

Overcoming challenges  
implementing social-  
emotional learning (SEL)



Peekapak

# Topics

- The importance of developing social and emotional learning (SEL) skills at a young age
- Peekapak accessibility and design intention
- Peekapak case studies to maximize early childhood learning
- Future SEL projects
- Peekapak live demo

# Learning SEL skills at a young age improves odds



4x



2x

Kindergarten students who scored high on social skills are:

- **four times** as likely to graduate from college
- **two times** as likely to have a full-time job by the age of 25

## Sources:

- 1) Borenstein, David. "Teaching Social Skills to Improve Grades and Lives." July 24, 2015, The New York Times
- 2) Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenberg, Max Crowley. Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. American Journal of Public Health, 2015

# Research on SEL and low-income students

Students from low-income communities may face **challenges** in their environment that could affect early social and emotional growth, **impact their development into adulthood**, and place **risks** upon their opportunities in career, relationships and life success.

- Regular exposure to stresses in childhood for low-income students can inhibit early development of the neural connections that enable **executive function** (skills such as **impulse control**, **emotional regulation**, and **attention management**)<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Even short periods of childhood poverty can be accompanied by **uncertainty, stress, and unmet needs**<sup>3</sup>.
- Students living in communities with high rates of poverty and crime are **more likely to experience trauma**. A traumatic event can evoke feelings of helplessness and affect interpersonal relationships and interactions<sup>4</sup>.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scilearn.com/blog/ten-facts-about-how-poverty-impacts-education>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/how-kids-really-succeed/480744>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.urban.org/urban-wire/what-affects-future-success-poor-children>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.education.pitt.edu/Portals/0/Research%20Service/CUE'dIN%20Newsletter%202015.pdf>



# Peekapak is accessible to all

**Cost, accessibility and time/know-how** are key barriers in teaching SEL, particularly in low-income communities.

Peekapak ensures that all classrooms and homes can access critical SEL curriculum to help set all students on a path to success through:

1

**A freemium platform**

2

**Minimal time & SEL know-how**

3

**Connection with parents**

4

**Easy accessibility**

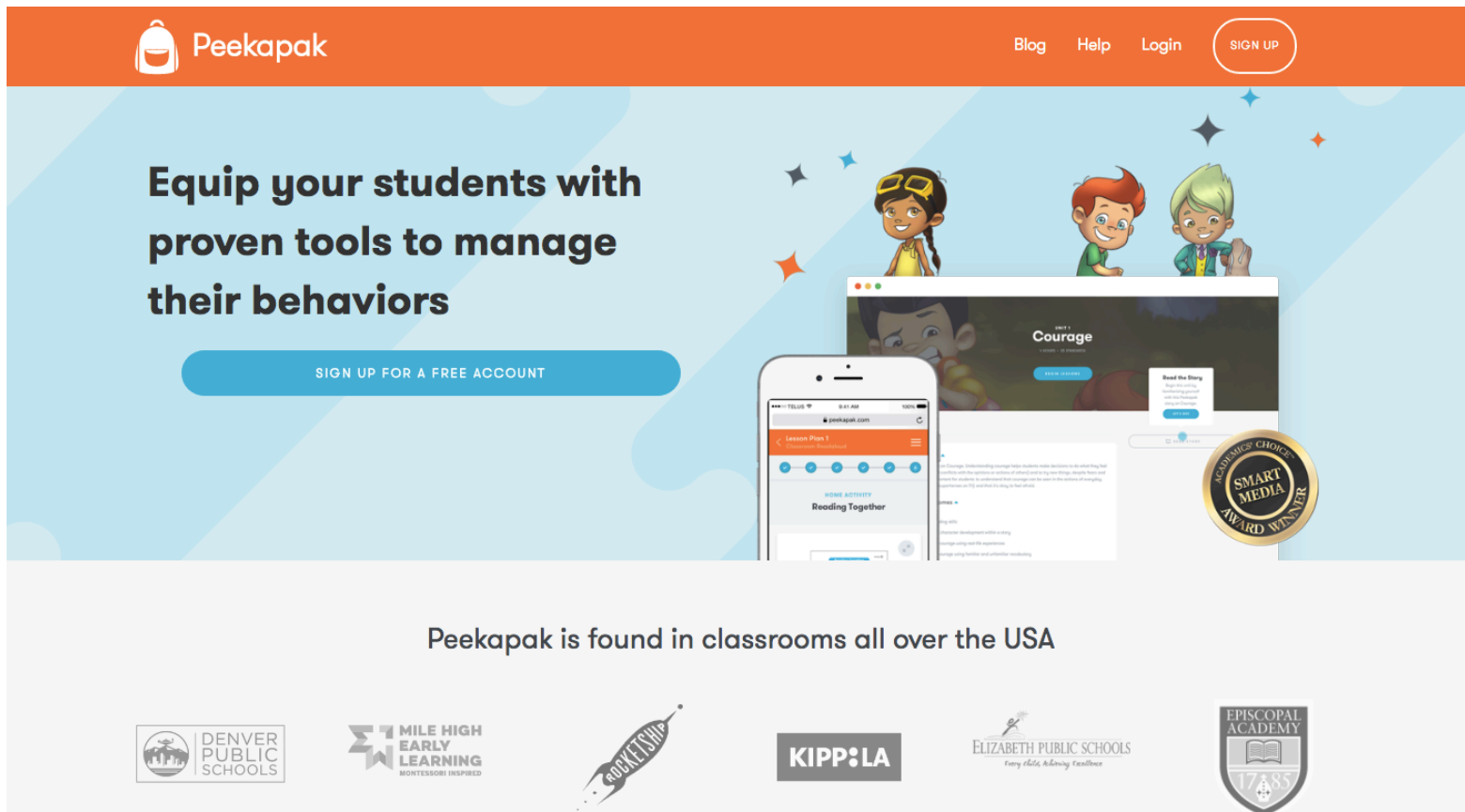
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**Supporting modifications and additional needs**

