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An Observational Study of Social Skills Learning Within Third, Fourth and Fifth Grade

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AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF SOCIAL SKILLS LEARNING WITHIN THIRD,
FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE

A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

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May 2009

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In this day of high stakes testing we are at even greater risk of overlooking students' social-emotional well being in search of higher test scores. The goal of social-emotional learning is to strengthen a person's ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of life in ways that enable the successful accomplishment of life tasks, such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004).

Children preoccupied with interpersonal conflict, unable to make the friends they want, or consumed with other emotional tensions not only engage in maladaptive behaviors but also are less able to focus on the academic demands of the classroom (Elias, 1997). Social-emotional learning must be embedded in the academic curriculum.

The participants in this study attended the same, small elementary school in south central Pennsylvania and included students from third, fourth and fifth grade. The analysis of data section included identifying evidence from each of twelve social emotional expected learning behaviors. The principal investigator believes the study came full circle as a result of identifying participants, examining answers from student surveys, reviewing notes from grade level focus group discussions, comparing data from

individual parent and teacher questionnaires, examining evidence of demonstrated social skills learned in day to day interactions as recorded based on observations, and in the end, analyzing the evidence of each of the expected learning behaviors. The latter focused on the subquestion; is there enough evidence to suggest that social skills education is effective?

The participating subjects were articulate in expressing the strategies that do and do not work within their social group. They expressed and demonstrated a security within their learning environment and an understanding of individual differences and the need for acceptance of all peers. Their teachers modeled a deep understanding and respect for all feelings and dealt with concerns and frustrations as they came up. As a result, the data indicate that students who have been engaged in an established social-emotional program do exhibit behaviors that are a result of that program.

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Without a doubt, this dissertation is dedicated to my family: To my parents, who were my first, and best, teachers. They taught me to work hard and persevere always. Their enduring love and encouragement has given me security throughout my entire life. That is a gift I have never taken lightly. To my best friend, my husband, who is the most dedicated partner I could ever have hoped to have, who makes me laugh daily, fills my heart and is supportive beyond measure. To my children, who inspire me to achieve, have truly become my closest friends and make me proud to be their mom. To my brothers and sister and their families who have always encouraged me and have been extremely patient while I have pursued this degree and missed some family functions as a result. To them, I am anxious to say, “I’m back!” And, to my husband’s family, who has also been a source of constant support. This process has been made much easier by the fact that my family is my circle of friends and they are always just a phone call away. I could not have accomplished this without all of you.

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Chapter I

THE PROBLEM

In an effort to effectively teach children, teachers must understand and pay attention to the whole child. This requires teachers to have a clear understanding of child development and the importance of social and emotional learning.

In this day of high stakes testing, students' social and emotional well-being is often ignored as time previously spent socializing and working on cooperative projects has slowly been eliminated to allow for more intense practice for tests. Careful attention needs to be paid so that data driven administrations do not continue to overlook the need for quality social and emotional learning and student growth. If students struggle to be accepted in their peer groups it may have a significant impact on their ability to learn. Children preoccupied with interpersonal conflict, unable to make the friends they want, or consumed with other emotional tensions not only engage in maladaptive behaviors but also are less able to focus on the academic demands of the classroom (Elias, 1997).

The core psychological framework to consider in this study is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to this theory,

There are six kinds of needs: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, love needs, self-esteem needs, and, at the highest level, self-actualization needs. These needs are arranged in a hierarchical order such that the fulfillment of lower needs propels the organism on to the next highest level. (Crain, 2005, p. 373)

Social skills education may provide the tools children need to help them solve immediate personal problems. Knowing which adults may provide help and how to get

that help is important information in all aspects of growing up. Further, striving for a balance of independence and support from adults is often difficult for students. The outside influences, such as being teased, bullied or even ignored can be extremely distracting. Having a solid awareness of social skills and armed with strategies that help one make the right decisions can aid in preventing destructive behaviors and personal pain. Sadly, our classrooms have too many children who, though physically present, walk through their days feeling unacknowledged and unseen, feeling they aren't really there (Kriete, 2002). Social and emotional learning also means teaching members of the group to protect the emotional safety of all members, including watching out for others and making sure everyone is thought of and cared for. A classroom rich with positive social and emotional learning opportunities can help protect children from the challenges of a tough world. Learning to problem solve, to value oneself and others as well as knowing where to go for help can foster the resiliency necessary to stay socially and emotionally strong. It takes time and trust to build resiliency. It takes consistency and compassion to build resiliency. It cannot be done through incrementally prescribed lessons, but must be embedded throughout the day. And, it takes understanding.

Adults have to be conscious of a rise and fall in children-like the rise and fall of the tide-of courage and confidence. Some days kids have a tiger in their tank. They're just raring to go; they're full of enthusiasm and confidence. If you knock them down, they bounce up. Other days, you scratch them and they pour out blood. What you can get them to try, and what you can get them to tolerate in the way of correction or advice, depends enormously on how they feel, on how big their store of confidence and self-respect happens to be at the moment. This may

vary-it may vary even within the space of an hour. (Holt, 1989, p. 155-156)

If the only thing social and emotional learning fostered was resiliency it would still be worthwhile. But, good social and emotional learning can do so much more. Research prepared by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007) indicates that emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for brain development and emerging cognitive abilities. Bluestein (2001) states, “When a truly caring and supportive community is available to a child, whether in the form of a family, neighborhood, peer acceptance or even one caring adult, the positive outcomes can be substantial” (p. 99). Social and emotional learning in the classroom strives to provide that caring and supportive community.

We must move away from the simplistic view that teaching academic skills and content is separate from promoting the growth of a student’s emotional and social well-being. Focusing on the whole child does not detract from teaching academic material. Rather both domains are parts of the same fabric and are inextricably interwoven. If any part of the fabric is weakened, the entire fabric may unravel; if all the fibers are strong, the total fabric will be resilient. (Brooks, 1999, p. 72)

Social-emotional development is clearly a key foundation for school success (Mindess, Chen & Brenner, 2008).

Problem Statement

Students who lack appropriate social skills can be so filled with self-doubt and sadness that they are unable to fully attend to daily expectations in school. All students who are unable to be self-fulfilled due to social and emotional issues are at risk. It is estimated that between 15 and 22 percent of U.S. youth have social-emotional difficulties

warranting intervention (Cohen, 2001). The number of those who face challenges and could benefit from excellent social and emotional learning is, no doubt, higher. If teachers hope to help students meet their academic potential, attention must be given to their social and emotional well-being. The primary focus of this study is to determine whether or not students enrolled in a social and emotional learning program exhibit behaviors that reflect the expected learning behaviors of that program. The strategies they find useful, coupled with their metacognitive understanding of social skills and sense of self-efficacy in relationships must all be considered. Students must be able to demonstrate how they relate with peers and successfully deal with conflict.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of social-emotional learning is to strengthen a person's ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of life in ways that enable the successful accomplishment of life tasks, such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004).

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to examine the impact of social skills education on elementary school students. The impact of social skills education will be generally defined as the self-efficacy of being a successful member within their peer group.

When analyzing the social skills of students and how they interact with their peers, it is essential to use qualitative methods to collect information. It is nearly impossible to quantify feelings. Therefore, it would seem, the best way to evaluate social skills, emotions, self-esteem, self-concept, self-determination and self-efficacy is through

surveys, journal writing, group discussions, observations, and questionnaires.

Developmentalists place a high value on the kinds of growth that emerge from within the child – from the child’s inner maturational promptings and spontaneous interests in the world (Crain, 2005). By studying the thoughts, behavior and self-reflection of children, we may further develop our comprehension of how environmental factors shape behavior.

Questions to be Researched

This research examines students’ orientations toward social skills education and examines their behaviors and their self-efficacy beliefs in regard to implementing the multiple strategies they have learned in class with their peers. This study uses qualitative research methods that will utilize questionnaires, rating scales, observations, journaling and group discussions to address the following questions:

- Do students who have been engaged in an established social-emotional program (for 3-5 years) exhibit behaviors that are a result of that program?
 - What are the specific social skills components that students utilize in their daily school lives?
 - To what extent do students believe that what they have learned in this program affects their self-efficacy and impacts relationships?
 - How do students reveal their metacognitive awareness of social skills?
 - Is there enough evidence to suggest that social skills education is effective?

Definition of Terms

Bibliotherapy- a creative tool using books to help children resolve issues (Brinson, 2005)

Bullying- repeated, negative acts committed by one or more children against another (Limber & Nation, 1998)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (PL 107-110) - The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 aims to bring all students up to the proficient level on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year, and to hold states and schools more accountable for results. Retrieved July 9, 2007 from (www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/pa/district_profile).

Self-awareness- aware of oneself, including one's traits, feelings, and behaviors. Retrieved July 9, 2007 from (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/social+science>)

Self-concept- refers to perception about self-identity and achievement (Powell, 2004)

Self-determination- is the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself (Field, Hoffman & Posch, 1997)

Self-efficacy- the belief that our effort directly affects the outcome or goal (which greatly affects our motivation) (Crain, 2005)

Self-esteem- refers to self-worth, self-respect or how one regards or feels about oneself (Powell, 2004)

Self-motivation- the ability to satisfy a desire, expectation or goal without being influenced to do so by another person. Retrieved July 9, 2007 from (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/social+science>)

Social-emotional learning- The process of developing social and emotional skills in the context of safe, caring, well-managed, and engaging learning environments. Retrieved

July 9, 2007 from (<http://www.casel.org>). CASEL=Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

The Zone of Proximal Development- (a Vygotskyian theory) the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Crain, 2005).

Significance of the Study

There are three core components to any form of literacy whether it is linguistic, mathematical, or social-emotional literacy: (1) being able to decode information in a given domain, (2) being able to use this information to solve real problems, and (3) being able to learn and/or create in any number of helpful ways. Hence, social and emotional literacy refers to our ability to decode social and emotional cues expressed by others and ourselves and to use this information to solve real social-emotional problems and to be a creative learner in any number of ways (Cohen, 2001).

Given this information, it becomes clear that there is a need to understand and teach social-skills and to provide students with necessary strategies to help them successfully navigate their lives.

Social-emotional learning involves three domains: the development of cognitive understanding (thinking), the development of skills (action), and the development of will (motivation) (Dasho, Lewis, & Watson, 2001).

As children gain skills in social-emotional areas, they build language and problem solving skills, as well as creative thinking, memory, and abstract thinking skills

(Burrington, Terreri & Sliwowski, 2006). The skills children gain impact their abilities in other areas, which can strengthen their self-confidence as a learner.

Identifying the social skills that teachers value most for classroom success has implications for promoting appropriate social interactions and preventing problem behavior in schools. Teachers' ratings of the importance of social skills have been shown to be stable across the elementary grades, which makes it possible to identify and teach a common set of desired social skills at a school-wide level (Meier, DiPerna & Oster, 2006).

Developing a pro-social classroom does not involve over-praising children. As Holt (1989) believed, much has been written about how important it is to encourage children's self-concept by giving them lots of praise. However, what children want and need from adults is thoughtful attention. They want adults to notice them and pay some kind of attention to what they do, to take them seriously and to trust and respect them as human beings. They want courtesy and politeness, but they don't need much praise (Holt, 1989).

Ultimately, the effects of social behaviors reach far beyond the classroom. The ability to use social strategies is critical in the learning environment as well as the employment and social arenas. Understanding one's own emotions is prerequisite to self-control and anger management (Bodine & Crawford, 1999). Just as important is understanding the emotions of others, which is essential if learners are to read social situations accurately and respond to them appropriately.

Students are trying to find out who they are, as they separate from their families, what they are about, their interests and personalities and where they are going, in order to discover a place in adult life (Santrock, 2001). If social skills education can provide a

foundation where students feel safe in their personal exploration then it will provide a valuable tool to educators, students, families, and the community as a whole.

One cannot look at social skills education without thinking about bullying. Bullying has always been an issue in schools, but incidents have become both more prevalent and more violent. According to the National Resource Center for Safe Schools in 1999, 30% of American children are regularly involved in bullying as bullies and/or targets.

Approximately 15% are severely traumatized or distressed as a result of encounters with bullies (Brinson, 2005). Studies have shown that 60 percent of children identified as bullies in middle school go on to have arrest records (Sampson, 2002). The deep effects of bullying must not be underestimated. Many students bear the internal scars for a lifetime. Victims are more likely than peers to be submissive, have low grades, drop out of school, engage in delinquent behavior, experience depression, and entertain suicidal thoughts (Davies, 2007). And, children can fall victim to bullying at a very young age.

As children begin to move from the family-oriented stage of development and enter the multifaceted world of their peers, moving into the politics of the playground, they define themselves more by how they fit in with their classmates. Their self-image begins to be defined, in part, by the pecking order that prevails on the playground. In everything from athletic ability to popularity, appearance, brains, and clothes, children rank themselves against others (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

Oliver, Hoover & Hazier (1994) were struck by the number of students who remarked that it was acceptable to tease or ridicule another student when his or her actions were at

variance with peer group norms. This is where it becomes undeniably evident that thoughtful, school-wide intervention is absolutely necessary.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation that necessitates consideration is that students may have learned to be socially competent from their parents. Through modeling, various opportunities and discussion, parents may provide children with a strong foundation for social and emotional interactions. This would make it difficult for the principal investigator to be able to attribute a student's understanding and social success solely to that which they have been exposed to at this school. This may become evident throughout the study.

Another consideration has to be this particular study site. This study was carried out at a very small laboratory school. This school is unique for a number of reasons. The school is committed to experiential learning, student based problem solving and creative and critical thinking. Dr. Ron Tibbets (2004) of the Henry Barnard School, College of Rhode Island identified the following five functions of a laboratory school;

Function I: Research-Provide a setting for a variety of investigations that can be conducted by professors, graduate students, and others.

Function II: Experimentation-Provide a laboratory of human resources to engage in the trial, development, and refinement of innovations that may not be necessarily research based.

Function III: Clinical Teaching Experience-Provide for observation and participation in a setting of quality educational practice and may provide a higher level of experience for selected education majors who are in need of advanced, more rigorous experiences prior to certification.

Function IV: Curriculum Development-Provide a setting to create, test, pilot, and evaluate new curriculum materials and teaching strategies.

Function V: Staff Development-Provide a site conducive to educational staff development for the diversity of personnel found in schools.

Listed on the National Association of Laboratory Schools (NALS) website is the following mission statement; NALS is an international association of pre-kindergarten through graduate laboratory and university affiliated schools engaged in practices of teacher training, curriculum development, research, professional development, and educational experimentation for the purpose of supporting member's schools and as a voice speaking for the improvement of learning for all children. John Goodlad, when interviewed (Miller, 1997) about the role of the laboratory schools stated,

The one thing that should be common to all laboratory schools is that they should be experimenting, trying other ways of doing things, showing how things might be done differently, opening up periodically to let people see what they have done. Take cooperative learning, for instance. Cooperative learning has been around in the literature for about 20 years. What does this look like when you develop it? Or, what does it look like to use a multiplicity of pedagogical approaches to get all of the children learning? The laboratory school can be a creator and demonstrator of alternative ways of providing educational delivery systems. (p. 1)

This unique setting provided a small sample; therefore the ability to generalize results is limited. It also must be noted that there is no one exclusive program taught at this study site. There is, however, a clear dedication to the attention given to social and emotional

development. Social and emotional learning is a priority. Social skills training is embedded throughout the day. This creates a limitation because it is difficult to pinpoint or transfer, exactly, to another setting. The core premise is what will be key when considering the emphasis for other schools to adopt. It is much more than a program, it is a philosophy, one of children first and compassion for all. Gardner (2000) suggests six pathways for understanding specifically outlined as educational systems. This school would fall under his Progressive Pathway, which he explains as follows:

Inspired by John Dewey, Francis Parker and Deborah Meier, for those who desire a system in which individual differences and growth patterns are respected, the curriculum grows out of community concerns, and democratic values are lived, not merely studied. Students will be genuinely involved in community activities and will seek to create and sustain a school community that embodies democratic values. (Gardner, 2000, p. 225)

A final limitation to consider would be the possibility that this study used a skewed sample. Among other criteria, students were selected based on whether they were willing and capable of expressing themselves verbally and in writing. It was necessary to choose students who were likely to contribute to group discussions. The sample may then be skewed because it is not known whether these participants are better able to use social skills strategies than those who are less inclined to verbalize their thoughts.

Teachers in this school do use programs such as Second Step (Committee for Children, 2002) and Morning Meetings (Kriete, 2002) but the level of the social and emotional learning in this study focuses on the attention given to a consistently positive classroom environment modeled through a sense of community and partnerships rather

than a series of isolated lessons. It is still worth outlining these programs to look at their approaches and general goals. Mindess, Chen & Brenner (2008) found that Second Step, developed by the Committee for Children, specifically addresses empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger/emotion management. The committee grounded the program's approach in research about cognitive behavioral therapy showing that thoughts affect people's social interactions (Committee for Children 2002).

The program is organized into grade-level kits, each containing various tools for teaching. Every kit includes lesson cards divided into key units. Lesson cards for the primary grades have a realistic photograph on one side and a lesson for the teacher's use on the other side. The lesson includes clear objectives, a short story about the photograph, discussion questions, role-play/pretend scenarios and/or activity suggestions, and wrap-up ideas. The lesson cards offer activities to help children transfer the unit's skill to their everyday lives, activities that extend the learning, and take-home reminders-part of the curriculum's family connections (Mindess, Chen & Brenner, 2008, p. 58).

Morning Meetings (Kriete, 2002) are a strategy used by the Responsive Classroom, an approach developed by Northeast Foundation for Children. During morning meetings, students are personally and individually greeted. All students are given an opportunity to speak, share and/or voice concerns. The time spent in meetings gives students experience in listening skills, interpersonal exchange and collaboration.

Teacher language and child language are important components of the program, and children respond well to the schoolwide consistency. Responsive Classroom strategies include engaging children in the formulation of rules, guided discovery

and academic choice and collaborative problem solving (Mindess, Chen & Brenner, 2008, p. 57).

Summary

A positive school climate is critical to the learning environment. Miles and Stipek (2006) say that children do not develop in particular domains independently of other domains. To the contrary, social development and academic development are inextricably connected. Efforts to improve development in one domain will be more successful if attention is given to development in the other. The developmental differences in their findings suggest that attention to particular domains may be more important during some periods of development than others.

Social skills education is important for all students. It has long been common sense among many teachers and parents that children who are given clear behavioral standards and social skills, allowing them to feel safe, valued, confident and challenged, will exhibit better school behavior and learn more as well (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005).

Interventions designed to teach social problem solving and social skills have been shown to result in achievement gains (Miles & Stipek, 2006).

School policies that support positive relationships between teachers and students can contribute significantly, not only to students' social-emotional health and well-being, but also to their academic performance. That's why paying attention to students' nonacademic needs is a key ingredient in schools' efforts to meet today's high academic expectations (Stipek, 2006).

Teaching students to be fair, kind and compassionate can never be wrong. School-wide intervention is a must. Everyone in the school must be aware of the goals of the

program and support the effort in every way. Creating a positive school atmosphere is a welcomed relief for all learners. Class meetings allow students and their teachers to update progress and reinforce goals. Trade books provide students with a springboard to discussion and problem solving. Bibliotherapy can help children with bullying issues, conflict resolution, and personal development of positive self-attributes (Brinson, 2005).

With regard to the prevention of negative social behaviors, understanding the social skills that teachers value the most allows practitioners to a) assess whether those skills are explicitly taught to children in elementary classrooms and b) develop class and school-wide instructional approaches to promote the development of such skills during the elementary years. With regard to intervention, such studies provide insight into the social skills domains that are most important to teachers and perhaps most likely to be identified in referrals for children experiencing social difficulty in the classroom (Meier, DiPerna & Oster, 2006).

The school culture must embrace pro-social behaviors, acknowledge disagreements, teach the tools for dealing with frustrations and listen to the students. By paying close attention to their needs and concerns, adults send the message that students are valuable, unique individuals worthy of our attention, effort and respect.

Children's social behavior can promote or undermine their learning, and their academic performance may have implications for their behavior as well as their opportunities to develop social relationships and skills (Miles & Stipek, 2006).

It is necessary to understand what theorists say about development. And, in an effort to best understand children as social learners within their environment, adults must take a

practical approach to theoretical knowledge when teaching social skills within the classroom. In the next chapter a theoretical framework will lead to clarity for the approach necessary for students to grow socially.

Chapter II

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of social and emotional learning education on elementary students. By studying the thoughts, behaviors and self-reflection of children, we may further develop our comprehension of how environmental factors shape behavior as well as which strategies work in helping to strengthen the social skills of children. Understanding the social interactions of children requires a review of theorists from the psychology, sociology and educational arenas. This chapter will review both the historical and contemporary theoretical considerations as well as the practical applications so important in today's classrooms.

Theory refers to the set of preconceived ideas or principles that adults have about a topic. Theories may be recognized or not, explicit or implicit, and, upon reflection, sensible or not (Cohen, 1999). Theories of development impact all aspects of education as many debate the most effective models of teaching.

School life *always* profoundly affects the social and emotional lives of students and educators. Teacher-student and peer relations, our pedagogic methods, and the learning process shape students' experience of themselves and others (Cohen, 1999). The ability to diagnose group dynamics helps children to develop cognitive and social skills that will be very valuable in school – and beyond school, in the real world (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

Educational and developmental psychologists have paid an increasing amount of attention to the use of peers as instructional resources in the classroom. School activities that employ collaborative problem solving have the potential for teaching children how to

deal with complex tasks and to work with and learn from each other (Forman & McPhail, 1993). Understanding others, being successful within a social group and reciprocal problem solving are all important life skills.

Cohen (1999) stated, “There is much to learn about the underlying psychobiological nature of social and emotional abilities/disabilities and the complex sets of psychosocial meanings that are attributed to them. Future learning in this area may inform educational and psychoeducational efforts”. (p. 185)

Theorists’ Views: Bronfenbrenner

When considering how a child interacts with his or her environment Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) concentric structures, the *micro-*, *meso-*, *exo-*, and *macrosystems* must be taken into account. A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The “given setting” in this study is the classroom and school. An ecological systems framework reminds us that families do not operate in isolation from the larger environmental context in which they exist (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002).

The microsystem consists of children’s experiences in their immediate surroundings. Children also influence other individuals by virtue of their personalities, interests and behaviors (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). The factors of activity, role, and interpersonal relations constitute the elements, or building blocks, of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study site is committed to experiential learning which lends itself well to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) point that a critical term in the definition of the microsystems is *experienced*. The term is used to indicate that the scientifically relevant features of any

environment include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are perceived by the persons in that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Reflection, discussion and developmental understanding build on experience and reveal individual and group perceptions.

The various microsystems in children's lives form a connected network known as the mesosystem. Children are more likely to thrive when families and schools maintain regular and productive communication (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002).

An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25).

Parents must transport their children to the school used in this study, therefore they see and interact with their child's teacher daily. This may further strengthen the child's exosystem.

The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and context of lower-order systems that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26).

The macrosystem, as it refers to the subculture of this study site, provides consistencies of the lower order systems due to the school's commitment to social and emotional learning. Parents choose to send their children to this school possibly based, in part, on its commitment to child-centered learning, meaning parents may see some consistency in the

way teachers and staff attend to the needs of the developing child which may provide consistency to the attention given to their child within the home and family.

Examining macrosystems that “could exist” so as to expand the concept of macrosystem...could encompass possible blueprints for the future as reflected in the vision of a society’s political leaders, social planners, philosophers, and social scientists engaging in critical analysis and experimental alteration of prevailing social systems. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26)

This study could lend itself to administrative decision making when considering what could exist in classrooms rich with the benefits of quality social and emotional learning. Research has shown that social and emotional learning can lead to greater cognitive growth. A good additional theoretical argument for the importance of emotional interaction for cognitive as well as social and emotional growth is that when affect is involved, it appears to activate many different parts of the brain, often integrating left and right as well as different components (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27)

Social and emotional learning development is clearly a key foundation for school success (Mindess, Chen & Brenner, 2008).

Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory

Lev Vygotsky also stressed the importance of society and culture for promoting cognitive growth, sometimes referred to as a sociocultural perspective (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Vygotsky's primary focus was on the role of nurture, and especially on the ways in which a child's social and cultural environments foster cognitive growth (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002).

Vygotskian theory suggests that higher mental functions arise when children are able to direct their own cognitive activity in a self-conscious and voluntary manner. Thus for Vygotsky, cognitive growth can be fostered under conditions in which children are given the opportunity to set their own goals and organize their own activity in the service of these goals (Forman & McPhail, 1993).

Vygotsky thought that social activities are precursors to, and form the basis for, complex mental processes; as an example, the "arguing" process, first used in discussions with peers, is gradually internalized, such that children can eventually consider multiple perspectives when they think and reason. (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002, p. 147-148)

No sooner does an active mind take in information than it lets that new bit of knowledge ring bells, forming associations and linkages with pre-existing knowledge or experience (Levine, 2002). Attention to social and emotional learning enhances social functions. Students are able to acquire a set of social skills that enable them to understand the social world around them. The social thinking system consists of a repertoire of partly overlapping neurodevelopmental functions that equip kids to become socially acceptable,

indulge in durable friendships, and make the grade politically in and out of school (Levine, 2002).

Among the educational implications of Vygotsky's theory is promoting self-regulation by teaching children to talk themselves through difficult situations. Through self-talk and inner speech, children begin to direct and regulate their own behavior in much the same way that adults have previously directed them (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). While Vygotsky focused on guided exploration, Piaget thought self-exploration led to development as children began to disagree with others. Vygotsky placed greater importance on interactions with adults and other more advanced individuals who could support children in challenging tasks and help them make appropriate interpretations while Piaget saw benefit in the conflict children faced with each other (McDevitt & Ormrod).

