

Relational and Social Intelligence:
What the Research with a Pre-K Through 4th Grade School Using CosmoKidz
is Telling us About the Development of Social-Emotional Skills in Young Children

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Independence Leadership Academy

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*Our Kids in Crisis: Social Media, the pandemic and vast cultural changes have left a generation
anxious and depressed. And the system designed to support them—and us—is in tatters.*
~Stephen Perrine

The quote by Stephen Perrine is the title of a Special Report from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), September, 2022 News Bulletin. The Special Report that he authored details the research that is being conducted on the state of the emotional health of our young children. The fact that a Special Report about the state of our youngest population in a magazine designed for those of us 50 and older is a testament to the urgency that all of us, and not primarily parents and teachers of school-aged children, need to be aware of and acting mindfully into. The research cited in this report echoes the research from a variety of sources in the United States and abroad. Here is a sample of what you will find if you did a more comprehensive dive into the current crisis...

In a November 9, 2021 Pew Research article, Sharon Hoover, Co-Director of the University Maryland-based National Center for School Mental Health said, “Nearly every child in the Country is suffering some degree from the psychological effects of the pandemic.¹ Months later, in July, 2022, the Children’s Hospital Association’s Associate Chair of Research in Philadelphia, Dr. Jami Young, reported that the data are showing that mental health is getting worse: “Despite the return of in-person school which many people felt would boost kids’ mental health, we’re not seeing declines in depression or suicide”. She suggested stronger support for teacher, student, caregiver relationships.² Dr. Jill Haak Bohenkamp, Assistant Professor at the National Center for School Mental Health, University of Maryland School of Medicine, cited the Center for Disease Control’s research showing a significant increase in

¹ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/11/08/covid-harmed-kids-mental-health-and-schools-are-feeling-it>

² <https://www.childrenshospitals.org/news/childrens-hospitals-today/2022/07/the-pandemics-lasting-effects-on-kids>

violence, mental health problems, and substance abuse alongside a decrease in positive personal connections.³

These troubling signs are not primarily in the United States. For example, a longitudinal study in the United Kingdom funded by the Department of Health in England beginning in 1999 through April of 2020 has found that for children ages 4 to 10, the pandemic lockdown greatly affected the mental health and behavioral issues of these children.⁴ In Denmark, a June, 2022 survey given to 918 kindergarten class leaders indicated that the children entering their classes are less or much less ready (60%) than the children who started five years ago and that 90% of the children lack social skills such as waiting in line, forming friendships, and being considerate of others. Sixty percent of the respondents pointed to social skills as the most important area that parents and daycare centers can focus on to help these children succeed.⁵

The pandemic has exacerbated these problems but they have been long in the making. Generational scholar, Jean Twenge, documents the most recent generation (iGen) as “completely unprepared for adulthood.” She notes, “as social media and texting replace other recreational activities and ways of communicating, iGen’ers spend less time with their friends and loved ones in person—which perhaps explains why they are experiencing unrepresented levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness.”⁶ Clinical psychologist and Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, Sherry Turkle, also documents the loneliness, anxiety, and lack of social skills in children as technology supplants our human connections with each other.⁷ The observations from these scholars and others have been documented long before the pandemic.

The CMM Institute’s development of the conversational activities called CosmoKidz and CosmoTweenz has been our attempt to provide opportunities for adults and children to have meaningful conversations about children’s social worlds. Consistent with so much of the social-emotional literature that focuses on healthy relational connections as a primary source of well-being, CosmoKidz focuses on relational conversations about the issues and worlds that children find themselves in as one way for those children to learn how to be in conversation and in

³ibid

⁴ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/04/early-snapshot-of-pandemics-impact-on-childrens-mental-health/>

⁵ Danish Teacher’s Association 918 Kindergarten class leaders between June 10-21, 2022 surveyed. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/mere-hensynsloese-og-mindre-taalmodige-laerere-efterlyser-sociale-evner-hos-nye-skoleboern><<https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/mere-hensynsloese-og-mindre-taalmodige-laerere-efterlyser-sociale-evner-hos-nye-skoleboern>

⁶ Jean M. Twenge (2017), *iGen: Why today’s super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood*. New York: Atria.

