

WILLIAM JAMES COLLEGE

Destination Imagination: An Examination of Highly Creative Children's Experiences on
Their Journey Through Imagination.

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By

Elysha Greenberg

Acknowledgements

“When we become more fully aware that our success is due in large measure to the loyalty, helpfulness, and encouragement we have received from others, our desire grows to pass on similar gifts. Gratitude spurs us on to prove ourselves worthy of what others have done for us. The spirit of gratitude is a powerful energizer.”

--Wilferd A. Peterson--

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Nadja- *“The greatest act of courage is to be and own all that you are. Without apology. Without excuses and without any masks to cover the truth of who you truly are.”*

-unknown-

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Yousef- *“Earth without Art is just ‘Eh’”* *-unknown-*

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Destination ImagiNation Organization

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Dance

“The knights of infinity are dancers... To this end, passion is necessary. Every movement of infinity comes about by passion, and no reflection can bring movement about.”
--Kierkegaard--

To my dance communities who give me the space for creative expression and a release of stress- you are my knights of infinity. Thank you for dancing with me through the challenges and excitements and allowing me to reflect openly and deeply through movement and connection.

Family

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I love you all forever and for always, to the moon and back.

“Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.”

--Marcel Proust--

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Their Journey Through Imagination.

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2016

Chairperson: Nadja Reilly, Ph.D

Abstract

Destination Imagination (DI) is a creative problem-solving program that allows children in grades 2-12 to extend the typical thought process and delve into a world of creativity and imagination. The goal of this study was to understand middle school (grades 6-8) students' understanding of the impact that participation in DI has on their mental health and well-being. Previous literature provides valuable insight into the impact that DI has on academic achievement, creative thinking, divergent thinking, critical thinking, creative problem solving, collaboration, and teamwork skills. However, little is currently known about the impact that DI has on the mental health of students. Ten middle school students (mean age 12.8 years; 50% male, 50% female) who have participated in DI for at least one year (mean of 4.7 years) participated in 45-60 minute in-person interviews. Results revealed that, through the promotion of friendship, coping skills, and perseverance, DI appears to have a significantly positive impact on important domains of mental health and well-being for middle school students. Experiences in DI provide students with a tool set of skills that support them across all life experiences, both in and out of Destination Imagination. This research also provides insight into the ways in

which DI participation can be used as a clinical intervention and to aid in the development of Social-Emotional Learning curricula in schools.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Children can spend afternoons in Australia, Egypt, and outer space simply by using their imagination. This extension of typical thought processes into a world of the unknown is a fun and exciting process. Use of imagination also challenges children to flex their creative muscles and push their problem solving and divergent thinking skills beyond the limits. Destination Imagination (DI) is a creative problem solving organization that harnesses the power of children's imagination. Children in grades 2-12 think creatively to perform, build, design, create, and transform their world into something new. Participants in DI learn that creativity is a not only a thinking style, but also a way of life. Children learn the exciting process, as well as how to manage the more challenging aspects of this new approach.

The Destination Imagination Program

The DI organization is a non-profit, volunteer-led, cause-driven organization. With the purpose of inspiring and preparing students to become the future generation of leaders and innovators, DI's programs foster creativity, creative problem solving, divergent thinking, flexibility, teamwork and leadership through the processes of concurrently thinking and doing (Destination ImagiNation, 2014). Experiences within the program teach the creative process of transferring imagination to innovation, while promoting the incorporation of creativity into every aspect of life. Every year, DI impacts more than 200,000 kids and promotes mental health by encouraging learners to have fun, take risks, focus and frame challenges while incorporating STEM (science,

technology, engineering, and mathematics), the arts and service learning. Participants learn patience, flexibility, persistence, ethics, respect for others and their ideas, and the collaborative problem solving process, which aid in achieving and sustaining mental health and well-being (Destination ImagiNation, 2014).

The Odyssey of the Mind (OM) Association began in New Jersey in 1978, when it was identified as a federally registered non-profit organization. This program began with a mission of conducting programs in creativity for children. The charter for OM was taken over in 1982 and, subsequently, changed names to Destination Imagination (DI) in 1999, officially blending programs that shared a common commitment to creativity, problem solving, and teamwork. The merger of these two programs was officially completed in 2000. Since then, DI has impacted more than one million participants and directly influences approximately 200,000 youth who participate in creative process every year. With the extensive global network of people who work hard to carry out the programs offered, DI remains the world's oldest and largest producer of programs and activities utilizing the creative process and fostering 21st century learning (Destination ImagiNation, 2014).

A central component of the DI program is the Challenge program. Within the Challenge program, each team of up to seven students choose a Team Challenge at the start of the DI season in September. The challenges change every year, but remain within certain multidisciplinary categories: technical, scientific, structural, fine arts, improvisational, or service learning. Following the selection of a challenge, students create, develop and practice their solutions. To present their creative solutions and efforts, teams attend a local tournament in which they present their work with other teams

participating in the same challenge. In addition to the Team Challenge component, teams participate in an Instant Challenge on the day of the tournament. The Instant Challenge is unknown to the teams prior to the tournament and requires impromptu, rapid-fire critical thinking through the use of teamwork and problem solving skills to complete performance and/or task-based challenges. Top scoring teams overall (Team and Instant Challenge scores combined) advance to state or country tournaments. Teams who then advance beyond the state level attend the top level of the tournament, which is the Global Finals competition. Global Finals is the world's largest celebration of creativity, uniting teams of children and young adults from more than 48 states and 30 countries (Destination ImagiNation, 2014). The tournaments focus on celebrating each team of students as a group and the overall goal of creative fun (Calkin & Karlsen, 2014).

Destination Imagination and Mental Health

There are many risk factors associated with navigating the developmental changes in middle school. According to a 2010 longitudinal study on risk and resilience factors in middle school students, "the transition from elementary to middle or junior high school is commonly regarded as a period of stress and turmoil for young adolescents, and has been associated with changes in anxiety and other psychological problems" (Grills-Taquechel, Norton, & Ollendick, 2010). These students, who are entering into the formal operations stage of cognitive development, are increasingly able to think abstractly, consider the hypothetical as well as the real, consider multiple dimensions of a problem at the same time, and reflect on themselves and on complicated problems with newly developed metacognitive abilities (Armstrong, 2006; Eccles, 1999). Thus, it is critically important

to explore the possible resources for building protective factors in middle-school aged students.

Destination Imagination can serve as one of these resources to build protective factors. Through the promotion of creativity, creative problem solving, divergent and flexible thinking, teamwork, and leadership, DI offers students a world of possibilities and opportunities for growth. In a survey conducted at the DI Global Finals in 2011, respondents, comprised of 1,000 team members participating in the Global Finals competition, indicated that DI had improved their grades and helped them to perform better in school (Griffith, 2012). This program has been effective in improving academic outcomes, and it also offers the potential to promote participants' mental health and well-being.

Research indicates that “problem solving and problem generation abilities are important components of an individual's overall capacity to cope with both major and minor stresses of life” (Carson & Runco, 1999, p. 167). In comprehensive DI program evaluation and a research studies conducted by Callahan, Hertberg, and Missett in 2011 and 2013, it was found that DI participants outperformed comparable students who had not participated in DI on assessments that measured creative thinking, divergent thinking, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. It is clear that the opportunity for students to develop these skills is a major benefit of DI participation and that these skills can additionally promote healthy coping skills. As the ultimate goal of programs that strive for creativity enhancement remains increasing the ability of individuals to produce original and useful ideas and solutions in a given context, DI engages students in a variety of project-based learning opportunities to achieve this goal. Students engage in

hands-on projects that focus on building empathy, promoting a bias toward action, encouraging ideation, and fostering active problem solving (Carroll, Goldman, Britos, Koh, Royalty, & Hornstein, 2010).

Additionally, it has been demonstrated that one of the richest opportunities that participants gain in DI is the improvement in collaboration and teamwork skills. This occurs in an environment that allows individuals to learn to cooperate with one another, use each other's strengths, and present a collaborative solution to an intricate challenge, which serves as a means for students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses as leaders and team members (Calkin & Karlsen, 2014). Furthermore, DI aims to foster students' confidence in navigating novel situations, perseverance in the face of difficult situations, performance in "rapid response mode," as well as collaboration and cooperation (Treffinger, Selby, Schoonover, 2004). "Persistence at tasks, having positive goals, feeling included in a social group and in a worthwhile enterprise, feelings of competence and safety, developing problem solving capacities and having a sense of self efficacy" play an important part in shaping emotional well-being according to McLaughlin and Clarke's 2010 review of relational matters in early adolescence. This review also indicated that children who feel connected and feel that they belong in some way experience a higher degree of well-being. Thus, the opportunity to build these skills would foster healthy development, mental health, and overall well-being.

The current literature provides valuable insight into the impact that DI has on academic skills. Results from a 2011 study of 600 primary, elementary, junior high, and high school students at Global Finals conducted by the University of Tennessee indicated that, "of the students polled, 70 percent reported they "do better in school" because of DI,

and nearly half reported DI has helped them improve their grades” (Destination ImagiNation, 2014). However, little is currently known about the impact that DI has on the mental health of students. The goal of this research was to examine students’ perceived impact of DI participation on their mental health. The aspects of mental health that were specifically examined included: social connections (social skills, sense of belonging, and friendships), self-regulation (attentional capacity, coping skills, and self-awareness), and grit (motivation, sense of purpose, and perseverance). By giving a voice to the participants to express their own perceptions and views of program, the literature has gained valuable insights into the impact of DI on participants’ mental health. This qualitative research study aimed to identify and explore the individual experiences of middle school students (grades 6-8) who have participated in DI for a minimum of one year. These students participated in interviews, which gave them the opportunity to share their perspective on the impact of DI. Understanding the unique experience and impact of participation as perceived by the participants in this program was crucial for better understanding the ways in which DI plays a role in adolescent mental health and well-being.

These research interviews focused on three main domains that targeted the internal and external experiences of DI participants. These domain areas included social connections, self-regulation, and grit. Under the umbrella of these constructs, questions further targeted social skills, belonging, friendships, attentional capacity, coping, self-awareness, motivation, purpose, and perseverance.

Social Connections

Social Connection can be defined as “the development of positive relationships

with others in the social world” and “a person’s subjective sense of having close and positively experienced relationships with others in the social world” (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013, p. 412). An increase in peer relationships and social connection in adolescence is widely known as a normative part of development (Engels, Deković, & Meeus, 2002; La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Thus, it is important to consider the elements of social connections that influence the social functioning of adolescents. By examining participants’ sense of belonging, social skills, and established friendships, this research better elucidated the social impact of DI participation.

Self-Regulation

For the purposes of this research, self-regulation is considered to encompass attentional capacity, coping, and self-awareness. Self-regulation has been defined as a number of complicated processes, which allow individuals to respond appropriately to their environment (Bronson, 2000 as cited by Florez, I. 2011). Part of these processes includes the inhibition and maintenance of behavior and behavioral changes while responding to situational demands (Heatherton, 2011). Self-regulation is not only important for emotional regulation, but also for learning. “Learning to persist in complex learning tasks that stretch children’s skills is one of the most important outcomes of healthy self-regulation” (Florez, I. 2011). It is when there is difficulty with self-regulation that concerns for individuals’ mental health and well-being are raised. In a 2013 study of the growth trajectories of effortful control and impulsivity of 214 eight-twelve year-olds over three years by King, Lengua & Monahan, it was determined that there are different antecedents and outcomes for the various dimensions of self-regulation in pre-adolescence and adolescence. Additionally, researchers determined that emotional

and behavioral problems during adolescence are related to difficulties with self-regulation (King, Lengua, & Monahan, 2013). Self-regulation skills have implications for social functioning, emotional regulation, academic achievement, and mental well-being. Thus, it became important to understand if and how DI impacts these skills among participants.

Grit

Grit has been defined as the “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007) and the “determination to accomplish an ambitious, long-term goal despite the inevitable obstacles” (Doskoch & Flora, 2005). Research has shown that, in order to succeed and make achievements in difficult goals, one must not only have talent, but also demonstrate sustained and focused application of this talent over time (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). In a 2008 study of 254 undergraduate students between the ages of 17-27 years, it was determined that there is a positive correlation between happiness, life satisfaction, and grit (Singh, & Douggal Jha, 2008). Additionally, a 2014 cross-sectional study of adults examined associations between three different orientations to happiness and the personality trait of grit. Researchers revealed “individual differences in grit may derive in part from differences in what makes people happy” (Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014). As the concept of grit remains embedded in perseverance, motivation, and a sense of purpose, it was important to evaluate how DI participation impacts these domains among participants.

By gaining an in-depth understanding of students’ experience, this research elucidated the impact that DI participation has on middle school student’s positive development, mental health, and well-being.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development

The Development of Middle School Aged Students

Grades six through eight encompass a pivotal developmental period for students ages 11-14. It is a time when children transition into adolescence, facing biological, cognitive, social and emotional changes. The experiences that boys and girls have in school, at home, and in activities during this growth period will shape their development (Eccles, 1999). According to Erik Erikson's stages of development theory, this stage of adolescence is characterized by the conflict between identity versus role confusion, in which adolescents attempt to determine who they are as individuals and in a social context by establishing sexual, ethnic, and career identities; or, if unable to navigate this developmental task, end up confused about what role they may engender in the future (Sokol, 2009). While there remains vast variation among individual students' achievement of these various biological and social milestones, this remains a universally important time of growth and development.

Biological development. As students between the ages of 11-14 years begin to enter into puberty, their bodies are rapidly changing. Periods of sudden growth are common, characterized by accelerated physical development marked by increases in weight, height, heart size, lung capacity, muscular strength, bone length, and brain growth (Characteristics of Middle Grade Students, 1989; Freeman, 2013; Morin, 2014; Zembar & Blume, 2009;). Girls have a tendency to develop and mature faster than boys,

experiencing a growth spurt and puberty approximately two years earlier than boys (Characteristics of Middle Grade Students, 1989; Freeman, 2013; Rycus & Hughes, 2007; Zembar & Blume, 2009). During this period of growth, both genetics and environment can affect the rate, progress, and success of development (Freeman, 2013). Additionally, while the body is developing and changing, the brain also experiences neurophysiological development in which perceptual and motor skills are refined (Zembar & Blume, 2009).

Cognitive development. These changes in neurophysiology and brain growth also give rise to new cognitive and intellectual abilities that flourish in adolescence. It is during this period of growth that students move from concrete thinking towards more abstract thought processes and metacognition (the ability to think about thinking) (Lorain, 2015). Middle school students become increasingly able to utilize logical reasoning, concrete examples, and new learning strategies (Zembar & Blume, 2009). What is more, this period of growth marks further development in the skills of deductive reasoning, problem solving, and the ability to generalize (Lorain, 2015). Being able to consider the “hypothetical in addition to the real” while considering “multiple dimensions of a problem” is indicated by the “steadily increasing sophistication of information processing” of early adolescence (Eccles, 1999). These skills are aided by the growth in abilities to make decisions, think more independently, and organize ideas, time, and responsibilities (Friedman, 2013; Morin, 2014). Furthermore, this period of development is characterized by increases in memory abilities and capacity (Morin, 2014; Zembar & Blume, 2009). These changes may aid in school performance through strengthening important academic skills like reading comprehension and enhanced mathematical

abilities though complex problem solving. Furthermore, the development of critical thought processes and perspective-taking abilities brings about further developments in students' worldview and understanding of others in a social context. This has important implications for development and psychological well-being as research has indicated that perspective taking abilities increase with cognitive development during adolescence, which results in increased empathic concern for others (Van der Graaff, Branje, De Wied, Hawk, Van Lier, & Meeus, 2014).

Social-emotional development. These expanding thinking abilities promote a sense of independence and identity seeking within a social environment, which is characteristic of adolescent development. Middle school marks a shift in the relationship and social-emotional components of students' experiences. During this time period, not only are individuals more able to think independently and articulate their own ideas and opinions, but they also increasingly seek a sense of independence (Friedman, 2013). As teens become more concerned with independence as well as the ways in which their physical changes affect their social interactions, it is common for teens to experience a shift in their relationship focus from parents to peers (Characteristics of Middle Grade Students, 1989; Freeman, 2013; Morin, 2013). As such, adolescence is an important time for peer interaction, social relationships, and identity development. Feeling a sense of belonging and having social relationships with peers allows individuals to develop a sense of identity, pride, values, independence from parents, interpersonal understanding, and social skills (Eccles, 1999; Freeman, 2013; Friedman, 2013; Morin, 2013; Zembar & Blume, 2009). Spending more time with peers reinforces individuals' existing strengths and allows for the further development of abilities. These social and emotional changes

experienced as children progress into and through their teenage years are directly related to the physical and cognitive changes experienced simultaneously.

Implications of Growth and Development

With the rapid changes and growth that individuals between the ages of 11-14 years experience, there is a heightened opportunity and potential for both positive and negative developmental outcomes. This time period is a time of high risk for behavioral and psychological problems. Research has identified potential risks during early adolescence, including declining academic motivation and performance, risky behavior, negative self-perception, and decreased self-esteem (Eccles, 1999; Pickhardt, 2011). The presence of these risk factors may be related to internal and external processes. From a biological perspective, different rates of brain development during adolescence of the limbic system, which is involved in incentive and emotional processing, and prefrontal control systems of the brain are indicated in increased risk for teens (Casey, Jones & Hare, 2008). Heightened responsiveness to rewards and immaturity in behavioral control may play a role in the ways in which adolescents tend to seek immediate gains. This may explain increases in risky decision-making and decreases in ability to regulate emotions in the heat of the moment that are associated with this developmental time period (Casey et al., 2008). During adolescence, the social environment evolves so that teens spend a greater amount of time with peers and more conflicts may arise between teens and parents. This change may then influence the rise of emotional reactivity (Casey et al., 2008). In addition, researchers have suggested that the “value of positive and negative information may be exaggerated” amongst teens (Casey et al., 2008 p. 2). Therefore, it is clear that this time period provides critical opportunities for families, schools, and out-of-

school programs to promote positive development and growth. Given the fragility of middle school aged students, it is important to consider and understand the ways in which the key constructs of social relationships, self-regulation, and grit can promote mental health and well-being.

While there are numerous implications that adolescents are at great risk, many exhibit a great deal of resilience and strength in the face of these developmental challenges and transitions. In a study of 7,639 adolescents ages 13-18 years, it was identified that, in addition to physical activity and a healthy lifestyle, family and other supportive relationships also serve as protective factors against adolescent anxiety and depression (Skrove, Romundstad, & Indredavik, 2013). Additionally, in a study of 1,820 high school students (mean age 14.1 years), attachment to school and close parent-child relationships served to protect against anti-social behavior (Connell, Cook, Aklin, Vanderploeg, & Brex, 2011). Furthermore, perceived friendship self-efficacy and having a sense of meaning in life have also been shown to protect against the increased risk for psychological challenges amongst teens (Brassai, Piko & Steger, 2011; Fitzpatrick, & Bussey, 2014). It is clear that positive social connections, the presence of self-regulation skills, and grit are important protective factors and areas of resiliency for mental health and well-being amongst adolescents in the face of risk (Duckworth, 2006; Duckworth et al., 2007; Singh & Douggal Jha, 2008; Gardner, Dishion & Connell, 2008; McKown, Gumbiner, Russo & Lipton, 2009; Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). Thus, it is important to examine the ways in which these domains can be developed to further foster this resilience among teens.

Social Connections

Social connection, which has been identified as a primary psychological need, can be defined as “the development of positive relationships with others in the social world” and “a person’s subjective sense of having close and positively experienced relationships with others in the social world” (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013, p. 412). Causal links exist between social connection, prosocial orientation, and prosocial behavior (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). An increase in peer relationships and social connection in adolescence is widely known as a normative part of development (Engels, Deković, & Meeus, 2002; La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Thus, it is important to consider the elements of social connections that influence the social functioning of adolescents, such as a sense of belonging, social skills, and established friendships. According to La Greca and Harrison (2005), “adolescence is a critical period in social development, marked by an expansion of peer networks, increased importance of close friendships, and the emergence of romantic relationships” (p. 49). Being accepted by one’s peers plays an important role in identity development, psychological adjustment, and psychosocial functioning during this phase of development (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). It is during this developmental growth period that primary sources of social support come from close friendships and begin to surpass the primary nature of parent relationships, contributing to adolescents’ self-concept and well-being in important ways (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Knowing that peer relationships influence psychological well-being is central to understanding the impact that DI has on social connections.

As social connections are strongly correlated with subjective well-being, it is important to consider the role that these relationships play on positive emotions. Not

only do connections with others facilitate positive emotions, but the positive emotions also subsequently serve to broaden intellectual, social, physical, and psychological resources. Additionally, research indicates that social connections increase well-being by improving emotion regulation and serving as a buffer against stress (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). Social connections, therefore, serve to impact creativity and flexible thinking, the ability to connect with others, health and coordination, resiliency and optimism, as well as the ability to achieve a state of flow- or working in an inspired, engaged, focused, and productive way (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013).

It has been said that, “the most important ingredient of social connection is a subjective sense of belonging and intimacy” (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013, p. 418). Belongingness is considered a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). Humans are inherently social beings that are driven by an interpersonal desire for a sense of connection to others, which is motivated by this need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Wölfer, Bull & Scheithauer, 2012). The literature suggests that a lack of social connection, especially being purposefully excluded from one or more relationships by other people, is one of the main sources of anxiety for the general public, often leading to significant emotional distress. Low social connection and lack of belonging can result in negative effects on health, adjustment, and well-being, hostility, social anxiety, jealousy, low interpersonal trust and self-esteem, and lower agreeableness and sociability, leading to a difficulty feeling close to others and developing relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). Those who experience few social connections, social exclusion, and/or lack a sense of belonging, therefore, may engage in less prosocial

behavior and more aggressive behavior. Thus, it is critically important to determine ways in which a sense of belonging can be achieved during adolescence, which is a crucial time for peer relationship development and changes in well-being.

Glick and Rose (2011), in their study of children and adolescents' social strategies in response to vignettes evaluating different indicators of friendship adjustment, noticed that differences in friendships had unique effects on youths' strategies in response to helping tasks. Having quality friendships was more beneficial than having a greater quantity of friends. Those with more quality friendships predicted emotionally engaged social strategies, like talking about the problem, and fewer disengaged strategies, like ignoring the problem in relationships. Importantly, this study indicated that friendships may provide a critical venue for the development of relationship skills among youth. As friendships and peer interaction remain an integral component of social connections and adolescent well-being, it is important to consider the influence of social skills and integration into a social community on these constructs.

Wölfer, Bull, and Scheithauer (2012) define the lack of social integration as "low frequencies of peer interaction," which is conceptually different from low levels of peer *acceptance*. These researchers indicate that isolated adolescents do not receive any form of attention from others, including negative attention from bullies. In their study of 317 seventh through ninth graders, it was identified that those adolescents who demonstrate less social integration lack either appropriate social skills or lack contextual opportunities to acquire those social skills as a result of being less integrated with their peers (Wölfer, Bull & Scheithauer, 2012).

Given the overall importance of social skills' influence on psychological well-

being, developing friendships, and forming a sense of social integration, it is critical to consider the ways in which interventions and/or support can be provided to foster the necessary skills. Thus, it is clear that youth should have learning opportunities to improve their social skills and that interventions should address an overall sense of belongingness and integration for teens.

In addition to fostering social skills, belonging, and integration, gaining an overall sense of social competence is an important component of adolescent development and social connections. While “social competence” remains a term lacking a universally accepted definition, it can be described as “the ability to effectively make and maintain positive social outcomes and peer relationships by organizing one’s own personal and environmental resources” (Holopainen, Lappalainen, Junttila & Savolainen, 2012). Prosocial behavior is a main dimension of social competence and includes utilizing cooperation and empathy, the behavioral and affective elements of social skills, and the ability to communicate emotions as well as inhibiting impulsive and disruptive behavior (Holopainen, Lappalainen, Junttila & Savolainen, 2012). In an examination of the relationship between social competence and psychological well-being of adolescents, results indicated that psychological well-being predicts an increase in cooperation skills and a decrease of both impulsivity and disruptiveness, which are important components of social competence (Holopainen, Lappalainen, Junttila & Savolainen, 2012). It is clear that social competence abilities like sharing, cooperating, understanding the perspective of others, and inhibiting impulsive and disruptive behaviors are important for the ability to engage in learning situations. Stepp, Pardini, Loeber and Morris (2011) examined trajectories of adolescent social competence as a resilience factor among at-risk boys. It

was determined that social competence facilitates adaptive functioning, positive adjustment, and later goal attainment despite early adversity or stressful life events. Furthermore, “social competence during adolescence is related to a wide variety of positive outcomes, such as educational attainment, employment status, and lower levels of substance abuse, depression, and self-reported delinquency” (p. 458). Based on this recent research, one possible predictor for an individual’s academic successes in addition to psychological well-being could be social competence. Thus, during this risky time of development, it is crucial to facilitate positive social competence among youth.

