

Generative Football Play for Preschoolers: Theoretical Implications, Realistic Dilemmas, and Pathways for Creation

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Abstract

In order to solve the problems such as single form of kindergarten football activities, football teaching focusing on skills, insufficient gamification, ignored football culture and so on, this paper defines the concept of generative football play and puts forward the analysis of the value of generative football play as well as its realistic dilemma and influencing factors from the aspects of “national demand, kindergarten development and children’s growth”. Then, according to Gadamer’s play theory and the theory of “integration of teaching and doing”, it creates five ways to promote the development of children’s generative football play: promoting the quality and efficiency of children’s generative football play; integrating AI technology to strengthen the digital transformation of children’s soccer; creating a new model of “1 + 5” new home co-breeding for life; innovating children’s football culture and laying the foundation for children’s football generative play; building a children’s soccer ecosystem for the whole society.

Keywords

Generative, Preschoolers, Play Spirit, Football Plays, Path of Creation

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of “starting football from a young age” has gained significant traction, leading to the development of early childhood football becoming a strategic priority highly emphasized by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council of China. This initiative aims to use football as a vehicle to implement the fundamental task of moral education,

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sowing the seeds of hope for the revitalization of Chinese football. This endeavor not only has profound implications for promoting the core socialist values and shaping the healthy physique and sound personality of children but also serves as a crucial pathway for advancing football education in kindergartens. It enables young children to experience joy, enhance their physical fitness, and cultivate their willpower through football-related activities. Since the Ministry of Education issued the “Notice on the Pilot Program for Football-Featured Kindergartens” in 2019 (Ministry of Education, 2019), China’s early childhood football education has entered an unprecedented phase of development, laying a solid foundation for the sustainable growth of the football sector. However, behind this rapid development, kindergarten football activities face numerous dilemmas and difficulties. Specifically, current kindergarten football activities generally exhibit a single teaching model, placing excessive emphasis on skill training while neglecting the cultivation of football culture. This has resulted in children failing to gain a comprehensive growth experience from football activities. Furthermore, traditional teaching methods often center around the teacher, overlooking the subjectivity and creativity of children during play, thus limiting the further enhancement of the quality of early childhood football education. In this context, generative football play for young children has emerged as a novel teaching concept and practical model, with their unique value becoming increasingly prominent. Generative football play emphasizes a child-centered approach that is guided by the interests and needs of the children. Through flexible and diverse play formats, these activities stimulate children’s enthusiasm and initiative to participate in football activities, fostering their ability to autonomously generate learning content and experiences during play. This characteristic effectively addresses the shortcomings of current kindergarten football education, providing children with a richer, more interesting, and challenging learning experience. To gain a deeper understanding of the current state of football courses in kindergartens and the implementation of existing plays, this study first conducts a comprehensive review and analysis of the current landscape of early childhood football education. Building on this foundation, the research further explores the theoretical implications and practical value of generative football play, proposing specific strategies to promote their development in light of the existing dilemmas. This study aims to provide robust theoretical support and practical guidance for advancing high-quality development in early childhood football education, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of well-rounded socialist builders and successors who are developed in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor aspects.

Definition of Generative Football Play—The intrinsic value of football lies in the enjoyment derived from the play itself, experienced within an open environment (Cao & Cao, 2020). Generative football play represents a form of athletic play centered around football as the core element, aimed at fostering young children’s creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills. In these generative football play, children transition from being passive participants to active learn-

ers and creators. They have the freedom to choose the content, rules, and roles within the plays, thereby exercising their imagination and creativity as they confront various problems and dilemmas inherent in the football activities. Generative football play is characterized by several key attributes: a high degree of flexibility, allowing for adjustments based on the interests and needs of the children; a strong interactivity, emphasizing cooperation and communication among peers; and a high level of innovation, encouraging children to explore their creative potential. These elements work synergistically to create a dynamic and engaging environment in which children can thrive, ultimately enhancing their overall development through the medium of football (Zhong, 2023).

