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Action Today for Tomorrow: Examining How Building a Video Montage Over Time Impacts a Family

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ACTION TODAY FOR TOMORROW: EXAMINING HOW BUILDING A VIDEO
MONTAGE OVER TIME IMPACTS A FAMILY

by

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SYNTHESIS[*]
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Abstract: I started shooting one second of video every day almost four years ago. The short clips are amalgamated into a video montage at the end of each year. This paper is an inquiry into that practice and how it can impact a family. On a broader scale, the paper shows any individual how the consistent act of taking one second of video each day can help with the inherent malleability of memory, support effective dialogue, provide a platform for reflection on one's life and promote mindful living. The project is a reaction to the ubiquity of smartphone technology, and an attempt to use the technology in a meaningful and intentional way. The paper is based on my reflections and observations but is also informed by concepts and theories that point to possible future implications of the practice.

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[*] The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

Introduction

I sat at my kitchen table on June 29, 2015, recording a video of my wife walking towards me with a cake in one hand and my brother and his two-year-old son singing happy birthday through FaceTime in the other hand. One year later, my wife forgot to buy a birthday present. Instead, she took a pregnancy test and handed me the results. I have a one-second video of the positive result, showing my wife was pregnant with our third child. Over the past four years, I have consistently shot a couple of seconds of video every day, sometimes substituting a photo for video but rarely missing a day entirely. At night, I review the short clips and decide which one-second snippet to keep. At the end of each year, I combine the curated one-second clips to create a six-minute video consisting of a single moment from each day of the year.

When our third son, Coen, moves away from his family home, he will have a two-hour video comprised of one-second moments beginning with the pregnancy test my wife gifted me. Accurately predicting the impact these videos will have on my children, my wife and even myself is difficult. Both the project and its effects are inherently long-term. As far as I know, there is no one else in the position Coen may find himself in 18 years from now. At 20, he will be able to look back at one second from every day of his life; he'll be able to watch himself and his brothers grow, his parents age, and those he loves pass away. In a way, this project is similar to daily journaling. But unlike journaling, which is typically a solitary endeavour, the results and contributions for this project are shared with family members. In that sense, the practice may more closely resemble the creation of a photo album. But it differs from that, too, in that it relies on consistent daily action as opposed to the intermittent action that contributes to the creation of photo albums.

Research from 1997, in which psychologists tried to create conditions for strangers to fall in love by having them ask specific questions and then stare into each other's eyes, has recently become popularized (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997). Three weeks ago, my wife and I went through the 36 questions to fall in love. The questions reminded me of the first week we met. We sat on a couch at the Université de Moncton, attending a five-week French immersion program. We had met briefly a few days earlier. Cheating the program, we spoke in English and she asked me many of the same questions the psychologists identified as conducive to strangers falling in love. One of the questions: what is your greatest fear? At that point, 23-years-old with no children, I knew my greatest fear was to outlive my children. Now, at almost 38, I understand at a much deeper level why it is my biggest fear. This synthesis allowed me to focus on the most important aspect of my life, my family. Taking one second of video each day allows me to re-watch my children learning to walk, learning to talk, but mostly, just laugh and play. Watching the video montages brings me almost to tears, I find myself confused by the passage of time and wondering what will unfold next. The project has taught me a significant amount about reflection, complexity, love and sadness. This is why I wanted to explore it in more detail and examine how it can impact my family in the long-term.

There is a song by Eddie Berman called "Untamed." In it, he sings: " *'Cause when the dark it calls us by name/We'll know we were alive once and at least for a moment, untamed*." I'm not sure what the song is about or where this particular lyric originated, but it makes me think about the project of taking one second of video each day. My hope is that during difficult times, my children might be able to literally look back at their childhood, see their development and resilience, and remember that they were untamed, permitted to be children, while growing up supported and loved. This underlying hope is what drives my project forward.

Additionally, as someone who scribbled HTML and Java code by hand on scraps of paper in high school, and who generally felt ahead of the curve when it came to the internet (only to watch the technology outpace my interest it), I have been attempting to regain a balance of using and learning from new technology as opposed to relying on it and being used by it. In essence, with the one second of video a day project (1SE), I am trying to actively reap the benefits of modern technology instead of merely trying to avoid its adverse side effects. Completing graduate school and the 1SE project have been my two most recent effective uses of new technology, and it seems appropriate to combine them for my final synthesis. This is especially true because they both also relate to a personal area of interest acquired through studying critical and creative thinking; they both take advantage of the potential of consistency, exemplifying how incremental actions over a long period of time can create a result that is more significant than the sum of its parts.

The project sits at the edge of technology. Only a few years ago, the storage capacity and portability required for such a project did not exist—at least not in the ubiquitous manner that it does today. While other long-term documentation projects exist, none have a form that allows an individual to look back at one second of video from every day of their life. It is difficult to study something that does not yet exist. However, having spent almost four years working on this project, I can confirm that it has had a number of significant impacts on myself, my wife and my children. In addition to this, there are principles, concepts and theories that might point to possible future implications. My reflections and observations—paired with the principles, concepts and theories that may help to anticipate the project's future impacts—are what informs this inquiry.

My one second of video every day project was inspired by a 2012 TED Talk by Cesar Kuriyama (Kuriyama, 2012), in which he describes the benefits of his own one second a day project. Specifically, the project addressed Kuriyama's frustration with not being able to accurately retrieve memories. It also prompted Kuriyama to seek out novel experiences and identify patterns in his life. Spurred by the impact the project was having on his life, Kuriyama developed an application to make the process of collecting and combining clips easier and more accessible to the general public[1]. This is the application I have used over the past four years to create the video montages.

The bulk of parenting research and writing focuses on the situational aspects of the role (i.e., how to best address a particular issue). There are also resources that take a more holistic view, such as *Everyday Blessings, the Inner Work of Mindful Parenting* by Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014) and *The Awakened Family* by Shefali Tsabary (Tsabary, 2010). These holistic resources focus on broader approaches to parenting that can influence a wide range of situations. This paper does not focus on any specific situational aspect of parenting, nor does it examine a broader holistic approach to parenting. Rather, it examines how a specific practice (taking one second of video each day) can impact a family in various ways.

Every parenting situation is different. I have three sons (whose ages are 2, 5 and 7) and have been married for about 13 years. Some children are raised by one parent; some families have all daughters; some have large age gaps between children. The variables are endless. However, there are shared characteristics of the role that apply across circumstances and are somewhat universal—at least within cultures (and, at times, across them). Ideally, this synthesis

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[1] The 1 Second Everyday application is available at https://1se.co/.

will resonate with anyone raising children. But it may also be of interest to anyone in need of a mechanism to better recall memories, live more mindfully, or, use new technology more consciously.

This paper examines how taking one second of video every day, and combining the clips into a video montage at the end of each year, can be used as a tool to impact a family.