⁷ Sherry Turkle (2011), *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic books.

healthy relationships with their peers. To the extent that children can talk meaningfully with one another and adults about the issues and concerns affecting their worlds, the better able they are to act positively into those situations. What we couldn't have anticipated when we began developing the CosmoKidz and CosmoTweenz conversational activities was a world-wide pandemic that would significantly impact the academic, emotional, and relational lives of children.

From its inception, the CMM Institute has been committed to CosmoKidz as an evidence-based set of activities. Consequently, for the last 8 years, we have conducted research in a number of schools, first in Arizona and subsequently in Louisiana, to determine what differences, if any, the consistent use of CosmoKidz conversations has on the relational and social-emotional development of young children. The first two years focused on kindergarten through second-grade while years three and four added pre-kindergarten classes. The year-after-year results were very encouraging—children were developing relational skills and abilities characterized by increased mindfulness of their social worlds, compassion for others, problem-solving, and agency, to name a few.⁸ What the research also made apparent was a lack of carry-over once these children entered third-grade. Consequently, the CMM Institute developed the next level of conversational activities for third through sixth-grade students called CosmoTweenz (with the help of five CMM Institute teen/young adult Fellows, we are currently developing activities/products for 7th through 12th grade teens). We were also interested in the question, “what happens if an entire school culture is having consistent conversations about the children’s social worlds?” Fortunately, Lisa Matherne, Principal of a pre-kindergarten through fourth-grade school was interested in her school, Independence Leadership Academy (ILA), participating in a longitudinal school-wide research project.

Background Information about Independence Leadership Academy

Independence Leadership Academy is a pre-k through 4th grade school in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana. The school serves approximately 406 students. The demographics of the school are 58% black, 22% Hispanic, and 20% white. Seventy-seven percent are economically disadvantaged with the same percentage receiving free lunch. The school, led through June, 2022 by Principal Lisa Matherne, includes Vice Principal Melanie Johnson, Interventionist/Disciplinarian Veronica Richardson, 22-25 teachers (depending on the year), and 19 pre-k through 4th grade classes.

We began in the Fall of 2019, having no idea of the world-changing events about to occur. We learned quickly into the pandemic that schools would be forced to make unprecedented changes to their instructional delivery, their face-to-face connections with students, and students’ connections with their friends and peers. Through most of the pandemic and lockdown, ILA used CosmoKidz remotely (2020-2021) and during the first and third school year in-person (2019-2020; 2021-2022). This report summarizes data from teacher surveys assessing changes in the students’ relational skills and in the overall school culture during the

⁸ The complete research summaries can be found at <https://cosmokitdz.org/research/>

three years of consistent CosmoKidz/CosmoTweenz conversations throughout the COVID 19 pandemic.

When ILA began using CosmoKidz in the Fall of 2019, the school had been using a school-wide social-emotional and behavioral intervention program that is widely used in schools throughout the United States called PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support). When we began our research using CosmoKidz, we wanted to have a baseline assessment of how well the students were doing with social-emotional and relational skills knowing that the school had been using the PBIS program. Based on teacher observational surveys, we learned that the younger students were more demonstrative in their show of care and compassion but as the children got older, expressions of compassion and kindness diminished. The younger children tended to be quite impulsive and use nonverbal communication much more than their words to convey their thoughts/feelings. They were more likely to cry, grunt, push or hit as a means of communicating. When they did use their words, it was typically in the form of tattling. As the children progressed in age, they were using language more often, but their words tended to be counter-productive; their use of name-calling, for example, was much more frequent and tended to escalate an issue rather than diffuse it. Some of the older children also seemed unable or unwilling to express their thoughts and feelings in words. They struggled to find the language to communicate their wants and needs. This led to aggressive behavior for some of the students—all grades had students pushing and shoving others. Most all of the students, from the youngest to the oldest, acted before thinking. So, although the school was using PBIS, most of the teachers described underdeveloped relational and communication skill sets. This baseline assessment was useful as it provided us with specific categories for teachers to measure changes overtime.