The theoretical foundation of generative football play

Gadamer's theory of play posits that play is the optimal mode of autonomous learning for children (Yu & Wang, 2019). According to Gadamer's framework, play is characterized as a spontaneous, self-directed, expressive, meaningful activity governed by its own rules, which facilitates the development and learning of children. Gadamer emphasizes that play has a positive impact on various dimensions of children's holistic development, including physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Generative football play for young children is rooted in the principles of child autonomy and exploration, aligning with Gadamer's perspective on play. In the context of generative football play, children are empowered to make independent choices regarding play elements such as objects, rules, and objectives. This autonomy stimulates their creativity and imagination while fostering interaction and cooperation with peers. Gadamer's perspective indicates that through these playful activities, children can build self-confidence, cultivate autonomy, enhance problem-solving abilities, and derive joy and satisfaction from their experiences. Thus, the theoretical underpinnings derived from Gadamer's views provide substantial support for the conceptual framework of generative football play for young children. By creating suitable play environments, providing guidance and motivation, integrating interdisciplinary content, establishing mechanisms for cooperation and competition, and focusing on comprehensive evaluation and feedback processes, the development of generative football play and the overall growth of children can be effectively promoted. The integrated application of Gadamer's theoretical foundation offers educators and policymakers a useful framework to support and advance the practice and research of generative football play in early childhood education.

The theory of "integrating teaching and practice," proposed by the educational theorist Tao, which advocates for innovative teaching methodologies that are informed by the methods of learning. This theory emphasizes a student-centered approach, wherein learning is promoted through doing—meaning that learning occurs through active engagement in practical activities. The core tenet is that teaching and learning should be closely centered around the act of doing, as doing enables students to comprehensively enhance their knowledge and skills. Drawing on the principles of the "integrating teaching and practice" theory, it is crucial to incorporate this concept throughout the process of generative football

play for young children. In these plays, teachers encourage children to autonomously design play mechanics, play scenarios, and materials. This approach prioritizes children's interests and needs, with educators providing a diverse array of play materials and environments that offer a realistic and immersive gaming experience, thereby meeting the developmental requirements of different children. Moreover, teachers stimulate active exploration and practice among children, offering timely feedback and guidance during the play. Through a well-structured teaching methodology, educators can facilitate the teaching of football in a manner that allows children to continuously adjust and refine their performance within the play, ultimately enhancing their skills in football play. By integrating the "teaching and practice" framework, the educational experience in generative football play can be significantly enriched, fostering both engagement and development.

2. Realistic Dilemmas and Influencing Factors in the Implementation of Generative Football Play for Preschoolers

2.1. Low Public Awareness of Preschooler's Football Education

Preschooler's football education, aimed at fostering children's physical fitness, teamwork, and social skills, does not enjoy a high level of public recognition in some societies. Firstly, preschool football education is relatively new compared to traditional academic and classroom-based learning. In certain contexts, it remains a relatively novel concept due to insufficient promotion and awareness campaigns, leading many to be unaware of its existence and significance. Secondly, there are prevalent misconceptions regarding the nature of preschool football education. Some individuals may perceive it merely as a simple kicking activity, overlooking its educational essence and importance. They often fail to recognize how preschool football education contributes not only to physical development but also to the enhancement of social skills and teamwork capabilities among children. Furthermore, the limited dissemination and adoption of preschool football education in certain societies is exacerbated by a lack of supporting resources such as adequate playing fields, equipment, and professional coaching staff, as well as a weak cultural foundation for football (Sun, 2021). Consequently, these factors collectively hinder the recognition of preschool football education within society.

2.2. Limitations of Traditional Teaching Models on Generative Football Play for Preschoolers

Generative football play for preschoolers represents an innovative educational approach that offers opportunities for holistic development and learning. However, traditional teaching models impose certain limitations on the implementation of these generative football play. Firstly, there is an overemphasis on classroom instruction. Traditional football teaching methods often prioritize the transmission of knowledge within a classroom setting, frequently neglecting the

learning and development that occur during play. This imbalance restricts opportunities for generative football play among young children. Physical education typically focuses on the delivery of content, overlooking the importance of children's autonomous exploration and creativity (Su, 2024). Secondly, traditional teaching models tend to prioritize a singular correct answer. This emphasis on outcomes and correctness limits tolerance for the diversity and creativity inherent in generative football play. Consequently, young children's autonomy and imaginative capabilities during play are hindered. Additionally, there is a lack of individualized attention within traditional teaching frameworks. Instruction is often delivered based on a uniform teaching plan and methodology, disregarding individual differences and the unique needs of each child. Such an approach constrains the development and progress of generative football play for preschoolers. Lastly, traditional teaching models often disconnect learning from real-life applications, resulting in a lack of practical and contextualized education. This disconnection weakens the relationship between generative football play and actual scenarios, thus limiting the effectiveness of learning outcomes and the transferability of skills acquired through play.