# Peekapak is accessible to all

1

**A freemium platform:** We will always have a **free component** to our platform, enabling any teacher to start teaching SEL right away, including access to free books.



The image is a screenshot of the Peekapak website. At the top, there is an orange navigation bar with the Peekapak logo (a backpack icon) on the left and links for 'Blog', 'Help', 'Login', and a 'SIGN UP' button on the right. The main content area has a light blue background with abstract shapes. On the left, the text 'Equip your students with proven tools to manage their behaviors' is displayed in a bold, dark font, with a blue button below it that says 'SIGN UP FOR A FREE ACCOUNT'. To the right, there are illustrations of three diverse children (two girls and one boy) looking at a tablet. The tablet screen shows a story titled 'Courage' with a 'Read the Story' button. Below the tablet, a smartphone displays a 'Lesson Plan 1' for 'Reading Together'. A gold circular seal on the right side of the tablet area reads 'ACADEMICS CHOICE SMART MEDIA AWARD WINNER'. At the bottom of the page, the text 'Peekapak is found in classrooms all over the USA' is centered. Below this text are logos for several partner organizations: Denver Public Schools, Mile High Early Learning (Montessori Inspired), Rocketship, KIPP LA, Elizabeth Public Schools (Every Child Achieving Excellence), and Episcopal Academy (founded 1785).

Peekapak

Blog Help Login SIGN UP

Equip your students with proven tools to manage their behaviors

SIGN UP FOR A FREE ACCOUNT

Courage

Read the Story

Lesson Plan 1

Reading Together

ACADEMICS CHOICE SMART MEDIA AWARD WINNER

Peekapak is found in classrooms all over the USA

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MILE HIGH EARLY LEARNING MONTESSORI INSPIRED

ROCKETSHIP

KIPP LA

ELIZABETH PUBLIC SCHOOLS Every Child Achieving Excellence

EPISCOPAL ACADEMY 1785

# Peekapak is accessible to all

2

**Minimal time & SEL know-how:** We offer a **comprehensive, research-based, plug-and-go solution** that is easy to follow.

## Step Overview

### You Will Need ...

- "Is This A Calm Body?" PDF
- Device to project PDF
- Chart paper
- Markers

### Instructions to Teachers

- Students learn what a calm body looks like, sounds like and feels like.
- Have "Is This A Calm Body?" PDF prepped and ready to show students.
- Ask students how characters in each image may be feeling, and whether the main character is showing a calm body.

### Resources

 Is This A Calm Body?.pdf

### Core Standards

## Guiding Students Through This Activity

- When you hear the word "calm" what do you think of?
- (Show "Is This A Calm Body?" PDF)
  - How do you think this Peekapak Pal is feeling?
  - Is this Peekapak Pal showing a calm body? Why or why not?
- What do you think a calm body looks like?
- What do you think a calm body sounds like?
- What do you think a calm body feels like?
- When we're being calm in our classroom, we ... (write these words on chart paper and draw a simple image

### Teacher Tip

Model an example first before having students reply.