Self-Regulation

Given the identified importance of human’s fundamental need to belong and be socially connected, it is important for individuals to engage in behaviors that demonstrate their ability to be positive and productive members of a peer group. As discussed, social competence involves not only cooperation and empathy but also the ability to communicate emotions as well as inhibit impulsive and disruptive behavior (Holopainen, Lappalainen, Junttila & Savolainen, 2012).

“Inhibition is a core feature of self-regulation, which refers to the process by which people initiate, adjust, interrupt, stop, or otherwise change thoughts, feelings, or actions in order to effect realization of personal goals or plans or to maintain current standards” (Heatherton, 2011, p.2).

This is important in fostering amicable social relationships and is a fundamental means of demonstrating self-regulation skills.

Self-regulation involves “initiating, avoiding, inhibiting, maintaining, or modulating the occurrence, form, intensity, or duration of internal feeling states, emotion-

related physiological, attentional processes, motivational states, and/or the behavioral concomitants of emotion in the service of accomplishing affect-related biological or social adaptation or achieving individual goals” (Eisenberg and Spinrad 2004, p. 338). This process serves to modulate (inhibit, activate, or change) reactivity, which involves both the initiation and maintenance of behavioral change in addition to inhibiting or interrupting a response to undesired behaviors and responding to situational and environmental demands (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004; McKown, Gumbiner, Russo & Lipton, 2009; Heatherton, 2011; King, Lengua, & Monahan, 2013). What is more, not only are self-regulation and inhibition skills involved in social competence, but these constructs also encompass physiological functioning, bio-psychological features of behavior (for example temperament), and intentional, goal-directed thought processes (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007).

Heatherton (2011) has identified four psychological components to self-regulation: self-awareness, mentalizing, threat detection, and self-regulation itself. Primary components of self-regulation capacities include having an awareness of one’s own behaviors and societal norms along with an understanding of others’ reactions to behavior in order to infer mental states and predict responses. It is also necessary to possess the ability to detect threat, or monitor for signs of being socially excluded, especially in complicated social situations. Considering the human need for belonging, this ability to internalize, mentalize, and determine the inclusionary status of a group is vital. This is also necessary in order to have a method for resolving discrepancies between one’s own desires and the greater social expectations or norms as well as the motivation to resolve any conflict that may exist. Regulating one’s behaviors and

emotions through the process of self-regulation is critically important for psychological well-being and maintaining social connections (Heatherton, 2011).

As such, it is clear that the ability to self-regulate influences peer relationships, social behavior, and social competence. Having the ability to regulate and inhibit behavior, focus attention, and competently encode, interpret, and reason about social and emotional information, influences social success (McKown et al., 2009). In a study of 158 typically developing children ages 4 to 14 years and 126 clinic-referred children ages 5 to 17 years, those who performed and were rated higher on measures of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skill and behavior regulation were more competent in their social interactions (McKown et al., 2009). Additionally, the ability to focus attention and inhibit impulses has been associated with social competence (McKown et al., 2009).

Thus, self-regulation problems are involved in many social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems and disorders. The emergence of a range of developmental outcomes during adolescence, including externalizing problems, internalizing problems, alcohol and substance use problems, low empathy, problems with social and academic competence, prejudice, and criminal behavior are related to self-regulation difficulties (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Tangney et al. 2004; King et al., 2013). King et al. (2013) examined a community sample of 214 8–12 year-olds in grades three-five to understand the growth trajectory of multiple domains of self-regulation. It was determined that the various dimensions of self-regulation have differing precursors and outcomes in pre-adolescence and adolescence. On the contrary, those who demonstrate better self-regulation abilities exhibit improved relationships, increased job success, and better mental health (Tangney et al. 2004).

The biological and neurobiological capacities for self-regulation continue to develop well into adolescence (Luna, Garver, Urban, Lazar, & Sweeney, 2004; Steinberg et al., 2008; Monahan, Steinberg, Cauffman, & Mulvey, 2009; King et al., 2013). One's capacity for delayed gratification is an important precursor to the development of self-regulation skills (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Gestsdóttir and Lerner's (2007) study of data from a longitudinal sample of fifth and sixth graders who were participating in the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development examined 1,700 fifth-grade youth from 13 U.S. states, demonstrated that intentional self-regulation faces significant developmental change in adolescence. Furthermore, with more frequent use of this skill set, Baumeister & Heatherton (1996) indicate that individuals may become better at implementing and utilizing self-regulatory behaviors. Thus, it was indicated that self-regulation is a global process in early adolescence that contributes to positive youth development (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007). Self-regulation develops over time through differences in reactivity and regulation, maturation of the executive attention system, and socialization through educational and social experiences in school, family, and peer contexts (Gardner, Dishion & Connell, 2008).

Experiences of stress, fatigue, and loss of attentional control, however, increase the likelihood that an individual will experience more self-regulation failures (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Those who are slower to develop self-regulation skills across adolescence may be at greater risk for externalizing problems (King et al., 2013). Thus, it has been indicated that, "growth in self-regulation during pre-adolescence may improve children's ability to navigate the challenges and stressors in their increasingly broadening and decreasingly supervised contexts that mark the transition to adolescence" (King et al.,

2013, p.2). This suggests that the development of self-regulation skills across childhood and into adolescence may be sensitive to environmental and situational influences.

The individual differences in self-regulation that emerge during adolescence play an important role in adolescent psychosocial adjustment, development, and well-being, and may serve to “moderate the relationship between deviant peer affiliation and antisocial behavior” (Gardner, Dishion & Connell, 2008). Executive control of attention is an important component of effortful control and effective self-regulation. This is especially important to consider as low effortful control and poor behavioral self-control is associated with aggression and externalizing problems in preadolescence (Krueger, Caspi, Moffitt, White & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996; Gardner, Dishion & Connell, 2008). However, those high in self-regulation are better able to resist temptations and maintain focus on long-term goals despite opportunities for intense short-term social rewards that are often associated with adolescent peer groups (Gardner, Dishion & Connell, 2008). Experiences of social emotions tied to peer group interactions (e.g. embarrassment, guilt, shame, jealousy, empathy, and pride) help to promote self-regulation by aiding and allowing individuals to modify behaviors in order to prevent being rejected by their peers. This helps to facilitate successful social relationships through two primary pathways: providing incentives to engage in social interactions and increasing the likelihood of adherence to necessary social norms (Heatherton, 2011). Thus, it can be seen that self-regulation skills are linked to beneficial positive outcomes across various domains and can serve as a protective factor for antisocial behavior and a source of resilience within the context of peer deviance (Tangney et al., 2004; Gardner, Dishion & Connell, 2008). Therefore, it is important for interventions to aid in fostering strong self-regulation skills

in early adolescence.

Grit

What is Grit?

It is clear that self-regulation and self-control are important attributes of a successful individual (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Another important construct considered in success and well-being is *grit*, which is a significant metric in the social sciences today (Powell, 2013). Angela Duckworth, a psychology researcher at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and many of her colleagues have been central forces in understanding the concept of grit. Grit has been defined as the disposition to pursue long-term goals with sustained interest and effort over time (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). Taking this definition further, grit is considered to be “perseverance to accomplish long-term or higher-order goals in the face of challenges and setbacks, engaging the student’s psychological resources, such as their academic mindsets, effortful control, and strategies and tactics” (U.S Department of Education, 2013, p.34; Laursen, 2015, p.15). This elucidates the fact that grit is a combination of passion, consistency of interests, and persistence. It is expected that achieving the trait of grit may be one of the most important goals in circumstances where individuals have considerable choice over their actions (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014).

“Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the

course” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p.1087-1088; U.S Department of Education, 2013).

This non-cognitive personality trait has demonstrated predictive power for educational attainment, academic retention, IQ, and significant positive correlation with happiness, life satisfaction, positive affect, and overall well-being of individuals. (Duckworth, 2006; Duckworth et al., 2007; Singh & Douggal Jha, 2008). Non-cognitive factors include “attributes, dispositions, social skills, attitudes, and intrapersonal resources, independent of intellectual ability that high-achieving individuals draw upon to accomplish success” (U.S Department of Education, 2013, p. v). Thus, grit is clearly a fundamental non-cognitive factor of well-being. Individuals high in grit are known to deliberately set and dedicate themselves to tremendously long-term objectives that may be either implicitly or explicitly rewarding goals and do not veer from these goals, regardless of facing challenges, difficulties, disappointments, setbacks, or a lack of positive feedback (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). What is more, research has indicated that the quality of grit may, in fact, increase over the lifespan (Duckworth et al., 2007). As researchers continue to understand the concept and development of grit, it is important to understand grit not only as a construct itself, but also how it relates to other important areas of functioning.

What is Grit Related to?

Given the known importance of self-control on well-being, it is important to consider the ways in which the ability to regulate attention, emotion, and behavior in the presence of temptation may be related to grit. Research indicates that self-control and grit are strongly correlated, but operate in different ways (Duckworth & Gross, 2014).

The distinction between self-control and grit lies in the timeframe in which an individual might exhibit these qualities. Self-control is more closely connected to everyday successes, whereas grit is better associated with exceptional achievements that often take many years to achieve (i.e. decades, or even an entire lifetime) (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). However, in Duckworth and Quinn's research (2009), grit was found to be statistically independent from or slightly inversely correlated with intelligence. This elucidates that grit corresponds with the capacity for hard work, the concept of zeal (i.e. enthusiastic diligence), and the character strength of perseverance (Singh & Douggal Jha, 2008; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Interestingly, Galton (1892) suggested that self-control is a surprisingly poor predictor of the very highest achievements, whereas grit is considered related to, albeit distinct from, the need for achievement, or the "drive to complete manageable goals that allow for immediate feedback on performance" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). In Duckworth's research (2006),

"Grit predicted educational attainment among a larger sample of adults aged 25 or older, GPA among high-achieving adolescents and undergraduates, retention and GPA at the United States Military Academy (West Point), and final ranking in the National Spelling Bee. In the latter four studies, grit provided incremental predictive validity over and beyond that of IQ" (Duckworth, 2006).

Although grit may overlap with self-control and aspects of achievement, especially conscientiousness (i.e. careful, painstaking, particular, and meticulous actions), the difference lies in the emphasis on long-term stamina rather than short-term intensity, in

which an individual with grit completes and pursues a task for a lengthy duration (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014).

Grit is closely related conceptually to conscientiousness, which is better known as a related trait that combines consistency of interests and persistence in pursuit of long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). However, grit is distinct from dependability and other facets of conscientiousness, in that grit implies tremendous endurance in terms of particular interests and applied effort toward these interests. Thus, grit is more an aspect of working persistently toward a higher-order goal over particularly long stretches of time than of working hard on current tasks at hand (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). Therefore, it is important to make the distinction between conscientiousness and grit, which is a facet of an overarching personality characteristic that also incorporates initiative and productivity (Duckworth et al., 2007; U.S Department of Education, 2013; Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014).

Benefits of Grit

A very prominent feature of gritty individuals as described by grit researchers is the element of perseverance and persistence over time. Perseverance has been defined “as voluntary continuation of action or behavior that is goal directed and typically in the face of difficulty or obstacles” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004 as cited by Martin, 2011 p. 146). In a study of 7,637 high school students from 14 Australian schools, Martin (2011) indicated that perseverance in spite of academic difficulty in the face of fear, also known as courage, can generate adaptive academic effects that were, at times, similar to the positive effects indicated by demonstrating confidence. In this research, those who

demonstrated the strength of perseverance but faced low amounts of fear were considered to be confident. Furthermore, those who lacked perseverance in the face of great fear were considered to be ‘avoidant,’ whereas those low in both perseverance and fear were considered to be more ‘helpless’ (Martin, 2011). This is important to understand when evaluating the effects of grit.

Across six studies in Duckworth and colleagues’ research (2007), these individual differences in the manifestation of grit accounted for differences in the ways in which individuals demonstrated successes beyond what could be explained by IQ. Grittier individuals appear to make fewer career changes, to progress farther in education (greater lifetime educational attainment), perform better in tasks, achieve more professional success, and indicate better self-discipline (Duckworth, 2006; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). What is more, in Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014 studies of soldiers, sales representatives, high school juniors, and adults, those who demonstrated greater grit were more likely to remain dedicated to their commitments. This decrease in dropping commitments was also indicated by Laursen (2015) who suggested that grit is a better predictor of high school graduation and grade point average than IQ. Overall, aside from the related constructs of self-control, conscientiousness, perseverance, happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect that have been identified as connected to and correlated with grit, it is clear that there are many benefits to possessing grit for individual success and well-being. However, there remains a dearth of research in this area.

Potential Risks of Grit

Despite the many potential benefits of grit that research has elucidated, it is also important to consider the potential risks associated with grit. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), “grit can have a “dark side.” It is not necessarily always productive and can have costs and risks—especially in this accountability-driven climate and in communities that place extremely high expectations on students” (p. 29). The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology (2013) completed a report on grit, tenacity, and perseverance, which are important related constructs in overall psychological health. In this report, the potential risks of grit were addressed. It was suggested that demonstrating a great degree of grit, or persevering in the face of challenges or setbacks to accomplish goals, may be detrimental to long-term retention, conceptual learning, and psychological well-being if this grit is implemented towards extrinsically motivated goals that are unimportant or inappropriate for an individual, noting that this could induce stress, anxiety, and distraction. Furthermore, it is possible that recognizing the importance of grit could lead to an overemphasis on this characteristic and over attribution of poor performance to a lack of grit. This would be detrimental to success if it resulted in overlooking a lack of critical environmental supports that may equally be contributing to performance issues. With that in mind, those who demonstrate perseverance or ‘grit’ as a result of a punishment and reward token economy system or in an accountability driven environment may face unstable long-term grit. This indicates the importance of self-driven performance and intrinsic motivation for the long-term stability and beneficial effects of grit for individuals. However, there remains a severe lack of research in this domain of grit research.

The domains of social connections, self-regulation, and grit have typically been addressed through more traditional means of evaluation, for example in the classroom or in therapy. The literature fails to address the ways in which mental health and wellness can be developed through non-traditional programs like DI. In order to continue to understand and promote protective factors for youth, it is necessary to recognize alternative and non-traditional methods to teach these skills. Creativity, imagination, and creative problem solving through DI provides an innovative avenue for promoting resiliency among youth, which remains untapped by the current body of literature.

Creativity

Research about creativity has both theoretical and practical applications. While researchers and other academics are interested in learning about the uniquely human capacity to utilize creativity for the development of ideas and solutions, educators, parents, politicians and many other individuals are interested in ways to use creativity to address societal problems (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). With that, the definition and measurement of creativity has been a debated topic. It has been identified that “creativity arises through a system of interrelated forces operating at multiple levels” (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, p. 572). Furthermore, Simonton (2012) indicated that creativity manifests in three distinct ways: as a mental process that yields original ideas, a type of person who exhibits creativity, and/or concrete products that result from the creative process or person. This concept encompasses progressiveness and imagination and necessitates originality (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Simonton, 2012; Diedrich, Benedek, Juak & Neubauer, 2015). What is more, Beghetto and Kaufman (2007) make a distinction between different types of creativity- “Big C” creativity and “Little c” creativity. “Big

C,” or eminent creativity, is described as relatively rare displays of creativity that have a major impact on others; whereas “Little c,” or everyday creativity is daily problem solving and the ability to adapt to change. Overall, creativity as a general concept can be defined as the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, and relationships, to create meaningful new, unexpected, and adaptive ideas, forms, methods, and interpretations (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Simonton, 2012).

Developmental Aspects of Creativity

There is existing research on the developmental trend of creativity, indicating creativity increases during adolescence (ages 10-19 years). Smith and Carlsson (1985) found that, beginning at 14 years of age, creative functioning shows a slow, steady increase. In Rothenberg’s 25-year research project (1990) on creative thinking, results demonstrated the development of creative capacity occurs primarily during the adolescent period of development. Rothenberg viewed the development of creativity and one’s awareness as a creative person as beginning in adolescence, corresponding with the biological, physical, and sociological changes of this growth period (Rothenberg, 1990). This is consistent with Gardner’s 1982 research (as cited by Claxton, Pannells, & Rhoads, 2005) that identifies the significant increase of affective elements of creativity during adolescence.

These affective elements are identified as divergent feeling, which, for the purposes of this research is defined as “curiosity, complexity, risk-taking, and imagination,” and have an impact motivation and personality. This increase in divergent feeling appears to occur as students enter early adolescence (ages 10-14, grades 6-8) and in areas described as non-cognitive facets of creativity (Cropley, 2003, as cited by

Claxton et al., 2005). Research indicates that there are developmental differences in creativity related not only to creative and divergent thought processes, but also to divergent feeling. In a 2005 study that addressed the fluctuations found in cognitive and affective components of creativity, results indicated that both divergent thinking and divergent feeling increase over time, with a major shift in ability between grades six and nine (Claxton et al., 2005). Thus, there are strong implications indicating that creativity may continue to develop throughout adolescence.

Additionally, mid-adolescence has been shown to be an important time of creative potential, during which the developmental trends and trajectories of creativity appear to be connected to age and gender (Kleibeuker, De Dreu, & Crone, 2013). In a 2010 study of Chinese school children, Lau and Cheung found that creativity was higher in boys between grades four and six, higher in girls between grades seven and eight, with the difference narrowing in grade nine (Lau & Cheung, 2010). These authors indicated that knowing the different abilities for creativity at various developmental time periods is important for providing “equal opportunities for the sexes” to utilize these skills in the school environment. In addition to the grade level influence on creativity, a 2005 study of sixth grade and university students in Hong Kong indicated that knowledge enhances knowledge-rich creativity task performance (Wu, Cheng, Ip, & McBride-Chang, 2005). This may play an important role in understanding the age and grade level differences in creative abilities. Given that students in higher grades are both older and more knowledgeable as a product of receiving more education, it is possible that the type of creativity studied is related to knowledge based creativity tasks. This indicates that it is possible for creativity and creative abilities to be influenced by learning. Aside from the

implied age differences in creativity, a study of German students (ranging in age from 12 years and 6 months to 16 years and 6 months), results revealed gender differences in divergent thinking. This study indicated that there may be a higher prevalence of divergent thinking abilities among girls and students with higher intelligence (Kuhn & Holling, 2009). However, it is possible that this sex difference evens out in adulthood. In a study of Brazilian adults ages 17-70, sex differences in creativity as measured by “fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality,” or qualities of divergent thinking, were not observed, which endorsed the concept of creative similarity among men and women (Wechsler, Vendramini, & Oakland, 2012). It is important to note that the ability to generalize these results to the American population is limited given that the sample populations of the identified studies are multicultural in nature. However, in Brandoni and Anderson’s 2009 study on middle school students in the United States, results revealed individual differences that were expressed as variations in divergent thinking, defined as “a cognitive process where a person generates many responses to a single question or problem” which may be related to differences in creative thinking.

Elements of Creativity

Creative problem finding ability has been indicated as a key component of creativity. According to Han et al. (2013), problem finding is “a thinking activity that utilizes existing contexts and experience to produce and express newfound questions according to certain purposes” (p. 249). The factors that influence students’ creative problem finding include circumstantial factors (like school and family), factors in the students themselves (like personality and temperament), and peer interactions. Research has shown a significant positive correlation between creative problem solving and a

positive emotional state, an open and accepting group environment, positive peer interactions, and enthusiasm (Han et al., 2013).

Research indicates that an individual's creativity can be negatively affected not only by extrinsic reward, but also by evaluative supervision and time pressure (Amabile, 1996 as cited by Simonton, 2012). With increased intrinsic motivation, increases in creativity have been demonstrated, which has important implications for the goals of cultivating creativity (Amabile, 1998; Hennessey & Amabile, 1998). Comparing rewarded activities (extrinsically motivated) to non-rewarded activities (intrinsically motivated), those with rewards associated resulted in lower creativity (Hennessey & Amabile, 1998). This sense of internal motivation appears to play an important role in fostering creativity.

Stress also appears to play a role in creativity, especially on creative performance (Byron, Khazanchi, & Nasarian, 2010). As such, individuals in low-evaluation contexts had a tendency to show an increase in creative performance while those in high-evaluation contexts demonstrated a decrease in creative performance (Byron et al, 2010). This has important implications for utilizing creativity in education settings. Beyond evaluation and stress from uncontrollability, which "occurs when individuals believe that their effort or behavior is not likely to appreciably affect outcomes," individual stressors also appear to play a role in the demonstration of creative abilities (Byron et al, 2010). Situational stress, like anxiety which promotes arousal rather than boredom, combined with positive feelings of personal adequacy were demonstrated to enhance problem solving flexibility, which is a key component of creativity (Rollins & Calder, 1975). What is more, those who experienced an increase in a sense of uncontrollability

decreased their creative performance (Byron et al, 2010). Additionally, fear has also been shown to have an adverse effect on creativity (Han, Hu, Liu, Jia & Adey, 2013). It seems that having a degree of control and safety paired with freedom from excessive evaluation is a central element of creative output.

Creative Problem Solving

In 1967, Guilford proposed a distinction between two types of thought processes involved in creativity. Convergent thought involves the choosing of a single correct response from among a series of alternatives. This kind thinking process is what is used, for example, on aptitude or intelligence tests. Divergent thought, however, involves the capacity to generate numerous responses, including ideas of considerable variety, originality, and ingenuity (Guilford, 1967 as cited by Simonton, 2012). Divergent thinking, or expansion of thoughts and ideas, is an important characteristic of creative individuals. Simonton (2012) notes that “creative individuals tend to be independent, nonconformist, unconventional, even bohemian; they also tend to have wide interests, greater openness to new experiences, and a more conspicuous behavioral and cognitive flexibility and boldness” (Simonton, 2012, p. 3).

Creative problem solving, which is a strategy applied to open-ended, ill-defined problems requiring a solution, like those in the DI program (Missett, Callahan, & Hertberg-Davis, 2013), is an important component of DI participation. Creative problem solving incorporates productive thinking tools for generating and focusing options, enabling “individuals and groups to recognize and act on opportunities, respond to challenges, balance creative and critical thinking, build collaboration and teamwork, overcome concerns, and thereby to manage change” (Treffinger & Isaksen, 2005, p. 348).

The challenges within DI are designed to provide a flexible and natural problem-solving framework through problem understanding, idea generation, and action planning that call for both divergent and critical thinking processes (Missett, Callahan, & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). Individuals engage creative problem solving skills in multiple ways when participating in DI. Participants must understand the challenge, brainstorm multiple ideas and possible solutions, evaluate and analyze the chance of success for the developed solutions, and select the most effective and appropriate solution. Not only does this involve various forms of problem solving skills, but this process also incorporates both divergent and critical thinking (Missett, Callahan, & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Treffinger, & Isaksen, 2005).

Critical thinking has been identified as an important element of creative problem solving (Treffinger & Isaksen, 2005). This type of thought refers to the analysis and evaluation of ideas regarding their logical and empirical foundations in order to develop options. During this process, also known as convergent thinking, one may screen, select, and support the possibilities of options, compare and contrast ideas, and infer, deduce, and improve or refine alternatives in order to make effective judgments and decisions (Missett, Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Treffinger & Isaksen, 2005). On the other hand, divergent thinking involves brainstorming and includes originality, fluency, flexibility, and elaboration, which allows for the expansive generation of numerous ideas (Missett, Callahan, & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Carson & Runco, 1999). While divergent thinking has been recognized as a central component of creativity (Carson & Runco, 1999; Hoffman & Russ, 2012), much of the current education system emphasizes convergent thinking, which focuses on finding the singular correct answer for

standardized tests in order facilitate streamlined assessment of successes and/or failures (Carroll et al., 2010). It is widely known that, as children advance in grade level, education and instruction shifts from an emphasis on stories, speculation, and imagination towards facts, specifics and skill-based approaches, despite the fact that giving students the opportunity to explore and problem solve remains an essential component of learning (Carroll et al., 2010; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008). Finding ways in which divergent thought can not only be encouraged, but also emphasized can serve as an important means of strengthening achievements in core subject areas, building cognitive, coping, and social skills, relieve tension, and foster positive mental health (Carroll et al., 2010; Carson & Runco, 1999).