2.3. The Impact of Family Environment on Generative Football Play for Preschoolers

The family environment is a crucial influencing factor in the growth and development of preschool children and significantly affects the progression of generative football play. Firstly, a family's perception and attitude towards football can influence a child's interest in and willingness to participate in generative football play. If a family lacks an understanding of football or holds negative attitudes toward the sport, this may adversely affect the child's opportunities and enthusiasm for engaging in generative football play. Secondly, the economic circumstances and resources available within the family can also impact the development of generative football play for young children. Football requires access to facilities, equipment, and guidance; therefore, families with limited economic means or inadequate resources may encounter barriers that hinder their children's involvement in generative football play. Moreover, the importance and level of involvement that family members place on children's play can significantly influence the development of generative football play. When parents recognize the significance and developmental value of children's football-related play and actively participate in and support their children's football activities, it can substantially promote the advancement of generative football play for preschoolers.

2.4. Dilemmas in the Development of Habits for Generative Football Play in Preschoolers

The cultivation of habits is a significant issue in the development of generative football play among preschool children. Currently, children tend to spend a considerable amount of time engaged with electronic devices and virtual entertain-

ment, resulting in reduced participation in physical plays and outdoor activities. This trend contributes to a lack of interest and motivation in generative football play. Additionally, the rise of social media and online gaming has led children to favor virtual experiences over real-life interactions. Consequently, preschoolers are less likely to engage in authentic football plays within their families and social circles, adversely affecting the development of generative football play. Moreover, contemporary lifestyles and environmental factors impose certain limitations on the habit formation related to generative football play. The rapid pace of urbanization, constraints on living space, and safety concerns have made it challenging for children to access adequate outdoor and recreational areas, thereby restricting their opportunities to participate in football plays. Furthermore, parental concerns regarding the safety of football activities and excessive protective behaviors may also limit children's freedom to engage in outdoor football plays.

3. Fostering Development Pathways for Generative Football Play in Preschoolers

3.1. Enhancing the Quality and Efficiency of Generative Football Activities for Preschoolers

Generative football play represents a crucial component of physical education in kindergartens, significantly contributing to the physical development, social skills, and creativity of young children. To enhance the quality and efficiency of generative football play activities, it is vital to establish a safe, comfortable, and stimulating play environment. Kindergartens can leverage the distinct characteristics of different seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—to provide preschoolers with a variety of playing surfaces, such as grass, dirt, sand, and water. Educators should encourage children to create and express themselves freely based on the variations in the playing environment, utilizing football equipment of different sizes and a range of diverse play props to appropriately plan and design the play area. Furthermore, during the implementation of football-themed activities, it is essential to adhere to three fundamental principles: “interest as the foundation, health as the priority,” “play-based learning, with a focus on childhood joy,” and “interactive cooperation, prioritizing enjoyment.” (Hai, 2023) A child-centered approach should be adopted, utilizing teaching methods such as inquiry-based learning and project-based learning that prioritize understanding before instruction. These methodologies can better meet the learning needs of preschoolers and provide them with more opportunities for engaging in generative football play. Educators can support this process by offering appropriate guidance, designing diverse types of plays, and organizing varied forms of activities to help children fully unleash their imagination and creativity. For instance, in a middle class football-themed activity titled “Fun with Football,” educators begin by posing open-ended questions to the children, encouraging them to express their inquiries freely. Based on the children's responses, teachers can identify driving questions such as: What is a football? Why is a football round? How

