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Article

Psychosocial Outcomes from Self-Directed Learning in Public Education Settings

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Abstract: Self-directed learning in different public education settings can produce positive psychosocial outcomes if learners accept their own and others' right to self-direct their learning regarding what they value in a community that demonstrates team mindfulness. Successful self-directed learning is possible at diverse academic levels and in various public education settings. The evidence is that the author co-founded three such educational initiatives. The author assesses the total works published since 2020 regarding these initiatives using narrative analysis. One result of this investigation is that for these initiatives to succeed online, a participant-trusted facilitator who takes on the role of an authentic leader is necessary. Lacking such a facilitator, participants may achieve positive psychological outcomes, but they will not realize the positive sociological outcomes from a well-functioning group decision-making method based on consensus decision-making available to self-directed learners. Achieving positive sociological outcomes has been found challenging in public educational settings. However, these outcomes are possible when a group has a common self-directed learning goal. Offered are suggestions to achieve positive psychosocial outcomes with self-directed learning in public education.

Keywords: self-directed learning; psychosocial outcomes; public education; team mindfulness; educational initiatives; narrative analysis; facilitator; authentic leader; consensus decision-making

1. Introduction

"Psychosocial" is a complex, difficult to disentangle, and discipline-dependent term (Peter et al. 2022). Prominent researchers have considered the relationship between the psyche and the social to be a continuum (Martikainen, Bartley, and Lahelma 2002; Engel 1981). Others, however, have evaluated this understanding as too linear (Sulmasy 2002; Borrell-Carrio 2004). The view presented by this author is that psychosocial implications are divisible into those that are individual-focused and those that involve others as team members. In this regard, team mindfulness—a shared belief by team members that their interactions involve non-judgmental awareness and attention in processing team-related experiences (X. Liu et al. 2022; Yu and Zellmer-Bruhn 2018)—differentiated from the present awareness and non-judgmental processing of mindfulness in individuals (X. Liu et al. 2022; Kabat-Zinn 2015), is a significant distinction (S. Liu et al. 2020).

Self-directed learning is the ability to learn independently (Knowles 1975). It is learning initiated by the learner based on personally held values (Gamage, Dehideniya, and Ekanayake 2021) and contrasted to standardized learning directed by a government-approved predesigned curriculum (Polikoff 2021). Self-directed learning is commonly associated with adult education (Loeng 2018; Knowles 1978) as the need for self-directed learning remains unrecognized by most young people (Loeng 2020), resulting from the universal support by society and parents (Nash 2023a) for standardized schooling (Kucirkova 2021). The expectations of standardized learning often result in depression and anxiety in learners (Deng et al. 2022; Ojo et al. 2023), which is recognized as a serious mental health problem (Mirza et al. 2021; Tomaszek and Muchacka-Cymerman 2022). The World Health Organization defines depression as a loss of pleasure or interest in activities for significant

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periods, leaving the person feeling sad, irritable, and empty (World Health Organization 2023b), while anxiety is intense and excessive fear and worry (World Health Organization 2023c).

Although deemed essential in adults to avoid intellectual obsolescence (Houle 1984), self-directed learning for young people is attainable only when they know what they value, and this personal awareness guides their learning (Wood and Ristow 2024). For adults and young people, self-directed learning is enhanced in supportive communities, leading to lifelong learning (Broek et al. 2024). Yet, the expectation is that self-directed learning is solitary (Murniati, Hartono, and Cahyo Nugroho 2023; Voskamp, Kuiper, and Volman 2022), so communities of self-directed learners are seldom available (Chou et al. 2023). Much of the peer-reviewed research on self-directed learning is decades old (Towle and Cottrell 1996; Wilcox 1996; Barrows 1983; Brookfield 1993; Candy 1989), with the emphasis on newer research limited to the professions (Taylor et al. 2023; Curran et al. 2019; Jeong et al. 2018; Lee, Kim, and Chae 2020; Slater and Cusick 2017; Slater, Cusick, and Louie 2017). Of these publications, the psychosocial effects of self-directed learning comparing solitary to group arrangements for secondary and post-secondary settings is not a focus. In this regard, discussing the work by this author is unique in investigating the effect of self-directed learning on groups of young people and adults concerning the psychosocial implications.

