challenges. Some with severe traumatic experiences affecting their lives (e.g., substance abuse, sexual assault, violence, death

of a loved one, etc.). And the trauma happens in waves such that there are repeated stressors. Teachers do the best they can with the tools they have to help engage the children and deliver educational programming. I wanted to understand how this particular trauma-informed curriculum could serve the greatest needs within the community of learners. I searched for disengaged students dealing with their own experiences and/or teachers that might tell me a story of HLF program limitations. While I made every effort to be aware of my biases, given my passion for the program and holistic health practices, I may not have been completely successful in doing so.

Because qualitative studies typically involve small samples, generalizations to broader groups of people can be a limiting factor and in fact, are inappropriate. Participants of SEL programs demonstrate heightened awareness of stress management, therefore findings may exaggerate effectiveness of HLF as a curricular tool. It is also important to recognize that all the individuals interviewed had considerable experience with the program and were staunch advocates for it. It would have been useful to interview students and teachers who chose not to participate. A multi-year, mixed-method longitudinal randomized control trial behavioral intervention with many participants would be the ideal setting for a program evaluation, preferably pulling data from urban, rural, and multicultural contexts. However, this is unlikely to occur without a multimillion-dollar grant.

Conclusions

This dissertation was very personal to me. In 2017, I was selected as a juror in a murder trial in Michigan, U.S.; it was that experience that underlies my pursuit of advanced study in promoting wellness education. When I walked in the courtroom on the first day of trial, I noted the layout of the room and the people serving in varying roles. It happened that in this instance,

the judge was White, the bailiff was White, the prosecutors were White, the defense lawyer was White, the court reporter was White, the jury was predominantly White, 10 of 14 selected (a jury of 12 with two alternates). The defendant was Black. Two well dressed women sat behind the defendant's table. I imagined they were the defendant's mother and grandmother. The person I thought to be the mother was not much older than the defendant, and the defendant's probable grandmother was not much older than the woman sitting beside her. Both women were Black. Several more Black women entered the room, filing in behind the plaintiff's table where the White prosecutors sat. A few of the young women held children in their arms. All were Black. What played out over the next three weeks would change my life.

The jury was primarily comprised of blue-collar community members. As I assessed the surroundings, it became imperative that the jury select a foreman who was a person of color. The judge gave instructions, tension then filled the room. The entire experience pushed me far outside my comfort zone. I grew up in the inner city and attended public schools in the capital city. I come from an ethnic family, and I have lived and worked in a multi-racial environment my whole life. My career path has focused on working for social justice and elevating consciousness and healing.

What was unfolding before me was the culmination of racial injustice, compounded by a series of poor decision-making. The judicial system is structured with inherent racism. A pathway to prison may begin early in life, when a child of color may experience school punishments that become exceedingly harsh over years, often leading to police action, reinforcing the disenfranchised behavior, and leading straight into the criminal justice system in America (Hemez, et al., 2020). The U.S. has a history built on an economic and social system that has traditionally disenfranchised people of color (Adams, et al., 2007). Inability to transfer wealth

from generation to generation, differing sets of laws and/or an application of laws, all contribute to differing pathways into adulthood. People of color have been underserved in terms accessing government services for as long as the White heteropatriarchy set hierarchical rules in motion that would create a system of control, ensuring people of color would live subservient to and or separate to where White people would build communities.

This history of social injustice contributes to school suspensions that influence the odds of imprisonment during young adulthood and fuels the prison industrial complex; school suspensions influence the odds of imprisonment, affecting the life course for these children (Hemez, et al., 2020). Regular consultation with a local circuit court judge (who is Black), served as my encouragement to elevate this important work being done by HLF in support of social justice. This experience as a juror prompted me to pursue another graduate degree, to commit to supporting work with children, teaching tools of self-regulation of the body that lead to healing and wellness, giving children more opportunities to create joyful lives.

The HLF curricula examined in this dissertation empowers underserved youth with tools for conflict resolution and instills life-skills that contribute to upending the pipeline to prison which survives through a culture of incarcerating Black youth and other children of color, also deemed of a minority status. The teachers that HLF train look like the students they serve in the community, a critically important feature to success of translating the HLF SEL curricula (HLF, 2024; Interviews 1 through 11, 15; Smith, et al., 2022, p. 107). I pursued this work to elevate the SEL teachings so that more people can learn that our thoughts create our physical experiences, and we live with the decisions we choose as we create our lives. Given my strong feelings in this area, it was and remains imperative that I recognize how these strong feelings influence my work as an evaluator.

Relative to specific components of the HLF program, mindfulness practices combined with yoga and exercise appear to be an important tool for learning skills to self-regulate the body and manage persistent stress. What lessons are available given the research already done? Through the identification of stress and reaching for tools that help manage negative feelings, HLF's SEL PYD curriculum offers the potential to evolve personal and professional skills that can be carried forth to benefit livelihoods at home, in the community and throughout life. Evidence of development and employment of coping skills, creative and critical thinking, advanced problem solving offer promising outcomes.

Future research might integrate teacher assessment of student performance, student grades and learning measures, physiological and neurological measures associated with the practice of exercise, mindfulness, silent reflection meditation, and stress reduction yoga (cortisol levels, electroencephalogram brain wave patterns and neuroplasticity, heart/brainwave cohesion, for example). What are some research lessons moving forward? A longitudinal study that examines where HLF students have landed in the world could provide greater understanding of SEL practices and their impact on learners. Examining HLF student livelihoods over time to see choices made over the course of lives, compared to their peers, would be an interesting study. Investigating home lives and career pathways will be important to examine how SEL skills and principles taught may affect daily living.

As an educational policy imperative, further investments must be made in SEL trauma-informed curricular teaching. The demonstrated learning outcomes have the amplified benefit of providing stress relief and mental health benefits in students and teachers alike. The US Department of Education should invest in SEL responsible thinking classrooms to substantiate the impact of trauma-informed SEL curricula on students and teachers. Anticipated results may

demonstrate how SEL improves professional development, increasing teacher satisfaction/retention and student success.

The final 17th step in the methods of the Utilization-focused Evaluation note that the program evaluation is to be accountable, learn, and improve, offering recommendations. Program details were fact checked before publishing. The final assessment was shared with HLF for feedback. Recommendations are offered in Chapter Four, Lessons Learned and General Recommendations (p.165).

The depth of the HLF curricula is told through qualitative assessment. Adding mixed methods research with inclusion of teacher reports, school grades, figures on reduction of suspension, with physiological (cortisol) neurological (neuroplasticity, heart/brain coherence) reports of student growth through empowerment is key. Because everyone has stress in their lives and situations that challenge day-to-day living, the HLF curricula can serve as a resource to provide improvements in wellbeing, classroom/community management, with beneficial effects for both students and teachers. Enhancing self-regulatory capacity is essential in promoting SEL and PYD, advancing resilience in mental, emotional, and behavioral outcomes experienced through exercises that contribute to stress reduction, relaxation, gratitude, and positive thinking.

One pathway to creating health, happiness, and wellbeing in life is through breathing techniques and learning how to harmonize the mental and emotional fields through creating balance in the mind, the autonomic nervous system, and in the immune system. HLF offers many tools to students to help each find greater peace in their lives through their unique SEL curricula.

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APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND RESEARCH TO SUPPORT HOLISTIC HEALTH CURRICULA

Foundations for Wellbeing to Promote Creativity and Learning

In academic settings, an SEL curricula provides children with tools that are reinforced and result in a strengthening of PYD skillsets (Bridgeland, et al., 2013; Gould, et al., 2008; Weissberg, 2019). Deep breathing is a self-regulation tool that aids in lowering blood pressure, reducing heart rate, decreasing cortisol stress hormone levels, oxygenates blood, exercises the lungs, increases physical and mental energy, and improves immunity (HLF, 2024; Zaccaro, et al., 2018). Slow breathing techniques are tools to increase relaxation, comfort, and alertness which offers greater emotional control. Trained breathing effects alternate the flow of oxygen, and in some cases create hypoxia, where the person holds their breath for a series of counts during mindful flows; hypoxia has been linked to stem cell regeneration, (Hawkins, et al., 2013). These tools help to reduce stress, which is known to exacerbate inflammation in the body; and inflammation often weakens physical health, leading to health decline and disease (Goldin, 2010).