 READ STORY

Lesson plans aligned to  
Prek standards while  
teaching social-emotional  
learning topics that can  
easily be fit in

# Peekapak is accessible to all

3

## Connection with parents:

Parents may struggle with finding ways to interact with their child or carving out the time. We offer **free digital storybooks** and **quick at-home activities** that are fast, easy and fun for families to do together.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Here's an update on what we did in class today and a fun and quick activity for you to do with Ami to reinforce what we learned in class.

### Class Update

Today we read a story about Leo the Hedgehog's first day of school and how he overcame his nervousness. We learned that there are many different ways to manage our emotions.

### Activity: Story Read Aloud At Home

- Parents/guardians, read the story, The Peekapak Pals and the Classroom Chaos, with your child.
- Discuss how both of you would feel if you were in Leo's shoes.
- Ask your child to point out different strategies the Peekapak Pals used to manage their emotions.
- Ask your child to pick one technique you will both try the next time you need to regain calm at home.



[Click here](#) to read the Story Book

# Peekapak is accessible to all

4

**Easy accessibility:** Peekapak is accessible through the **internet** and **mobile-friendly**. **Teachers can also print at-home lessons for parents** if mobile accessibility is limited.





# Peekapak is accessible to all

5

**Supporting modifications and additional needs:** We offer our **books in Spanish** and **enhanced accessibility** through **audio/visual support**



# Maximizing Early Childhood Learning

To maximize early childhood learning we thoughtfully we focused on four key areas within the program:

1. Empathetic **characters and world**
2. Engaging **original stories**
3. Stimulating **classroom activities**
4. Bonding and reinforcing **parent connection**


# Group Activity

As we explore the four ways we've overcome the key challenges, we are inviting you to share your ideas.

## How this works:

- As we explore each of the four points, please write down ideas on post it notes
- At end we'll compile all the thoughts we got and share this with the broader group





With young children, it starts  
with creating a **world** so **inviting**  
and **magical** –yet **relatable**  
and **accessible**– they can’t  
wait to return to it  
**over and over again ...**

How do you incorporate “magical” into your classrooms?

# 1. Empathetic characters and world

Peekapak's characters and world were carefully crafted to surprise, delight and inspire young children through:

- **Diverse** and recurring human characters
- Interesting **animal** characters
- Inspiring **interests** and **talents**
- Familiar settings with a **twist**
- **Organic** lines and **warm** colors



# Diverse and recurring characters

Peekapak's human characters feature different **ethnicities**, **socio-economic backgrounds**, **skills** and **interests**, and **temperaments**.



# Interesting animal characters

**Animal** characters were created to help young students further strengthen their **empathetic** thinking by learning about **different** ways animals may think and ...





# Interesting animal characters

... how they might **live**. Young children learn and grow by putting themselves in someone else's shoes and **imagining** themselves in **different situations and scenarios**.