It considers how such a project affects memory acquisition and recall; how it can contribute to creating a positive family narrative; how it can induce productive dialogue; how it relates to reflection, pattern recognition, and the desire for new experiences; and finally, how it relates to mindfully parenting and an appreciation for the mundane. All of these aspects stem from the consistent practice of shooting one second of video each day.

The Potential of Consistency

People who work in financial management are well versed in the power of compounding interest and understand how to harness it to increase wealth. There is an often cited example to show its potential. The example is about golf and involves two friends making a wager on each hole of an 18-hole course. On the first hole, the friends' bet is 10 cents, and it doubles after each hole. By the time they get to the 18th hole, the friends are playing for $13,107.20, and the combined total for all the holes is $26,214.30. Though a somewhat trite example, it demonstrates the embedded opportunity of compounding interest—an element of which is a consistent pattern of action. In financial management, consistently investing small amounts over time is generally considered more advantageous than investing large amounts intermittently. The rationale for this thinking flows from how those small increments grow, resulting in growth upon growth. The longer each small increment is invested, the more benefit will accrue. It is the difference between linear and exponential growth.

Consistent action can provide a useful method of improvement in more areas of life than finance. For example, many music teachers prefer that students practice in shorter daily sessions rather than longer, less-frequent sessions. Admittedly, there are many complex factors that lead to improvement. But Anders Ericsson's work on developing expertise posits that consistency is a key component in the quest for improvement, noting research that suggests "the best expert musicians were found to practice, on the average, the same amount every day" (Ericsson, 2002, p. 29). The consistent actions in the 1SE project differ from the deliberate practice Ericsson references, but they are similar in that both examples of consistency may, over time, result in a product with larger impacts than the sum of its parts. I posit that consistently shooting one second of video each day impacts a family, the first component of which is how it impacts the cognitive functioning and in particular, memory of family members.

Memory, Family Narrative and 1SE

Parenting and its impacts are not predictable. Parents can at best anticipate what skills and attributes will serve their children well. But they do so in an ever-shifting context with ever-changing children. Parents can intend to have a positive impact in raising their children, but the end results depend on variable on top of variable, which makes it difficult and perhaps impossible to define the exact outcome. In much the same way, the 1SE project's cognitive impacts can only be forecast to an inherently imperfect degree. The impact can be surmised but forecasting exactly how it will affect a family in the long-term is difficult. That said, the difficulty doesn't preclude this facet from being examined. The following section explores how the 1SE project can be used as a tool to aide memory and how it might provide a method, in the digital age, to strengthen a cohesive family narrative.

Active Management of Familial Memories

The active management of familial memories is the concerted effort to intentionally create and reinforce memories of others within one's family. In my experience, actively managing familial memories may help to grow and maintain positive child-parent relationships while shaping a strong and cohesive family narrative. Actively forming memories for others may seem intrusive at first, but the inherent malleability of human memory storage and retrieval (Reisberg, 2011) creates an opportunity for parents to bolster the accuracy of their children's memories and can enhance the positive impact of those memories by setting their focus on positive events. Although we can never predict precisely how a memory will be acquired, stored or retrieved by any one individual, our understanding of memory may allow for parents to actively create positive memories for their children. With that said, the 1SE project is in no way an attempt to create false memories. Rather, it endeavours to help children focus on the positive aspects of life, and to give them a method for cueing memories at a later date.

The 1SE project is an effective way to manage familial memories through consistent action. It creates a record of events, and a repository of cues for positive memories. Since the default alternative is allowing memories to form by happenstance, active management through collecting and storing moments from each day provides an opportunity for parents to have a positive impact on the family.

Accuracy and Memory Separation

Given that passive management of familial memories still results in memories, albeit less accurate ones, one primary value of active management is that it allows parents to increase the accuracy of their children's memories.

When memories are acquired, both the primary material and the surrounding contextual information are encoded in the brain. Memories rely on connection paths for retrieval. These pathways form a web of intersecting points. The stronger the pathways, the more likely something can be recalled. However, these same connection paths cause different memories to mesh together and appear as one (Reisberg, 2011, pp. 185–221). In my experience, having cues in one-second fragments allows for memory separation and for the accompanying context of each visual cue to be recalled. For example, in reviewing one-second snippets in my videos, I realized that events I remembered as happening on the same day actually occurred over a week-long period. Seeing the moments on separate days allowed me to separate the memories and recall the contextual information associated with each, instead of having the individual memories blend together as one event and losing some of that contextual information.

Although there is no direct evidence, given the separation provided in the 1SE project and the way memories get encoded and can mesh over time, the 1SE project may very well equate to more accurate, plentiful and nuanced memories.

Repository of Positive Cues

Active management also allows parents to nurture their children's memories towards a generally more positive psychology. Researchers at Rutgers University used fMRI to study subjects as they recalled positive autobiographical memories. The research suggests that "positive autobiographical memories can be intrinsically valuable to an individual, serving adaptive functions such as bolstering positive emotion that is significant for an individual's well-being and ability to cope with negative affect" (Speer, Bhanji, & Delgado, 2014). To raise children who are resilient in the face of challenge is an often-cited goal of parenting, and this study suggests positive memories may enhance the likelihood of building this resilience.

Reviewing the curated video montages provides the repetition necessary to encode many of the events into long-term memory, and it also provides a method to access and cue memories at a later date. The effectiveness of using visual cues to facilitate memory recall is evidenced through the development of a treatment for dementia patients called Reminisce Therapy, in which photos are used to spark the recall of dormant memories (Sellors, 2014).

Just as photo albums are repositories for cueing memories at a later date, the 1SE project can create the same benefits and can focus on videos and images that evoke emotion. Interestingly, research on photo albums suggests that "favored images were usually chosen [for photo albums] not in terms of the quality of the image but of the memories and emotions evoked" (Van House, Davis, & Takhteyev, 2004). In choosing one-second snippets, I generally select snippets that evoke the most positive emotions. Compiling those into an annual video seems like an effective way to create a repository of positive memory cues for my children, given how often they ask to watch the previously-created montages.

However, I also include significant negative life events. For example, when someone in our family is in the hospital, which has happened a few times over the four-year period. Kuriyama made the point in his TED Talk that sometimes remembering intense moments helps one further appreciate positive and even mundane day-to-day moments (Kuriyama, 2012). My experience over the past four years mirrors this understanding. More consistently recognizing that life can change quickly helps me appreciate the mundane and accept the more intense moments in life, recognizing that they will also pass.