The aim of the investigation is to provide the range of information that has been published regarding this author's created public education self-directed opportunities at the secondary and post-secondary levels for promoting positive psychosocial outcomes. The intention is to reveal the necessary ingredients to develop such programs in public settings and specify the difficulties, providing directions for future research.

2. Materials and Methods

The materials for this investigation are the publications by this author regarding three public education opportunities created by the author for self-directed learners in public education settings. Narrative inquiry is the method of analysis for these works (Weiss and Johnson-Koenke 2023). It interprets the details of the author's written documents, going beyond a text description to analyze content and structure by contextualizing their meaning in social and historical terms (Josselson and Hammack 2021). The three public education opportunities are Alpha II Alternative School, the Health Narratives Research Group (HeNReG), and the Health Narratives Research Process (HeNReP).

Alpha II Alternative School is a senior elementary and secondary public school with the Toronto District School Board developed over the 2006-7 academic year as a self-directed learning environment for young people co-founded by the author. There are no grades, tests, curriculum, or diplomas. Young people self-direct their learning based on what they value personally. Those interested in post-secondary education apply either as homeschoolers or, after 21, as mature students. The author was among the parents who worked with the Board to create the school and is the only co-founder remaining associated with the school. Open since September 2007, the school continues to thrive in the public setting (Toronto District School Board 2024).

The HeNReG is an author-created offering developed along with the Hannah Chair in the History of Medicine through the Health Arts and Humanities Program based at the Toronto Mount Sinai Hospital that began in the fall of 2015 (Nash 2025). Researchers (from undergraduate students to professors emeriti) who self-identify as burned out decide to join the group once they become aware of it. Prompted by a series of research-related questions developed by the author, participants write stream of consciousness (Coppola et al. 2022; Pollio 2013)—accessing what they value most regarding their thoughts, feelings, moods, and expectations (Aziz 2022) of themselves as researchers. As a result of COVID-19 limitations, the in-person group moved online in March 2020 (Gertler 2020) and continued in that manner until the end of the pandemic, May 2023 (World Health Organization 2023a), when the group evolved to a one-on-one process based on what was considered by the author to be the preferred participant involvement.

Since 2023, the one-on-one process offered online to those health researchers who self-identify as experiencing burnout is the HeNReP. The author developed this process similar to the in-person

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HeNReG, except the writing prompts are provided by the facilitator and answered by the participant online when it suits the participant to engage rather than based on a pre-determined group schedule.

Regarding the psychosocial outcomes of students enrolled in the Alpha II program, there are two publications (Nash 2024b; 2020a), with the 2020 publication additionally discussing outcomes for HeNReG participants while the meeting was in person. Publications that began with the onset of COVID-19 (when the group was forced to move online) on the psychosocial results are several (Nash 2020b; 2021c; 2021b; 2021a; 2022; 2023b). There is one publication concerning the HeNReP (Nash 2024c). The examination concerns the psychosocial outcomes of self-directed learners and others who are not self-directed learners in different public education settings regarding each of these publications.

3. Results

The results are divided into a narrative analysis of the publications about each of the three forms of self-directed learning opportunities in public education settings for which the author is a founder.

3.1. Alpha II Alternative Publications

The 2020 publication on Alpha II (Nash 2020a) differentiates the types of young people who have historically attended and remain enrolled at the school. The identification is of three kinds of learners—self-expressive, self-absorbed, and self-directed. Self-expressive learners direct their actions by their interest in having momentary enjoyment rather than what they value in their learning. The self-absorbed are learners dedicated to what they currently study. They do not consider how their current interest relates to what they value as learners. Self-directed learners are the third type of learner who enrolls in the school. They alone are directing their learning based on what they value.

Reconsidering these three types of students in the current study from the perspective of psychosocial outcomes produces a novel finding. One of the questions asked in the 2020 publication was why self-expressive and self-absorbed learners would be interested in enrolling at Alpha II if they are not self-directed. The answer at the time concerned Alpha II being the preferred option to schools demanding standardized learning. Although this conclusion remains, if considered regarding psychosocial outcomes—and accepting that these outcomes are productively divisible into individual and group aspects—learners who enroll at Alpha II who demonstrate being self-expressive or self-absorbed rather than self-directed are primarily intent on creating a positive psychological outcome for themselves and the social outcome they seek is not related to learning at Alpha II.