When stress levels are high, the body's physiology moves into a fight or flight response. This often leads to over-analyzing a challenge. Each moment the body is in this state, it triggers an increase in adrenaline (epinephrine) and cortisol hormone levels. When one is hyped-up on adrenaline and cortisol is pumping through the body, clear thinking is challenged. How do we address this? We pause and breathe. We ground ourselves. We have a mindful check on our thought processes, then we hit the reset button and start again. Every time we realize our thoughts are spiraling and attention is bouncing, we need to take a mindful moment (Rogers, et al., 2012; Salzberg, 2011). Anxiety challenges real happiness and makes it difficult to engage in successful relationships (Salzberg, 2011). To alleviate anxiety, we can reset the emotions and

mental processes, bring attention back to the present moment, realign thoughts and move forward. The more this “reset” behavior is practiced, the easier it becomes a habit, bringing physiological balance in the body to create a state of wellness (Lutz, et al., 2008; Smith, et al., 2022; Taylor, et al., 2017).

When we become the observer of emotions, we see that our experiences are made up of many moments, some include immense joy, others include sadness, fear, helplessness, frustration, all contribute to anger or apathy. None of these experiences are permanent. They are all passing moments. When we pay attention to how we feel through scanning our bodies, we can understand the emotion in a deeper context. By bringing attention to this range of what is arising and what is passing, we see that the feelings are not eliminated, but we begin to realize the impermanence, that the emotions pass. It then helps us understand how to live more in the present moment and realize the power in where we focus our attention. It is no surprise, then, that breathing techniques play a key role in SEL programs designed to help children and youth regulate their emotions and reduce stress through focused awareness.

Physiological Outcomes

PA is an essential factor that creates health in the body. Through vigorous physical movement, we increase an oxygen intake which decarbonizes the body, triggers serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine hormones while regulating other neurotransmitters; this helps our brains and our bodies to feel better (Guddal, et al., 2019; Hagan, et al., 2014; Janssen, et al., 2010; Kleppang, et al., 2018; Kohl, et al., 2013; Lubans, et al., 2016.) Physical exercise is prescribed for improvement in mental and physical health. It is a foundational component of wellbeing, regular exercise benefits, mind, body, and spirit with breathwork directly supporting self-regulation of the body.

In a fascinating review of the physiology of weight loss, Ruben Meerman, an Australian academic known for his work in sports nutrition, metabolism, and breathing, presents a compelling overview on how breathing directly contributes to the process of weight management (Meerman, 2013). For an average fat molecule, represented as $C_{55}H_{104}O_6$, the way it leaves your body, considering 10 kg of fat: 84% of fat is exhaled as CO_2 (breath) and 16% of weight is excreted as H_2O (water in sweat or excreta) (Meerman, 2013). That 10 kg of fat becomes 8.4 kg of CO_2 with 1.6 kg excreted as water (Meerman, 2013). To lose weight, we must turn fat into carbon dioxide and water, by moving more, and breathing. After we eat food, energy is then converted into adenosine trisphosphate (ATP), the immediate usable energy needed in cellular function. Food is made up of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. The body breaks down food into glucose, fatty acids, and amino acids during digestion. They are transported through blood to be used in metabolism or stored for later use. There are three pathways to generate energy: 1. the phosphagen pathway [immediate use], 2. the glycolytic pathways [*anaerobic* short bursts] and 3. the oxidative pathway [*aerobic* sustained energy production] (Sharon-David, et al., 2018; Stathopoulou, et al., 2006; Weinberg et al., 2018). If a person does not consume more food to compensate for the extra calories being burned through exercise, weight loss is supported. The overall point was raised to show the importance of breathing and its role in the physiology of weight management, which contributes to overall wellness.

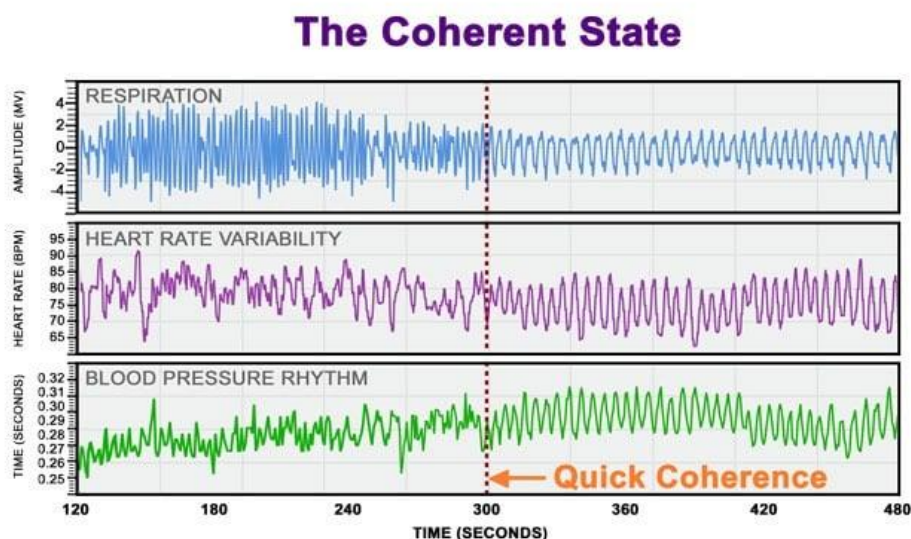
Breathing exercises are an essential component in meditative practices. Through training the body to breathe in different patterns, it creates a space for altering physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual processes. Silent reflection meditation supports focus and memory development with mindful exercises that help our brain create new neural pathways to evolve

greater receptivity in learning, an openness to empowering, learning to implement co-creative powers driven from desire. Meditation also supports focus and memory development with mindful exercises that help our brain create new neural pathways to evolve greater receptivity in learning, an openness to empowering, learning to implement creative powers driven from desire.

Our central nervous system controls internal organs and serves to regulate heart rate, respiratory rate, digestion, bowel activity, sexual drives, and pupillary response. Through deep breathing, the central nervous system begins to entrain with the heart, which aligns heart rate variability. Figure 11, below, illustrates a state of alignment when the brain's electrical activity and the heart's rhythm are in synch. This represents an alignment of the physical/etheric, mental, emotional, and spiritual bodies.

Figure 11

Physiological Entrainment Heart Brain Coherence



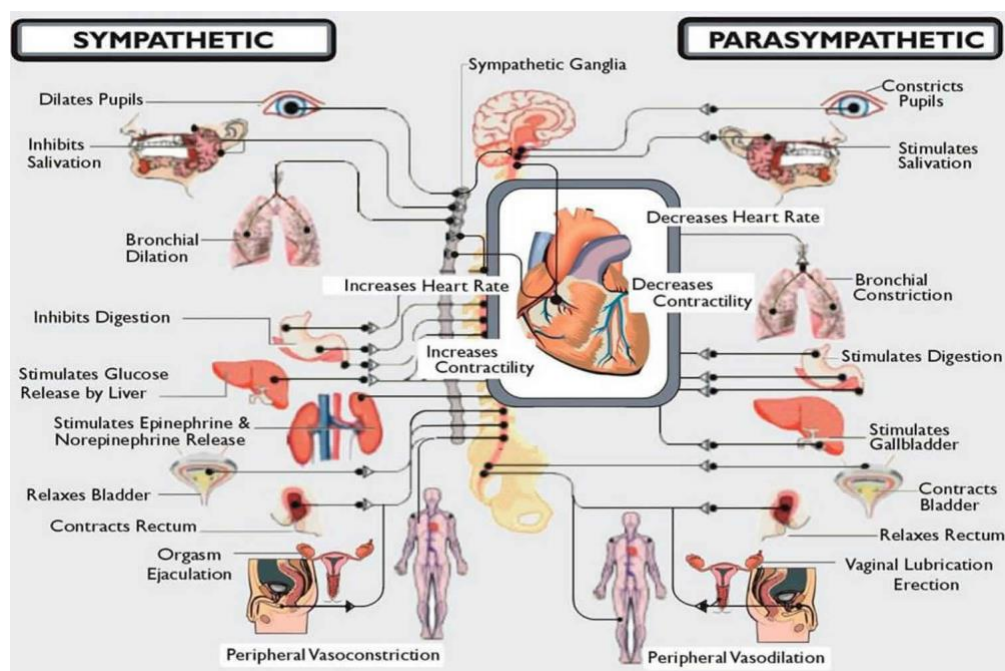
Note: HeartMath Institute, 2024. (Permission granted to reprint).
Image courtesy of the HeartMath® Institute www.heartmath.org
This is a positive health outcome, reflecting how adaptable the body can be to change.

People with high heart rate variability are often less stressed and better able to adapt to life's changing circumstances. In good health, there is a balance between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems.