Essentially, focussing mostly on positive moments but also including clips of the objectively negative moments seems like an effective way to help foster children's memories towards a generally more positive psychology

Attention and Documentation

Maryanne Garry of Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, suggests that the ubiquity of cell phone photography is creating the context for people to be continually "giving away being in the moment" (Thomas, 2015). Not being present or attentive to an event negatively impacts memory. Attention to the event helps encode memories with more connections for better retrieval (Reisberg, 2011, pp. 185–221). A recent study in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* concluded that "using media to preserve these moments may prevent people from fully experiencing them in the first place. These effects can be both substantial and sustained: media distract us from our experiences – limiting our ability to remember the moments we so wish to hold" (Tamir, Templeton, Ward, & Zaki, 2018). Previous studies have also shown a decrease in the ability of participants to recall details about objects they photographed. While participants were on an art museum tour, those tasked with taking photos remembered fewer details compared to those who only observed the objects. The so-called photo impairment effect is the idea that by taking a photo we are cognitively off-loading our memories and therefore do not encode or retrieve them as well. Interestingly, a follow-up study, conducted as part of the same research, revealed that when participants were required to zoom in as they took the photo, the impairment effect was mitigated (Henkel, 2014). The photo impairment effect also seemed to be negated when people were not told what specific objects to photograph, and were instead allowed to photograph whatever they wanted (Barasch, Diehl, Silverman, & Zauberman, 2017). Essentially, the evidence shows that purposeful engagement in the activity of photography (and videography) negates the impact of the photo impairment effect, and suggests that paying more attention during the composition stage will increase a person's ability to more deeply encode a given memory.

Although attention during composition may be important, the 1SE project also gives parents the opportunity to focus the majority of their time on the event itself instead of trying to capture its entirety. For instance, as my oldest son is now in school, there is an increasing proportion of snippets from things like Christmas concerts and Taekwondo classes. Although the choice is always present, the 1SE project seems to diminish my sense of needing to document every performance in its entirety. I am comfortable taking my phone out for a few seconds and then putting it away, allowing myself to be more immersed in the event at hand.

It is easy to decide that the day's snippet should come from a child's concert, but on days when there is less happening, extra attention is required to find moments one might wish to remember. For instance, we have nothing special planned for today, and as I write this, I am noticing the sunrise from my seat in a coffee shop. Moments like this one are more easily recognized when you are staying attentive to the mundane in order to capture a brief moment of appreciation. Myla Kabat Zinn suggests that when people are asked about their most treasured family memories, "wordless moments" are often the ones that are cited (Psychotherapy.net, 2014). As she provided examples, I remembered my grandfather sitting on his chair by the radio as he always did; but this time, showing me how to throw a fastball before I ran outside to play with my cousins. It's when nothing special is happening that something special can happen (Psychotherapy.net, 2014), and that is true whether one is in the midst of raising three boys or growing a career. In short, the 1SE project helps people further appreciate the mundane parts of life.

Finally, even though documenting a moment may negatively impact the ability of a parent to remember an event, the creation of an artefact that will be curated and compiled in a timeline will serve as a memory cue at a late date. Many of the existing studies on photography

and memory do not seem to adequately address the idea of cueing. This is likely, in part, because of the cognitive off-loading that occurs with digital collections. Often, the photos or videos we take are not reviewed and are thus forgotten. However, the 1SE project creates a mechanism to review the snippets and contextualize them into a narrative timeline, which Maryanne Garry also suggests is important for creating memories (Thomas, 2015).

Replacing Photo Albums

Photo albums are also a curated repository that generally cue positive memories. However, with the proliferation of digital photos, it has become more difficult to manage photo albums. There are a few photo albums on the bookshelf in my living room, but the majority reside under the stairs of my unfinished basement. The 1SE project may provide an adequate substitute to the photo album, in that it provides some of the same benefits when the sheer abundance of digital photos and videos has made it difficult to manage digital collections.

In an article examining how digital photography impacts the storage and access of personal photos, researchers found that the abundance of digital photos in people's collections, coupled with inadequate organization and file storage solutions, led to an inability to find photos from specific episodes in their lives (Whittaker, Bergman, & Clough, 2010). The research aptly noted that "the ability to collect more digital information is not matched by a similar ability to organize and maintain such information" (Whittaker et al., 2010). In short, the number of items in most digital collections makes them more difficult to manage than the photo albums of the past. That said, this study was published in 2010, and technology has since improved. The ability to search for photos by object and through facial recognition has advanced substantially, and continues to do so. However, there are other cognitive implications to leaving our digital photo and video collections and curations to algorithms.

Reviewing images reinforces autobiographical memory, but new technologies aimed at categorization limit our decision-making ability (Fawns, 2013). The near infinite amount of storage capacity we now have access to has led to less thoughtful decision-making about which photos to keep, and even which ones to take in the first place (Fawns, 2015). That decision-making process helps people encode events into long-term memory. Printed photos appear to have assisted people by creating the need to consider what pictures to keep, display or disregard. Without an appropriate substitute for the review and decision-making that aides in memory acquisition, one might surmise that memories are being lost to do the lack of review/decision-making. The 1SE project addresses the lack of cognitive engagement associated with digital photos and videos by requiring a certain degree of decision-making when curating items for inclusion. Thinking about what should be included, the content of the photo or video itself, and how it fits into the family narrative overall, facilitates parents in building more entrenched memories and is an example of actively managing familial memories. This does not have a direct impact on the memories held by children, but rather an indirect effect. If parents remember less, it may be reasonable to suspect they will have fewer memories to incorporate into a family narrative through stories and anecdotes over time.

Building Cohesive Family Narratives

Gordon Neufeld is a developmental psychologist who provides education and training for parents. Gabor Maté is a physician who has focussed much of his work on child development and trauma. Together, in the book titled *Hold on to Your Kids: why parents need to matter more than peers* (Neufeld, G., & Maté, 2013), they argue that children in Western cultures are increasingly influenced by their peers as opposed to their parents and other adults. As such, children are increasingly taking their behavioural cues, values and sense of identity from peers

instead of parents. The main solution the authors propose is for parents to re-establish the hierarchy of having adults lead children instead of children leading each other. Although there is more nuance and detail to their argument, the authors essentially claim that this occurs through attachment, which involves keeping children close and connected to their parents through various means. Creating a cohesive family narrative may be an effective way of addressing some of Neufeld and Maté's concerns, by keeping the family tied together and thus allowing the parents to remain connected and in proximity to their children.

In examining the social uses of technology and personal photos, researchers from the School of Information Management and Systems at the University of California at Berkeley highlighted the social aspects of photo albums, specifically pointing out that people tend to review photo albums in small groups, and that these review sessions precipitate conversations based on the photos (Van House et al., 2004). Although not the case for everyone, when I visit my childhood home every few years, I habitually review photo albums and discuss the accompanying memories with my family—just as the researchers point out. What this tends to create is a cohesive family narrative. Just as I look through the photo albums, so do my five siblings. Although the memories are individualized, there is a generalized cohesiveness—an overall family narrative that becomes strengthened over time and through repetition.

Some research suggests that when children understand their family narrative, it can lead to an increase in their well-being and their ability to address psychological and educational challenges (Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008). The evidence is correlational rather than causal, and likely "reflects certain processes that exist in families whose members know their histories" (Duke et al., 2008), but it may still mean that creating a shared repository of memories through

the 1SE project could be an effective method for building cohesiveness in a family narrative, which may in turn have positive impacts on children.