The self-expressive learner is interested in positive social outcomes but not those regarding their learning. Their positive social outcome concerns daily enjoyment with others at the school. Alpha II is ideal for such outcomes by permitting young people to determine what they do throughout the day. For the self-absorbed, they are interested in a positive social outcome regarding learning, but not one that is school-related. Instead, these positive social outcomes concern those engaging with them in the same activities—either at off-school in-person meetings or, more frequently, online.

In now identifying that both the self-expressive and self-absorbed learners at Alpha II are gaining only positive psychological outcomes regarding their learning at the school, the point also is that, in contrast, self-directed learners have both positive psychological and positive social outcomes regarding their learning activities. In recognizing this, the differences in how the three types of learners at Alpha II interact in the school-wide meetings to make decisions that affect the school are relevant.

3.1.1. Community Meetings

The 2020 publication (Nash 2020a) notes the problems arising at these community meetings. The 2024 (Nash 2024b) article focuses on the method of group-wide decision-making. With the primary

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aim of Alpha II being that each person has the support to self-direct their learning, a decision-making practice was necessary that incorporates each person's point of view into the final decision. Enacted when founding the school with the Toronto District School Board was a form of consensus decision-making (Seeds for Change 2020) to permit this. The form is that each person provides their viewpoint for every matter discussed. If a person does not want to participate in discussing a particular issue, they pass. The discussion continues until there is a presentation of all points of view and the proposed solution is acceptable to everyone. This process is often time-consuming and, as a result, has been resisted by those learners who are not interested in the self-direction of others at the school—that is, the self-expressive and the self-absorbed.

The resulting animosity of those who are not self-directed at the school towards this method of decision-making led to considering whether other non-education-related groups supporting self-direction have devised successful methods of decision-making that promote positive social outcomes. The identification was the decision-making methods of two groups—Stray Kids, a Korean popular (K-Pop) group, and Autscape, a yearly conference for autistic individuals held in England.

Relate in (Nash 2024b): in 2017, the 20-year-old leader of the K-pop group Stray Kids hand-picked each of the then eight other members (seven since October 2019) under JYP Entertainment. Since then, they have agreed on their goals as a group—so much so that, unusual in K-Pop, they have signed on for an additional seven years with JYPE. They became of interest because of their usual decision-making method—using rock, paper, scissors to decide on group-wide, non-music-related matters to which there might be disagreement. Using this type of consensus decision-making method at Alpha II would mean that for any group-wide matter that did not involve what the learner personally valued concerning self-directing their learning, they could use rock, paper, scissors to settle the matter. Nevertheless, using rock, paper, scissors (yet to be tried at Alpha II) might not be a successful solution for learners at the school because, unlike Stray Kids, these learners do not hold one vision in common for their learning.

At the Autscape conference held yearly in England for individuals on the autistic spectrum (Nash 2024b), socializing decisions are made by each person choosing a badge at the beginning of the event. The badges are different colors. Attendees who do not want to interact with others select to wear a red badge. Those who would like to interact if they give their permission choose to wear a yellow badge. A participant who wants to interact with others but requires help initiating conversations wears the green badge. The person selecting a white badge or who does not wear one identifies that interactions are unproblematic for them. During an Alpha II school-wide community meeting at the end of 2024, there was a discussion regarding using the Autscape system. Alpha II members might try this method so that those recognized as self-absorbed can determine how they want to participate in the community meetings (or generally during the school day). However, a solution for the self-expressive learner is not provided in adopting this method since they have no difficulties expressing what they want to communicate. Their problem at the meetings is not wanting to participate if the meeting is not enjoyable. In this regard, employing rock, paper, scissors might better fit these young people.

3.1.2. Psychosocial Outcomes

Identified here is that there are positive psychosocial outcomes possible at Alpha II if the young person is a self-directed learner. Self-expressive or self-absorbed learners have positive psychological outcomes regarding their learning at Alpha II but not positive social outcomes concerning their learning. Instead, their positive social outcomes come from interpersonal enjoyment at Alpha II if they are self-expressive, or these outcomes emerge outside the school with the self-absorbed learners. A final type of learner who attends Alpha II but is not likely to stay has negative psychosocial outcomes for their learning. This type of learner comes to Alpha II not because they are self-directed but because they or their parents consider all other schooling inappropriate for the young person. These young people have been unable to meet the demands of standardized learning, but both they and their parents still believe that standardized learning is the only acceptable form of education. As

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such, they remain depressed and anxious while at Alpha II because they cannot accept the value of self-directed learning. In concentrating on self-directed learners, Alpha II has developed an extensive input protocol (Toronto District School Board 2023) to ensure that young people do not exit with negative psychosocial outcomes.