The school disciplinarian, Veronica Richardson, reported that prior to using CosmoKidz teachers would often forget the differences in parenting that existed in households. She often heard a teacher in conversation saying, “these kids should know better.” As teachers engaged their students in CosmoKidz conversations during the first 6 months and just before the pandemic lockdown, Ms. Richardson observed that,

“Instead of complaining, CosmoKidz created a mindful atmosphere of a problem and provided a solution. Because of the program, teachers were given the tools to share conversations with students about conflict in a positive way. These conversations allowed students to apply these techniques when conflict arose. The CosmoKidz program afforded ILA teachers the opportunity to not only prepare students academically but to help students become better citizens through conversations about positive character and core values.”

The pandemic lockdown closed the school in April and May, 2020. Part of our research included data about changes, if any, in school infractions, bus referrals for unruly behavior, suspensions, and PAC (positive action classroom) assignments. Ms. Richardson reported the following: “We experienced an unprecedented end to the 2019-2020 school year due to the

COVID 19 Pandemic. Discipline data for April and May is incomplete or absent. For the first part of the second semester, it seems discipline was improving. We were hopeful that this trend would have continued in April and May.” Although the disciplinary data was incomplete, we did collect data from teachers through the end of the school year. You will find the complete summary of the 2019-2020 research on the CosmoKidz website under the section Evidence-Based.⁹

The second year of the research (2020-2021) was quite challenging for the school as remote education was still in place for the first half of the school year and in-person learning throughout the United States with mandatory face masks and social distancing guidelines hampered a smooth transition back to the classroom. Although the majority of teachers at ILA continued to have consistent conversations using CosmoKidz, we made the decision to halt data collection knowing teachers were stressed and struggling with a lingering pandemic that made their jobs extraordinarily difficult.

We resumed data collection during the 2021-2022 academic year as the school had returned to in-person instruction and the COVID restrictions were more relaxed. The data collected included a base-line survey, three intermittent surveys at the end of each quarter, and an end-of-year survey. The results of the baseline and year-end surveys are summarized below.

Research Data Collection and Results from the 2021-2022 Academic Year: Baseline

We began by asking teachers to rank their top five relational/social-emotional challenges. The top two challenges of “expressing and managing strong emotions” and “taking ownership to help make a situation better” were equally ranked at 67%. “Conflict management” and “listening to the teacher” were the third and fourth challenges at 62% and the fifth choice at 57% was “expressing thoughts and feelings productively.” Many of these challenges were consistent with the first baseline assessment we did in 2019. What we also wanted to know was the percentage teachers observed students handling their relational challenges well. Therefore, the rest of the survey asked teachers to rate the overall relational skill sets of their students using a sliding scale from zero percent to one hundred percent. Using Survey Monkey, teachers were able to choose any percentage on the sliding scale from zero percent (not at all) to 100 percent (always). The top 5 relational challenges and the specific relational questions were revisited throughout the year to see what changes, if any, were occurring. The base-line questions along with the mean responses from all teachers were as follows:

My students are handling conflict well: *mean response 49%*

My students are expressing and managing their strong emotions well: *mean response 51%*

My students are listening to me: *mean response 58%*

⁹ <https://cosmokitdz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ILA-Final-Report-to-Kettering-Foundation2020.pdf>

My students are listening to their peers: *mean response 47%*

My students are expressing their thoughts and feelings productively: *mean response 54%*

My students are helping to create a positive classroom environment: *mean response 56%*

My students are taking ownership to help make a situation better: *mean response 41%*