Developing Creativity

Beyond the process of creativity, research has also focused on the importance and benefits of creativity. For example, Pannells and Claxton indicate that having a sense of creative ideation leads to an external locus of control in college students (ages 17-52; mean age of 22.36 years), which has been positively correlated with happiness (Pannells & Claxton, 2008). The link between creativity and healthy emotional development, divergent thinking, and emotion regulation capabilities, or the “ability to manage one’s emotional experiences to engage adaptively within the daily environment” (Hoffman & Russ, 2012), exemplifies the importance of considering the ways in which creativity can be fostered and developed, particularly among middle school aged students.

Research indicates that there are a number of possible areas for intervention to support and facilitate creative problem solving abilities. Peer interactions have played a role in creative problem solving ability (Han et al., 2013), which has important

implications for the use of peer relationships and interactions in fostering creative problem solving, thinking, and activity. In addition, the use of improvisation has also been shown to facilitate divergent thinking and creativity, thus allowing individuals to cultivate the benefits of the creative cognitive process (Sowden, Clements, Redlich & Lewis, 2015). Providing individuals with an open environment to utilize these skills can have an influence on the development of creativity as well (Han et al., 2013). It is clear that there are multiple avenues for approaching the development and facilitation of creativity, which combine understanding individual differences, problem solving skills, peer interactions, and environment (Selby, Treffinger, Isaksen & Lauer, 2004; Han et al., 2013; Sowden, Clements, Redlich & Lewis, 2015).

Destination Imagination

Destination Imagination Program

As referenced in chapter one, Destination Imagination is a program derived from the elements of creativity and creative problem solving. The DI organization is a non-profit, volunteer-led, cause-driven organization. With the purpose of inspiring and preparing students to become the future generation of leaders and innovators, DI's programs foster creativity, creative problem solving, divergent thinking, flexibility, teamwork and leadership through the processes of concurrently thinking and doing (Destination ImagiNation, 2014). Experiences within the program teach the creative process of transferring imagination to innovation, while promoting the incorporation of creativity into every aspect of life. Every year, DI impacts more than 200,000 kids and promotes mental health by encouraging learners to have fun, take risks, focus and frame

challenges while incorporating STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), the arts and service learning. Participants learn skills that aid in achieving and sustaining mental health and well-being (Destination ImagiNation, 2014).

Destination Imagination (DI) is:

“a fun, hands-on system of learning that fosters students’ creativity, courage and curiosity through open-ended academic challenges in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), fine arts and service learning. Participants learn patience, flexibility, persistence, ethics, respect for others and their ideas, and the collaborative problem solving process”

(Destination ImagiNation, 2014).

A central component of the DI program is the Challenge program. Within the Challenge program, each team of up to seven students choose a Team Challenge at the start of the DI season in September. The challenges encompass various multidisciplinary categories: technical, scientific, structural, fine arts, improvisational, or service learning. Students create, develop and practice their solutions to present at local tournaments. Tournaments focus on celebrating each team of students as a group and the overall goal of creative fun and imagination (Calkin & Karlsen, 2014).

Imagination

With imagination serving as a key component to DI, it is imperative to understand the role that imagination plays in development, cognitive processes, and well-being. The imagination process is tremendously vital in the development of human mental ability as it serves as the foundation of abstract thinking and the basis of concept formation (Vygotsky, 2004). Eckhoff and Urbach (2008) astutely identified that “imagination is a

lifelong cognitive and affective endeavor that acts as the catalyst for all creative actions; thus, ultimately it becomes an essential dynamic in the evolution of both cultural and scientific lives” (p. 180). What is more, “imagination, as the basis of all creative activity, is an important component of absolutely all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific, and technical creation alike” (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9). Thus, as academic achievement is frequently linked to grades, production, and performance, it is important to recognize that imagination serves as the building block of thought, inventions, productions, and creative output, and it is critical to incorporate it into the lives of developing students (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Kudriavtsev, 2001).

This crucial component of education and creativity not only has a deep connection with cognition, but is also evolving in nature and can be developed throughout the lifespan and is expressed in each unique stage of development (Vygotsky, 2004; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008). The extremely complex process of imagination cannot be isolated from reality given that it is rooted in one’s life experiences as individuals utilize and blend the different aspects of their experiences to form imaginative thought and creative products (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Kudriavtsev, 2001; Vygotsky, 2004). Vygotsky (2004) discussed that the product of imagination, whether through creativity or other cognitive processes, builds using elements of reality and must correspond to some real phenomenon. Thus, if the products of imagination are constructed from experience, it must rely on the richness and variety of a person’s previous experience (Vygotsky, 2004). There is an incredible importance then, on providing experiences for children to develop their imaginations. In order to build a strong foundation for creativity and the evolution of imagination through the life span, it is necessary to cultivate experiences that

encourage and foster creativity and imaginative thought (Vygotsky, 2004; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008). This will promote the reciprocal relationship between experiences and imagination that exists.

DI and Development

While the creative imagination does not disappear and can exist in all individuals, it is important to note that there are stages of development in which imagination may have the potential to prosper. Vygotsky (2004) argued that a child's imagination is not richer than that of an adult and, in the process of development, the imagination grows and matures into adulthood. It has also been observed that there exists a close relationship between puberty and the development of the imagination (Vygotsky, 2004). Much like the previously identified domains of social connections, self-regulation, grit, and creativity, mid-adolescence is an important time to provide the experiences that enhance and develop imagination. Thus, it is likely that DI participation provides a unique venue for the development of these important skills.

Research on DI

Existing research indicates that middle school students that participate in the DI program show significantly higher creative problem solving, divergent thinking, critical thinking, and teamwork skills than students who did not engage in DI activities (Missett, Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). According to Carroll et al., (2010) to prepare students for the future, it is essential to focus on innovation, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. Thus, it is important to consider and evaluate what elements of the DI program influence these skills.

Understanding the ways in which creativity develops and is impacted provides

informed means of developing and fostering this important strength. There is much left to be understood about creativity and the ways in which it plays a role in mental health and well-being. While there is a wealth of existing research on the various elements of creativity, the field continues to grow and find need for new exploration. As creativity continues to expand and evolve, further research is needed to better comprehend individual differences, creative characteristics, and the scope of possibilities for creative interventions. This research will evaluate the creative elements of the Destination Imagination program and the ways in which it impacts middle school students' mental health and well-being.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Introduction

The goal of this study was to understand the impact that participation in the Destination Imagination (DI) program has on middle school students' (grades 6-8) mental health and well-being. Previous literature provides valuable insight into the impact that DI has on academic achievement, creative thinking, divergent thinking, critical thinking, creative problem solving, collaboration, and teamwork skills. However, little is currently known about the impact that DI has on the mental health of students. This study investigated how students' perceived impact of DI participation impacts their mental health.

Research Design

This study is qualitative. The research was conducted via a semi-structured interview. This allowed for participants to express any and all emotions and experiences related to DI participation. The research interviews focused on three main domains that, for the purposes of this study, served as the proxy measures for mental health and well-being. The domain areas included: social connections, self-regulation, and grit. Under the umbrella of these three main domain areas, questions further investigated social skills, belonging, friendships, attentional capacity, coping, self-awareness, motivation, purpose, and perseverance. These interviews were important for gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' own perceptions and views of the program, and to contribute to the dearth of literature on the impact of DI on participants' mental health.

Participants

This qualitative interview study identified and explored the individual experiences of middle school students (grades 6-8) who are currently on a DI team and have participated in DI for a minimum of one year. In qualitative analyses that rely on participant interviews, the point at which no new information is introduced is unknown. However, for the purposes of this study, the design was limited to a target number of 10 participants.

Procedures

Students participated in 45-60 minute, in-person, semi-structured interviews. This researcher conducted all interviews. Parental consent was obtained prior to meeting with students; child assent was obtained prior to interview administration.

Solicitation and Enrollment of Participants

The participants for this study were solicited through professional contacts in the Destination Imagination organization. The Regional Director for New Hampshire Destination Imagination (NH-DI) agreed to facilitate communication between the researcher and various DI teams across southern New Hampshire. Communicating with local team managers and parents/guardians of potential participants, students were selected for participation through purposive sampling (see team manager and parent/guardian letter in Appendix A and B respectively).

Participation in the interview was entirely voluntary. When individuals agreed to participate, given that students participating were children and adolescents lacking the capacity to give legal consent, both parents (or guardians) and student participants were

provided with Informed Consent and Assent, documents, respectively. These documents clearly informed the participants of the nature and intent of the project, the expectations of the participants (e.g., participant instructions) and the rights of the participants along with the ways in which these rights are protected.

The consent and assent forms specifically stated that participants may discontinue their involvement in the study at any time without adverse consequences. Parents or legal guardians of participants were informed of their rights to confidentiality, as well as of the limits of confidentiality, and how their identities and the identities of their children were protected by de-identifying data and storing data on a locked computer or in locked storage containers. Additionally, parents or legal guardians of participants, as well as the participants themselves, were asked to give consent for audio recording and were provided with information about how the audio recording and transcriptions were used and destroyed. Copies of Informed Consent and Assent documents are included in Appendices C and D, respectively

Data Collection

Measures

Data collected for this study is entirely based on qualitative information obtained via a semi-structured interview. After the interview was finished, the participant was asked to complete brief demographic information. In order to most fully understand the participants' experience and perception of participation in DI, information from the semi-structured interviews was coded and analyzed.

Semi-Structured Interview. The examiner interviewed participants for approximately 45-60 minutes. The open-ended prompts were created by the researcher

specifically for this study. A full list of the prompts is included in Appendix E. These research interviews focused on three main domains that targeted the internal and external experiences of DI participants. These domain areas included social connections, self-regulation, and grit. Under the umbrella of these constructs, questions further targeted social skills, belonging, friendships, attentional capacity, coping, self-awareness, motivation, purpose, and perseverance. Interview prompts were intended to elicit responses that address these domains.

Demographic Information. At the end of all interviews, participants were asked to provide basic demographic information for descriptive purposes (see Appendix F).

Data Storage

In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality for participants, all unique identifiers from the data were removed. Individuals were assigned code names to protect identities as the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Additionally, transcripts of the interview did not include identifying information, which was replaced in the text with the specified code names. The transcript documents were encrypted with password protection. The researcher was the only person with access to recordings. After the research study was completed, audio recording files were destroyed.

Data Analysis Method

To begin the data analysis, the audio recorded interviews were transcribed into text format with the use of HyperTRANSCRIBE, which is a transcription tool that helps researchers transcribe audio data from its source to a text file. The information gathered via the semi-structured interview was then analyzed through thematic evaluation. To

conduct this evaluation, transcripts were analyzed and coded with HyperRESEARCH for the themes identified as the main research domains. HyperRESEARCH is a software system designed to assist with the analysis of qualitative data.

The aspects of mental health that were specifically examined as research domains and themes included: social connections, self-regulation, and grit. Under the umbrella of these constructs, the themes of social skills, belonging, friendships, attentional capacity, coping, self-awareness, motivation, purpose, and perseverance were examined. For the coding process, the transcript texts were read through thoroughly while the researcher identified and assigned codes to the text. This was done with each transcription independently. The following is the list of possible codes and their descriptions:

Social Connections

- **social connections_social skills:** Any demonstration or discussion of social skills, social competence, or attributes that aid in maintaining social connections. Discussion of skills used to communicate and interact with others, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language and personal appearance. Statements about the ability or inability to effectively make and maintain positive social outcomes and peer relationships by organizing one's own personal and environmental resources.
- **social connections_belonging:** Any talk of a sense of or lack of belonging (e.g. in a peer group, team, social environment, club, activity). Discussion of feelings of fitting in or feelings of being excluded from peers, friends, or a group.

- **social connections_friendships:** Anything related to friendships. This can be contact with friends, the role of friends in the student's life, the nature of peer relationships. Helps to capture a picture of the friend relationships.
- **social connections_other:** Anything pertaining to the student's sense of social connections that does not seem to fit any of the given codes.

Self-Regulation

- **self-regualtion_attentional capacity:** Any talk of the ways in which the student is successfully able to or has difficulty with maintaining and sustaining attention on tasks (this can be related to academics, goals, responsibilities, etc). Statements about the extent to which the student can allocate his/her processing resources.
- **self-regulation_coping:** Any discussion of the ways in which a student copes with challenging situations. This can include the methods of coping and the presence of coping skills; a lack of, or difficulty coping; and/or descriptions of times when the student had to cope with a situation. Discussion of the ability to deal effectively with something difficult or modulating the occurrence, form, intensity, or duration of internal feeling states.
- **self-regulation_self-awareness:** Any statements about the presence or absence of a student's sense of self, understanding of oneself as a person/individual, understanding of their own actions, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and/or relationships. Discussion about the student's conscious knowledge of his or her own character, feelings, motives, and desires. Statements about having or lacking an awareness of one's own behaviors and

societal norms along with an understanding of others' reactions to their own behavior.

- **self-regulation_other:** Anything pertaining to the student's sense of self-regulation that does not seem to fit any of the given codes.

Grit

- **grit_motivation:** Any statements about the presence or absence of a student's sense of motivation. This can be motivation for or pertaining to activities, school, relationships, and/or responsibilities. Descriptions of the reason or reasons the student has for acting or behaving in a particular way. Statements about the general desire or willingness to do something.
- **grit_purpose:** Any talk of the presence or absence of a sense of purpose, meaning, direction, aspiration (e.g. long term vision for self, not just short-term goals); or experiences of feeling directionless, a sense of meaninglessness. This can also include experiences that lead to developing or thwarting a sense of purpose, meaning, or direction in life.
- **grit_perseverance:** Any talk about the presence or absence of steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. Discussion of perseverance for long-term goals in the face of challenges. Statements about possessing or lacking perseverance to accomplish long-term or higher-order goals in the face of challenges and setbacks.
- **grit_other:** Anything pertaining to the student's sense of grit that does not seem to fit any of the given codes.

Once the codes were applied to each transcript, a frequency report was generated through HyperRESEARCH. The frequency report indicated how frequently each code was applied to the transcripts and allowed for the inclusion of relevant source material directly in the report. Evaluating and analyzing the frequency and content of the themes allowed for the examination of the ways in which students perceived the impact of DI participation on their mental health. Information was clustered based on these themes to detect patterns within and across the students in each of the three grade levels.

This type of evaluation was beneficial as the literature identifies that the targeted domain areas are associated with mental health and well-being. This research analysis allowed the researcher to evaluate whether these are the domains of mental health that are also identified by the students and the ways in which DI taps into these areas of functioning. Additionally, through this open-ended evaluation, the ways in which middle school students talk about mental health and well-being are better understood. What is more, the research elucidated the ways in which the identified themes relate to or differ from the existing data on mental health.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter begins with a review of descriptive data garnered from the Demographics Questionnaire (Appendix F) in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the study sample population. The next section presents an in depth qualitative analysis of the interview data and the themes that emerged during thematic analysis.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		N (%)
Sex/Gender	Male	5 (50%)
	Female	5 (50%)
	Transgender	0 (0%)
	Other	0 (0%)
	Prefer not to respond	0 (0%)
Ethnicity	African American/Black	0 (0%)
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0 (0%)
	Hispanic/Latino	0 (0%)
	Multiracial	0 (0%)
	Native American/American	0 (0%)
	Indian	
	White/Caucasian	9 (90%)
	Not listed	1 (10%)
Age	Prefer not to respond	0 (0%)
	10 years	0 (0%)
	11 years	2 (20%)
	12 years	0 (0%)
	13 years	6 (60%)
	14 years	2 (20%)
	15 years	0 (0%)
Grade	6 th	2 (20%)
	7 th	2 (20%)
	8 th	6 (60%)

Table 1 (Cont.)

		N (%)
Years in DI <i>(Total including current participation year)</i>	2 years	0 (0%)
	3 years	3 (30%)
	4 years	2 (20%)
	5 years	2 (20%)
	6 years	1 (10%)
	7 years	2 (20%)
	8 years	0 (0%)
	9 years	0 (0%)
	10+ years	0 (0%)

Descriptive Characteristics. The characteristics of the participants are outlined in Table 1. Ten middle school students participated in 45-60 minute in-person interviews. All participants completed the interviews in one session. Participant ages ranged from 11 to 14 years, with a mean age of 12.8 years. Ninety percent of the participants identified as White/Caucasian with one participant identifying with an ethnicity that was not listed. Additionally, there was an even division of male and female participants (50% male, 50% female). All of the participants are currently in grades six to eight, with the majority of participants in eighth grade (60%). These participants range in their years of experience in the Destination Imagination program from three to seven years of participation, which includes the current DI year, with a mean of 4.7 years of participation. All participants are currently members of a DI team in New Hampshire; however, no more than three participants from the same team were interviewed.

After the interview process with each participant, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into text format with the use of HyperTRANSCRIBE, which was followed by analysis, coding, and thematic evaluation of the data gathered with the use of HyperRESEARCH. The coding and analysis process was done independently with each transcription, followed by an analysis of all the compiled data, codes, and evident themes.

There were three major themes that were most salient across all 10 interviews. The main themes of friendship, coping skills, and perseverance were evident within the data gathered from each participant. These themes held consistent across all demographic variables as well. The means by which friendship, coping skills, and perseverance appeared in the interviews will be discussed below.

Table 2
Prominent Themes

Friendship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishing Friends 2. Deepening Existing Friendships 3. Understanding Social Skills Needed to Establish and Sustain Friendships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Respect b. Appreciation of Differences c. Perspective Taking d. Teamwork 4. Learning to Read Social Cues to Understand Human Behavior 5. Sense of Belonging
Coping Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning New Ways to Lower Stress <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Awareness of means b. Experience managing stressful situations c. Learning about focus 2. Time Management 3. Developing a Sense of Self Awareness <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abilities and Capabilities b. Sense of one's own helpful characteristics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Determination c. Understanding personal challenges d. Understanding one's own behavior and reactions 4. Managing One's Own Feelings 5. Relationship Skills that Aid with Coping 6. Using Relationships for Coping

Table 2 (Cont.)

Perseverance

1. Motivation
 2. 'Just Do It' Attitude
 3. Sticking With It in the Face of Challenges
 - a. Problem Solving
 4. Developing and Growing Goals
 5. Sense of Purpose
 6. Empowerment
 - a. Mindset
 - b. Healthy risk taking
 - c. Sense of agency
-

Friendship

The overarching theme of friendship appeared throughout all interviews.

Participants discussed many ways in which Destination Imagination played an important role in friendship, including how to establish friends and deepening existing friendship bonds. The ways in which DI influenced friendship according to the ten study participants are described in detail below.

Establishing Friends

According to the study participants, being a part of a DI team provided students with the opportunity to make new friends. Many students described how they developed lasting friendships with their teammates and other DI participants. Participants described how DI provided students with the opportunity to learn the important skills of being a friend as well as the chance to broaden the range of possible friends through exposure to new students. Additionally, student interviews reflected that these new friendships expanded beyond those made on their DI team to developing friendships with people outside of DI as well.

I think it's really helped because, with doing DI I've met these people that maybe I wouldn't have talked to. And I think that's kind of pushed me to do that outside of

DI, like maybe go talk to some people you wouldn't talk to normally, so, and I think that's really cool because, once I kind of, once I did DI and I started hanging out with all these people that I wouldn't normally hang out with, I started doing that with other people, you know, which was I think really cool, because even outside of DI it's caused me to have so many more friends than I normally would have (7th grade female)

Through DI participation, students often meet individuals outside of their traditional peer group. Based on participant responses, developing important friendship skills, like openness, aided and provided these middle school students with the tools to develop new friendships beyond their existing friendships.

There was a team that I met last year when we were at- was it Regionals or States... We were at States and there was a team, and they, I had everything in common with them..., and I'm still in contact with a couple of them. And their team had a really cool bird monster and it was awesome and I admire them. Even though most of them are a little bit younger than me. And I really connected with them, so yeah, I make friends through DI. (8th grade female)

Um, kind of to be more open to people. And just more of, more open to other people outside of your friend group. 'Cause you go during the competitions and you look at other teams and how they solved their challenge, and kind of, and you can kind of see there's a lot of different ways to solve things. And that helps. (8th grade female)

Deepening Existing Friendships

Beyond establishing new relationships, study participants reported that their existing friendships deepened as a result of participation in DI. Whether these existing relationships were members of their DI team or outside of their immediate team, the time spent together allowed these students to grow with one another.

Um, they've [my friendships] built up a lot. I've gotten to know them a lot more since, since we started DI. It like, we, we've been over each other's houses so much more, we've gotten to know each other's family so much more since we traveled for like 5 days and we were just in all 1 hotel room... We joined the team together in 4th grade, and yeah. So it's just built up among all of the, among, or built up along with our DI skills I guess. (8th grade male)

Participants noted the strengthening of their relationships, much of which was connected with the challenges that they experienced together. Through experiencing difficult times in the DI work or relationships, it was identified that friendships seemed to grow and deepen.

Um, I think it's made friendships a lot stronger because, um, I think if your friendships is just kinda like, well it's good all the time, you don't really have problems, I don't think it's really a strong friendship until you have to like work through some things. Like, maybe someone has their idea, and really likes their idea, and doesn't want to do anything. And you just kind of have to work with them, and sometimes it's hard because you like your idea and they like their idea, um, and it creates a little bit of conflict. But what I really like about DI is that you learn how to work through those conflicts, and it's made my friendships so much stronger. (7th grade female)

Um, it's made us closer and now we know each other more. Like sometimes it can get a little tough, 'cause sometimes it's stressful and we see each other's worst, at our worst, but we still like, we still do it because we know that we're all, like, we're, we can do it [laughs]. We're together as a team so we can, um, we know that together we can do it. We can, like, if, as long as we're like, as long as we're a team, we'll win. (8th grade male)

Well, it made us all work together as a team, first of all, so like if one of us didn't like the other person, we can't just be like 'Oh my God, I hate you, get off this team,' because we couldn't do that. So we had to learn to work together and eventually we became friends (8th grade female)

Um, we typically argue a little and then, once everything settles down, we, and we're more clear headed, we figure out a solution that fixes all the problems. And then we do the solution! (8th grade female)

Understanding Social Skills Needed to Establish and Sustain Friendships

The process of developing and deepening friendships helped DI participants to learn important social skills that are needed to both establish and sustain friendships.

Across all interviews, study participants emphasized the specific social skills of respect, appreciation of differences, perspective taking, and teamwork that led to establishing and sustaining friendship relationships.

Respect. Developing an understanding of respect was a prominent theme for these study participants. Participants emphasized that they learned respect for others that developed through their experiences in DI.

Be respectful to other people. Like your peers... Like you can't just say 'this is my idea, we're doing this idea, nothing else, this is the whole thing and I'll do it when I get home.' You have to like listen to other people's ideas, not talk over them, and like help them out. (6th grade male)

... it sort of taught me like respect for my peers and stuff, which got me friends in school. (6th grade male)

I learned that you have to respect other people's opinions and just kind of be more open and accepting to people.... Well, there's one person on my team who I don't exactly get along with when it comes to ideas. So sometimes I just have to respect her opinion so that she doesn't get all mad. 'Cause she does that. [Interviewer: So you figured out how to find the balance between having your ideas be different, but also still respecting her ideas?] It took a while because we would always have different ideas, and her ideas would be so different than mine, and we'd have to try to find a balance between us, so that helped me. (8th grade female)

Appreciation of differences. Additionally, study participants identified appreciation of differences as a key component to help with being a good friend and maintaining friendships over time. This appreciation for differences was described in terms of personal beliefs and characteristics as well as differences in opinions, ideas, and values.