Both sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are part of the autonomic nervous system which handles many bodily functions automatically, that one does not have to think about regulating: heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, blood sugar, hormone, respiration, digestion, urine, and sweating (Vinik, 2012). Figure 12 below, represents the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems that work together to keep the body balanced.

Figure 12

Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Functions



Note: This chart depicts the anatomy and functional physiology of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems; cited in Vinik, 2012. Open-Source Image.

In times of imbalance- injury, pain, or stress may be evident; the nervous system moves to a fight or flight response. The body may display muscular tightness (hips, neck shoulders and/or jaw), chronic pain, depression, anxiety, present with immune related disorders, allergies, difficulty recovering from exercise, high blood pressure, or related symptoms. When the heart rate is invariable – it is inconsistent, fight-or-flight responses are often dominating and symptoms such as poor digestion, a fluttering in the chest, a racing heartbeat (tachycardia) or a slow heartbeat (bradycardia) chest pain and shortness of breath can present (Goldin, et al., 2010; HeartMath Institute, 2024). Once a person is trained in self-regulation techniques, it becomes easier to see and feel the changes in the body and brain which bring about a change in life experience. Mindfulness meditation and movement-based PA, which includes yoga, produces beneficial structural changes in the brain associated with concentration and stress (Annesi, 2015; Hölzel, et al., 2010; Hölzel, et al., 2011; Kauffman, et al., 2024). This is a pathway to overcome challenges and conditions in the life we are experiencing and allows for multiple positive SEL outcomes of that provides developmental agency in children. Silent reflection meditation and mindfulness practices train the brain to be more present-focused, thus the brain is spending less time focusing on what ifs or anticipating future negative events.

Neurological Outcomes

The neocortex of the brain is the seat of conscious mind, it is where we process rational thoughts (Dispenza, 2008; Kauffman, et al., 2023). The frontal lobe of the brain is the area of executive function. As the symphony leader, it helps us concentrate and decide on actions. It is where learning originates, it guides our intentions to action, and this is where focus and concentration begin. The frontal lobe of the brain also restrains emotional reaction. Our conscious thoughts are derived in this creative center (Dispenza, 2008; Kauffman, et al., 2023).

The occipital lobe of the brain is the visual cortex; it is where we process sight or spatial orientation. Motor function, movement, and importantly, the place in the brain where we distinguish between self and non-self (Dispenza, 2008). Healthy functioning of the occipital lobe is key in SEL. We learn new things with new experiences, and we make new connections in the brain. As we learn, new synaptic connections are created (Stapleton, et al., 2020).

When behaviors are acted upon to match intentions in our brain, we initiate knowledge in some way, actions and thoughts bring this coherence of the mind and body working together to create new experiences. These new experiences provide new sensory information to create new neural pathways. New neurons in the brain are created and form neural networks. This neurogenesis cultivates new connections which activate new genes to signal new thoughts (Chiasa, et al., 2010; Dispenza, 2008; Stapleton et al., 2020).

The limbic brain is shown to create a chemical in the body; it can be identified as a sensory feeling (Dispenza, 2008). The moment we are filled with emotions of gratitude, the body chemistry is altered (Jain, et al., 2010; Jain 2021; Lipton, 2008). We are teaching our body chemically what our minds understand; we are signaling new genes with new thought patterns, and thus bringing a chemical change to the body. The limbic brain is the seat of the autonomic nervous system, the part of the nervous system controlling involuntary physical functions like heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and digestion. As we teach our bodies through new creative experiences, we are becoming neuro-conditioned (Chiesa, et al., 2010). And as we advance these new neural pathways, new body chemistry is created and we are automatically evolving through new repetitive skills and habits, so much so, that we no longer need to think about it, our autonomic nervous system kicks in and the process of higher brain and body chemistry unfolds. We learn, we apply the learning, this brings knowledge and wisdom over

time. SEL is at the core of this process. Dr. Bruce Lipton refers to this process as the “biology of belief” (Lipton, 2008). Our biology, neurocircuitry, gene expression, hormones, all coalesce to forge how we think, act, and feel. So, as we grow in new thoughts, which create our physical experiences (thoughts become things), it leads to new choices, which helps us process new behaviors, that lead to new experiences filled with new emotions and feelings, that lead to new thoughts (Desbordes, et al., 2012). Our lives grow through the wisdom of this experience, bringing changes in our bodies with the ideal of feeling better and healthier.

When our mind and behavior are stuck in old thought patterns, old belief systems, it brings stress to the body. People who live in stress tend to tell the same stories over and over, rehashing the past, which leads to pumping cortisol hormones throughout the system, increasing inflammation throughout the body. Stressful thought patterns cause the brain to fire incoherent synaptic connections, leading to mental instability. We become imbalanced; the body then moves to a state of disease. The goal is to change the relationship with the thoughts. Breathing with a focus on the present moment brings a pause; a moment where we can reset the brain and body chemistry, initiating brain and heart to work in greater holistic state. This is at the core of SEL self-regulation techniques.

Brain and heart coherence sends more energy to brain, causing brain to function at a higher level of awareness, a higher consciousness. Our perceptions become honed. Through thought alone, we create more order in the brain, we begin to think beyond limitations in our environment. This is essential to getting into a place of thinking beyond our physical self-awareness into a higher order of cohesion.

David Bohm, in alignment with ageless wisdom handed down through generations, believed that reality is fluid, what is being reflected back to us is being created as we think, and

we group think as we focus on our collective consciousness (Bohm, 2002; Bohm et al., 1993; Braden, 2008; Howard, 2020). David Bohm was one of the first western scientists to devote scholarship to the study of theoretical physics and how it related to neuropsychology and the philosophy of the mind. Bohm was a 20th century physicist, yet he spent much of his career exploring the nature of consciousness. He considered the role of thought as it related to focus, attention, motivation, and group consensus in how thoughts are formed as societal beliefs (Bohm, 1993; Bohm, et al., 2002; Howard, 2020). His work focused on quantum mechanics, moving consciousness into higher connections to elevate mind, body, and spirit.

Quantum entanglement is defined as two particles linking together in a certain way, no matter how far apart they are in space; their state remains the same (Howard, 2020). The understanding of quantum entanglement has greatly advanced through science over the past 70 years since Albert Einstein first noted “spooky action at a distance,” the ability of separated objects to share a condition or state (cited in Howard, 2020). This enhanced understanding of quantum entanglement will help us better understand group consciousness and elevated mind, body, and spirit processes. These are foundational principles in understanding how the mind and brain work, how we can work collectively to bring wellness in the body and teach generations to come about basic tools that are inherent in developing a socially, emotionally thriving person. Together this information informs SEL.

Experiencing the Practice

As humanity advances new ways of thinking, we will create new ways of being. It is essential to consider what brings us joy. What do we love? What is our passion? And then follow the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual pathways that move us beyond old social constructs or outdated belief systems of the past and visualize a future of possibilities. Improved

concentration, creativity and greater relaxation are outcomes of training the body to reduce and manage stress, returning to a state of coherence. With practice, one can more easily move into a heightened state of focus and feel the real benefits of these deepening techniques that lead to peak experiences.

Los Angeles Lakers Coach Phil Jackson, one of the winningest coaches in NBA history, utilized deep breathing exercises to bring about a parasympathetic state in his players. This led to greater cohesion within team dynamics, promoting an improved level of play. “When players are totally focused on the team goal, their efforts can create chain reactions. It’s as if they become totally connected to one another, in sync with one another - like five fingers on one hand. When one finger moves, the rest of them all react to it” (Jackson personal interview with Ross Robertson, 2013). He plugged his team into oneness instead of focusing on any one player. Jackson’s life experience, with learned principles from Zen Buddhism and wisdom of the Lakota Sioux, helped him to bring greater harmony to the teams he coached. His stated goal was to evolve “unselfish, team-oriented style” with heightened group consciousness (Jackson et al., 1995). There is an “energy that is unleashed when players put their egos aside and work toward a common goal...a powerful group intelligence emerges that is greater than the coach’s ideas or those of any individual on the team” (Jackson, et al., 1995).