My students are showing empathy and compassion towards other children: *mean response 56%*

My students are solving problems with others in helpful ways: *mean response 46%*

How often have you heard one or more students referencing CosmoKidz conversations or the importance of being a CosmoKidz: *mean response 37%*

What role do you think CosmoKidz conversations plays in helping your students develop better relational/social-emotional skills and competencies: *mean response 77%*

What role do you think CosmoKidz can play in helping improve your class climate: *mean response 80%*

What connection do you observe between your students' academic performance and their relational/social-emotional skills: *mean response 74%*

Throughout the year the highest percentage of challenges that persisted the most for teachers were “taking ownership to help make a situation better” and “handling conflict productively.” We were curious to learn what kind of progress, if any, students were making in their ability to manage and take ownership of their strong emotions even though teachers continued to rank this as the biggest challenge. We learned from the periodic survey results that for most of the students, and albeit quite slowly, they were making progress in their ways of being with others. Learning these relational skills takes time, especially when systems outside of the school culture are not modeling and reinforcing these skills. Consequently, the process for internalizing these skills and ways of being with others takes practice and takes time.

Year-End Results from the 2021-2022 Academic Year

At the end of the school year in May, 2022, we administered our last survey to assess the observed changes teachers saw in their students and in themselves since the inception of the school year. Given the turnover of a few of the teaching staff, one of the first questions we asked was the length of time teachers had been using CosmoKidz uninterrupted. Forty-six percent (10 teachers) had used CosmoKidz throughout the three years of research; thirty-two percent (7 teachers) used CosmoKidz for two years; eighteen percent (4 teachers) for the last academic year only and 5 percent (1 teacher) for less than six months. Based on this data, we

were not only interested in the overall mean for each question but also comparing the differences in teachers' answers based on the length of time they had been using CosmoKidz (I will say more about these differences later). Consistent with the previous surveys, the final survey questions asked teachers to answer questions based on a sliding scale from zero percent (not at all) to one hundred percent (always) using Survey Monkey. Teachers could place their percentage anywhere on the scale. The mean responses were as follows:

When you think about your students' abilities with conflict management, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn ways to manage conflict better? Mean response: 67%

Did their skills at effective conflict management get better over time? mean response: 66%

When you think about your students' abilities to express and manage their strong emotions, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn positive ways to express and manage their emotions? mean response: 67%

Did their ability to express and manage their strong emotions get better over time? mean response: 68%

When you think about your students' abilities to express thoughts and feelings productively, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn how to express their thoughts and feelings? mean response: 67%

Did their ability to express their thoughts and feelings productively improve over time? mean response: 68%

When you think about your students' abilities to take ownership to help make a situation better, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn how to make a situation better? mean response: 59%

Did their ability to make a situation better improve over time? mean response: 59%

When you think about your students' abilities to solve problems in helpful ways, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them practice problem solving? mean response: 64%

Did their ability to solve problems in helpful ways improve over time? mean response: 64%

When you think about your students' abilities to self-regulate, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn ways to self-regulate? mean response: 60%

Did their ability to self-regulate improve over time? mean response: 60%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to help create a mindset about the importance of treating other people with kindness and respect. How much of a shift in students' mindsets about treating others kindly and respectfully are you seeing? mean response: 70%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to provide ways for teachers to connect more meaningfully with students. To what extent do you feel more connected to your students because of the CosmoKidz conversations you are having using CosmoKidz topics? mean response: 73%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to provide ways for teachers to learn more about how students are experiencing their social worlds. To what extent do you feel you know more about the social worlds of your students because of the conversations you are having using CosmoKidz topics? mean response: 70%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to help change patterns of communication to improve the way people talk and listen to each other. To what extent do you feel you and your students are talking and listening better because of CosmoKidz conversations? mean response: 68%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to also help adults become more aware of our own way of relating with others. To what extent do you feel you are acting more mindfully into your conversations with others (adults and children) since using CosmoKidz? mean response: 72%

A goal of CosmoKidz at ILA is to help create a school culture of more respectful and caring communication towards one another. To what extent do you think CosmoKidz is improving the school culture at ILA? mean response: 68%

How important do you think parental involvement is in reinforcing the social-emotional skills of students that ILA is trying to develop? mean response: 95%

What else about your experience using CosmoKidz would you like us to know about?

