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Creating a Restorative Room and Instructional Resources for the Inukai Boys & Girls Club

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Creating a Restorative Room and Instructional Resources for the Inukai Boys & Girls Club

Abstract
The Boys & Girls Clubs of America began in 1860 to enable all young people to reach their full potential. The Inukai Boys & Girls Club in Hillsboro, Oregon, serves a diverse population of youth, and was well suited for a restorative room and resilience based instructional resources, as stated by the site supervisor. Developing relaxation skills, especially early in life, may serve as an asset for resilience by providing resources for coping with life stressors. This practicum involved the implementation of the findings of relevant studies regarding effective room design and relaxation skills for youth. Literature reviews resulted in the creation of a restorative room and instructional resources. These resources addressed the teaching of guided imagery, mindfulness, and yoga skills to youth. Altogether, the practicum provided me with increased knowledge and it provided the youth with more resources for developing resilience through increased positive assets.

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Abstract
The Boys & Girls Clubs of America began in 1860 to enable all young people to reach their full potential. The Inukai Boys & Girls Club in Hillsboro, Oregon, serves a diverse population of youth, and was well suited for a restorative room and resilience based instructional resources, as stated by the site supervisor. Developing relaxation skills, especially early in life, may serve as an asset for resilience by providing resources for coping with life stressors. This practicum involved the implementation of the findings of relevant studies regarding effective room design and relaxation skills for youth. Literature reviews resulted in the creation of a restorative room and instructional resources. These resources addressed the teaching of guided imagery, mindfulness, and yoga skills to youth. Altogether, the practicum provided me with increased knowledge and it provided the youth with more resources for developing resilience through increased positive assets.
Overview

This Practicum in Applied Psychology created a restorative room and instructional resources for youth at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club in Hillsboro, Oregon. The Inukai Boys & Girls Club serves a diverse population of youth, both racially and ethnically, as well as economically. My practicum aimed to address the needs of the organization and the population by providing a restorative room and instructional resources for the teaching of relaxation skills. To accomplish these aims, I conducted many reviews of current literature and consultations with the youth and staff, ensuring the effectiveness of the products provided. At completion, my practicum provided the club with an implemented restorative room design and instructional resources for teaching mindfulness, guided imagery, and yoga to youth. Additionally, the experience led to personal and professional growth through overcoming challenges and refining interests.
Section 1: Youth at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club

This section will discuss the Boys & Girls Clubs in general, as well as the Inukai Boys & Girls Club, where I had my practicum in Applied Psychology. It will also discuss the needs of youth, specifically those in racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as those who come from families with low annual incomes. Finally, it will address the needs of the youth served at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club.

The Boys & Girls Clubs

The Boys Clubs originated in 1860, providing a place for young boys who roamed the streets to develop healthy behaviors (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, n.d.-b). The organization began serving girls as well, and changed the name to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in 1990. They have evolved over time to increase their breadth and depth of service in order to “enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens” (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, n.d.-a).

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America promote child safety and healthy behaviors by providing life-enhancing programs, a safe place to learn and grow, and character development experiences (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, n.d.-a). Each club throughout the country works to provide these resources to youth in ways that create progress toward their mission statement. More specifically, they provide activities in areas including education and career, character and leadership, health and life skills, the arts, and sports, fitness and recreation (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, n.d.-c).

With respect to the Boys & Girls Clubs as an intervention, research has found that simply having ties to prosocial organizations is a constructive factor for resilience: the ability to “bounce back” (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Further, the
club has systems in place that provide positive attachments to role models, which has been found to be another factor in developing resilience (Werner, 2013). The clubs also have processes in place to help the youth develop self-regulation, further developing resilience (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). For example, in between activity times, the youth are gathered into a meeting area and asked to practice controlling their body movements and noise levels while the next activity options are explained.

**Population Being Served**

The clubs serve youth ages 6 to 18 nationally, with over 60% being ages 6 to 12 (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2014). Some youth under the age of 6 are served, but it is the smallest age category. Fifty-five percent of the youth are males, and 45% are females, and race and ethnicity is evenly distributed: White (32%), Black or African-American (28%), and Hispanic or Latino (23%). Many youth come from families of a low socioeconomic status; 65% of the youth qualify for free or reduced price school lunches.

The Inukai Boys & Girls Club, located in Hillsboro, Oregon, serves youth comparable to those participating nationally. The Inukai Club serves youth aged 6 to 18, with the primary age range being between 6 and 11 years (Boys & Girls Clubs of Portland Metropolitan Area, 2014). There is also diverse ethnic distribution that matches the local demographics: the three largest categories being Hispanic or Latino (53%), White (27%), and Multi-Racial (8%). The significant majority of youth come from families with annual incomes of $36,000 or less. Further, most youth’s families report annual incomes of $12,000 or less.

**Needs of the Population**

**Needs of minority and low income youth.** There are documented differences in the availability of educational resources for youth in racial and ethnic minority groups, such as
relative lack of teacher availability, courses, curriculum materials, and equipment (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Considering these inequalities in educational resources, there are likely also differences in resources for things such as psychological skills trainings. Additionally, youth who come from families with low annual household incomes may have increased difficulty in supplementing the often expensive educational resources, such as tutoring. And although parental involvement has been found to contribute to academic success, parents who have occupations with low annual incomes are often forced to work multiple jobs, creating competing demands that might limit the time they could devote to their children’s education (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 2008).