Alternatively, one might argue the public sharing of photos and videos through online platforms helps create family narratives. Although the research on this topic is in its infancy, there appears to be some consensus that this is not the case. In fact, there appear to be a number of negative cognitive impacts related to taking and posting photos online for broad distribution, ranging from stress related to taking the perfect picture to anxiety over how others perceive it (Tamir et al., 2018). There is also some preliminary research that suggests that when photos are shared publicly online, people lose some degree of personal ownership over them (Barasch, Zauberman, Diehl, Johar, & Hamilton, 2018) as they become part of a broader shared narrative rather than a relatively narrow family narrative.

Making the Most of Digital

Active management of familial memories may be an effective approach for addressing some of the deficits created by the shift from analog to digital memory keeping. Active management of familial memories can be achieved by addressing and recognizing:

- the inherent malleability of memory;

- the creation of a repository of positive memory cues for recall at a later date;

- the need to actively seek moments to capture to help create a more attentive life; and

- that creating a video montage may be an effective way to further a family narrative and replace the role of photo albums.

The importance of appreciating how memories are created and their relationship to a family's narrative seems amplified in an environment where the mere presence of a phone in our pocket impacts our cognitive abilities (Ward, Duke, Gneezy, & Bos, 2017). Additionally, it is

particularly significant considering the fact that research has found both an increasing reliance on smartphones to obtain and recall information (Barr, Pennycook, Stolz, & Fugelsang, 2015), and that "the long-term ramifications of the expanding externalization of our cognitive functions to device remain unseen" (Barr et al., 2015). The 1SE project is an effective way of creating long-term episodic memories. Creating a video montage each year builds a digital version of a family photo album. It can then be viewed to cue memories at a later date, by both parents and children. It creates an opportunity for parents to use technology in order to curate memories and create a cohesive family narrative. The practice also gives parents the chance to focus the majority of their time on the event itself, instead of trying to capture it in its entirety; this further enhances family cohesiveness.

Not taking advantage of digital technology and managing familial memories leaves a great deal to chance and may forfeit an opportunity to foster a cohesive family narrative. Each person will have their own interpretations of memories, but the project can at least provide a framework that can help bind a family together. In brief, the active management of familial memories through the use of digital technology impacts the long-term encoding and retrieval of memories for both parents and children, and capitalizing on this may have positive long-term effects on how children see themselves and their families.

Although the cognitive psychology of memory and creating a family narrative is a benefit associated with the 1SE project, there are also other benefits, such as how it can induce effective dialogue within a family.

Dialogue and 1SE

The 1SE project can facilitate changes in the way family members interact. Responsibility for furthering dialogue within families falls largely to parents. To this end, parents

should become apt at recognizing how dialogue is presenting itself within the family and leveraging opportunities to cultivate effective dialogue where possible.

Dialogue versus Discussion

There are two Tim Hortons locations in our city. One is on the north side, and the other is on the south side. I spent a considerable number of hours at the north side location while drafting this synthesis. As I was fairly consistent with my schedule, I noted a group of older men who gathered each day before heading to work. They discussed practical matters—things like how to fix snow machines, or their plans for the weekend. One day, I went to the south side location and noticed a similar group. The difference was that the second group talked about the emotional impact of dealing with prostate cancer, how their retirement was impacting their spouses, and what it felt like to create a new business in retirement. There is a difference between discussion and dialogue, and it is crudely illustrated by these two groups.

In his book titled *On Dialogue*, David Bohm highlights the distinction between discussion and dialogue, noting that discussion "emphasizes the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view, and where everybody is presenting a different one - analyzing and breaking up" (Bohm, 2013, p. 7). In contrast, for dialogue he evokes the image "of a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all" (Bohm, 2013, p. 7). Similarly, William Isaacs, in his book titled *Dialogue – The Art of Thinking Together*, compares discussion and dialogue, explaining (as does Bohm) that we need both. Issacs summarizes discussion as being about making decisions, contending that "Unlike dialogue, which seeks to open possibilities and see new options, discussion seeks closure and completion" (William Isaacs, 2002, p. 45), and

that "Dialogue is about evoking insight, which is a way of reordering our knowledge –

particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table*"* (William Isaacs,

2002, p. 45). In short, both preeminent thinkers in the domain of dialogue see an important role

for, and difference between, discussion and dialogue.

In my observation, the child-parent relationship tends to default to discussion. This is in

part out of necessity, but also the result of habit. And it may then be important to purposefully

induce dialogue with children, or to at least actively create conditions in which dialogue might

occur. The 1SE project can provide a platform for diving into more in-depth dialogue and finding

a place of openness that allows new ideas and understandings to emerge. Reviewing the 1SE

videos with my sons has provided an opportunity to ask them about how certain events made

them feel, and about what types of things are important to them.

Dialogical Leadership – Responsibility of Parents

William Isaacs defines dialogical leadership as:

> A way of leading that consistently uncovers, through conversation, the hidden creative
> potential in any situation. Four distinct qualities support this process, the abilities:
> (1) to evoke people's genuine voices,
> (2) to listen deeply,
> (3) to hold space for and respect as legitimate other people's views, and
> (4) to broaden awareness and perspective.
> Put differently, a dialogic leader is balanced, and evokes balance, because he [she] can
> embody all four of these qualities and can activate them in others
> (William Isaacs, 2016).

Admittedly, there is considerable complexity in the field of dialogue. Still, the definition

provided by Isaacs can serve as a reminder to parents that it is essential to play a leadership role

in relationships with children.

Issacs points out that there are structures that "govern the way we think and act" (W.

Isaacs, 1999, p. 204). He sees these structures as falling into three main categories. The first he

terms a "closed system," the main tenet of which is stability and tradition. According to Isaacs, the need for hierarchy and authority are inherent in a closed system. The second he terms an "open system," the main tenet of which is learning through participation. Open systems have a high level of collaboration. The final system he terms a "random system," noting that the central tenet of this is to explore via improvisation. Isaacs takes pains to remind readers that each of the three systems has its own set of merits and limitations; the key is to find a balance between them. Isaacs is essentially arguing that to thrive dialogically, the goal should not be to pick one of the three systems and its associated characteristics, but rather to find the right balance of these three within a particular culture (W. Isaacs, 1999, pp. 224–226).

If parents have a responsibility to be dialogical leaders within a family, part of that leadership entails recognizing the existing structures and systems. However, it also involves understanding how conversations unfold. For this, David Kantor provides a useful framework.

Kantor breaks conversations down into four main actions:
- moving;
- following;
- opposing; and
- bystanding.