- Nothing—7 responses
- The kids are proud to be called CosmoKidz. I would love to offer them cosmokidz paraphernalia
- The children really enjoy doing drawings to go along with our topics
- During the lessons they use the CosmoKidz lessons. However it is not spilling over during the rest of the day
- As we are finishing up the year, I have been talking with the students about CosmoKidz and what they remember. It has had a bigger impact than I had originally thought. The students remember our discussions and remember how they reacted to situations. I guess we go on from one day to the next and it is only when we step back and look at the big picture that we realize what a difference a program has made
- I found it difficult to have a conversation flow. The kids would raise their hand to talk, but I would love for it to be more like natural conversation

- The students really enjoyed the colorful cards and expressing times they experienced the situations on the cards
- The children really seem to like it and enjoy inputting into the conversations with their experiences
- I do my lessons towards the end of the day. By doing this, I feel that the students are not getting much out of it because they are tired and are hard to keep focused. Doing it earlier in the day would work better so students are alert and ready to answer the questions
- CosmoKidz is a very needed program at our school
- I thoroughly enjoy this program and so do the students
- I love CosmoKidz!
- I think it is great. I'm just not sure the little ones quite get the concept of some of the topics
- Topics are well chosen. I think short videos may be more effective for some of the topics. Students seem to engage better with videos of role play
- For my Special Education students, I have to provide choices to drive our conversations after questions are asked because most of my students struggle with communication. Even though they struggle with communicating, they were eager to make their choices
- CosmoKidz provides an outline for teaching SEL (Social Emotional Learning)

This data suggests that positive changes across every measurable category were happening despite the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic and in the midst of the larger cultural crisis that has been occurring for children and youth that the beginning of this summary report has cited.

I was also interested in comparing the responses from teachers who had been using CosmoKidz for the longest and shortest durations. Below are mean comparisons among the ten teachers who had been at ILA for three years, the teacher who had been at ILA less than six-months and the responses from all 22 teachers. I'm also including relevant baseline comparisons for some of the questions:

When you think about your students' abilities with conflict management, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn ways to manage conflict better?

Three Years: 77%

Less than six months: 1%

Overall mean response: 67%

Baseline mean response: 49%

When you think about your students' abilities to express and manage their strong emotions, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn positive ways to express and manage their emotions?

Three Years: 77%

Less than six months: 0%

Overall mean response: 67%
Baseline mean response: 51%

When you think about your students' abilities to express thoughts and feelings productively, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn how to express their thoughts and feelings?

Three Years: 76%
Less than six months: 0%
Overall mean response: 67%
Baseline mean response: 54%

When you think about your students' abilities to take ownership to help make a situation better, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn how to make a situation better?

Three Years: 70%
Less than six months: 1%
Overall mean response: 59%
Baseline mean response: 41%

When you think about your students' abilities to solve problems in helpful ways, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them practice problem solving?

Three Years: 71%
Less than six months: 0%
Overall mean response: 64%
Baseline mean response: 46%

When you think about your students' abilities to self-regulate, to what extent was CosmoKidz useful in helping them learn ways to self-regulate?

Three Years: 72%
Less than six months: 0%
Overall mean response: 60%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to help create a mindset about the importance of treating other people with kindness and respect. How much of a shift in students' mindsets about treating others kindly and respectfully are you seeing?

Three Years: 77%
Less than six months: 0%
Overall mean response: 70%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to provide ways for teachers to connect more meaningfully with students. To what extent do you feel more connected to your students because of the CosmoKidz conversations you are having using CosmoKidz topics?

