



BOSTON
UNIVERSITY

COGNITION ACROSS DEVELOPMENT

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026

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MEET THE LAB!!



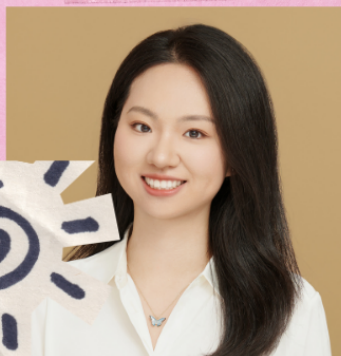
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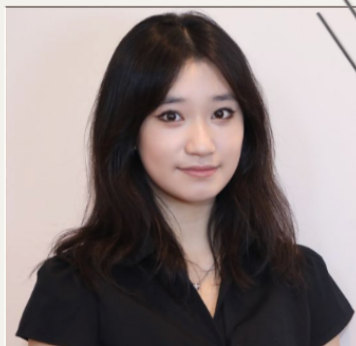
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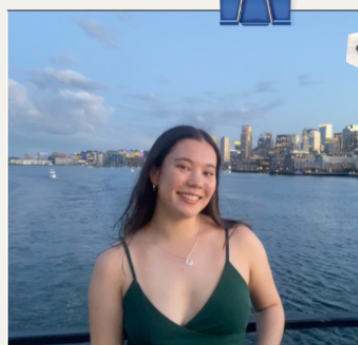
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OUR RESEARCH !!

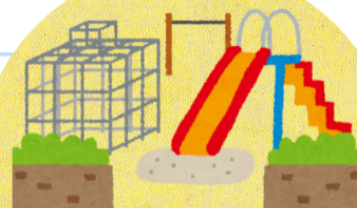
THIS SUMMER, YOU MAY HAVE
PARTICIPATED IN SCIENCE GAMES WITH
US AT ANY OF THESE LOCATIONS!



**FARMER'S
MARKETS**



**ONLINE
ZOOM CALL**



**PARKS AND
PLAYGROUNDS**



**THE BOSTON
COMMON**



**THE MUSEUM OF
SCIENCE**

RECENT
PROJECTS



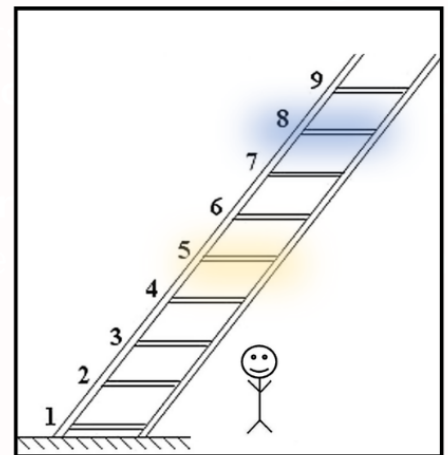
WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK CAUSES UPWARD MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES?

WE KNOW THAT CHILDREN AS YOUNG AS 4-YEARS-OLD ARE AWARE THAT SOCIAL STATUS SOMETIMES CHANGES OVER TIME. WE ALSO KNOW THEY UNDERSTAND THAT **RACE**, **IMMIGRATION**, **SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS**, AND **DISABILITY** CAN INFLUENCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPWARD MOBILITY. THE THING IS, WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT WHAT THEY THINK **CAUSES UPWARD MOBILITY**.

IN THIS STUDY WE LOOKED AT **INTERNAL** AND **EXTERNAL FACTORS** AS POTENTIAL CAUSES FOR UPWARD MOBILITY. INTERNAL FACTORS CAN BE DEFINED AS SELF-GENERATED QUALITIES (BEING SMART OR HARD WORKING) AND EXTERNAL FACTORS CAN BE DEFINED AS SITUATIONAL OR CONTEXTUAL FACTORS (HOW MANY PEOPLE WITH GOOD JOBS YOU KNOW).

WE ASKED CHILDREN: **WHAT HELPS AND WHAT HINDERS UPWARDS SOCIAL MOBILITY?** DOES SOCIAL MOBILITY DEPEND ON LUCK? HARDWORK? ACCESS TO A WELL CONNECTED SOCIAL NETWORK?

FOR THIS, WE FIRST TAUGHT CHILDREN HOW TO USE A LADDER TO REPRESENT **HIGHER**, **MIDDLE**, AND **LOWER SOCIAL STATUS** (E.G., "PEOPLE AT THE TOP OF THE LADDER HAVE LOTS OF MONEY, REALLY GOOD JOBS, THE BEST EDUCATION, AND NEVER WORRY ABOUT MONEY"). THEN, WE INTRODUCED A PERSON WHO WANTS TO MOVE UP THE LADDER, AND ASKED CHILDREN TO ASSESS WHETHER A VARIETY OF CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HELP OR HINDER THAT PERSON'S UPWARD MOBILITY.