George Mumford is a performance expert who worked with Jackson’s teams. His goal was to get the athletes out of their head and quiet their minds which were churning with emotions and thoughts. Through engaging in deep breathing, the body is activating the calm and relaxation functions and quieting the stress responses, as well as filling the largest muscle, the diaphragm, with lung-filling breath (Mumford, 2015). Teaching deep breathing is important in helping with self-regulation tools and mental skills. Most people take shallow breaths. When

one learns to deep breathe, and move the belly too, it can be incorporated into daily habits and other PA exercise. An important outcome is to get the person to focus on movement and connect with the body. Through body scans, and intention setting, it makes it easier to develop an inner clarity, an intense focus that positions the body and mind to move into a conscious state of breathing, a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Golden State Warriors Coach Steve Kerr brings a growth mindset, through reflexive analysis and team cohesion exercises, to also push players into a higher level of play. He has worked to consciously build inclusion through decision making within team ranks, every one of the players and coaches on the team is considered a leader. He emphasizes positive psychology in his coaching philosophy that includes four core values: joy, mindfulness, compassion, and competition (Thompson, 2016). Kerr has described the importance of staying open to ideas from players and coaches and building trust to let the team know of their importance. These highly effective coaches understand the practice of creating a state of flow within their teams. Their extraordinary winning seasons and ability to bring cohesive teams together is a model for others to emulate. It is also foundational for SEL competencies.

Our mind is like an orchestra conductor sending electrical and chemical signals to every cell in our body; the human body has 30 to 50 trillion cells under our direction (Lipton, 2008). To thrive, we need light, water and food that is highly comprised of light in water - as in green vegetables and fruits, among other things (Kobayashi et al., 2009; Srinivasan, 2017). When you eat, you are eating sunlight that is photosynthesized in the plants or other forms of food. This light feeds the mitochondria in every cell, all 30-50 trillion! Whole and natural green foods are highly beneficial to fueling wellness in the body. In ancient Egypt, medical solariums existed to help people heal from various ailments; rooms were created with a specific color so that when

sunlight poured in, healing could occur throughout the body via colored windows that helped direct the light energy to assist in the therapy of healing, along with green foods (AHMAa, 2024; Briner, 2019).

Each cell has bioelectric charges for distinct physiological functions, sensitive to light, sound, and touch; many of these cells secrete hormones or other chemicals (Kobayashi et al., 2009). The elements in our bodies (sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium) all have specific electrical charges. Our cells use these charges (ions) to generate electricity. Cells control the flow of charged elements across membranes with proteins that sit on the cell surface, allowing certain charges (ions) to pass through. The heart, brain, blood, bones, organs, and facia all have electrical charges. So, while the distinct parts of the body are electrically charged energy at different rates, the collective general frequency of the entire human body is electrically charged energy at 7.83 hertz (Kobayashi, et al., 2009; Srinivasan, 2017). The current runs through the body with a magnetic field around it; as in all matter, when an electrical charge exists on the inside, it also exists on the outside (Bohm, 1993; Bohm, et al., 2002; Howard, 2020). Anything that has an electric current running through it has a magnetic field around it, and magnetic fields guide the electric current. The body's energetic field is referred to as the biofield (Jain, 2010; Jain 2015a; Jain 2015b; Jain, 2021; Langdon, 2014; McKusick, 2021; Redner, et al., 1991; Rubik, et al., 2015). Our memories, the sensory experience of living, are translated to the body through this electrical signal and our memories are stored in the body's electrical system and magnetic fields (Hay, 1984; Hay, 1995; McKusick, 2021; Redner, et al., 1991; Roby, et al., 2024). Human beings are electrically charged light bodies, understanding this at a deeper level can facilitate SEL experiences that bring about greater wellbeing.

Life experiences inform this electrical current and when upsetting or traumatic experiences occur, the energy flowing through the body becomes disrupted and off balance. This point is critical to understanding how trauma gets lodged in the body and affects our ability to move through life with greater physical, mental, and emotional health. This has profound implications for the success of SEL pathways that position people for greater success in life. It is also important to note that tools exist to remove stuck energies and restore greater coherence in the bodies (physical, etheric, mental, emotional, spiritual). It is through processes of balancing the energies in our physical/etheric, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies. Practices that involve massage therapy, sound healing, psychological skill training, energy medicine, acupuncture, and related integrative tools all work to restore energetic balance in the body (American Holistic Medical Association [AHMA], 2024a; Hastings, et al., 2018; National Institute for Integrative Healthcare [NIIH], 2024).

The body is comprised of 60% water, which serves as a conduit to run electrical currents through the body (USGS, 2019). A disruption in the electrical current in the body can lead to illness. Resistance in the electrical flow can be relaxed in that biofield energy to increase the voltage in the body to carry out vital processes that contribute to wellness. Ageless wisdom teachings note that cells also take directive from the vibrational frequency of our thoughts (Bailey, 1953; Briner, 2019; Jain, et al. 2015a; Jain, 2021; Lipton, 2008). In many cultures, it is believed that our thoughts create our physical experience and emotions amplify that experience, form follows thought and energy flows where our thoughts go (Bailey, 1953; Briner, 2019; Hay, 1984; Hay, 1995; Jain, 2021; Lipton, 2008; Roby, et al., 2024). So, to create health and wellbeing in the physical body, the logic would flow that a practice of reaching for positive thoughts, moving the consciousness to a higher state, nourishing our bodies with highly

nutritious foods like green vegetables, fruits, and whole foods, and hydrating the cells with water, all contributes to greater wellbeing. We must also exercise with vigorous activity to pump the heart, sending oxygenated blood throughout the body to transport nutrients (Annesi, 2015). This provides nutrients to the cells, transports hormones and removes waste products. Resting the body also ensures that cellular functions can be processed (Walker, 2017). These contributing factors fuel the body with the ability to think clearly and focus, aiding in the process of SEL.

Consider that these 30-50 trillion cells take directive from each person's thoughts (Bailey, 1953; Briner, 2019; Hay, 1984; Hay, 1995; Jain, 2021; Lipton, 2008; Roby, et al., 2024). In 1975, Dr. Mihály Csikszentmihalyi posited ideas about how to move the body into a state of flow, the cohesion of actions and consciousness, though many world philosophies have recognized this concept for thousands of years (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is a process involving high concentration, a focus that moves one out of an awareness of the passing of time. Sports psychologists and other mental health professions have used flow tools of to help alleviate stress and anxiety, while hyper-focusing on a task, so much so that the task becomes almost effortless. Positive psychology flow contributes to the bioenergy field work identified by Dr. David Bohm and has continued in the labs of Dr. John Allen, Dr. Hal Blumenfeld, Dr. James Comer, Dr. Mark Greenberg, Dr. Shamini Jain, Dr. Paul Mills, Dr. Roger Nelson, Dr. Dean Radin, Dr. Ed Sarath, and countless others working in related fields of physics, psychology, education, health and the neurosciences. Increasing numbers of universities around the world are establishing centers for mindfulness and consciousness research to advance our understanding of the benefits of practice. In a flow state, a person becomes energized and totally centered. So much is known about what creates health in the body and we know how to manage

wellness through self-regulation; the disconnect is in how it is translated to children at an early age so that tools are adopted to help us better manage our lives. HLF trauma-informed curricula has bridged this translation.

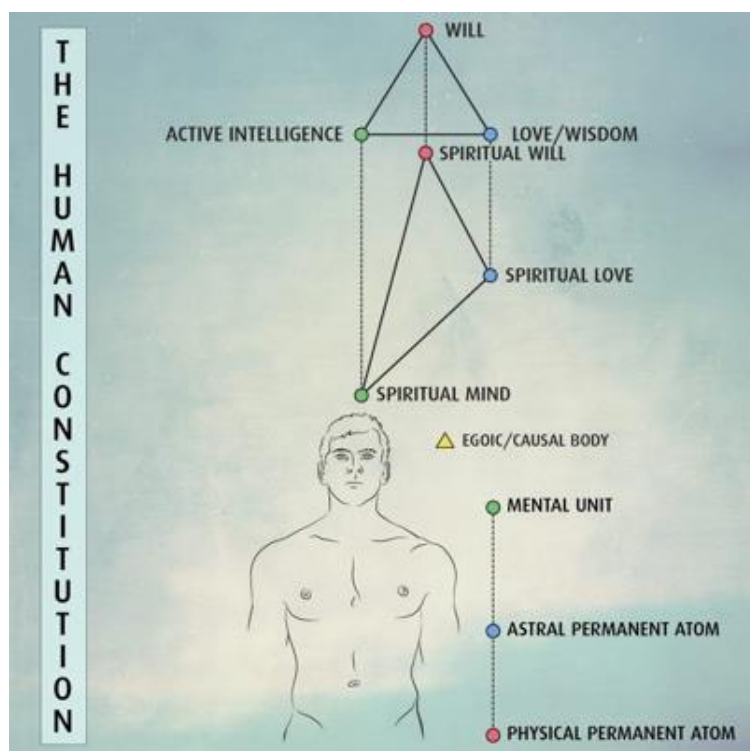
To understand the tools for self-regulation of the body, we will examine a deeper connection that considers the intersections of ageless wisdom and indigenous practices combined with western thought. Much of this context forms the basis for the mindfulness breathing and postures contained in the HLF trauma-informed curricula. For this research on SEL PYD and wellness, tools of greater health and wellbeing are included in this Appendix A, citing the longer-term study and practice of yoga but not specifically cited by HLF directly. HLF trauma-informed curricula has removed all references to ancient wisdom teachings so that the SEL stress reduction curricula are acceptable in all public-school secular settings and the focus is on breathing, mental skill development, and movement.