can football be played? Who can we play with? Where can we play? How can we construct a football field? How can we play in creative ways? Subsequently, children collaborate with peers to hypothesize and autonomously design their football play plans, which includes determining the number of participants, establishing rules, and outlining play. After formulating their play plans, the children collect the necessary materials together and commence their generative football play. During the play, teachers position themselves at one end of the field, attentively observing and documenting each child's interests, motor abilities, and developmental levels, while providing timely individualized guidance and dilemmas or actively participating in the play. This approach aids in stimulating children's enthusiasm and creativity, fostering their autonomous development within generative football play. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure the safety of children during generative football play by providing appropriate supervision and guidance, enhancing their ability to perceive, understand, and avoid potential dangers and injuries (Li, Zhuo, & Chen, 2023). Additionally, emphasizing play evaluation and feedback plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of generative football activities. Teachers can observe and record children's play performance, offering positive evaluations and feedback in a timely manner. They can also facilitate play sharing and exchange among children, allowing them to learn from and draw inspiration from one another. By focusing on play evaluation and feedback, children can continuously improve and enhance their play skills. Finally, it is essential to integrate generative football play with other learning activities, such as mathematics, language, and the arts, to promote holistic development in preschoolers.

3.2. Enhancing the Digital Transformation of Preschooler's Football through AI Technology

With the rapid development and widespread adoption of digital technologies, digital transformation has emerged as one of the trends in modern education. In the context of preschool football education, digital transformation can offer numerous new possibilities and opportunities for children's learning and development. Firstly, digital transformation can provide enriched play contexts and personalized learning resources for preschool football activities. By utilizing various digital tools and platforms, educators can offer diverse learning materials and instructional videos, thereby catering to the unique learning needs of different children. Furthermore, in line with the principles of personalized learning, digital transformation can also facilitate the customization of individualized learning plans and teaching content based on each child's interests and abilities. Secondly, digital transformation can create more authentic and immersive learning experiences. Technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) enable young learners to engage in football play scenarios, enhancing their sense of participation and interest. This immersive learning experience can stimulate children's willingness to learn and their motivation, resulting in improved learning outcomes and a greater sense of accomplishment (Wang &

Lin, 2023). For example, the football play “Little Cat Fishing” in a senior class utilizes interactive projection technology to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment. The play begins with the educator posing questions to the children, such as: “Children, where do fish grow? How do we build a fish pond? What might be around the fish pond?” Together, the children establish a playful scenario of a fish pond, after which the educator asks, “Look, now that the fish pond is built, what can we do to catch fish? What materials do we need?” Following this, the educator organizes the “Little Cat Fishing” play. In the first round, the educator acts as the “little cat” attempting to catch fish, while the children assume the role of fish, evading capture within the designated area. In the second round, the play introduces increased difficulty by requiring the “fish” to protect the football. In the third round, the educator gathers the children and asks, “Where does the little cat fish?” Subsequently, a virtual “fish pond” is projected onto the ground using interactive projection technology, inviting some children to play as “little cats” while the rest act as “fish” evading capture while protecting the football within the projected area. In the fourth round, the play is adjusted by limiting the number of “little cats” and their distance from the fish, leading to a reorganization of the football play. In the fifth round, bait is introduced into the play, with the rule stating that the number of bait pieces consumed by the “little fish” determines victory; fewer catches result in a minor win. The use of interactive projection technology not only immerses children in the passion and enjoyment of football plays but also enhances their ball control abilities while developing their reaction times and coordination skills. Moreover, these activities promote communication and collaboration among children, fostering team spirit and cooperative attitudes.

Furthermore, digital transformation invigorates the learning and teaching of preschool football plays. For example, during a designated activity area, children can engage with augmented reality (AR) through a World Cup penalty shootout play on tablets. Following this activity, educators guide children to an AR soccer room, which simulates an interactive football pitch for further football-related activities. The teacher prompts the children with questions such as, “Have you ever played projected soccer? What do you see on the projected football field?” Subsequently, two children are invited to actively participate in the projected football play, with the objective of scoring as many goals as possible within a designated time limit of 30 seconds. All six groups of children partake in the play. The educator then queries the children, “Is the projected football play restricted to one player from each team facing off? What other ways can we play football?” After the children respond, two teams, each consisting of two players wearing different colored vests, are organized to engage in the simulated interactive football play, continuing this pattern as needed. Additionally, digital transformation offers more convenient and efficient learning methods. Through online learning platforms and applications, children can access educational resources anytime and anywhere, free from the constraints of time and space.