Vygotsky's proposal was that children first learn these tools in their social interactions with others; then they apply them to their own, individual thinking. For example, children first learn to speak in order to communicate with others; then they internalize their speech, talking to themselves to plan and direct their thought and behavior. Similarly, children learn many conceptual tools in social interactions in schools before they use these tools on their own. (Crain, 2005, p. 243)

Piaget

Theorist Jean Piaget thought children learn much on their own from an intrinsic interest in the world. He felt that their thinking undergoes a series of broad transformations which are not molded by the external environment but that spontaneously

create mental stages (Crain, 2005). This would suggest, in the social skills arena, that students are intrinsically capable of relational problem solving. Results from this study may or may not suggest that students need guidance to move beyond an egocentric perspective. From an educational perspective, Piaget's contributions were significant in that he identified stages that allow teachers a better understanding of developmentally appropriate practices.

In Piaget's eyes, the people in a child's life present information and arguments that create disequilibrium and foster greater perspective taking. For instance, when young children disagree with one another, they gradually begin to realize that different people may have different yet equally valid viewpoints, and so they begin to shed their preoperational egocentrism. (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002, p. 143)

Piaget portrayed children as active and motivated learners who, through numerous interactions with their physical and social environments, construct an increasingly more complex understanding of the world around them (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). This may not be enough and difficulty may lie in trying to understand how children are able to resolve social conflict without any intervention or guidance from adults, especially if they are locked in an egocentric stage. From a teaching perspective, adults must think beyond the concrete stages Piaget identified in order to challenge students and broaden their horizons. Piaget thought that a child's development comes from within. It doesn't come from adult teachings or environmental influences, but from the child's own spontaneous interests and efforts to create new ways of understanding the world (Crain, 2003). Piaget identified four general periods of development,

Period 1 he referred to as sensorimotor intelligence (birth to 2 years) when babies organize their physical action schemes. Period 2 as preoperational thought (2 to 7 years) when children learn to think but their thinking is unsystematic and illogical. Period 3 he called concrete operations (7 to 11 years) when children develop the capacity to think systematically, but only when they can refer to concrete objects and activities. Period 4 as formal operations (11 to adulthood) when young people develop the capacity to think systematically on a purely abstract and hypothetical plane. (Crain, 2005, p. 115)

The participants in this study would all fall in the concrete operations to formal operations stages due to their chronological age. The very nature of this study challenges Piaget's structured stages as children are often asked to imagine themselves in other's positions, which requires abstract thinking. In recent years, dozens of researchers (some of whom have conducted training studies) have tried to show that Piaget underestimated children's capacities – that children are a lot smarter than he gave them credit for (Crain, 2005). Piaget did not write extensively on education but felt that true learning is not something handed down by the teacher, but something that comes from the child (Crain, 2005).

The social and emotional learning examined in this study requires an understanding of developmental levels but also necessitates adult guidance and reassurance. One goal is to engage children in higher-level thinking and reflection, as with all aspects of their cognitive development. While Piaget viewed children as active, motivated learners, it was Vygotsky who pointed to other supports for learning. Vygotsky was deeply interested in

the role of the social environment, which included tools and cultural objects, as well as people, as agents in developmental thinking (National Research Council, 2000).

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky proposed that, in their interactions with children, adults help children attach meaning to the objects and events around them (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Vygotsky called the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers, the zone of proximal development (Egan, 1983, p. 101). A logical extension of the view that new knowledge must be constructed from existing knowledge is that teachers need to pay attention to the incomplete understandings...teachers then need to build on these ideas in ways that help each student achieve a more mature understanding (National Research Council, 2000). The ability to co-construct deeper meaning and understanding with peers and adults is both a strong foundational skill and an ongoing building process refined with practice. This is at the very center of the classroom meetings that are regularly held at the school which serves as the study site for this research.

In a group of thirty children performing independently at, say, an eight-year level, one may expect their zones of proximal development to vary from eight years to maybe fourteen years. This represents something teachers will recognize immediately (Egan, 1983). Varying zones offer the opportunity for collaborative learning and problem solving within a social group. If adults assume that peer collaboration involves merely the transfer of knowledge from expert to novice, they are restricting the way one evaluates the nature and value of peer activities (Forman, Minick & Stone, 1993). The idea is not

to pass on pre-packaged knowledge but to hammer through ideas and increase understanding through collaboration. School is one obvious place where children and adolescents can toss around ideas about a particular issue and perhaps reach consensus about how best to interpret and understand the topic in question (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). The give and take and sharing of thoughts and ideas is essential to social and emotional learning.

Vygotskyian theory sees cognitive development as inherently integrated with social and emotional development. This aspect of the theory implies that an analysis of the potential benefits of peer collaboration must include information about changes in children's communication, goals, and social interactions over time as well as changes in their ability to solve a particular problem (Forman, Minick & Stone, 1993).

Through all of this collaboration, discussion and listening, language development can be greatly enhanced. Good social language means effective communication, and effective communication goes a long way toward forming meaningful and uplifting relationships with others. So we should help kids think about the impact of their words upon others (Levine, 2002). Class meetings offer an opportunity for reciprocal speaking and problem solving. The language development evident during cooperative play and activities cannot be underestimated.

Social and emotional learning exposes students to language that reflects feelings as well as critical thinking. Students who are given time to express themselves through discussion, role-playing and even art are at an advantage academically. For those who are caught up in the data driven craze of education today, Shriver and Weissberg (2005) offer

some significant findings. Not only do good social and emotional learning programs turn out students who are good citizens but an average student enrolled in a social emotional learning program ranks at least 10 percentile points higher on achievement tests than students who do not participate in such programs (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005).

This idea of social problem solving through communication, collaboration and interactions is central to this study. The study may produce some evidence of changes in problem solving abilities as the participants vary in age from 8 years to eleven.

Bandura

Key to the content of this study is the idea of reciprocal problem solving and mutual respect. Social learning theory approaches the explanation of human behavior in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1977). Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them as to what to do. Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977). Whether or not students actually experience social success through trials within their peer group may steer their belief that they have control in a given situation. Experiencing success fosters self-efficacy.

Albert Bandura thinks that people do not learn out of a spontaneous interest in the world but to achieve their internal goals and standards. Children internalize external standards and make their own positive self-evaluations contingent on the achievement of these standards (Crain, 2005). With regard to social skills development this theory seems

too one-sided. Socially, a peer or a group brings additional variables that are out of the child's immediate control. Bandura (1977) identifies self-efficacy as dealing with self-perceptions of competence rather than an actual level of competence. Self-efficacy is a cognitive mechanism that regulates behavior and determines whether the person will initiate or sustain a specific behavior in a difficult situation (Bandura, 1977). This study intends to identify strategies that transfer from practice to real life. If participants are able to demonstrate strategies they find helpful in their social group the information they share may suggest which strategies are most beneficial to teach. Additionally, if students have experienced success practicing a particular strategy and then using it within their peer group they are more apt to use that strategy in the future, further extending their confidence and practice.

Consider the following claim of Bandura's: "The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations." (Egan, 1983, p. 171) Positive self-efficacy strengthens resiliency. There are times when environmental factors exercise powerful constraints on behavior, and other times when personal factors are the overriding regulators of the course of environmental events (Bandura, 1977). Children may need to understand how this impacts their responses and roles within a group.

Developing resiliency in students can be the most powerful tool for dealing with both environmental factors and dealing with events. Students with a strong sense of self and armed with strategies to deal with struggles are at an advantage socially. It is critical for students to be able to separate themselves from problems so as not to internalize negative beliefs about their own ability or self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on the judgments and

feelings students have of their capabilities and worth (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Developing a negative self-worth as a result of social and emotional struggles is dangerous for any child. Problem solving should be empowering and take into account experiences, feelings and knowledge of the culture. Knowledge of the culture includes both tools such as language and objects such as family rituals and community activities. Understanding the culture is critical to social success. This can lead to a positive sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is also defined as the belief that one is capable of executing certain behaviors or reaching certain goals in a particular task or domain (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Without a sense of having some control within a situation, one may lose hope of ever succeeding. Such students could easily become targets of social isolation and bullying. Social and emotional learning is two-fold: giving students the tools necessary to be successful within their peer group and teaching all children that being unkind is unacceptable. Creating disequilibrium through scenarios of unkind treatment can be a most effective way to teach perspective taking.

In many cases intolerance and prejudice toward individuals and groups who are different are learned or reinforced through social learning and modeling and can be unlearned (Haynes & Marans, 1999). Teachers teach by what they do as well as by what they say. When teachers model compassion and consideration of the feelings of others, such behaviors are likely to rub off on students (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). This also sets the tone of compassion and kindness within the community of the classroom.

In the social cognitive model of interactive agency, people serve as reciprocally contributing influences over their own motivation and behavior within a system of reciprocal causation involving personal determinants, action and environmental factors

(Bandura, 1986). The study of social and emotional learning always raises the question of whether or not understanding reaches an intrinsic level or, instead, is extrinsic, remaining somewhat superficial. Social cognitive theory distinguishes between two separable processes in the social diffusion of innovation: the acquisition of knowledge concerning the innovation and the adoption of that innovation in practice (Bandura, 1986). Adoptive behavior is highly susceptible to incentive influences and adoptive behavior is also partly governed by self-evaluative reactions to one's own behavior (Bandura, 1986). This is why "teaching" social and emotional learning is not a weekly, fractured lesson independent of the rest of a child's learning. Effective social and emotional learning is embedded throughout the day so much so that children buy into it because they see immediate attention and results both personally and for the group as a whole. Johnson, Polinar & Bonaiuto (2005) found, in their school, that social and emotional learning had accomplished cognitive change but had failed to change students' behavior. They studied the program in an effort to find out what was missing. As a result their teachers became more astute observers of group dynamics and more sophisticated designers of cooperative activities that take advantage of varied perspectives and skills.

Bandura has significantly broadened learning theory and contributed enormously to our understanding of how environmental factors shape behavior but underestimates the importance of developmental variables (Crain, 2005). There may be some evidence of that in this study. Bandura feels that children really learn in order to obtain reinforcements, such as praise, which they eventually come to administer to themselves and that they internalize external standards and make their own positive self-evaluations

contingent on the achievement of these standards (Crain, 2005). Responsibility falls on the teacher to provide positive modeling of such standards. Brooks (1999) stressed:

We must recognize that students will learn most effectively in an atmosphere in which they feel safe and do not fear being ridiculed or humiliated, in which they are challenged and assisted to meet realistic goals, in which they feel teachers genuinely care about them and respect their individuality, and in which learning is seen as an exciting adventure rather than as drudgery. It is within such an atmosphere that resiliency and hope are reinforced. (p.65)

Appropriate role models coupled with a compassionate environment provide a foundation for resiliency. A teacher with an understanding of child development recognizes typical growth patterns as well as opportunities for demonstrating alternative ideas.

In addition, schools must emphasize intrinsic reasons to be kind, fair, and responsible, rather than extrinsic rewards (Dasho, Lewis, & Watson, 2001). If this can be accomplished, students are more likely to generalize their social skills strengths to the outside world.

Kohlberg

Similar to Piaget's discussion of disequilibrium, Lawrence Kohlberg proposed that children develop morally when they are challenged by moral dilemmas they cannot adequately deal with at their current stage of moral reasoning. Kohlberg grouped his stages into three levels of morality – the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional levels (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). In level 1 children are focused on external consequences of behavior. In level 2 there is a concern for maintaining interpersonal relationships and rules are perceived to be inflexible. In level 3 people

understand rules can be modified and serve the well-being of a society (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Kohlberg's stages emphasize issues of fairness and justice but omit other aspects of morality, especially compassion and caring for those in need (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Carol Gilligan (1982) found discrepancies in Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning when it came to gender differences noting that females develop a morality that emphasizes a greater concern for others' welfare, whereas males are more likely to look at a situation in terms of someone's rights being violated. This study included male and female participants and, therefore, may contribute to Gilligan's findings.

Maslow

Probably the theory most closely tied to social and emotional learning is that of Abraham Maslow. In addition to his hierarchy of needs, Maslow suggested

the inner core is a positive force that presses toward the realization of full humanness, just as an acorn may be said to press toward becoming an oak tree. It is important to recognize that it is the inner nature, not the environment that plays the guiding role. The environment is like sun, food, and water; it nourishes growth, but it is not the seed. Social and educational practices should be evaluated not in terms of how efficiently they control the child or get the child to adjust, but according to how well they support and nourish inner growth potentials. (Crain, 2005, p. 374)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory identifies the essential need for safety and belongingness before any child can move on to self-actualization. While other theorists have explained stages and phases children pass through from a developmental perspective, Maslow simply states the most basic needs of children (and adults) if they

are ever to reach fulfillment. From an educational perspective, teachers have the same responsibility to support children at risk of not attaining levels of basic needs as they do to those struggling in reading and math.

The Field and Hoffman (1994) model of self-determination shows that self-determination is promoted (or discouraged) both by variables within the individual's control (e.g., values, knowledge, and skills) and by variables that are environmental in nature (e.g. opportunities for choice making, attitudes of others). The model states that one must have both a foundation of self-awareness and self-esteem and the ability to act on this foundation to be self-determined. The final step is one's ability to both celebrate successes and reflect on attempts to become self-determined in order to learn from the experience. Each attempt to be self-determined leads to the development of knowledge and skills that will in turn help the individual to improve his or her ability to be self-determined in subsequent efforts.

Positive Classroom Environment

A positive classroom environment can be fostered through modeling and setting expectations of kindness and cooperation. Researching which strategies are helpful and what students' specific needs are will help to better prepare future teachers and give children the social and emotional support they need to allow them to focus on academics. Bluestein (2001) found many survey respondents included a reference to the "freedom to be who you are, expressing yourself as an individual...without fear or hurt, rejection, ridicule or belittlement" (p. 210). This expectation of respect for others and respect for individuality is necessary in a positive and productive classroom. More and more

educators are suggesting that social and emotional learning needs to be a recognized and respected form of learning in and of itself...in fact, as educators, we can not afford to ignore this essential dimension of learning (Cohen, 1999). Without a sense of security students are unable to focus completely on academics. Developmentally appropriate practice is essential for all learners. Increasingly, early childhood education is being invaded by homework, seat work, worksheets, computer time, a longer school day, less time for recess, and other developmentally inappropriate practices (Armstrong, 2006).

A positive classroom is one that allows children to imagine and create and learn through social interaction. Depriving young children of play experiences, the reverie of imagination, and open-ended exploration of the world around them contributes to the acceleration, fragmentation, and deterioration of young children's developmental possibilities (Armstrong, 2006).

Such deprivation sends the message that the teacher's needs supersede the child's needs which is counterproductive to developmentally appropriate teaching. Academic safety is about our willingness to stimulate and encourage students, starting where they are, and providing the ingredients necessary for each to learn and grow (Bluestein, 2001).

The need to tailor experience to individual differences is particularly important in early education. Patterns involving extra nurturing, practice at modulating activity, increased opportunities to engage in pretend play with empathy, and gentle but firm consistent limits often lead to positive development. (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

Armstrong (2006) examined Academic Achievement Discourse versus Human Development Discourse in an effort to identify best practices in education. He noted that

Human Development Discourse has as a major concern the development of individuals who *care* about the world around them and who will ultimately develop in adulthood what Erik Erikson called the quality of “generativity”: the capacity to give something back to the community and culture (Armstrong, 2006).

By being concerned with the whole development of students, including their social, emotional, and creative needs, Human Development Discourse is primed to support attitudes and behaviors that are life-affirming and that can help resolve conflicts and nip psychological problems in the bud before they have a chance to explode and damage the lives of students and those around them. (Armstrong, 2006, p. 60)

In light of standardized testing and the punitive action taken for scores that fall below an established expectation, some schools have virtually eliminated opportunities for children to grow socially and to share, play and work together. Some teachers have observed that they would like to spend more time getting to know students and supporting their emotional growth but are unable to do so because of a prescribed curriculum that fills class time (Brooks, 1999). What will be the cost in the long run? There may be short-term evidence.

Armstrong (2006) stressed:

If all the focus of an educational program is on academics, then students who are school smart will be the only ones who really succeed. At the same time, those who do not possess schoolhouse intelligence but who are accomplished at nonacademic pursuits will have few opportunities to show their abilities. (p. 57)

And, he argues:

What kind of future is this? A future of *more* hard study, grade grubbing, and test taking. The real world is not like that. The real world involves getting along with others, solving commonsense problems, becoming part of a community, and developing competence in a profession that could involve music, art, theater, mechanics, carpentry, or other nonacademic pursuits. (p. 57)

Many educators are sending the message that a child's value lies in a test score. Most mission statements make some reference to developing the whole child but too often that is not given any attention until there is a discipline problem. Discipline problems can be a direct result of the interpersonal frustration some students are faced with day in and day out. Students at risk need support. To overlook that is to ignore developmental needs as well as psychological needs.

Human Development Discourse results in fewer discipline problems in schools and is able to generate solutions to help provide students with safety, academic help, social skills training, or any number of other developmental interventions that get at the heart of the difficulty. In addition, when students are engaged in classroom activities that engage their social, emotional, creative, physical, and spiritual selves, they are far less likely to *need* to engage in activities designed to subvert the learning process. (Armstrong, 2006, p. 63).

Many new teachers feel inadequately prepared for the discipline problems they are likely to face. One goal of this research was to demonstrate that attention to social and emotional learning is well worth the time and effort as it can alleviate many classroom problems. It also demands respect for every child, a security that each and every one

deserves. The articulate, critical thinking the participants in this study demonstrated is evidence that, with all of the attention spent on their social and emotional growth, they have not missed a beat academically. It is worth noting that the students at this school consistently outscore their peers on PSSA testing. This may suggest a link between their strong social and emotional foundation and overall school success.

There are four basic guidance techniques that together sustain encouraging elementary classrooms, where all children feel welcome despite the conflicts that some experience. The techniques are classic conflict management, guidance talk, class meeting and comprehensive guidance. By establishing a framework adults can maintain a consistent purpose in social skills development. (Gartrell, 2004, p. 82)

In the process of learning social skills children, like all of us, make mistakes (Gartrell, 2004).

Six key practices teachers need to follow to maintain a socially and emotionally positive classroom are listed below. If followed, these practices serve to embed social and emotional learning throughout the school day.

1. The teacher realizes that social skills are complicated and take into adulthood to fully learn.
2. The teacher reduces the need for mistaken behavior.
3. The teacher practices positive teacher-child relations.
4. The teacher uses intervention methods that are solution oriented.
5. The teacher builds partnerships with parents.
6. The teacher uses teamwork with adults. (Gartrell, 2004, p. 30-32)

These key practices exemplify social and emotional learning. An intensive approach, as opposed to individual canned lessons, is necessary for success. While isolated social skills lessons are well-intentioned, they simply cannot meet the practical needs of children. Character education programs, on their own, are too shallow, they do not teach social and emotional learning in its' truest form, experientially. Fractured lessons provide a distant connection to real world situations and tend to not be supported beyond the allotted lesson time and therefore internalization can be lost.

That which goes by the name of character education nowadays is, for the most part, a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make children work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted – caring or fairness, say – the preferred method of instruction is tantamount to indoctrination. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being. (Kohn, 1997, p. 2)

Schools need to create positive interventions that get at the root of the difficulty, including anti-bullying programs, conflict resolution, character education, gang awareness, alcohol and drug abuse counseling, student court, peer mediation, and anger management (Armstrong 2006). But it does not stop there. Not one program or even several can replace the day-to-day concern and attention given to key aspects of social and emotional learning. Allowing and even encouraging students to reflect gives them opportunity to separate process from self. Students can begin to think through problems without the stress of self-doubt and negative pressure. Reflection is not something that happens automatically. Time for reflection needs to be provided. Without reflection,

social and emotional learning remains fragmented and temporary at best (Charney, Crawford & Wood, 1999). Inconsistency is one of the most common reasons that social and emotional learning can fall apart. Without a deeply embedded commitment students cannot maintain a sense of real security.

Methodological Considerations

Simply having such a program does not offer any guarantees for student security. Johnson, Poliner & Bonaiuto (2005) noted in their study that it is not enough to just design targeted, theory-based program packages; researchers must assiduously attend to assessing the implementation of interventions and how schools respond to, extend, and adapt interventions.

Understanding background knowledge is also an important foundation for the principal investigator in this study. Bronfenbrenner's description of the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems can all be taken into consideration at this study site. The children in this study have all gone to school together since kindergarten. For the third graders this is their fourth year together, for the fifth graders it is their sixth year together. This amount of time together could have an impact on their background knowledge, thoughts and interactions. Parent input is important, as parents are able to provide information as it pertains to the child's mesosystem as they can speak to a child's ability to transfer skills from one microsystem to another. The exosystem is strengthened through the relationship between parents and teachers and their understandings and responses to the child's needs should be aligned. This study will take into account the consistencies in behaviors as observed by the parents and teachers. Teachers, also, have an important perspective of the child's systems.

While the theorists mentioned in this chapter had some differing views, all shared the idea that environment impacts behavior. According to Vygotsky, social interaction leads to change in children's thinking which leads to change in their behavior (Salkind, 2004). During discussions with participants careful attention will be paid to how they express and explain their own changes in thinking and behavior and whether or not they reveal their internal motivations. Earlier in this chapter it was noted that Bandura thinks children internalize external standards and make their own positive self-evaluations contingent on the achievement of these standards (Crain, 2005). Through discussion groups and observations this study may or may not reveal behavior that demonstrates this. While group discussions may allow students to express an understanding of expected learning behaviors and knowledge of appropriate strategies, observations may afford the researcher opportunities to note whether or not strategies have reached an intrinsic level and are evident within the actual social interactions of the group.

Four major ideas underlie Vygotsky's sociocultural theory: children construct their own knowledge, development cannot be separated from its social context, learning can lead development and language plays a central role in mental development (Salkind, 2004). The second idea states that development cannot be separated from its social context. Providing students with a forum for discussion whether it is through meeting circles or group discussions, as with this study, gives students the opportunity to express their own thoughts and ideas as well as hearing others perspectives. Hearing others' perspectives also enables children to gain some insight into external standards. From there students are better able to weigh their position, and options, within the social group.

Schools sometimes overuse the expression, “to be fair”. For students working through the moral reasoning stages identified by Kohlberg, this statement could simply be too vague. A greater understanding may be developed through group discussion and consideration for how children learn to compromise. In line with Bandura’s focus on external reinforcements is Kohlberg’s first level of morality; the preconventional level. In level 2 there is a concern for maintaining relationships and rules are perceived to be inflexible, in level 3 people understand rules can be modified and serve the well-being of society (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Discussion groups, observations, journal writing and survey information may or may not suggest which moral reasoning stage the participants are in and what circumstances lead them to the next level. Observations may provide the strongest resource of information as children are engaged in an activity whereas reflecting may or may not provide an interpretation or justification of actions.

These methods of data collection should also provide insight into what Piaget referred to as disequilibrium (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). For most children, at some point in time, they are faced with disequilibrium in their social circle. It is the process by which they negotiate with peers that moves them through the stages of development. This study could provide evidence of disequilibrium and the processes by which students work through it. Most critical to any study of social and emotional learning is recognizing the needs of all members of the group. When one child’s needs are overlooked, or one child is ignored, the whole group can suffer. Good social and emotional learning encourages students to watch out for peers, to protect them from being ostracized and to give them a sense of value and belongingness within the group. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Crain, 2005) can never be overestimated. Journaling, observations, and both parent and teacher

observations should provide a strong overall picture of how alert students, parents and teachers are to the very basic needs of all children. Ultimately, student questionnaires, focus group discussions and observations are purposefully used to give children the voice in this study. Many studies have been conducted within social and emotional learning, few have been focused on the perspective of the children.

The design and methodology of this study was considered much the same as one would use when trying to identify, for example, reading difficulties. Reading specialists break down the skills in reading, confer with classroom teachers and parents in an effort to see which strategies work for a particular child and which strategies do not. In the following chapter, the design and the methodology of this study is outlined and explained. Information pertaining to prior knowledge and experience will give the researcher some indication as to where the students' social and emotional understanding lies.

Chapter III

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

When analyzing the social skills of students and how they interact with their peers, it is essential to use qualitative methods to collect information. It is nearly impossible to quantify feelings. Therefore, it would seem that the best way to evaluate social skills, emotions, self-esteem, self-concept, self-determination and self-efficacy is through questionnaires, journal writing, group discussions and observations.

The researcher sought information from children about their day-to-day social experiences. It is very difficult for children to quantify their responses. Quantitative research adheres to numerical or categorical boundaries that are too difficult for children to follow. Young students are better able to relay information through discussion or the retelling of a personal situational story. This allows them to explain from their own perspective. Knowing this, the principal investigator needed to allow for many opportunities in which the students could respond to open-ended inquiries in an effort to best collect qualitative data that would be able to be examined at a later time.

Using Qualitative Research

Creswell (1998) recommends that a researcher reduce her or his entire study to a single, overarching question and several subquestions. To that end, the principal investigator created the following overarching question;

- ❖ Do students that have been engaged in an established social-emotional program exhibit behaviors that are a result of that program?

And, these subquestions:

- ❖ What are the specific social skills components that students utilize in their daily school lives?
- ❖ To what extent do students believe that what they have learned in this program affects their self-efficacy and impacts relationships?
- ❖ How do students reveal their metacognitive awareness of social skills?
- ❖ Is there enough evidence to suggest that social skills education is effective?