3.2. HeNReG Publications

There is publication of more articles regarding the results of the HeNReG compared with Alpha II, although Alpha II is the older of the two educational offerings because reporting on research results is not a requirement of the school's design. In contrast, yearly historical reporting was an aspect of the HeNReG through the Department of Psychiatry in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine.

3.2.1. Pre-COVID-19

The first report on the HeNReG is the same publication that initially discusses Alpha II. It was published in 2020 but written pre-COVID-19 (Nash 2020a). From 2015 to 2020, the group was a weekly, in-person, two-hour meeting in which participants who self-identified as burned out regarding their research related to health responded to a series of writing prompts created by the author (as the facilitator) regarding their research experience. The participants would write stream of consciousness (Coppola et al. 2022; Pollio 2013) for five minutes. Once time was up, each would share out loud with the group what they wrote, and, one by one, the participants would ask a follow-up question to the response, starting with the same word of the week as the prompt.

The word of the week followed a pattern of questions beginning with when, where, who, what, how, and why, in that order. These questions presented prompts beginning with the most objective questions—"when"—and, over the series of weeks, they evolved to the most subjective questions—"why". There were twenty-eight sessions, with four weeks devoted to each of the when, where, who, and what questions, five weeks to how questions, and six weeks to why questions. There were additional weeks once the questions became more subjective, as accessing the subjective reasons the researchers felt depression and anxiety related to their research in being burned out was the ultimate purpose of the endeavor. An aspect of the group initiated by one of the participants in 2018 was the encouragement of group-wide doodling at the meetings. When participants were waiting their turn to read what they wrote or ask another participant questions, if they chose, they would doodle. Most participants chose to engage in doodling because there was a provision of attractive artist materials and paper for their work by the author (as facilitator).

Unlike Alpha II, where people might attend the school for reasons other than being self-directed in their learning, those who chose to engage in the in-person HeNReG during the first five years of its operation presented themselves as committed to self-directing their learning and coming to know about the self-directed learning process of the other members of the group. As such, those who participated consistently over the twenty-eight weeks had positive psychosocial outcomes, reducing their depression and anxiety related to work—outcomes evident from the written feedback they provided twice an academic year (Nash 2020a).

3.2.2. March–April 2020

As a result of the lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020, the HeNReG became an entirely online group, meeting weekly on the Facebook app created yearly to record group member responses. In-person members were met with changes to the meetings (Nash 2020b). Prompts would be sent to the group members by Messenger the day before the meeting. Then, as the facilitator, the author would go online each week for two hours to the private Facebook group set up for the HeNReG at the same time the in-person meeting had been held pre-COVID-19 and type in all the responses received by Messenger to the weekly writing prompt. The organization of responses regarded the participant names in the private Facebook group. The substantial difference from the in-person meeting was that, rather than all participants providing questions to each other once their

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reply to the prompt appeared online, the only questions reliably posed were from the facilitator. Other group members might choose to type a question or not.

The hypothesis was that using the private Facebook group, in contrast to the in-person meetings at the hospital, would do little to disrupt the group function because the feedback from participants was that the HeNReG served a vital, enjoyable, personally revealing function that was social and intellectually stimulating. As anticipated, the group participation continued to be high until the end of the academic year, six weeks after the start of the lockdown. Unexpectedly, most participants who joined the two-hour weekly online meeting in the private Facebook group did not provide questions to all those at the meeting as they would have in person. Instead, they selected only a few people to whom they posed questions. Furthermore, the expectation was that those involved in this synchronous format would each provide their doodles or drawings at the end of the meeting, as doodling continued to be encouraged online. Instead, a 50% participation rate in doodle submission at the end of the two-hour meeting was the norm. It was unclear whether the change in doodle participation was because the group members did not see others creating, as they would have at the in-person meeting, because of the uncertainty regarding the pandemic, a lack of drawing materials, or other reasons.