Ageless wisdom teachings over thousands of years have identified that our bodies have permanent atoms that stay with us through our lives, recording every act of mental, emotional, and spiritual activity (Bailey, 1953; Besant, 1954; Briner, 2019; Hopking, 2004; Lansdowne, 1986). Figure 13 below graphically depicts the Human Constitution of Man. Adding western empirical science to examine principles of ageless wisdom shared through eastern philosophies, creates more resources to advance greater understanding (Bohm, et al., 1993, Braden, 2008; Cox, 2022; Hastings, et al., 2018; Jain, et al., 2015a; Jain, et al., 2015b; Langdon, 2014; Mills, 2022; Rubik, et al., 2015; Zaccaro, et al., 2018; Zope, et al., 2013). *We each have a higher-level anatomy that can be utilized in bringing greater mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing*

(Besant, 1954; Briner, 2019; Cox, 2022; Jain, et al., 2015a; Jain, 2021; Langdon, 2014; Patanjali, 1975; Redner, et al., 1991; Roby, et al., 2024; Vaidya, et al., 2022; Yogananda, 2014).

Figure 13

The Human Constitution



Note: This image was created by Alan Hopking, 2004, p. 148. (Permission granted to reprint.)

Practitioners of holistic health, integrative medicine, and complementary therapies draw upon principles of ageless wisdom to enhance understanding of what brings wellness to the body (Brennan, 1988; Briner, 2019; Hastings, et al., 2018; Patanjali, 1975; Shealy, 2012; Tzu, 1996; Vaidya, et al., 2022; Yogananda, 2014). The National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health is devoted to improving health practices through understanding the intersections of ageless wisdom and indigenous remedies combined with western medical practices. For the purposes of this research on social, emotional learning and wellness, holistic health practices are important tools in our toolbox that can be utilized to

bring about greater health and wellbeing that impact our ability as social-emotional learners and forms the basis of the HLF SEL program.

Indigenous cultures have written about tools for self-regulation of the body, handed down for generations (Besant, 1954; Jain, et al., 2015a; Patanjali, 1975; Shealy, 2012; Tzu, 1996; Vaidya, et al., 2022; Yogananda, 2014). Self-regulation tools are at the core of SEL curricular teaching. My work has taken me to places and connections, to further explore ageless wisdom over the past two decades with partners in: Australia, China, Croatia, England, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, Peru, Republic of Georgia, Senegal, Slovenia, Tibet, Wales, and the U.S. The insight is profound, though controversial because it challenges commonly held beliefs, with the knowledge held by elite groups of elders, not commonly shared with general populations until such insight is sought (Bailey, 1953; Spalding, 1924; Selbie, et al., 2010; Yogananda, 2014). The texts suggest that elites held onto this wisdom, so it was not misused by the general population, reserving such critical information for distinguished leaders. Regardless, the tools have remained outside of western mainstream acceptance.

However, knowledge is always available for those that seek greater insight. The works of Patanjali describe a process of the purification of the body that occurs through the breathwork and the mindful movement practice of yoga. With practice in meditation, our awareness can move into a higher state of consciousness, eliciting higher brain waves (Briner, 2019; Patanjali, 1975; Salzberg, 2011). When a brain scan registers hyper-gamma brain waves, high energy frequency and vibration brain waves are evidenced (Dispenza, 2008). We can move consciousness with or without a body, through our thoughts, hearts, minds, and through the love of ourselves and love for all life (Briner, 2019). Practices of stress reduction yoga, gentle

movement, and focused breathing aid the body in increasing blood flow to create a harmonious condition that stimulates tissues and removes toxins. Electrical pulses in the body support this restorative action by flowing oxygen to all body parts. Life force energy is carried through the breath, into the body, and moved throughout the body through the bloodstream (Briner, 2019).

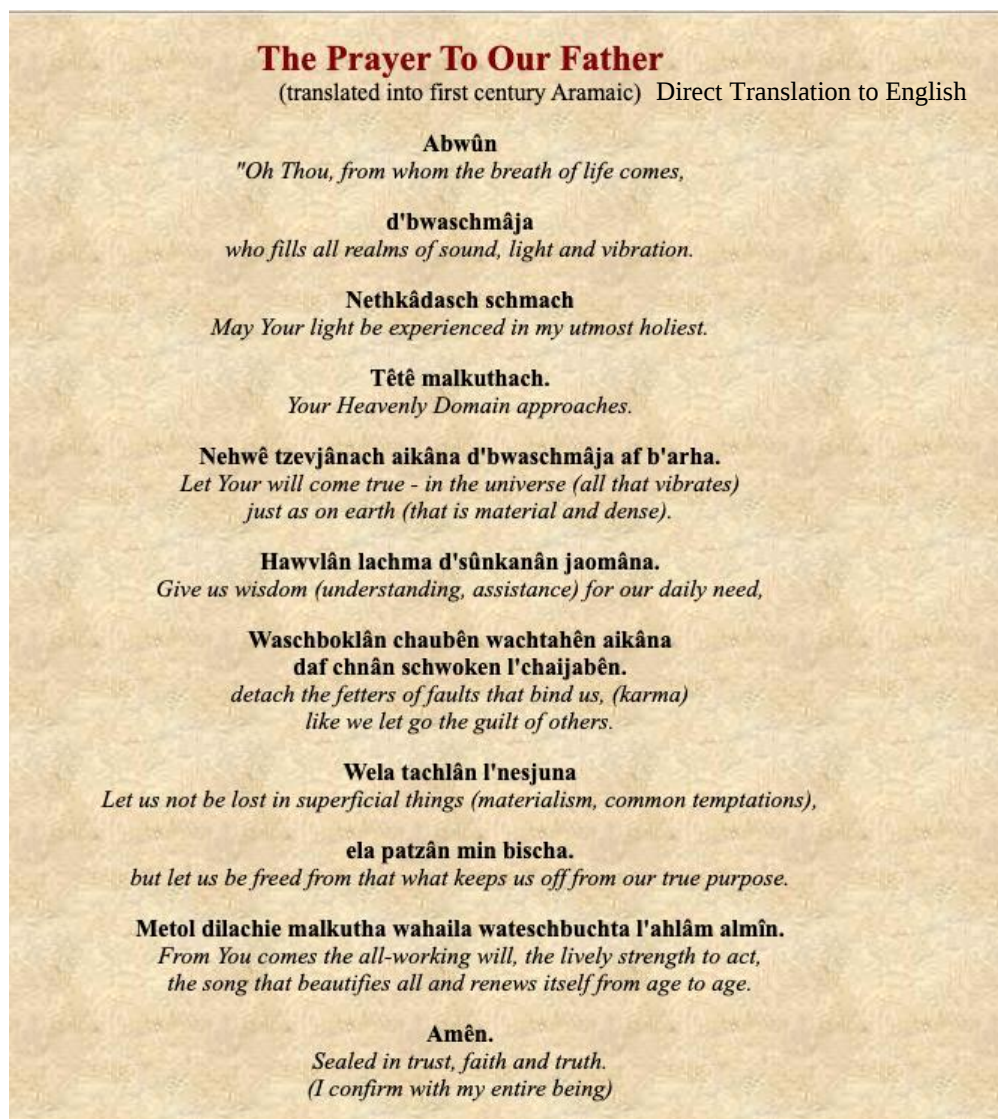
Ageless wisdom shared throughout traditions examined here all have a common goal: that is that the purpose of life is to become one with the Infinite through inner communion (Briner, 2019; Jain, et al., 2015a; Jain, 2021; Patanjali, 1975; Tzu, 1996; Vaidya, et al., 2022; Yogananda, 2014). In the ageless wisdom practice of Kriya (action) yoga, the PA exercise, poses and other limbs are defined from approximately 200 BC, as a psychophysiological practice of decarbonizing blood and recharging it with oxygen through breathwork; cells are then rejuvenated and sent through the spine to nerve energy bundled centers in the body and to the brain (Patanjali, 1975; Yogananda, 2014). This is shown to lessen the decay of tissue, with cells being transmuted energetically, neutralizing the breath and arresting decay in the body while quieting the heart (Patanjali, 1975; Yogananda, 2014). This alchemical knowledge of regenerative health has been laid out in the Upanishads, ancient texts from India dating from 700 BC to 300 BC, where it notes five distinct aspects of breathing (Easwaran, 2007). Breath is what brings life into the physical body, and through increasing frequency and vibration of energy, a higher state of consciousness can be obtained (Patanjali, 1975; Yogananda, 2014). Through discipline, study, and devotional practice of yoga, it is designed to help bring self-regulation and balance to the bodies (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual).