Additionally, life stressors and adverse experiences are a part of life for many youth. Adverse experiences can be described as events that cause stress, and have the potential for long term neurological and emotional effects on youth (Heim, & Nemeroff, 1999; Heim, et al., 2002; Kaufman, Plotsky, Nemeroff, & Charney, 2000). Given that adverse events and stress can have long term effects, it is important to provide services and resources to youth that help increase their coping capabilities. One possible long term effect is presented by Semple and Lee, stating that anxiety disorders are the most common mental health problems of childhood (2008). Considering this, the possible added stressor of anxiety disorders may compound the generalized need for positive coping behaviors to increase well-being and positive affect (Durham & Frost-Hartzer, 1994).

**Needs of youth at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club.** Considering these needs along with the demographics of the youth at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club, it would be likely that the youth at the Inukai Club experience similar disadvantages in the availability of educational resources. Youth from the Inukai Boys & Girls Club are often of minority racial and ethnic groups, and
from families with low annual incomes (Boys & Girls Clubs of Portland Metropolitan Area, 2014). Recognizing the need, the Inukai Boys & Girls Club, through intentional action, contributes to a leveling out of these resources and their associated benefits. They provide assets the youth may not otherwise have access to by providing supplemental resources aimed at healthy and positive behaviors.
Section 2: Practicum

This section will discuss the practicum position, and how it was formed to meet the needs of the organization and the population. Specifically, it will discuss the learning goals that guided my roles and responsibilities in the practicum, ensuring personal development, as well as successful outcomes for the organization.

Resilience is defined as the ability to “bounce back” after adverse experiences (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). In recognition of the previously discussed needs of the population, the site supervisor stated specific site needs in preliminary conversations: the development and implementation of a restorative space design and resilience based relaxation skills (R. Parker-Sharpsteen, personal communication, August 17, 2015). In order to meet these stated needs, and the ones presented by the characteristics of the population, I created the position of Resilience Program and Room Designer at the club. This meant that I set the objectives, timeline, and outcomes for implementing the resilience based resources. The three-month long practicum was ultimately guided by the intentions to develop a new restorative space and instructional resources within the preexisting system that was the Inukai Boys & Girls Club.

Learning Goals

In order to provide an evidence-based restorative room and resilience resources, several goals and objectives were created through consultations with both the site supervisor as well as the academic advisor.

First, I aimed to learn the design of an effective restorative room, which would involve researching, reviewing, and synthesizing research to implement the most effective elements of room design. It would also require room design and surveying skills, in order to discover the preferences of the youth. Additionally, accomplishing this goal would require learning how to
apply for grants, in order to fund the implementation of the room design. Second, I aimed to learn about age-appropriate skills to enhance youth well-being. This learning goal would also involve researching, reviewing, and synthesizing research. Third, I desired to learn how to relate these skills to the development of resilience in youth. This would involve researching resilience, how to develop it in youth through relaxation skills, and what relaxation skills are effective for youth. This would also involve connecting seemingly separate psychological concepts and constructs. Finally, once the literature was reviewed, I aimed to create instructional resources for the skills. This would include translating academic literature so it would be accessible for the general population; taking concepts found in the research, and making them tangible and understandable for those who may not have experience in Psychology. Finally, this goal would also involve learning how to format the information into a booklet.

These four learning goals ensured that the practicum met both my academic needs, as well as the needs of the population and the organization.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

My practicum role was Resilience Program and Room Designer, and had three main components: research reviewer, room and instructional resource designer, and consultant with the youth and staff at the Inukai Club. In order to review research, I planned to search databases to find relevant articles, and synthesize the findings in order to implement them. In this role at the club, I intended to spend time at the practicum reading and reviewing articles, in order to find what would be most effective for the practicum products. To be successful in role of designer, I again planned to review literature to create a room and resources that would benefit the youth. I also planned to survey the youth, to ensure that their preferences were taken into account in the room design. Additionally, I set out to implement the design through observations of the current
space, knowledge of the desired space, and creating the steps needed to get from one to the other, including community organizing and volunteer recruiting. Finally, in regard to my role as a consultant, I aimed to attend staff meetings and complete check-ins with the staff throughout the practicum in order to ensure the involvement of key stakeholders throughout the process. I also intended to have similar consultations with my academic advisor in order to ensure effective use and application of research.

Altogether, my role and the associated responsibilities were to meet the needs of the youth and the organization. This meant I was to do the work necessary to create an evidence-based restorative room, as well as the evidence-based instructional resources that, together, would lead to increased development of resilience in the youth.
Section 3: Resilience, Relaxation Skills, and Restorative Room Design

This section will discuss the findings of the research that was reviewed throughout the practicum. Specifically, it will cover research regarding resilience and positive youth development, fostering resilience through relaxation skills that are effective for youth, how to teach these skills to youth, and elements of an effective restorative room design. As previously discussed, the purpose of Boys & Girls Clubs is to support youth in positive development. This practicum aimed to further aid those efforts, through the previously described roles. Here, the many findings encountered throughout the practicum while working in the role of researcher will be presented.