Kantor explains that individuals can switch between the four actions. With the right awareness, people may find that they tend to utilize certain actions more often in certain relationships or contexts. Each action has a purpose; similar to Issacs' systems, the key is finding the right balance between them. For instance, movers are necessary for providing direction, followers facilitate completion, bystanders provide new perspectives, and opposers can correct the course. Being mindful of these four actions can be extremely helpful for moving things forward when groups get stuck at an impasse (William Isaacs, 2016).

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön recognized that the four actions fall on a continuum between advocacy and inquiry. Advocacy is where individuals are advocates or proponents of certain viewpoints, and is dominated by movers and opposers. Inquiry is where individuals fall more into an inquiring state, asking questions and confirming details; this area is largely comprised of followers and bystanders (William Isaacs, 2016).

With practice, parents can become cognizant of the discussions and dialogue they have with their children. They may find their family is typically a closed authoritarian system, or that they tend to be what Kantor defines as movers in conversations with their children. Or they may come to recognize whether they spend most of their time in family conversation as advocates or inquirers. This awareness, and the knowledge it can bring, is key to leading effective dialogue within families.

The 1SE project presents an opportunity to play a different conversational role with our children, and for them to play a different role with us. As we review the videos, I find it much easier to be an inquirer (which is not my typical function). The 1SE facilitates asking questions and opens the relationship. That's because, for at least a few moments, I am not trying to herd my children in some particular direction (physical or psychological), nor am I providing them with instructions on what needs to be done. The reflective nature of reviewing and talking about the videos allows everyone in our family to temporarily shift our conversational roles.

Recognizing these patterns of conversation is important to dialogical leadership, but that same pattern recognition can also extend to other elements of the 1SE project.

I used to think that the first time a child saw themselves reflected in a mirror would be a profound moment. But seeing themselves in the mirror has not been a milestone celebrated by my children. There is likely a great deal more complexity to this than I am prepared to address here. Still, it makes me consider two important points. The first is whether the lack of a big reaction is because it's natural to look at ourselves. The second is whether the lack of celebration or amusement is because we innately know that long-term reflection is more important than just seeing ourselves in the mirror. This section will explore two facets of long-term reflection. The first is how it can help people become aware of patterns and the importance of that recognition. The second is how long-term reflection can help parents notice and then examine the expectations they have in relation to their children.

Pattern Recognition

In *The Fifth Discipline*, a book about applying systems thinking to complex issues, Peter Senge describes creative tension as the difference between one's reality and one's vision. Senge posits that creative tension is similar to a rubber band between reality and vision. People can either adjust their vision or adjust their reality to relieve the tension. Adjusting vision is more about redefining one's internal expectations, while moving towards a creative vision is an active process requiring specific actions (Senge, 1990). Consciously or not, parents typically have a creative vision for their family. That vision is almost certainly in creative tension with reality. Parents can either adjust that vision or takes steps to move towards it.

Successful parent-child relationships are based in part on the quality of presence parents bring to the interactions with their children. The ability to maintain a quality of presence is not the only key to the long-term health of the relationship, but it is one that's within a parent's

sphere of influence. Occasionally, while distracted around my children, I notice myself thinking that at least I am there. I justify not being present by comparing myself to absent parents, instead of directly addressing my behavior. To Senge's point, when I have that thought, I am relieving the creative tension by changing my vision instead of my reality. The lesson then is to be aware of and recognize the gap between vision and reality within the parenting domain.

Similar to the systems discussed with regard to dialogue, repeated patterns can create a structure that limits a family's ability to change. Patterns and routines are common and necessary, but recognition of those patterns may facilitate structural shifts that allow a family to evolve. Work in the field of expertise development commonly points to the importance of recognizing patterns of information, noting that novices in a domain are "much less likely to be organized around big ideas; they are more likely to approach problems by searching for correct formulas and pat answers that fit their everyday intuitions" (Council, Education, Board on Behavioral and Sensory Sciences, & Practice, 2000). Meanwhile experts have an "ability to see patterns of meaningful information" (Council et al., 2000). Recognizing patterns may then serve as a way out of some of the negative structures and routines developed in the family narrative, and may provide avenues for improvement.

Reviewing the captured video each night provides an opportunity for daily reflection on Senge's creative tension as it relates to parenting and family. This reflection can lead to thinking about both the positive and negative moments shared with the children that day. For example, sometimes, when reviewing the videos, I notice that my voice took a harsher tone than I realized. As a result of that reflection, I may decide to focus on avoiding that tone during the next day.

In his 2012 TED Talk, Kuriyama noted that reviewing his videos inspired him to find a way to travel. He got tired of seeing himself at work and on a computer. My wife and I had a

similar experience, in that I recently signed up for deferred leave from my job. In three years, I will take a year off work and travel with my family. This leave is not something I can attribute solely to the 1SE project, but it was a factor. I have been fortunate to have taken several extended parental breaks from work, two of which are captured in the four years of the 1SE project. In reviewing the videos with my wife, I noticed myself putting up Christmas lights the same week two years in a row. It reminded me of the Christmas we spent in New Zealand on a previous parental leave. The recognition of the pattern of putting up lights was something that gave me comfort, but it also made me think about what changes I wanted to see. The pattern recognition, in this case, initiated a conversation about taking deferred leave, which is now a leave in waiting.

Additionally, I noticed that in the first two years of the project, when the clips were more focused on me than on my family, I did not take any clips of work. That recognition helped prioritize my decision making. Last year, I turned down a promotion because I felt it would not suit my family. Again, I cannot attribute that entirely to the 1SE project, but I can say that recognizing that my work life is more transitory than my family life via the 1SE project was a factor.

Essentially, the act of reviewing the videos presents an opportunity for parents (and children) to recognize patterns that they may wish to change. It serves as a mechanism for providing feedback to parents, in order to influence and better inform decision making.

Expectations

Our perception of the world is heavily influenced by how our minds are primed to perceive and ultimately respond to stimuli (Reisberg, 2011, pp. 185–221). Understanding this principle of cognitive psychology can have a positive impact in the domain of parenting, and it can be considered during daily review of the 1SE clips.

In Figure 1.0, there is a V formation of geese on the right-hand side of the illustration. One might assume they are flying south for the winter as the farmer harvests. In reading the story to my son, I told him the little I know about bird migration. When I started talking, he asked me about the pterodactyl. I hadn't even noticed the dinosaur flying in formation with the geese.
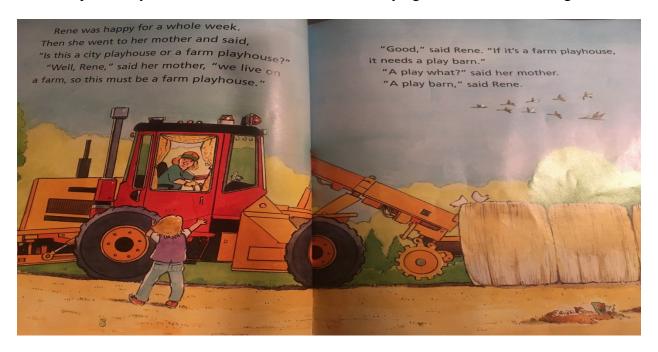

Photo from *Playhouse* by Robert Munsch. Illustrated by Michael Martchenko: Scholastic Canada Feb. 1, 2002.

