**Loneliness, friendship and the skill of self-disclosure:**

**A theoretical analysis and practical recommendations for psychology in the schools**

**Abstract**: Loneliness is a widespread phenomenon in today’s world. It is prevalent among the “iGen” generation, as well as among pupils who fail to develop close friendships naturally. This paper takes an active approach and argues that pupils should be supported to develop social skills. One of the communication skills that has emerged from the literature as highly relevant to building close friendships is *self-disclosure*, which facilitates the development and strengthening of close relationships. This paper presents school counselors and psychologists with an organized thinking framework and intervention methods for cultivating this skill within a school setting, with the aim of helping pupils develop and deepen their social connections.

Survey analysis in the United States has found that feelings of loneliness among today’s adolescents (iGen) have risen sharply post 2011. The phenomenon of loneliness is not unique to pupils.

,which will be the focus of this paper.

This intervention is intended for all pupils in preadolescence and adolescence. However, it will be of particular benefit to introverted and lonely pupils, who find it difficult to form close friendships naturally. Although social networks in childhood are very large, and children thus experience fewer feelings of loneliness, in older age groups, loneliness becomes more fixed.

The issue of building and deepening close friendships among pupils does not currently receive sufficient attention in educational practice, and there is a degree of acceptance of the costs of excessive screen time. This paper seeks to examine this issue in-depth, to bring awareness of it to school staff, and to offer school counsellors and psychologists a coherent thinking framework and intervention methods to correct this deficit.

A meta-analysis comparing self-disclosure in computer-mediated and face-to-face communication found that self-disclosure was higher in face-to-face communications, in particular in terms of the depth of disclosure. These findings require further study.

It was found that offline friendships, where close and caring connections can be established, are important for wellbeing, and even for the state of an individual’s health.

A study reviewing trends of self-disclosure in adolescence found that this skill is essential for the acquisition of key developmental tasks—specifically identity formation, wellbeing, and self-worth.

Is the “dose” of self-disclosure appropriate to the context?

The paper *Loneliness and Patterns of Self-Disclosure* describes a set of experiments: when single men and women conversed with a person of the opposite sex, they utlized lower levels of disclosure (compared with people who were not single). This low level persisted throughout the conversation and affected its reciprocity pattern. As a result, partners reported that the single people were less well-known.

A meta-analysis conducted on loneliness found that levels of loneliness remain fairly stable throughout an individual’s life. Lonely children find it difficult to break the circle of loneliness, since there are various factors that feed it. A study conducted Israel during the coronavirus crisis found that children who tended to have fewer friends experienced loneliness during this time. In other words, the possibility that change will occur naturally is not high.

Social network usage can also be a source of loneliness. For example, studies have found that people who have friends start to use Facebook; however, after a while, they actually start to feel lonely. The researchers hypothesized that this was because they were replacing offline interactions with online relationships. Another argument posits that, due to the proliferation of interactions via the internet, social connections have become shallower.

Studies suggest that iGen is characterized by high levels of loneliness, with fewer face-to-face interactions and a lack of intimate connections; researchers have cautioned that this trend could impact on iGen’s social functioning. As adolescents use Facebook more and more (to update their status or to post photos), they feel that they lack intimate relationships, and experience loneliness. Further, studies have found that adolescents characterized by high technology usage, who simultaneously reduce their face-to-face interactions, report particularly high levels of loneliness.

Recent studies deal with the experience of loneliness among pupils, and there are programs to provide children with friendship skills. Today in particular there is a need to continue developing programs that support children’s abilities in this area. Such programs will help all children but are of particular importance for shy and lonely children, who find it harder to form close friendships naturally.

The problem that this paper addresses is: how can school counsellors and psychologists cultivate the skill of self-disclosure among pupils and thus support them to forge, develop, and deepen close friendships?

In 1982, researchers Parish, Solano and Batten noted that low levels of self-disclosure can be addressed through training.

The methods described below are included in the training phase.

They are intended for school counsellors and psychologists, who will be able to convey their messages to education staff. The methods may be applied in personal conversations with pupils. Activities based on one of the methods may be carried out in the classroom or during break. In addition, lessons that deal with developing close friendships might be held during class, there could be discussions with pupils around the methods, or the topic could be linked to material that is being studied. Each method comes with a detailed explanation. However, the demonstrations are not described in detail, so as to provide school practitioners with room for personal and professional interpretation. The methods are below:

Similarly, pair-based conversation activities should be carried out in the classroom, with the echoing component built into the instructions provided for the exercise.

Pair work (in contrast to large group work) can also help to increase feelings of control over disclosure.

A meta-analysis conducted on studies dealing with loneliness did not find any cultural differences; the researchers hypothesized that this was related to the universal nature of challenges around creating close connections.

Further, the meta-analysis found that it was lower in in communications via computer.

In educational practice, connections can be made between lessons that deal with the issue of thoughts and feelings, orally in and writing, and with cultivating the skill.

Planning is required when presenting the subject to education staff.

In keeping with the characteristics of this generation, and with the call to develop interventions,

It is my hope that the proposed thinking framework will help education staff to reduce the widespread, contemporary phenomenon of loneliness.