Contact with the participants focused on the above subquestions. The principal investigator used various data collection methods. Creswell (1998) stresses rigorous data collection to mean that the researcher collects multiple forms of data, adequately summarizes – perhaps in tabular form – the forms of data and details about them, and spends adequate time in the field. Key to this principal investigator’s approach to this study, qualitatively, is Creswell’s (1998) eight compelling reasons to do a qualitative study. Eighth on his list is the researcher’s role as an *active listener* who can tell the story from the participant’s view rather than as an “expert” who passes judgment on participants. This is critical as this study aims to understand the impact of social skills education from the child’s perspective and relies almost exclusively on their interpretations and opinions. One goal of this study is to examine the overarching question and subquestions without adult and teacher assumptions about what students may think. The data collection from adults within the study sought to reflect students’ outwardly exhibited behaviors and not what adults perceived students to think.

In an effort to gain the clearest, most accurate interpretation of the participants’ voices, the principal investigator views this study as a microethnographic case study. Creswell (1998) viewed a holistic study of a social-cultural group or system as resulting

in an ethnography and an in-depth study of a bounded system, or a case (or several cases), becoming a case study. He states that case studies of several individuals, usually three or four, in which one can establish depth through both within-and among-case analyses, are even more accepted. Hatch (2002) explains that ethnographic fieldwork usually involves participant observation, informant interviewing, and artifact collection in an effort to come to understand the cultural knowledge that group members use to make sense of their everyday experiences.

In the following section is what Creswell (1998) refers to as the description of the culture-sharing group. He calls this one of the first tasks of an ethnographer, to simply record a description of the culture-sharing group. The participants in this study have all attended the same elementary school since kindergarten, and all have been exposed to the same school-wide social skills education.

As schools are faced with increasing incidences of violence and high dropout rates, teachers and administrators are searching for ways to help students be compassionate, resilient and strong. Miller (2007) defines social growth as learning to understand and function appropriately in one's social environment by learning how to effectively interact with others. He describes emotional growth as developing and learning to manage the feelings that affect behavior and self-esteem.

Research has shown that not only do good social and emotional learning programs turn out students who are good citizens but recent studies have revealed that an average student enrolled in a social emotional learning program ranks at least 10 percentile points higher on achievement tests than

students who do not participate in such programs. (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005, p. 1)

This type of research supports the forming of good citizens and higher scores on achievement tests but lacks verbal input from the children. The input these authors do address has to do with scores and, while they support social and emotional learning programs, they fail to really represent the social and emotional benefits children might express and need. All across the country, schools are using or considering all types of social skills curricula. Rather than merely looking at how programs compare to one another, it is imperative that we consider to what degree a program impacts the day-to-day lives of students. This study aims to analyze the direct effects of social skills education. This study could provide information that may help teachers be more holistically aware of the needs of their students. Continual emotional distress can create deficits in a child's intellectual abilities, crippling the capacity to learn (Goleman, 1995).

Findings from studies on social and emotional learning are typically supportive of programs that encourage and foster such efforts, but in a fairly generic way. Key missing components are the voices of the children, the ones who are expected to utilize strategies taught in such programs. Also missing are which strategies students find beneficial and which, according to them, do not work in peer interactions. This researcher feels it is important to hear from the 'voices in the field.' Sensing that children will be open and honest about how they get along with classmates, this researcher seeks to hear their thoughts and opinions and understanding of what works, what doesn't work and how they feel about being students of social and emotional learning. The hope is their insight may guide future classroom lessons for those schools that already teach social and emotional

learning and help reach those who have not yet made the commitment to such an approach. The overall goal is to understand the impact of such learning on student behaviors. This information could benefit schools as they struggle with curriculum time constraints and student conflicts. The primary purpose of school is to promote academic skills, but school is a social setting in which the social and academic domains are inextricably connected. Children's social behavior can promote or undermine their learning, and their academic performance may have implications for their behavior as well as their opportunities to develop social relationships and skills (Miles & Stipek, 2006).

The principal investigator, in an effort to understand effective strategies taught in social and emotional education, has to closely examine the current strategies children use or don't use by working directly with children to see how this plays out in their daily interactions with peers. This chapter describes the methods used to research which strategies the children find to be most effective and which strategies gave them little or no support in their peer interactions. The chapter is divided into nine sections: qualitative research, methodology, subjects, setting, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, principal investigator's role, and other considerations. This study is situated in the larger social context of education, psychology and sociology. The impact of this study spans these three areas and can have a critical effect on an overall classroom environment. Theories from Bronfenbrenner, Maslow and Vygotsky, among others, will guide the study. From an educational perspective, social skills begin the day a child walks into a classroom or play group, regardless of age. It may be their first exposure to interacting with and managing behaviors with peers. Whether or not a child feels comfortable within

a social group can have an enormous impact on his or her ability to attend to schoolwork and intellectual growth.

The goal of social/emotional learning is to strengthen a person's ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of life in ways that enable the successful accomplishment of life tasks, such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias & Seigle, 2004, p. 68)

Children preoccupied with interpersonal conflict, unable to make the friends they want, or consumed with other emotional tensions not only engage in maladaptive behaviors but also are less able to focus on the academic demands of the classroom (Elias, 1997).

It is estimated that between 15 and 22 percent of U.S. youth have social-emotional difficulties warranting intervention (Cohen, 2001). Table 1 lists behaviors that may be evidence of social emotional learning. The principal investigator created this list. It will be important to link these expected behaviors to strategies that students may identify as useful because the interpretation could be that those strategies should be incorporated into class lessons, meetings and activities. It will also be important to look for any evidence of data triangulation or confirmation between expected behaviors, learned strategies and observed behaviors.

The responses from teachers, parents and students, as well as information gathered through observations and discussion groups, will be separated and coded according to common themes. In the process of going from initial codes to more focused codes, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) demonstrate that focused coding requires that a researcher

develop a set of analytical categories rather than just labeling data in a topical fashion.

How students exhibit the expected learning behaviors in Table 1 may lead to modifying and developing codes and more in-depth analytical dimensions or subcodes.

Table 1 <i>Social Emotional Expected Learning Behaviors</i>
Inclusive of all peers
Positive/fair problem solving techniques
Respectful of others' space
Evidence of sharing
Self-management
Use of words to express frustration
Cooperation/Teamwork
Peer encouragement
Social greetings
Understanding of others' perspectives
Standing up for oneself and/or principles
Reflective discussion/understanding/practices

The principal investigator created the list of expected learning behaviors in Table 1.

Methodology

One form of data collection for this qualitative study is grade level focus groups.

Focus groups are a profound experience for both the researcher and the research participants that generate a unique form of data. They tell the qualitative researcher things about social life that would otherwise remain unknown (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, a 2006).

This was key in this study as the researcher sought to understand social skills from the students' points of view. Open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge (Patton, 2002). Focus groups were divided by grade level. The third graders met together, the fourth graders were a separate group and the fifth graders met as a group as well. Groups

should be so composed that, while different groups may contrast with each other, each individual group should be relatively homogeneous (Bloor & Wood 2006). The principal investigator felt that separate groups were especially important in this case because she did not want younger students to feel intimidated meeting and discussing social situations in front of older students. In this way, each group had their own forum. A focus group should be used to collect data on the norms of behavior current within that social group – that is, on what kinds of behavior are approved and disapproved of by that group (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Neuman (2003) finds advantages to focus groups to include the following: the natural setting allows people to express opinions/ideas freely, people tend to feel empowered, especially in action-oriented research projects, and participants may query one another and explain their answers to each other. The latter of these advantages could, quite possibly, be the most important when giving children the opportunity to explain their perspective to an adult. Hatch (2002) reminds us that, in some studies, focus group data can be a valuable source for research triangulation. When particular phenomena are under investigation, having data from a variety of sources can be very powerful.

In an effort to be able to conduct a thorough analysis of the data, the principal investigator used several methods of data collection. Multiple-method research promises to be better research, if only because it permits more reality checks throughout the research process (Firebaugh, 2008).

Observing the children in their daily school environment allowed the principal investigator to look for evidence of whether or not the students were actually using the social skills strategies they talked about during focus group discussions. In a fieldwork

setting such as an educational institution, note-taking is a natural activity to be engaged in openly, but, in most others, blatant note-taking is apt to make research subjects self-conscious (or worse) (Bloor & Wood, 2006). This is especially true in this school where the students are used to daily observations. The key behaviors the investigator was looking for within their behaviors were the same terms that were included on the parent and teacher questionnaire (appendix A). The questionnaire asks individual questions about how the child typically reacts to frustration, problem solving, conflict, cooperation, fairness, and sharing with others. By concentrating on these key terms, the principal investigator was able to keep her observations focused. Patton (2002) defines observation as fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. The goal of observation is to understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of the participants. Observers attempt to see the world through the eyes of those they are studying (Hatch, 2002).

With regard to the natural setting, Hatch (2002) points out that, for qualitative research, the lived experiences of real people in real settings are the objects of the study. Understanding how individuals make sense of their everyday lives is the core of this type of inquiry. That is precisely what this study set out to do, to understand children within their social setting on a daily basis. Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living it. It is axiomatic in this view that individuals act on the world based on their perceptions of the realities that surround them and not on some supposed objective reality (Hatch, 2002).

Another form of data collection the principal investigator utilized in this study is journal writing. This allowed students to write down any thoughts, ideas or situations that they may not feel comfortable discussing in the group. It allowed them to write whenever they felt the urge to do so. It also enabled them to write during any permissible time during the day, including when they were at home. Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as a stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing (Patton, 2002). Journaling could give greater insight and additional focus to the principal investigator. Qualitative researchers are especially interested in how individuals understand the social circumstances in which they operate, and asking them to make written reflections on their experiences can be a powerful way to get another take on participant perspectives (Hatch, 2002).

A reflective/rating scale (appendix B) was offered in an effort to help students who, possibly, wanted to write but had some difficulty knowing where to start. The reflective piece is open ended and would allow students to focus on one particular incident, to describe it, rate their response and add further information as they are able to.

The initial survey (appendix C) that was used was designed to gain insight into the children and their perceptions about themselves socially as well as their interpretation of peers and peer group success.

The questionnaire (appendix A) was purposely designed as an exact duplicate for parents and teachers. Some children may display consistent behaviors for parents and their teacher, while others may behave differently depending on whether they are at home or at school. This may have some implications with regard to the student's level of

internalized social and emotional learning and their ability to transfer learned strategies to all areas of their lives.

Subjects: Pre-Selection

This study utilized a convenience/stratified sample due to the age/grade selection of the subjects. This was also a non-proportionally stratified group because 4-6 students from each of the specified grade levels will be selected regardless of class size. The director of the elementary school where the study is to be conducted has given site approval (appendix D). Every student in third, fourth and fifth grade in this school and who has been a student in this school since kindergarten was invited to participate in the study. A letter and the Informed Consent Form (appendix E) were sent to parents/guardians. The letter explains the study, the purpose, the data collection methods and the voluntary nature of participation. There are approximately 60 total combined students in third, fourth and fifth grade. Therefore, a few less than sixty students were initially eligible to participate in the study and received a letter. The selection goal was to include a diversity of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and academic ability based on information gathered from teachers and the central office. Students were also selected based on whether or not they were willing and capable of expressing themselves verbally and in writing. By choosing at least twelve participants, twenty percent of the population will be directly represented in this study.

Three teachers were asked (appendix F) to participate in the study by allowing their students to be observed and to attend grade level focus group meetings with the principal investigator. Participating teachers were also asked to complete a questionnaire (appendix A) for each student from their class to provide further insight to the study.

Subjects: Post Selection

Six fifth graders, five fourth graders and five third graders participated in this study. Only third, fourth and fifth graders were invited to participate in the study. The school served a total of 58 students in these grades for the 2007-2008 school year. Therefore, the 16 participants represented 28% of the total population within third, fourth and fifth grade. Of the 6 fifth graders, there were 4 female participants and 2 male. Overall in fifth grade there are 12 females and 6 males. Female participants represented 33% of the fifth graders; male participants represented 33% as well. In fourth grade, overall, there were 13 female students and 6 male students. Female participants represented 31% of the fourth graders and the one male participant represented 16% of his gender. In third grade, overall, there were 11 female students and 10 male students. Female participants represented 18% of the third graders and male participants represented 30% of the third grade class. Within the study group, 62.5% were female and 37.5% were male. At the time of the study, in these three grades within this school 62% of the students were female and 38% were male.

This study included students from a small South Central elementary school. The elementary school's total enrollment was 118 students. Of that total, 49 are boys and 69 are girls. At the time of the study there were 19 enrolled in kindergarten, 20 in first grade, 21 students in second grade, 21 in third grade, 19 in fourth grade and 18 in fifth grade. Demographics include 2% Asian students, 8% Black students and 89% White students. Nine (9) percent of the students are on free and reduced lunch.

Setting

The study took place at a small South Central Pennsylvania elementary school, in a rural setting. Each week several forms of data collection took place, whether it was through observation, collecting journal entries, meeting in grade level focus groups or gathering questionnaires from students, parents and teachers.

The setting and site are appropriate for this study because it is the natural setting for these students; these are their classrooms and this is their school. The study was conducted in several classrooms of the school. Observations were also conducted during lunch and recess and specials (music, physical education, art, and library). The conference room at the school was used for grade level focus group discussion sessions. The participants were able to select a location to complete surveys and questionnaires.

Access to this study site was gained through permission from the school director. Research is one of the major functions of a laboratory school. As students within this school, the subjects are used to being observed by college students and researchers alike. It seems to have minimal, if any, impact on their behavior with their peers. They sing, dance, argue, jump around, tell secrets and just behave as children even within short physical proximity to observing adults. This *is* their natural setting.

If we as a society are to increase our capacity to resolve conflicts peacefully, we need to provide comprehensive educational programs for our children, beginning while they are young, in the home and in school (Gartrell, 2004). An important, unique feature of this school to consider is the staff's commitment to social and emotional learning. It begins in kindergarten when the children learn "Peace not Conflict" which even has a hand signal that students use as a reminder. "Peace not Conflict" is not from any social

skills program but something the kindergarten teacher created and has taught for years. Students in the upper grades have been seen using this hand signal when an argument begins during a soccer or football game. Students respond immediately by getting right back into the game. But it is so much more than that. When there is an issue of any sort these children know there are adults who will help their concern will receive immediate attention.

If necessary, emergency meetings are called. When a group discussion and decision is sought then a meeting may be necessary to address a situation. The children are active problem solvers and are expected to be both responsible and accountable within the group. When a child needs individual attention a conference is held in private with the teacher. Any individual concerns are strictly confidential. There is an enormous amount of respect from the teachers for the developing child and it is understood that mistakes are part of the learning process. Experiential learning is a priority as well. Holt (1989) noted:

It is always, without exception, better for a child to figure out something on his own than to be told – provided, of course, as in the matter of running across the street, that his life is not endangered in the learning. But in matters intellectual, there is no exception to this rule. In the first place, what he figures out, he remembers better. In the second place, and far more important, every time he figures something out, he gains confidence in his ability to figure things out.

(p. 138)

Children are very capable of brainstorming ideas, weighing options and reflecting on results. Words also derive their meaning from emotional interactions. A word like *justice*

acquires content and meaning with each new emotional experience of fairness and unfairness (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). At this site, this kind of learning opportunity is essential social and emotional learning.

Also beginning in kindergarten, all students are paired up with older students as partners. Kindergarten students have third grade partners, first graders have fourth grade partners and second graders have fifth grade partners. Barring any personality conflicts or move outs these students keep the same partner for three years. Partners meet approximately once a week for a variety of activities. It could be a cooking activity, math game, reading together or even just sitting together during an assembly. Spontaneous meetings are not unheard of. Multi-age partners can be seen occasionally sitting together at lunch, playing at recess or just giving each other a hug or high-five when they pass in the hallway. The older students feel a certain responsibility to watch out for their younger partner and to be a good role model. The younger partner feels special having an older partner that pays attention to him or her. There are countless stories of older partners who have moved on to middle school coming back to see their younger partners, going to their soccer games or coming to see them at the all-school picnic. The children also go to overnight camp for two days in the spring. It is two days of science activities and exploration but it is also two days of camaraderie and fun.

Trade books are often used to support a lesson or begin a discussion. For example, a book such as *Louder Lili* by Gennifer Choldenko where the main character finds her voice and stands up to an unruly partner is an ideal lead in to being a good listener during conversation. Or, *The Big Orange Splot* by D. Manus Pinkwater, where Mr. Plumbean

paints his house in stark contrast to the houses in his neighborhood, is a lesson in creativity and celebrating diversity.

Can we teach children to be kind, to solve conflicts without violence, to reach out to a new or different classmate, to want to do their most beautiful work? We know we can teach them to read. Can we also help them take better care of themselves, each other, and their environment? (Charney & Kriete, 2001, p. 77)

Another unique feature of this school is that “taking care” moves beyond just the classroom to the environment and community. The school actively recycles, composts and has both a vegetable and flower garden. They are in the planning stages of building a pond area for study and a water recycling system to reuse rainwater. There is a definite undertone of responsibility to care for surroundings as well as each other and the community. Their community also reaches far and wide as they collect food and gently used clothing for a local food bank and shelter and run a school store that allows them to put school bags together for students in Vietnam.

Essential to this positive social and emotional learning is the belief that developing social skills is as important as learning to read, write and do math. We are convinced that how children learn social skills and develop emotional and ethical literacy is similar to how they learn to read. They learn by doing, by practicing, and by talking about the experiences that result from the doing and the practicing (Charney & Kriete, 2001). Opportunities for practice and reflection are very important at this site.

Social and ethical literacy, like reading literacy, flourish when students are provided a mix of direct instruction, coaching, and opportunities to practice and when they are surrounded by models who value and practice skills. Just

as we want our students to see us enjoying the act of reading, so too do we want them to see us greeting each other cordially in the morning and expressing our differing opinions directly and courteously. (Charney & Kriete, 2001, p.78)

The staff and families are committed to this approach. As teachers in a laboratory school, these teachers are responsible for modeling best practices in all facets of teaching for all of the observing college students, which includes pre-service teachers. To that end, the teachers believe wholeheartedly in the foundation outlined by the Responsive Classroom.

The seven beliefs underlying this approach are:

1. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. There is a specific set of social skills that children need to learn and practice in order to be successful academically and socially: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
5. Knowing the children we teach – individually, culturally, and developmentally – is as important as knowing the content we teach.
6. Knowing the families of the children we teach and encouraging their participation is as important as knowing the children we teach.
7. How we, the adults at school, work together to accomplish our shared mission is as important as our individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community. (Kriete, 2002, p. 220)

This philosophy, coupled with a dedication to protect and help those who are at risk socially, is the very foundation of this school.

Permission to conduct this study in this setting was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University of Pennsylvania as well as the Institutional Review Board of Shippensburg University.

Instrumentation

The study was open to only those in third, fourth and fifth grade who had attended the school since kindergarten. All who fit these criteria were invited, via letter (appendix E), to participate. Parents and students had to agree to participate and both were made aware they would be able to withdraw at any time without consequence of any kind. Third, fourth and fifth grade teachers (appendix F) were also invited to participate as their insight and observations were needed as well as permission required for students to be out of the classroom with the principal investigator. Their permission for the principal investigator to be observing at various times and locations throughout the day was also necessary.

Any participation on the student's part was always optional. Children may or may not have felt like participating on any given day and the instrumentation was designed to respect that. Participants were reminded of this option at every contact point. The participants chosen for the study (appendix G) were invited to complete an initial student survey. The initial survey (appendix C) was used to examine how students interpret their social awareness in relation to daily interactions. The language of the survey was also reflective of that which the students use in classroom discussions during social skills activities.

Parents were given a questionnaire (appendix A) to complete based on their perceptions of their child's social skills. Teachers were given the exact same questionnaire (appendix A) to complete for each child participating from their class. These questionnaires were also voluntary and parents and teachers were able to fill out all, part, or none of the questionnaire as it pertained to their knowledge of the child within this context.

Anecdotal records and field notes (appendix H) were used extensively to observe participants in their social setting. The settings included their classrooms, playground, lunchroom and hallways. A discussion topic form (appendix I) was used during grade level focus group meetings. The principal investigator completed the form in an effort to maintain the focus of the discussion and to record any topics of interest or concern for future meeting times. The form was designed to initiate discussion of social interactions, reactions and problem solving techniques.

Participants were also given journals to be used confidentially; no name had to be anywhere on the journal. Journal writing was optional and students kept the journals in their possession, writing at home or at school during appropriate times. A reflective piece (appendix B) consisting of a rating scale was developed in case students wanted to write in their journals but needed some help getting started. This was to be used as a guide in identifying a problem or situation and having the student explain their reaction to it. This reflective piece (appendix B), as well as the journal writing, was strictly optional. Data were collected between January 2008 and June 2008.

This study is a multimethod case study geared toward measuring the impact of social skills education on students' day-to-day peer interactions. The initial student survey will

give some insight to each student's social background, beliefs and sense of self-efficacy in peer relationships. The reflective rating scale (appendix B) will also be available for students to use when and if they choose to journal. The parent/teacher questionnaire (appendix A) pertains to social behaviors that the child exhibits. The questionnaires have the identical set of questions on them. The goal is to examine this information, coupled with the children's responses and the principal investigator's observations and to triangulate key data. Key behaviors would be those behaviors that demonstrate strategies used in social and emotional learning along with a consistency between what parents, teachers and children perceive and what the researcher sees while observing children and hears during focus groups. Observations provide a check on what is reported in interviews; interviews, on the other hand, permit the observer to go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts (Patton, 2002).

Journals were optional and were offered to students who may not want to discuss a social issue in front of peers. They may choose to journal because they are dealing with a situation they find difficult and have yet to resolve. Every student was provided with a journal. The students put a code or pseudonym of their choice on the journal for self-identification purposes only. Students were encouraged to keep the journal with them, allowing them to write at home or during available times at school. The principal investigator checked in with students periodically to see if they had added new entries.

An anecdotal records/field notes recording sheet (appendix H) was devised to use during observations. The form records the student's name, grade, date, and location of the observation. It also recorded what particular activity the child was engaged in and provides notes for the researcher. The principal investigator used the notes section to look

for key behaviors discussed in the questionnaires. These specific behaviors gave purpose, guidance and organization to the observations. The grade level focus group discussion topic form (appendix I) was used to maintain focus during the group meeting, but also to record student responses and pay attention to (and note) topics for further discussion. This also allowed for data analysis to begin immediately.

Procedures

The principal investigator had become increasingly aware of the impact of social skills issues on a student's overall performance and sense of self within the classroom. She began looking at the specific strategies that were taught as well as the fact that many schools have a limited and somewhat fractured approach to teaching social skills. This setting provided the principal investigator with a school that seems to provide consistent instruction in social skills. And, yet, the question remained...do these students behave in a way that reflects the effort of such a program? And, is there enough evidence to suggest that such a program is effective?

Upon receipt of teacher, parent and participant agreement, the principal investigator sent home a questionnaire (appendix A) for parents to complete. This questionnaire was intended to provide some background information about the student with regard to his or her ability to problem solve, cooperate, share and deal with conflict, frustration and being fair. The same questionnaire was sent to each child's teacher in an effort to gather more complete information.

During the initial meeting with each grade level, the students were welcomed and the principal investigator explained that she needed their help in studying:

- ❖ how children interact with their peers

- ❖ how they problem solve
- ❖ how they know what to do when there is a conflict
- ❖ whether they use strategies learned in social skills lessons
- ❖ which strategies students believe work and which do not

Participants were then asked to fill out the initial survey (appendix C), answering only the questions they felt comfortable completing. The initial survey was intended to gauge students' level of social skills and understanding of social situations. The principal investigator also explained to students that they may see her doing various observations throughout the day in several locations and they were assured she was not "making sure they were behaving or checking up on them" but simply watching how children play and work together. A second meeting was scheduled and it was during that meeting that the journals were handed out and the procedure explained as follows:

- ❖ Journaling was purely optional
- ❖ Journaling could be done at home or at a time their teacher deemed allowable
- ❖ Peer names were not necessary – confidentiality was important – the focus being on behaviors, conflicts, solutions, strategies and not pointing blame at individuals. Students opted for pseudonyms when referring to classmates in their journal writing
- ❖ Instead of their own names, participants could put a code on the journal for self identification purposes
- ❖ Students were allowed to write about anything they wanted within the journal related to peer/school interactions

- ❖ Students were to try and keep track of the journal, possibly keeping it in their backpack so they had access to it whenever they wanted it

Journal writing, though optional, was included so that students may write openly and honestly without concern for what others may think or say. Participants were introduced to and given a copy of the reflective piece/rating scale (appendix B) which they were able to use to help initiate their journal writing if they found it helpful.

It was after this second meeting (which for the principal investigator amounted to six meetings because each grade level met independently of one another) that the principal investigator began doing various observations. She used the anecdotal records sheet (appendix H) to complete field notes and record behaviors during observation times.

Data Analysis

Initial data were analyzed throughout the data collection process. The principal investigator analyzed the data, initially, to seek areas necessary for further discussion in grade level focus groups. She also analyzed data to look for patterns in behaviors and responses. Using patterns to develop categories may lead to cross-category examination, which would guide the next phase of the analysis. Analysis was based on all of the instruments and methods listed above. Analysis began with the coding of all responses from students, parents, teachers and notes from the principal investigator.

Various coding methods may provide patterns from which the researcher can begin to answer the research questions. Creswell (1998) identifies open coding as a procedure for developing categories of information and axial coding as interconnecting the categories. Patterns may emerge as well as themes and relationships that will allow the researcher to develop explanations.

Data analysis involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison and pattern finding (Hatch, 2002). Categorizing, comparing and looking for patterns will serve as a guide for this investigator. Analysis usually begins with looking for descriptive codes within the data, eventually hoping to generate a set of key concepts (categories) which are much more analytical (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The categories may or may not align with strategies and expected behaviors of students engaged in social and emotional learning. (Table 1)

The findings will be validated by the procedure of data analysis. Going back to the research questions and overall purpose of this study will give the researcher the specific theories to be critiqued. Any evidence of Maslow's hierarchy of needs will be examined, as this could have a significant impact on the results. Data need to be substantial enough to allow in-depth analysis and interpretation. This investigator will be looking to support the findings with real trustworthiness and validity.