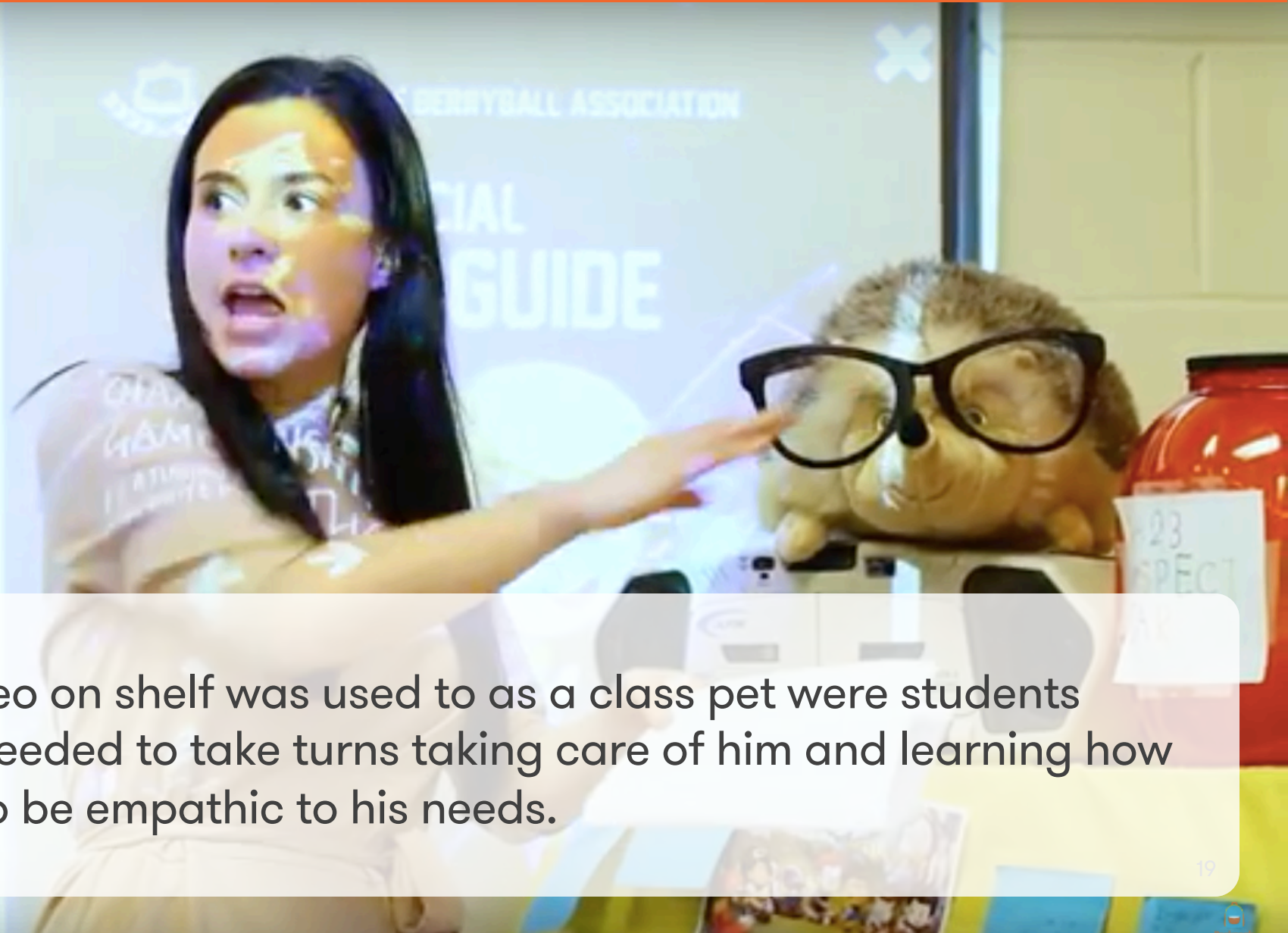


# Familiar settings with a twist




Our world, Peekaville, was designed using **organic shapes and lines** to promote **fluidity** and **flexibility**. Each location features a **twist** on the familiar settings young children are used to to help **stretch their imaginations**.

# Case Study: Leo on the Shelf, Elizabeth, NJ



Leo on shelf was used to as a class pet were students needed to take turns taking care of him and learning how to be empathic to his needs.





The **benefits** derived from reading to young children include **academic excellence**, **communication** skills, **language** mastery, new **experiences**, **empathetic** thinking ... and so much more!

How do you incorporate reading into the program?  
What types of books do you choose?

## 2. Engaging original stories

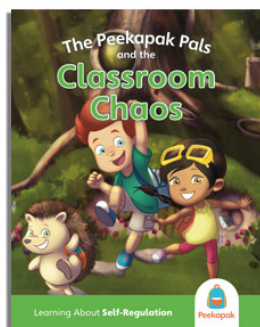
Peekapak's original stories follow the mantra: *Teaching without preaching*. Indeed, our stories are fun and exciting and young children come away learning a brand new character skill without realizing it! Stories feature:

- One learning focus per story
- Relatable emotions (facial and body language)
- Focus on new emotional vocabulary
- Recurring characters and simple yet engaging scenarios and storylines
- Large story projection or printed story books

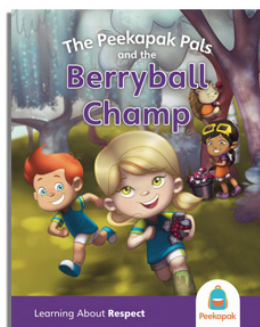


# One learning focus per story

Peekapak's stories are each based on a social emotional learning skill that early childhood educators\* identified as being one of the **most relevant** for young children.