The V formation, the autumn-like scene of harvesting, and the fact I was reading it in October had all primed me to see geese. Priming is helpful in some cases, as it allows us to pick things out quickly. But it also limits the scope of what we might perceive. This example is of expectation driven priming (Reisberg, 2011). We expect to see geese, so we see geese.

Expectation priming can benefit the parent-child relationship because, in part, we appear to have a level of control over this type of priming. But utilizing it in this manner takes awareness. Expectation priming helps us prune what we see in the world, and that can be helpful as the brain cannot pay attention to everything (Reisberg, 2011).

It is important to imagine how children might react, what might scare them, when they need help, and so on. But it's also important to keep in mind that these are all expectations

created in our minds. Children have their own influences and will at times step outside of our expectations. It's crucial to at least assess if and when we are placing expectations on our children.

Awareness of our expectations of and assumptions about our children can be useful, and can be highlighted in our reflection on the 1SE project. In *The Conscious Parent*, Shefali Tsabary notes that as parents, it is routinely "the adjustment of our expectations, rather than reality itself, that's the hurdle we have to leap" (Tsabary, 2010). For instance, I often try and capture our oldest son in moments of intensity. This fits with many of my expectations of him. However, like anyone, he is multi-dimensional; he often sits quietly and reads books or listens to podcasts. I tend not to capture as many of these moments. I tend to capture those types of moments with my other sons.

The 1SE project has provided me with a useful reflection tool for examining my own biases and expectations as they relate to my children. Refection is made even more critical in the domain of parenting given its ever-shifting nature. Staying attuned to and reflecting on expectations as they relate to one's children then becomes even more essential.

Mindful Parenting and 1SE

Another way to mitigate the impacts of the constant changes in the domain of parenting is to increase our ability to remain present and practice mindful parenting. Jon Kabat-Zinn founded the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He studies the effects of mindfulness and mindful parenting, having coined the term with his co-author and wife Myla Kabat-Zinn in *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting.* In the book, the authors describe mindfulness as "the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present

moment, nonjudgmentally*"* (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 25)*.* Mindfulness is an

awareness of our thoughts and surroundings. It is also about letting go of judgment. Mindful

parenting is not something achieved in full, but rather a path down which there are benefits for

the parent-child relationship and for the family as a whole. It is a way of being, rather than a

concept or an idea (Shonin & Kabat-Zinn, 2016). After four years of experience with the 1SE

project, I suggest that it is an effective mechanism to advance mindful parenting.

I think of mindfulness as being similar in nature to roasting a marshmallow. Awareness

allows us to heat it by keeping it close enough to the flames, but if we are not paying close

enough attention we burn the marshmallow. Thus, it's about returning our awareness to the

marshmallow as our mind inevitably wanders. Jon Kabat Zinn says this type of awareness allows

people to see beyond the surface-level thoughts of their mind. He likens it to a lake. On top there

are waves and movement, but below the surface things are still and calm. Practicing mindfulness

is about dropping beneath the surface and into the underlying and always-present calmness of the

lake (J. Kabat-Zinn, 2002).

I have been actively working on mindfulness for 10 years and still do not feel at ease in

explaining it, or even that I have improved significantly at practicing it. I continue because I see

its benefits. Its application is no different in parenting, being both demanding and rewarding but

always a work in progress. Jon and Myla Kabat Zinn posit that mindful parenting is "an absolute

necessity if we are to serve as effective parents for our children over the long haul, so that they

may be sheltered and grow well in their own ways and in their own time" (M. Kabat-Zinn &

Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 92). The authors also note the continuous nature of mindful parenting, in

saying "mindful parenting is a continual process of deepening and refining our awareness and

our ability to be present and act wisely. It is not an attempt to attain a fixed goal or outcome" (M.

Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 28). They suggest that parenting provides an excellent opportunity to develop mindfulness, comparing it to an 18-year meditation retreat. Not because of the tranquility it offers, but because parenting can test our patience and trigger our reactions. Gabor Mate notes that it is "in the nature of sibling conflict to bring out the deepest anxieties and least adaptive responses in the parent" (Mate, 2005). These reactions can mirror the way Zen masters might provoke students to teach them through their responses (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, pp. 98–106). Parenting is a long-term process, and mindfulness is also developed over time. It is repetitive in nature and relies on consistently and gently reminding ourselves to pay attention.

In *Everyday Blessings*, Jon and Myla Kabat Zinn categorize mindful parenting into three main components, each of which can be furthered through the 1SE project. The three components—which will be further explained, along with how they relate to the 1SE project—are acceptance, sovereignty, and empathy.

Acceptance

Mindful parenting involves accepting reality, because there is no changing what is (only what might be). I recently went for a swim at a hot spring with my 5-year old. It was during winter, and we started playing with the snow on the side of the pool. At first, we were trying to sculpt it into something before it melted. We realized this was not working, because the snow melted too quickly in the hot water. We changed our approach to taking a handful of snow, immersing it in the water, and then pulling it out to see what it resembled; it was not dissimilar to the game people play when they look at clouds and describe what they resemble. We tried only to recognize shapes as they were presented to us. This illustrates the concept of acceptance. What we were able to control was how and when we viewed the objects. Within seconds, the same

chunk of snow would change shape dramatically, but we could only assess the shape by removing it from the water and viewing it.

Instead of actively sculpting, we were assessing reality. Gabor Mate suggests that "the parent's role is often to help a child find the sadness and tears over a situation that cannot be changed" (Mate, 2005). But acceptance is not simply a passive process. Although we were no longer trying to sculpt, we could have set that as a longer-term intention and began to notice how we might move in that direction. We could have improved at knowing when and how to pull the snow from the water more efficiently. This is a key aspect to understanding acceptance and how it relates to mindful parenting. Acceptance is not solely the process of recognizing and accepting reality; it is more active in nature than that. Acceptance, as much as it is about not opposing reality, is also about "keeping in mind what is truly important as we go about the daily living with our children" (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 26). Jon Kabat Zinn describes mindful parenting as requiring us to consider and reconsider the question "what is truly important here?" (Psychotherapy.net, 2014). That is to say, our awareness should be a gauge to see if our thoughts, actions, and circumstances align with what is most important to us. Ravi S. Kudesia of the Fox School of Business at Temple University echoes this sentiment in his work on mindfulness and creativity in the workplace by noting that the original Buddhist teachings reminded practicing monks of the "the importance of remembering their intention… focusing on their actions in the present moment, and monitoring this activity in a particular way to ensure their actions are consistent with their intentions" (Kudesia, 2015). Acceptance, therefore, is about moving something forward. Within parenting, it is about remembering our true intentions related to raising children.