There are four kinds of validity or tests of research accuracy: ecological validity, natural history, member validation, and competent insider performance. Ecological validity is the degree to which the social world described by a researcher matches the world of members. A project is valid in terms of natural history if outsiders see and accept the field site and the researcher's actions. A project is member valid if members recognize and understand the researcher's description as reflecting their intimate social world. A valid field project gives enough of a flavor of the social life in the field, and sufficient detail so that an outsider can act as a member, allowing for competent insider performance. (Neuman, 2003, p. 389)

This researcher believes this level of trustworthiness and validity is critical to this project. It is the social world of the students that is to be examined for greater understanding and evidence of behaviors and strategies that may reflect and support social and emotional learning. For this study to be trustworthy all four kinds of validity that Neuman (2003) stresses must be met. According to Christians (2005), ensuring that data are accurate is a cardinal principle in social science codes.

Principal Investigator's Role

The principal investigator had two primary roles in this study. One was to design the study in such a way that the data would be organized, accurate and trustworthy, and two, to facilitate the groups as they explained their positions in the social context of their peer groups. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur (a maker of quilts) and the interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage-that is, a pieced together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. In that case, this researcher seeks to analyze data in an effort to piece together that which the subjects demonstrate, verbally and through actions, with what teachers and parents reveal to see if a complete "quilt" is the result.

Because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, a qualitative report should include some information about the researcher. What experience, training, and perspective does the researcher bring to the field (Patton, 2002)? This researcher has over twenty years of teaching experience and a masters' degree in early childhood education. Over those years, she has developed a desire to better understand ways to support her students socially and emotionally in addition to the academics in which they are engaged in the classroom. Over the years, she has used a variety of social and emotional learning

programs, some seemingly with better results than others. It was through these years, that a better understanding of students' social and emotional needs and what strategies made a difference became increasingly important. Her basic philosophy is that one must tend to a child's heart before she can truly reach his mind and that compassion and respect are the primary attributes of a good teacher.

The students in this school have social emotional learning embedded throughout their day, with specific strategies taught in mini-lessons. College students would often comment that there is a noticeable difference in the social interactions and emotional support among these students as compared to those from other schools and they wanted to know more about what kind of approach or strategies the children use. The principal investigator has always felt social and emotional learning was critical to the overall success of any classroom. Having used a variety of strategies over the years, she felt it was time to hear from the elementary age students. This insight may help teachers, schools and teacher preparation courses to address students' needs more appropriately.

This researcher met with the participants in grade level focus discussion groups biweekly between January and June 2008. She observed each grade level weekly, checked journals weekly, and touched base with teachers and parents to answer questions whenever necessary. The level of engagement and willingness to share ideas was evident at each group meeting as the children always had more to say and the groups always ran out of time. There was never a shortage of discussion material.

Other Considerations

Any other considerations must include the ways in which these children were protected. First and foremost, the study was put through and approved by Indiana

University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board. This is a thorough process geared specifically to protecting research subjects. The study was then expedited through Shippensburg University's Institutional Review Board. All participants' identities are protected through the use of pseudonyms. Participants are told this prior to signing up and reminded of it throughout the study. Parents/guardians and students signed the Informed Consent Form and teachers all signed a participation agreement, as well. The principal investigator made sure the subjects were comfortable during all aspects of the study.

The study posed no serious ethical problems because students were given the option to withdraw at anytime and were reminded of that at several points throughout the research. Students were allowed to participate in the study to the extent to which they felt comfortable, and nothing more. This researcher is interested in social and emotional learning because she is committed to the social sense of security for children and finding out from them what it takes to achieve that. Neuman (2003) reminds us that the researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when research subjects are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics. This is important to this research as it deals with children.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 86) put the centrality of ethics into the form of four key questions that a researcher must ask him or herself:

- ❖ What moral principles guide your research?
- ❖ How do ethical issues enter into your selection of a research problem?

- ❖ How do ethical issues affect how you conduct your research – the design of your study, your sampling procedure, etc.?
- ❖ What responsibility do you have toward your research subjects?

These important questions must be addressed first and foremost. Ethical issues supersede everything in research. The moral principles that guide this research include being the honest, heartfelt voice of children, representing them and their emotional well being in peer relationships truthfully, loudly and clearly and collecting data in such a way as to not cause them any discomfort of any kind.

The ethical issues that enter into the selection of the research problem are derived directly from an adult and teacher responsibility to protect our children from being emotionally damaged or socially and emotionally at risk. Ethical issues affecting how research is conducted include hearing primarily from children in a mixed-methods approach and pulling a sample that reflects diversity of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and academic ability based on information gathered from teachers and the central office. The responsibilities to the research subjects in this study include their parent/guardian consent (appendix E) to participate as well as their own personal consent, protecting them through the use of pseudonyms and always reminding them that participation is voluntary meaning they can participate as little or as much as they want and may withdraw from the study at any time.

The results of this research will not directly benefit the subjects of this study but may have implications in a much broader sense to their peers outside of this school and possibly to younger students from all school settings. Helping them clarify which tools are necessary and helping to make children socially and emotionally strong will benefit

everyone. Research results are frequently useful as background information on which administrators or practitioners can base their plans for the future (Thomas, 2003). This may be the case with this study.

Chapter IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Participants

This study included students from a small South Central elementary school in Pennsylvania. The elementary school's total enrollment was 118 students. Of that total, 49 are boys and 69 are girls. At the time of the study there were 19 enrolled in kindergarten, 20 in first grade, 21 students in second grade, 21 in third grade, 19 in fourth grade and 18 in fifth grade. Demographics include 2% Asian students, 8% Black students and 89% White students. Nine (9) percent of the students are on free and reduced lunch.

Included in the third grade group were Jenna, Emmitt, Tyson, Michaela and Jerry. The following is a brief description of each of the third grade participants;

Jenna's birthdate is 6/16/99. She is the younger of two siblings in a two-parent family. Her older brother is in eighth grade. Jenna is White. Her teacher reports that she is an average student but because she is a hard worker her grades are slightly above average.

Emmitt's birthdate is 12/30/98. Emmitt is the second of four siblings. His mother is a single parent and all of Emmitt's siblings are girls. His older sister is in fourth grade and his twin, younger sisters are in first grade. Emmitt is African American. His teacher reports that Emmitt is a below average student who avoids tasks that are too difficult or of little interest to him.

Tyson's birthdate is 11/17/98. Tyson is the younger of two siblings in a two-parent family. His older sister is in fifth grade. Tyson is White. His teacher reports that Tyson is an above average student.

Michaela's birthdate is 6/12/99. Michaela has an older half brother who is in seventh grade. She lives in a two-parent family. Michaela is White. Her teacher reports that she is an average student.

Jerry's birthdate is 4/19/99. Jerry is the second of two siblings in a two-parent family. His older sister is in seventh grade. Jerry is White. His teacher reports that Jerry is a very strong student who receives directed studies instruction as per his Individualized Education Plan having qualified as a gifted student.

The fourth grade group consisted of five students as well. Their names are Nathan, Terese, Catherine, Chelsey and Maggie. The following is a brief description of the fourth grade participants;

Nathan's birthdate is 2/16/98. Nathan is the older of two siblings. His younger brother is in first grade. They live in a two-parent family. Nathan is White. His teacher reports that he is an above average student.

Terese's birthdate is 11/19/97. She is the oldest of four siblings. Her mother is a single parent. Terese's brother Emmitt is in third grade and also participated in this study. She has twin sisters in first grade. She is African American. Terese's teacher reports that she is a very organized above average student.

Catherine's birthdate is 11/13/97. She is the younger of two siblings in a two-parent family. Her sister is in ninth grade. Catherine is White. Her teacher reports that Catherine is an above average student.

Chelsey's birthdate is 1/22/98. She is the younger of two siblings in a two-parent family. Her brother is in seventh grade. Chelsey is White. Her teacher reports that Chelsey is an above average student.

Maggie's birthdate is 11/16/97. She is the youngest child in a two-parent family. She has three adult half siblings. Maggie is White. Her teacher reports that Maggie is an above average student.

The fifth grade group included six students. They were Thea, Greg, Sarah, Dakota, Dominique and Andrew. The following is a brief description of each of these participants:

Thea's birthdate is 6/12/97. She is the middle child of three siblings and lives in a two-parent family. Thea has an older brother in tenth grade and a younger sister in third grade. She was adopted from Vietnam as an infant. Her teacher reports that Thea works hard and is a below average student.

Greg's birthdate is 9/26/96. He is the oldest of three siblings and lives in a two-parent family. His younger brother is in second grade and his younger sister is pre-school age. Greg is White. His teacher reports that he is an average student.

Sarah's birthdate is 6/16/97. She is the younger of two siblings and lives in a two-parent family. Her older brother is in seventh grade. She is White. Her teacher reports that she is an above average student.

Dakota's birthdate is 12/14/96. She is the oldest of three siblings and lives in a two-parent family. One younger brother is in second grade and one is pre-school age. Dakota is White. Her teacher reports that she is an average student.

Dominique's birthdate is 2/20/97. She is the one of four siblings; she is also a triplet and lives in a two-parent family. Her older sister is in ninth grade. Her triplet siblings include a brother and a sister. Dominique is African American. Her teacher reports that she is an average student.

Andrew's birthdate is 6/26/97. He is the younger of two siblings. His mother is a single parent. His older, half sister is in ninth grade. Andrew is White. His teacher reports that he is an average student.

In the following data analysis, the researcher has separated the responses according to the method by which they were collected.

Initial Analysis: Student Initial Survey

The grade level groups first met in an introduction meeting during which the principal investigator discussed the purpose of the study. Students were told that the researcher was looking to them to teach her which social skills strategies work with their peers and which do not. Further, the group would discuss the challenges and successes of being and having friends, being part of a class and the social constructs therein. Students were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose not to participate in any part of the study and to even withdrawal at any time. They were then asked to complete the introductory survey. This allowed the principal investigator to get some background information to use as a springboard to further discussions. Results from this survey gave immediate insight into the students' impressions as social beings within their school. The words and length of answers children used varied from grade level to grade level and increasing complexities were evident in their responses.

Following is a brief overview of their answers and comments. The first question asked what is the most important attribute or characteristic of a friend? The third graders answered nice, good and fun (two students answered fun and two answered nice, one answered good). From this point on answers with multiple/same responses will have the number in parentheses behind it. Among the fourth graders the answers included

kindness, fairness (2), helpful and nice. The fifth graders answers were; reliable, honest (2), helpful and something in common/like the same things (2). Overall the most frequent response was nice/kind (4) making it the answer 25% of the time. When considering the most important characteristic of a teammate, student responses from third grade included; helpful (2) fair and nice (2). Answers from fourth grade were sharing, play with you, kind, helpful, cooperate. Fifth grade responses included; good sport (2) trust, back you up, good at that sport and teamwork. The answers of helpful and nice/kind were both given three times making them the answer 19% of the time. And, the last part of the question asks them to consider the most important characteristic of a classmate. Third graders replied funny (2), helpful (2) and sharing (1). Fourth graders said cooperative, generous, helpful, friendly and kind. Fifth grade answers included cooperate, good work, helpful, respectful, reliable and loyal. The most common answer was helpful, given four times, or 25% of the time. According to their answers, they have the same expectations of a friend and a teammate and, overall, a classmate should be helpful.

The next question was, what makes a good friend? This question gives some important insight that will be reviewed specifically here. After that, the remaining answers from this initial survey will be displayed in tables for quick review. The third grade students responded that a good friend is: nice (3), considerate and one (1) no answer. These one-word answers were appropriate but note how they become increasingly detailed in the upper grades. Fourth graders felt that what makes a good friend is uniqueness, reaching out, someone who plays with you and you have fun together, plays with you and one (1) no answer. The details that fifth grade offered are as follows as they considered what makes a good friend: this is a good time to meet them.

Dakota said, “A good friend is someone who is nice to you, makes you laugh, is always there for you and if he/she moves away they will keep in contact with you.”

Sarah wrote, “A good friend is somebody who doesn’t make fun of you and somebody who doesn’t tell your secrets.”

Dominique said, “ A good friend is always there to cheer you up and is always understanding.”

Andrew’s response was, “They tell each other good stuff.”

Greg said, “You trust each other, be nice to each other, help each other out, does not lie.”

Thea said, “They can rely on you because you can rely on them.”

Clearly as the children get older they are able to be more detailed in their ideas about what makes a good friend. The next question had the three possible answers of yes, no, sometimes.

Do you think friends are...

	Yes	No	Sometimes
fair	IIIIII		IIIIIIII
patient	IIIIII	I	IIIIIIII
kind	IIIIIIII	II	IIII

This question was important because we cannot assume that being a friend is easy. This allowed us to consider areas where there might be some evidence that friends face challenges with each other. These preliminary questions are also important because we have to first note what the challenges might be in peer relationships and that will lead us to ways in which children deal with a variety of issues socially.

The next question was, how do friends stick up for each other?

Third grade responses:

- they are nice and strong.
- don't let a friend get hurt.
- help each other.
- cooperate with each other.
- when you fall you help each other.

"To help" was in the answer two out of five times.

Fourth grade responses:

- they work as a team.
- when someone is bullying them, they help.
- when a bully comes along, a friend will help you by telling the bully to go away.
- if one of your friend's brother is picking on them or hurting them you should step in and help them anyway you can.
- by being kind and supporting you.

Protecting a friend from "a bully" was in the answer two out of five times. Supporting each other was a theme throughout all five answers.

Fifth grade responses:

- by helping them cheer up when they're sad and by not spreading rumors about them.
- they tell each other to keep trying and stuff like that.
- they help you when people are making fun of you.
- friends stick up for each other when one friend gets hurt the other can tell the adult what happened.

- help each other out; stand up to the bully.
- if someone is picking on your friend say, “stop it”.

“Helping” is in the answer three out of six times. There is additional depth in these answers as they refer to spreading of rumors, people making fun, encouraging each other to keep trying. The fifth graders seem to have a clearer understanding of more of what needs to be considered in being a friend, indicating their developmental growth.

The overall consensus was that “sticking up for a friend” requires one to be helpful more than anything else. Their interpretations of “helpful” are varied but clear and appropriate.

The next question asked the participants what is hard, for some kids, about being a good friend? This question was designed in an effort to have children consider both sides of friendship, putting themselves in the position of both the giver and the receiver of friendship. After the answers from the student survey were outlined, the principal investigator will look for patterns that may suggest intrinsically or extrinsically based social skills. This will be addressed in the summary section.

The third graders responded:

- sticking together.
- because they fight sometimes.
- being friends with the mean people.
- they could be scared.
- they are shy or mean.

These answers suggest that even good friends fight sometimes and that there is a certain expectation to be kind to peers who may not be nice in general.

Fourth grade responses regarding what is hard for some kids about being a friend included:

- being fair and honest.
- trying to be nice and patient.
- they are frightened.
- being shy.
- some friends might not be nice or caring to their friends.

These answers provide the same kinds of themes, it can be hard to be nice and patient, fair and honest with friends and that it is hard to be friends with peers who may not be nice or caring, though, again, these students apparently view this as an expectation. There is also a commonality with the responses of scared, shy, frightened, all possibly considering children who lack confidence in social skills and therefore are faced with some difficulties in peer relationships.

The fifth graders responses, again, are longer. And, include:

- some kids think they are hot shots all the time.
- their attitude, tones of voices.
- if they aren't truthful.
- telling the truth, being nice.
- well, for boys, trying not to be bad.
- well, sometimes it is hard to be a good friend and be nice to everyone like if there is someone mean or not your favorite person in the class, then it's hard, I should know.

“Truthful” is mentioned twice in these responses. Did the student who responded that some kids think they are hot shots all the time mean that they are difficult people to be

friends with or that they do not make the effort to be kind to others? There are some answers that could give additional insight, such as “tones of voices”. Did this child mean that it is hard to maintain voice tone, or others tones make it difficult? It is hard to know.

Question 6 asked, how would you recommend someone deal with a bully?

Third graders wrote:

- go to a teacher.
- you could tell them, if you don't stop I will tell the teacher.
- tell the teacher, tell the bully stop, I don't like that.
- runaway.
- tell the bully “back off”.

In most cases, the third grade students felt telling a teacher was the best answer.

The fourth graders answered:

- tell them to stop.
- runaway.
- by standing up to the bullies.
- tell him to stop.
- you say, would you like me to say what you said to me?

The fourth graders', on the other hand, felt confronting the bully was the best answer.

The fifth grade responses included:

- to tell them to knock it off, then tell a teacher.
- tell them to stop in a mean voice so they will get scared and leave.
- look him straight in the eye and tell them (sic) to “go away”.
- don't fight just walk away from the bully so no one gets hurt or in trouble.

-they should just walk away and say “your words don’t hurt me” if the bully is saying bad things to you or calling you names, but if they hurt you then you should get a friend and then walk away.

-first, only use words and tell them to stop or go away, if they do not listen tell them again, if they do not listen to you a third time, get a teacher.

This group responds with more choices, almost a trial and error type effort, an if this...then this... approach. This may show they have some understanding that there are no guarantees that a certain approach will work and one may need to have some other options in mind.

The next question, number 7, asks when there is a conflict, how do students usually react? This question looks to see if students tend to think before they react or if the reactions seem more impulsive.

Third graders answered:

-they say stop or tell a teacher.

-walk away.

-sad.

-they gather around.

-they get mad.

Interestingly, the answers here are all a little different.

Fourth grade replied:

-they try to solve it.

-they argue (BIG TIME).

-they usually get mad and yell or choose a side they can depend on.

-talk about it.

-by starting a fight.

While two answered that students try to solve it or talk about it, the others all referred to arguing, getting mad and starting a fight which would reveal more impulsive reactions.

Fifth grade wrote:

-cry, get mad, yell.

-well, if some of the boys get in a fight they “break up” for awhile then they come back together.

-yell and think it has to be their way.

-get mad, fight and use put downs.

-word fights and looks.

-depending on what the conflict is, students react differently, if somebody gets hurt the students gather around and try to see what’s going on and they try to help them. But I think people get too close.

These responses are much more reactive and seem to lack planned strategies. Further information should be available in focus group discussions.

The 8th question is, what is the hardest part of being involved in a conflict (disagreement)?

Third graders responded:

-walking away.

-it’s just hard.

-solving it.

-it is hard.

-the hardest part is not overreacting.

These answers seem to indicate that conflicts continue to be hard and either students forget to try strategies they have learned or they do not feel confident that they will work, or they, in fact, do not work.

Fourth graders wrote:

-voting.

-not giving in.

-going to both sides and getting their story.

-figuring out how to defend it.

-deciding on which side you agree with.

These responses may indicate that the fourth graders are more apt to problem solve even when they are not exactly sure how to go about it. Their answers reflect less frustration and more clearly identify challenges.

The fifth graders responded:

-having to find a solution.

-that you want to hurt he/she (sic) so bad but you know you can't.

-I'm one of the kids in the class who likes to be friends with everybody, but if two of my friends are in a conflict I try to help without getting too involved.

-you get angry.

-people not agreeing with you.

-not to be mean over a little thing.

The fifth grade students continue to show a little more depth in their responses. These answers demonstrate their understanding of the complexities of a peer conflict and also some of the isolation felt as an individual in a social group.

Question nine asked whether students usually solve the problem, ignore it or get an adult to help.

Third graders replied:

- get an adult.
- get an adult.
- ignore it.
- get help.
- (no answer).

Overall, the consensus in third grade seems to be to get help.

Fourth graders wrote:

- an adult to help.
- solve the problem or get an adult.
- solve or ignore it.
- get an adult to help.
- some usually ignore it or get an adult to help.

Here the fourth graders reveal a sense of having more choices and making an attempt on their own to either ignore it or solve it before getting an adult.

Fifth graders responded:

- solve it or get an adult.
- solve the problem.

-my friends try to solve it.

-ignore it.

-ignore it.

-ignore it.

The fifth graders tend to solve it or ignore it, which may show a greater maturity in their ability to deal with it on their own or even ignore it all together.

The next question asked if students usually solve it, how do they solve it?

Third graders responded:

-say stop.

-by getting help.

-talk it out.

-they talk to them.

-they vote.

Several made references to talking through a problem and voting came up, which had come up earlier in a fourth grade response to the difficulties of dealing with a conflict. So voting could possibly be something these students resort to when solving problems, and that may be explained in discussion groups also.

Fourth graders replied:

-by getting both sides of the story and bringing the people together to solve it.

-with words.

-they talk about what happened.

-by fighting and then making up.

-talk it out.

Talking it out is a common response.

Fifth graders wrote:

- by starting the game over, talking it out or ignoring it.
- talk to the person, apologize.
- well, it depends what kind of situation it is.
- girls would use put downs, the boys would fight.
- choosing sides.
- students solve a problem by mostly using words and just talking it out.

There are a variety of responses here. The response of “starting the game over” is a reminder that many conflicts begin in the throes of games and competition.

Question #11 asked how should someone react if they feel excluded?

Third graders answered:

- just walk away.
- sad.
- sad, mad.
- tell the teacher.
- go to an adult.

For these children, getting an adult to help is clearly an option, reacting by feeling sad and/or mad is the reality.

Fourth graders wrote:

- ask if I can play or just stay in from recess.
- ask if they want to play.
- walk away or try again.

-tell the teacher.
-probably make them feel guilty for excluding them.

Again, this seems to be an area where students may not feel particularly strong, staying in from recess, walking away and even making them feel guilty, though honest, do not sound like good solutions.

Fifth graders replied:

-if I were excluded I would probably ignore the fact I was left out.
-sad, mad.
-sad and mad.
-they would feel pretty sad.
-play it anyway

Several students responded to this question with their gut reactions; how being excluded makes them feel as opposed to what they would do about it. This shows that either the wording of the question was confusing to them or the feeling of sadness at being excluded is the overwhelming initial reaction therefore that was the first thing they thought of and reported so.

This lends itself to question #12 that asked, do students usually feel confident with their peers?

Third graders responded:

-yes.
-sometimes.
-I feel confident.
-some.

-not at the beginning.

These responses vary which may demonstrate the younger students' inability to view feelings from another's perspective.

Fourth graders replied:

-sometimes.

-no, they might not know what game it is.

-sometimes.

-yes.

-no they usually feel peer pressure.

Here there are more examples of why students may not feel particularly confident, and there are more "sometimes" responses.

Fifth graders responded:

-usually they do but like if they have to sing or something they don't use their full ability because they would be nervous.

-sometimes.

-sometimes, it depends.

-sometimes if they're not shy or mean to their peers.

-yes if their peers are helpful, nice to you.

-it depends on who it is.

Fifth graders explained that there are certain situations where confidence is an issue and that some people are more apt to feel confident than others. Did the child who said, "sometimes if they're not shy or mean to their peers" suggest that they can see through the tough façade of those who are mean and understand that the very behavior of being

mean can be a cover up for self-doubt? Another response worth noting is that in every grade group the response of “sometimes” came up. Does this suggest that they have all really felt self-doubt at one time or another? Is this reflective of Kohlberg’s preconventional morality (Crain, 2005), stage one and two, where students have some sense of right action, as isolated individuals, but still see a connection between the behavior and the result? If a person is mean, it may be because they lack the confidence to “fit in”.

Question thirteen asked, why do you think some kids feel confident and others don’t?

Third grade responses included:

- you’re getting a new thing and their (sic) not.
- some are scared.
- because they can.
- everyone has different feelings.
- because they have no friends.

The first response, about “getting a new thing” might be interesting as it could suggest a certain materialistic connection to feeling confident. The connection between a lack of confidence and “no friends” is interesting because it may be an assumption made by others. Again, this is information that may come up in grade level discussions.

Fourth graders wrote:

- some kids have a lot of friends and are outgoing, others are shy and don’t have many friends.
- because they might do some things wrong.
- some people are afraid to say what they think.

-(no answer)

-because maybe they feel like they have faults and people will put them down.

Interestingly, several of these responses refer to a fear of what others will think or say.

So, it may be safe to say that, by fourth grade, students are acutely aware that the approval of others is based on what they say or do and whether or not it meets peer approval, for whatever reason.

Fifth graders responded:

-they are used to meeting people, others aren't.

-they probably have learned to be confident and others haven't.

-they have had examples in their house.

-maybe because they're shy, mean to their peers, or don't like to be around people a lot.

-maybe other kids feel overweight and don't get friends.

-popularity.

Several of these answers are matter-of-fact and related to a student's general comfort level. The two that signal other social issues have not been brought up before. Does the student who replied, "maybe other kids feel overweight and don't get friends" mean to imply that if a child is overweight it is a given that they won't have friends? And, the word "popularity" pops up for the first time; does this answer suggest that popularity secures a sense of confidence or vice-versa? It is not yet clear.

The final question on the survey asked, how do you know how to solve problems with your peers? This question was purposely designed to find out if they believe they learned problem solving strategies at home or at school and from their families or from their teachers and/or peers but without leading them on.

Third graders wrote:

- say stop and tell.
- say I'm sorry or get a teacher.
- you stop.
- (no answer).
- they vote and say stop.

Rather than explaining *who* taught them, the third graders perceived the question to be more to the effect of, you know how to solve problems, *how* do you do it?

Fourth graders replied:

- well I have an older sister so I get advice from her.
- by my teachers.
- if they make you really mad just take a breather.
- talk with them about it.
- by talking calmly to them and figuring out the problem.

Similar confusions are demonstrated in a few of these answers but the first two understood what the principal investigator was asking.