Resilience and Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is defined as the ongoing and inevitable process of youth interacting with their environment, specifically positive agents within it, in order to both nurture positive assets as well as meet basic needs (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Moreover, the interaction with these positive agents often occurs within programs built to intentionally provide youth with these constructive resources: (a) satisfying bonding, (b) social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and moral competency, (c) self-determination, (d) fostered spirituality, (e) a clear and positive identity, (f) belief in the future, (g) recognition of positive behavior, (h) opportunities for prosocial development, and (i) established prosocial norms among the youth (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998).

Thriving is a key concept in promoting positive youth development, and is defined as the achievement of potential through community engagement and well-being (Benson & Scales, 2009). Further, the benefits of thriving carry on into adulthood and they continue to grow as the person ages (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). These long-term benefits, including the ability to
bounce back after adverse experiences, increase the likelihood that youth will thrive throughout their lifetime (Werner, 2013). Said another way, the promotion of positive development assets, is more effective than trying to prevent the inevitable adverse events and will serve to achieve the same end (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009). In this way, resilience and positive youth development are parallel terms; increased through the same constructive assets and competencies. Further, resilience is effective for all youth. Whereas deficit-focused programs might be effective in bringing struggling youth back to the established norm, strengths-based programs aimed at developing resiliency increase positive assets for all youth, regardless of age or circumstance.

Increased positive assets does increase resilience in youth, however, bouncing back is not a pain-free or immediate process (Blum, 1998). Resilience aids in the process of rebounding from adverse experiences by creating “patterns of positive adaptation” following those experiences (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009, p.118). Therefore, although there is no magic formula for the development of resilience, an effective program should aim to develop these increased positive patterns of adaptation (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Additionally, though there are no set standards for resilience development, the protective factors do seem to transcend “ethnic, social class and geographic variables” (Werner, 2013, p.82). Some researchers even argue that the younger the participant in a resilience based program, the more likely they are to develop the competency (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Likewise, the benefits of developing resilience before age ten may be enhanced through healthy brain development, tapping into the power of the human adaptation system that protects against risk factors which tend to compound over time (Blum, 1998; Lamontagne, Mason & Hepworth, 1985; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). All told, it is certainly possible
for youth to develop resilience, and these patterns of positive adaptation may actually be more beneficial when providing protective factors over the lifespan.

**Resilience and Effective Relaxation Skills for Youth**

Although there are many components to the development of resilience, relaxation skills (i.e., guided imagery, mindfulness, and yoga) have been found to be particularly effective in developing the ability to bounce back (Lamontagne, Mason & Hepworth, 1985). For example, learned relaxation skills may be beneficial in helping youth cope with stress. Developing relaxation skills provides opportunities for youth to learn more effective ways to appraise stressful life events, resulting in more adaptive coping later on (Werner, 2013). These increased coping skills create both psychological and physiological benefits: “The ability to relax, clear the mind, and engage in healing images has been shown to support both physiological and psychological wellness” (Durham & Frost-Hartzer, 1994, p. 222). Not only are there direct benefits from these skills regarding well-being, these skills are associated with resilience. Specifically, two relevant components of resilience are the ability to create emotional health and well-being, and the ability to effectively function within systems (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009). Overall, relaxation skills not only have short-term benefits, but also long-term benefits in developing resilience within youth.

Relaxation skills may be considered positive assets or protective factors: influences that alter a person’s response to environmental stressors (Rutter, 1985). These protective factors can come from both within and outside of the child, and include factors such as social support, behavioral regulation, and self-control or self-regulation (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Smith, & Carlson, 1997). If a child is able to regulate behavior and exhibit self-control, they are more likely to elicit positive responses from their environment. This would
benefit youth by then providing them with more protective factors outside of themselves, which would likely lead to increased resilience. These increased external protective factors may then also provide resources that increase internal protective factors, which would then lead to a cycle of positive responses and resilience development. In this way, using relaxation skills to develop abilities such as self-regulation would lead to positive cycles of resilience development (Stück & Gloeckner, 2003). In summary, relaxation skills paired with self-regulation can act as protective factors to promote resiliency in youth.

For example, skills based in mindfulness have been found to aid in the development of resilience (Greenberg & Harris, 2011). Mindfulness can be simplistically described as centering one’s thoughts in the present moment. One program, which emphasized various components of mindfulness, such as awareness of thought patterns and modifying explanatory or attributional styles, was found to be effective in developing resilience (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Similarly, a study by Semple and Lee (2008) suggests that using mindfulness techniques could create benefits when adverse experiences cause reactions similar to state (short-term) anxiety, or when they exacerbate the symptoms of trait (long-standing) anxiety. Semple and Lee argue that both past-oriented and future-oriented thoughts tend to be associated with negative emotions. Therefore, centering thoughts in the present moment could be seen as an effective method of promoting positive mental states.

Along with these psychological protective factors, relaxation skills have also been found to have physiological benefits, which may act as physical protective factors supporting resilience development. Relaxation skills such as guided imagery, mindfulness, and yoga have been found to reduce biological markers of stress in youth (Weigensberg et al., 2009; Weigensberg et al., 2014; Wright, Gregoski, Tingen, Barnes, & Treiber, 2011). This, in turn, creates improved
physiological functioning, which may have benefits for both further relaxation skill development and resilience development. If youth can learn effective relaxation skills, this will not only directly benefit them psychologically, but it will also create indirect benefits through other increased abilities, such as physiological functioning leading to physical movement, which can be complementary tools for resilience development.