The 1SE project provides an opportunity to reflect on defining our intentions as parents. This is not in-the-moment acceptance, but rather the design of an intentions-based roadmap of where we want mindfulness to lead us. Some of these intentions may be reasonably straightforward. We want to show our children love, for example. The 1SE project provides the opportunity to consider what conditions make that possible. For instance, the dynamic between my oldest son and me changes considerably when it's just the two of us together. When we are alone, the love I have for him is somehow easier for him to see (and for me to show). The same is true for each of my children, in that the dynamic changes as people from within our family are present or not. For that reason, my wife and I try to shift dynamics by having individual time and different combinations of our family together for various events. Admittedly, there are likely many reasons why this is important. However, here I am only highlighting the fact that it feels important to us as parents, which is why we intentionally facilitate it. In the case of my oldest son, I try and leave town with him a few nights each year to bolster our understanding of each other. However, this does not absolve me from needing to find and foster the conditions for him to feel my love when others are around. This is where the 1SE project has helped. It has provided me with an opportunity for reflection on this aspect of our relationship. For example, I noticed that he and I connect well while outside and during high-energy events.

In short, the 1SE project offers a platform to consider parental intentions and the conditions that facilitate their success. It can assist parents in defining the roadmap to which acceptance is leading a family—just as it is helping me find the conditions in which my son and I can most easily connect.

Empathy

I cannot tell you that the 1SE project will create more empathetic parents or children. Yet, as detailed later, I can verify that the 1SE project makes me more empathetic, and it appears to have the same effect on my children. In discussing empathy as it relates to mindful parenting, Jon and Myla Kabat Zinn explain that a parent's ability to empathize impacts their ability to treat children with kindness, compassion, understanding and respect. It also impacts their ability to provide children with the right balance of freedom, safety, privacy and sense of belonging (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 66). All of these resonate with me as noble goals in the role of a parent.

At its most fundamental level, empathy in mindful parenting is about seeing things from our children's perspective. What the 1SE project affords parents is a mechanism through which to develop their own empathy, and possibly their children's. Selecting the video snippet each night is an example of how this works. In choosing the clip, I think about my children's point of view and picture them watching the year-end compilation as they age. This can be practical, like when I select a clip that includes or excludes individuals. For instance, if I felt one child had a great time at an event while another did not, I might add a clip of just the one that enjoyed it. The process allows me to put myself in their place to try and determine how viewing it, later on, might make them feel.

It can also provide a mechanism for a deeper level of empathy. There is a clip of my two oldest sons playing in the hospital cafeteria the day after my wife had a stroke. It always makes me think of the event from their perspective—how their parents disappeared and the neighbours got them ready for school that day, how their daily routines changed for months while my wife was not allowed to drive. There's another clip of my son asleep in a hospital bed, and the next

day, one of him running high speed through our kitchen while laughing. These clips help me empathize with children at that age, and reminds me of how quickly their mindsets can change.

In short, the 1SE project gives parents a tool for developing their empathy through nightly reflection, which can then be translated to empathy in dealing with children during the day. It is easier to accept a tantrum when the night before you considered how quickly circumstances and states can change for young children.

I also believe that watching the compilations helps siblings empathize with each other, and with their parents. One time, my two oldest sons were arguing with enthusiasm in the back of our van. Then a song came on, and they both immediately stopped. The van went quiet except for the song, which is a rarity. One of my sons broke the silence when he said, "can you turn it up? I like this song." The other said, "me too—it reminds me of Mom," to which they both agreed. The song was "All We Ever Knew" by The Head and the Heart. It accompanies the video clips in one of our annual videos. I cannot say it is empathy my children were feeling in that moment, and that they saw life through their mother's eyes. But I can say for certain that after they watch a compilation they are kinder and gentler to each other—at least for a short period. I also have a difficult time believing that watching your siblings change with time in the way the 1SE project allows—where one of our videos starts with my son not being able to stand and finishes with him running—would not foster some level of empathy. Similarly, accepting my parents aging is a process I am currently in the midst of, and it generates my empathy towards them. It does not seem unreasonable to hypothesize that my children, in watching their parents age in these videos, might also eventually foster empathy, which can strengthen our family.

Sovereignty

Jon and Myla Kabat Zinn explain recognizing sovereignty as seeing past children's actions and emotions by appreciating what is always present—their inherent wholeness. When children act up or argue, it is about seeing past the chaos and recognizing their intrinsic goodness. It is about making them feel loved no matter the behaviour or circumstances layered on top (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, pp. 51–64). The authors compare recognizing sovereignty to bowing in some cultures, noting that bowing is about signifying:

> a shared recognition of each other's inherent wholeness, of what is deepest and most fundamental, already and always present. You are bowing from your true nature to theirs, recalling that at the deepest level, they are one and the same, even as we recognize that on other levels, we are all different unique expressions of this oneness.
> (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 53).

Still, the authors take great pains to ensure readers do not misconstrue sovereignty for something it is not. It is not giving children free rein with no boundaries, or simply ceding to demands. Recognizing a child's sovereignty is not an act of deference; to the contrary, the authors point out the importance of structure in parenting and discuss how boundaries, limits, and firmness are also vital elements in the role of parenting (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 29).

My father was a mechanic who fixed things with his hands, not his words. With six children, he led by example. One of those examples was praying. Catching glimpses of my father kneeling at the side of his bed in the morning framed my understanding of the world. I understood that there is individual sovereignty beyond any layer of personality or ego, and something more significant to which that sovereignty connects. Jon and Myla Kabat Zinn note this when they say that "everything is perfectly and uniquely what it is, and yet nothing is separate and isolated from the whole" (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014). For me, recognizing the sovereignty of children is similar to the process of magic eye images. With

magic eye images, people stare at patterns, playing with their perspective and focus to reveal a

hidden 3D image. At first, the images present a distorted view. But with practice, one can see

beyond the surface and recognize the latent image within the chaos. There is a poem by Khlail

Gibran that also seems to encapsulate the idea of sovereignty as it relates to parenting. It reads:

> Your children are not your children.
> They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
> They come through you but not from you,
> And though they are with you yet, they belong not to you.
> You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
> For they have their own thoughts.
> You may house their bodies but not their souls,
> For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
> You may strive to be like them but seek not to make them like you.
> For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
> You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
> The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
> Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
> For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.
> (Gibran, 2002, p. 20)

Given Jon Kabat Zinn's clinical expertise in the field of mindfulness, I do not dispute the

impact recognizing sovereignty may have on a family and that "in honoring our children's

sovereignty, we make it possible for them to show themselves in their 'true seeming' and find

their own way" (M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 51). However, there is no direct

evidence to support the assertion that the 1SE project would further a parent's ability to see and

appreciate their children's sovereignty. What I can provide is my insight.