Fifth graders responded:

- just talk but if it gets really frustrating then I go get a teacher.
- I think a lot so I usually think about these things.
- talk to them.
- experience.
- using words and not hands.

-because I've been taught.

Some fifth graders understood the question but more information will have to be noted using the other data that were collected. It will be important to know if students feel their social emotional learning comes primarily from home or school and will always have to be considered a limitation in this study as there is no clear-cut way of knowing that it is from a school based program. It will also be interesting to note how students indicate and differentiate skills that are taught and skills that are gained through experience. This is highlighted later in a focus group when a child explained, "I believe it is from learning over the years...but kids only *get* so much until they experience it, they don't understand it 'til they've been through it". This child helps make the important connection between teaching strategies and experiential learning, which also necessitates time allowed for reflection and discussion.

The following section reviews data collected during focus group discussions. Where appropriate, responses are bulleted for the ease of the reader. In other sections the researcher included the participant's name and quote because it was necessary for a complete picture of the group response or dynamic.

Initial Analysis: Grade Level Focus Group Discussions

The initial group meeting was to introduce the study and distribute the student initial survey. The subsequent meeting was to get students to think about how they interact socially. Therefore, the main purpose was to identify the biggest problems that students encounter throughout the day in an effort to better understand their challenges and how they deal with them. Throughout each phase of this research the principal investigator

was paying close attention to references students may have made about strategies they use, where they learned them and whether or not they are effective.

When asked to identify what the biggest problems are for third graders there was no hesitation. They agreed that bossy kids, bullies, playground games and “kids mocking you” are the greatest sources of conflict. They felt that bossy kids interrupt all the time, especially at lunch. One child commented, “People interrupt all the time, like at lunch, kids can be very bossy. Bossy isn’t as bad as a bully, bossy kids don’t really push you around, they just never let you talk or finish what you are saying”. When asked what do you do about a bully a student responded, “Using a strong voice does not work, maybe for bossy people but not for real bullies. ‘Please stop’ doesn’t work either”. Another child stated, “I remind them of what we learned when we were little, I say, ‘remember what we said?’ and sometimes people will stop and think because friends listen and we make promises to listen to each other even when we are mad”. Yet another child said, “With a bully I say, ‘would you want me to say that back to you?’ and then I say, ‘do you like it?’ they say, ‘no’ and I say ‘then don’t do it to me’”. This reflects the Golden Rule of do unto others that which you would want them to do unto you. It will be interesting to see if this comes up again and to where it can be attributed.

When discussing the challenges of playground games one child commented, “one of the hardest problems for my friends is deciding who is ‘it’. They will not take turns, they will say, ‘I need to be it first, it has to be me’. Sometimes it ruins the game; sometimes they will still play and not quit. We promise to give everyone a turn but they want to be ‘it’ first, sometimes rules aren’t clear because we made it up and that starts a fight because no one really understands the game”. When describing what it is like to have

someone mocking her, one student said, “I say, ‘why would you do that to me?’ sometimes they stop and think”. “Stop and think” is a frequently used strategy for children in any situation. “Stop and think and make good choices” is the entire strategy. Through this analysis time will tell if it is something students internalize or if they just rely on the words themselves. Another child speaks up, “Things I learned from my older brother are more helpful because he tells me sometimes I have to threaten back and be mean and stick up for myself back and that’s not really what we learn in school”. “You know, kids argue, they do not walk away – ever – more people actually get involved, who weren’t even in it to begin with. They never go to a teacher right away, they try to argue it out” said another child. To which someone added, “It helps to get involved and then maybe make your friends laugh or forget about it”. Another comment, “I show people how they sound when they are mocking or being bossy, I think because they realize how they sound and how it makes you feel they might stop. I go right to the person and tell them exactly what I think. People think I’m confident. I don’t let anyone stop me from saying how I feel. Kids have to try and solve it and not get an adult. Adults don’t always fix it; they just try and end it. Then the same thing happens again”.

This group shows how students feel it is really up to them to interact and work together socially and that, it sounds as though, one cannot be timid *and* successful. It will be necessary to continue to listen to how students perceive adult intervention.

When discussing challenges, the fourth graders overwhelmingly reported that most peer conflicts begin with playground games. Several commented that they would much rather play on community teams than teams on the playground. Comments included;

- On my community soccer team we have referees and coaches to call fouls, on the playground everyone argues over stuff.
- There are ball hogs, which is ok if you're good and not rude about it.
- Some kids trip you on purpose.
- Some kids say, "we are winning, you are losing" or "your team sucks", if you tell them not to brag they say "I'm not, I'm just cheering" or "I'm just celebrating".

When asked what are some possible solutions, students offered:

- Ignore them, we are used to the kids that do it.
- Yea, I can ignore them, I don't care.
- Saying "good game" and "good try", but only do that with friends.
- Celebrate in your head.
- You can't tell them to shut up at school but I do that at home.
- Neighborhood friends are good to see but if you're friends with one, the other won't play with you.
- Three friends is hard.
- Yea, we learned "your friend's friend is your friend" but that doesn't always work.

At a glance it seems like these children are pretty immune to the effects of what they identified as one of the biggest problems and yet, they are clearly bothered by it. They also understand that what adults teach does not always work. It will take more time and data to understand how this impacts their social decision-making.

The fifth-grade focus discussion group identified recess activities/game rules, bragging, troublemakers and expectations from their teacher as the areas that are most

problematic. They immediately referred to using a “strong voice” as being worthwhile even though, they noted, “it only works until about fifth grade but it is a good way to build friendships when you are younger and those friends are better later on, they care more”. Troublemakers, they said, can be tricky.

- If your class has one troublemaker who likes to make fun of people, does pranks and tricks, you need to laugh at yourself and go along with it, like we don’t get mad at each other.
- But if it is someone new, then you should say, “look you are new here, maybe at your old school that worked but I want to get to know you and I don’t want to get hurt”.
- They will get it eventually. Leave them alone, they will change eventually.
- They realize they won’t have any friends, it is important they know that’s not good to do anywhere, I mean people do get mad at each other here but it turns into a word fight, not physical.
- It doesn’t last long, they get over it, we solve it and work it out the second or third day. We talk about it at lunch because it usually happens at recess. That’s what the girls do anyway.
- Boys fight too, though, because Greg and I got in a gigantic fight, it lasted like forty days, but that is unusual. To which Greg added, Yea but we eventually got over it, it was a bad one, though.
- Boys argue about bragging, that’s a big problem. We argue and stress about it, then argue about other things that have nothing to do with the bragging, saying things against the person, like personal stuff. We know we shouldn’t do that stuff.

If I do something I shouldn't, I look for ways to make it up to that person. I stuck up for him another time when people were making fun of him; he told about it at sharing, he really appreciated it. We are getting more mature. Our teacher is like a life coach, she expects us to treat each other fair. She reminds us to think, "would you like me to treat you like that or say that to you?"

This group also made reference to the Golden Rule philosophy, which Andrew clearly attributes it to his teacher in this case. It seems the children are very aware of the social dynamics within their groups; they also seem fairly resilient in their ability to ignore, discuss, re-connect and bounce back. Because we know that life is not easy, one of the greatest gifts we can give children are the tools for strength and resiliency.

For the second meetings the students hit the ground running and needed very little prompting, if any, about what their greatest concerns are. The third-grade group still felt the need to talk about arguing, saying it is the most frustrating problem because it happens all the time. They said that it is usually about a game but not always. Sometimes it is about whom something belongs to.

- Some people just get carried away with it.
- The best way is to say "stop arguing" and just get along.
- Yea, say, "I'm not arguing with you anymore but let's keep playing".
- It doesn't always work that way but I agree the worst way to solve it is yelling like everyone else, I just don't play with that person because I don't want to argue.

- You should try to play with people who don't play nice, try to be fair, maybe he thinks no one likes him, maybe you have to tell the rules again so everyone knows them.

The students went on to say that their guidance counselors do activities and lessons that remind them of strategies. Jenna said, "You have to relearn not to be mean, 'cause it can just be a bad habit". When the principal investigator mentioned that for the next group discussion meeting the topic would include excluding, Jerry quickly commented, "well teachers saying you can't exclude does not work at all". In looking back over the discussions it is clear this group is at a bit of a stalemate in dealing with arguing and may need some new ideas of how to remediate the issue. Jenna made the comment about 'relearning' skills, which may explain that they understand the need to review strategies after experiencing conflict in day-to-day interactions.

When the fourth-grade group met there was also no shortage of topics they identified as challenging social issues. They quickly mention personal space, judging others, jealousy, and various forms of bullying – more than enough to discuss in one day. The child who brought up personal space goes on to say that if you are sick or having a bad day you don't want someone in your space but might feel bad saying so and that others should remember to respect it from the beginning (could this be emphasizing the need to relearn a skill as mentioned in third grade?). She stressed the personal space "rules", "an arm span apart", "a rainbow of space", and "don't pop someone's space bubble". She said, "It is so annoying that people forget the rules".

Maggie mentions that people judge others a lot and name call. She said, "Some people call others 'dorks'". "Or 'retard'", adds Nathan. Chelsey said, "I agree with Maggie,

people get jealous and they judge you if you are good at something. I think it is cool to be yourself. If you have to act cool, you are not. The new word for cool is uber peonage”.

Nathan expands a bit, “bullying is a real issue. People don’t always know that bullies are bullying”. Catherine adds, “On the news bullies actually killed a kid then got arrested, ‘cause that’s not bullying, that’s murder”. They went on to give examples of ways in which they have seen kids bully others. Examples included,

- taking property.
- throwing it on the ground, stomping on it.
- Taking a shoe.
- Jealousy is a big deal so they might try to steal friends away by pushing one aside and sitting in between them or being overprotective of some friends.
- If there are three friends and two don’t like each other that can take a long time to get over, a new friend taking an old friend away and being left out.

When asked what to do about all of this, Terese said, “people just forget to care about each other, ‘cause ya know when we talk about it we know it is awful but when it is happening it just kind of keeps happening”. Is this the relearning theme again or is it the lack of true intrinsic motivation?

Maggie added, “Ya, know, the nurse comes into our school and shows a movie and at the end gives us deodorant. She said don’t make fun of someone if they smell and really I think that is true if they are different in anyway, like if they can’t read, too”.

When the fifth graders met again they brought up excluding and apologizing. They felt that excluding is a problem even after years of learning it is unacceptable. They said it is tricky because it happens in so many ways. Their first example was people

whispering and looking at you. They also differentiated between the ways girls excluded and boys exclude. They felt that girls mostly gossip, talk about who has phones and what they wear. Boys said, sports are important and you might not get picked to play and clothes sometimes matter, too.

The fifth graders also brought up the idea that sometimes peers say stuff to see your reaction. Dakota said, “yea, once someone told me to do something then called me a name in front of others, just to get a reaction, so I just said ‘I’m pretty smart’ loud, in front of everyone. This is the strong voice strategy mentioned earlier. Thea then said, “you should give up being friends with people like that, if you see them do stuff to others say to them you shouldn’t treat your friends like that then they realize you won’t be their friend if they do that”. Dakota, nodding, added, “yea just walk away and talk to others and be careful when they apologize. Sometimes they just do it when there are adults around to make them look mature but they don’t mean it or care and then they carry out the fight after adults leave”. Just in these few focus group discussions it becomes increasingly apparent that adults may not really know what is going on between children as some engage in negative social interactions only when adults are not present. This could cause concern because it may mean that social emotional learning strategies may give students the tools but do not reach them on an intrinsic level. Continued data analysis will need to occur to explore this further.

At the beginning of the third meeting the third-grade students were asked if anyone could describe a challenging situation they had faced or witnessed so we could brainstorm ideas or solutions together. Tyson spoke up, “We were playing with the parachute and they said there’s already too many people playing, you have to get out, but

even though I was one of the first ones”. Michaela said, “You should have said, ‘the more the merrier’” then laughed but went on to explain, “There are lots of problems with the parachute ‘cause there are no real rules, that always causes fights”. When asked about possible solutions, Jenna said, “As many can play as want to, it really is the more the better”. Emmitt said, “We said, we thought of this, ‘if you don’t like it *you* go out”. What is the most positive solution? Jerry said, “It’s too many battles, we just give up and play something else, it’s not worth all the arguing”. Emmitt replied, “Saying ‘you’re excluding’ helps, so ‘if you’re excluding you can’t play the game’”. When asked for an overall reaction, maybe when someone tried something like this, did it work? Michaela responded, “I’ve been excluded before, someone said I couldn’t play ‘cause the game already started. ‘I said to her I get to play or you have to quit the game’. She chose to quit. I still felt excluded when she quit but I thought, ‘well, you didn’t have to quit, so who cares?’” Additional comments included,

- Teachers should teach that when kids feel excluded it’s someone else’s job to stick up for them too, that should be part of the rule.
- When people cheat, then lie, it’s easy to want to exclude them ‘cause they’re no fun to play with anyway.
- Two boys were playing a game and another came up to play and they said, “no”, so he left and played with someone else. If I was him I would’ve told the teacher.
- See that’s what I mean, Michaela’s right, someone should have helped him, it’s too hard to do by yourself.
- But Jerry, some teachers will say “you’re not involved”, they say things like, “it’s nice that you want to help but if he’s upset he will tell me”.

- Teachers should keep teaching about a “strong voice” but tell kids it doesn’t always work. I once tried it and the kid told me, “you sound stupid, like you are yelling” I felt bad.

When the group was asked if they had any other questions before we were done, Tyson said, “I have a comment, I wish they’d teach the Golden Rule more ‘cause that is the most fair rule there is for everyone”. This was not the first time the Golden Rule was mentioned, always brought up by the children. This will be worthy of further discussion later.

When the fourth graders met for a short meeting they came into the room already in discussion. Nathan said, “I was just telling them I have neighborhood kids that will come over all the time and don’t go home, so I don’t really invite them”. Maggie added, “I don’t really play with my neighbors either, I mostly stick to myself or play with my friends at Girl Scouts or soccer or stuff like that”. Nathan then said, “Well, I can just tell they make different choices than we do, they can be real jerks, kind of snobby. I play with Matthew because no one likes him so I play with him once in awhile, and he has a pool”. Terese said, “It’s hard playing with kids you don’t know”. Maggie replied, “Not really, you just have to stick with them and not feel like an outsider. It’s not that hard to make new friends. You just say ‘hi’ and you get closer as you do stuff together, remember the reason you are there is because you have something in common, like soccer or whatever the club is”. Chelsey said, “We don’t really play with neighbors either, I mostly do my own thing, or play with my brother”. The principal investigator asked if the group viewed this as a problem, not playing with neighborhood kids, to which the members all responded, “no”.

Any questions before we are done? There were no questions so we concluded the meeting.

When the fifth graders gathered, we first, briefly, reviewed the discussion from last time. Sarah referred to the conversation about bullies and said, “I refuse to let it bother me, I know I’m a good person so I will talk to them and then ignore them if I have to”. The conversation then switched to children making fun of others. Dominique said, “Girls might make fun about clothes but not really”. She goes on to say, “we like to have nice clothes but we don’t care if others don’t have them”. Sarah added, “Girls don’t like show-offs or if someone is annoying, if someone is being mean we will exclude them, then they deserve it”. They were asked what else might cause someone to be excluded? Greg said, “Their skin-color, no just kidding” and the entire group laughed like it was ridiculous. The researcher asked, “This wouldn’t happen?” This group, which was racially mixed, responded unanimously, “No, not at all”.

Having heard what some of the girls thought, the boys were asked what might cause boys to exclude or make fun of someone? Andrew said, “It would have more to do with how we act ‘cause we don’t care enough about clothes to exclude someone or grades. Boys especially don’t care about grades”. To which Sarah jumped in, “But girls don’t care about grades either, like we might help others but we don’t make fun”. Andrew said, “Yeah, that’s the good thing about our class, we are all buddies, no one is really more popular and if someone excludes then apologizes, and means it, the group lets them back in”. He goes on to say, “I am sensitive with my friends, I want things to be right, but really don’t care about mean people”. Sarah added,

I believe it is from learning over the years, we had important lessons from kindergarten to fifth grade. In kindergarten ‘peace not conflict’ works and in first to fourth you begin to learn what excluding can look like, then in fifth grade we learned about put downs and how mean that is, but kids only get so much until they experience it, they don’t understand it ‘til they’ve been through it.

The fifth-grade meeting ended with students wanting to talk about lessons learned. It was agreed that would be the topic for the next meeting.

When third grade met next, they still felt that exclusion was worth discussing more.

- It does work to say that you cannot exclude and if you do then *you* can’t play. That’s what Mrs. S says and it does work ‘cause people want to play more than they care about *who* plays.
- Secrets and not allowing you into a lunch table are harder exclusions to deal with because people act like they weren’t excluding you, like they’ll say, “you just think I was”.
- Telling makes it worse, but you have to tell or they will not stop, ever. Then the class can talk about it at least.
- Excluding is a big, big problem.

To which the researcher asked, Why do kids exclude each other?

- Probably because they are bullies, they want to be bossy and control everything.

The researcher wondered aloud if participants think that when kids exclude they think about how that makes someone feel?

- No.

- Sort of, but they just don't care.
- Yes, I think they do it on purpose and want that person to feel bad, it makes them feel bossy.

The researcher then asked, Do they exclude just one person?

- Yes, it can be more but it's usually one or two because they will listen, a big group probably wouldn't listen.
- No, but they don't care how many, it's just if they like them or not.

The researcher asked if the participants had ever caught themselves excluding and not realizing it at first? Jerry, Jenna and Tyson all immediately responded, "No" while Michaela said, "No, I don't think, I might have whenever I was little" and Emmitt explained, "Yea, but not at school".

When asked if there were any concerns, questions, or topics for next time, Tyson said, "Bossy people and bossy words, they sort of start all the problems...and trusting 'cause you can't trust them". This set the group on a whole new tangent and only because we were simply out of time did we have to put it on hold until our next meeting.

The fourth graders came to their meeting wanting to discuss cheating and apologies. The researcher responded by asking what brought up the topic of apologies.

- Because kids don't usually mean it, they just say it to make sure people don't tell and teachers think they mean it.
- You can tell by their voice, it can be sooo fake, like "Oooooohhhhhh I'm soooo sorry" but when they really mean it they look at you and help you and will walk with you to make sure you're ok.
- But that doesn't happen all the time, it happens mostly...never.

- Adults should *never* make kids apologize ‘cause they just say it and don’t mean it. It’s better to say, “how can we solve this?” then usually they will apologize but may really mean it that time.

Throughout this conversation as one child was speaking the others were nodding and saying, “yes” in agreement. The researcher continued by inquiring about their concerns about cheating.

- Oh people get tagged and say they didn’t, they don’t want to be “it”, so the new agreement is if you do that once you can’t play the rest of that recess.
- We just don’t include them in the rest of the game if they don’t be “it” when they are tagged.
- One kid trips himself and then says the tagger pushed him just to not be “it”.
- You should tell the little kids this ‘cause we used to play tag a lot more, now I mostly play football.
- Tell them to be fair picking teams too because sometimes a group will say, “no, no don’t pick that person”.
- Yea that happens always.

To which the group all agrees.

The researcher asks if there are any specific questions or concerns because time is up. There are none and the meeting time ends.

Fifth grade came to their meeting wanting to discuss responsibility, as a lesson they have to learn. Dakota said, “Sometimes as you get more responsible it is easier to solve problems”. Greg jumped in and said, “Yea but I think the problems get harder”. Dakota continued, “You learn by watching how others act and from your parents”. Dominique

added, "Parents don't give in and then you learn something". Sarah said, "You do learn from both, and you outgrow some behavior, like you realize tantrums are embarrassing and you can't get your way". The principal investigator asked the group whether they learn more from parents or other kids? Dominique explains, "From other kids, you see them solve problems and you learn". Dakota said, "I think adults more but both". Sarah said, "both, but kids watch and learn and see other people don't do some kinds of stuff". The researcher asked if that is true then how come sometimes kids still don't make the best choices? Greg said,

They want to be cool. They are influenced by others, I don't know, Jason does it to be funny and when people laugh we are not laughing with him, we are laughing at him. Like, he licked a flyswatter. He should just be himself. But he thinks he's being cool and he's really just being dumb. I tell the other boys they shouldn't laugh at him but they still do. It's kind of hard not to, it is so dumb.

Sarah continued, "I think it's mostly older kids, like older than 18, that make good and bad choices. The ones who make bad choices are just trying to be cool, they do dumb stuff like smoke, even when they know better and should be smarter". Andrew added,

Definitely other kids, half of the time you don't even tell your parents what happens at school. You see what other kids do and if it's really bad you say, 'I'm definitely not doing that' and if it's good then you want to learn to do that too.

Greg commented, "Plus, it shows that you are responsible that you know the difference".

Andrew went on,

Sometimes you have to learn responsibility and sometimes you are given responsibilities. That's what my Mom says and I have chores that are *my* responsibility. You realize it takes work to get things done. I have to do the chores to get allowance. Allowance gives you something to look forward to.

The mere mention of allowance started a bit of a debate. Dakota said,

My parents don't believe in allowance, they believe you should do it as part of the family and you shouldn't just rely on money to do something. I think they are trying to teach me that I have to save my money, like birthday money and I can't just be doing it for the money but because I care about my family.

Dominique said, "If I do it without complaining and attitude then I can get something after, like, five weeks". Thea felt the same, "I clean my room and help with dishes, and if we all help there isn't a huge mess". Andrew felt, "You should just do it from your heart and when you get to be fifteen or so you should be able to spend your money on what you want".

In an effort to steer the conversation away from allowances the researcher asked about being responsible, not necessarily having responsibilities, but how do you show you are a responsible person? Sarah said, "Mostly older kids make bad choices, they go on their own and they think no one will know and that others can't tell them what to do". Dakota added, "They think they have to party just 'cause they think their friends are more important". Thea said, "They know it's wrong, even dangerous, but do it anyway to try to be cool". Dominique responded, "They think socializing is more important and don't care about ruining their reputation or having a good one".

The principal investigator asked how the participants perceived reputation. The groups responses included,

- who you are.
- what you say.
- what you wear.
- your appearance.
- what others think of you.
- how you act.
- whatever size you are.

When asked how it gets ruined, their overwhelming response was, “by the choices you make”. Andrew added, “People definitely care about that more than they should and more than school. I mean, they get to be seniors and missed a lot of thinking because they only worried about their reputation”.

At the conclusion of their prior meeting the third grade group expressed a need to discuss bossy people, bossy words and trust. With that in mind, the principal investigator started the meeting with the reminder of their intended topics and asked how students can trust a friend.

- If they are kind, like you wouldn't trust them if they are telling secrets about you.
- Trust is what friendship is for.
- If they don't leave you out and they will play with you always.
- Chad doesn't always play with me but I always trust him because I've played with him since, like, kindergarten.

- Tyson countered, “If you grow up to, like, high school people change a little and you might not be able to trust them again”.
- It’s not really the time length but how good a friend you are.
- If two people are friends, then one isn’t trusted anymore, then they split, that changes the whole class a little ‘cause they go to new friends in the class.
- You should know why they suddenly want a new friend, ‘cause if you know it’s because they weren’t trusted maybe you don’t want to be their friend either.
- Emmitt disagrees saying, “The reason they’re not friends anymore does not matter, it’s not my business”.
- To which Michaela said, “Emmitt, you don’t even care if they broke a rule?”
- Emmitt replied, “I never broke a rule”.
- Jerry said, “I never did either”.
- Tyson said, “I don’t break rules”.

The principal investigator offers the idea that everyone makes mistakes, herself included and asks them to re-think their responses. Is it possible you may have broken rules before? Emmitt then said, “Yes, a few”. Tyson added, “Yes, everyone does once in awhile, but I never meant to”. Michaela said, “I definitely have”. Jenna said, “We all have, guys”. Jerry replies, “I never did”. When asked what is the most important thing about getting along with people? Emmitt said, “Kindness and talking”. Jerry responded, “How much you care” to which Michaela and Jenna quickly agree. Tyson added, “I think that is a hard one to set apart, but caring is really important, if you don’t care you will never have friends”. “But” Michaela added,

you know what is wrong with that? There is a kid in our class” she looked at the group and said, “I’ll call him Ed” she continued, “he gets so upset that teachers feel bad for him and almost always take his side to help him settle down and he does bad stuff, so it’s almost like people care too much and he gets away with a lot”.

So, the principal investigator asked if there are issues that seem hard or impossible to solve?

- People who don’t back down are impossible.
- People who manipulate, because that is hard to prove and they just say they didn’t try to do that or people who lie, then lie about lies, uhh, they are so frustrating.
- People who say, “forget it, we are not friends anymore” instead of “sorry”.
- When they steal your friends, ‘cause then you have no one to go to for help.

When asked, who is the biggest help in these harder situations? Michaela quickly responded, “I am”. Jerry said, “Michaela *is* because she always tells the truth”. Emmitt said, “Tyson is because he always sticks up for me”. Jenna said,

People say I am a big help because I am always fair and I never lose my temper. It’s true, I don’t. If the problem is mine then I can be very emotional especially if I feel embarrassed. I think being embarrassed is the worst thing because the more people know what happened the more embarrassed I get. I hate it and sometimes even good friends don’t care if they embarrass you ‘cause they think it’s funny. My face turns red and I get shaky.

It is interesting to note here that all of the children referred to other children or themselves as the 'biggest help' and no one mentioned adults. Jerry did mention something interesting in his next comment. He said,

You know what I hate? If someone is persistent in their tattling, adults believe them after awhile. It is so annoying. They, the adults, start off saying 'do the right thing, take turns, be fair, don't touch other people's food' but then they believe them and yell, especially in the lunchroom.