In total, relaxation skills have strong benefits in the development of resilience. For example, the ability to recognize and regulate one’s own emotions benefits both mental and physical well-being. Relaxation skills function as assets that would provide youth with more opportunities to develop resilience, based on both internal and environmental resources. Once an understanding of the benefits to resilience from relaxation skills was established, it was crucial to examine the effectiveness of various relaxation skills in resilience development for youth. The findings of current research converged on three skills: yoga, guided imagery, and mindfulness. Each skill was found to be effective for youth for various reasons, many of which are discussed here.

**Guided imagery.** Guided imagery is a relaxation skill that is effective for the development of resilience. Guided imagery can be described as the use of words, particularly in story-like formats when using the skill with youth, to evoke positive imaginary scenarios that focus attention on healing (Peck, Bray & Kehle, 2003; Weigensberg et al., 2014). Studies have found guided imagery to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety for moderate and high anxiety youth, as measured by salivary cortisol (Lamontagne, Mason, & Hepworth, 1985; Weigensberg et al., 2009; Weigensberg et al., 2014). Other researchers have also found that guided imagery can be helpful in reducing both short-term and long-term anxiety (Peck, Bray &
Kehle, 2003). Therefore, guided imagery can help all children in reducing the effects of anxiety, with possibly increased degrees of efficacy based on baseline levels.

Not only are there effects associated with psychological well-being, guided imagery programs show a positive effect on social development as well (Hernández-Guzmán, González & López, 2002). For example, one found that guided imagery addressing positive socialization, increased positive socialization (Hernández-Guzmán, González & López, 2002). This positive development of social skills may then help to improve social competence, which is a protective factor in developing resilience and psychological well-being. It has been found that self-perceptions of low social competence are linked to negative outcomes such as depressive symptoms (Cole, Martin, Peeke, Seroczynski, & Hoffman, 1998; King, Akiyama, & Elling, 1996). Therefore, developing these skills may improve self-perceptions and create further associated protective factors. The development of these social skills through guided imagery may also be particularly effective in youth; Barret (2000) states that “the anxieties expressed by adolescents relate more commonly to social identification and interpersonal issues” (p. 479). This suggests that guided imagery could not only reduce stress and anxiety, as previously discussed, but it could also reduce the specific anxieties associated with social interaction.

In summary, these studies suggest that guided imagery associated with a certain skill or experience, can promote resiliency and well-being in youth. It can help reduce stress and anxiety, providing psychological and physiological protective factors. It can also be used to develop skills that function as protective factors and positive assets for resilience development. Considering these findings, guided imagery can be thought of as a relaxation skill that is relevant to and effective for youth.
**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a relaxation skill that also has been found to be effective for youth. It is defined as using one’s awareness to nonjudgmentally focus their attention on the unfolding of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Semple & Lee, 2008). It has many benefits for youth, including improved cognitive functioning, emotional and stress related improvements, social benefits, and also physiological benefits (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Sibinga et al., 2011; Wright, Gregoski, Tingen, Barnes, & Treiber, 2011). Mindfulness can, therefore, be effectively used as a relaxation technique for youth in order to benefit their positive development.

There are many psychological benefits for youth that come from engaging in mindfulness based relaxation. One study found that mindfulness increased scores on the cognitive control component of an attentional task (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). This suggests that mindfulness, as a training of attention directed inward, creates general increase in one’s ability to control attention. Additionally, it has been found that mindfulness reduces both general discomfort, and emotional discomfort or distress (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Sibinga et al., 2011). This extends the psychological benefits of mindfulness past cognition and into the reduction of negative patterns of emotion. Finally, mindfulness has been found to reduce the effects of common psychopathologies, such as anxiety and panic disorders (Baer, 2003). In sum, research has made it very apparent that mindfulness has extensive benefits for many facets of psychological functioning, including cognition, emotion, and common pathologies.

Mindfulness also has benefits for social functioning among youth. Two studies have found that mindfulness based stress reduction programs reduced reported hostility (Sibinga et al., 2011; Wright, Gregoski, Tingen, Barnes, & Treiber, 2011). This reduced hostility would then lead to direct improvements in social behavior, causing increased life satisfaction and resilience by increasing social resources. Additionally, not only does mindfulness have benefits for
psychological and social functioning, it has been found to benefit youth in physiological ways as well. In a previously mentioned study, a form of mindfulness meditation was found to significantly reduce 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure (Wright, Gregoski, Tingen, Barnes, & Treiber, 2011). In total, it is clear that mindfulness aids in positive psychological, social, and physiological development in youth.

**Yoga.** Yoga has also been found to be effective as a relaxation skill for youth. Simplistically, it is described as mindfulness of the body (Semple & Lee, 2008). There are many benefits to practicing yoga, including those based in psychological well-being, physical health, and behavioral health (Birdee et al., 2009; Frank, Bose, & Schrotenhauser-Clonan, 2014; Hopkins & Hopkins, 1979; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Stück & Gloeckner, 2003). It can be thought of as an asset for resilience when considering both protective factors and its role as a mindfulness skill. Altogether, yoga has been found to be an effective relaxation skill for youth in multiple ways.