Furthermore, the integration of smart sensors and cameras allows for real-time monitoring and analysis of children's movements, providing educators with precise and convenient data on children's football performance. Utilizing AI algorithms for instructional assessment and feedback enables teachers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each child based on these data insights, allowing for tailored play suggestions, which ultimately facilitates the learning and development of young children.

3.3. Developing a Family-Integrated "1 + 5" Model for Collaborative Education in Early Childhood Football

Collaborative education between home and school is a vital extension of preschool education, with parents serving as the first teachers of their children. Their involvement and support are crucial to promoting generative football play among young children. Firstly, it is essential to provide football training and education for parents. Through such programs, parents can understand the concepts and significance of generative football play for preschoolers, as well as how to create an environment that supports this play in the home setting. Secondly, establishing a collaborative mechanism between families and educational institutions is paramount. This mechanism primarily consists of two components: a family-initiated football education guidance alliance and a preschool-initiated family football education guidance organization, both aimed at providing educational support to all parents within the school community. On one hand, the family-initiated football education guidance alliance focuses on creating a "parental incentive mechanism" and organizing family football activities. These initiatives include setting up family reading corners with recommended football literature, creating parent-child football picture books, organizing performances of children's football-themed plays, hosting weekend football competitions for families, and conducting a Family Football Night. These activities aim to enhance children's enthusiasm for participating in football, turning the sport into a shared journey of growth for both parents and children. By extending football education into the home, parents are encouraged to actively engage in their children's football activities, thereby mobilizing family resources to create a synergistic effect that fosters child development and enhances the quality of early childhood education. On the other hand, the preschool-initiated family football education guidance organization collaborates with families to establish objectives for generative football activities for children. Parents play a pivotal role in uncovering resources for football-related academic exploration and play, as well as creating conducive indoor and outdoor environments for these activities. This organization will facilitate the implementation of innovative strategies for generative football activities within the home-school collaborative model, which includes assisting teachers in football instruction, supporting football-related activities, participating in parent-child generative football initiatives, engaging in football cultural events, and contributing to themed football studies. Furthermore, it is crucial to establish a multi-faceted evaluation approach, implement-

ing a “2 + 1 + 3 Group” mechanism that involves community participation in assessment as a safeguard for effectively promoting generative football evaluation activities among preschoolers. This collaborative framework aims to cultivate an enriching environment for young children’s football education, fostering their overall development and engagement in physical activity.

3.4. Innovating Preschooler’s Football Culture: Laying the Foundation for Generative Football Play

Culture is the essence of the development of sports (Zhong, He, Hao et al., 2018). Campus football is cultural football, rather than merely technical football (Sun, 2018a). To strengthen the foundation of early childhood football culture, it is essential to first help young children understand football culture. In organizing football plays for preschoolers, it is important to convey the spirit and history of the sport, allowing children to grasp the rules of football and the significance of teamwork. Furthermore, kindergartens can enhance children’s awareness of football culture by organizing themed lectures, screening historical football matches and videos, and guiding children to read related picture books. Secondly, creating a supportive football environment is vital. Kindergartens can foster a rich football atmosphere by designing activity rooms with football themes, displaying posters of football stars, and establishing small-scale football fields. Children should be encouraged to participate in creating football-themed murals and handicrafts, thereby increasing their interest in football culture. Lastly, organizing football cultural activities is crucial. Kindergartens can regularly host activities such as themed painting, handcrafted creations, and poetry recitals centered around football, exposing children to various aspects of football culture. Additionally, inviting professional football players or coaches to engage with children enables direct interaction, thereby enriching their understanding of the sport (Tuo, 2021). Based on this foundation, it is imperative to further develop educational and engaging generative football play for preschoolers. Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of these plays by observing and understanding children’s interests and needs, creating conducive play scenarios, innovating play formats, flexibly adjusting the difficulty levels, and encouraging children to participate in play design. This approach aims to provide a more vibrant and enjoyable football learning experience, significantly enhancing the quality and effectiveness of early childhood football education. Finally, strengthening teacher training, fostering cooperation between home and school, and integrating community resources are also essential measures to ensure the construction of early childhood football culture.