Just everybody comes from everywhere, so we have to, so once you get to know them it helps you learn and adjust. (8th grade female)

Yeah, 'cause most of the time if I want some, like if I want a friend, they would most likely have the same values as me and have the same like views so we see things the same, but most of the time that doesn't happen 'cause not a lot of people don't have, like everybody's different, you all look at things different ways, which I think is why, like that it's good 'cause then during DI me, Friend_P, and Friend_T all look at things differently and um, we, that's how we're so successful because Friend_T is more focused on where the points are Friend_P is, Friend_P and I are more focused on the presentation, on like how the skit's gonna go. (8th grade male)

It was described that learning the value of having team members with different personalities and the ways to manage these differences allowed DI participants to accept and appreciate diversity.

I've learned that if you, it's important to have a DI team of people whose personalities don't completely like, aren't completely opposite but aren't completely the same. Because you want enough diversity that people are gonna contribute different ideas, but you don't want so much that these people can't get along and they can't work together well. Which I learned by being on that 1st DI team where we kind of ended up in 3 groups of people, me and my friend, the older girls together, and then the 2 boys who are like really good friends. And so it was problematic because we all had different ideas on what we wanted to do, except we all kind of laid back and went along with what the boys wanted to do, because we kind of knew they would shoot down any ideas that we gave. And you do not want that with a team. (7th grade female)

Perspective taking. Working to understand and manage these differences, DI participants described ways in which they were able to develop skills of perspective taking.

It [DI] certainly has impacted the way I think about things, 'cause I will think of them from different perspectives and points of views. (7th grade female)

Teamwork. Not only did students explain how they better understood the perspectives of others, but how this also helped to develop the important skills of teamwork and good sportsmanship.

You have to work with your team. You can't just be all you. Like I'll write the script, I'll make the props, I'll get the costumes, I'll be the team captain. You have to say alright you can be the team captain, you can get the props, I'll write the script, you make the costumes. Gotta like work together. (6th grade male)

I think like, the thing I've learned from DI most is teamwork, because it really shows you how to work as a team from, maybe someone's idea that they put out you don't really like, or maybe someone's doing something wrong, or maybe you're doing something wrong. And I think it's helped to not, to maybe like 'oh maybe you should try it this way' and learning how to not be mean about things, and learning how to really work as a team with someone, rather than just yourself or just them, to kind of everyone put something in rather than one person and

everyone else. And I think it's just really showed teamwork, how to take, maybe this person has this idea, you have this idea, and just put them together to make everything even better. So I think I've learned teamwork the most. (7th grade female)

Even when you're with your competition, you're not like looking at them dead in the eye and being like 'I don't want to see you, like go.' No, like, I made friends with people I met at the competition. And even when they won I was like 'Oh, that's so cool. Like send me pictures when you're at Globals.' You're not like 'ugh' like you learn to be a good sport about things. (8th grade female)

Learning to Read Social Cues to Understand Human Behavior

Results also indicated that, in addition to developing important social skills, students also learned to read social cues and understand human behavior through various elements of DI participation. The interviews revealed that students developed an understanding of peoples' responses, reactions, facial expressions, and body language, which aided in understanding their own needs and how to be helpful to others.

I remember doing Instant Challenges when I was younger and we'd always look over at the team manager or the vice team manager. What's it called? We never had a vice team manager for a couple years, so they just call it vice team manager. So we'd look at them and we'd see the expressions on their face and we're like, we're doing something wrong, okay. And we, I'd learn from looking at other people that 'Oh, they didn't like that idea,' or, 'cause there's a lot of drawing board and showing ideas for a story or for props, or for, you know, techniques during Instant Challenge. There's a lot of different idea time to share with people every single meeting. So you get used to different facial expressions pretty fast. (8th grade female)

Interviewer: Okay, so what are some things from this year, from this past year that you've learned about yourself? Participant: That I am a lot, I'm much funnier in front of an audience than I am with like a few people. And, certain people like, certain people you have to be different around than other people. Like, sometimes you just... Um, like, sometimes people are more serious so you can't joke around them, they might not understand, or be sarcastic, so you have to lean towards the more serious side. And if people are more like, fun-loving and humorous, then you could crack jokes a lot more. (8th grade male)

Understanding and appreciating differences among individuals along with reading cues was described as an important part of these friendships and social relationships.

I learned to evaluate personalities more. So like, if you can understand the person, you can usually help know how to help calm them down, 'cause everyone's different. (7th grade female)

Sense of Belonging

With these new friendships and deepened connections, results indicated that DI participants gained a sense of belonging. The team aspect of the challenges, the sense of community created, and the environment of competitions allowed students to feel like they fit in.

I guess in DI you really feel like you fit in because everyone's doing the same thing. Sometimes outside of DI it's a little hard to fit in because you're not maybe doing what everyone else is doing, but I really feel like I'm at my place when I'm in DI, you know. It's like the best part of the day [laughs]. (7th grade female)

Team members developed a sense of trust and understanding that they are supported in their work. Feeling the sense of support and community allowed individual participants to feel connected and feel as though they belong.

When we were performing at Globals last year, I did not like our skit so much, but I was proud of some of our props and looking back and fixing all the problems with it, but I'm like, in the moment, I was, we were all proud of it and we all worked together to, there was this pen that we had to change color so there were different coverings that came on and off with Velcro, and I wasn't able to come out in time because I'm the back person behind the scenes mostly. Again with my speaking to people, so I'm out in front some times, but I couldn't come out for my scene, so they stalled for me a little bit, which I felt was like, whenever props fell down and someone's like 'oh earthquake,' it was, they were filling in for me and it felt like I fit in and I could trust them and stuff like that. (8th grade female)

Students described how participation in DI not only provided the sense of support and community, but also illuminated common interests among students, which allowed them to develop and deepen their social connections with one another.

It connected us with a group of people who like were passionate about the same things we were and it brings people together. (7th grade female)

Additionally, participants learned that identifying common interests helped to foster friendships.

If you can find something in common with someone, you can become their friend, like even if you've like hated them in the past. You can still become their friend.
(8th grade female)

While working to establish and sustain friendships, this sense of belonging helped DI participants to feel understood.

It's great because nobody knows you and you don't know anybody, so when you're doing the Cake Walk, or the Hamster Ball, or the pool, you can just talk to people and then they'll just respond, and, 'cause you already know you have something in common. You already know that you both do DI, you both, um are really creative. So, it's nice just having people to talk to that will like understand.
(8th grade male)

Participants indicated that feeling cared for, supported, and accepted allowed them to feel like they could be themselves and feel successful.

Interviewer: Okay. What are some other things that you've learned from being on a DI team? Participant: Um, that... hmm... that, friendship, or good friendship, close, like people close to you, or getting people close to you, um, sometimes can lead to success. Like if I didn't know Friend_P and Friend_T at all, then it would be like a little weird to just have them on a DI team with me. I wouldn't feel all that comfortable just, I wouldn't be myself completely around them, so it's just made me realize, if, when you're around people you know, know you, like know you well, then you'll be yourself and you'll win. And you'll be successful. (8th grade male)

This sense of belonging and self-acceptance grew with experiences in DI, and was described as a means for students to foster self-confidence.

You, during DI, you kind of accept yourself like for coming up with ideas that, if you weren't in DI people would be like 'What? Why would you like do that?' And you're like 'oh, yeah, you're right. Nevermind.' But then in DI, people are like "Oh yeah! We could do this and stuff!" And then you actually think your idea is like great. And then you can like think that you are creative and you do have a good imagination, and you can become self confident with yourself and with other people helping you. Um, if they're like 'yeah that's a great idea' instead of being like 'no, I don't think so.' And then you'll be like 'yeah!' and then you'll have self-confidence. And it'll make you think that not everyone is gonna be the same, 'cause if everyone on your DI team was the exact same person, then you would

not have a great DI team, because you wouldn't be able to come up with like different ideas. You come up with great ideas because one person said this, and then another person thought of something and was like 'oh what if we could do this,' and then another person, and you know, it just keeps going. (8th grade female)

Coping Skills

The ability to cope with life stressors is an incredibly important skill that was demonstrated by all interviewed participants. Many of these skills were fostered, developed, and learned through participation in Destination Imagination. Participants described ways in which DI participation aided in learning new ways to lower stress, time management, developing a sense of self awareness, managing one's own feelings, learning relationship skills that aid with coping, and utilizing relationships as a means of coping. The ways in which DI influenced coping skills according to the ten study participants are further discussed in detail below.

Learning New Ways to Lower Stress

A majority of the interviewed participants indicated that they have learned new ways to lower their stress levels from their experiences in DI. Many described ways in which these experiences taught them ways to not only manage these feelings of stress in and out of DI, but also means by which they can lower these stress levels.

I think, I think a lot of times to lower stress, it's good if you maybe almost schedule things. Cause like, if you're feeling really stressed like 'oh I have to do all this stuff for school and then all this stuff for basketball.' And I think it's always taught me that a good way to calm down is to make a plan. Like 'okay, I'll do these, I'll do this Monday and then I'll do basketball Tuesday.' You know, so that it's kind of spread out and everything, so. I think it's taught me to like, when you're stressed and you're feeling overwhelmed, like make a plan, because then everything is kind of like, you know what's gonna happen, so nothing's gonna change, or you're not gonna get there and be unprepared. (7th grade female)

Awareness of means. Students described ways in which they developed an awareness of various means to lower stress and implement different coping skills to help relieve stress and/or refocus their attention. These participants described utilizing taking breaks, creative expression, sleep, deep breathing, and utilizing support from others as means of coping that they have found to be helpful. These are skills that they have practiced while in DI and are able to implement in their lives outside of DI as well.

I sometimes just walk away from things and just put it down and then just like go read or watch a movie just to take a break from it. And then I come back and I'm ready to go. (8th grade female)

Interviewer: What are some other things you do to lower stress? Participant: Play drums. It's an instrument where I can just put all my stress into like sticks and beat something with them it gets rid of all my stress. (8th grade male)

Interviewer: So it sounds like you balance a lot of different things [laughs, I guess] How do you stay focused? Participant: How do I? Music. I listen to a lot of music um, and I play the piano. I find that, uh, remember when I told you I don't get overwhelmed? [Mhm] Well, the moments that I'm like 'oh my goodness,' I just go down to the white room, start playing the piano. I'll be back doing whatever it is I needed to do. And I think that's very stress relieving for me. 'Cause it's just like a pretty sound. You just get to be like, wow, I'm making that sound. So I think that's cool. And it's fun to play. (8th grade female)

Well, sometimes I go to bed early, which sounds like it's not really much, but for me it is because I stay up really late sometimes, so going to bed really helps. And listening to music, although it sounds like it would be more complicated with another thing in your ear, it actually calms me down. Especially when it's music with no words, it's just the background and it's nice. And then having an animal. I have 2 cats. Holding the animals when they jump up on my lap and they just sit there purring, it just makes me feel more at ease and less stressed and stuff like that. (8th grade female)

... most of the time I guess it's just, if you're stressed, just breathe and put aside whatever you're doing that's stressing you out and watch TV or something, or try to take a nap. That's what I would do if I get stressed out, like too stressed out. (8th grade male)

What are some things you do to deal with that when you're feeling more stressed? Participant: Tea. I drink tea. Or hot water, or anything, hot chocolate. Warm beverages. (8th grade female)

What are some things you do to help manage your stress? Participant: Um, well, I can't find it now, but I used to have this glitter jar. It's like you put glitter and brightly colored water. And you shake it up and it calms you down. So that used to be something. (6th grade male)

Experience managing stressful situations. While some students identified that DI can be stressful at times, they also indicated that having the stressful experiences in DI allowed them to learn methods to manage the stress.

Um, well in DI I definitely get stress when it's a little closer to um like the competitions when you're like 'we need to get everything done!' you know, or 'make sure everyone knows their lines!' But I think, um, and I think in the world outside of DI, it's kind of the same thing. Like whenever you get close to something, like a test or anything like a big basketball game, or a play. You really get kind of nervous. And I think DI has told me, like, every single year we go to competition and we're fine, but still like every single year, right before competition, you gotta, you get nervous. And I think it's taught me to just like, calm down, everything's gonna be fine by the time it gets here. (7th grade female)

Learning about focus. In addition to managing those feelings of stress, results indicated that DI also helped students learn about the importance of focus as well as their abilities to focus. Furthermore, students explained that they learned new ways to self-regulate by focusing and refocusing their attention. By being encouraged to use out of the box and creative thinking (divergent thinking) and being provided opportunities to learn about one's own preferential means of coping, DI participants indicated that they developed skills in self-regulation.

I've learned that uh, that if you want to do something, you really have to stay focused or else you're just going to not pay attention, and you're either not going to get it done or it's not going to be good quality. (8th grade male)

...It helps me think, like outside the box, so when I'm focusing, it'll help me focus on thinking of a way to do something faster... (8th grade male)

Interviewer: Do you think DI has had any impact on how you focus on things?
Participant: Yeah, um, especially 'cause my Mom's the team manager, so if I don't focus, she won't be happy. Uh, and it's entertaining so I want to focus. Especially

during the Instant Challenges. You have to focus 'cause in um, 'cause if you don't focus then you don't know what's going on and you won't be able to solve it and you'll have to take that extra minute to read the whole challenge again, look over the points again. So, it's mostly, especially during improv too, you have to listen to what they have to say 'cause they, well, actually they give you a piece of paper, but you can start off right away when they say it, so. Yeah that's pretty much. You have to listen to what they say, so you can do it right away. That rhymed! [laughs] (8th grade male)

...[In DI] you get to be creative. And I think that if you do something that's creative to you, then it makes things easier to focus. So, for example, my creativity's kind of in music and piano and stuff. So, if I listen to piano music, or just music, play the piano, it helps me focus. So, if someone else can find it easier to focus if they draw, or if they are like doing something with their hands- a lot of people do that. They can just like, take a little, I don't know, putty or something. And I guess it's 'cause, I think it's from, like, I think it shows like your creativity 'cause like if you're doing something with your hands, then maybe you're more like a hands-on person. And if you're listening to music, maybe you're more like a drama, not like dramatic like 'ugh,' like drama like plays, and music and stuff like that. So yeah, I guess it all comes back to DI. Yeah, 'cause you are so So creative during DI. Like, it's creativity overload in the white room when we do DI. So yeah. (8th grade female)

Students indicated that they learned coping techniques and skills in DI that served to help them maintain focus and accomplish tasks both in DI and in other activities.

Interviewer: Do you think DI has had an impact on the way that you focus at all?
Participant: Probably. Because we spend time in our meetings. Like focus during Instant Challenge, 'cause my team has, we have a bad time with that, we can't do it. So we all have a different couple techniques. One of us will like have gum, although we won't be able to have it during the actual Instant Challenge, it's good for practice, and they'll chew the gum really intently to be able to focus. I have a rubber band or a hair elastic that I'll snap every time I start spacing out. Uh, the other two will just have a cold glass of water in front. They're gonna keep drinking it every time. Like really cold water. Like hurts your teeth cold. To stay focused and stuff like that. (8th grade female)

Participants also indicated that DI has increased their ability to focus overall.

I think it's just improved the way that I focus... Like, before DI, I would sort of, um, like just stop paying attention in the middle of something, but with DI, if you do that you, um, it just won't work. (8th grade male)

Time Management

The theme of time management as a coping skill was a particularly salient topic for DI participants as well. Not only did students indicate that they learned ways to manage time, but they also learned the value of time management as a coping skill that can be used in one's everyday life.

I think DI has really taught me time management and how to handle things. Um, because, in DI you have a start date and you have a date you need everything to be finished. And I think you need to figure out when things are gonna get done. And I think that's really helped to do that, just to know, like um 'alright this has to be finished by this.' And it's kind of like the same thing if you look at all the things you have to do at once, you can start to get a little overwhelmed, but when you just kind of cut it up into pieces, and you see what things you do when, it gets so much easier. And you're like 'oh this is a little easier.' Yeah. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: Are there other things that you've learned from being in DI?

Participant: Time management. Definitely that 'cause Instant Challenge. And, there are sometimes 2 or 3 parts to an Instant Challenge, and whenever it's an acting one, you always have to leave time to practice before doing the actual thing. We have learned that over failed attempts at performing arts Instant Challenges. Um, it helps, and then, of course with DI, deadlines and stuff like that. And then I also have deadlines for myself when I'm working on a project, which I've gotten from DI, because deadlines make it seem like you don't have as much work to do if you slowly work on it over time. It helps with school. Get this amount of paragraphs done by this day so that it won't seem as much to have the project done by this day. (8th grade female)

Students indicated that they learned time management skills from various components of the DI program like planning for the team challenge and participating in Instant Challenges. Learning the value of managing time and taking large projects one step at a time was described as especially relevant for these participants as they approached their education and interactions outside of DI as well.

Interviewer: How do you stay focused on things? Participant: Um, I think it's just kind of taking one thing at a time really. Like, if you kinda like step back and you look at everything at once, you can get a little overwhelmed, but I think if you just take things one thing at a time and really do your best on every, everything like one thing at a time, it doesn't get so hard after a while. (7th grade female)

I just, I just like take things like one thing at a time so you don't get overwhelmed by like 'I have 20 things to do today.' You just say like I have one thing to do right now. And I think it's a lot easier right now. (7th grade female)

I think when it's harder [to focus], you kind of... you're trying to tackle everything at once, and um, I think when it's easier [to focus], you can just take things one by one. And I think it really gets hard when you start to look at everything you're doing all at once and trying to do everything all at once, which gets really hard. But I think it's easier when you have like one thing to do. Right now, I'll do this next. (7th grade female)

Developing a Sense of Self Awareness

Participants noted the ways in which they understood more about their own abilities and capabilities, their positive personal characteristics, their own areas of personal challenges, as well as having developed a greater understanding of their own behaviors and reactions.

Abilities and capabilities. Across all ten interviewed participants, results indicated that, through their experiences and participation in DI, students learned about their own abilities and what they are capable of doing.

You know, I think I'm a pretty diplomatic person. You know, half is good, half is like you know, so-so, right? And I think that's because of DI, because there are times when I have to be like, 'guys, we have to get down to work now.' And there are also times when I'm like making funny faces and we're all being silly and stuff. So it helps you find a balance, it helps you be creative, you use your imagination more than you thought that you had, and you can make these incredible things with that, like you can make something totally amazing out of tape. It's amazing. [laughs] So, you can just see what you're capable of doing and stuff. (8th grade female)

I think DI has taught me to always put my ideas out there, um and to like not be afraid of maybe they'll be bad ideas, but to just kind of say them and see what happens.... I think because in DI when there's, when you have your problem where you're all giving ideas um, and I think you have, when you have one but you're just kind of afraid to say something, but then they're like, 'Oh, what do you think?' or they're like 'Let's all go around and say one idea,' and I think that's really helped. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: So thinking about DI as a whole, what are some things you feel like you've learned from being in DI? Participant: Um, leadership... how to like,

creativity, um, like, sort of, like um, art sorta, 'cause this year and in 6th grade we had to do like, in 6th grade we had to use Halloween makeup to make costumes and then this year we have to make props out of newspaper, so I feel like it taught me some art skills that I didn't have before. And um, acting, 'cause before this I legitimately couldn't, like I would try to lie and people would know [laughs]. It sorta helped me to learn how to act. (8th grade male)

I'm really good at talking. And thinking on my feet. 'Cause that's part of DI, 'cause there are times when you have to think on your feet, and you have no time to think about anything, you just have to come up with something and hope that the rest of your team just goes along with it. (7th grade female)

For me it [DI] just helped me learn how to like talk in front of people better and like give presentations and, like, take questions and answer peoples questions, and like think on our, my feet. (7th grade female)

I know I've said this before, but it's made me more confident, uh, it's made me more comfortable in my own skin. I feel a lot more comfortable in my own skin. It's made me more of a people person, and it's made me care more about the work that I do and how it looks, rather than the fact that I get it done, but rather, maybe I don't get it completely done, but at least I'm proud of the work that I've done. (8th grade female)

I've really learned that if I work hard at something, it can really turn into something great. Interviewer: That's awesome! How do you think DI helped you learn any of that stuff? Participant: Well, DI is really what you put into it. You can either not work on it that much and it won't be that much fun, but if you put a lot of work into it, it can, it um, it can... it can just turn into something amazing. (8th grade male)

Sense of one's own helpful characteristics. Understanding abilities and capabilities, students also indicated an awareness of their own positive and helpful characteristics.

Some of these characteristics included being a leader, plan oriented, and determined.

I think I'm very plan oriented. I don't like to jump into a project or anything without a plan, and I think that's really helped me in DI. Um, and, I think there is that, which has really helped me. (7th grade female)

I'm pretty good at leadership. Leadership-wise, I'm pretty good at it. So like if I'm having trouble with a group then I can sorta help at least to get us all to work together better, 'cause, yeah. Interviewer: Did you learn any of that in DI? Participant: Yup. Interviewer: How so? Participant: Um, during like preparation time for a challenge, if we're off topic, we'd all have to be like 'guys, come on we

gotta work.' And I feel like that helped all of us get better at leadership. (8th grade male)

Determination. Determination was indicated by multiple DI participants as an important characteristic that helps to manage difficult situations, to stay motivated, and to achieve success, which was learned in DI.

I think I'm determined. I think I'm not gonna stop until I get the goal that I want. And I think DI has taught me that, you know, they say um "It's good, but is it DI good?" [laughs] Which I think has always shown me, like strive for the best, you know. And I think that's helped me like, don't study for 10 minutes, maybe study for 15 minutes so you can ace the test rather than get a good grade on it. And I think that's really helped me. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: Are there any particular characteristics, or skills, or things about you that help you get through those difficult situations? Participant: Determination. I guess if I start something, I don't want to stop it, unless it's a chore I guess. But if it has to do with DI, if we're already like, if we already have a plan, like if someone says an idea, I'll just take that idea and I'll just, I'll add to it. I don't really, it's, pretty much all ideas are good ideas I guess. And if you just improve that idea as much as possible, it will be good. As long as you do your best. (8th grade male)

DI made me more determined. 'Cause I didn't, like last year I didn't wanna do um DI for like a little while either, but I still did it anyways because I felt like, if I continue doing this, I could, it could lead to really good things, it's really nice to see it. But, now, like, it's not only just a good thing to see on your resume, it's now like a fun thing and it's enjoyable. You look forward to the competitions, you look forward to some of the practices. Um, yeah. So, it's just made me realize that as long as you, if you stick with it, then you'll probably achieve it. Most likely. As long as it's not like, flying a unicorn [laughs]. (8th grade male)

Um, I think kindness makes success. I don't think you can get anywhere with being mean to people. Um, thinking outside the box I think always is gonna make, 'cause you can't be successful if you think about, if you think what everyone else is thinking. You know, I think, it will, it sets you apart and I think you need that to be successful. You need to know how to tackle problems and challenges. And I think determination. You just need to keep going. (7th grade female)

Understanding personal challenges. Results further indicated that students learned about these helpful qualities by being challenged in new ways. This also helped them to learn about particular things that are personally challenging.

I think maybe out of DI, I'm a little more competitive than I used to be, um because of competitions and all this. And I think I'm a little bit more competitive because we've, in some of the years I've done DI we really haven't gotten far, but in other years we've gotten the farthest you can go. And I think it's made me a little more competitive, like always wanting to do the best.... Because before it was um, it was like 'oh maybe we'll do good, maybe we won't.' And now it's like 'let's do good, and let's beat all the other teams, and let's get the farthest we can get.' And sometimes for me, it can take a little bit of like the fun away from it of just doing it. But I always have friends that are like 'Just calm down a little bit,' which I think is good. (7th grade female)

Understanding one's own behavior and reactions. Experiencing and developing an understanding of things that can be challenging for them has helped these students to also learn about their own behavior and reactions to challenging situations. They reported awareness of the ways in which they react and respond to stress, anxiety, and other challenging situations. These reactions included anger, irritability, panic attacks, distractibility, and changes in behavior. Participants indicated that having an awareness of their reactions and responses helped them to understand what they are feeling and when to reach out for support.