Michaela added, "It is always the same kids that cause the problems. It's like whenever there is a disagreement, there is one girl who wants everyone on her side. I will never be on her side for anything! She says red hair looks stupid". Jerry then said, "Michaela is 100% right about it being the same kids. One girl always asks the teacher in a fake nice voice and is allowed to do stuff even though she doesn't finish her work". Their insights are not to be overlooked. These students are aware and honest. Their thoughts will be seriously considered in all phases of this study.

The fourth grade meeting focused on how children go about problem solving and who the children feel taught them to problem solve.

- I talk about problems to think of solutions. Mom and Dad, they told me how to work things out.
- Really I do my own judgment and I kind of learn from school and my mom. I like asking her questions and sometimes we talk about friends.
- I talk to kids, my teachers help by telling me not to be mean.
- I talk with others, our teachers help, in first grade the lessons were activities.

When it is fun it sticks in their minds more.

- My mother, we talk about friends and problems a lot. Her ideas are good, and my teachers, too.

So, the principal investigator asked, whether the lessons that teachers teach are worthwhile?

- Yes, because first graders don't really know how to do stuff yet, working together helps them. I liked the lesson where we planted flowers because it helped with teamwork and responsibility because first graders have to remember to water it everyday.
- Kind of, because sometimes we do fun educational stuff and sometimes my partner and I talk about friend stuff.
- Yes, to help them get along.
- Yes, it teaches the first graders to become more mature. We are like a role model to them.
- Yes, I like the Peace Awards and the saying 'Peace Not Conflict'. It is the first lesson people learn and the most simple and the most important.

The Peace Awards are given weekly in kindergarten to the child who promotes peace in the classroom. A peace sign is presented to the child, which he or she is allowed to keep. (see appendix J) Without time to start any new topics this meeting time came to an end.

The fifth graders were asked if teachers should continue to do lessons about ways to get along and strategy ideas? Dominique said,

Yes, because then the younger kids get an idea on being helpful, fair and kind to each other. My partner helped me do that in partner lessons. I helped my kindergarten partner learn how to read. And, we did a lesson in fifth grade about

slave trade and every single person opened up and really got mature and thought about treating others with respect.

- Yes, because if we don't, then students will be bullies to other students.
- Yes, because they need to learn about others' feelings and because it gets little kids interacting and learning from the big kids.
- Yes, because little kids learn from us, and Peace Not Conflict”.
- Yes, because it helps them work well with each other, but they might get more independent as they get into the upper grades. With the lessons, I thought Second Step was kind of boring. If teachers made it more fun like when we did role playing stuff.
- Yes, it will help them in their future.

One other facet to be considered with regard to social emotional learning for this group might be Morning Meetings. Students mention them occasionally saying, “When we were in Morning Meeting we talked about...”. The teachers in this school use a general version of the Morning Meeting developed by Roxanne Kreite (2002). What do the students do during Morning Meeting? What do they think of them? When the third graders met, Tyson said, “I like Morning Meetings because you get to talk about your weekend”. Emmitt added, “It lets us tell what we did on the weekend. Yea, but I really like Compliment Tuesday”. Third grade sets this day aside to acknowledge others. Jenna said,

We talk about problems and solve problems, too. Sometimes I don't have the strength to say, ‘you can't exclude’, ‘cause I still want friends. I never used to know what excluded meant but then it happened to me. But,

I don't want people to not be my friend...so meetings help you figure out how to solve those things.

Michaela said,

Yes, the things we talk about are important. I remember us talking about if someone is lonely and you could ask them to play with you. We don't just talk about problems though, we also talk about good things and compliments.

Emmitt said, "We also talk about rules for games that can cause problems like Zombie and Dodgeball".

When the fourth graders met, the same question was asked.

- We shake hands and share what we did on the weekend.
- It's fun to share what happened the night before at home or at a game.
- I think teachers think it's important because they go over the things they need to discuss and a big discussion is going around but sometimes kids don't follow the discussion.
- Well, I like to hear what other people have been doing.

When the fifth graders were asked about Morning Meeting times, Dakota remarked, "Morning Meetings help kids because they can share feelings with one another. I know that we sit in a circle and pass a football to one another and say a greeting". Greg added, "Morning Meetings are a great idea, they help others get to know people they don't know yet and they get to share stuff with the whole class". Sarah said,

Oh my gosh, I think Morning Meetings are great, that's where we started the idea of the school garden and that's so important because if you don't

water it stuff will die and kindergarten learns how to be careful around it and not stomp on it.

Dominique added,

Planting is good for the future and if you learn it young you are more interested. I think it's good to teach about teamwork and community and that's the stuff we get to talk about at morning meetings.

Thea commented, "Because you learn from your mistakes, too, and you get to know other students and sometimes people can get in fights but at the end it sometimes gets better, but I think school is where people learn from their mistakes". Dominique went on, "We like the idea of sharing. I think younger kids veer off track, but in fifth grade we stay on one topic. And, you can say 'pass' if you don't want to share or have nothing".

This was the last round of grade level focus discussion groups. The next part of the analysis examines the parent survey, teacher survey and field notes/observations from the principal investigator. It will be organized by grade level and then by individual participant with the survey responses and observations pertaining to each child outlined and reviewed.

Initial Analysis: Parent & Teacher Questionnaires and Principal Investigator's Field

Notes

Notes from all grade levels will be mapped out to look for patterns, tools, strategies and evidence of social and emotional learning. More importantly, this research seeks to look for signs that students have internalized social skills and are not simply able to explain what they *should* do in certain situations. It will be helpful to look at how parents view their child's social skills at home as compared to what their teachers see and what

the principal investigator actually observes. Each section includes the child's name, the parent information, the teacher information, the observation field notes and a comparison of the information provided. The parent and teacher questionnaires are identical and the principal investigator's field notes were purposefully aligned to the language set forth on the questionnaire in an effort to maintain a clear focus for the observations. This will begin with third-grade notes and proceed through each grade level.

Third-grade Participants

- Emmitt

The first third grade child to be discussed is Emmitt. Emmitt's mother did not return the parent survey, so this is a case where just the teacher and observer information will be compared. When describing how Emmitt deals with frustration, conflict, cooperation and fairness, his teacher reports the following: Emmitt has difficulty when little conflicts arise in play situations. He sulks, pouts, and refuses to play. He avoids school tasks that are difficult or not of interest, shuts down when upset in class, head down, refuses to work for short periods of time. He is unable to express feelings when frustrated but given time to cool down, he does very well talking out problems with friends. He does get upset with friends on the playground. Emmitt argues his point and can get angry. He works well in partners, small and large groups and is very kind and thoughtful toward others. His teacher did not complete the space pertaining to sharing with others.

The principal investigator noted that on several occasions, when Emmitt was observed in the classroom, he was off task, socializing with peers around him. At one point, he was talking to another child when he was expected to be listening. When the teacher spoke, quietly to him he had many excuses. When observed in the lunchroom, Emmitt was

always busy eating and watching others. On another occasion when the researcher observed Emmitt in the classroom, he was wandering around the room making sure everyone else was doing what he or she was supposed to be doing; yet he was not working. The student teacher sat with him to help keep him on task. While washing hands for lunch and lining up, Emmitt was observed rubbing his hands all through another child's hair, opening and shutting the child's mouth, the other child said nothing. Emmitt continued touching the other child with one hand while his other hand was in the air making the "quiet" sign. Probably the most telling observation of Emmitt's social interactions was when the researcher observed him working on a building project outside with two other students. As the group discussed which pieces to tape on, one child mentioned, often, "We do not need that piece". Emmitt kept taping, saying, "Yes, we do". The third child went to see other groups, the first child called him back to clean up. Emmitt continued to build. Child three avoided clean up, instead played with materials. Child one kept saying, "It's time to clean up". Emmitt continued to work and said "got it" about a piece he had been working to cut off. Emmitt then proceeded to clean up without saying anything to the others about helping him. Emmitt is clearly a hands-on learner who is engaged through active participation. His teacher's comment that Emmitt is unable to express feelings when frustrated but given time to cool down, he does very well talking out the problem with friends, tells the researcher that Emmitt has the tools to engage in positive social interactions and with maturity may be less inclined to react impulsively allowing frustration to take over. This was evident in his behaviors as he was able to make good choices whenever he was redirected.

- Tyson

Tyson's mother completed the parent survey and his teacher completed the teacher survey as well. Both agreed that Tyson has difficulty dealing with frustration. His mother wrote that he becomes quiet and sad. His teacher wrote that he shuts down. In reference to Tyson's problem solving skills the two are also in agreement. While his mother reported that he takes a leadership role toward working it out, his teacher wrote that he is excellent at brainstorming solutions. They continue to agree when asked about his reaction to conflict. Tyson's mother wrote that he avoids conflict at all costs, that he chooses his battles wisely and stands up for his principles. His teacher concurred, and wrote that Tyson becomes very upset when there is a conflict, even when it involves others and not him. Both agreed that Tyson is very cooperative. With respect to fairness, the two continued to agree. His mother said that Tyson expects it and gets upset when it is not enforced. His teacher confirms that he is kind and caring and always thinking of others. His mother reported that Tyson is very willing to share almost to a fault; his teacher did not complete that part.

The principal investigator observed Tyson on several occasions and in several different locations within the school. When at lunch Tyson was cheerfully chatting with those sitting around him. On the playground, it was noted on four different occasions that he would walk the perimeter talking with a friend. Though not running and jumping and playing on equipment, Tyson seemed content and happy, as did his friends. When observed working in the classroom, at one point, Tyson was distracted when there were many activities in the room and he seemed unable to focus on the task at hand. On

another occasion there was a guest speaker and he was talking to another child, when his teacher quietly spoke to both of them, Tyson responded by pouting. Another time Tyson was observed not working, just staring into space and looked tired. While working on the computer with a classmate, Tyson was engaged and smiling. The way in which Tyson's mother and teacher concurred on so many of Tyson's social skills, tells the researcher that this is a child who has strong social convictions. The fact that his teacher mentioned that he shuts down when frustrated and he was observed pouting after being corrected may speak to some internal struggle. Possibly, Tyson is lacking that last step of applying that which he clearly understands is appropriate to himself. This, again, could be a developmental step that may come with maturity.

- Jenna

Interestingly, for the next participant there were several discrepancies between what her mother reported on the parent questionnaire and what her teacher reported on the teacher questionnaire. In response to the topic of frustration, Jenna's mother wrote that she can get angry, start to cry or just go and hide. Her teacher, on the other hand, said that Jenna will talk things out. When asked how Jenna reacts to problem solving, her mother wrote that Jenna is not quite sure how to react to needing to solve something between friends, but can solve other types like math. Her teacher responded that Jenna is eager to offer good suggestions for solutions. When explaining how Jenna deals with conflict, both her teacher and her mother wrote that she tends to seek adult help. They both described Jenna as very cooperative, fair and said she shares with others. Field notes show Jenna working diligently, concentrating, reading and counting to herself in the classroom. When observed in a small reading group, the group decided in which order

they were going to read. Jenna started. When asked by the student teacher to summarize the story. Jenna and another girl dominated the response, not giving a boy in their group a chance to add his input. Jenna was also observed on the playground with a small group of friends. She called a teacher over and explained that they were playing a game called 'People Helping People'. She could be heard saying, "We are making sure only one goes down the slide at a time, we invented it to keep people safe". They were observed playing the game most of the recess time with little or no objection from peers.

The two areas where Jenna's mother reported she has some difficulty were frustration and problem solving and yet, her teacher reported no evidence of that. Both of them wrote that Jenna seeks adult help during a conflict. The slight difference in this response may be telling. Jenna's mother wrote, "tends to run and tell Mom". Her teacher wrote, "seeks adult help after trying". It may be safe to say that Jenna feels more confident, at least trying, at school but, at home, goes immediately to her mother. If that is the case, Jenna, too, may know what to do but not have the confidence or maturity to do it on her own. Jenna is also the child who revealed during a focus group that "sometimes I don't have the strength to say 'you can't exclude', 'cause I still want friends". So, possibly, she is torn by the risks that one must take to stand up to others.

- Michaela

Michaela's parents did not return the parent questionnaire. On the teacher questionnaire, Michaela's teacher reported that when she is frustrated she seeks assistance from adults. The teacher went on to write that Michaela takes on a "tattle-tale" role when frustration involves friends or social issue. She also, however, is very good at brainstorming and expressing solutions when problem solving, according to her teacher.

It is also reported that Michaela verbally expresses her concerns loudly when dealing with conflict and sometimes will treat others unfairly during playground interactions. Her teacher did not respond to the section pertaining to sharing.

Through classroom observations the principal investigator found Michaela to be on task. Twice, she raised her hand quickly to answer a question but then did not offer an answer. While in reading circles, she turned to a specific group and firmly said, “Whoever is making noise over there, please stop!” During a group discussion she and another student dominated the decision-making, ignoring other suggestions. When being observed working in a small group outside, Michaela repeated the directions and discussed the steps sequentially. She was comfortable giving directions to her peers. She also cleaned up for the entire group and never complained, though wondered aloud where they had all gone.

- Jerry

The final third grade participant is Jerry. His mother completed the parent questionnaire and his teacher completed the teacher questionnaire. There were some similar responses and some key contradictory answers. When dealing with frustration both reported that he becomes agitated and argumentative and storms off. With regard to problem solving his mother wrote that Jerry is pretty creative with solving problems with others but generally wants things to go his way. His teacher reported that Jerry is good at brainstorming. When dealing with conflict, Jerry’s mother said that he holds his ground, and conflict with his sister often results in some type of physical response, on both sides. His teacher said that Jerry argues his point without hearing others’ views. She adds he gets very upset and rational thought seems to shut down. In dealing with conflict there is

a definite contradiction in answers. While Jerry's mother reports that, generally, Jerry is very cooperative and seems to enjoy cooperating with others his teacher only partially agreed. She explained Jerry is very cooperative if asked to help or assist in class. But she also reported that he can be very uncooperative when working to complete tasks with a team. She added that he misses many environmental cues and does not seem to realize how his actions affect others. With respect to fairness, his mother said that Jerry believes that life should be fair but knows that it isn't always. She believes he tries to be fair. His teacher explained Jerry has shown the ability to play fairly but that it can be difficult for him at recess.

Fourth-Grade Participants

- Chelsey

Among the fourth grade participants, Chelsey's mother completed the parent questionnaire and her teacher completed the teacher questionnaire. Both agreed that she gets quiet when frustrated, and her teacher reported she looks down, while her mother added that she makes what they call an "elephant" sound. With regard to problem solving, the two responses conflict. Chelsey's mother wrote that Chelsey argues her point, while her teacher said she gets quiet, could appear uninvolved, but is probably/usually contemplating the task at hand. Her mother reported that she is cooperative, works nicely; her teacher said that Chelsey is cooperative with her, but selectively cooperative with peers. Her mother wrote that Chelsey accepts fairness wholeheartedly; her teacher said that she definitely knows right from wrong and is sometimes challenged to apply this knowledge. In reference to sharing, Chelsey's mother

reported that she willingly shares while her teacher said, upon conferencing with her that Chelsey has demonstrated positive communication with a child who is not a close friend.

When observed in the classroom, the class was using slates and markers and prepared to move to taking a test. Chelsey had been asked repeatedly to put her slate away and she eventually did. During the test, she was stretching, moving her shoulders and seemed hesitant to start. She was creating a pattern with math cubes on her desk. Her teacher had previously referred to Chelsey's problem solving and had pointed out that Chelsey may seem uninvolved. She instead suggests that Chelsey is probably/usually carefully contemplating the task at hand. Knowing that one could have a different understanding of what might be going on. The principal investigator observed Chelsey in the lunchroom where she sat within close proximity to a group of two others but rarely engaged in conversation with them, although she seemed comfortable and relaxed. Outside, at recess time, Chelsey was observed walking around the perimeter of the play yard, at times with one friend, at times on her own. She, again, seemed content. The impression Chelsey makes is that she is possibly a child who is inflexible in her social interactions, simply not willing to play with others just to have friends, but also strong enough to feel ok about that.

- Catherine

Catherine's mother and teacher both completed their respective questionnaires and their responses completely supported each other in every category. With regard to frustration, her mother reported that she gets quiet and silently cries, while her teacher said that Catherine does not outwardly display frustration. In solving problems, Catherine's mother wrote that she is good at discussing what to do to fix things and is

willing to work with others and listen to other's ideas. Her teacher responded that Catherine is a logical, systematic thinker. Her mother wrote that Catherine avoids conflict and her teacher said she is a peacemaker. Her mother added that Catherine is very, very cooperative and her teacher agreed that she is always eager to demonstrate cooperation. While Catherine's mother reported that Catherine believes in fairness but is willing to accept less to decrease conflict, her teacher stated that she has a strong internal compass of right and wrong. Their strongest response about Catherine had to do with her willingness to share. Her mother said that 'she loves to share, enjoys the feeling of giving, and understands that she may not always get something in return if she gives'. Catherine's teacher said that she is socially conscious and gave an example of her recent donation of her own \$129.00 to a Relay for Life collection within the school.

During a classroom observation Catherine was on her chair, up on one knee, while the class was being given a lot of directions. Catherine was talking to a seatmate, and soon became settled in, focusing on her work. During another classroom observation a classmate was making a presentation. Catherine was attentive. She shared praise for her classmate's presentation telling her, "I like the pictures you used, it was very interesting, you did a good job". Outside, at recess, Catherine was observed coloring at a picnic table with two friends laughing and talking. When observed walking through the halls in the morning, Catherine was observed smiling at younger children and saying "hi" to teachers and parents. Overall, Catherine seems to be a well-adjusted child who is confident and comfortable with adults and children. She evidently makes friends easily and makes it a point to include others.

- Nathan

Nathan's parents did not complete the parent questionnaire but his teacher did complete the teacher questionnaire. She reported that, when it comes to frustration, Nathan is improving but he is still easily frustrated in social situations as compared to his peers, who are able to deal with social situations with little or no frustration. When problem-solving alone Nathan is thorough and logically sequential if the task is solving a constructed math problem. If the problem involves peers, she reported, he often employs ineffective strategies. Likewise, if a conflict is socially based, social cues are often not understood by Nathan or not noticed at all. She also reported that Nathan is always cooperative with adults and wants to be with his peers. He has trouble at times with seeing the natural consequences of his actions with peers and, hence, seeing fairness is altered, yet he is trying. What his teacher means is that Nathan still only sees situations from his perspective and if it is in his favor he perceives it as fair, if it is truly fair he thinks he is at a disadvantage. She also noted that Nathan is willing to share.

On the several occasions that Nathan was observed in the classroom, he was always engaged in a specific task, working diligently reading or writing. When observed at lunch, he was sitting with two friends, one of whom struggles socially and is painfully quiet and shy. They had bananas and were pretending they were telephones; they were talking into them and laughing. At recess, Nathan was observed playing soccer with a friend. He could be heard saying, "That's a goal, I made it". His friend responded, "No, I stopped it". Nathan responded, "It counts". His friend said, "Ok then when you make one more we switch again". Later when the ball went off the field, two girls kicked it back to them. Nathan impatiently yelled, "Hurry! Kick it!" He failed to add a "thank you".

While reports and observations show Nathan is still somewhat egocentric socially, both also indicate he is trying, evidenced by his inclusion of a struggling peer in his lunch group. His impatience with his classmates returning a soccer ball and his insistence that he scored a goal show he still lacks some social graces that could affect his peer relationships. It will be important for Nathan to continue to make a conscious effort to be a kind friend.

- Terese

Terese's mother did not return the parent questionnaire. On the teacher questionnaire her teacher reported that Terese's self-imposed striving for top quality work occasionally results in tears. She described Terese as an extremely methodical thinker who strives for perfection. With regard to conflict, she described Terese as one who tries to resolve things peacefully. She wants to take charge and delegate. Terese is socially adept, mature and always cooperates. Her teacher added that Terese has a clear sense of fairness for herself and others and she generously shares with others. All of Terese's teacher's comments are reflected in the observations made by the principal investigator. She was observed working diligently in the classroom. In the lunchroom and at recess Terese was interacting with peers appropriately. She would talk and laugh and take turns conversing. She seemed content and confident. She was observed at a lunch table, inviting a classmate to sit with her, a classmate who has difficulty maintaining friendships. The one concern would be the pressure she seems to put upon herself, as explained by her teacher. She seems happy socially, but apparently has very high academic expectations for herself.

- Maggie

The final fourth grade participant is Maggie. Maggie's mother completed the questionnaire, as did her teacher. Both agreed that Maggie deals with frustration appropriately and works through it on her own. When solving problems, her teacher describes Maggie as a deep thinker adept at articulating and logically expressing her problem solving strategy, while her mother said she will try to resolve a problem but will go to a teacher, parent, or friend for advice or help. When responding to how Maggie deals with conflict, her teacher reported that Maggie is mature and wants to be kind to all others. Her mother said that Maggie will never accept fault and will normally walk away to avoid confrontation. Maggie's mother said that Maggie is willing to cooperate with anyone as long as they are willing to do it her way. While this is not true cooperation, her teacher did not express that she is uncooperative in any way. In regard to fairness, her mother said that when Maggie plays games she is willing to play by the rules. Her teacher supported that she is fair, mature and kind. Now, while her teacher responded that Maggie is always willing to share with others, her mother said that she will share anything as long as she is not playing with it, which again, is not truly sharing.

During one classroom observation, she was digging in her desk during a test when her teacher spoke quietly to her. She got back to working on the test. Maggie was observed giving a class presentation on Pennsylvania symbols, during which she was confident, calm, excited and poised. She called on peers during a question and answer time and always acknowledged their interest with an appreciative, "thank you for asking". During another classroom observation Maggie was up on one knee talking with others during directions. When the group disbanded to centers, her assignment was editing at her desk.

She continued to talk and rock in her chair, playfully falling onto a friend on the floor, talking and laughing well past when others started working, but then re-focusing and settling into work. While it may seem to a casual observer that Maggie was being disruptive, it is probably a fair assumption to say she is a typical happy, silly fourth grade student who enjoys school and her friends. Without having background knowledge from her mother and teacher this would be a difficult statement to make.

Fifth-Grade Participants

- Thea

Among the fifth graders only Thea's parents did not complete the parent questionnaire. Her teacher did and reported that when dealing with frustration Thea gets quiet and withdrawn, but is always willing to talk about her frustration when prompted. When problem-solving, Thea is quite agreeable when working to solve problems in groups. Individually, she has grown to be confident when asking for help with any problem. In reference to conflict, Thea's teacher reported that Thea makes every effort to avoid conflict. She wants everyone to be hospitable. She also stated that Thea will cooperate in any way to help or get a job done. The teacher noted that fairness is a synonym to describe Thea. She always makes sure that she follows the rules and asks classmates to join in games. In the response to Thea's sharing with others, her teacher wrote: "110%, Thea shares thoughts, feelings and successes with an open heart. Thea also shares items when necessary without complaining".

During an observation on the playground, Thea was observed walking and talking with two friends. They were smiling and occasionally stopped to talk and laugh with others and retrieved a soccer ball twice, returning it to the field. No words were

exchanged between the soccer players and the small group. During a classroom observation the fifth graders were talking about an upcoming field trip to the middle school they will be attending next year. Two other, much larger elementary schools feed into the middle school. The fifth grade group is noticeably quieter than usual, maybe a little nervous. When the teacher asked if they have any concerns, Thea raised her hand and said, "I've heard that some of the kids are mean". Several other children nod their heads in agreement. This conversation continues and involves several of the fifth grade participants in this study. That analysis will continue a little later.

- Greg

Both Greg's mother and his teacher completed questionnaires. His mother and teacher reported the same things in some areas and had different responses in other areas. With regard to frustration, Greg's mother reported that usually Greg holds in his frustration and that often he rationalizes before reacting. His teacher responded that Greg jokes his way out of frustration. He calls attention to himself easily when he is frustrated by calling out in class with some sort of "funny" remark. Greg's responses in class are more immediate and may cause him to choose avoidance in front of his peers, triggering a different reaction than at home.

When problem solving, Greg's mother reports that he often thinks in-depth before answering a question or problem and he is very analytical in the process. His teacher, on the other hand, reports that Greg depends on others heavily to problem solve. According to his teacher, he lacks confidence to take great risks on his own in this area. Again, Greg seems to respond differently when with his peers. His mother reports that Greg usually avoids conflict at all costs and he is much more of a peacemaker. His teacher reports that

Greg is quiet about conflict, even if he is responsible for creating it; he denies participation in conflict situations to avoid repercussions. Both report that Greg is very cooperative most of the time, while his teacher added that he can easily get off task if not closely monitored. Greg's mother responded that at home he seems to be very fair with his siblings and friends most of the time, except when he wants to lead the situation. His teacher reported that Greg is fair with all but one peer. For some reason he is a follower when others poke fun at or "bully" a particular classmate. Greg, himself, identified this challenge when, during a group discussion, he described a classmate licking a flyswatter for attention and Greg's own difficulty in trying to convince his classmates not to laugh. While both Greg's mother and teacher report that Greg shares openly and willingly, his teacher added that he is even willing to give up something if another student needs to use that something. His mother added that he can also demonstrate a need to lead or control a group situation. Greg seems to exhibit positive social skills behavior but doubts himself enough to avoid conflict when the need arises for him to stand up.

During an outdoor observation, Greg and another student were seen playing football and, at one point, play fighting. When it appeared that the other student may have been hurt and a teacher headed their way, Greg stopped and stepped away. When the group continued to play football it was obvious that everyone was included. The ball got to everyone. It was not completely evident to the observer how everyone was included. They were not yelling, "My turn" or "I'm next", but all had the ball at some point, including Greg.

While observing Greg in physical education class the group was playing volleyball. At one point, the teacher sent Greg for a walk because she felt that he was out of control.