Studies show that yoga, as a controlled form of physical movement, has a positive effect on mood by reducing stress, negative emotions, anxiety, depression, and global psychological distress (Birdee et al., 2009; Frank, Bose, & Schrotenhauser-Clonan, 2014). One study with at-risk youth suggests that these positive effects of yoga occur as a result of significant reductions in negative thought patterns, such as rumination and intrusive thoughts (Frank, Bose, & Schrotenhauser-Clonan, 2014). These improved thought patterns would likely account for the decreases in negative mood states, since thought patterns often feed into situational appraisals and associated mood states. Further, yoga, along with other physical activity, provides an opportunity for youth to use their physical energy in a goal-driven way while promoting relaxation, psychological health, and physiological health evidenced through improved
cardiorespiratory functioning (Galantino, Galbavy, Quinn, 2008). Another study found that relaxation training has even more benefits when paired with physical activity (Rauhala, Alho, Hänninen, & Helin, 1990). This means that yoga, which pairs relaxation training and physical activity within itself, may have double the benefits. The positive effects on thought patterns combined with an effective outlet for physical energy, makes yoga an effective relaxation skill for youth in physical health as well.

Yoga also has cognitive benefits, specifically regarding attention, extending its psychological utility beyond only emotion. Yoga was found to improve concentration in youth, in effect sizes similar to that of gross motor activity (Hopkins & Hopkins, 1979). Considering that gross motor activity is widely accepted as psychologically beneficial, this finding places yoga on a level that could lead to its wide acceptance as beneficial to youth in cognitive capacities. Another study found that yoga may become a promising alternative or accompaniment to other interventions that are commonly made for youth with attentional problems (Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005). These cognitive benefits would extend to resilience through the increased ability to focus one’s attention on positive patterns of thought centered in the present. This would further reduce the aforementioned negative effects of rumination and intrusive thoughts through both its utility as a mindfulness skill as well as developed abilities to direct attention away from these negative thought patterns.

Yoga has been found to be effective for developing self-control, suggesting that it could become an effective intervention for youth with behavioral difficulties (Stück & Gloeckner, 2003). Self-control is the ability to gain control over attention and emotions, and it often results in improved behavior (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). This improved behavior then benefits
resilience development by creating more positive social perceptions of the youth, which would then lead to increased positive social assets.

Altogether, yoga has been found to be a very effective skill in promoting resilience through psychological and physiological well-being for youth. It has been found to be a form of physical movement that improves physiological functioning, and provides methods for youth to improve thought patterns. Additionally, it has many cognitive benefits including improved self and attentional control. These improved cognitive capacities may then also lead to improvements in social functioning, further extending the list of assets for resilience that yoga provides.

**How to Teach Relaxation Skills to Youth**

When teaching these relaxation skills to youth, there are some considerations that should be made in order to make the interventions as effective as they can be. For example, it is important that all interventions have been created with the needs of youth in mind, as many interventions are created for adults and may not be as effective for children (Barrett, 2000; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). Similarly, there are social environment considerations that should be made in order to ensure that the full effects of the relaxation skills are felt. As a whole, it is important the aforementioned skills are applied in ways that give their full benefit to youth.

First, it is important that all session material is child specific. Often, interventions are made from research conducted with adults, based on the false assumption that “children are little adults” (Barrett, 2000, p.481). It is important to recognize that there are often differences between how a child interprets a word, and how an adult interprets a word, leading to an importance for age-specific clarifications (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). Similarly, since children have less attentional resources than adults, it is important to also have shorter and more frequent sessions (Hernández-Guzmán, González & López, 2002; Semple & Lee, 2008). Having shorter
sessions better caters to the attentional abilities of children, while making the sessions more frequent would also increase the likelihood that the effects of the interventions would “stick” (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Keeping the programs child specific both in the wordings, as well as the duration and frequency, would ensure the possibility of their full effectiveness.

It is also important that the facilitators of the programs keep the first few sessions relatively simple as children orient themselves to the language of the skills, and the skills themselves, so that the children do not become overwhelmed (Semple & Lee, 2008). Further, the facilitators should also practice the skills themselves, so they may better understand what is effective, and prevent any common misconceptions (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple & Lee, 2008). In addition, it is imperative that the facilitators are also encouraging to the youth as they attempt to learn these new skills, in order to promote positive self-evaluations, patience, and continual effort on the part of the youth (Durham & Frost-Harter, 1994; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple & Lee, 2008). If the facilitators can format the sessions in ways specified for youth, while also being encouraging, it is very likely that the youth will gain the full benefits of the skills.

Finally, the environment that the sessions occur in can certainly affect the effectiveness of the relaxation skills. It is important that the space is safe; one that responds to the needs of the children, and ensures respect, care, and kindness toward all of the youth involved (Semple & Lee, 2008). This may include not speaking while others are speaking, or acting with kindness and respect. If the sessions are of this quality, then the youth will be able to feel more valued in the space, making them feel more freedom to explore the skills and find what is effective for them.
Research suggests that if these considerations are taken into account, then the program implementation will be much more effective among youth. The sessions should be kept child specific, as well as short and frequent, in order to effectively utilize the cognitive capacities of youth. The sessions must also be filled with positive support from facilitators, and occur in a safe and respectful social environment, to ensure that youth do not become discouraged from trying new skills or continuing to develop previously learned skills. If these guidelines are followed, it is likely that the relaxation skills will be as effective as possible.