OUR DATA FOUND THAT **OLDER CHILDREN WERE MORE LIKELY THAN YOUNGER CHILDREN TO THINK THAT UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY WAS HELPED BY INTERNAL FACTORS**. THIS FINDING CONTRADICTED OUR INITIAL HYPOTHESIS! WE HAD PREDICTED THAT YOUNGER CHILDREN WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO AGREE WITH EXPLANATIONS THAT FOCUSED ON INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS, WHILE OLDER CHILDREN WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO ENDORSE EXPLANATIONS THAT FOCUSED ON SITUATIONAL OR CONTEXTUAL FACTORS. SEEING THIS UNEXPECTED RESULT HELPS US GENERATE NEW QUESTIONS AND TELLS US THAT CHILDREN MIGHT THINK ABOUT SOCIAL MOBILITY AND SOCIAL STATUS IN UNIQUE WAYS.



UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK ABOUT WHAT CAUSES SOCIAL MOBILITY CAN HELP US DEVELOP AGE-APPROPRIATE WAYS OF TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT THE SOCIAL INEQUITIES THEY SEE IN THE WORLD AROUND THEM, AS WELL AS HELP KIDS RESIST THE IDEA THAT A LACK OF UPWARD MOBILITY IS DUE TO A PERSONAL FAILING.

DO CHILDREN THINK THAT DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEIGHBORHOODS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES OR CHALLENGES?

DIFFERENCES IN HOUSING, SCHOOLS, BUSINESSES, AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES MAY SHAPE HOW CHILDREN UNDERSTAND WHO HAS ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES—AND WHAT MAKES IT EASIER OR HARDER FOR FAMILIES TO IMPROVE THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES. YET WE KNOW SURPRISINGLY LITTLE ABOUT **HOW CHILDREN INTERPRET THESE NEIGHBORHOOD DIFFERENCES** OR **WHETHER THEY SEE CERTAIN COMMUNITIES AS OPENING DOORS OR CREATING BARRIERS**.

FIRST, WE TAUGHT CHILDREN HOW TO USE A PICTURE OF A LADDER TO REPRESENT HIGHER, MIDDLE, AND LOWER SOCIAL STATUS

NEXT, CHILDREN WERE ASKED TO EXPLAIN WHERE THEIR FAMILY WOULD GO ON THE LADDER RIGHT NOW, AND WHERE THEY THEMSELVES MIGHT GO ON THE LADDER WHEN THEY'RE ALL GROWN UP.

FINALLY, WE INTRODUCED CHILDREN TO PAIRS OF IMAGINARY FAMILIES WHO LIVED IN HOUSING OR COMMUNITIES THAT DIFFERED IN: (1) **HOUSING QUALITY**, (2) **PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, AKA WHETHER HOUSING WAS SUBSIDIZED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT**, (3) **THE ECONOMIC COMPOSITION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD**, AND (4) **SOCIAL DISORDER** (E.G., WHETHER NEIGHBORHOODS ARE PERCEIVED AS SAFE AND CLEAN). FOR EACH FAMILY, CHILDREN RATED HOW OFTEN THEY THINK FAMILIES IN EACH TYPE OF COMMUNITY WOULD MOVE UP THE LADDER, FROM 1 (NONE OF THE TIME) TO 5 (ALL OF THE TIME).

WE FOUND THAT ON AVERAGE, CHILDREN **VIEWED ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE**—SUCH AS LOW QUALITY HOUSING OR HIGH SOCIAL DISORDER—**AS A BARRIER TO MOVING UP THE LADDER**, SUPPORTING OUR INITIAL HYPOTHESIS. HOWEVER, THE SAMPLE, ON AVERAGE, ALSO BELIEVED THAT THOSE WHO **RECEIVE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE (AN OFTEN STIGMATIZED GROUP)** WERE **MORE LIKELY TO ACHIEVE UPWARD MOBILITY** COMPARED TO THEIR ADVANTAGED COUNTERPARTS.



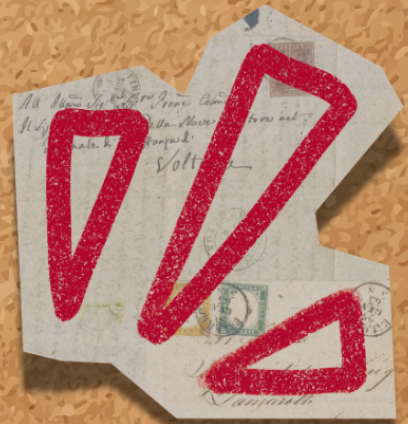
UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN VIEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE IMPROVEMENT CAN HELP US PROVIDE THEM WITH THE RIGHT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO SET AND ACHIEVE THEIR OWN GOALS, WHATEVER WHAT THEIR CURRENT SITUATION MAY BE.