3.2.3. The 2020/21 Academic Year

The next academic year for the HeNReG began in October 2020. Meetings at the hospital remained prohibited as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Thus, a new private Facebook group for the year was the site of the online weekly two-hour meetings. Researchers joined the group with the same commitment to engaging in and completing the process as pre-COVID-19. However, there was diminished participation by the group members from the year before in attending the full two-hour meetings, both in the questions asked to participants and the doodles posted to the group at the end of the meeting. Given that those who participated did so because they felt burned out as healthcare researchers during the unsettling period of the continuing pandemic, some could not contribute as they might have wanted because they reported they had limited energy to invest. The details of this academic year, compared with all the previous years of the group from its beginning in 2015, are presented in (Nash 2021b). The change in the doodling of the group members for the 2020/21 academic year is the focus of (Nash 2021c).

The results were unexpected regarding the psychosocial outcomes of the group for the first full year of meeting online only because of COVID-19 limitations. From their twice-yearly feedback responses analyzed in (Nash 2021b), participants considered that they were self-directing their participation in the group and had a positive psychological and sociological outcome. However, their online behavior demonstrated otherwise. The participants were either self-expressive or self-absorbed over the 2020/21 academic year, similar to those who might enroll at Alpha II. Those who were self-expressive joined the meeting to have a break from their burnout, but they participated only as long as it was enjoyable to do so. Sometimes, they would attend the two-hour meeting for only ten minutes to respond to the prompts provided by the facilitator. What they did not do was ask questions of others or answer the rare questions that others posed to them. Those who can be described as self-absorbed attended the meetings rarely and looked to see what had happened once the meeting was over—often, immediately after the end. These participants would then respond to the prompts when and if they chose. What is surprising from their feedback responses, recorded in (Nash 2021b), is that the self-expressive and the self-absorbed did not recognize that they were not participating in the group in the manner intended.

Noted in (Nash 2021b), the team mindfulness evident pre-COVID-19 was lacking in the HeNReG over the first full year of online meetings. Pre-COVID-19 research indicates that moving online is sufficient to demonstrate a lack of team mindfulness (Curtis, Dennis, and McNamara 2017), yet team mindfulness remains a significant ingredient in reducing burnout found in groups (Klatt et al. 2022). Once the group meetings were entirely online, the group focus became answering the prompts that the facilitator would post. In this regard, the previous equal participation of group members was no

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longer a group feature. When participation is unequal, group trust and cooperation are diminished (Germain 2022; Cozzolino 2011), and group members are less likely to participate (Ni, Zheng, and Liang 2022). The result is that although group members believed the online HeNReG was effective in reducing their research-related burnout, the lack of team mindfulness in the group may have been instrumental in the increase in non-research-related depression and anxiety reported by some group members that was evident in the change in their doodling behavior. A detailed examination of this result is in (Nash 2021d). After the facilitator no longer provided the intriguing art materials to participants as when the group met in person, HeNReG members had less desire to doodle (Nash 2021c).

A question from the results of the 2020/21 academic year is why some participants developed increased depression and anxiety resulting from non-research-related matters over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic while others participating in the HeNReG did not. Those who did not see an increase in their depression and anxiety were considered to express hopeful resilience. Resilience alone is a process of effectively adapting to significant sources of stress of trauma, supporting recovery from adversity (Bozdağ and Ergün 2021; Windle 2011). However, while resilience permits the person to return to a previous level of interaction pre-COVID-19 (Grant and Kinman 2013), necessary for the self-directed learner member of the HeNReG during the pandemic was to develop a new and more satisfying adaptive perspective to their work as a researcher referred to as "hopeful resilience" (Nash 2022). Those participants who remained with the group during the entire 28 weeks of the offering, demonstrating team mindfulness in their online participation, were those who had this hopeful resilience. In effect, their psychosocial outcome represented that of self-directed learners.