One of the oldest texts that has been shared widely around the world - over two millennia - describes the breath as the essence of life. In Figure 14 below, a translation of the

text in its original language of Aramaic directly translated into English, without translation through multiple languages; it reads:

Figure 14

Aramaic Translation of The Breath of Life



Note: The translation is given by Nazarene Way, cited in their online library collection, 2024.

The importance of breathwork is essential to our being. Breath brings the life force that charges the electrical circuits to make the body function. Without breath, life ceases. When we

are focusing on breathwork, it is the first stage of flowing energy into the body. This is critical to bringing wellness. The breath oxygenates our blood which moves the electrical charges through our blood plasma and crystalline structures of our bones, when compressed. The trauma-informed curricula of the Holistic Life Foundation (HLF) include the practice of breathing through stress reduction yoga, to instruct people of all ages, especially children, these secular principles of wisdom that involve a number of tools to bring healing to the body, allowing for greater SEL to occur.

We ourselves are energetic beings; and we live in an energetic space, everything is surrounded by energy (Bohm, 1980; Bohm, et al., 2002; Howard, 2020; Jain, 2021). Energetic impulses affect our physical body and as energetic beings, we influence our surroundings. A central thesis here is that our thoughts create our physical experience, energy flows where our thoughts go and wellness in the body is achievable. The SEL curricula encompasses this understanding as it considers broader holistic development of a child, with teaching and learning that builds skill sets to support behavioral, social, and emotional development in life. SEL programs consider main aspects of physical/etheric, mental, and emotional wellbeing as the curricula are designed to provide students with integrative tools to navigate life.

Albert Bandura believed we model our behaviors from our observed environment, forming our conscious experience (Bandura, 1986). Social conditioning reinforces the beliefs we experience throughout our childhood and into adulthood. This societal conditioning too often projects one's inner pain or misunderstandings onto others. Children learn that life brings challenges but may receive a message that is distorted from the lens in which it was received. Parents/family/peers/school/religious organizations/neighborhood/community organizations/mass media/social media tell a story of how we all live in a harsh world and that life is unkind.

We learn that only through hard work can we succeed, which is important, but it conveys a repeated and reinforced message that we are not doing enough, that we may not be deserving, and that we are constantly comparing ourselves to others and that we are just not good enough to measure up to impossible standards of perfection. This belief is supplanted in our consciousness. It fuels competition instead of cooperation. Media reflects attitudes and ideologies of the environment throughout the course of our lives; observing television commercials often demonstrates the harmful messaging of lack and limitation, and far too many include suggestions of disease present in the human condition. In the U.S., medication advertisements supplant the idea of lack of wellness. The mere suggestion of illness influences our belief systems. Stories of conflict and limitation are repeated in the daily news cycle which compounds the negative messaging designed to agitate, anger, and create anxiety through messages of lack and limitation.

We must unlearn this negative social conditioning. Through the teaching of self-regulation learned through breathing techniques, the bodies (physical/etheric, mental, emotional, and spiritual) can be harmonized, self-regulated, balanced and brought into a steadier state of homeostasis (Briner, 2019; Jain, 2021; Shealy, 2012). Time spent in nature also brings renewal. It is a connection to the natural world where our senses are filled with greater calm and relaxation; being in nature offers a respite, a chance to recharge from daily life's stresses (Djernis, et al., 2019; Pearson, 2014). Our connection to the natural world has important benefits that invite greater relaxation and focus, reducing stress levels, lowering cortisol, and offering a deeper sense of connection, important conditions that support SEL.

There is an energy field that permeates all living things (Bohm, 1980; Bohm, et al., 2002; Howard, 2020; Jain, 2021). It is universal in nature; it can be measured, felt, and sensed

(Briner, 2019; Cox, 2022; Jain, 2021; Mills, 2022; Shealy, 2012). When energy is balanced, harmony ensues. When energy is blocked, chaos is often the result. The human energy field has been called by various names: vital body, bioenergy field, and etheric body (Bohm, 1980; Bohm, et al., 2002; Howard, 2020; Jain, 2021; Lansdowne, 1986; McKusick, 2021; Page 1992). Within this energy field are vortexes of energy; there are seven such energy centers on the human physical body (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Jain, 2021; Lansdowne, 1986; Levin, 2019a; Levin, 2019b; Page, 1992 & 2005; Setterston, 2010). Each of these centers vitalizes a specific nerve center, endocrine gland, or internal organ system body (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Levin, 2019a; Levin, 2019b; Page, 1992 & 2005; Setterston, 2010). If the major energy center becomes unbalanced or restricted, the corresponding area can also become unbalanced or restricted (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Setterston, 2010). The result is physical/etheric, emotional and or mental disease or illness (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Lansdowne, 1986; Page, 1992 & 2005; Setterston, 2010). Therefore, balanced energy in each of the endocrine glands and nerve centers is critical to managing integrative health through alignment of the physical/etheric, emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies.

Indigenous health practices passed down through generations in many cultures around the world offer insight into wellbeing practices. One well known tradition is of eastern philosophy and aligns the spinal column with nerve bundled energy centers or chakras (AHMA, 2024a; Brennan, 1988; Lansdowne, 1986). The word chakra is Sanskrit in origin, it translates to the word “wheel.” It has been adopted into the English language vernacular and is defined as an:

...understanding of human energy in a system of seven major vortices that activate and energize surrounding areas...any of the seven energy centers running parallel to the spine that influence the conscious state of the body and therefore, its health and

wellbeing. Chakras are believed to interact directly with the endocrine and nervous systems to influence physical and emotional states (Medical Dictionary, 2024).

All diseases are the result of inhibited life force energy flowing into and out of the physical body; this is true of all life forms (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Johnston, 1975; Lansdowne, 1986; Paige, 1992). While a physical body may be born with an inherited illness, it is a condition to be learned from and to overcome; to heal the body, energy blockages must be removed so that higher energies can flow into and out of the living being and restore homeostasis in the body (Bailey, 1953, Hopking, 2004; Johnston, 1975; Lansdowne, 1986; Lipton, 2008; Paige, 1992 & 2004). As one regains an energetic balance in the bodies, energy is allowed to flow freely and heal the underlying cause behind the imbalances, resulting in and restoring the health of the individual (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Johnston, 1975; Lansdowne, 1986; Levin, 2019a; Levin, 2019b; Lipton, 2008; Page, 1992 & 2004; Shealy, 2012).

There are several bodies that comprise every living organism: an etheric body blueprint, a physical body, an emotional body, a mental body, and a spiritual body (Bailey, 1953; Hopking, 2004; Johnston, 1975). Outside the physical form, these other bodies can be referred to as subtle bodies. Consider they overlap one another like a multidimensional overlaying. As subtle bodies become unbalanced through trauma, stress or difficult life experiences, the bioelectric field around the body becomes stagnant. Trauma creates a thought pattern in the brain where threats are repeatedly reimagined. It sends the hormone adrenaline which then signals a thought process of past wounds. Trauma signals danger and tells the brain a story of the need to return to safety. Muscles tense up, the heart races and the breath accelerates. When one learns how to pause, move into the present moment, breathe, utilize mental skills to self-

regulate the body, move the body, it then gently releases imbalances and restores energy to flow freely again. It takes repeated practice and self-compassion. The body chemistry also changes with stress and with relaxation. Over time, one can heal the underlying cause behind the imbalanced energy (dis-ease) resulting in the health of the individual. It takes courage and practice, with reassurance of safety within one's own self, to free the mind of the past and live in the present moment. *This point cannot be understated.* The work of the HLF is foundational in helping children understand that they can create anything with their minds, including bringing a balanced state of health to the body.