ONGOING WORKS

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

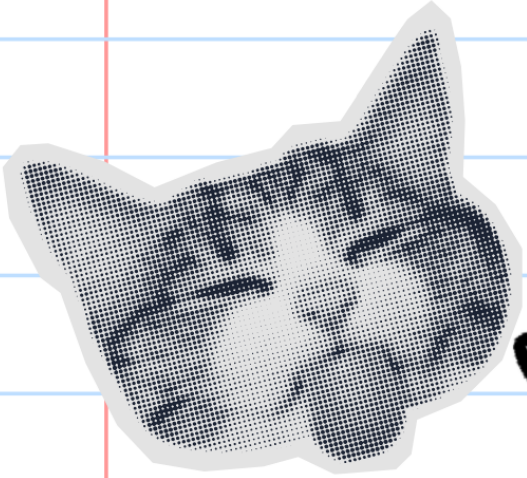
WE ARE COLLABORATING WITH **BIONIC PROJECT** ([HTTPS://WWW.BIONICPROJECT.ORG](https://www.bionicproject.org)), A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT DELIVERS SCHOOL-BASED WORKSHOPS TO REDUCE STEREOTYPES ABOUT INDIVIDUALS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES. OUR RESEARCH EXAMINES WHETHER THESE WORKSHOPS REDUCE BENEVOLENT ABLEISM, A SUBTLE AND UNDEREXPLORED FORM OF PREJUDICE. BY ASSESSING CHANGES IN STUDENTS' ATTITUDES BEFORE AND AFTER PARTICIPATION, WE AIM TO EVALUATE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF DISABILITY-RELATED BIAS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS.



WHAT MAKES CHILDREN EXCITED ABOUT SCIENCE?

OUR NEW STUDY, **SCIENCE TALES**, EXPLORES HOW CHILDREN THINK ABOUT SCIENCE AND THEIR POTENTIAL ROLES WITHIN IT. WE ASK OUR QUESTIONS BY TEACHING KIDS ABOUT THREE ALIEN PLANETS, EACH FEATURING DISTINCT SCIENTIFIC CULTURES THAT VARY IN HOW COLLABORATIVE SCIENCE IS, OR HOW MUCH THEIR SCIENCE DEPENDS ON BRILLIANCE OR HARD WORK. BY VARYING THE DESCRIPTIONS OF SCIENCE ACROSS PLANETS, WE AIM TO EXAMINE HOW THESE VARIATIONS INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE AND THEIR SELF-CONCEPTS WITHIN IT.

REACH OUT!!



WE'RE ALWAYS EXCITED TO WELCOME NEW PEOPLE TO THE LAB, WHETHER YOU'RE INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH US, LEARNING MORE ABOUT OUR RESEARCH, OR PARTICIPATING IN OUR STUDIES!



IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT OUR WORK, VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT:

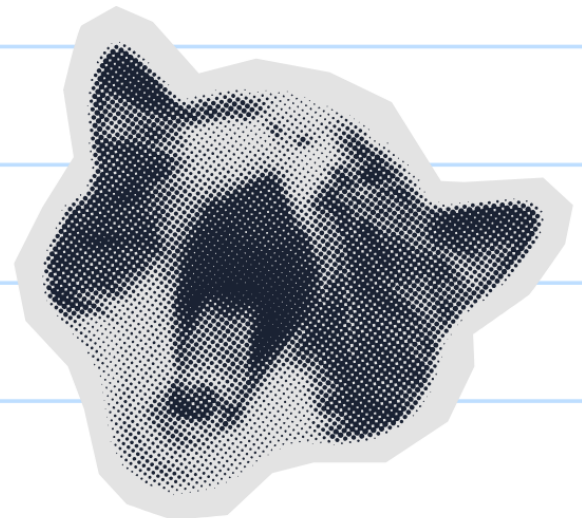
[HTTPS://WWW.THECADLAB.ORG/](https://www.thecadlab.org/)



IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH THE LAB, HAVING YOUR CHILD PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY, OR YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT WE DO PLEASE

EMAIL US AT: CADLAB@BU.EDU

WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU



THANK YOU



THANK YOU TO THE BOSTON
MUSEUM OF SCIENCE, THE UNION
SQUARE FARMERS MARKET IN
SOMERVILLE, AND TO THE
SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND
CAREGIVERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN
OUR STUDIES.



**WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR STUDIES AND
KEEP UP WITH OUR RESEARCH? SCAN THE QR
CODE TO SIGN UP FOR OUR EMAIL LIST!**