**Planning and Implementing an Effective Restorative Room Design for Youth**

The design of a space designated to be used for relaxation skills should be completed with intentionality and direction, for room design can be used to positively impact the effectiveness of the relaxation skills being taught in the room. Cotton and Geraty (1984) state that children, in particular, are susceptible to the effects of the physical design of a space. For example, having an overstimulating room design may make it even more challenging for youth to learn to control their attention in the skill-specific ways (“Disruptive Decorations,” n.d.). Therefore, it is important that the relaxation skills training is done in a room that is designed effectively for youth and their needs.

It has been found that room design can be used to the benefit of youth, such that a restorative room design (e.g., modifications to paint color, softness of the floor, and wall designs) can reduce aggression faster than a standard room (Glod et al., 1994). In contrast, poor room design can be detrimental, by disrupting youth’s attention (Berk, 2013; “Disruptive Decorations,” n.d.). Considering these effects of room design, it is clear that room design could either help youth or create challenges, particularly in the development of relaxation skills.
As previously mentioned, restorative room design has positive effects on youth via various modifications to room elements. One such element is the color of the walls: Mahnke (1996) emphasizes that color is interwoven throughout the entirety of human experience. Furthermore, researchers suggest shades of blue and green have similar, positive effects (Boyatzis, & Varghese, 1993; Glod et al., 1994; Grangaard, 1993; Terwogt, & Hoeksma, 2001). Moderate amounts of both colors, especially blue, were found to have positive psychological and physiological effects for youth (Gaines & Curry, 2011; Grangaard, 1993; Terwogt, & Hoeksma, 2001). For example, shades of blue were found to reduce blood pressure, as well as to be rated as most related to happiness by youth (Grangaard, 1993; Terwogt, & Hoeksma, 2001).

Additionally, elements of nature within the room design, as a moderate and positive distractor, have been found to be effective in creating relaxation for youth, especially in potentially stressful environments (“Disruptive Decorations,” n.d.; Koller, & McLaren, 2014).

Beyond wall design and coloration, considerations should also be made when it comes to the furniture in the restorative room. It is important that the room and the furniture provide softness and the ability to move and rearrange room elements (Cotton & Geraty, 1984; Glod et al., 1994). In creating a room with soft, moveable furniture, the youth may also feel more at home in the space, allowing for greater comfort and increased social interaction, which, as previously discussed, can influence resilience and positive youth development (Papoulias, Emese, Rose, McKellar, & Wykes, 2014). Cotton and Geraty (1984) provide the example of large pillows scattered throughout the room in order to create softness, which is likely to increase the benefits of the relaxation skills, by allowing youth to more effectively and comfortably engage in the skills.
Finally, more general elements of the room structure of the room should be considered in order to ensure its effectiveness as a restorative space. The room should be available for modification by the youth, such that there should be areas for them to portray various forms of art, or school papers, or any emotionally validating documents in order to help the youth to feel as though they are more actively involved with the activities within the room (Cotton & Geraty, 1984). It would also be important to differentiate the restorative room from other, normal classrooms (Semple & Lee, 2008). This would create benefits in removing any possible outside academic pressures that the youth may feel, and make the room feel as though it is specifically designated for the development of their well-being. Semple and Lee (2008) suggest that this can be done using signs, or having rituals such as the removal of shoes upon entry to the restorative room. These elements of modifiability and differentiation from normal classrooms can increase the benefits of the restorative room and the development of resilience within the space.

Altogether, room design should be given much attention and recognition as an important element of resilience development in youth. Youth may be particularly affected by the design of a restorative space, making the considerations for the elements within the room more important than it might be in a restorative room for adults. Using blue shades on the walls, incorporating nature as a moderate and positive distractor, and also ensuring that the furniture is soft and moveable can all be elements of an effective restorative room design. Further, allowing the youth to modify the space, within reason, and differentiating the room from other classrooms may increase the benefits of the elements within the room.

Implementation of the aforementioned room elements is crucial to the effective design of a restorative room. In order to implement these components, it is important to consider both the current state and the desired state of the room. Once those are compared, it is crucial to also
consult the youth who will be using the space regarding their preferences for the space, within reason (Ulrich, 1991). If these considerations are made throughout the process, the implementation of the aforementioned design elements can be much more effectively applied both in general and in ways relevant to the specific population who will be using the room.

Research suggests many possible elements to create an effect restorative room. Some elements include wall color and design, as well as the type of furniture within the space. A systematic approach to the implementation of the design, combined with consultations of the youth, would increase the likelihood that the room elements would truly be effective for the population.