I think, um, like stress and anger is more of like a... you just have to deal with it yourself, in my opinion. Like you can ask people for advice, like if you think you're stress and anger levels are different, they shouldn't be like that, like it's too much, then you should definitely ask for help or something. (8th grade male)

Interviewer: So how do they know when you need something? Participant: Usually they can just see in my face, or they can tell by my voice, or [laughs] they can tell by how my body moves. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: Do your friends know when you need something? Participant: Usually because I'm very quiet and I just kind of sit there. I have panic attacks occasionally and they can help me through those. Interviewer: So they know the signs and things to watch for? Participant: Yeah, when I continue to be quiet and stare fixed at something, they'll know to help me. (8th grade female)

Interviewer: What are some things that happen to you when you find that maybe you're more distracted by something or you're having a harder time focusing? Participant: Like um, I get a lot more anxiety and a lot more stressed and stuff like that.... I'm more like angry towards siblings or something. (6th grade male)

Managing One's Own Feelings

With a heightened sense of self-awareness and an understanding of behaviors and reactions, students indicated a greater ability to manage their own feelings, especially when faced with difficult situations or challenging relationships. Students described working together, understanding how to get along with people, and controlling impulses as means of managing these challenging feelings.

If you want your kid to be a little more outgoing and a little bit better socially, then put them in DI because it will help them learn how to work together with people that they may not get along with so well, and that if they really, and make them, have them enjoy something, and be a part of something that will help them grow. (7th grade female)

I kinda learned a little how to get along with people that are very hard to get along with. (8th grade female)

'Cause you're with people all those hours that you're there. And you gotta like, you have to not flip out on them if they make one mistake. And it teaches you to like be social and stuff. (6th grade male)

Students discussed ways that they learned to work through differences in opinion, ideas, and/or style of relating by recognizing challenging situations and difficult relationships.

Students discussed that having difficult experiences with teammates and the need to work through those challenges helped them to learn skills for conflict resolution.

Even when a person seems like you would never be able to get along with them and like, there's no way that like that person and you can work together. If you like, try hard enough and like, you're doing something together, you actually find out that there are many ways that you guys can get a long and that your ideas help one another more than hurt. And like you can actually make and do stuff that is really cool when you thought like 'I'm never gonna be able to work with this person.' But you can! (8th grade female)

And there was this other girl, who, at the very very beginning, I hate to say this, but we weren't really really good friends. We had just met each other so we didn't really know each other and I didn't know how to get close to that person. 'Cause like I said at the beginning, I'm pretty outgoing. Most of the time. And so, but um, I just like couldn't find a good approach. 'Cause I felt like, um, she was kind of

like a different personality than I've ever seen before. And it was like in 3rd grade, so I haven't seen a lot of personalities yet, but um, so like I couldn't find a good approach. But now, like, we could, when we split up in teams. So we'll be like, how about you two work on this while we work on this so we can get some stuff done, and then we'll go back together and be like 'oh okay, this is so cool. Oh wow, what if you guys do this' and all that. We share ideas and stuff. And then during those times when it's just one-on-one with someone else, and we're working on something 'cause we're a small team, we are so much closer now than we were in 3rd grade. Um, and like, you make a lot of friendships with people you didn't know you could have a friendship with. But it turns out to be great and so much fun. (8th grade female)

'Cause you can't, in DI you can't pressure someone to do an idea. Like 'I want this to happen and it will happen.' You can't do that. You can be like 'oh this is an idea' and people can talk it out. And in the end, you can be like 'I don't know if this fits. Does it go with the main points, will we have enough time for it?' And in the end, it can not be included, but it's okay because you know, you still, some of your ideas are still put in and you still have a great time. And so, I guess I learned it's okay if they don't use your advice. It's better for them, it's better for you. So, and then, at the same time, you can also learn that by just giving something small, like a sentence, like 'what if we do this?' then you can create this great thing out of it and it can be even better than before. So, whether or not they want to use your idea in DI, like it still, you still get a good experience from it. 'Cause you learn that it's okay if you don't use it. Like it's fine. And also at the same time, you learn that you can use other people's ideas and you can use your ideas, and it's all good. (8th grade female)

There's this one person, I'm not going to name names, that I had a difficult time with for like the past 5 years, and we absolutely hated each other. But we didn't want anyone else to know 'cause we'd always get yelled at by our DI team manager when we obviously showed that we hated each other. And this year, she started telling me about Star Wars, and I tried to come into meetings with, we were both coming into meetings with like 'oh again with this person.' But I think she subconsciously and I subconsciously started going into meetings with 'you know what I should give them a chance' and now we've become better friends. And we're not constantly angry at ourselves. And I have become ok with her obsession with One Direction. Still I don't understand it, but I'll let her have that, and we've become good friends now. So yeah. That helped. (8th grade female)

Relationship Skills that Aid with Coping

In addition to recognizing areas of conflict and learning means for resolution, participants discussed the relationship and social skills learned that aid with coping.

Conflict resolution, patience, openness to others, and empathy were indicated as skills learned by these DI participants.

It helped me be a little more patient when sharing ideas and helped me be more creative. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: Did you learn anything about being a friend in DI? Participant: Yeah. Um, don't judge a book by its cover. Like, if you see someone at DI and they don't look like they're, they should be there. Like if they look all tough and mean, I guess if you're like stereotyping, you wouldn't expect them to be like, doing creative stuff. But now, it like makes you realize that anybody can do DI and you can't, you can't just say, 'Oh they would never want to be friends with me 'cause they're all into sports or it looks like they're all into sports' and you're not really into sports. You don't know what they're actually like. You don't know um, like what they value. (8th grade male)

From learning the value of face-to-face interactions to developing a better sense of how to communicate one's own ideas, thoughts, and feelings, the theme of communication was particularly salient among these students.

Whenever someone can't make it to a meeting we FaceTime them because some people can't get a ride. Um, and we FaceTime them and it's like having them there even though they can't work on any of the props. Although sometimes they have stuff at home that they can work on. They can put in their input on like the script, on how we should do the props and stuff like that. And I think it's better seeing someone's face when you give them an idea or show them a prop rather than having them just send you words. (8th grade female)

... You're spending most of your time with someone or multiple people, instead of just sitting on your laptop or something. So I learned like, you don't do this around people, or people like it if you do this. Stuff like that. (6th grade male)

They don't love all of my ideas, but sometimes I have to make them like my ideas. And I'm not trying to be like 'Make my ideas!' in a weird way or a mean way, but I have to show them the value of the idea that I brought forward, why it's a good idea, how it can help us with points, how we can make it better, how they can add onto it with their own opinions or their own color, structure, texture, stuff like that.... Over the years I learned to communicate with that one person I told you about who I've been doing DI for so many years. And I can communicate with her really well and I've been able to transfer it slowly to other people over time. To communicate with them. (8th grade female)

...You'll see someone, and it's maybe they're different than all the other DI meetings and it's like 'what's wrong?' and then they'll be like "I just, I don't know if I can get these lines." Or "I don't know how to do my costume." And I think it's really helped because, you kinda, not only can just tell them, you know 'Oh don't worry, you'll be fine,' but you can also kind of help them through it. You know, like 'well here, let's talk about some ideas for your costume,' you know. And I think that's really helped kind of communicate in the world outside of DI. (8th grade female)

During DI you actually get to see how, like at the very beginning you're like 'No, don't do that, no, stop stop stop.' But then like you realize that the whole point is don't say no. You have to try to find a way, even if you don't think it's the greatest idea, that maybe it can be a great idea. You just need to, I don't know, tinker with it. And like, um, during DI, you find this way of communicating of saying 'I don't know how I feel about this, but maybe we could do this' instead of being like 'No, I don't like that that much' And so, like you are able to communicate in a way that like, before you would have just been like, 'no' or 'oh yeah, that's cool,' but now you can be like 'maybe we could do this and then this, and we could do that maybe.' And then you could 'oh yeah!' and like you can have this conversation and make it better than it was before. Or you can find a way to make it integrate as it is and just make it really really cool. And you can also be really excited about stuff. (8th grade female)

Our team manager every year has us say stuff to other people and you can't say the same thing over and over again, and when you really tell someone how you feel about them or when you really talk about an idea or how you feel about it, it makes a stronger connection between your team in my opinion, and the idea on the project can be done faster with more enthusiasm and more skill. (8th grade female)

Using Relationships for Coping

Additionally, an incredibly salient theme that appeared across all ten interviews was that of the use of relationships as a means of coping. With the increased sense of self-awareness, understanding of one's own behaviors and reactions, as well as the relationship skills that influence coping, students described ways in which their relationships with both peers and adults help them to manage stressful and challenging times. Students explained the ways in which they are able to talk with friends and teammates about important topics and during times of insecurities and anxieties.

Additionally, these participants indicated the use of both peer and adult relationships as beneficial relationships for coping.

I think a lot of us, we really trust each other, which is good. And I'm able, yeah I'm able to talk to them about things that really matter to me. And, whether they make you sad, or happy, or whatever, you can really talk to each other, which I really like.... There are a few friends that I'm really close with that when I'm feeling insecure or anxious, they, I can talk to, and I think they really understand. And just, I think saying it and them like reassuring me like "no no no, don't worry, you're gonna do fine," I think always makes me feel better. And I think being that friend to someone else when they're feeling anxious or insecure is really important too. Interviewer: Are you able to do that with any of your DI team members? Participant: Yeah, I think that happens a lot. Like, when they're really anxious and they're like freaking out that they're not gonna remember their lines or that they're gonna mess up, I think it happens all the time, and it just, like "don't worry, you're gonna do fine, Just relax," you know. (7th grade female)

These students indicated the use of relationships to help them get through difficult times by being able to rely on others in times of stress.

...Friends are always good, because whenever you're feeling stressed like 'oh I have all these things to do,' friends will reassure you, like 'you're gonna be fine.' And a lot of times they'll, well my friends'll be like 'okay, well what are you gonna do first, and what are you gonna do next?' Um, and I think friends can always really help you like take things piece by piece and help you calm down, and just help you with everything. So I normally, when I'm feeling stressed I normally call my friends because they really always know what to do. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: So what happens when something gets in the way of trying to accomplish a goal or to finish something? Participant: I try to overcome it. And if I can't I try to get help from my friends or DI friends. 'Cause I know, I've learned in the past that I cannot do everything by my self. That's not gonna work. I need help. (8th grade female)

Interviewer: Is there ever any person that helps you when you're feeling stressed? Participant: My Mom. [Mhm] Interviewer: How does she help? Participant: I couldn't really say. But just her sort of like being there kinda keeps me calm. (6th grade male)

Interviewer: What do you do to help refocus? Or to help move past that anxiety and on edge feeling? Participant: Usually I like talk about it with someone. (6th grade male)

...I was like with my friends and stuff, so we were all like nervous together. And they're like 'oh you'll do great!' (6th grade male)

Like one time I had depression, well, I still have it, but I was having really bad depression and I was feeling, I had a bad time with the team meeting that day, and the team manager took me aside and talked to me, and I felt a lot better about that, and it helped. (8th grade female)

Perseverance

The final prominent theme elucidated by these ten interviews was the theme of perseverance. Discussion of experiences related to this theme encompassed student's understanding and descriptions of the experiences, thoughts, and mindsets that contribute to one's ability to sustain motivation, face challenges, persist, and succeed. Students discussed ways in which their participation in DI contributed to their goals, greater sense of purpose, and ability to persevere.

Motivation

Interview participants were asked to discuss what provides them with motivation and what helps them to stay motivated in difficult times. It was identified that motivation stems from thinking of the outcome of their potential actions (i.e. positive personal and/or emotional gain and rewards), goals, opportunities, competitiveness, and challenges.

When it's, when it gets really hard trying to accomplish something, I always like to think of um, what happens after I accomplish it. Or you know, really think about why you started. 'Cause, when something gets really hard I always like to think of what it's gonna be like when I finally get it and why I started it. 'Cause when you really wanna stop doing something, just think of why you wanna do it, rather than why you don't want to do it. (7th grade female)

I really have to um, motivate myself sometimes and just really get myself to think that like I really need to do this, and if I do this good things will come from it. (8th grade male)

Interviewer: What are some things that motivate you? Participant: Um, I guess sorta like competing. Like I wanna do good in this play so that everyone can see

like that I did good. I don't know what the word is, but like, I wanna do the play so I can feel good after. (6th grade male)

Interviewer: What's some things that motivate you? Participant: Um, knowing that if I like mess up severely I'll lose things, so it's like, if I get a bad grade on a test, I get an email sent to my parents, so, then they get mad at me, and then I know I shouldn't get a bad grad on a test. So it's like, just knowing that I have to do good or otherwise I'll get, people will be upset at me. (8th grade male)

I like winning. I'm competitive, so I like getting to the finish. I don't like leaving things in the middle. So, that motivates me. (8th grade female)

I wanna win. And I just want to, it's mostly DI that I'm motivated in, 'cause I wanna go to Globals again. It's like, we thought it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, but it's a more than a once in a lifetime opportunity as long as you're trying your hardest.... And, it's just, yeah, it's just wining that really pushes me to continue doing DI and trying my best. And it's also like a really good opportunity. It's, yeah so opportunities also motivate me to do stuff. Like if, if I want to, I don't know, get money to do something, I don't know, I'm gonna work my hardest to do that and get that money. Like do a chore around the house or something and that, so in DI that opportunity would be going to Globals or going to States even. And um, so I just try. (8th grade male)

Interviewer: What are some things that motivate you? Participant: Um, I think actually more than anything, I think problems motivate me. I think seeing a challenge or a problem makes me wanna fix it, makes me wanna tackle the challenge. And I think that's what really motivates me. (7th grade female)

Participants identified that they not only learned what motivates them, but also learned ways to stay motivated in the face of challenges. Adjusting their mindset around the problem, working to problem solve, and focusing on the outcome were identified as ways to sustain motivation in the face of challenges.

‘Just Do It’ Attitude

Participants also identified that their experiences in DI have helped them to develop a ‘just do it’ attitude. This was identified as a helpful means for participants to accomplish tasks and to stay focused. Students indicated that this attitude and mindset allows them to self-discipline and self-motivate in order to complete tasks and work

towards their goals. Students described a dedicated and disciplined work ethic that aids in persevering through difficult times and when faced with challenges.

Interviewer: So when things are harder to stay focused, or when something's going on that makes it a little bit more difficult to stay focused on a task or something like that, what do you do to stay focused? Participant: Um... I don't really know. You just do. You just discipline yourself and just say 'okay, you're gonna listen to what they have to say' and you just do. And then you just do it. (8th grade male)

I got a kind of just deal with it attitude from DI. Not like in the mean way, just when, for everyone that I've basically known who does DI, when stuff gets stressed and down to the wire you just do it. There's no, oh, friendship building exercises, which we do occasionally, you know it's a DI thing to try and build friendship among your teammates and have a good connection. Or friendship building exercises, or 'oh let's just have a 5-minute break.' It's get down to work and do it. Stuff like that. (8th grade female)

Interviewer: What helps you to get through it and to stick with it even though you don't like doing it. Participant: 'Cause I know if I do it I won't have to do it again, and once it's over I can just have it stay over. (8th grade female)

At first, you, if you don't feel like doing something and you think, and but you know it's gonna help you just, and you know it's, you're gonna enjoy it eventually, just do it. Um, 'cause that's what happened to us. Everybody didn't want to do it and then we did it and we won. (8th grade male)

DI has really helped me just realize um, how much more I have to put into everything so I can get out what I really want. (8th grade male)

Sticking With It in the Face of Challenges

Part of the DI program is working to solve challenges and each interview participant described experiences of being faced with various difficult situations throughout their participation. Students explained how they handle set backs and when something gets in the way of accomplishing a goal. Participants indicated themes of resilience, perseverance, and experiencing positive outcomes from sticking with it in the face of challenges.

I mean if something were to get in the way of me achieving a goal, I'd probably just um, just avoid it. Like, or I'd try and stop that from getting in the way. I don't

know what it would be, but I would try and avoid it, like go around instead of doing it. (8th grade male)

Um... I normally just stay resilient when like I just stick to whatever I want to do, I stick to a plan. I'm not like a plan person, I do stuff as I go, but I'll stick to a general idea of how I'm gonna do something and I'll do it. (8th grade male)

Participants described experiences of not wanting to compete, perform, or participate in the program, but shared ways in which they were able to continue despite these feelings.

Last challenge we did so good, um, in our State meet, we did like great, I'm like still really proud of that and, it's because we, at first we were like in the beginning of last year's DI we didn't even know if we wanted to do it. We only had 3 people. And, we were just, so, most of the, most people didn't want to do, but we still did it anyways because we just felt like we have to continue doing DI. We said we were gonna do it or the rest of our lives. And so, now, then we stuck with it (8th grade male)

The first time we competed as a team Friend_A was like having extremely bad stage fright. And so, we all went together and we huddled around her and we told her she was gonna do fine and to go out there and to, and she's got this. And so she went out and she did great, and then the next year the same thing happened except not quite as worse, and so we told her again, and then the year after that she had only a little bit of stage fright, and you could totally see how this had helped her get over her fear of being in front of people and shyness. (7th grade female)

Problem Solving. Those interviewed described problem solving skills that they gained from DI participation that helps them to stick with it and persevere. Utilizing and practicing creativity and problem solving skills learned in DI has helped these participants not only in their DI challenges, but also in school and when facing general life struggles and setbacks.

I think there are things always that get in the way of achieving you goals. I don't think achieving your goals are ever easy. Um, and I think, I really think DI has helped me with that 'cause when there's a problem like, whenever like basketball maybe, one of your best teammates has got an injury or something like that. And I think DI has helped me 'cause it kinda shows, kinda like tells you think of the creative solutions. Or in class, maybe your project broke 2 minutes before your supposed to present. And I think it's really helped me like deal with obstacles in a better way. Because once you can start, once you do DI you always are taught to

think of really good solutions, and I think that's really helped me in other places where maybe there was a setback. (7th grade female)

'Cause we have a lot of problems when you start doing it, and I think you need to find lots of different solutions to problems that you wouldn't normally encounter just out in life, like 'how are we going to make our scenery stand up or make a puppet that looks like a lizard or something.' And I think that's where I really got it from, was, you really have to think about these problems, because every single solution has positives and negatives, and you have to keep going through all your solutions until you find one that will, that the best solution. (7th grade female)

I think it's kind of like, the more you try and be creative, the better you get at it. I don't think anyone can go in and just be creative. I think, overtime you kinda have to learn and be a problem solver. Try and, the more you think about different ways to solve a problem, I think the more creative you're gonna get. (7th grade female)

I think um, I didn't really notice the impact it was making until I started accomplishing a lot more things than I had before. Um, we have engineering and a lot of times you can see the kids that do DI are thinking differently than all the other kids. Um, 'cause you'll see like, we had to make timers, water timers, and um, you could see that most of the kids were kind of having like the same idea, but you could see kinda like the DI kids like me and my friends were really thinking differently. And I think I've seen that and also when you have maybe like a project and something goes wrong, rather than just sitting around, you really try and fix it. And I think it's helped in that way and a lot of ways really. (7th grade female)

Developing and Growing Goals

Students also revealed that, with this creativity, problem solving skills, and dedicated work ethic, they are able to develop and grow their personal goals. Students described ways in which participating in DI helped them to form new goals by learning about new or existing interests and skills as well as by gaining exposure to opportunities.

Um, I think DI I've always, before DI I don't think I really knew what I liked that much. I guess, you know, well I sorta liked basketball, and, but I think DI has showed me I really like script writing, and I really like talking to people and trying to figure out problems and building things. That's what DI has really showed me. I think it's gotten me so many more goals, and things to achieve, and things I like doing. (7th grade female)

At Globals, like um, there was a thing last year on like Computer programming and that sort of made me want to learn how to do computer programming, so it

sorta helped me figure out what I wanna do.... Well, I went over to a, there was a booth there in this building in Knoxville and the guy had made a robot that was to pick up a Starburst and you had to pick up a Starburst with it and he like showed us all the programming he did and stuff and it looked really and I wanted to figure out how to do that myself, so it sorta helped me decide what I want to do. (6th grade male)

Students also described how DI participation influenced the way they think about their goals and how to achieve them. Participating in DI has served as a venue for these students to focus on their new and pre-existing goals and to work towards accomplishing them.

DI has helped me with realizing what I can do and what I can't, and what I maybe can do. If I work hard at it. So, in 4 years I'd like to see myself as a lawyer, maybe.... Um, if I really get down to it and I stop procrastinating, if I put my heart into it, if I know I care about it. Stuff like that. 'Cause if I don't care about it then I'm just like 'eh.' But when I'm doing DI, I get super excited and riled up about making props and backdrops, and stuff that does things (8th grade female)

Participant: Uh a lot of my friends who did DI became a bit more serious.... Like serious on what they wanted to do for the future, and like other more serious in school.... I just kinda feel that it has helped me. It like helped me with focusing on my goal of being an engineer, or like a scientist. 'Cause now that I'm sorta doing the stuff that they would sorta do, it makes it like a lot of fun, so it sorta helped me focus even more on achieving that goal. (6th grade male)

The reason I joined DI was like to figure out and sorta help me on the goals that I had set for myself before. (6th grade male)

I decided to join DI 'cause I thought that sort of would like lead me on my way to being a scientist or an engineer. (6th grade male)

Sense of Purpose

Results further indicated that this focus on goals provided these participants with not only the motivation to act, but also with reasons for their actions, which connects to their sense of purpose. Aiming to accomplish goals, achieve success, and thinking about the positive personal and emotional gain from their actions was described as a great

benefit for these students. Participants described working hard to feel proud, successful, and confident.

Interviewer: So you sort of measure success by how much you enjoy things?

Participant: Yeah. Because if you don't enjoy it, then there's no point. Interviewer:

Did any of that come from doing DI? Participant: Yeah. If I didn't enjoy DI, I wouldn't still be doing it. So I definitely enjoy it. And um, 'cause DI you don't actually get anything, you don't get money from it clearly. You get experience, and you get fun, and you get friendships and stuff. And if you are getting all that stuff, the you realize that you feel successful, but you didn't gain any money. So, you feel successful because you did something that you enjoy and you got to hang out with people that you had, like, good times with. You make good memories. And that's all success. It's the success that I think is important. (8th grade female)

Success means not necessarily getting 1st place or whatever for what you're doing, but feeling accomplished and proud of the work that you've done. And feeling proud of yourself and getting confidence, 'cause I'm not a very confident person, so when I do feel confident in something it helps. And, um, feeling proud. And when you're able to bring it up in a discussion and you feel like other people are interested in what you have to say. (8th grade female)

Um, just having it all finished at the end, and having everything look nice, and presenting it. And then maybe you go to States, well, we've always gone to States, but just making it and seeing the finished product, and just imagining that. (8th grade female)

Interviewer: What are some things that help you to accomplish your goals?

Participant: Um, ...I think like um, just like I wanna feel like proud of myself and not be like not going to a college and not having a good job. Or to like be able to feel proud of myself. (6th grade male)

Empowerment

Throughout these interviews, all participants discussed ways in which DI helped them to develop a sense of empowerment, which served an integral part of their ability to persevere. The components of this empowerment included participants' mindset, healthy risk taking, and sense of agency.

Mindset. Students described their mindset about difficult situations that often focused on the positive outcomes, belief in oneself, self-confidence, and persistence. It

was described that this mindset helped students to focus, persevere through challenges, sustain motivation, and manage negative affect.

I think what really helped me was like, I knew it was like, I knew once I got caught up, I knew it was gonna get easier. I knew if I got through kinda like the difficult part, I was gonna get to the easier part. So I think that really just kept me going. (7th grade female)

Interviewer: Okay, so, thinking about those difficult situations, like when you're faced with a test that you have to study for or things like that, what are, what makes you able to persevere or stick with it? Participant: Um, thinking that it will get better after I take the test or stuff like that just like knowing that I only have to sit through the test and then I'll be able to do whatever I want for a while. (8th grade male)

I am good at like, even if something is super, super upsetting, and people like that weren't me would be like crying about it, I just am like 'you know what, it's okay. Just calm down. There is no need to like cry over it. It's like gonna be okay.' 'Cause, the thing that I said before, that it's like my motivational quote- "If it's not okay, then it's not the end." So I guess I just kinda think that and that um, if, yeah, if it's not okay, then it's just not the end yet. And um, I think that, in the end, that something great will come out of it. Maybe someone that you didn't necessarily, you weren't close to them, you could get close to them, you could have a beautiful friendship. Or, something like that. And something good will come out of it eventually. (8th grade female)

I guess, you can get in the way of yourself. 'Cause if you are trying to do something and you're like 'no, I'm never going to be able to do this. This is pointless. Why am I even trying at this point.' If you have that kind of mindset, then clearly you're not gonna get anything done. You don't believe in yourself, you can't do it. Um, and there is an extent to believing in yourself. Even though I can believe that I fly and I won't fly. There's a whole song about it. Um, so, if you believe in yourself, then you can definitely do better than if you don't believe in yourself. If you're like 'no, I can't.' The you're not gonna be able to do that. And if you say 'yeah, you know what, I can.' Then you can. And that's also from DI. If everyone's always telling you no that idea's not gonna work, then you're always gonna feel like I'm always wrong. But if everyone's like 'you know, what, yeah! We can do this and this and this.' Then you get to feel like yes, you can. And you'll be able to go through that um point in time when you think that you can't. (8th grade female)

...I can convince myself that whatever I'm doing is fun even if it's not. (8th grade female)

Um, thinking about what will happen when I accomplish those goals, uh, it really helps. (8th grade male)

Interviewer: What do you think would happen if something did get in the way?