Self-Regulation



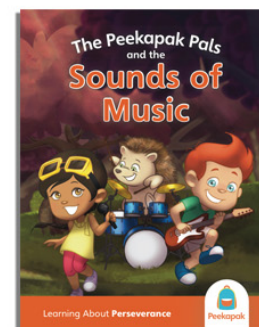
Respect



Gratitude



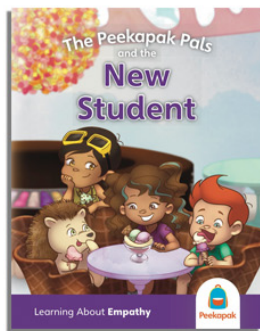
Kindness



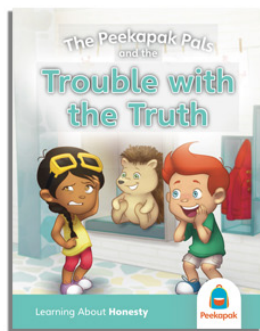
Perseverance



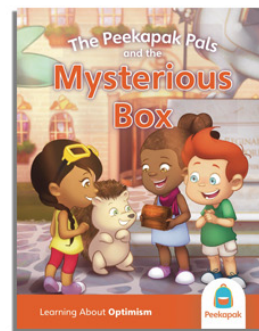
Teamwork



Empathy



Honesty



Optimism



Courage

\*Based on interviews with over 300 early childhood teachers and educators conducted by Peekapak.

# Read aloud & story projection



Read alouds foster young children's emerging language and literacy skills while visual storytelling and big, bright and bold illustrations keep young children engaged.



# Emotional literacy and vocabulary

We've designed our illustrations and characters specifically to encourage young children to **point** to the **facial expressions** and **body language** they see and learn the emotional **vocabulary** that goes along with different **feelings**. Later, they **practice** these words in 'real life' classroom activities.