3.2.4. The 2021/22 Academic Year

By the second academic year of the pandemic, the HeNReG remained an online-only group meeting. As reported in a 2023 publication (Nash 2023b), team mindfulness was compromised further in the second year. In contrast to the pre-COVID-19 period, group members were less inclined to participate in the intended manner of the group—both regarding questing-asking and the creation of doodles. Again, similar to the first year of the online-only HeNReG meetings, participants were not directly aware of their lack of demonstrating team mindfulness as evidenced by their feedback responses. In that publication, consideration was given to why members continued to think that they were participating in the group as intended and that it was helping their burnout, by referring to two features of the group—a diversity of membership and the group using a continuous feedback model. These stated points making the group uniquely attractive to members remain regarding the HeNReG. However, a more substantial reason for this lack of team mindfulness and recognition by participants is that participants must be self-directed learners to demonstrate positive social outcomes in combination with positive psychological outcomes. From the feedback outlined in (Nash 2023b), the most likely interpretation is that participants were either self-expressive in their learning or self-absorbed learners. Unfortunately, there were those participants who felt guilty about not participating. As such, they did not accept the value of self-directing their learning. To this extent, they lacked positive social outcomes and did not achieve positive psychological outcomes. In this way, they were similar to the young people who enroll at and then leave Alpha II who remain committed to standardized learning and can't accept the value of self-direction.

Sustained was the relationship each participant had with the author as the facilitator. In (Nash 2022), this outcome was considered "authentic leadership", defined as a type of leadership able to influence a group to achieve a common goal (Gardner et al. 2021). Recognized as possible to undertake by self-aware individuals, authentic leadership has been found particularly well-suited for healthcare settings connected with the development of resilience (Anwar, Abid, and Waqas 2019). The finding was that, for the in-person HeNReG, the idea of an authentic leader doesn't correspond because of the egalitarian group construction. However, once the group moved online because of COVID-19, the egalitarian feature of the HeNReG became less evident. Instead, participants viewed the online interactions assuming the facilitator was the leader while, at the same time, accepting the

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author as such because they desired the group to have the common goal defined by following the HeNReG process. Given that participants viewed the facilitator as an authentic leader and the HeNReG feature that continued successfully online was the trusting relationship each group member had individually with the facilitator, the decision was made to continue this offering, intended to help reduce burnout in health researchers, beginning the 2022/23 academic year as a one-on-one online meeting between a health researcher and the facilitator. It was then renamed and restructured as the HeNReP (Nash 2023b).

3.3. The HeNReP

The HeNReG evolved to the HeNReP because of the facilitator interpreting that during an online-only group meeting, researchers self-identifying as burned out who selected to join preferred to interact with the author alone as the facilitator based on the way participants interacted with the group in the previous years when the group was only online. In (Nash 2024c), the following is noted regarding holding these one-on-one online groups. Completing the process as a HeNReP rather than HeNReG remained unique in reenergizing the research careers of participants. However, choosing this burnout reduction method is not equivalent to participant completion. When participants demonstrate a high level of depression or anxiety, confusion in using the online platform, perceived work overload, or there is a wait time for the start-up of the process, these negatively affect the completion of the online one-on-one intervention by participants. In this regard, participants may express feelings of guilt or shame in their feedback for not being able to complete the process, adding to their negative mental health symptoms related to burnout. The implication is that HeNReP completion is not guaranteed but leads to success in reducing burnout, according to the feedback provided by participants. For burned-out researchers to complete the intervention, their depression and anxiety must be stable, confusion overcome, the process should begin immediately, and participants consider their work level manageable. These results led to the conclusion that a revision to the information participants receive about the process for joining a HeNReP should include a statement that participants may not complete the process under certain adverse conditions while assuring them that shame or guilt is unnecessary if this occurs.

Evolving the HeNReG to the HeNReP regarding psychosocial outcomes accomplished two things. The first: those describable as self-expressive or self-absorbed did not participate in HeNRePs. Researchers who self-directed to participate and did so with the level of commitment that permitted them to complete the process diminished their burnout, producing positive psychosocial outcomes. The second result was, in having no perceived outlet for either self-expressive or self-absorbed participation as was possible with the HeNReG, a higher percentage of participants in the HeNReP than with the HeNReG were left with an inability to participate if they could not self-direct their learning. These researchers started but had various reasons for leaving the process. What identified them as lacking the ability to self-direct their learning was the guilt—and sometimes the shame—they expressed in being unable to finish the process. For these participants, the result was a negative psychosocial outcome. The possibility is that if the group included additional people, the participants who could not fully commit to the social aspect of the group might have had a positive psychological outcome by just responding to the prompts. In that researchers—as the sole participant in these one-on-one HeNRePs other than the facilitator—were required to show themselves in the online group and interact with the facilitator, they recognized their inability to participate appropriately. This represents a level of recognition they would not have had to confront in the larger HeNReG online meetings.