Participant: I would try hard to fix it and then continue pushing to try on my goals. (6th grade male)

Healthy risk taking. In connection with the dedicated and disciplined work approach paired with a sense of agency and empowerment, DI participants also indicated that this process has helped them to learn ways to engage in healthy risk taking. Students described their participation in DI as an influencing factor in their ability to express ideas and try new things.

Um, I think DI has taught me to always put my ideas out there, um and to like not be afraid of maybe they'll be bad ideas, but to just kind of say them and see what happens.... Um, I think because in DI when there's, when you have your problem where you're all giving ideas um, and I think you have, when you have one but you're just kind of afraid to say something, but then they're like, 'Oh, what do you think?' or they're like 'Let's all go around and say one idea,' and I think that's really helped. (7th grade female)

Um, I learned not to say no. You have to give things a chance. If you shoot it down right away, then you can't make anything of it. But if you think about it like, 'yeah, you know, I can do this,' then you get better outcomes from it. Um, I learned that you can do things that you didn't think were possible. And, you know, that everything can be fun. Even if there are some times when you don't like, it's not the challenge that you wanted, but you know, you learn that, you know, I can like this challenge. There are things that I did like. And you can find that are things that you want to do and instead of just being 'hm, I wish I got my challenge, this is awful. I don't like, this year's gonna be the worst.' If you think like that, then it's probably going to be the worst. But if you're like, 'you know what, this'll be fine. Everyone wants to do this and I'm sure I'm gonna find something that I like about this.' Then you're gonna have a good year. It's all about the mindset and like, you can learn from DI that the important things aren't always what you think they are. You know, the important things are the memories and like, the friendships, and you know. Definitely the memories. I think memories are so important. 'Cause even if you're not friends forever, If you don't do something forever, at least you still have those memories of those good times, and, yeah. (8th grade female)

Sense of agency. Finally, a prominent theme among these interviewed students was the sense of agency that they develop from participating in DI. Students described how the participant-driven work, without the assistance from adults, helped them to develop a sense of independence and understanding that they are capable. Participants described ways in which their experiences gave them a sense of ownership and pride in their work, confidence in their abilities, and the understanding that they are able to accomplish tasks.

I get myself up and I end up doing. And, if I don't have as much of a time constraint sometimes, I will actually do that, cause there's a theory that if you get yourself going on your own rather than forcing yourself to do something, then you'll do better work on it and it'll be done faster. (8th grade female)

Even if someone is younger, that doesn't mean that they can't do it like an adult can do. 'Cause the thing that I love about DI is that adults can't help. So when someone's like 'an adult probably helped them.' If they haven't been with DI, they're like 'you know, someone must have helped them.' You can be like 'No! I did this. Like, we could do this 'cause, even though we're younger, than you guys are, doesn't mean that we can't do that. Like, we can still do all this. This was all our own.' And I think it's amazing that you can just like, take complete ownership, like you and your team. And we can be like 'no, this is ours, and we did this together as a group.' Instead of being like 'yeah, we had a parent help with this, and this, and this.' 'Cause then it's like, I feel like it makes it, it's not yours anymore, you know? So, I think that, no matter the age, you can do anything if you really want to. And you don't need help. You can do it! (8th grade female)

Summary

Overall, the themes of friendship, coping, and perseverance were repeatedly emphasized across all interviews of these 10 middle school DI participants. The congruency around these themes was evident for all students regardless of age, grade, or number of years of experience in DI. The focus on friendship permeated across all domains and served as a means for both coping and perseverance. These social bonds that formed across all functions along with the sense of belonging and connectedness

were identified as means for students to help to self-regulate, problem solve, and not feel alone when stressed. It was indicated that these experiences in DI have provided these students with a tool set of skills that support them across all life experiences, both in and out of Destination Imagination.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Destination Imagination (DI) appears to have an overwhelmingly positive impact on important domains of mental health and well-being for middle school students. Social bonds that form from sharing participation in DI, along with an enriched sense of belonging and connectedness serve as means for students to self-regulate, problem solve, and not feel alone when stressed. Furthermore, these friendships offer a vehicle for learning and maintaining coping and perseverance to promote the mental health and well-being of DI participants. In general, it appears experiences in DI seem to provide students with a tool set of skills that support them across all life experiences, both in and out of Destination Imagination.

Interpretation of Results

Friendship

The main theme of friendship that appeared across all ten interviews aligns with the important concept of social connections for middle school students. These results supported existing literature describing that early adolescence is a critical period in social development. The study participants indicated that participation in DI can have a positive impact on these social relationships. DI participants spend a vast amount of time with their teammates working together, learning about one another, and gaining skills to establish friendships. Developing important friendship skills, like openness, aids and provides these middle school students with the tools to develop new friendships above

and beyond their existing friendships, which supports and enhances their social development.

Within these new friendships and existing relationships, DI also appears to provide the means for students to strengthen relationships through fostering conflict resolution skills. Despite facing challenges in relationships, students learn ways to work through conflict to deepen the relationships and continue to work together. The specific social skills of respect, appreciation of differences, perspective taking, and teamwork that are promoted by DI participation lead to establishing and sustaining friendship relationships. It is the deeper understanding of and respect for others that allows these students to develop a sense of appreciation for differences and resolve conflicts in a healthy manner. Being able to mutually respect and understand the different perspectives of others aids in the maintenance and strengthening of friendships. Furthermore, the social skills of respect, appreciation of differences, perspective taking, teamwork, and good sportsmanship are important for students to establish and sustain friendships. Effective conflict resolution skills and respect for others' opinions leads to positive relationships both when dealing with conflict in the moment and after resolution occurs. Students are better able to develop methods for resolving discrepancies between one's own desires and the greater social expectations or norms as well as the motivation to resolve any conflict that may exist. These skills are indicated not only as important components of self-regulation, but also of maintaining positive relationships. Taken together, the development of these skills allows students to not only foster important social connections, but also to feel a sense of belonging.

Being accepted by one's peers plays an important role in identity development, psychological adjustment, and psychosocial functioning during adolescent development (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Based on this study's findings, DI appears to provide a vehicle for acceptance and belonging. Not only is this sense of belonging and feeling understood important for these DI participants, but experiences in the program also seem to provide students with a sense that they are cared for, supported, and accepted. This sense of belonging and self-acceptance grew with experiences in DI, which also helped students to foster self-confidence.

Each of these important components of individual well-being impacts the ways in which one presents oneself and interacts in social relationships. It is clear that participation in DI allows individuals to engage in behaviors that demonstrate their ability to be positive and productive members of a peer group. As social connections are strongly correlated with subjective well-being and friendships, and peer relationships influence psychological well-being, DI can serve as an incredibly beneficial impetus for social development in adolescents (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013).

Coping Skills

Research indicates that social connections increase well-being by improving emotion regulation and serving as a buffer against stress (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). Additionally, coping skills are a necessary component to aid in the management of stress and negative affect. The results of this study indicated that DI appears to have a positive impact on the coping skills and self-regulation capacities of early adolescents. Primary components of self-regulation capacities include having an awareness of one's

own behaviors, of societal norms, as well as an understanding of others' reactions to behavior in order to infer mental states and predict responses (Heatherton, 2011). As part of DI, participants learn methods to manage stress and regulate emotions, which includes taking breaks, creative expression, sleep, deep breathing, time management, and utilizing support from others as means of coping. Learning the value of managing time and taking large projects one step at a time is helpful for both DI participation and approaches to education and interactions outside of DI as well.

By understanding peoples' responses, reactions, facial expressions, and body language, participants are better able to understand their own needs, how to be helpful to others, and the fundamental components of human interactions and behavior. These adolescents also demonstrate improved abilities to manage their own reactions and to self-regulate. Understanding others' reactions to behavior in order to infer mental states and predict responses has been identified as a psychological component of self-regulation (Heatherton, 2011). DI participants are better able to develop these skills in self-regulation by the encouragement to use out of the box and creative thinking (divergent thinking) and opportunities to learn about preferential means of coping. Participants work together, understand how to get along with people, and learn to control impulses as means of managing challenging feelings. This aids in further developing self-regulation and self-control, which are important attributes of successful individuals (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Additionally, developing the skills for conflict resolution, patience, openness to others, and empathy that seems to occur through DI participation are important elements of coping. It is known that regulating one's behaviors and emotions is

critically important for psychological well-being and maintaining social connections (Heatherton, 2011).

By developing improved coping skills with self-regulation, focus, and new techniques, students develop a greater sense of self-awareness. DI participation appears to influence the ways in which participants understand more about their own abilities and capabilities, their positive personal characteristics, their own areas of personal challenges, as well as develop a greater understanding of their own behaviors and reactions. This self-awareness manifests as a recognition of the ways in which one reacts and responds to stress, anxiety, and other challenging situations. Having an awareness of one's reactions and responses helps teens to understand what they are feeling and when to reach out for support. Students with the ability to recognize and manage emotions and establish and maintain positive relationships experience an impact on both preparation for learning and the ability to benefit from learning opportunities (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

Not only is it important for adolescents to understand when to reach out for support in times of need, but also to be able to communicate their needs. Within this research, DI participation has been described as a means to develop more effective communication skills. DI provides a vehicle for learning the value of face-to-face interactions and for developing a better sense of how to communicate one's own ideas, thoughts, and feelings, which is an important element of self-regulation and coping skills. With the increased sense of self-awareness, understanding of one's own behaviors and reactions, communication skills, as well as the relationship skills that influence coping,

students are able to utilize both peer and adult relationships to help manage stressful and challenging times.

The main theme of coping skills identified by this research directly connects with the main construct of self-regulation. Self-regulation problems are involved in many social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems and disorders. As middle school remains a time of risk for adolescents, developing coping skills and self-regulation is critical. It is clear that the skills fostered through DI participation are important elements of healthy coping skills and may be indicated in the prevention of later mental illness.

Perseverance

The main theme of perseverance is an integral component of grit, which is a central construct of this research. These results indicated that participation in DI helps to develop not only perseverance, purpose, and a sense of self-motivation, but also feelings of accomplishment, confidence, and empowerment.

The motivation for these DI participants stems from thinking of the outcome of their potential actions (i.e. positive personal and/or emotional gain and rewards), goals, opportunities, competitiveness, and challenges. Not only are DI participants able to learn what motivates them, but also learn ways to stay motivated in the face of challenges. Adjusting mindset around the problem, working to problem solve, and focusing on outcomes are ways to sustain motivation in the face of challenges that have been ascertained through DI participation. This is consistent with Carol Dweck's concept of a growth mindset. Students with a growth mindset understand that intelligence and talent can be developed (Dweck, C.S., 2006). Carol Dweck indicated that,

“Students’ mindsets—how they perceive their abilities—played a key role in their motivation and achievement, and we found that if we changed students’ mindsets, we could boost their achievement. More precisely, students who believed their intelligence could be developed (a growth mindset) outperformed those who believed their intelligence was fixed (a fixed mindset)” (Dweck, C.S., 2015).

With this mindset, individuals thrive on challenges and set backs on the way to learning, which promotes positive feelings in both the short and long term (Dweck, C.S., 2015).

For students with a growth mindset, like those who participate in DI, the process is just as important as the outcome. These students face challenges with the drive to try, despite being unsure of the potential outcome. Students with a growth mindset are more motivated to learn and exert effort in difficult situations (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). DI appears to promote and facilitate a growth mindset amongst participants, which further fosters adolescent mental health and well-being.

Attitude and mindset that often focus on positive outcomes as a result of belief in oneself, self-confidence, and persistence allows DI participants to self-discipline and self-motivate in order to complete tasks and work towards goals. Thus, DI also contributes to goals, a greater sense of purpose, and an ability to persevere. Students who participate in this program appear to maintain a dedicated and disciplined work ethic that aids in persevering through difficult times and when faced with challenges. Utilizing and practicing creativity and problem solving skills learned in DI has helps these participants not only in their DI challenges, but also in school and when facing general life struggles and setbacks. Furthermore, from learning how to handle these set backs and when

something gets in the way of accomplishing a goal, DI participants demonstrate grit, resilience, perseverance, and experience positive outcomes.

Grit has been defined as the disposition to pursue long-term goals with sustained interest and effort over time (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). This combination of passion, consistency of interests, and persistence in working towards goals has many benefits for early adolescents (Laursen, 2015). Grit is further described as “perseverance to accomplish long-term or higher-order goals in the face of challenges and setbacks, engaging the student’s psychological resources, such as their academic mindsets, effortful control, and strategies and tactics” (U.S Department of Education, 2013, p.34). Self-control, conscientiousness, perseverance, happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect have been identified as connected to and correlated with grit. All of these qualities, based on this study, appear to be cultivated by DI participation.

Grit has predictive power for academic retention, IQ, and has a significant positive correlation with happiness, life satisfaction, positive affect, and overall well-being of individuals. (Duckworth, 2006; Duckworth et al., 2007; Singh & Douggal Jha, 2008). Furthermore, grit is associated with exceptional achievements, educational attainment, and corresponds with the capacity for hard work, the concept of zeal (i.e. enthusiastic diligence), and the character strength of perseverance (Duckworth, 2006; Singh & Douggal Jha, 2008; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Grittier individuals appear to make fewer career changes, to progress farther in education (greater lifetime educational attainment), perform better in tasks, achieve more professional success, are more likely to remain dedicated to commitments, and indicate better self-discipline (Duckworth, 2006; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Eskreis-

Winkler et al., 2014). Fostering perseverance and grit through DI participation has the potential to provide great benefit for adolescents and to create protective factors that may buffer against many adolescent risk factors.

Learning about new or existing interests and skills and by gaining exposure to different opportunities, DI provides a venue to help students form new goals. Students are empowered to work hard in order to feel proud, successful, and confident. They aim to accomplish goals, achieve success, and think about the positive personal and emotional gain from their actions. Participants learn ways to engage in healthy risk taking, which influences the ability to express ideas and try new things. This develops with the dedicated and disciplined work approach paired with a sense of agency and empowerment fostered by DI. Likewise, without assistance from adults, the experience in participant-driven work gives a sense of ownership, pride, confidence in abilities, and understanding of one's ability to accomplish tasks.

Social-Emotional Learning

The three main themes of friendship, coping skills, and perseverance illuminated in this research are directly related to the central domains of social connections, self-regulation and grit, which have been identified as important aspects of mental health (Heatherton, 2011; Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). These larger constructs are part of the framework of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which is the currently leading organization in SEL. According to CASEL,

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary

to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

CASEL has identified five cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies, which include self-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, social awareness, and relationships skills. Through deeper analysis of the data collected, it is clear that each of these five competencies were identified as part of DI participation, indicating DI as a potential venue to promote SEL.

SEL helps to “provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores.” (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). Early adolescence is a time period of development in which there appears to be less emphasis on SEL through organized programs and/or established curricula. Developing the foundation for positive social behaviors and peer relationships through SEL becomes especially relevant as children enter into adolescence- a time of increased risk- and spend more time with peers and other adults outside of the home environment. DI not only appears to be a venue to provide this same foundation, but also promotes the same core competencies. Looking at DI through this lens, it appears that DI participation promotes social-emotional learning and could serve as a venue to emphasize SEL during early adolescence.

Limitations of the Study

While the presented research exemplifies many ways in which DI appears to be incredibly beneficial for adolescent mental health and well-being, and also contributes to very limited literature on the topic, it is important to note that it is difficult to determine correlation or causation from this study. Given the qualitative nature of data collection, this is not a possibility. It is also important to note that the present study was conducted through in-person, audio recorded interviews. It is possible that, in the presence of the researcher and audio-recorder, and, despite being asked, participants may not have felt comfortable sharing the more negative perspectives on their experiences.

Additionally, a limitation to the generalization of these data lies in the restricted diversity of the sample. While the sample demonstrates an even representation of gender (50% male; 50% female), all participants resided in New Hampshire and almost all identified as White (90%). It is important to consider ways in which DI participation may have a differential influence on participants of various racial, ethnic, and community backgrounds. Future research would benefit from including a broader and more diverse sample.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is necessary to continue to expand upon the dearth of literature on Destination Imagination's impact on mental health and well-being. Given the addressed limitations of this study, it would be important for future research to consider expanding the inclusion criteria of research participants to include a broader range of subjects in order to further address differences in age, gender, grade, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and years of DI experience. In order to gain a better understanding of the ways in

which these demographic factors may have an influence on participants, a mixed methods study that combines qualitative interviews and quantitative data may be beneficial. Furthermore, broadening the research question to expand beyond middle school students would be valuable for better understanding the DI impact on all participant levels (kindergarten through university level). Further research then could be conducted to explore ways to implement the principles and concepts that make Destination Imagination a beneficial program into developmentally appropriate everyday education and into clinical work. Beyond understanding individual differences amongst student DI participants, it would also be advantageous to explore the perceived impact of DI participation from parents, team managers, and other stakeholders. There are many opportunities to expand upon this research to further understand the impact that DI participation has on students.

Clinical Implications

This current research demonstrated that participation in Destination Imagination can be extraordinarily beneficial for early adolescents. It is important to consider the ways in which these benefits can be utilized. Since adolescence is known to be a time of great risk for declining academic motivation and performance, risky behavior, negative self-perception, and decreased self-esteem, the opportunity to prevent mental illness and promote mental health is incredibly valuable (Eccles, 1999; Pickhardt, 2011).

DI promotes the SEL core competencies of self-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, social awareness, and relationships skills identified by CASEL (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). These competencies are consistent with the constructs of social connections, self-regulation, and

grit along with the main themes of friendship, coping, and perseverance that were identified in this research. Presently, there is an incredible focus on bringing these core competences of SEL into schools. These identified principles and concepts of Destination Imagination could be included in everyday academics to contribute to social-emotional learning curricula.

CASEL has identified the elements of effective SEL programming, including instruction in and opportunities to practice and apply an integrated set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills, as well as the provision of learning environments characterized by trust and respectful relationships (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). The Destination Imagination program includes these identified components as part of their core values. DI's programs foster creativity, creative problem solving, divergent thinking, flexibility, teamwork and leadership through the processes of concurrently thinking and doing with the purpose of inspiring and preparing students to become the future generation of leaders and innovators (Destination ImagiNation, 2014). Importantly, these were areas that students identified as important for them, with the opportunity to amply learn and practice this as part of their DI experience. Considering DI participation or aspects of the DI experience that impact students as an integral and intentional part of education and/or academic curricula may help to propagate the positive impact of this program and further incorporate SEL into schools.

Furthermore, considering the ways in which DI participation provides such important components of mental-health and well-being for middle school students, this program could be considered a valuable complement to clinical intervention. The three

main themes of friendship, coping skills, and perseverance illuminated in this research map onto the central domains of social connections, self-regulation and grit, which have been identified as important aspects of mental health (Heatherton, 2011; Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). This has implications for both group and individual therapy. Utilizing DI participation as a positive complementary intervention and/or incorporating concepts of the DI experience into group work and individual treatment of teens may serve as an effective intervention for students struggling with friendships, coping, and/or perseverance. Overall, the opportunity to build these skills would foster healthy development, mental health, and overall well-being.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examined middle school aged students' perceived experience and impact of participation in Destination Imagination (DI). By giving a voice to participants and gaining an in-depth understanding of students' experience, this research aimed to elucidate the impact that DI participation has on middle school student's positive development, mental health, and well-being. Prior to this research, little was known about the impact that DI has on the mental health of students.

In order to carry out the purpose of this study, 10 middle school students (grades 6-8) who have participated in DI for a minimum of one year, participated in 45-60 minute in-person interviews. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and subject to a thematic analysis. Research focused on three main construct domains of social connections, self-regulation, and grit, which have been identified as integral components of mental health and well-being, especially for adolescents. Under the umbrella of these

constructs, the questions further targeted social skills, belonging, friendships, attentional capacity, coping, self-awareness, motivation, purpose, and perseverance to illuminate the internal and external experiences of participants.

Results revealed three main themes of friendship, coping skills, and perseverance. From this, it was indicated that DI can serve as an incredibly beneficial impetus for social development in adolescents, as social connections are strongly correlated with subjective well-being and friendships, and peer relationships influence psychological well-being. What is more, it is clear that the skills fostered through DI participation are important elements of healthy coping skills and grit, which is important to foster for the promotion of mental health. Self-control, social skills, self-awareness, conscientiousness, perseverance, happiness, life satisfaction, positive affect, motivation, purpose, communication, and coping appear to be cultivated by DI participation. Social bonds form along with the sense of belonging and connectedness, which serve as means for students to self-regulate, problem solve, and not feel alone when stressed. Friendship, coping skills, and perseverance serve to promote the mental health and well-being of DI participants. Experiences in DI seem to provide students with a tool set of skills that support them across all life experiences, both in and out of Destination Imagination. This indicates that DI participation may serve as a protective factor against many adolescent risk factors.

There are many opportunities to expand upon this present body of research that would contribute greatly to the current literature. By expanding research to include parents of DI participants, team managers, and stakeholders, broadening the scope of participant data collected, evaluating and examining differences among age, grade,

race/ethnicity, and gender of participants, and considering a mixed method approach to research with both qualitative and quantitative components are a few ways to further expand upon this research. Additionally, considering ways in which the principles and concepts of Destination Imagination can be included in everyday academics could contribute to the Social-Emotional Learning curricula. Allowing for DI participation to be accessible and available to more students and considering it an integral and intentional part of education would help to disseminate the positive impact of this program. Furthermore, considering the ways in which DI participation provides such important components of mental-health and well-being for middle school students, this program could be considered a valuable clinical intervention. Incorporating concepts from DI into clinical work with middle school students and utilizing DI participation as a positive intervention for students struggling with friendships, coping, and/or perseverance may also be a means to translate the benefits of DI for adolescents. This has implications for both individual and group therapy.

Given the overall importance of social skills' influence on psychological well-being, developing friendships, and forming a sense of social integration, it is critical to consider the ways in which interventions and/or support can be provided to foster these necessary skills. Self-regulation problems are involved in many social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems and disorders. Therefore, it is important for interventions to aid in fostering strong self-regulation skills in early adolescence. It is clear that youth should have learning opportunities to improve their social and self-regulatory skills and that interventions should address an overall sense of belongingness and integration for teens. Destination Imagination participation could serve as this

important opportunity. The opportunity to build these skills through Destination Imagination can foster healthy development, mental health, and overall well-being for adolescents.

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Appendix A: Team Manager Letter

Dear esteemed and fabulous team managers,

My name is Elysha Greenberg and I am a 10-year DI alum and a fourth year doctoral student at William James College working towards my doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. I am conducting a research study, which has been approved by the William James College Institutional Review Board, on Destination Imagination (DI) and the impact that participation in the program has on middle school students' mental health and well-being. I would like to invite members of your team to participate in this research study by being a part of an interview to discuss their experiences in DI. I am asking you for your help in facilitating communication with the parents of your team members.

This research, while related to DI, is not connected to or funded by the DI organization. Participating in this study is entirely voluntary. Additionally, being a part of the study (or not) will have no impact on team members' participation or role in DI or on the success of his/her team in competition.

I would love to talk some of the creative problem solvers on your team about his/her experiences in DI. My only requirements are that the kids who participate are 1) currently on a DI team, 2) have done DI for at least one year prior to this DI year; 3) the student is in grade 6-8; that 4) parents/guardians give consent, and 5) the child agrees to participate. Participation involves a 45-60 minute in-person interview and the completion of a demographic information sheet.