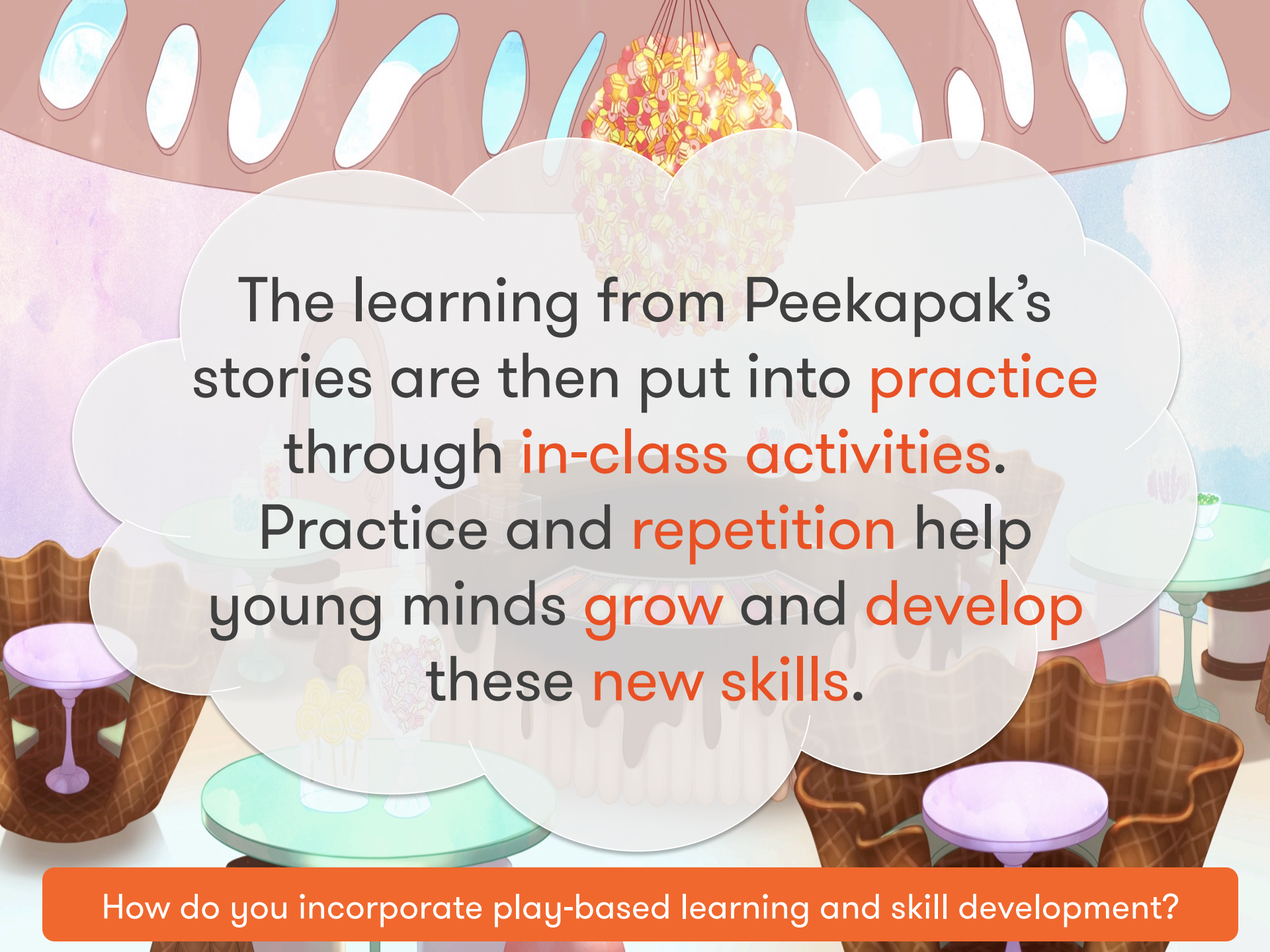




# Case Study: NYC Dept of Ed PreK



Students referred back to the story on respect while on the playground to identify a situation when another student was being disrespectful and turned to the teacher to help resolve it.



The learning from Peekapak's stories are then put into **practice** through **in-class activities**. Practice and **repetition** help young minds **grow** and **develop** these **new skills**.

How do you incorporate play-based learning and skill development?

### 3. Stimulating classroom activities

Young children learn through hands-on discovery and play. We've designed our activities, based on research, with the following emphases in mind:

- **Big ideas** that establish a **foundation** and **ladder** on learning
- **Play-and-inquiry-based** learning
- Different activity **makeups** (e.g., partners, groups)
- The **four C's** (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity)
- **Ties to Prek Standards** and encourages literacy and writing activities



# Establishing a foundation and laddering



Classroom activities help teach young children by using the story to **introduce** the topic and **establish a base** and then **laddering** the learning through **Big Ideas**.

For example:

Big Idea 1: What is Respect? Why is Respect Important?

Big Idea 2: How is Respect Demonstrated?

Big Idea 3: How is Respect Applied in Our Lives?



# Play-and-inquiry-based learning



Studies show the effectiveness of **play-based** and **inquiry-based learning** for young children. Peekapak's lessons are based on these concepts to ensure student **interest** and **comprehension**.

Learning techniques include **role-playing**, **movement** and **kinesthetic** learning, **discussions**, **arts and crafts** and more, as well as learning to work in **groups**, **partners**, and **as a class**.




# Case Study: NYC Dept of Ed PreK



Incorporated the Peekapak Pals into different play centers and to create their own stories.





Finally, student learning is **reinforced** at **home** by **parents**, providing additional **practice** and teaching students how to **transfer** and **apply** their new skills in all **environments**.

How do you currently engage parents in classroom learning?

## 4. Reinforcing parent connection

Young children learn best when their parents are involved. We've aimed to remove all barriers and help parents reinforce their child's learning at home. Peekapak's home activities were designed by early childhood expert Dr. Kimberly Bezaire.

- Parent updates helps inform and establish a **common vocabulary**
- **Play-and-inquiry-based** activities for the home
- **Re-reading the story** together helps build **strong relationships and bonding**
- Students **practice** character development in a **safe environment** with trusted people

# Example parent communication and activity

## Update & Activity To Send Home



### **Class Update**

We learned what respect looks like by examining how the Peekapak Pals showed respect in the story, *The Peekapak Pals and the Berryball Champ*. We looked for clues in each character's facial expression and in their body language.