In sum, according to the current body of research, there are identifiable relaxation skills that are most effective for youth in developing resilience. Developing the ability to engage in mindfulness, yoga, and guided imagery would provide them with more assets that could then lead to increased well-being and overall positive development. The benefits from these skills can also be expanded when they are supported by the physical environment. It has been found that youth are especially prone to the effects of physical space design, and that there are many ways a space can be manipulated to facilitate positive emotional states. For example, blues and greens combined with softness in the room can help youth feel more comfortable and relaxed. A room designed and implemented using the aforementioned methods, would support the development of relaxation skills such as mindfulness, yoga, and guided imagery, and increase the development of resilience among the youth who engage in the skills.
Section 4: Progress and Reflections

Youth at the Boys & Girls Clubs are often from minority racial and ethnic groups and households with low annual incomes, which may lead to differences in resources and increased stress. In order to address this, I developed a practicum that provided strengths-based assets addressing resilience and positive youth development (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2014; Boys & Girls Clubs of Portland Metropolitan Area, 2014; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 1995). These resources manifested themselves as a research-based restorative room design and instructional resources aimed at making the education of youth in relaxation skills accessible to the Inukai Club Staff. My role as a Resilience Program and Room Designer was to research, design, and implement relaxation skill instructional resources and a restorative room design to support the development of resiliency in youth at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club.

By implementing these new resources in the Inukai Club, I met many of the needs of the population. The youth at the Boys & Girls Club received an intentional intervention aimed at supplementing any gaps in resources that they might experience in their daily lives. As previously mentioned, youth in minority racial and ethnic groups, such as the youth at the Inukai Club, often experience differential availability of educational resources. This practicum project filled this gap by providing relaxation skill resources, as well as physical resources in the implemented restorative space design. These resources also compensated for the relative gap of resources that youth from low income families might experience. By providing these resources and evening the distribution of educational assets, this practicum project met the needs of the population as stated by research and by the site supervisor.
Practicum Progress and Outcomes

Over the three months of the practicum, I reviewed roughly 70 articles in order to create effective instructional resources and an effective restorative room. All of the research and the inclusions for the project outcomes were guided by the learning goals. Further, each learning goal was met and each objective was completed during the course of the practicum. The learning goals were realized through the production of the restorative room and the instructional resources. My learning goals for the practicum were as follows: (a) I aimed to learn the design of an effective restorative room, (b) I aimed to learn about age-appropriate skills to enhance youth well-being, (c) I aimed to learn how to relate these skills to the development of resilience in youth, and (d) I aimed to create instructional resources for the skills.

The first learning goal was met through research of room design, as well as consultations of the staff and the youth. Many articles were reviewed, and their findings synthesized in order to ensure that the room would be based on empirically suggested design elements. Once the findings were effectively synthesized, I surveyed the youth regarding their specific preferences, in order to make the space effective for the youth at the Inukai Club (see Appendix A). This survey led to various inclusions in the room (e.g., body pillows), as well as the name, The Peace Place. The second learning goal was also met through reviews of many research articles. Through the reviews, I found that yoga, mindfulness, and guided imagery are the most effective relaxation skills for youth. I accomplished the third learning goal by researching resilience, and performing conceptual mapping of the relaxation skills onto resilience. In doing so, I was able to find that the relaxation skills would serve as positive assets, leading to increased resiliency in the youth. Finally, I accomplished my fourth learning goal through gaining new software skills, as well as consulting with the Inukai Club staff and my academic advisor in order to ensure both
practicality and efficacy. I was also able to apply my new knowledge from the second and third learning goals in the creation of the educational resources for these skills.

After the research reviews were completed, I had to begin implementing the findings in the room and instructional resource design. This implementation phase led to the tangible outcomes of the practicum: the restorative space and the instructional resources. The room design was implemented through the coordination of roughly 15 volunteers from the both the Center for Civic Engagement and Psi Chi Honor Society at Pacific University (see Appendices B and C). *The Peace Place* was created from a preexisting classroom space, and included many of the elements suggested by research and requested by the youth. Some of the room elements were blue walls, body pillows, music and mp3 players, pictures of animals, books, and nature elements. The instructional resources (see Appendix D) are also now also in place, guiding the staff and youth in effective use of the room. They were formatted into booklets, and included information regarding guided imagery, mindfulness, and yoga and their effectiveness, and how they match the mission of the Boys & Girls Clubs. Additionally, each skill had a section discussing possible activities for that skill that could be completed in *The Peace Place*. This section also provided information regarding where in the room the resources for that activity could be found, and what the youth would learn from participating in that activity.

In summary, I intended to learn about relaxation skills for youth, how they enhance resiliency, and how to support the development of the skills with a restorative room and instructional resources. I was able to meet all of these learning goals, leading to growth for myself, as well as successful, tangible outcomes for the Inukai Club. The resources were received well by the youth at their unveiling, and the room and resources are well-used by the staff and youth at the Inukai Club.
Reflections

Altogether, I gained knowledge and developed abilities through this practicum experience, and was able to provide tangible resources for the club. First, I learned how to meet specific needs of a population using my skills and knowledge. By developing and refining my ability to synthesize research from multiple sources, I was able to provide a resource that met the stated needs of the organization and the youth served by it. Specifically, through the use of an annotated outline, I developed my abilities in identifying and utilizing similarities throughout various studies and pieces of literature. This skill has further extended its benefits into developments in thought patterns and increased abilities to recognize similarities or trends in topics embedded in daily life.

