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## Editorial Introduction: Fostering Holistic Learning Environments

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## **Editorial Introduction: Fostering Holistic Learning Environments**

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As educators, we are continually reminded that our students bring more to the classroom than just their academic potential—they bring their emotions, experiences, and challenges. This edition features a collection of articles that underscore the importance of addressing students’ social, emotional, and academic needs in tandem. Through trauma-informed practices, mindfulness techniques, whole-child approaches, and restorative practices, the authors provide actionable insights into how teachers can create supportive, inclusive environments where all students can thrive. These studies not only highlight the positive impact of these approaches on student behavior and engagement but also stress the importance of teacher resilience and self-care in fostering such communities. Whether it’s building classroom community, integrating movement into lessons, or promoting digital literacy, these articles offer a comprehensive look at how we can cultivate classrooms that are as emotionally supportive as they are intellectually stimulating. I hope this edition inspires you to think more deeply about how we nurture the whole child in our ever-evolving educational landscapes.

The article *Teaching Math to Newcomer Multilingual Learners: The Case for Teaching Diverse Math Practices* by Elena **Andrei** and Melissa **Daley** addresses the challenges and innovations involved in teaching math to newcomer multilingual learners (MLs) in U.S. schools. These students, who have been in the U.S. for less than two years, face the dual challenge of learning English and reaching grade-level academic standards. Mathematics is often considered a universal language, but this assumption overlooks the diverse mathematical practices that MLs bring from their home countries.

Ms. Shelley, a high school Algebra I teacher at a school for newcomers, noticed that her students employed different methods for solving math problems, particularly in long division, which did not always align with the approaches taught in U.S. schools. She documented these diverse practices and incorporated them into her teaching, creating a more inclusive learning environment that respected the students' prior knowledge.

Ms. Shelley introduced four methods for solving equations, including the "Western" method commonly taught in U.S. schools and methods used in countries like Syria and Afghanistan. By offering multiple approaches, she empowered her students to choose the method that worked best for them, thus improving their understanding of mathematical concepts. The article highlights the importance of recognizing and utilizing students' existing math skills to foster a more effective and culturally responsive math education for multilingual learners.

Emily Colwell's study titled *Mindfulness Is When "You Don't Think at All You Just Do Whatever You Want Without Thinking of the Consequences": Reframing Mindfulness in a Third-Grade Classroom* explores the effects of incorporating five minutes of daily mindfulness activities in a third-grade math and science class. Conducted over three weeks, the research aimed to assess changes in student behavior and engagement, as well as their understanding of mindfulness.

Data collection involved pre- and post-surveys, observations, and interviews with both students and the classroom teacher. The findings revealed four main themes: improved understanding of mindfulness, the influence of home and school on students' calming strategies, the calming effect of mindfulness activities, and the consistency of student behavior.

Before the intervention, students had a broad and often inaccurate understanding of mindfulness, as evidenced by one student who thought it meant not thinking. Post-intervention,

students demonstrated a clearer understanding of mindfulness, associating it with calmness and self-awareness. The study also highlighted that while behavior remained consistent, students and the teacher noticed improved concentration immediately after mindfulness activities.

The study concludes that although the intervention did not drastically alter behavior, it provided students with useful calming strategies and a deeper understanding of mindfulness. The author suggests that introducing mindfulness from the start of the school year could yield stronger results and recommends further research on the long-term effects of mindfulness in the classroom.

The study *Movement in Math: Integrating Movement-Based Activities into a Kindergarten Math Classroom* by Katelyn R. **Gonzales** explores the impact of movement-based activities on kindergarten students' engagement and motivation during math lessons. The research was conducted during a year-long clinical teaching placement and aimed to examine how gross motor activities integrated into math lessons influenced student behavior and teacher perceptions.

The study involved 12 kindergarten students, who participated in a series of movement-based activities called "The Math Games," designed to align with specific math content such as addition, graphing, and shape recognition. Each activity was carefully planned to incorporate gross motor movements like throwing, rolling, jumping, and crawling, with a focus on active engagement.

Data was collected through surveys, observations, student artifacts, and interviews with both students and the cooperating teacher. The findings indicated that integrating movement into math lessons improved student engagement, motivation, and confidence. Students expressed

excitement about the movement activities, and the teacher noted that students felt more successful in their learning. Movement helped reduce students' anxiety about math and allowed them to better grasp mathematical concepts.

The study concluded that movement-based learning, while requiring preparation, was highly effective in keeping students engaged and motivated. The researcher suggested that movement activities be incorporated into classroom routines to enhance both academic and social-emotional learning, particularly in early childhood education.