### **Activity**

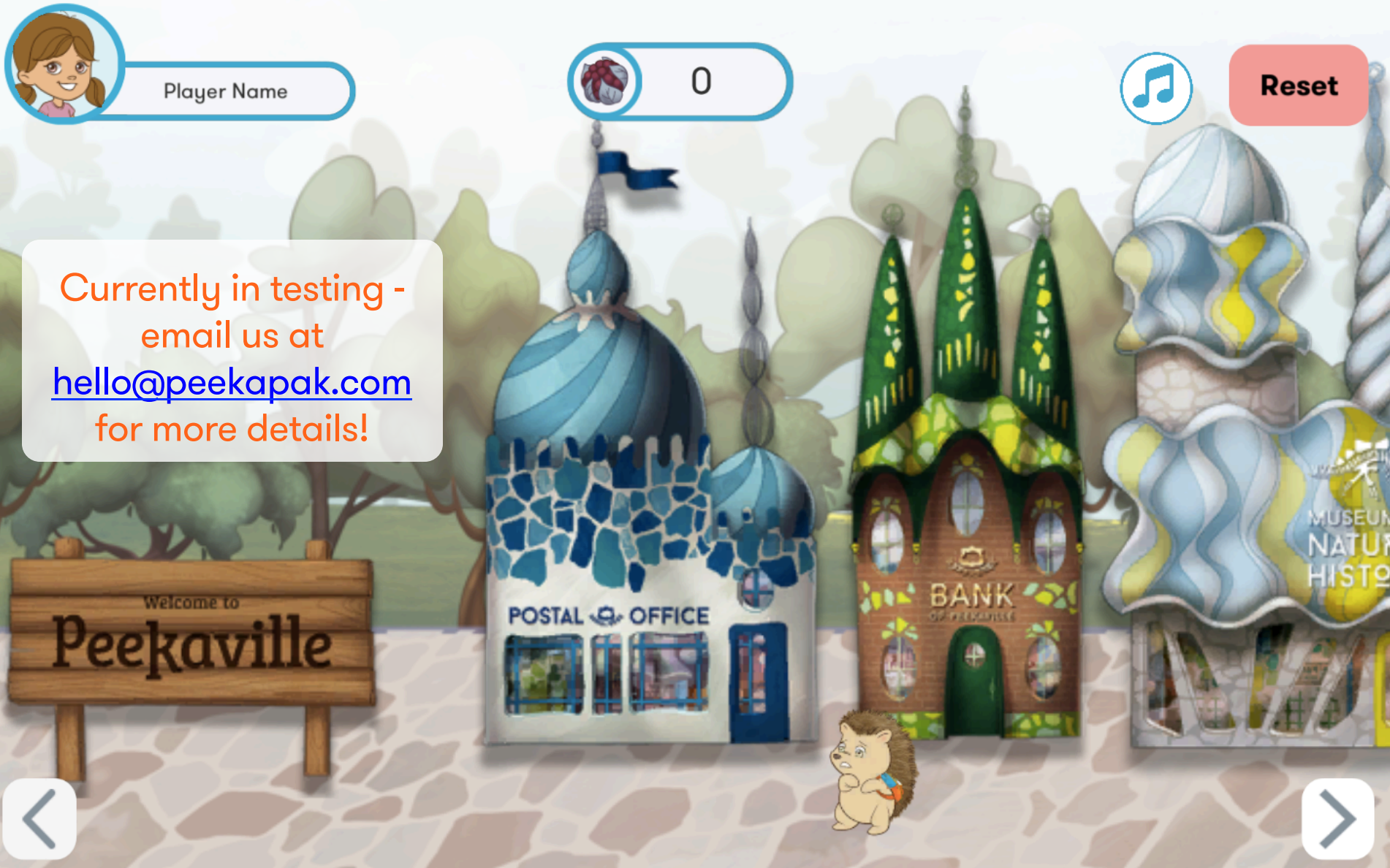
#### **Respect At Home**

- Parents/guardians: Discuss with your child how your family shows respect to each other in your home. This may be saying “please” and “thank you”, or helping with chores, or it may be listening to someone’s opinion without judgment.
- Take turns saying and acting out a way you show respect at home.
- Discuss why it’s important to remember to say respectful words or to do respectful actions at home.
- Have other family members join in, too!

Demo



# Future projects: SEL Learning Games





# Case Study: Research & Pilot

Mile High Early Learning Centers in Denver, CO are piloting and researching the impact of Peekapak across its 6 locations:

- Offering step-by-step, turnkey lessons to teach these skills
- Measuring pre-post and across a control and test group.
- Testing options to connect with parents

# Case Study: Mile High Early Learning




<b>Intensive Interventions</b>	When children have persistent challenging behavior, comprehensive interventions are developed.
<b>Targeted Social Emotional Supports</b>	Peekapak provides explicit instruction in social skills and emotional regulation.
<b>High Quality Supportive Environments</b>	Inclusive environment at MHEL and supportive home environments. Peekapak provides universal support for all students to develop SEL and personal relationships both in the class & at home with families - <b>with the goal of minimizing the development of challenging behavior.</b>
<b>Nurturing and Responsive Relationships</b>	Peekapak actively supports a child's development by helping <b>educators team with families to work as partners in a child's learning</b> , by providing all parties with a <b>common social and emotional language</b> , and by <b>embedding instruction</b> into a child's everyday plan - both at school and at home.
<b>Effective Workforce</b>	Mile High Early Learning has provided high quality training & support to all its educators

# Let's talk!



**Peekapak**

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## Additional Research & Design behind Peekapak



# Skills for low-income students

Research in executive function, effortful control, and emotion regulation point to ways children's exposure to the chronic ecological stressors associated with low income has serious negative effects on their ability to modulate their emotions, their higher order cognitive function, and their behavior.