Three Years: 79%
Less than six months: 0%

Overall mean response: 73%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to provide ways for teachers to learn more about how students are experiencing their social worlds. To what extent do you feel you know more about the social worlds of your students because of the conversations you are having using CosmoKidz topics?

Three Years: 75%

Less than six months: 1%

Overall mean response: 70%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to help change patterns of communication to improve the way people talk and listen to each other. To what extent do you feel you and your students are talking and listening better because of CosmoKidz conversations?

Three Years: 74%

Less than six months: 0%

Overall mean response: 68%

A goal of CosmoKidz is to also help adults become more aware of our own way of relating with others. To what extent do you feel you are acting more mindfully into your conversations with others (adults and children) since using CosmoKidz?

Three Years: 77%

Less than six months: 0%

Overall mean response: 72%

Baseline mean response: 53%

A goal of CosmoKidz at ILA is to help create a school culture of more respectful and caring communication towards one another. To what extent do you think CosmoKidz is improving the school culture at ILA?

Three Years: 73%

Less than six months: 0%

Overall mean response: 68%

The data clearly shows that the CosmoKidz conversations have made a significant difference in the relational and social-emotional development of the children, the increased mindfulness and awareness of the teachers' own communication with their students and adults alike, and the improvement of the overall school culture at ILA. The data also indicate that the mean scores for teachers who have been using CosmoKidz the longest was higher than the mean averages in every category we measured.

The goal of this research was to study the effects overtime on the entire school culture of ILA as the children and teachers continued to have brief but daily/almost daily conversations about the children's social worlds using CosmoKidz and CosmoTweenz. We were interested in seeing how the children's relational and social-emotional intelligence developed over time beginning in pre-k and ending when the students graduated from 4th grade. Unfortunately, our hopes for six years ended in three when the school district moved several school administrators to new

schools. Principal Lisa Matherne was one of them. The District also decided to implement a new SEL program Districtwide called, *The Leader in Me*, based on the work of educator Stephen Covey and his popular and successful book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*. We wish the new Principal and the entire School District well knowing we are all committed to the health and well-being of children.

Lessons Learned from the Last Eight Years

The end of the research at ILA has concluded the research that the CMM Institute began in 2014. We believe we have gathered sufficient data to be in a position to say some things about CosmoKidz/CosmoTweenz. The eight years of researching CosmoKidz have occurred in a variety of contexts: in a school in which some kindergarten through second-grade classes used CosmoKidz while others did not, for purposes of comparison; in three schools by adding pre-school children as well as Special Education classes to better understand the applicability of CosmoKidz conversations to their lived experiences; and, in one school to see the differences CosmoKidz makes for an entire school culture. The one constant among each of the schools we worked in was the socio-economic challenges they faced—a majority of students in all of the schools lived close to or below the poverty level with many families struggling with food insecurity and difficult home situations. Consequently, the children in our research had multiple factors in their life that worked against relational, social and material health and well-being. With this as contextual information, here are some of our most important lessons learned:

1. CosmoKidz works. In other words, children developed better relational and social skills because of a “normalizing” way to connect with their peers. They learned how open-ended questions open up a conversation; that some questions invite exploration of our own thoughts and feelings, other questions invite us to imagine how other people might feel, and yet other questions are invitations to explore the relationship. They learned that questions and conversation invite curiosity—that we learn about other people and their experiences and discover similarities and differences (we are not all the same). They learned to listen, and they developed empathy and a deeper level of care for one another as they learned more about their peers. And, as Ms. Richardson said after the first several months of using CosmoKidz at ILA, they learned “to become better citizens through conversations about positive character and core values.” They learned this through the conversational nature of engaging and reflecting together rather than “being told” by the adults what kind of behavior is appropriate or inappropriate.