3.5. Building a Collaborative Ecosystem for Early Childhood Football Education in Society

The establishment of a collaborative ecosystem for football education within society refers to the joint efforts and cooperation among various societal entities to support and create conducive conditions for the cultivation and development of

football talent. This ecosystem requires the involvement and effort of multiple stakeholders, including educational institutions, football associations, kindergartens, clubs, families, and the general public. Firstly, the educational sector plays a critical role in shaping this collaborative ecosystem for early childhood football education. It is essential for educational authorities to enhance the emphasis and support for football education by integrating it into preschool physical activity and teaching curricula. Furthermore, educational departments should strengthen the training and guidance of football educators, thereby improving their professional competencies and teaching efficacy. Secondly, football associations and clubs serve as vital forces in constructing a collaborative ecosystem for early childhood football education. These organizations should enhance their organization and management of preschool football activities, providing high-quality training and opportunities for children to attend live matches. Additionally, they must foster collaboration with kindergartens and families to collectively support the cultivation and development of young football talent. Moreover, families also play a pivotal role in this ecosystem. Parents should actively support and encourage their children to participate in football activities, nurturing their interest and passion for the sport. They must also focus on their children's physical health and psychological development, providing a conducive environment and conditions for their growth. Lastly, the general public should engage in building this ecosystem for collaborative early childhood football education. Community members can contribute by attending matches, participating in volunteer activities, and offering sponsorship, thereby supporting and promoting the development of youth football initiatives. Increased awareness and understanding of early childhood football education among the general public will facilitate the dissemination of football culture and the establishment of a favorable atmosphere for the sport (Yu & Lü, 2023). Through the collective efforts of all these stakeholders, a comprehensive collaborative ecosystem for early childhood football education can be developed, characterized by a sustainable investment mechanism that includes “policy guidance, government support, market cultivation, and social participation.” Such a framework will ensure greater attention and support for the cultivation and development of young football talent, ultimately contributing to the prosperity of the football industry and the advancement of national sports development.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The generative football game for young children is a promising activity that has evolved in response to contemporary societal changes, presenting significant potential for development. Although it currently faces numerous practical challenges, this paper leverages Gadamer's game theory and the “unity of teaching and practice” theory to elucidate the multifaceted value of generative football games from the perspectives of “national demand, kindergarten development, and children's growth.” The aim is to explore developmental pathways for generative football games, thereby enhancing their educational effectiveness in early

childhood education.

Analysis of the Value of Generative Football Play

Generative football play holds significant value across three dimensions: national needs, kindergarten development, and child growth. Firstly, from the perspective of national needs, generative football play contributes to the cultivation of football talent essential for a country's sports development. Football, as a globally recognized sport, necessitates the nurturing of skilled athletes as a fundamental task for the advancement of national sports initiatives. Engaging young children in generative football play fosters their interest and passion for the sport, establishing a foundational basis for future football training and ultimately contributing to the development of a larger pool of football talent within the country. Secondly, from the viewpoint of kindergarten development, generative football play enhances the quality and distinctive character of early childhood education. As a comprehensive sport, football promotes various aspects of physical and social development. By incorporating generative football play into the curriculum, kindergartens can boost children's learning interest and participation, facilitating the development of physical coordination, teamwork skills, and creativity. When children face dilemmas or setbacks during football activities, they learn to approach life with positivity, courage, and joy, which serves as the essential "root" for the propagation and evolution of the sport (Sun, 2018b). Lastly, regarding child growth, generative football play plays a crucial role in promoting holistic physical and mental development. Football requires physical coordination and teamwork, and engaging in generative football play can enhance children's physical fitness and sports skills, thereby improving their overall coordination and athletic ability. Furthermore, these plays foster a spirit of cooperation and a sense of competition among children, enhancing their social skills and self-confidence, which are vital for their comprehensive development (Lu, 2022). In summary, generative football play for young children contributes to the cultivation of future football talent (by igniting children's interest in the sport), enhances the educational quality and distinctive character of kindergartens, and promotes the physical and mental development of children (Huang, 2023).

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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