We all possess the ability to heal ourselves; our thoughts are powerful enough to bring greater wellbeing into existence, recall that energy flows where our thoughts go (Briner, 2019; Dispenza, 2008; Lipton, 2008). The placebo effect is a “belief” that a healing effect is taking place (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2024). The placebo effect contributes to interesting possibilities as we explore self-regulation of the body (Wager, et al., 2021). Placebos offer a beneficial health outcome; one must be convinced an intervention will help, then the mind creates the conditions for health because the belief is strong. The gold standard for testing interventions in human health is a randomized, placebo-controlled, clinical trial. Participants cleared for a study are randomly assigned to a test group and receive either an experimental intervention or a control group - receiving a placebo (an inactive substance that looks like the treatment or drug being tested). At the end of the trial experiment, results of the two groups are compared. The researcher must determine whether changes in the test group resulted from the actual treatment or from chance, the suggestion of mere *belief* that the treatment would improve the condition (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2024).

It has been stated that illness in the physical body is caused by a higher state of energy imbalance. It is also noted that the physical body thrives on light and green foods high in oxygen (Kobayashi, et al., 2009; Srinivasan, 2017). And the idea has been posited that that our thoughts create our physical experience, thoughts become things (AHMA, 2024a; Lipton, 2008). The goal of this research is to help evolve a curriculum that facilitates health and wellbeing, knowing that we all possess tools that can be used to heal illness in our physical body; and the social emotional curricula may begin with breathwork. Through greater understanding, illness can be a teacher. Dis-ease teaches us how to live more fully and over time; there are lessons in the experience of overcoming sickness. Until one has encountered the experience, it is not easily understood.

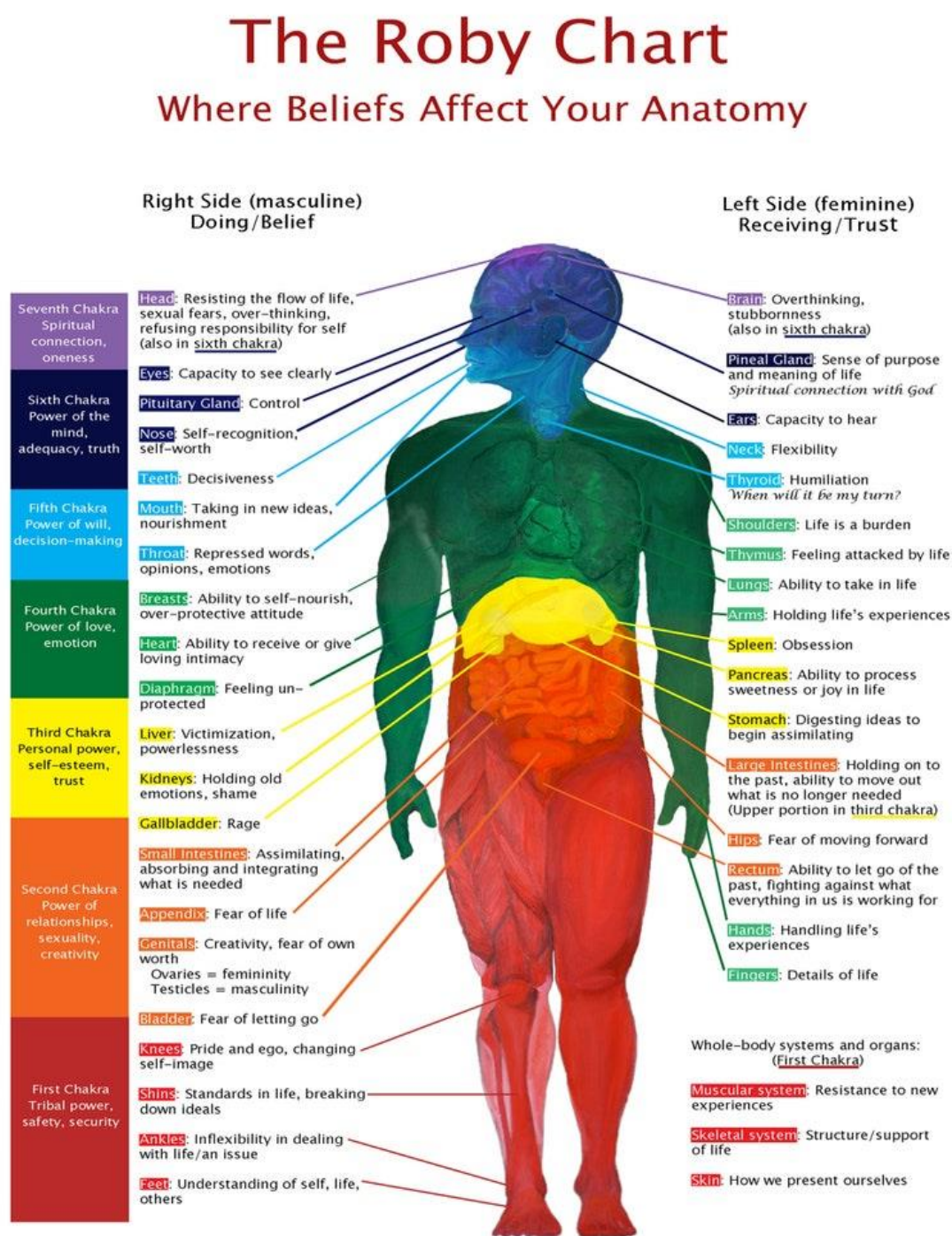
Through our life experience, we seek positive outcomes, familiar connections that lead us to greater joy, and more cohesive and loving relationships. Ultimately, a component of love is the solution to every problem, the pathway, and it feeds our journey forward. It can transform our physical body, relationships, and group consciousness. Love, gratitude, and forgiveness are all powerful physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing tools we are given. We can repair cells to health when we live in a higher state of consciousness (Bailey, 1953; Briner, 2019; Lipton, 2008; Patanjali, 1975; Selbie, et al., 2010; Shealy, 2012; Yogananda, 2014). A critical piece in wellness and health is to understand that many people are unwilling to let go of things that cause illness in the first place; the thoughts and experiences that caused the illness to manifest then become obstacles. The HLF trauma-informed curricula helps the children unpack trauma and fear, while reinforcing techniques to build a healthy lifestyle. As the children advance in the skills, they overcome obstacles through becoming competent at developing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, evolve relationships skills and exercise

responsible decision making. Understanding the inextricable link between how our thoughts create our physical experience is central to supporting the healing of chronic pain and illness.

Figure 15, below, illustrates the physical anatomy that is aligned with energy centers affected by beliefs.

Figure 15

Physical Anatomy Aligned with Energy Centers Affected by Beliefs (The Roby Chart).



(C) Copyright 2004 Cheryl Roby

www.robbychart.com

Based on the work of Louise Hay, Dorothy Martin-Neville and Caroline Myss

Note: Roby, et al., 2024. (Permission granted to reprint).

While higher chakra centers are believed to exist as taught in ageless wisdom, especially from the Hindu perspective, the focus here is on the energy nerve center chakras aligned with physical body alignment depicted in The Roby Chart Figure 15 above (Briner, 2019; Jain, 2021; Lansdowne, 1986; Patanjali, 1975; Roby, et al., 2024; Shealy, 2012; Yogananda, 2014). This physical anatomy map is aligned with the energy center chakras; color coding aligns with more universal depictions of the center that governs the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual body being regulated through each energy center (AHHAa, 2024; Lansdowne, 1986). What is unique about this mapping is that it applies physical ailments to each of the energy centers, corresponding to where blockages occur in the physical body from misaligned thought patterns (Hay, 1984; Hay, 1995; Roby, et al., 2024). The ancient Indian medical system, known as the science of Ayurveda, is based on holistic approaches to physical and mental health; the chakra systems are key to understanding medical mapping of illness and their causes (NCCIH, 2024).

The crown center chakra is believed to function by allowing higher energies to enter the physical and etheric body, the blueprint of the physical body (AHMA, 2024a; Jain, 2021). It is based in the head. The pineal gland serves as the endocrine gland in the physical body to regulate the functioning of the crown center; this energy center is believed to filter higher level thoughts (Briner, 2019). The color associated with this center is violet and the frequency of this center vibrates at 963 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note B (McKusick, 2021). The Solfeggio frequencies are the universe's harmonics, referring to specific tones of sound that help promote balance in aspects of the body. Ayurveda practices have used Solfeggio frequencies in healing practices for centuries.

The Alta major chakra is based in the forehead; it is believed to open higher-level energies flowing into the body (AHMA, 2024a; Jain, 2021). The hypothalamus gland regulates

this center; the sinuses, pituitary, and frontal lobes are enervated through the Alta major (Briner, 2019). Its function is to improve insight. The color associated with this center is indigo and the healthy frequency of this center vibrates at 852 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note A (McKusick, 2021).