You should have received this letter from your DI Regional Director along with a letter for the parents/guardians of your team members, a parent/guardian consent form and my contact information. I ask that those who are interested in participating contact me by **December 6, 2015** to let me know that they are interested. You can either email or call to let me know. I can be reached at Elysha_greenberg@williamjames.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and we will discuss scheduling.

Thank you in advance for your help and support with my research!

Creatively yours,

Elysha Greenberg, M.A.

Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Letter

Dear parents/guardians of creative problem solvers,

My name is Elysha Greenberg and I am a 10-year DI alum and a fourth year doctoral student at William James College working towards my doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. I am conducting a research study, which has been approved by the William James College Institutional Review Board, on Destination Imagination (DI) and the impact that participation in the program has on middle school students' mental health and well-being. I would like to invite your child to participate in this research study by being a part of an interview to discuss his/her experiences in DI. I am asking you for your child's permission to participate and will ask for your child's agreement to participate in this research as well.

This research, while related to DI, is not connected to or funded by the DI organization. Participating in this study is entirely voluntary. Additionally, being a part of the study (or not) will have no impact on your child's participation or role in DI or on the success of his/her team in competition.

I would love to talk your creative problem solver about his/her experiences in DI. My only requirements are that the kids who participate are 1) currently on a DI team, 2) have done DI for at least one year prior to this DI year; 3) the student is in grade 6-8; that 4) you give consent, and 5) your child agrees to participate. Participation involves a 45-60 minute in-person interview and the completion of a demographic information sheet.

You should have received this letter from your child's team manager along with the parent/guardian consent form and my contact information. I ask that those who are interested in participating contact me by **December 6, 2015** to let me know that you are interested. You can either email or call to let me know. I can be reached at Elysha_greenberg@williamjames.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and we will discuss scheduling.

Thank you in advance for your help and support with my research!

Creatively yours,

Elysha Greenberg, M.A.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

This informed consent form is for parents or guardians of students in grades 6-8 who currently participate in the Destination Imagination Program and have participated in the program for at least one year.

Elysha Greenberg

William James College

Destination Imagination: An Examination of Highly Creative Children's Experiences on Their Journey Through Imagination.

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Elysha Greenberg and I am a fourth year doctoral student at William James College working towards my doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. I am conducting a research study on Destination Imagination (DI) and the impact that participation in the program has on middle school students' mental health and well-being. I would like to invite your child to participate in an interview to discuss his/her experiences in DI. I am asking you for your child's permission to participate and will ask for your child's agreement to participate in this research as well.

Purpose of the research

As you may know, Destination Imagination (DI) is a creative problem solving organization that develops the power of children's imagination. Children in grades 2-12 think creatively to perform, build, design, create, and transform their world into something new. Understanding the unique experience and impact of being on a DI team as perceived by the participants in this program is important to gain a better understanding of the ways in which DI plays a role in students' mental health and well-being.

Type of Research Intervention

This study will involve your child's participation in an in-person interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes and the completion of a demographic information form.

Participant Selection

Your child is being invited to participate in this study because I feel that his/her experience as a participant in DI can add to the understanding and knowledge about the impact that this program can have on students' mental health and well-being.

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is the choice of you and your child whether or not to participate. The choice made will have no effect on your child's DI team participation, success, or performance in competition. Also, your child may discontinue participation at any time before or during the interview with absolutely no consequences.

Procedures

If you and your child accept and agree to participate, he or she will be asked to complete an in-person interview lasts 45-60 minutes and a short demographic information form. I will conduct the in-person interview with your child.

In this interview, students will be asked about their experience of being a part of a DI team. We will discuss the ways DI affects social relationships, self-regulation, and grit, or perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Your child does not have to share any information that he/she does not feel comfortable disclosing. If he/she does not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, he/she may say so and the interviewer will move on to the next question. The information your child communicates during the interview will not be shared with any teachers, DI team managers, or other school personnel.

The entire interview will be audio-recorded, but no one will be identified by name on the tape. The recording will be kept on a locked computer. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except myself, the principal researcher, will have access to the audio files. The recordings will be destroyed after the completion of the research.

Duration

The interview will take about 45-60 minutes to complete.

Risks

In these interviews, I will be asking your child to share their personal experiences and thoughts about participating in DI. There are no known risks to completing this interview, other than minor upset he/she may experience if recollecting a distressing situation related to the program. As stated above, your child is free to stop participation before or during the interview for any reason without consequence.

Benefits

The investigator does not anticipate a direct benefit to you or your child for participating in the study. However, data from these interviews will contribute to the research investigating the impact of DI on the mental health and well-being of students.

As a thank you, your child will get a light snack for their participation.

Confidentiality

The research conducted will remain confidential. No one else except myself, the principal researcher, will have access to the audio files. The recordings will be destroyed after the research is finished. Also, to ensure confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a code name, which will replace his/her name in the transcripts of the audio files. Other names discussed in the interviews will be replaced with pseudonyms. Only I will know the code names and the information will be kept in a password-encrypted document on a locked computer. Whatever we discuss is confidential and individual answers will not be shared with your child's school or team managers in a way that he/she could be identified. Only under rare circumstances in which she/he is at risk of hurting oneself or someone else may confidentiality be broken.

Sharing the Results

Nothing that your child shares in the interview will be shared with anyone in a way that could be attributed to him or her by name. The general knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with my doctoral project committee and presented in a public colloquium presentation. It is possible that the findings from this research may be published in the future and/or shared with the Destination Imagination organization. Your child may also be anonymously quoted during the presentation and write-up of the findings. If you are interested in the study after it is completed, I will gladly share the results with you.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Your child does not have to take part in this research if you or your child does not wish to do so. Choosing not to participate will not affect your child's ability to participate in DI nor their team's success in competition. I will give your child an opportunity at the end of the interview to add, change, or remove any of his/her responses.

Who to Contact

The investigator of this study is Elysha Greenberg, a student at William James College who is conducting the study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology. For answers to questions about the study or about your child's rights as a participant, you may contact Elysha at Elysha_greenberg@williamjames.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX. The results of the study may be used in a future publication of a psychology journal or through the Destination Imagination organization. However, all information will be reported anonymously.

You can also contact my doctoral project chair, Nadja Reilly, Ph.D at nadja_reilly@williamjames.edu with any questions or concerns.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at William James College, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm.

This research has been reviewed and approved according to the William James College IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, or if you wish to report a concern or complaint, you may contact:

Dr. Edward De Vos
Institutional Review Board Chair
William James College
1 Wells Ave
Newton, MA 02459
E-mail: edward_devos@WilliamJames.edu or irb@WilliamJames.edu

Part II: Certificate of Consent

My child has been invited to participate in research about the impact of Destination Imagination participation on the mental health and well-being of middle school students. If I agree to allow my child's participation, he or she will participate in an in-person interview that lasts approximately 45-60 minutes and complete a demographic information form. I have read that my child's participation in this research is voluntary and confidential. I have read the intent and purpose of this research. If for any reason at anytime my child wishes to stop the interview, he or she may do so without any explanation or consequences. I have read that the data will be used in a doctoral dissertation. If I have any question about the study, I am free to contact the following student researcher: Elysha Greenberg at Elysha_greenberg@williamjames.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I have read the information in this document. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Child's Name: _____

Print Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____
Day/month/year

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent: _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent: _____

Date: _____
Day/month/year

Appendix D: Informed Assent

INFORMED ASSENT

My name is Elysha Greenberg and I am a fourth year doctoral student at William James College working towards my doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. I am conducting a study on Destination Imagination (DI) and the impact that participation in the program has on middle school students' mental health and well-being. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview to discuss what you think about being a part of DI.

I am going to give you information about this study and you can choose whether or not you want to participate. I have discussed this study with your parent(s)/guardian and they know that we are also asking you for your agreement. If you are going to participate in the study, your parent(s)/guardian also have to agree. If you do not wish to take part in the study, you do not have to, even if your parents have agreed.

You may discuss anything in this form with your parents or friends or anyone else you feel comfortable talking to. You can decide whether to participate or not after you have talked it over. You do not have to decide immediately.

Why are you doing this study?

As you know, Destination Imagination (DI) is a creative problem solving organization that lets you and your team members show your creativity. You get to perform, build, design, create, and change your world into something new. Understanding the unique experiences you have and how being on a DI team has affected you will help me to better understand the ways DI does good things for kids.

Why are you asking me?

You are invited to be a part of this study because I feel that your experience as a DI team member can help me learn more about what DI does for students. Having done DI for at least one year, you have a lot of experiences to share!

Do I have to do this?

You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to be. It's up to you. If you decide not to be in the study, it's okay and nothing changes. The choice you make will not affect your DI team's success or performance in competition. Also, you are free to stop at any time before or during the interview. Even if you say yes now, you can change your mind later.

What is going to happen to me?

If you decide to be a part of this, you will be asked to participate in an interview that's about 45-60 minutes long and complete a short information form.

In this interview, I will ask about what it's like to be a part of a DI team. We will talk about you, your friendships, your goals, and other things you learn from DI. You do not have to share any information that you do not feel comfortable sharing. If

you do not want to answer any of the questions during the interview, just let me know and we will move on to the next question.

The entire interview will be audio-recorded, I will create codes that I only know what they mean to label each tape. The recording will be kept on a locked computer. The information recorded is confidential, which means that no one else except the person who does your interview, Elysha Greenberg, will be able to hear the tape of the interview. The tapes will be destroyed after the study is done.

Do I get anything for being in the study?

For being in this study, you will get a small snack.

Is everybody going to know about this?

We will not tell other people that you are in this study and we won't share information about you to anyone who does not work in the study. Information about you that will be collected from the study will be put away and only I will be able to see it. Any information about you will have a code name on it instead of your name. Only I will know what your code name is and will lock that information up with a password on the computer. Whatever we discuss is confidential and your individual answers will not be shared with your parents, school, or team managers in a way that you could be identified. Only under rare circumstances in which you are at risk of hurting yourself or someone else may confidentiality be broken.

What will happen to the results?

Nothing that you share in the interview will be shared with anyone in a way that they could figure out you said it. The information that I get from this study will be shared with my doctoral project committee and presented in a meeting. Afterwards, we will be telling more people about the study and what we found. We will do this by writing and sharing reports and by going to meetings with people who are interested in what we find out about DI. You may also be anonymously quoted in the presentation and write-up of the findings. If you want to know anything about the study after it is finished, I will happily share it with you.

Can I choose not to be in the study? Can I change my mind?

You do not have to be in this study. No one will be mad or disappointed with you if you say no. It's your choice. You can say "yes" now and change your mind later and it will still be okay. If you choose not to be a part of the study, change your mind, or decide to stop at any time, it will not have any effect on you or your DI team.

Who can I talk to or ask questions to?

You can ask me questions at any time. You can email me or call me with any questions at Elysha_greenberg@williamjames.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can also email my doctoral project chair, Nadja Reilly at nadja_reilly@williamjames.edu with any questions.

I have been invited to be a part of a study about Destination Imagination and middle school students. If I choose to be a part of this, I will do an in-person interview for about 45-60 minutes and complete a short information form. I understand that being in this study is my choice and my answers are kept private. I understand what I will be doing in the interview. If I want to stop the interview, I can without any questions or trouble. If I have any question about the study, I can talk to Elysha Greenberg at Elysha_greenberg@williamjames.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

This research has been reviewed and approved according to the William James College IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, or if you wish to report a concern or complaint, you may contact:

Dr. Edward De Vos
Institutional Review Board Chair
William James College

1 Wells Ave
Newton, MA 02459
E-mail: edward_devos@WilliamJames.edu or irb@WilliamJames.edu

I have read this information (or had the information read to me) I have had my questions answered and know that I can ask questions later if I have them.

I agree to take part in the study. _____ (initials)

I do not wish to take part in the study and I have not signed the assent below:
_____ (initialed by child/minor)

Only if child assents:

Print name of child _____

Signature of child: _____

Date: _____
day/month/year

Print name of researcher/person taking the assent: _____

Signature of researcher/person taking the assent: _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Parent/Guardian has signed an informed consent ____ Yes ____ No
_____(initialed by researcher/assistant)

Appendix E: Student Interview Protocol

**Destination ImagiNation: An Examination of Highly Creative Children's
Experiences on Their Journey Through Imagination.**

Qualitative Interviews: Students

Elysha Greenberg, M.A.

Interviewer: _____

Participant ID: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Interviewer: Please provide some written comments about the completed interview:

What are your overall impressions about this interview and what was said?

What were some key themes (words, phrases) that came up during this interview?

Permission to Record: With your permission I'd like to record our conversation. Is it ok with you for me to turn the recorder on now? [Once the recorder is on, state that it is so that the recording reflects that the participant was aware the conversation is being recorded.]

Introduction: DO NOT READ VERBATIM: I am very interested in learning about the views and experiences of Destination Imagination participants. I have some questions to guide us, but I'm interested in whatever is on your mind about your experiences in DI. Whatever we discuss is confidential and your individual answers will not be shared with your parents, school, or team managers in a way that you could be identified. Only under rare circumstances in which you are at risk of hurting yourself or someone else may confidentiality be broken.

Before we begin, I'd like to talk to a little bit about this study. In this study, I am trying to understand what it's like to be DI participant by getting an in-depth picture of a student's feelings about their experiences. These interviews give us a chance to get a much deeper picture of some students' experiences of DI. I would love to be able to interview everyone, but just can't. So I have selected a group of students on a few different DI teams to participate and am so glad that you are willing to talk with me and share your experiences. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions – we really want to know what you think and how you feel.

Domain	Main Question(s)	Follow-Up/Additional Questions and Probes
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about yourself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you describe yourself? How would other people describe you? (Friends, classmates, teachers, parents, etc)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some things that you've learned about yourself in the past year? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have you learned about yourself from being in DI? How has being in DI helped?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's something unique about you? 	
Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does creativity mean to you? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are you creative? 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can creativity be learned? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why/how or why not?
Destination Imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is imagination? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and when do you use your imagination?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What made you decide to join a DI team? 	
Social Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me some about your friendships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What about other important relationships in your life? Family? Teachers? Mentors? Other Adults?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role do friends play in your life? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have a few close friends? A lot of people you hang out with? Both? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you meet these friends? Are any of your close friends on your DI team? Do you keep in touch with any members of your DI team that are not a part of your team now?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you like to do and talk about with your friends? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you usually communicate with your friends? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has DI impacted the way you communicate with friends?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you tell me about a time you felt like you fit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A time when you did not fit in?

	in?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What makes someone a good friend? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you do to be a good friend? Did you learn about any of this in DI?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you able to talk with your friends about the things that are really important to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you're feeling more insecure or anxious about something? Are you able to do this with any of your DI team members?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do your friends know when you need something? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do they know? Do you know when they need something? How? Do your DI team members or friends know?
Self-Regulation		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you do to stay focused? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about a time it was harder to stick with a task or to stay focused? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A time when it was easier? What was different? What helped? Has DI had any impact on the way you focus?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What happens when you have a harder time paying attention? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you do to refocus?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some things that make you feel stressed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What contributes/adds to these stresses? (family, friends, school, etc) Do you ever feel stress from DI?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What made you feel stressed?

	me about a time you were feeling stressed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you deal with it? • Was there anyone that helped you?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do when you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed with something? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of things do you do to lower your stress? • Are there certain people or places that help you? • Do you ever look to people on your DI team to help you when you're feeling stressed? • Have you learned any new or different ways to manage stress from being in DI?
Grit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about a time when you were particularly stressed or were in a difficult situation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were you able to persevere or stick with it?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some things you do to help you accomplish your goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What gets in the way of achieving your goals? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What happens when something gets in the way? ▪ What do you do when that happens? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What characteristics, skills, or other things about yourself help you to do well in difficult situations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you learned any of those things in DI?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motivates you? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do to stay motivated when you have to do something that's hard or that you don't want to do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What helps you?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does success mean to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do you measure success? ○ How do you know when you've accomplished a goal? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What makes something a goal?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of your short-term goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your plans for the immediate future, like in the next few years?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about some of your long-term goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you could imagine yourself at 40 years old, what will you be doing? • What will be important to you?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you come up with those goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you come up with any new goals for yourself after you joined a DI team?
Destination Imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you learned from being on a DI team? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has DI influenced you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In school? ○ In general? ○ With goals? ○ With friends? ○ Positive/negative?
Closing	Is there anything else you think is important that we haven't talked about yet that you think would help me better understand what is going on for kids who participate in DI today?	

Thank you!

Appendix F: Demographics Questionnaire

Demographics Questionnaire

Code Name: _____

Birthday: _____ (month/day/year)

Mark an 'X' next to the line that best fits how you describe yourself

Sex/Gender:

- _____ Female
- _____ Male
- _____ Transgender
- _____ Other: _____
- _____ Prefer not to respond

Race/Ethnicity:

- _____ African American/Black
- _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
- _____ Hispanic/Latino
- _____ Multiracial
- _____ Native American/American Indian
- _____ White/Caucasian
- _____ Not listed (please specify: _____)
- _____ Prefer not to respond

Grade:

- _____ 6th
- _____ 7th
- _____ 8th

Age:

- _____ 10 years
- _____ 11 years
- _____ 12 years
- _____ 13 years
- _____ 14 years
- _____ 15 years
- _____ Other: _____

Years in DI: *(before this year in DI, how many years have you been on a team?):*

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| _____ 1 year | _____ 6 years |
| _____ 2 years | _____ 7 years |
| _____ 3 years | _____ 8 years |
| _____ 4 years | _____ 9 years |
| _____ 5 years | _____ 10+ years |

Appendix G: Sample Transcript

Sample Transcript: 8th Grade Female

Interviewer: Okay. So now that the recorder is on, I'll just say this is Elysha's interview with Tea_8F on Dec-, January, not December, January 23rd, 2016. That being said, um, with my study what I'm really interested in doing is just hearing a lot about your experiences. I'm trying to get a picture of what it's like to be in DI and how that has an influence on different areas of your life. So, I have some questions that will guide us, but for the most part if anything pops into your mind or there's something I haven't asked about, I want to hear it. Okay? For the most part, what we talk about will stay between you and me. The only time that someone would have to know that it was you that said something is if you're at risk of hurting yourself or somebody else. But, other than that, I may use the things that you said, or things that we talk about, but they won't be in any way connected back to you specifically who said them. Okay? Any questions about that so far? [Nah]. So, I'm interested in getting to know you and to hear some about your experiences, so I wonder if you can tell me a little bit about yourself.

Participant: Uh, I'm a sleepy teenager who likes to play videogames and do DI, obviously.

Interviewer: Okay, if you could pick a few words to describe yourself, how might you describe yourself?

Participant: Uh, studious, artistic I guess, and sleepy, that's another, a big one for me.

Interviewer: How do you think other people might describe you? Like parents, teachers, friends?

Participant: Most people at school would describe me as, I guess, distant, but with my friends they would describe me as humorous. I tell bad jokes. My parents would describe me as, again, studious.

Interviewer: Okay, so what's something that's unique about you?

Participant: Uh, I have dyed hair. I can animate, so I've done that before. Gone to Globals twice- I don't know if that's something remarkable or not. Um, I get good grades, I don't know.

Interviewer: What are some reasons that you decided to join DI?

Participant: It's fun and I enjoy making props and background items. Right now I'm making a cloak that I'm sewing together with a machine, sewing machine in the room back there. It's good, I've learn a lot of different things. I started animation in my 2nd year of DI, in which we had a projector and then we did some writing with an extra white

board animation for the video before we had a slide show about information about what was going on in Syria and stuff like that. And then we had sent 50 jumbo bags of clothing to Syria, but that got me into animating and now I make animations on the computer, although it's a very small thing, but.

Interviewer: Awesome! What are some things that you've learned about yourself from being in DI, maybe over this past year?

Participant: I should probably trust myself more, and I should say my ideas and speak out when I have them in general.

Interviewer: How'd you learn that?

Participant: Uh our team manager every year has us say stuff to other people and you can't say the same thing over and over again, and when you really tell someone how you feel about them or when you really talk about an idea or how you feel about it, it makes a stronger connection between your team in my opinion, and the idea on the project can be done faster with more enthusiasm and more skill.

Interviewer: Is that something you feel like you put into areas other than DI?

Participant: Yeah. I study with friends for school. We work on shared study guides before studying them together for a test. And I do that with my friends, and then also for drawing I use the 'don't give up' because I have so many unfinished drawings that I never finish. [Mhm]

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me some about your friendships?

Participant: All of my best friends are awesome and super cool, and I'm lucky to have them. And one of my best friends I would consider one of the people on my teams since I've known her for so long, I would, I only met her through DI, I didn't know her much before DI, but now I'm really glad to have known her. She has helped me to get through some things, she's a really good person in my opinion.

Interviewer: So you met her through DI? [Yeah] Did you meet any of your other close friends through DI?

Participant: There was a team that I met last year when we were at- was it Regionals or States the second, I always forget? [States the second]. We were at States and there was a team, and they, I had everything in common with them. We talked about like Hayaozaki movies and other stuff like that, and we all shared stuff, and I'm still in contact with a couple of them. And their team had a really cool bird monster and it was awesome and I admire them. Even though most of them are a little bit younger than me. And I really connected with them, so yeah, I make friends through DI.

Interviewer: That's awesome! What role do you think friendship plays in your life?

Participant: I'm a bit of an introvert, so having friends keeps me from being inside all the time. So that helps. DI has also helped me with speaking in public, public speaking. My first couple of years in DI I could not do public speaking, but now I can because over time I went from smaller roles to bigger roles and now I'm up to, I could do main character if I want to, but I'm still sticking with side character.

Interviewer: So it sounds like it gave you some confidence in your abilities.

Participant: Yeah, It did. [Great!] I would say that.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you have a few friends that are close friends, a big group of friends, a little bit of both?

Participant: I have 5 really close friends and then I have a group of like 20 or 25 people that are closer at school. And then over the summer I always go to a summer camp. And I guess DI also helped me with talking to people 'cause it's hard to talk to people when you're like an only child. Interacting with people can be a bit harder because you never had a sibling to learn with. I mean, I have a half sister, but that's it. Um, so my friends that, I go to the summer camp every summer and the friends I have there I don't get to see them often and I communicate with them. And I tell them about DI and they're legitimately interested in it, and some of them have heard about it before, so that keeps in my mind that DI's not just a thing in NH. It's also in NY and FL, CA, PA, all my friends would say 'oh yeah, I've seen people do that before in my state.'

Interviewer: What are some things you like to talk about with your friends?

Participant: We like to talk about cartoons, like Stevie Universe and Gravity Falls because they are awesome and the animation is wonderful. And we also like to, most of us draw, so we compare drawings with each other. We give each other pointers and tips, we hand out, we talk about real stuff sometimes and it gets a little sad, but then we try to cheer each other up. You know, we're getting older and we're going to be high school next year and high school goes to college so we're sad that we might get broken up soon. I know 4 years seems like it's longer than it is, but it's probably gonna seem shorter to me. So we talk about that kind of stuff and if our friendships do end up in a bad way we wanna know that we care about each other.

Interviewer: How do you usually communicate with your friends?

Participant: Uh, When I'm at school I talk to them or I will FaceTime or video call with them when I'm at home, because I prefer that to texting because it feels like you're actually with the person. I don't like texting.

Interviewer: Do you think DI has impacted the way that you communicate with people?

Participant: Probably. 'Cause whenever someone can't make it to a meeting we FaceTime them because some people can't get a ride. Um, and we FaceTime them and it's like having them there even though they can't work on any of the props. Although sometimes they have stuff at home that they can work on. They can put in their input on like the script, on how we should do the props and stuff like that. And I think it's better seeing someone's face when you give them an idea or show them a prop rather than having them just send you words.

Interviewer: Mhm. So I'm wondering if you can tell me about a time when you felt like you fit in?

Participant: When we were performing at Globals last year, I did not like our skit so much, but I was proud of some of our props and looking back and fixing all the problems with it, but I'm like, in the moment, I was, we were all proud of it and we all worked together to, there was this pen that we had to change color so there were different coverings that came on and off with Velcro, and I wasn't able to come out in time because I'm the back person behind the scenes mostly. Again with my speaking to people, so I'm out in front some times, but I couldn't come out for my scene, so they stalled for me a little bit, which I felt was like, whenever props fell down and someone's like 'oh earthquake,' it was, they were filling in for me and it felt like I fit in and I could trust them and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Is there a time you can think of, whether in DI or out, that you felt like you didn't fit in?