4. Discussion

Alpha II remains unique as a public school supporting self-directed learning based on the personal values of those enrolled, where community-wide decisions use a method of consensus decision-making that includes each perspective. Applying this philosophy to other public schools is possible but requires the commitment of the board of education, the parents, the teachers, and the

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young people. In the aim of public schools to support standardized learning, meeting all these criteria is difficult but necessary. To encourage those who might have an interest in developing public self-directed programs for young people, a "Scoping Review of Self-Directed Online Learning, Public School Students' Mental Health, and COVID-19 in Noting Positive Psychosocial Outcomes with Self-Initiated Learning" was conducted, providing the background for self-directed learning (Nash 2023c). Published in 2023—this review was yet to make the distinction discovered in the current narrative analysis of the significance of separating psychological outcomes from sociological outcomes.

In using the HeNReG or HeNReP, there are several publications on how the group or one-on-one process can benefit participants in various settings (Nash 2024d; 2021a; 2024a). Employing the HeNReG method online for graduate student supervision is the topic of a 2021 publication (Nash 2021a). Setting up these groups and administering them is discussed in detail. The second application regards creating a HeNReG for decreasing burnout in public health nurse practitioners, published at the beginning of 2024 (Nash 2024a). This publication was the first to extend the use of the HeNReG process from researchers to practitioners. It begins with a detailed account of the past results of the HeNReGs over the years and then provides a section on transforming the research group successfully into a practitioner group. The third publication from the end of 2024 regards the one-on-one HeNReP (Nash 2024c). This work focuses on how the online HeNReP can be adapted to help participants who develop increased non-work-related depression and anxiety while participating in the offering. Noted is the importance of the facilitator in providing the necessary supportive online atmosphere for the participant to continue with the process even under challenging circumstances, developing a hopeful resilience. The facilitator assumed the role of an authentic leader in this regard (Gardner et al. 2021).

Self-directed learning has the potential to produce positive psychosocial outcomes but requires learners to accept their own and others' right to self-direct their learning regarding what they value personally in a community that demonstrates team mindfulness. Successful self-directed learning is possible at different academic levels and in various public education settings, as is evidenced by the author's co-founding of Alpha II Alternative School and the creation of the Health Narratives Research Group and the one-on-one Health Narratives Research Process—both the latter achieving a decrease in the depression and anxiety from burnout of participants who complete the process.

The author outlines the creation of opportunities for self-directed learning in the public setting in various works published since 2020. What is required to make the online offerings succeed is a facilitator who takes on the role of an authentic leader whom participants trust. Lacking such a facilitator, participants may achieve positive psychological outcomes as self-expressive or self-absorbed learners, but they will miss the positive sociological outcomes that come from a well-functioning group decision-making method based on consensus decision-making.

5. Conclusions

Psychosocial outcomes have a psychological and social component. Results for these components can be positive, negative, or lacking a positive sociological response. When learning is self-directed, the result is a positive psychological outcome, decreasing depression and anxiety regarding learning, unless such learners believe they lack the right to self-direct what they learn because it is not standardized. In this case, the outcome is negative psychologically. For self-directed learning to have a positive social outcome, learners require a community of self-directed learners where group-wide decisions result from a specific form of consensus decision-making where each person's values are supported. Community flourishing requires team mindfulness. Self-directed learners who are members of learning communities demonstrating team mindfulness are those with positive social outcomes. Members of these groups—deficient in team mindfulness—do not show positive social outcomes.

This narrative analysis of the publications by the author on three public education programs for self-directed learners has noted that not all people who participate in these programs are self-directed

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learners. Those who are self-directed, but not as learners can gain positive psychological outcomes from participation, but not the intended positive sociological outcomes. To have positive psychosocial outcomes, participants must be self-directed learners. Such learners can make strides in decreasing their depression and anxiety associated with meeting standardized expectations in education and regarding burnout.

Suggested future research directions include continuing to monitor the outcome of these public education offerings for self-directed learners and studying using other consensus decision-making methods in these groups to determine their effectiveness in promoting team mindfulness. Furthermore, additional research on the role of facilitators of online groups as authentic leaders is suggested, as it is these types of facilitators who have the best chance of improving psychosocial outcomes in online groups.

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