The throat chakra is believed to support the eyes, ears, cranial nerves, central nervous system led by the polyvagal nerve, the lymphatic system, the mouth, jaw, esophagus, shoulders, elbows and hands, the upper lungs (AHMA, 2024a; Briner 2019). The thyroid and parathyroid serve the endocrine function of the throat center; it is based in the throat and supports clarity of truthful understanding (Briner, 2019; Jain, 2021). When this center is out of balance, related illnesses occur in any of these connected organs. The throat center is critically important in regulating the enervation of the body. The color associated with this center is blue and the healthy frequency vibrates at 741 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note G (McKusick, 2021).

The heart chakra corresponds to the heart organ, lungs/diaphragm, breast, circulatory system, muscles, immune system, respiratory system, and immune system (AHMA, 2024a; Briner, 2019; Jain, 2021). The thymus gland serves endocrine function, believed to be the focal point for interpreting the feeling of love (Briner, 2019). When the heart is out of balance it causes problems beginning with muscular aches and pains that could evolve into a most severe constriction of cardiac arrest. The color associated with this center is green and the healthy frequency vibrates at 639 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note F (McKusick, 2021).

The solar plexus chakra is believed to control the stomach, liver, pancreas, spleen, gallbladder, intestines – small - and large - colon, and the digestive system (AHMA, 2024a;

Briner, 2019; Jain, 2021). It is based in the abdomen. The spleen is the central endocrine gland for this center and is believed to serve as a battery pack for the entire physical body; the energy supports willpower (Briner, 2019). Imbalance in the solar plexus can cause disruption of digestion, the bowel, and related illnesses. The color associated with this center is yellow and the healthy frequency vibrates at 528 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note E (McKusick, 2021).

The sacral chakra is believed to sustain the creative center of the body, the sex organs are the endocrine organs (AHMA, 2024a; Briner, 2019; Jain, 2021). This center helps to support the creative processes in our lives (Briner, 2019). When it is out of balance, illness may appear in the reproductive organs or physical symptoms of pain in the hips, knees, and feet may evolve. The color associated with this center is orange and the healthy frequency vibrates at 417 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note D (McKusick, 2021).

The basic root chakra is believed to support the kidneys, bladder, sacroiliac joints, and spine (AHMA, 2024a; Briner, 2019, Jain, 2021). The adrenal glands serve as the endocrine center, providing energy to the physical/etheric, mental, emotional, and spiritual anatomy (AHMAa, 2024; Briner, 2019). The basic center is at the trunk of the spine; it is believed to support survival and is blocked by fear (AHMA, 2024a; Briner 2019). The color associated with this center is red and the healthy frequency vibrates at 396 hertz on the Solfeggio frequency tones, it resonates with the musical note C (McKusick, 2021).

The Solfeggio frequency of 174 hertz is believed to have the greatest impact on physical health and is often referred to as an anesthetic (McKusick, 2021). In the 1970's, Dr. Joseph Puleo began testing the Solfeggio frequencies in relation to identifying tones that bring the body back into balance and aid in healing (McKusick, 2021). The Solfeggio frequency of 285 hertz is

believed to bring soothing sounds of relief; it is believed to support the freeing of energy blockages (McKusick, 2021).

Everything in the physical world and all that we experience is vibrating with frequencies on the electromagnetic spectrum. Specific wavelengths for all matter, including thoughts, are received by our brains through sensory organs and translated into how we understand the physical world around us. Everything is vibrating energy. Individual atoms and subatomic particles emit and absorb light. The vibrational difference is how scientific inquiry distinguishes between wavelengths. This is a crucial point, so that when we aim to bring healing to the body, we know what healthy functioning vibration resonates at for that body part. There are medical uses for ultraviolet and infrared light. Ultraviolet light is used to disinfect air, water, and surfaces and has been used in food safety practices to reduce the spread of bacteria. Infrared light promotes detoxification of cells. It is used to treat inflammatory conditions such as arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and is being investigated in treatment of certain cancers (AHMA, 2024a; NIIH, 2024).

Understanding how energy flows in the body, how it might get stuck in the mental, emotional, spiritual, and or physical/etheric bodies, the field can become excessive or diminished, and the need to be able to clear and balance one's own energy is a critically important tool in learning how to self-regulate the body. This forms the basis for energy hygiene. It is more than learning how to pause, reflect, think, and act. Self-regulation techniques involve managing energy flow throughout the body. This ultimately contributes to our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. A key piece of SEL begins with a focus on breathwork to calm the mind and bring greater focus. Related tools are essential in understanding how to manage emotions to improve our health. It is important to understand this

background knowledge as it is built into the HLF trauma-informed curricula, assisting students with an understanding of the SEL tools needed to self-regulate the body and approaching SEL from a holistic perspective (Smith, Smith & González, 2022).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Michigan State University IRB Study 00006933

The purpose of my study is to examine the development of the HLF's trauma-informed curricular program and identify strategies and challenges associated with replicating the program and rolling it out in K-12 school districts more broadly.

Background and Program History

- (1) How did HLF get started? Tell me how this came about...How has it evolved?
- (2) What is your background/training?
- (3) What was your role in evolving HLF?
- (4) How did you develop content?

Program Content and Logistics

- (5) Does HLF have a logic model? Inputs, Outputs Activities/Participation, Outcomes—Impact?
- (6) Does HLF have a business plan with short/medium/long term goals?
 - (a) Long-term outputs
 - (b) Short-term outputs
- (7) What are the long-term goals of the program?
- (8) What about shorter-term goals?
- (9) What activities are carried out to lead to these goals?
- (10) Let us talk about HLF Training – who delivers it? Who creates content? Who starts it?
- (11) Can you give me a lineup of the organizational structure of HLF? Teachers/staff/others -
- (12) Can you share insights on curricula development? Details
- (13) Who implements the HLF curricula?
- (14) Who evaluates the HLF curricula?
- (15) Let us talk about outcomes ...Please tell me about effective outcomes, if any, delivered through program content?

Program Implementation and Challenges

- (16) What strategies worked to gain trust in the public school system? Community? How long did this take?
- (17) What are the keys to making it work programmatically? Administratively? On the ground, implementing the program?
- (18) What did not work so well programmatically? Administratively?

- (19) What are your challenges related to implementing the programming? Job satisfaction?
- (20) How did you overcome challenges...?
- (21) Can you tell me about the HLF programs replicated to other school districts/community-based programming outside of Baltimore County, MD, Harrisburg, PA, NY Akwesasne (Mohawk) Indigenous population? U.S. and globally, etc.? For what ages?
- (22) How did you pitch this to superintendents/school boards/principals/teachers?
- (23) Why do you think/believe the HLF organization is so effective? Or not?
- (24) How does the HLF team function?
- (25) Tell me the story of how HLF has grown over time...?
- (26) What makes it effective? Or not?
- (27) Tell me about the HLF staff- how did you decide to grow positions the way in which you have grown?
- (28) Others have demonstrated it works with the children, but for every 10 teachers that start, how many deliver the program as HLF intended?
- (29) Can you tell me more about the teachers you have trained over the decades... how do you stay connected? How do you build on your training programs/refreshers/annual conferences?
- (30) How do you maintain curricular inputs?

Updating the Program

- (31) Of all the research published on HLF SEL interventions, how do you utilize this to demonstrate effectiveness? Make changes to the program?
- (32) What are your plans to replicate this work more broadly?

Close

- (33) What recommendations would you have for others interested in doing this kind of work?
- (34) Little data exists on creating social emotional learning outcomes in children using mindfulness / stress reduction yoga / silent reflection meditation techniques. What data do you think I should be collecting?
- (35) Is there anything more you would like to tell me?

APPENDIX C: HOLISTIC LIFE FOUNDATION FOUNDERS

Figure 16

Ali Smith, Andrés González, and Atman Smith



Figure 17

Holistic Life Foundation Leadership Workshop with Sharon Salzberg:
Love is the Most Powerful Force in the Universe, 30 April 2022



APPENDIX D: DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me, MaryAnne Walker, and that the work contained herein is my own. The data presented in this thesis was obtained through my own research and interview work. The data analysis and interpretation are entirely my own work. Any contributions from colleagues, such as diagrams, are explicitly referenced in the text. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification; it was created for the self-driven purpose of completion of a Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology at Michigan State University. Any included publications are my own work, except where I have indicated throughout the thesis where I have shared summaries, clearly identified by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.