The rest of the class seemed to be having fun, cheering each other on, sharing the ball, lots of encouragement, high fives and no one seemed withdrawn or not included. What the physical education teacher may have viewed as out of control behavior was Greg being very silly, not aggressive or overly competitive, but silly to the point where he was distracting others and not participating appropriately.

- Sarah

Sarah is the next fifth grade participant. Her mother and her teacher each completed their questionnaires. They agreed in almost all areas even using the same language to describe Sarah in the different social situations. When dealing with frustration, Sarah's mother reported that Sarah sometimes tears up and talks it out. Her teacher responded that Sarah never quits, even when frustrated. When given a challenge, Sarah thrives. This carried over to their responses as to how Sarah deals with problem solving. Her mother reported that Sarah thinks things through, is determined and usually does not give up. Her teacher reported that Sarah enjoys problem solving both independently and in small groups. She takes charge of the situation. Both also go on to say that Sarah is usually very cooperative. Her mother added that, if Sarah thinks her way is better, she will voice her thoughts. Her teacher added that others sometimes see her as "bossy" because of her tone. Sarah's mother responded that Sarah likes to try and talk conflict out, whereas her teacher reported that Sarah is a fierce competitor, so that conflict is attached as a competition she needs to win. Sarah has been working on viewing the conflict from the others' perspectives in order to understand how to resolve conflict, rather than to try to "win" the situation.

In reference to fairness, both Sarah's mother and teacher report that she is very fair. Her teacher added that Sarah also expects all others to be fair. Her mother added that, for Sarah, it is important for things to be fair and that she will point out when they are not. With regard to sharing, Sarah's mother responded that Sarah has been one to share but she likes things to be equal. Her teacher responded that Sarah shares with her friends, but has difficulty sharing with others outside of her group.

During classroom observations Sarah was seen being on task and getting supplies for a friend. She was occasionally talking to peers, but primarily focused on the teacher and the task at hand. When she had a question she raised her hand, twice, for clarification of directions. During a playground observation, Sarah was jogging the perimeter of the playground with a friend, talking and laughing. She then joined in a basketball game. The principal investigator was not able to hear what she said as she joined in but there was no discussion or resistance from her peers who had already been playing.

- Dakota

Dakota's mother and teacher both completed the questionnaire and both agreed in most areas. Dealing with frustration was one area where their answers differed dramatically. Dakota's mother reported that Dakota is average to above average when dealing with frustration. In fact, she stated that Dakota can be very calm when others show anger or frustration. However, her teacher stated that Dakota gets easily and visibly frustrated, but keeps those frustrations inside many times. Her teacher added that through coaching she is learning to share her frustrations more openly. Both agreed that Dakota is a great problem solver. Her mother reported that she has a keen ability to think things through and that she can be extremely reasonable. Her teacher added that, while she is a

great problem solver, she hesitates to share her ideas with others, due to being mistreated in younger years by some classmates.

When faced with conflict her mother stated that Dakota is average. She does not like conflict in adults and becomes upset internally if parents do not get along, but conflicts easily with her brother. Her teacher reported that Dakota is the class peacemaker and that she is learning to stand her ground while maintaining a friendly tone. She added that, at the beginning of the year, Dakota avoided conflict but now she refuses to be bullied. Dakota's mother reported that she is excellent at cooperation, adding that she is extremely cooperative and will often seek the middle ground if necessary. Her teacher reported that Dakota is cooperative with most females in the room but is quite guarded with the males. Both report that Dakota is very fair. Her mother added that Dakota very rarely complains that something is "unfair", while her teacher added that Dakota gets frustrated with those who are not fair. In sharing with others, her mother responded that Dakota would rather share than keep anything for herself. Sharing and nurturing come naturally to her, she states. Her teacher reported that Dakota is a bit reserved when sharing thoughts or ideas but will do so in a very small group. There is some evidence of important dynamics when considering some of the things Dakota's teacher and mother reported. They differed in their responses as to how Dakota deals with frustration. Her mother reported her to be very calm, while her teacher reported that she is easily and visibly frustrated. When faced with conflict her mother reported that Dakota does not like conflict in adults and becomes upset internally, while her teacher describes her as the class peacemaker who is learning to stand her ground. Could it be that Dakota's roles at home and school are vastly different? Could it be that, at school, she feels she can take a

stand when dealing with conflict and display her frustrations as well, whereas at home she may feel the need to be calm, not adding to conflict, but not taking a stand either.

When the principal investigator observed Dakota during recess, she was sitting with a small group of girl friends talking and laughing. They welcomed others who stopped by to talk or tell a story and were cordial to others as they moved on to the swings. One girl called “Come swing”; Dakota asked her two friends if they wanted to go and they all said “yes” and ran to the swings. They continued to laugh and talk and swing for the remainder of recess.

During a classroom observation the class was engaged in a morning meeting. As the students passed a football to greet each other and share stories they came to Dakota. She told of digging up bones in a corner of her backyard and sharing them with her father. He is a scientist and thought they were either cat or dog bones and was going to take them to work to a person who might know. She went on to say that maybe it was a pet cemetery at one time. Several other students responded, “Cool!” Dakota smiled and passed the ball.

During another classroom observation students were discussing an upcoming test as their student teacher handed back a pre-test. Dakota was visibly upset with her test and made it a point to hide it so no one else could see it. She became teary and put her head down. Sitting next to her was Sarah, who patted her on the back and whispered something. Dakota did not reply and Sarah went back to her paper. Dakota was very quiet and did not look up even as the student teacher explained that they were going to use the pre-test to prepare for the test and would go over everything so that students had a chance to ask questions and see how the problems were solved. As the student teacher began the review Dakota started to look at her paper and the board, but was still bent over the page

and sitting in a way that no one could see her paper. Students were asking many questions and the student teacher was very positive and patient. By the fifth question, Dakota was more engaged and writing on her paper. Dakota did not ask any questions or offer any solutions during the review, but she sat up a little taller and continued taking notes. She shoved the paper in her desk at the end and met her friends as they lined up at the door, still a little quiet.

- Dominique

Dominique's mother and teacher both completed their questionnaires. They agreed in all areas except problem solving. Her mother reported that, when trying to problem solve, Dominique gets more frustrated, while her teacher responded that Dominique problem solves through active listening and reasoning. When dealing with frustration, her mother reported that Dominique gets more upset and her teacher noted that Dominique withdraws from the group when frustrated but does not hide her frustration. Both reported that she tries to resolve conflict. Both also noted that Dominique is very cooperative. Her teacher added that she models cooperation skills for her classmates. Additionally, they agreed on Dominique's fairness, reporting that she is very fair. Her teacher added that Dominique puts others before herself. Her mother responded that Dominique is very good at sharing with others and her teacher noted that she shares educational ideas openly but otherwise is a very private young lady.

During an outside observation Dominique was observed playing basketball with a group. Everyone seemed to be having fun. There was no discussion of fouls or score. In fact, they would laugh at themselves when they missed a shot. One child was heard saying, "Don't worry mine didn't even hit the backboard" and laughing. At some point,

Dominique saw Dakota walking by herself and ran to her. They spoke a bit and could be seen dramatically discussing something with hand gestures. Dominique went and got two other girls. The discussion continued and it seemed as though there was some sort of conflict although the principal investigator could not hear their words. After about five minutes the group was running toward the playground equipment then laughing together. Whatever it was, it seemed to be resolved. This could be evidence of social skills training, as noted previously by a third grader who stated: “Yes, the things we talk about are important. I remember us talking about if someone is lonely and you could ask them to play with you”. Dominique demonstrated this skill.

During a classroom observation the class was with a substitute teacher and student teacher. They were discussing that their teacher was absent because she had an eye infection and her mother-in-law had died. They were going to make cards for her. On top of that, it was their teacher’s birthday. Dominique raised her hand and wondered aloud how they could make their cards sound sincere and good but not too sad and not miss the important stuff. “I mean should we write it all?” she asked. The class had a brief discussion and everyone seemed satisfied as they got started. This discussion and her encounter with Dakota demonstrate what her teacher meant about Dominique putting others before herself.

- Andrew

There is some agreement and some disagreement within the questionnaire responses from Andrew’s mother and teacher. His mother reported that he generally tries to work through situations that cause him frustration. His teacher noted that Andrew’s physical response to frustration varies. When he’s frustrated with himself he will put his head

down and avoid eye contact. When he is frustrated about something someone else has done Andrew is quite vocal and even insulting at times. His mother responded that Andrew solves problems with careful precision. His teacher reported that Andrew is quite skilled at problem solving in content areas, but needs to mature with social problem solving. She adds that he tends to react before thinking in social arenas. In dealing with conflict, Andrew's mother noted that he does his best to eliminate conflict; he does stand up for his beliefs and morals. His teacher reported that Andrew avoids conflict when authority is in close proximity, but gets in the middle when near peers only. This may show that Andrew feels the need to step in and "help" when there isn't a teacher close by. Both his mother and his teacher reported that Andrew is cooperative. His teacher added that he will not cooperate when he feels that he or one of his friends may get into trouble. One of the most basic lessons in social and emotional learning is, "Stop, think, make good choices". It is possible that Andrew has internalized this. With regard to fairness, Andrew's mother reported that he sometimes tries to be in control. His teacher noted that Andrew is fair when he knows he is being supervised but can be quite controlling when he feels that an adult isn't watching. Again, this may not be a negative thing. He could feel the need to "help" by being a student leader when there is no direct supervision. It is difficult to know for sure.

In the last area, sharing with others, Andrew's mother responded that he is a generous child. He likes to make people feel good. His teacher reported that Andrew shares with boys his own age but doesn't attempt much socializing outside of that small group so sharing is difficult when put into a group that doesn't have boys in it. Ideas, however, are shared openly with all peers.

During an outdoor observation Andrew was playing football with a group of all boys. It was mostly a game of passing and some two-hand touch. When another child got bumped and stumbled, Andrew stopped and apologized. Another child had the ball and they all yelled, “don’t throw it”. He threw the ball and they laughed and went and got it. The overall game seemed light-hearted. When Greg came back into the game, he just walked onto a team and they “traded” another child to the other team. No one asked him if he wanted to go and he just complied. A group of 3 fourth graders lined up on the edge of the field. It was apparent to this observer that they would have liked to join in, but they did not ask and none of the fifth graders invited them to play either. It is doubtful that these fifth graders were still under the idea of irreversibility or egocentrism within Piaget’s preoperational thought, but they clearly were not open to including them in their game. As they were called in they lined up and they were laughing and chatting with all from that group engaged in the conversation.

During an in-class observation Andrew was helping to solve a math problem. He was patient with himself though he was not getting the problem right. The teacher was at the board and reminded Andrew of the steps. He quickly realized which step he missed and fixed it saying, “Oh yea, I forgot to do that. Now it makes sense. You have to put the 6 on top which makes it a 4 in the middle column”. He seemed comfortable working through a challenge in front of his peers. To which a peer could be heard quietly saying, “Woohoo, yea, go Andrew!” The two looked at each other and laughed.

This brings us back to the conversation that was observed prior to this class going to the middle school for a visit. This was to be the school they would attend the following year and was also the middle school for two other, much larger, elementary schools.

When asked if the students had any questions or concerns, Thea had commented that she had heard that some of the kids are mean. To which others responded,

- You just ignore the mean ones. There will be lots of nice kids too, like us (she laughs). No really, and we can all stick together too.
- That's what I want to do. I don't really want to meet new kids.
- Yea, I'm a little worried about meeting new kids too, 'cause we are all good friends and we like each other even when we don't agree. I don't think they will.
- Well, who cares? Then don't be friends with them.
- Yea, we don't have to be friends with them.
- Guys you are not even giving them a chance. You have to at least give them a chance. My sister is in high school and when she went to middle school she met some nice people. So don't just think they are all mean. They could think that about us ya know?

This very open and honest discussion continued as the teacher intervened and spoke of opportunities to meet new people and do new things and broaden their horizons. The students were nodding and seemed more at ease as the conversation wound down.

Analysis Discussion: Evidence of Learned Behaviors

It is important at this point to refer back to Table 1 in Chapter III. In an effort to

Table 1 *Social Emotional Expected Learning Behaviors*

Inclusive of all peers
Positive/Fair problem solving techniques
Respectful of others' space
Evidence of sharing
Self-management
Use of words to express frustration
Cooperation/Teamwork
Peer encouragement
Social greetings
Understanding of others' perspectives
Standing up for oneself and/or principles
Reflective discussion/understanding/practices

review, Table 1 is shown again.

Each section of the expected learning behaviors will be considered and measured with the data available thus far.

All twelve areas will be separated and evidence will be listed categorically in an effort to answer the overarching research question: Do students that have been engaged in an established social-emotional program exhibit behaviors that are a result of that program? This method will also aim to address the subquestions:

- ❖ What are the specific social skills components that students utilize in their daily school lives?
- ❖ To what extent do students believe that what they have learned in this program affects their self-efficacy and impacts relationships?
- ❖ How do students reveal their metacognitive awareness of social skills?

The final subquestion will be more easily answered by categorizing the data. The final bulleted question is:

- ❖ Is there enough evidence to suggest that social skills education is effective?

Sources of data will be noted using the following code: (P) Parent, (T) Teacher, (O) Observation, (S) Student Survey, (FG) Focus group.

The first behavior listed is, inclusive of all peers. Evidence of this behavior includes:

Inclusive Of All Peers

- A good friend “reaches out” and “plays with you”. (S)
- For some kids it is hard “being friends with the mean people” and “well, sometimes it is hard to be a good friend and be nice to everyone, like if there is

someone mean or not your favorite person in the class, then it's hard. I should know". (S)

- You should try to play with people who don't play nice, try to be fair, maybe he thinks no one likes him, maybe you have to tell the rules again so everyone knows them. (FG)
- Tyson felt it showed you could trust a friend if they don't leave you out and they will play with you always. (FG)
- Yes, the things we talk about are important. I remember us talking about if someone is lonely and you could ask them to play with you. (FG)
- Nathan was observed sitting at lunch with two friends, one of whom struggles socially and is painfully quiet and shy. (O)
- Terese was observed at a lunch table, inviting a classmate to sit with her, a classmate who has difficulty maintaining friendships. (O)
- Thea always makes sure she follows the rules and asks classmates to join in games. (T)
- When the group continued to play football it was obvious that everyone was included, the ball got to everyone. (O)
- The rest of the class seemed to be having fun, cheering each other on, sharing the ball, lots of encouragement, high fives and no one seemed withdrawn or not included. (O)
- The principal investigator was not able to hear what she said as she joined in but there was no discussion or resistance from her peers who had already been playing. (O)

- They welcomed others who stopped by to talk or tell a story. (O)
- One girl called, “Come swing”. Dakota asked her two friends if they wanted to go and they all said “yes” and ran to the swings. (O)
- ...with all from the group engaged in the conversation. (O)

Positive/Fair Problem Solving Techniques

- When asked how students usually react to a conflict, the responses included, “they try to solve it”, “talk about it”, “well, if some of the boys get in a fight they break up for awhile then they come back together”. (S)
- When asked, what is the hardest part of being in a conflict, the responses included, “the hardest part is not overreacting”, “voting”, “having to find a solution”, “not to be mean over a little thing”. (S)
- When asked, how students usually solve a conflict, the responses included, “talk it out”, “they talk to them”, “they vote”, “with words”, “by getting both sides of the story and bringing the people together to solve it”.(S)
- When asked how students know how to solve problems with peers, the responses included, “if they make you really mad just take a breather”, “by calmly talking to them and figuring out the problem”, “you talk but if it gets really frustrating then I go get a teacher”, “using words, not hands”.
- I remind them of what we learned when we were little, I say, “remember what we said?” and sometimes people will stop and think because friends listen and we make promises to listen to each other even when we are mad.” (FG)
- It helps to get involved then maybe make your friends laugh or forget about it. (FG)

- I show people how they sound when they are mocking or being bossy. I think because they realize how they sound and how it makes you feel they might stop. (FG)
- Using a strong voice only works 'til about fifth grade but it is a good way to build friendships when you are younger and those friends are better later on, they care more. (FG)
- The best way is to say "stop arguing" and just get along, "I'm not arguing with you anymore but let's keep playing". (FG)
- Saying "you're excluding" helps, so "if *you're* excluding *you* can't play the game." (FG)
- I said to her, "I get to play or *you* have to quit the game". (FG)
- I refuse to let it bother me. I know I'm a good person so I will talk to them then ignore them if I have to. (FG)
- While his mother reported that he takes a leadership role toward working it out, his teacher wrote that he is excellent at brainstorming solutions. (P&T)
- Her teacher responded that Jenna is eager to offer good suggestions for solutions. (T)
- She also, however, is very good at brainstorming and expressing solutions when problem solving. (T)
- His teacher reported that Jerry is good at brainstorming. (T)
- ...and her teacher said she is a peacemaker. (T)
- With regard to conflict, she described Terese as one who tries to resolve things peacefully. (T)

- When solving problems, her teacher describes Maggie as a deep thinker adept at articulating and logically expressing her problem solving strategy. (T)
- When problem solving, Thea is quite agreeable when working to solve problems in groups. (T)
- When problem solving, Greg’s mother reports that he often thinks in-depth before answering a question or problem and he is very analytical in the process. (P)
- His mother reports that Greg usually avoids conflict at all costs and he is much more a peacemaker. (P)
- Her teacher reported that Sarah enjoys problem solving both independently and in small groups. (T)
- Her teacher reported that Dakota is the class peacemaker and she is learning to stand her ground while maintaining a friendly tone. (T)
- Her teacher responded that Dominique problem solves through active listening and reasoning. (T)
- His mother responded that Andrew solves problems with careful precision. (P)

Respectful Of Others’ Space

- When asked what is the most important characteristic of a classmate a student responded, “respectful”. (S)
- She stressed the personal space “rules”, “an arm span apart”, “a rainbow of space” and “don’t pop someone’s space bubble”. (FG)
- She could be heard saying, “we are making sure only one goes down the slide at a time, we invented it to keep people safe”. (O)

- When another child got bumped and stumbled, Andrew stopped and apologized. (O)

Evidence Of Sharing

- His teacher confirms that he is kind and caring and always thinking of others. (T)
- His mother reported that Tyson is very willing to share, almost to a fault. (P)
- They both described Jenna as very cooperative, fair and said she shares with others. (P&T)
- The strongest response about Catherine had to do with her willingness to share, her mother said. “she loves to share, enjoys the feeling and understands she may not always get something in return if she gives”. (P)
- Catherine’s teacher said that, “she is socially conscious” and gave an example of Catherine’s recent donation of her own \$129.00 to a Relay for Life collection within the school. (T)
- She also stated that Nathan is willing to share. (T)
- Her teacher added that Terese has a clear sense of fairness for herself and others and she generously shares with others. (T)
- The teacher noted that fairness is a synonym to describe Thea. (T)
- In response to Thea’s sharing, her teacher wrote, 110%, Thea shares thoughts and feelings and successes with an open heart. Thea also shares items when necessary without complaining. (T)
- While both Greg’s mother and teacher report that Greg shares openly and willingly, his teacher added that he is even willing to give up something if another student needs to use that something. (P&T)

- During classroom observations, Sarah was seen on task and getting supplies for a friend. (O)
- In sharing with others, her mother responded that Dakota would rather share than keep anything for herself, sharing and nurturing come naturally to her. (P)
- Andrew's mother responded that he is a generous child, he likes to make people feel good. (P)

Self-Management

- She was comfortable giving directions to her peers. (O)
- She seemed content and confident. (O)
- When responding to how Maggie deals with conflict, her teacher reported that Maggie is mature and wants to be kind to all others. (T)
- Greg's mother reported that, usually, Greg holds in his frustration, often he rationalizes before reacting. (P)
- Her mother reported that Sarah thinks things through, is determined and usually does not give up. (P)
- She takes charge of the situation. (T)
- When she had a question, she raised her hand twice for clarification. (O)
- However, her teacher stated that Dakota gets easily and visibly frustrated but keeps those frustrations inside many times. (T)
- Dakota did not ask any questions or offer any solutions during the review but she sat up a little taller and continued taking notes. (O)
- His teacher added that Andrew will not cooperate when he feels he or one of his friends may get into trouble. (T)

- He was patient with himself though he was not getting the problem right. (O)

Use Of Words To Express Frustration

- In response of recommending how to deal with a bully, students responded, “you could tell them, if you don’t stop I’ll tell the teacher”, “tell the teacher, tell the bully, stop, I don’t like that”, “tell the bully to back off”, “tell him/them to stop”, “you say, would you like me to say what you said to me?”, “tell them to knock it off”, “look him straight in the eye and tell them (sic) to go away”, “say, your words don’t hurt me”, “only use words and tell them to stop or go away...get a teacher”. (S)
- While in reading circles, she turned to a specific group and firmly said, “Whoever is making noise over there, please stop”. (O)
- Thea gets quiet and withdrawn when frustrated but is always willing to talk about her frustration when prompted. (T)
- She also stated that Thea will cooperate in any way to help or get a job done. (T)
- When dealing with frustration, Sarah’s mother reported that Sarah sometimes tears, talks it out. (P)
- Dominique saw Dakota walking by herself and ran to her. They spoke a bit and could be seen dramatically discussing something with hand gestures. Dominique went and got two other girls. The discussion continued and it seemed as though there was some sort of conflict although the principal investigator could not hear their words. After about five minutes the group was running toward the playground equipment then laughing together. Whatever it was, it seemed to be resolved. (O)*

*The data from this observation could also be considered under the following additional categories;

-peer inclusion

-positive/fair problem solving techniques

-cooperation/teamwork

-understanding of others' perspectives

Cooperation/Teamwork

- In responding to the most important characteristic of a teammate, two students wrote, “a good sport” and “back you up”. (S)
- When responded to the most important characteristic of a classmate, students wrote, “helpful”, “cooperative”, “cooperate”, “reliable”. (S)
- When answering how friends stick up for each other, student responses included, “help each other”, “cooperate with each other”, “they work as a team”. (S)
- Yes, because first graders don't really know how to do stuff yet, working together helps them. I liked the lesson where we planted flowers because it helped with teamwork and responsibility because first graders have to remember to water it every day. (FG)
- I think it's good to teach about teamwork and community and that's the stuff we get to talk about at morning meetings. (FG)
- ...her teacher added that Catherine is very, very cooperative and her teacher agreed that she is always eager to demonstrate cooperation. (T)
- She also reported that Nathan is always cooperative with adults and wants to be with his peers. (T)

- Terese is socially adept, mature and always cooperates. (T)
- Both report that Greg is very cooperative most of the time. (P&T)
- The rest of the class seemed to be having fun, cheering each other on, sharing the ball, lots of encouragement, high fives and no one seemed withdrawn or not included. (O)
- Dakota's mother reported that she is excellent at cooperation adding that she is extremely cooperative and will often seek the middle ground if necessary. (P)
- Both also noted that Dominique is very cooperative and her teacher added that she models cooperation skills for her classmates. (P&T)
- Dakota then said, "yea, I'm a little worried about meeting new kids too, 'cause we are all good friends and we like each other even when we don't agree. I don't think they will." (O)

Peer Encouragement

- When explaining what makes a good friend, students wrote, "A good friend is always there to cheer you up and is always understanding." "You trust each other, be nice to each other, help each other out, does not lie." "They rely on you because you can rely on them". (S)
- When explaining how friends stick up for each other, student responses included, "they tell each other to keep trying and stuff like that", "help each other out". (S)
- She shared praise for her classmate's presentation telling her, "I like the pictures you used, it was very interesting, you did a good job". (O)

- The rest of the class seemed to be having fun, cheering each other on, sharing the ball, lots of encouragement, high fives and no one seemed withdrawn or not included. (O)
- She went on to say that maybe it was a pet cemetery at one time. Several other students responded, “Cool”. Dakota smiled and passed the ball. (O)
- Dakota was visibly upset...and put her head down, Sitting next to her was Sarah who patted her on the back and whispered something. (O)
- One child was heard saying, “don’t worry mine didn’t even hit the backboard” and laughing. (O)
- To which a peer could he heard quietly saying, “Woohoo yea, go Andrew!” The two looked at each other and laughed. (O)
- Sarah responded, “you just ignore the mean ones, there will be lots of nice kids, too, like us” (she laughs), “no really and we can all stick together, too”. (O)

Social Greetings

- In response to what makes a good friend, Dakota wrote, “A good friend is someone who is nice to you, makes you laugh, is always there for you and if he/she moves away they will keep in contact with you.” (S) *The last part ‘keep in contact with you’ may not necessarily be considered a social greeting but certainly is reflective of an awareness of greater social connectedness.
- We shake hands and share what we did on the weekend. (FG)
- I know that we sit in a circle and pass a football to one another and say a greeting. (FG)

- When observed walking through the halls in the morning, Catherine was observed smiling at younger children and saying, “hi” to teachers and parents. (O)
- She would talk and laugh and take turns conversing. (O)
- Maggie called on peers during a question and answer time and always acknowledged their interest with an appropriate, “thank you for asking”. (O)
- When another child got bumped and stumbled, Andrew stopped and apologized. (O)

Understanding Of Others’ Perspectives

- In response to, do you think friends are fair, patient, kind, there were three “no” answers, ten “sometimes” fair, nine “sometimes” patient and five “sometimes kind” which is evidence that these students understand that friendships are both reciprocal and not perfect. They were referring to friends and seem to understand that others have challenges, as well. (S)
- In response to what is hard about being a good friend, several students wrote, “they are shy”, “they are frightened”, “being shy”. (S)
- Jerry said, “You should try to play with people who don’t play nice, try to be fair, maybe he thinks no one likes him, maybe you have to tell the rules again so everyone knows them”. (FG)
- Sarah has been working on viewing the conflict from the other’s perspective in order to understand how to resolve a conflict rather than “win” the situation. (T)
- Dakota was visibly upset...and put her head down. Sitting next to her was Sarah who patted her on the back and whispered something. (O)

- Dominique raised her hand and wondered aloud how they could make their cards sound sincere and good but not too sad and not miss the important stuff. “I mean, should we write it *all*?” she asked. (O)
- Her teacher added that Dominique puts others before herself. (T)
- Dominique said, “Guys you are not even giving them a chance. My sister is in high school and when she went to middle school she met some nice people, so don’t just think they are all mean, they could think that about us, ya know”. (O)

Standing Up For Oneself And/Or Principles

- Tyson’s mother wrote that he chooses his battles wisely and stands up for his principles. (P)
- His teacher concurred, and wrote that Tyson becomes very upset when there is a conflict, even when it involves others and not him. (T)
- ...her teacher stated that she has a strong internal compass of right and wrong. (T)
- Catherine’s teacher said that she is socially conscious... (T)
- She takes charge of the situation. (T)
- Sarah’s mother added that for Sarah it is important for things to be fair and she will point out when they are not. (P)
- Her teacher responded that Sarah expects all others to be fair. (T)
- Dakota very rarely complains that something is “unfair” while her teacher added that Dakota gets frustrated with those who are not fair. (P&T)
- Her teacher reported that Dakota is the class peacemaker and she is learning to stand her ground while maintaining a friendly tone. (T)

- Andrew’s mother noted that he does his best to eliminate conflict and stands up for his beliefs and morals. (P)
- His teacher reported that Andrew avoids conflict when authority is in close proximity but gets in the middle when near peers only. (T)

Reflective Discussion: Understanding/Practices

- I believe it is from learning over the years, we had important lessons from kindergarten to fifth grade. In kindergarten “peace not conflict” works and in first through fourth grade you learn what excluding can look like, then in fifth grade we learned about put downs and how mean that is, but kids only *get* so much until they *experience* it, they don’t understand it ‘til they’ve been through it”. (FG)
- Yes, because the younger kids get an idea on being helpful, fair and kind to each other. My partner helped me do that in partner lessons. I helped my kindergarten partner learn how to read. And, we did a lesson in fifth grade about slave trade and every single person opened up and really got mature and thought about treating others with respect. (FG)
- Her teacher, on the other hand, said that Jenna will talk things out. (T)
- In solving problems, Catherine’s mother wrote that “she is good at discussing what to do to fix things and is willing to work with others and listen to others ideas”. (P)
- During a conversation about middle school Thea said, “I’ve heard some of the kids are mean”. (O)
- ...her mother added that if Sarah thinks her way is better she will voice her thoughts. (P)

- Her mother reported that, Dakota has a keen ability to think things through and she can be extremely reasonable. (P)
- The students were nodding and seemed more at ease as the conversation wound down. (O)

It is important to note that students, knowing journaling was optional, chose not to journal. While they had a lot to offer in every other capacity, they were not motivated to put pen to paper to record their thoughts. Future studies may benefit from responsive journaling, which may have given these students a better reason to write.