Participant: A while ago, someone I knew, who happens to be a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, she claimed that I punched her in the face, even though she had no black eyes and she's a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and I'm very weak and anyone could beat me at arm wrestling. And she kept bringing me to the guidance counselor's office, so I had to leave that group of people. I'm still friends with her kind of, and I've amended things kind of, and I care about the other people in that group, but during that time I had no one to go to, so I just kind of sat alone during lunch and during classes. And I could see them looking and whispering behind my back, but we're past that and it's better now. But then I went onto my friends that I have now, and I've known some of them, one of them I'm known since I was 5 um in my kindergarten, and another one I've known since 1st grade. And the other one's I've had contact before, but we never really got to know each other more. So I met up with the friend that I've known since kindergarten [sneeze- bless you]. I met up with the friend I've known since kindergarten and I started to get to know everyone from the group and I felt like I fit in more after that.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you have some really good friends in that group.

Participant: I am really lucky to have them, yes.

Interviewer: So what makes someone a good friend for you?

Participant: They care about what I have to say and I go on about nonsense a lot or stuff that people don't understand because, or they'll go on about stuff like sports and I don't understand sports, I mean I, they'll be like 'Oh and then I ran past,' Some of them do track and field, and I'm like 'I don't understand any of this.' 'I ran past the marker way' and I'm like 'I don't understand any of this', 'and then I did another lap,' and I'm like I don't, I can't even understand this. But when I go on about animating and I'm like 'and then I put in the bracket. I forgot to put the bracket in the program so it didn't work' and stuff like that. And they'll just listen to me even though I don't make sense some times. So, that's one thing. And also, it's enjoyable to listen to them talk. There are friends where you have to listen to them talk and you're like spacing out and stuff. But in our relationship with my 5 best friends it feels like I can talk to them, and they can talk to us, and everyone's always invested and interested in the conversation that we're having.

Interviewer: What are some things that you do to be a good friend to them?

Participant: I am like the Mom of the group actually. That sounds like a weird thing to say, but I fix their clothes for them and I brush their hair out of their faces. And whenever they go to something like, again my friends who do track and field, one of them is like the top 2nd or 3rd person on the entire team, which I think is pretty impressive, so when ever I can see them I like cheer them on and stuff and they et embarrassed by me and other stuff. And, uh, if they any emotional help, I'm always there to talk and I wont' tell anyone anything else. 'Cause I know I need that sometimes, so I try to give other people what I feel like I need sometimes.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything about being a good friend through DI?

Participant: Yes, because there's this one person, I'm not going t name names, that I had a difficult time with for like the past 5 years, and we absolutely hated each other. But we didn't want anyone else to know 'cause we'd always get yelled at by our DI team manager when we obviously showed that we hated each other. And this year, she started telling me about Start Wars, and I tried to come into meetings with, we were both coming into meetings with like 'oh again with this person.' But I think she subconsciously and I subconsciously started going into meetings with 'you know what I should give them a chance' and now we've become better friends. And we're not constantly angry at ourself. And I have become ok with her obsession with One Direction. Still I don't understand it, but I'll let her have that, and we've become good friends now. So yeah. That helped.

Interviewer: So you mentioned that you can talk with your friends when things get a little bit harder or sometimes you talk about the sad stuff. [Yup] What are some things that make you able to talk with them about that?

Participant: I feel like if I talk about the sad stuff to my parents, either they'll yell at me, I don't want them to hear this but they will. And I know they don't mean to yell at me or be angry with me, or they don't realize they're making me feel a certain way. But they are, 'cause they are parents. Parents don't always notice what's going on. And with my friends I could tell them stuff, without like my parents going full 'you should be doing blah, you

should be doing blah.' And when I was going through darker times, if I had told my parents that, I would have felt like I was disappointing them.

Interviewer: Hmm. So it sounds like your friends are really there to listen without judgment [Yup]. That's really great. They're there for you when you're more insecure or anxious, or when things are harder.

Participant: Yup. So I'm in a, last year I got, uh first year I was in normal math, and then I had gotten good enough grades to be in the advanced math for that grade, which is just like algebra or pre-algebra. And then this year I continued getting good enough grades, which, I'm not struggling with, but I have to work really hard and study for to be able to stay in. And we had a midterm yesterday, 'cause it's technically a high school class this year 'cause it's algebra. And it was really stressful, but they helped me study by, even if they weren't able to understand some of the things I was talking about 'cause they haven't gotten to that, but 1 or 2 of them are also in the same advanced math class, but they're in different classes different periods. And they helped me to study, even if they didn't know what I was talking about, they stayed on the FaceTime call with me and got me to like continue working. 'Cause I'm like 'I'm just gonna go to bed.' And they're like 'No, you're avoiding your responsibilities. It's only like 7:00.' And I'm like, mmm, and I feel like I did good on this test.

Interviewer: That's great! Now are some of those friends from DI?

Participant: No, but that's only because there, at the moment, there are 4 people on our DI team. Me and 3 other girls. One is homeschooled and she's the smartest person I have known ever, so she's not a school friend though. Another friend used to go to our school and I was glad that I got to know her better through DI. And now she, uh, goes to a different school. It's about a long time away, but her older sister goes there and she gets a better education there, and she feels like she can understand stuff there, and I know she has good friends there, so I'm happy for her. And then the 3rd one who I was on worse terms with, but have gotten on better terms with, we're just in different friend groups, so we never really hang out that much at school. So my 5 school friends are mostly, again, the one friend I have from kindergarten and from 1st grade, and then the other 3 kind of, I don't want to say came with the package because I love them all equally, but they were already in that group of friends when I came in, so [So it was a natural fit] it was a natural fit.

Interviewer: Sounds good. Do your friends know when you need something?

Participant: Usually because I'm very quiet and I just kind of sit there. I have panic attacks occasionally and they can help me through those.

Interviewer: So they know the signs and things to watch for?

Participant: Yeah, when I continue to be quiet and stare fixed at something, they'll know to help me.

Interviewer: Do you know when they need something?

Participant: I do, but sometimes they don't want my help, so I let them be alone, but I do let them know that I'm always there for them and I let them be alone and everyone else is like, 'oh what's wrong, what's wrong.' I'm like 'give them time' and later they'll come back and be like 'okay I'm ready to talk now.' So, yes. We all rely on each other.

Interviewer: So how do you know the difference between someone needs your help or when they don't want your help? How do you pick up on those cues or figure out those signals?

Participant: When they need your help and they're okay with your help then I'm more like, okay, I'll ask them a couple times and be like, 'okay, yeah I'll talk to you,' but if they don't then you ask them the first time and from the way they say, after the first time you ask if they're okay, the way they say 'I'm fine' you can tell that they just need to be alone. And I can't do that with most other people, just my friends 'cause I've picked up on their cues and stuff.

Interviewer: What about with your DI team?

Participant: I've also picked up on their cues since I've been with them for so long and I'm proud of the relationship we all have.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you've learned any about reading those cues from being on DI?

Participant: Probably, because I remember doing Instant Challenges when I was younger and we'd always look over at the team manager or the vice team manager. What's it called? We never had a vice team manager for a couple years, so they just call it vice team manager. [That works]. So we'd look at them and we'd see the expressions on their face and we're like, we're doing something wrong, okay. And we, I'd learn from looking at other people that 'Oh, they didn't like that idea,' or, 'cause there's a lot of drawing board and showing ideas for a story or for props, or for, you know, techniques doing instant challenge. There's a lot of different idea time to share with people every single meeting. So you get used to different facial expressions pretty fast.

Interviewer: I hear in that too that there's a lot of creativity.

Participant: Yeah, I never really considered myself someone who could sew, but this year I've been using a sewing machine to make a cloak for one of the characters and I think it's going good and I'm proud of myself. And I've also done papier-mâché work in the past couple of years, that I would have never considered myself able to do until I actually tried it. And there was a volcano and there's a really realistic pizza that had maggots in it. So it was kinda gross, but it was good for, it was one of the side trips that was good for the story. And it looked cool. So I thought I did some good work on it. And I would do like

the papier-mâché at home, and I'd come in and we'd paint it together and they'd help me other stuff. 'Cause the papier-mâché is not very travel-able until it's dry. And sometimes they'd come over like, if it was during the break, everyone would come over and we'd work on the papier-mâché together. And then there was stuff that they'd be doing the bases at home and then we'd come in together and finish it up together and finish it as a group.

Interviewer: So what does creativity mean to you?

Participant: Being able to come up with your own ideas. 'Cause I have artist's block and writer's block a lot and I need to look at other people's what should I draw references or suggestions for what you should draw. But when I am able to come up with my own idea and it turns out good, I'm proud of myself and I'm like 'I was creative this time. It was my own original idea.'

Interviewer: So how are some ways that you're creative? What are some ways?

Participant: Um, I like a lot of different media. I have a microphone over there that I use to record, uh, voice overs for comics on the internet. I write my own comics. I have not brought a lot of them out yet, 'cause I'm still at the sketching the out and lining them, but I haven't colored them. So they're on the computer. Um, I have an inexpensive small tablet that I use. And then I also, I, I think I'm a pretty good writer, so along with the comics or story line and stuff like that, and when we have free writing time at school I write story lines for the comics in more detail.

Interviewer: Do you think creativity can be learned?

Participant: Yes. I do. 'Cause I don't think I was as creative when I went into DI and I think I'm better now. But I don't know so much if it's learned as much as realizing that you have it.

Interviewer: What are some things that helped you to either learn or realize that you have it?

Participant: I think DI has so many times when you come up with ideas, so you exhaust your ideas that you think are good and then you have to go into those pockets of 'nah, I'd never present that.' And then you present that and then you present that and you're like 'oh wait, this is actually okay.' Or the idea is that, like when you stay up until 5 in the morning so that your brain is not blocked by the 'should I use this idea or not' and then everything goes out on to the paper.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you use your imagination some too. What do you think imagination is?

Participant: For me, it's being able to picture stuff in my mind before I actually make it. Or being able to sketch it out before I make it without a visual reference.

Interviewer: So how and when do you use your imagination?

Participant: Um, building props. Because I have to make brackets, we're using wood this year and I make brackets so it doesn't fall over. Uh, making new comics, 'cause if you do the same punch line for every comic or a classic comic punch like it's nothing different from the other ones. Same with drawings. If it's the classic 3/4 angle with the character facing forward and not doing anything particular beside standing, that's pretty basic, so you need to come up with stuff. And I'm trying to get out of the character facing 3/4 angle, 'cause I'm pretty bad at that.

Interviewer: So, it sounds like you do a lot of different things. [Yup]. What are some things you do to stay focused?

Participant: Well, sometimes I go to bed early, which sounds like it's not really much, but for me it is because I stay up really late sometimes, so going to bed really helps. And listening to music, although it sounds like it would be more complicated with another thing in your ear, it actually calms me down. Especially when it's music with no words, it's just the background and it's nice. And then having an animal. I have 2 cats. Holding the animals when they jump up on my lap and they just sit there purring, it just makes me feel more at ease and less stressed and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Can you tell be about a time when it was harder to stay focused or to stick with a task?

Participant: Ooh yeah. We had a thing due for school. It was basically writing a summary, review and reasoning behind why you thought all these things for the book. And it's on this thing called Kid Blog, which is really cool, and our school does it. And we can share with other classes, and the we go back and leave detailed comments and then the person can answer back on the comments about the book. And I've found some good books through there from my other classmates and stuff, but, what was the question again? I just lost my train of thought.

Interviewer: Having a harder time staying focused.

Participant: There we go! So I was doing one for a book called Night Garden, which is by the same author as Peter Nimble, which I know is popular for a couple years ago, and I was reading it and it was a good book and stuff, but I was up 'til it was due, midnight that night, the night before, you know, holiday break. And I'm just sitting there and my dad has to come up and sit next to me because I do not want to type this thing out. I'm just sitting there, its like 11 o'clock. He's like, you have an hour before it's due. You should be in bed. And I'm like 'uh,' so he had to keep me focused 'cause I kept being like 'no let's watch this internet video of cats dancing.'

Interviewer: What about a time that it was easier to stay focused or to stick with a task?

Participant: Sometimes I get like a craving for drawing, if that's a thing, where I need to put something down on paper, so I constantly have a sketch pad with me. And I have a couple drawings on my computer when um, it usually takes me a long time to sketch out the drawing and then go over it with in, and then color it on the computer. But a couple times, 2 or 3, I've actually been able to sit down and do all 3 at once in a couple hours, and I've been proud of myself. It feels good to accomplish something.

Interviewer: What do you think the difference is between the times that are harder to stay focused or the times that are easier?

Participant: Well, I have depression, which kind of does not help with the focusing. I'm on medication and whenever we change over medications, that's kind of harder. Um, stuff like that. When I really don't want to do it. 'Cause I enjoy doing the drawing and I don't enjoy doing the writing for school. [Mhm] And stuff like that. So it's whether I enjoy it personally or not If it's something I can relate to [Mhm] as a person I guess.

Interviewer: Do you think DI has had an impact on the way that you focus at all?

Participant: Probably. Because we spend time in our meetings. Like focus during Instant Challenge, 'cause my team has, we have a bad time within that, we can't do it. So we all have a different couple techniques. One of us will like have gum, although we won't be able to have it during the actual Instant Challenge, it's good for practice, and they'll chew the gum really intently to be able to focus. I have a rubber band or a hair elastic that I'll snap every time I start spacing out. Uh, the other two will just have a cold glass of water in front. They're gonna keep drinking it every time. Like really cold water. Like hurts your teeth cold. To stay focused and stuff like that. And we need to stay focused during the meetings 'cause we only have a couple more weeks left 'til the next, or the first performance.

Interviewer: Is the rubber band trick something you use outside of DI?

Participant: Yes, uh, I used to cut. I use it as an alternative to cutting when I'm really sad, but I haven't had to recently because I am stable. [Great!]

Interviewer: I really appreciate you sharing that with me. I know it can be a harder thing to talk about, but I think it helps me to understand a little bit about your experience too. And it sounds like you've done a lot of work to get to where you are.

Participant: That's why I'm constantly tired. [Yeah] (Talking about cat) Kiki likes people. She does not like being pet on her head, just so you know. [Okay] She'll love you otherwise.

Interviewer: So what are some things that make you feel more stressed sometimes?

Participant: Time constraints. Certainly. Like as I said, I've been to terms and those were timed. We had 90 minutes to do a short answer and a multiple choice, which is harder

that it thinks, because sometimes you don't get the answer that's one of the multiple choice answers and you're like 'What Now?!' And it's 9 minutes and there are 50 something questions total, so you have less than 2 minutes per question, and it's stressful, but I'm getting it done with spare time, so that helped. I think another thing that's stressful is when, you know, other people are depending on you. Like when we go home with assignments every week for DI to have done for next time so that we can get going on something. And you're like, it's stressful 'cause I don't want to do it 'cause team managers aren't allowed to do stuff, but also, (Talks to cat), I lost my train of thought again, I'm sorry [Things that are stressful]. Things that are stressful, okay, and then, you realize, oh I need to have this done and it's an hour before the DI meeting on Tuesday. And you're like 'well, crap. I didn't get anything done.' And then I'm rushing to get stuff done, 'cause you feel like, you just feels stressed 'cause you're like they were depending on me to do this. And then you go into the meeting and realize that everyone else had the same problem and we're like 'why do we do this to ourselves?' Yeah, we're procrastinators, that's why [laughs].

Interviewer: What are some things you do to deal with that when you're feeling more stressed?

Participant: Tea. I drink tea. Or hot water, or anything, hot chocolate. Warm beverages.

Interviewer: Do you ever look to other people when you're feeling stressed?

Participant: Occasionally. But I can't look to my parents because they yell at me for not getting the work done. But when I'm at DI meetings and I'm feeling stressed, I can look to my DI friends, yeah.

Interviewer: What do you usually do when you're feeling overwhelmed with something? How do you react?

Participant: I'm like, oh I have a lot of stuff to do, I'm feeling overwhelmed, I react by taking my ipod and watching Vine compilations on the couch, [laughs] 'cause that's the best course of action that my brain thinks. No you shouldn't do the work, there's a certain amount of time to do it, you should go sit on the couch and watch vine compilations. But I get myself up and I end up doing. And, if I don't have as much of a time constraint sometimes, I will actually do that, cause there's a theory that if you get yourself going on your own rather than forcing yourself to do something, then you'll do better work on it and it'll be done faster. I forget what the theory is. It might start with an L. Larkson's theory, I don't know.

Interviewer: Sounds like a good theory. So, are there certain things that you do to lower your stress so you can get motivated to to the things that you need to?

Participant: I seem to be constantly stressed besides drinking the hot beverages, I kind of just pile it on and get it all done. Not as quickly as possible, but as quickly as possible with as much quality of the work in the time constraint. Because when I'm done I'm like

'Phew, that weight's off my shoulders.' But if I just keep sitting there like I do sometimes, instead of piling all the work on and getting it done, it's like the straw on the camel's back and I'm like 'oh no, I'm just gonna, eh, faint out from all the work.' Pass out, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: Made sense to me. So, do you feel like you've learned any new or different ways to deal with stress from being in DI?

Participant: I got a kind of just deal with it attitude from DI. Not like in the mean way, just when, for everyone that I've basically known who does DI, when stuff gets stressed and down to the wire you just do it. There's no, oh, friendship building exercises, which we do occasionally, you know it's a DI thing to try and build friendship among your teammates and have a good connection. Or friendship building exercises, or oh let's just have a 5 minute break. It's get down to work and do it. Stuff like that.

Interviewer: So what are some things about you that help you just get down to it and do it. Are there particular characteristics or skills?

Participant: I can make myself feel like what I'm doing is fun sometimes. Like I'll be doing math, and I'll be like 'eh.' But then I convince myself 'you know what, this is fun! Lets enjoy this!' So I can convince myself that whatever I'm doing is fun even if it's not.

Interviewer: So what happens when something gets in the way of trying to accomplish a goal or to finish something?

Participant: I try to overcome it. And if I can't I try to get help from my friends or DI friends. 'Cause I know, I've learned in the past that I cannot do everything by my self. That's not gonna work. I need help.

Interviewer: What are some things that you use to motivate you?

Participant: Rewards. I'm like 'If you finish this work Tea_8M, you get to watch 3 of your favorite music videos before you go to bed' or yeah 'I will let you have a little bit of the chocolate that's left over' (Talks to cat).

Interviewer: So what are some goals that you have? Maybe some more short term goals for the more immediate future?

Participant: To actually finish some animations I'm working on. To finish the DI props I'm working on. To hang out with my friends outside of school more often. That was another one.

Interviewer: What about some longer term goals? Like if you could imagine yourself at 40 years old, what are some things you might like to have accomplished?

Participant: Um, I'm very focused on my future, so I would like to become a lawyer. So I've been looking at different colleges. Like obviously Harvard has like a 2.5 acceptance

rate and that would be super hard to get into. But I've been looking at Columbia University in NY and stuff like that. I guess you could say DI has helped me with realizing what I can do and what I can't, and what I maybe can do. If I work hard at it. So, in 4 years I'd like to see myself as a lawyer, maybe. [How so?] Um, if I really get down to it and I stop procrastinating, if I put my heart into it, if I know I care about it. Stuff like that.

Interviewer: And you learned that from being DI?

Participant: Yeah. 'Cause if I don't care about it then I'm just like 'eh.' But when I'm doing DI, I get super excited and riled up about making props and backdrops, and stuff that does things. Last year we had a thing that was like a clock that had a bunch of weird lines on it, and the it had a different huge pin over the black lines. And it was on a transparent sheet of like ply-plastic or something. It was pretty durable. And I moved it across, and as you moved it across, it looked like there was arrows going around the clock, because of the way stuff was placed. And I learned that online, and I worked really hard on it. It took me a very long time to get it down, but the end result was worth it because it was our, I think the best points we've ever gotten on a side trip prop in all the DI years, so it was really worth it.

Interviewer: So how would you know that you've achieved success?

Participant: Obviously with DI, if I get to Globals. But sometimes when we get to Globals, it's gonna sound weird, we've only gone twice. It's not like we don't try after [coughs] we know we're going to Globals. It's more like, okay, make sure we know our props are durable, make sure they're in the box, ship them off to Globals. Now, 'let's have a good time at Globals and forget about the performing!' And we always do mediocre, but that's 'cause we focus more on having a good time at Globals rather than wanting to get higher in competition, although we do want to have a good time while performing.

Interviewer: So what does success mean to you?

Participant: Success means not necessarily getting 1st place or whatever for what you're doing, but feeling accomplished and proud of the work that you've done. And feeling proud of yourself and getting confidence, 'cause I'm not a very confident person, so when I do feel confident in something it helps. And, um, feeling proud. And when you're able to bring it up in a discussion and you feel like other people are interested in what you have to say.

Interviewer: So with those goals that you have and that definition of success, do you feel like you've come up with any new goals from being in DI?

Participant: To feel accomplished with the props that I make, 'cause my DI team members nicknamed me the prop master 'cause I figure out how stuff works and then we all work together to build it, but I figure out how to put it together and make work for us. So to be accomplished with my props and to feel like I've put real effort and that my team

members have put real effort into the storyline that we've made. And that we're invested in it and care about it. I guess.

Interviewer: So you know that you've learned some about sewing, about prop making, about animation. Are there other things that you've learned from being in DI?

Participant: Time management. Definitely that 'cause Instant Challenge. And, there are sometimes 2 or 3 parts to an Instant Challenge, and whenever it's an acting one, you always have to leave time to practice before doing the actual thing. We have learned that over failed attempts at performing arts Instant Challenges. Um, it helps, and then, of course with DI, deadlines and stuff like that. And then I also have deadlines for myself when I'm working on a project, which I've gotten from DI, because deadlines make it seem like you don't have as much work to do if you slowly work on it over time. It helps with school. Get this amount of paragraphs done by this day so that it won't seem as much to have the project done by this day.

Interviewer: So what are some ways that you think DI has had an impact on your life in general?

Participant: I know I've said this before, but it's made me more confident, uh, it's made me more comfortable in my own skin. I feel a lot more comfortable in my own skin. It's made me more of a people person, and it's made me care more about the work that I do and how it looks, rather than the fact that I get it done, but rather, maybe I don't get it completely done, but at least I'm proud of the work that I've done.

Interviewer: How do you think it did that?

Participant: Points. Worrying about scores and stuff like that. But mostly worrying about my teammates approval and my family's approval and the fact that they're there for me. Last year when we went to Globals, my aunt and my grandpa came up from GA, came to TN and they watched us. And we had dinner with them afterwards, it was really nice. I felt really loved.

Interviewer: That's really great. Are there any negative things that you've experienced in DI or from being in DI?

Participant: Not directly. Like one time I had depression, well, I still have it, but I was having really bad depression and I was feeling, I had a bad time with the team meeting that day, and the team manager took me aside and talked to me, and I felt a lot better about that, and it helped.

Interviewer: So sometimes when there's harder interactions between friends or or between team members, it can be a little harder [Mhm]. But it sounds like you have a pretty supportive environment around you.

Participant: They don't love all of my ideas, but sometimes I have to make them like my ideas. And I'm not trying to be like 'Make my ideas!' in a weird way or a mean way, but I have to show them the value of the idea that I brought forward, why it's a good idea, how it can help us with points, how we can make it better, how they can add onto it with their own opinions or their own color, structure, texture, stuff like that.

Interviewer: How'd you learn to communicate that?

Participant: Over the years I learned to communicate with that one person I told you about who I've been doing DI for so many years. And I can communicate with her really well and I've been able to transfer it slowly to other people over time. To communicate with them.

Interviewer: That's great! Well, we've talked about a lot of different things, but I wonder if there's anything else that you think is important for me to know about or to keep in mind as I think about what it's like to be a DI participant and how that can impact people?

Participant: DI partially made me who I am. I don't know if I would be this person today if I didn't do DI. I would probably not be this awesome of a dork. I think I'm a pretty awesome dork. Um, so, I'm proud of that. And I've met a lot of great people through DI. And there are a lot of great people at NH DI. I went to Town_M DI and it was not as hyped. Not that people weren't have a good time, it was just not as hyped as NH makes it. NH's awesome.

Interviewer: Well, that about covers the questions that I have. So, unless there are any other final thoughts that you have [No]. Great! Well, thank you so much. It was really helpful.