My family's third annual video starts with that positive pregnancy test. Now, at 2 years

old, I can watch the transition from a pregnancy test to my son talking in less than fifteen

minutes. Seeing those types of transition in one-second increments has enhanced my

appreciation for my children's sovereignty. When you watch and reflect on the waves of

development, moods, and the interests children explore, you appreciate that parents are gifted the opportunity to witness something deeply significant. I know this not because a research paper proves it, but because I experience seeing that sovereignty as I watch my children develop in the videos. With that said, experiencing it does not make it easy to appreciate when I am in the middle of reacting to my children in a non-mindful way. Yet, on occasion, it has interrupted those reactions—which represents the type of incremental improvement parents should strive for.

Availability and Applicability of Mindfulness

Mindful parenting is a constant work-in-progress, but it is also a tool that is constantly available to parents. It is something that can be practiced at any moment. Jon Kabat Zinn notes:

> It is here all the time, inside and underneath our thoughts and feelings. Similarly, we might say that silence resides inside and underneath the notes in a piece of music. It can be felt, and even heard, but only if we are listening very carefully. We're so caught up in our thinking most of the time that we don't actually recognize moments of silence or value them, or know how to tap them as a source of deep balance, presence, and wisdom (J. Kabat-Zinn, 2002).

Therein lies much of the power of mindfulness; its availability to parents, and to anyone at any time and in any circumstances. Its importance might be especially pronounced in the current context of technology that "has made it easier than ever to fracture attention into smaller and smaller bits" (Pickert, 2013, p. 42). Technology is designed to steal our moments of silence—and is becoming increasingly successful at it.

In addition to always being available, mindfulness is appropriate for parenting because it helps mitigate the ever-changing nature of parenting by helping parents be more attuned to those changes as they occur. Jon Kabbat-Zinn makes this same point in noting the constantly-changing nature of parenting as children age, but also stresses its increased effectiveness in a time when cultural changes also seem to be accelerating (Psychotherapy.net, 2014)**.**

The impact of mindfulness is becoming increasingly well documented. For instance, an examination of mindfulness meditation programs on employees noted benefits such as influencing relationship quality, increased resiliency and better task performance/decision-making (Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2011, p. 139). Another study, on brain and immune function, found that "meditation can produce increases in relative left-sided anterior activation that are associated with reductions in anxiety and negative effect and increases in positive affect" (Davidson et al., 2003). Although this study was specific to meditation practice and not the more general concept of mindfulness, the evidence of the benefits of both meditation practice and mindful living is becoming better defined. Specific to mindful parenting, as an associate professor of human development and family studies at the School of Human Ecology and the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Larissa Duncan has found that "bringing mindfulness to the parenting relationship may facilitate parents' ability to maintain consistency in discipline through greater self-regulation, thus facilitating avoidance of unintended harsh discipline" (Duncan, Coatsworth, Gayles, Geier, & Greenberg, 2015). The 1SE project only plays a small but possibly key role in furthering mindfulness for parents. It is a mechanism that allows parents to define their intentions, feel more empathy for their children, recognize their children's sovereignty, and generally realize some of the many benefits related to mindfulness.

Conclusion

Russell Smith is a writer for the Canadian newspaper the *Globe and Mail*. In a 2013 article, he wrote that the 1SE application is the "perfect app for the time-pressed narcissist" (Smith, 2013). The crux of his argument revolves around the artistic merit of the practice but his concern about the "age of brevity" (Smith, 2013) is not unfounded. Participating in the 1SE

project as intentionless self-indulgence, or to post online to show people how exciting our lives are, is not likely to produce personal growth or any benefit to a family. But participating in it mindfully, and thinking about what outcomes we would like to see from the practice, might be well-placed effort. In that respect, the 1SE project can be applicable to many. With a certain level of forethought, it can be a great tool for improvement—whether for a father of three or a single person looking for more adventure. It cuts through to many of the issues of life itself. It forces us to decide what to focus our attention on, as well as which events we will remember (and how we will remember them). It is about finding the balance between embracing exciting adventures and appreciating the mundane moments that make up the majority of the time in between.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge notes that all participants in a system impact its results and that understanding how our actions might be creating our reality is critical. He highlights how the consequences of our actions are not always immediate, and often have a longer-term element (Senge, 1990). A focus on longer-term impact through incremental change and an emphasis on my own role (i.e., what I can do to impact the family system) is what led me to examine the 1SE project and how it can impact a family.

In a context where the mere presence of a smartphone in our pockets may be impacting our cognitive abilities (Ward et al., 2017), the 1SE project affords people the opportunity to attempt to use new technology in a positive way. It allows them to take incremental steps that build into a body of work that has increasing significance over time. At the very least, it can serve as a daily reminder of some of the more important aspects of parenting—and of life in general. The 1SE project provides an opportunity for parents to:

- impact the psychology of their children by using the inherent malleability of memory;
- increase the amount of effective dialogue occurring amongst family members;

- reflect on the patterns of family life and alter those as necessary; and
- mindfully parent by employing Acceptance, Sovereignty and Empathy.

Notwithstanding, there is much more exploration that might still be done with regard to the 1SE project and how it impacts a family. In particular, much of the existing evidence on memory relevant to this project is based on photography as opposed to videography. It would be interesting to see if there are any major differences between the two formats. It would also be interesting to delve more into the importance of forgetting, and the cognitive impact of a fully-documented life. I continue to think about how being observed and recorded—even for a second—might impact behaviour, and how that might differ by generation. In addition to those specific issues, this synthesis leaves me thinking about other areas of life where I can take consistent incremental actions that may have a long-term impact. Notably, it has led me to focus on how, as Senge suggests, all participants in a system impact its results, and on better understanding how our actions create our reality.

Recently, I was lying in bed with my five-year-old while he was crying. He told me it was because of a balloon he lost a few months ago. My first thought was to offer to buy a new one. I didn't, recognizing it would be a hollow response. Earlier that day, I sat at a preschool with his teachers. They requested a conversation because of his recent and out-of-character behaviour. Sitting at the table, I mentioned his tendency to avoid vulnerability and how I thought that was why he might be acting out. As I lay beside him, I resisted trying to fix things by offering to get him a new balloon because I wanted to show him that vulnerability can be welcomed. I wanted him to cry. I cuddled him and he responded by crying harder. Delaying my offer to buy a new balloon was difficult, but the extra space and time taught me why he was actually upset. It was a helium balloon that escaped from his fingertips. My son was sad because an astronaut visited his preschool, and he forgot to ask him if he had seen the balloon in space.

Buying a new one would not have fixed that, nor would it have helped him become more open to sharing his feelings. Lapsing right back into trying to fix things, I told him we could e-mail and ask. This synthesis has been about improvement, not perfection. My work as a parent—in this case, trying to create space by not fixing things—is as much a work in progress as the 1SE project itself, where I continue to adjust how things are done based on how I observe the project is impacting my family. This continuous revision through small incremental steps and an appreciation for how one might impact reality seems to be a valuable lesson across all domains of life.

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