(Blair et al., 2011; Evans & English, 2002)

Research has identified specific **skills** that may **help prepare low-income students for life-long success.**

**Peekapak's units help teach these skills.**

# Skills for low-income students

Identified skills	Peekapak's focus
Self-Regulation	Peekapak's first unit on <b>Self-Regulation</b> focuses on helping students <b>put a name to a feeling</b> and introduces <b>strategies</b> to help students <b>manage their emotions and reach a state of calm</b> . These skills especially benefit children <b>who are exposed to environmental stressors and will help in navigating unfamiliar situations and being ready to learn in school</b> .
Perseverance	Peekapak teaches <b>perseverance</b> through helping students understand and practice a <b>positive and growth mindset</b> . This is especially important to help students in low-income areas understand that they are <b>capable of changing and affecting the outcome of their actions and behaviors</b> through <b>planning and persistence</b> .
Respect	Peekapak's unit on <b>Respect</b> provides a guide on how to treat and communicate with others and demonstrate respect for oneself. The unit <b>can support students who may exhibit anti-social behaviors developed as a reaction to stress or trauma</b> . The unit also encourages students to embrace and appreciate differences <b>to promote diversity and inclusion</b> .
Optimism	Peekapak places great importance on the <b>power of positive thinking</b> . Our <b>Optimism</b> unit can <b>help students, especially those from urban environments who may have experienced trauma, move past a sense of learned helplessness and learn ways to keep trying even when times are tough</b> .

# Literacy and positive role models

- In addition to developing social and emotional skills, our units promote literacy and positive role models both at school and at home. Children from low-income communities are shown to be exposed to fewer books, which can affect literacy levels.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, children from minority groups are less likely to see characters that represent them, making it more difficult to connect with the stories.
- Peekapak's original storybooks and characters were thoughtfully designed to overcome those challenges by reflecting **diversity** in people, showcasing different forms of **homes**, **socio-economic backgrounds** and **interests**. The storybooks are also accessible at home for reading reinforcement.



- Each Peekapak Pal has an area of interest, such as architecture, robotics, programming, chemistry, art and fashion to **educate** and **inspire** students.

Sources:

1) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3095493/>



# Research-based program design

Peekapak has referenced countless research studies and expert and educator experience (via 300+ interviews) in designing our early childhood approach. Here are just a few examples of research studies we have based our program design upon (with brief abstracts). For additional details: [ami@peekapak.com](mailto:ami@peekapak.com)

## 1. Empathetic **characters and world**

- Sobel and Lillard (2001). *How fantasy benefits young children's understanding of pretense*. **Abstract:** 4-year-olds' understanding of the role that the mind plays in pretending improved when children were asked questions in a fantasy context.
- Maruyama, M. (2010). *The Effects of Animals on Children's Development of Perspective Taking Abilities*. **Abstract:** Students who showed stronger attachment with animals had higher levels of social cognitive development (i.e., perspective taking abilities) than students who showed weaker attachment.

## 2. Engaging **original stories**

- Kidd, D., Castano, E. (2013). *Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind*. **Abstract:** Reading literary fiction led to better performance on tests of affective ToM and cognitive ToM (comprehending that other people hold beliefs and desires and that these may differ from one's own).
- Mar., R. (2009). *Exposure to media and theory-of-mind development in preschoolers*. **Abstract:** Inferred exposure to children's storybooks predicted theory-of-mind abilities and influences upon 4 – 6 year old children.

## 3. Stimulating **classroom activities**

- Morris, P. et al (June 2014). *National Evaluation of Three Approaches to Improving Preschoolers' Social and Emotional Competence*. **Abstract:** Preschoolers who participate in social-emotional skills programs exhibit less aggression and anxiety and become better social problem solvers.
- Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009). *The Great Balancing Act: Optimizing Core Curricula through Playful Pedagogy*. **Abstract:** Young children learn best through the kinds of meaningful engagement and exploration found in play.
- Blair, C., Raver, C. (2015). *School Readiness and Self-Regulation: A Developmental Psychobiological Approach*. **Abstract:** Self-regulation abilities allow for engagement in learning activities and provide the foundation for adjustment to school.

## 4. Bonding and reinforcing **parent connection**

- Harvard Family Research Project (2006). *Family Involvement Makes a Difference*. **Abstract:** Early childhood is a time which significant transformations take place. Both participation in preschool-based activities and regular communication between families and teachers are related to young children's outcomes.