

GET BACK TO GREEN

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Understanding and improving education on the process of emotion regulation for children ages 5 to 7.

INTRODUCTION:

In the state of Ohio, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a required part of education in public schools. Emotion regulation is an essential component of the Common Core State Standard and refers to the ability of an individual to modulate an emotion, or set of emotions, effectively.

Early in life, this process involves teaching children:

- 1 How to identify their emotions
- 2 Recognizing what triggers the emotions
- 3 How to manage those emotions independently

It is imperative for young children to learn how to manage their emotions in order to achieve academic success, build positive and healthy relationships, and maintain overall mental well-being.

PURPOSE:

This research aims to investigate potential design opportunities that can facilitate both effective and engaging education of emotion regulation to first and second grade students.

The ultimate objective is to identify innovative and practical methods that can be implemented in educational settings to enable young children to better understand and manage their emotions.

RESEARCH METHODS:

Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with three first and second-grade teachers to identify the challenges they face in teaching emotion regulation to young students.

A Co-Design Workshop was held with a focus group of fifteen first-grade students to understand how they currently processed their own emotions if they did so at all.

FINDINGS:

The Perspective of Educators:

One resource that is available to teachers is a series of posters that use the concept of “color zones” and to help the children to identify different emotions they are feeling. These posters share coping mechanisms that students can use to process different emotions (or to return to the “green zone”, i.e., the desired comfortable emotional state.).

There is a designated space in the classroom referred to as a “calm-down corner”. This area has tools that are supposed to help students work through big feelings. The current “tools” however, mainly consist of fidget toys that have proven to often be a distraction in the classroom rather than educational.

1 There is currently a lack of resources for educating young students on emotion regulation.

2 There is a gap in teaching students how to properly exercise coping mechanisms.

3 The current coping tools available for students in class can be distracting.

The Perspective of Students:

This activity consisted of a drawing workshop where students illustrated examples of what makes them feel sad, mad, and excited. They then would illustrate ways they could process that emotion and return back to the “green zone”.

1 Young students could easily identify their emotions, but had difficulty deciding how to process them in a healthy way.

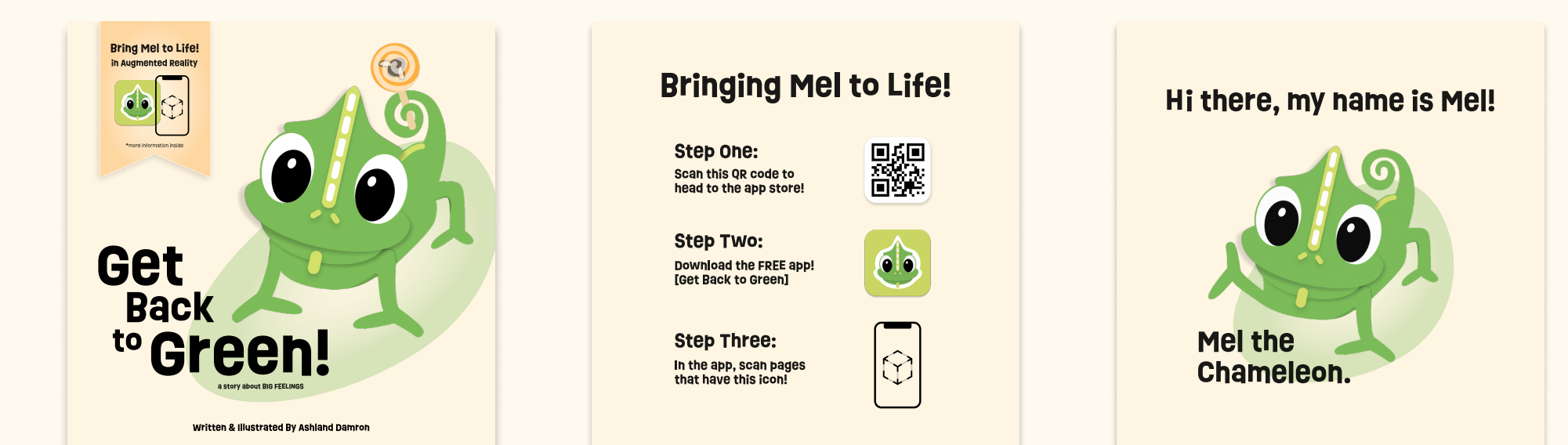
2 The primary coping mechanism used by the students was distraction, as evidenced by their depictions of toys, games, and cell phones.

While distraction can be an effective emotion regulation practice, there are many other healthy coping mechanisms that can be utilized. Some of these include deep breathing practices, redirecting negative thoughts, and using exercise as an emotion regulation tool.

SOLUTION:

The proposed solution that was derived from this research was to create an interactive storybook that aims to educate young children on emotion regulation, while also equipping them with a set of tools to navigate and process intense emotions.

“Get Back to Green” is a tool that can be used in a classroom setting, or at home, to assist young students in practicing healthy coping mechanisms.



The story and illustrations in the children’s book follow a chameleon as he faces several big feelings throughout his day. When he faces those emotions he changes to the color that corresponds with the color posters students are learning in class.

The goal for Mel the Chameleon is to Get Back to Green, or a state of feeling calm, happy, and focused. To do so, he practices three different coping mechanism exercises; happy thoughts, deep breathing, and exercise.

These coping mechanism illustrations are then brought to life through the use of augmented reality. Using a phone or tablet a reader can use the webAR experience to layer animations of the coping mechanisms on top of their storybook. This allows the young students to practice the coping mechanism exercises along with Mel.

FUTURE RESEARCH:

After completing the development of the digital version and WebAR activation for “Get Back to Green”, I plan to return to the classroom where I performed my co-design research.

I will be conducting **usability testing** with the same group of students to evaluate the effectiveness of the material for the children. I will also collaborate with the classroom teachers to assess the usability of the digital platform and its efficacy.

The validation results will be used to identify areas that require improvement before the storybook is released for publication.