Additionally, I grew in my abilities to interact in a professional environment as a relative specialist within the organization. Based on what I learned, I served as a resource on resilience and how room design and relaxation skills affect positive youth development. Through this role, I learned how to effectively communicate knowledge and represent the findings of research to various audiences, including those who may not have academic experience in psychology. In making the restorative room, I also learned how to access various forms of financial resources. I applied for multiple grants, and successfully received funding to implement the designs I had created based on the findings of research.

These various areas of growth were complemented by many meaningful moments in the practicum experience. I overcame challenges throughout that led to increases in self-awareness and ability to adapt. For example, an overarching challenge was accomplishing all of the given tasks in the short time line. However, through this challenge, I was able to increase my skills in time management, problem solving, and leadership and facilitation. Similarly, another set of
challenges came in deciding what to include in the restorative room and instructional resources. There were many options, and it was challenging deciding what to include and what to omit. Through this challenge, though, I developed abilities to see patterns of strengths and weaknesses at deeper levels. I was able to learn how to better objectively assess information and make decisions based on these assessments.

The project also helped to shape my future aspirations in a couple ways. First, it showed me a passion for working in applied settings in ways that involve direct interaction with others. I thoroughly enjoyed the aspects of the project that allowed me to use my knowledge and skills to directly influence the lives of others for the better. Second, I also learned that I have an excitement for community organizing, event planning, and managing others. During the phase of the implementation, I thoroughly enjoyed planning and coordinating tasks for the volunteers involved. Having a role of leadership and managing others toward a common goal was very exciting. Further, this leadership involved much collaboration, developing my abilities to coordinate various groups of people toward a common goal of meeting the needs of others. Throughout the practicum, I consulted the youth, the site supervisor, the Inukai Club staff, my academic advisor, and two volunteer groups in order to realize the goals of this project. Altogether, the practicum experience taught me more about myself, my passions, and how I want to apply those interests in a future career.

In summary, my knowledge and skills provided a resource for the Inukai Boys & Girls Club. It also provided the club with tangible outcomes of the restorative room and the instructional resources. It provided me with gained knowledge and experience through meeting all of the learning goals. I learned more about how to work in an applied format of psychology, as well as how to meet the needs of youth at the Inukai Boys & Girls Club. Further, through the
positive responses to challenges that I faced during the practicum, I grew personally and professionally. This growth was accompanied by many meaningful moments and refining of my future career aspirations.
Conclusion

The Boys & Girls clubs serve youth across America, aiming to provide safe spaces for youth to develop positive and healthy behaviors. The Inukai Club in Hillsboro, Oregon serves youth of a diverse ethnic distribution who would benefit from additional strengths-based programming aimed at building resiliency and positive youth development. The goal of my practicum was to develop a restorative space informed by empirical research, and instructional resources to guide the Inukai staff and youth in effective usage of the room. Through extensive literature reviews, I was able to determine the elements of effective room design, (i.e., blue coloration and soft furniture), the most effective relaxation skills for youth (mindfulness, guided imagery, and yoga) and how they relate to resiliency, and finally, the most effective methods for teaching the skills to youth, implemented in the form of the instructional resources. I was able to complete all objectives and learning goals over a three month period, and was able to introduce youth to the resources while having a meaningful experience and refining my future goals and career aspirations.
Author Note

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References


Survey used to assess youth preferences for the restorative room design.

**Quiet Room Design Survey**

We are making a quiet room where the Literacy Room is, and we want it to be comfortable for all of you to use. Your answers here will help us decide what to put into the room. Thank you!

1. Would you prefer blue or green in the quiet room?

2. Please circle the options you would like to have in the quiet room.
   a. Bulletin board
   b. Pictures of animals
   c. Pictures of nature
   d. Pictures of happy faces
   e. Stars
   f. Rainbows
   g. Headphones & music
   h. Books
   i. Body pillows

3. What do you want to call the quiet room?
Appendix B

Sample photos of the preexisting space, prior to the redesign through the practicum project.
Appendix C

Sample photos of the final implemented design of the space and a portion of the volunteers who helped to implement it.
Appendix D
The lives of children, families, and communities in which they live.

The project was led and executed by Tyler Clause (class of 2016) and "ero, in the space (e.g., windows, corridors),

which were instrumental in choosing the colors and elements they

ments and relaxation strategies,

and psychoeducation were being done. Child and youth using a variety of

The goal of the project was to develop an accessible space that

island, and healthy behaviors.

mission to "mediate" all young people, especially those who needed help,
References

Guided imagery

In the present study, we investigated the effects of guided imagery on the stress response in children with anxiety disorders. The results indicated that children who received guided imagery showed a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and salivary cortisol levels compared to the control group. These findings suggest that guided imagery may be a useful tool for reducing stress in children with anxiety disorders.

Example activities

- Deep breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Visualization
- Mindfulness meditation
- Affirmations
- Guided imagery

Guided imagery refers to a number of techniques that involve creating mental images to help regulate emotions and reduce stress.
Yoga may also help children to improve their mood development. Through yoga, children may learn to better control their physical and mental awareness, leading to improved skills in relaxation. The physical postures and the practice of mindfulness, breathing, and concentration can help improve children’s mood, reduce stress, and increase mindfulness.

Yoga is a form of mindful movement that allows youth to use their bodies in a positive, goal-oriented way. With the use of mindful movement and relaxation techniques, children can feel more balanced and centered in their lives.
References

Additional Activities