The article *Mindfulness in the Elementary Classroom: In-person and Remote Mindfulness Strategies to Help Alleviate Anxiety* by Gina L. **Solano** and Adriana **Quattrini** focuses on the rise of childhood anxiety and the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) to help students manage stress and anxiety, particularly in a second-grade classroom. The study highlights the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) and mindfulness as tools to enhance students' emotional well-being, both in-person and during remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The curriculum designed for the study was delivered weekly and included mindfulness exercises such as breathwork, yoga, and body scans. Techniques like “rainbow breathing” and “butterfly breathing” were introduced to help students calm their minds and bodies. These exercises were found to be effective in reducing anxiety before tests and during stressful moments in the classroom. The transition to remote learning continued the mindfulness practices through Zoom, providing students with a sense of community and tools to cope with pandemic-related anxiety.

The results from the teacher participants showed that the MBIs were highly successful in promoting calmness, focus, and emotional regulation among students. The study recommends

incorporating mindfulness as part of the daily curriculum in elementary schools, as it helps students manage anxiety and stress, potentially improving long-term mental health. The integration of technology, such as using YouTube videos and virtual assistant Alexa, also enhanced the delivery of mindfulness activities in both in-person and remote settings.

The study titled *The Role of Teacher Education in Improving Digital Literacy: A Pre-Service Teacher Case Study* by Rana **Taheri** and Sarah E. **Pennington** explores how teacher education programs (TEPs) influence pre-service teachers' (PSTs) digital literacy (DL) skills. Conducted at a land grant university in the northwestern U.S., the qualitative case study focused on three PSTs participating in a technology integration course. Through semi-structured interviews, the study assessed the PSTs' perceptions of their DL abilities, challenges, and readiness to implement DL in future classrooms.

The findings revealed four key themes: concerns, challenges, advantages, and future decisions. PSTs expressed concerns about ethical and legal issues, such as copyright, student privacy, and appropriate use of digital tools. They also highlighted challenges like staying updated with constantly evolving technology and ensuring that DL enhances student learning rather than becoming a crutch. Despite these challenges, PSTs recognized the advantages of DL, including its ability to engage students and improve teaching effectiveness.

The study concluded that while PSTs are aware of DL's importance, they lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach it. The authors recommend that TEPs prioritize DL training, providing ongoing support through workshops and curriculum integration. By doing so, PSTs can build the necessary skills and confidence to integrate DL across various content areas and support student learning in an increasingly digital world.

The article *Building Classroom Community Using a Whole-Child Approach* by Jennifer **Wells** explores strategies to foster a positive classroom environment for students who have experienced trauma. The study was conducted in a sixth-grade classroom, where Wells applied the Whole-Child Approach, focusing on students' emotional, social, and behavioral well-being alongside academic learning. The approach, rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emphasizes creating a safe, supportive, and engaged environment where students can thrive.

Wells implemented restorative practices, mindfulness activities, and relationship-building techniques, using community circles and mindful breathing exercises. Data collection involved pre- and post-observation checklists, teacher journaling, and reflection forms to measure the intervention's impact on classroom dynamics.

Results showed that the Whole-Child Approach helped improve student engagement, behavior, and emotional regulation. Students developed stronger social-emotional skills, with community circles fostering a sense of belonging and mindfulness helping students self-regulate. Positive behavioral recognition and the use of restorative practices also contributed to a calmer, more supportive classroom environment.

While the study highlighted the effectiveness of the Whole-Child Approach, it also suggested expanding this intervention to a larger scale—across grade levels or entire schools—could amplify its benefits, particularly for students who continue to experience trauma. The findings demonstrate that focusing on the whole child enhances both student resilience and the overall classroom community.

Finally, Yen Thi **Tran** reviews the book *Research Methods in Education* (8th edition) by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison serves as a comprehensive guide for educational and social researchers. Since its first publication in 1980, it has been widely acclaimed for its detailed

exploration of the research process. Divided into five parts and 45 chapters, the book covers topics such as research design, data collection, methodologies, and data analysis. It offers insights into both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with additional focus on current educational issues. The book's strengths lie in its practical advice, systematic structure, and accessibility, though its length and academic language may challenge beginner researchers.

In conclusion, it is clear that fostering student success goes far beyond academic instruction. The articles presented in this issue highlight the significance of nurturing students' emotional and social well-being through mindful, trauma-informed, and inclusive teaching practices. By integrating these approaches, educators can create classrooms where students feel safe, valued, and engaged—key conditions for thriving both academically and personally. These studies not only reinforce the transformative power of holistic education but also remind us of the essential role teacher resilience plays in sustaining this environment. As educators continue to navigate the complexities of today's educational landscape, it is my hope that these insights will encourage educators to prioritize both student and teacher well-being, and to continue building inclusive, supportive spaces where every learner can flourish.