2. When given the chance, most children love talking about their social worlds. Almost all of the conversational topics in CosmoKidz and CosmoTweenz have come from children themselves. What we learned throughout the process of developing the CosmoKidz activities is how much the children appreciate the chance to talk with adults and each other about their worlds of sharing and teasing and making new friends, etc. They found “talking things out” helpful and they reported how much fun they had throughout the process. We heard over and over from teachers how much their students “love CosmoKidz.”

3. CosmoKidz affects adults and not just children. We were struck by the self-report of teachers who said that the CosmoKidz conversations they were having with their students carried over into their adult relationships as well. We think that the “normalizing” of the relational skills that CosmoKidz invites, affects how we approach other relationships. The data from ILA suggests that the longer a teacher used CosmoKidz, the bigger affect it had on how mindfully they engaged with others (adults and children) in their lives.

4. If used over time and with consistency, CosmoKidz affects an entire social system. Again, we were struck by the self-report that the overall school culture of ILA began to shift as the entire school embraced the relational skills that CosmoKidz conversations were inculcating. The longer the teachers had been using CosmoKidz, the higher their assessment of the positive culture-wide changes occurring.

5. The relational skills that CosmoKidz teaches through embodied conversation are very different than the cultural norms. We are aware that our larger culture is much more polarized and adversarial, especially when it comes to differences and that children, like the rest of us but perhaps even more so, are influenced by the cultures they live in. Consequently, we think that it is important for parents, caregivers, and adults in general to learn these skills. Two of the schools who participated in our research also had a component to involve parents; we had a number of “parent and pizza” nights to involve families in CosmoKidz activities. We found that, although many parents did not attend these events, many parents did attend. Having a meal together and celebrating the relational skills that their children were learning helped to create a positive bridge between school and home and helped to reinforce conversations about the children’s social worlds at home and not just in the classroom.

6. Little to no training is necessary for adults to use CosmoKidz. The first two years of the research did not involve training. Instead, we introduced ways to use CosmoKidz but also encouraged the teachers to experiment and to add their own twists for how to creatively engage children in productive ways of exploring their social worlds. This led to new creations that none of the developers of CosmoKidz had thought of (children’s puppets and puppet shows; after school activities that the children developed; class assignments that the students decided on, etc.). We did offer training in other schools, but all of the training was teacher led. In both instances, the use of CosmoKidz led to positive changes in the social-emotional development of children.

7. CosmoKidz conversations need time and practice for deeper change to happen. As a culture, we have grown accustomed to patterns of relating that are more reactive than mindful, more adversarial than open and curious, and more interested in “getting our point across” and winning an argument than in building a relational mindset. Learning a different way of being in relationship with others takes time and practice. If we don’t mindfully work to create opportunities for children to learn these skills and ways of being, they will not learn them. We have learned over time that if there isn’t the desire by school administrators and/or faculty to practice these relational skills with their children, it won’t happen. One of the comments we

received from teachers, especially early on is, “I have so many responsibilities and curricular obligations that I don’t have time to have these kinds of conversations with my students.” What the teachers hadn’t learned yet was how to braid conversations into what is happening throughout the day and how to think about all of the conversations that are happening as opportunities to model and practice a different way of being in relationship with each other. When that shift began to happen, teachers reported needing to spend less time on behavioral issues and were able to spend more time on academics. What the teachers who have been using CosmoKidz the longest have taught us (some of them for eight years) is that the more they integrate this mindset into their day, the more their way of being with everyone (adults and children alike) positively changes.

I would like to thank all of the teachers, administrators, and schools who have participated over the years in this research with a special thank you to ILA for the entire school culture participating in an effort to better understand what culture-wide changes occur when the entire school commits to ongoing conversations about the social worlds of their students. I also want to thank the Kettering Foundation for partnering with the CMM Institute in this research, the Louisiana Children’s Trust Fund in helping to fund the research in Louisiana, and to Kent and Carole Sue Tiernan for their early and ongoing support of CosmoKidz in general and the research in Louisiana in particular.