Conclusion

Information gathered in this data analysis chapter will help answer the research questions in the following chapter. The chapter is organized using the overarching question as well as the subquestions in an effort to summarize the study and appropriately support the findings.

Chapter V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

AND SUMMARY

This chapter will include a summary of the findings, identifying some specific comments made by the participants and, where appropriate, a connection to theorists and developmental stages. More importantly, this chapter will examine each research question and include any evidence found in the data that may suggest a link. In the end, the overall research question and the last subquestion will be considered through synthesizing the information within the subquestions.

Summary of Findings

What are the Specific Social Skills Components that Students Utilize in Their Daily School Lives?

This question sought to find real world connections for the students in their daily peer interactions. It is the applicability that the principal investigator was seeking in an effort to support the strength or weakness of specific social skills strategy implementation. Do the students perceive a strategy to be worthwhile and what examples can they share to support whether or not teaching a strategy is worthwhile?

The students in this study demonstrated an understanding of the importance of social and emotional learning. They recognized the value of sharing ideas, respecting differences and cooperation within their community, which for now is primarily their classroom and school. They also recommended additional strategy implementation; “teachers should teach that when kids feel excluded it’s someone else’s job to stick up for them too, that should be part of the rule”. Comments such as this were considered by

participants, and after weighing the idea, one responded, “some teachers will say, ‘it’s nice you want to help but if he’s upset he will tell me’”. Such careful thought is evidence of the social emotional learning in which these students have been engaged. They have tried a variety of strategies and are aware of not only what works and what does not work, but why and why not.

Most students will tell you that social pressure exceeds academic pressure by a long shot (Levine, 2002). Choosing to not recognize this is one of the biggest failures of the teaching profession. It sends a signal to all children that certain children are not valued. In fact, chronic rejection by one’s peers is one of childhood’s saddest stories (Levine, 2002). Therefore, responsibility lies with the teacher to prepare all children for the social challenges they may face.

By failing to teach a victimized child to be rightfully assertive, traditional discipline may actually perpetuate, rather than reduce, bully-victim relationships. Because conflict management is guidance, the teacher focuses on making both parties equal contributors to a peaceful settlement through mediation (Gartrell, 2004). Students spoke of using a “strong voice”. This is a strategy taught in an effort to encourage children to stand up for themselves, to empower children to be assertive and attempt to take charge of a situation and to call out inappropriate behaviors and those who initiate them.

Students made the following direct references to using a strong voice:

- Using a strong voice does not work, maybe for bossy people but not for real bullies.

- A strong voice is worthwhile but it only works until about fifth grade, but it works until about fifth grade, it is a good way to build friendships when you are younger and those friends are better later on, they care more.
- Yea, once someone told me to do something then called be a name in front of others, just to get a reaction, so I just said, “I’m pretty smart” loud in front of everyone.
- Say to them you shouldn’t treat your friends like that then they realize you won’t be their friend if they do that.
- Teachers should keep teaching about a strong voice, but tell kids it doesn’t always work.
- She is learning to stand her ground while maintaining a friendly tone.
- I go right to the person and tell them exactly what I think. People think I’m confident. I don’t let anyone stop me from saying how I feel.
- I refuse to let it bother me, I know I’m a good person so I will talk to them and ignore them if I have to.

Creating role-playing opportunities and scenarios gives students a safe environment to practice being assertive. This approach is similar to the scaffolding Vygotsky (Crain, 2005) described as part of the learning process from early childhood. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development states that children learn best from an older or more capable person guiding their efforts. Too often people forget that children are in an incredible learning phase, and they are left to fumble through situations without specific guidance related to self-esteem, peer support and adult intervention. Most would agree that parents

and educators alike must maintain a close, positive support system with a clear framework that allows trial and error while practicing incremental decision-making.

One of the most important lessons in social skills training is naming behaviors. Many children experience exclusion at some point. Students are taught that excluding others is a form of bullying and they must take a firm stance against it in an effort to protect themselves and others. They learn that exclusion happens in many ways. Naming and standing up against exclusion was evident in this study in the following comments:

- As many can play as want to, it really is the more the better.
- Saying, “you’re excluding” helps, so “if you’re excluding you can’t play the game”.
- I’ve been excluded before; someone said I couldn’t play ‘cause the game already started.
- Teachers should teach that when kids feel excluded it’s someone else’s job to stick up for them, too, that should be part of the rule.
- When people cheat, then lie, it’s easy to want to exclude them ‘cause they’re no fun to play with anyway.
- It does work to say “you cannot exclude and if you do then *you* can’t play” ‘cause people want to play more than they care about *who* plays.
- Secrets and not allowing you into a lunch table are harder exclusions to deal with because people act like they weren’t excluding you, like they’ll say, “you just think I was”.
- Excluding is a big, big problem.
- Sometimes a group will say, “no, no don’t pick that person”.

- If they don't leave you out and they will play with you always, you can trust them.

The difference between being excluded by peers and being included in the group can make or break a student socially. The most basic need of being accepted can best be explained through Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Belongingness needs, love needs and self-esteem needs are all impacted by any form of exclusion. Students are asked to think about how others feel if they are excluded and to look out for ways to include peers so they do not feel left out. The opposite of exclusion would be peer encouragement and inclusion and the students in this study displayed evidence of that as well.

- You should try to play with people who don't play nice, try to be fair, maybe he thinks no one likes him, maybe you have to tell the rules again so everyone knows them.
- If someone excludes then apologizes, and means it, the group lets them back in.
- I remember us talking about if someone is lonely you could ask them to play with you.
- He is kind and caring and always thinking of others.
- She is willing to work with others and listen to other's ideas.
- She shared praise for her classmate's presentation.
- He was sitting with two friends, one of whom struggles socially and is painfully quiet and shy.
- She was observed at a lunch table, inviting a classmate to sit with her, a classmate who has difficulty maintaining friendships.
- She always asks classmates to join in games.

- The rest of the class seemed to be having fun, cheering each other on, sharing the ball, lots of encouragement, high fives and no one seemed withdrawn or not included.
- They welcomed others who stopped by to talk or tell a story.
- Dakota asked her two friends if they wanted to go.
- One child was heard saying, “Don’t worry mine didn’t even hit the backboard”.
- While working on a math problem, a peer could be heard quietly saying, “Woohoo, yea, go Andrew”.
- She patted her on the back and whispered something.
- Sarah was observed being on task and getting supplies for a friend.

When a child is a recipient of encouragement and has the opportunity to reflect on that feeling, they are very appreciative and more likely to pass it on. They begin to value the supportive friendships and reach out to others as a result. Evidence of this experience can be noted in the following statements:

- You need to laugh at yourself and go along with it, like we don’t get mad at each other.
- I stuck up for him another time when people were making fun of him; he told about it at sharing, he really appreciated it.
- Kindness and talking are the most important things about getting along with people.
- Younger kids get an idea on being helpful, fair and kind to each other.
- Every single person opened up and really got mature and thought about treating others with respect.

- Yes, because they need to learn about others' feelings.
- I think school is where people learn from their mistakes.
- She puts others before herself.
- 'Cause we are all good friends and we like each other even when we don't agree.

Teaching and practicing social greetings is one way to encourage students to broaden their social circle, to develop more interests, to be compassionate and foster social competence. There was evidence of these strategies as the students practiced and became more skillful in using them.

- You just say "hi" and you get closer as you do stuff together.
- We talk about problems and solve problems.
- We shake hands and share what we did on the weekend.
- You can say, "pass" if you don't want to share or have nothing.
- She was observed smiling at younger children and saying "hi" to teachers and parents.
- She called on peers during a question and answer time and always acknowledged their interest with an appreciative, "thank you for asking".
- When she had a question she raised her hand, twice, for clarification of directions.
- The students passed a football to greet each other and share stories.
- Several other students responded, "Cool!" Dakota smiled and passed the ball.
- Dominique raised her hand and wondered aloud how they could make their cards sound sincere and good but not too sad and not miss the important stuff.

This often requires children to begin to view situations from others' perspectives. This process was evident in these comments:

- I think it is cool to be yourself. If you have to act cool, you are not.
- I don't want people to not be my friend...so meetings help you figure out how to solve those things.
- He is kind and caring and always thinking of others.
- She loves to share, enjoys the feeling of giving, and understands that she may not always get something in return if she gives.
- Terese has a clear sense of fairness for herself and others and she generously shares with others.
- Maggie wants to be kind to all others.
- When problem-solving, Thea is quite agreeable when working to solve problems in groups.
- Thea also shares items when necessary without complaining.
- He is even willing to give up something if another student needs to use that something.
- Sarah also expects all others to be fair.
- Sharing and nurturing come naturally to her, and she would rather share than keep anything for herself.
- Dominique saw Dakota walking by herself and ran to her. They spoke a bit and could be seen dramatically discussing something with hand gestures.
- Dominique said, "Guys you are not even giving them a chance. You have to at least give them a chance...don't just think they are all mean. They could think that about us ya know?"

Positive problem solving is necessary in learning social and emotional skills. Void of negative criticism, problem solving requires hearing others' perspectives, peer encouragement, sharing ideas and acknowledging the contributions of others. Evidence of positive problem solving must include the many times these participants were described as cooperative, willing to share and kind. Beyond that, specific comments included;

- Celebrate in your head.
- They will get it eventually. Leave them alone, they will change eventually.
- Would you like me to treat you like that or say that to you?
- The best way is to say “stop arguing” and “just get along”.
- I'm not going to argue with you anymore but let's keep playing.
- I wish they'd teach the Golden Rule more 'cause that is the most fair rule there is for everyone.
- When they really mean it they will look at you and help you and will walk with you to make sure you're ok.
- Tell them to be fair picking teams.
- I tell the other boys they shouldn't laugh at him.
- If you don't care you will never have friends.
- People say I am a big help because I am always fair.
- We talk about problems and solve problems.
- If Sarah thinks her way is better, she will voice her thoughts.
- Dominique problem solves through active listening and reasoning.
- She models cooperation skills for her classmates.
- It's better to say, “how can we solve this?”

- She is very good at brainstorming and expressing solutions when problem solving.

All of this skill building and practice strengthens a child's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and helps in their social development as they begin to understand their role in a social group and their relationships with others. The participants' developmental stages should be considered to better understand their perceptions. Occasionally, there was evidence of such stages.

Sarah's teacher reported that, "Sarah is a fierce competitor, so much so that conflict is attached as a competition she needs to win. Sarah has been working on viewing the conflict from others' perspectives in order to understand how to resolve conflict, rather than to try to 'win' the situation". Sarah is possibly in the midst of grasping the differentiation of one's own perspective from the perspective of others as described in Piaget's stage of concrete operational thought (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002).

During a playground observation, Sarah was jogging the perimeter of the playground with a friend, talking and laughing. She then joined in a basketball game. The principal investigator was not able to hear what she said as she joined in but there was no discussion or resistance from her peers who had already been playing. This may be evidence of students who are accepting of reversibility as explained in Piaget's concrete operational thought (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002).

Students demonstrated a number of specific strategies and how they use them in day-to-day interactions with peers. Additionally, students were able to recall and explain ways in which they incorporate strategies and times when a strategy was not enough. Parents,

teachers and the principal investigator were all able to share evidence of social skills learning with regard to the participants in this study.

To What Extent Do Students Believe that What They Have Learned in This Program Affects Their Self-Efficacy and Impacts Relationships?

Believing that what one says or does can make a difference is critical to self-efficacy. Having the tools necessary to know how to participate appropriately in a group is vital to self-efficacy. Students shared the following;

- I believe it is from learning over the years, we had important lessons from kindergarten to fifth grade. In kindergarten “peace not conflict” works and in first to fourth you begin to learn what excluding can look like, then in fifth grade we learn about put downs and how mean that is, but kids only get so much until they experience it, they don’t understand it ‘til they’ve been through it.
- Really I do my own judgment and I kind of learn from school and my mom.
- I talk to kids, my teachers help by telling me not to be mean.
- I talk with others, our teachers help, in first grade the lessons were activities.
- My mother’s ideas are good, and my teachers, too.
- I liked the lesson where we planted flowers because it helped with teamwork and responsibility.
- Sometimes we do fun educational stuff and sometimes my partner and I talk about friend stuff.
- It teaches the first graders to become more mature. We are like a role model to them.

- Yes, my partner helped my in partner lessons. I helped my kindergarten partner learn how to read. And, we did a lesson in fifth grade about slave trade and every single person opened up and really got mature and thought about treating others with respect.
- It helps them work well with each other.
- Little kids learn from us.
- I think it's good to teach about teamwork and community and that's the stuff we get to talk about at morning meetings.

Human interaction is critical to the development of social skills. The development of these skills has also been referred to as social competence. Social competence refers to an array of abilities, behaviors, and responses, directed toward other people that serve to build positive human relationships (Jalongo, 2005). Building social competence requires allowing students to be active learners, encouraging partner activities and social opportunities to develop interpersonal skills.

Exemplary practices effectively bridge the gap between the artificial schoolhouse world and the richness and excitement of culture and nature. What these learning methods and programs all have in common is an educational philosophy that views the child as an active participant in constructing authentic knowledge about the world (Armstrong, 2006). Authentic knowledge includes social and emotional learning if one is to learn to live and work with others.

Human Development Discourse values such qualities as creativity, individuality, and innovation, and provides a climate within which teachers and students can engage in open-ended discussions, individualized projects, serendipitous learning

(exciting ideas that emerge unexpectedly and deserve to be explored), and innovative approaches that show promise in developing a student's social, cognitive, emotional, moral, or creative abilities (Armstrong, 2006).

Students also felt comfortable pointing out the shortcomings they see in some teachers' help and they knew they could state these without repercussion. They seemed able to separate the strategy implementation from the teachers' limited response. They seemed to be saying that this strategy does not work because here is how it is perceived by the adult you are telling. The lack of blaming throughout their discussions is further evidence of their social and emotional learning as one of the first lessons they are taught is to not mention names when discussing a problem because the conversation is aimed at solving the problem not pointing blame at anyone. This also highlights the important responsibilities of teachers when teaching social skills and following through in daily activities.

As teachers develop their relational capacities, they are better able to understand their students individually, culturally, developmentally, and as learners. Teachers gain skills as facilitators, problem solvers, and communicators. These skills are crucial for teachers to effectively implement new pedagogical strategies grounded in constructivist theory and problem-based learning. (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias & Seigle, 2004).

Students shared a number of ways in which they believe social skills education fosters self-efficacy and impacts relationships. Their experiences of once having an older partner and now being the role model for a younger partner allowed them to come full circle in understanding caring within their social community. Their clear understanding of

separating behavior from blame signifies an understanding of social learning. They were able to identify ways in which social and emotional learning is important and valuable to them and to their group.

How do Students Reveal Their Metacognitive Awareness of Social Skills?

When students demonstrated social skills in their peer group or explained a social encounter during focus group discussions they often expressed a sense of knowing what to do and how to react. They usually remained focused on solving the problem rather than resorting to inappropriate responses. Their resiliency became obvious to the researcher. This could, again, be evidence of their ability to understand behaviors to be the result of social challenges and not the response of either a “good person” or a “bad person”. This awareness allows them to not internalize such labels within themselves as well. The students also expressed that their group is forgiving which allows all students to feel safe and more comfortable in making mistakes. Students were also careful in their decision-making, wanting to be heard and be fair. By demonstrating these social skills students reveal their metacognitive awareness of social learning. All of these demonstrated skills reveal a sense of developing resiliency.

Resiliency as a benefit of social and emotional learning should not to be taken lightly. Resilience is about our response to stress. When predicting a person’s capacity for resiliency, the math is pretty simple. It works out to a highly individualized balance between the risk factors in a child’s life and the supports available, both externally and internally (Bluestein, 2001).

Students shared a sense of understanding the process of problem solving. Positive problem solving also allows children to build resiliency. They begin to realize that

through trial and error in a safe environment, problems can be overcome, relationships strengthened and self-esteem fostered. Signs of resiliency, problem solving and thoughtful decision-making are in the following data:

- They seem fairly resilient in their ability to ignore, discuss, re-connect and bounce back.
- Yeah, that's the good thing about our class, we are all buddies, no one is really more popular.
- He chooses his battles wisely and stands up for his principles.
- She is simply not willing to play with others just to have friends, but is also strong enough to feel ok about that.
- Sarah thinks things through, is determined and usually does not give up.
- She has a keen ability to think things through and she can be extremely reasonable.
- Dakota did not ask any questions or offer any solutions during the review, but she sat up a little taller and continued taking notes.
- After about five minutes the group was running toward the playground equipment and laughing together.
- His teacher added that he will not cooperate when he feels that he or one of his friends may get into trouble.
- So the new agreement is if you do that once you can't play the rest of that recess.
- Because you learn from your mistakes, too, and you get to know other students and sometimes people can get in fights but at the end it sometimes gets better, but I think school is where people learn from their mistakes.

- Yes, the things we talk about are important.
- I remind them of what we learned when we were little, I say, “remember what we said?” and sometimes people will stop and think because friends listen and we make promises to listen to each other even when we are mad.
- I say, “would you want me to say that back to you?” and then I say, “do you like it?” they say, “no” and I say “then don’t do it to me”.

Providing security and a safe place for trial and error gives students a foundation that builds resiliency. The ability to bounce back is so important in finding success and contentment. Bluestein (2001) sums it up well when she quotes a Japanese proverb, “Fall seven times, stand up eight” (p. 242).

Children responded favorably to the exchanges they experience during class meetings. Meeting circles allow children to develop key language skills that provide them with a greater understanding, awareness and knowledge of emotions. A vital social resource for children is the ability to express accurate feelings through language - those feelings she or he would like to convey or should convey (Levine, 2002). Children feel more confident and empowered when they feel they have a voice. They have to understand and trust they will be heard. Meeting circles, responsive teachers and a supportive environment provide an opportunity to be heard. One participant identified this as a source of reassurance, when he said, “Telling makes it worse, but you have to tell or they will not stop, ever. Then the class can talk about it, at least”. In their study, Johnson, Poliner & Bonaiuto (2005), point to a teacher who observed impulsive students improving their self-restraint and listening skills, quiet students participating more actively, students with special needs

discovering that they have things in common with their classmates, and all students showing a strong sense of community due to class meetings.

Even preschool children can learn to tune into feelings and use this information to solve their social problems and when children don't learn to consider others' feelings, they can carry this problem-solving handicap into their adult lives (Shure, 1994). Having an understanding of others' views and perspectives is necessary for children to be able to function within a group. Children get big benefits from defining themselves as group members. They gain an enormous ability for complex thinking. To negotiate the intricacies of multiple relationships within a group, they have to learn to reason on a very sophisticated level (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). Being part of a whole group activity builds cohesiveness and deepens individuals' sense of responsibility as group members (Kriete, 2002). This is reflective of the belongingness needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Without a sense of belonging, children can feel isolated. This can affect their self-confidence, which can create a downward spiral in their sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Being part of the group can begin simply in the greeting process during morning meetings. Class meetings give an opportunity for students to reflect.

Unless one has the opportunity to think about what one is doing and to reflect on what went well, what went poorly, and why, the chances for a long-term improvement curve are slight. Time for individual and joint reflection must be built into the schedule; if it is not, then genuine change is most unlikely to occur (Gardner, 2000).

Class meetings encourage reflection and sharing by children and teachers about their experiences, needs, concerns, problems, and triumphs (Gartrell, 2004). Those who have

very specific personal direction, expectations and goals are sometimes more immune to the outside responses they may receive. Considerations are two-fold. Intrinsic and extrinsic variables affect each student differently. Social and emotional support and learning programs can provide a safety net for those in need and a springboard for those ready to expand their sense of self.

Children need time to reflect on real problem solving. In this study, a fifth-grade student explained “kids only *get* so much until they experience it. They don’t understand it ‘til they’ve been through it”. She helps make the important connection between teaching strategies and experiential learning, which also necessitates time allowed for reflection and discussion. This also lends itself to the need to simulate situations, or as one child suggested: “If teachers make it more fun like when we did role playing stuff”.

McDevitt and Ormrod (2002) refer to Vygotsky’s ideas and their implications within the classroom, several of which can be addressed through role playing. Vygotsky thought that before children can perform tasks alone, they can perform them in collaboration with others, receiving some guidance or support. Teachers must directly teach children new concepts, not wait for them to make their own discoveries (Crain, 2005). This may underline a need for *creating* opportunities for all students to learn to interact in an incremental, positive, rewarding way with their peers. Powell (2004) notes that opportunities must be created to be supportive and to give tasks and challenges that raise self-esteem so that students may be able to have success in school and develop self-motivation.

One concept is that of presenting challenging tasks, perhaps within the context of cooperative activities, and another is providing opportunities to engage in authentic

activities. Role playing activities foster both of these concepts and provide an opportunity for cognitive development. Promoting self-regulation by teaching children to talk themselves through difficult situations through self-talk and inner speech (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002) can also be developed through social and emotional learning. Embedded in these concepts, role-playing allows teachers the opportunity to expand a child's competence through scaffolding. By successfully performing a task within his or her zone of proximal development, a child adds to their social competence.

A multitude of factors contribute to the social success or failure of a school-age child. Physical appearance, self-confidence, and credible social role models all exert their influence. But most important are a student's own social capacities (Levine, 2002).

Levine (2002) believes that the social challenges children face can be separated into three daily missions: the friendship mission, the popularity mission, and the political mission. Friendship formation and maintenance is our first social mission. Having a friend demands that children relate successfully on an individual basis. In the popularity mission, those who become rejected are somehow uploading and downloading the wrong messages, possibly committing a chain of social errors that have managed to alienate them from their peers and gain them their negative reputation. Peer rejection and abuse take a heavy toll. (p. 226)

Levine (2002) insists that childhood is political and therefore kids have to learn to interact advantageously with individuals in a position to help or hurt them.

Evidence of this may also have been exposed in comments from several students. One explained,

There is a kid in our class who gets so upset that teachers feel bad for him and almost always take his side to help him settle down and he does bad stuff, so it's almost like people care too much and he gets away with a lot.

Another child explained his frustration that, "If someone is persistent in their tattling, adults believe them after awhile". A third stated, "One girl always asks the teacher in a fake nice voice and is allowed to do stuff even though she doesn't finish her work". Have the children they are complaining about learned to use the adults politically, as Levine (2002) refers to? This possibility begs the question: Does social and emotional learning reach the intrinsic level, and how do we know if students merely adopt the skills extrinsically in an effort to succeed politically within the classroom?

It was noted in Chapter IV that in just a few focus group discussions it became increasingly apparent that adults may not really know what is going on between children as some engage in negative social interactions only when adults are not present. This could cause concern because it may mean that social emotional learning strategies may simply give students the tools but do not reach them on a deeper, intrinsic level. "Sometimes they just do it when there are adults around to make them look mature but they don't mean it or care and then they carry out the fight after the adults leave". Students expressed that "teachers don't really know what goes on when they are not around" and "teachers think they (students) mean it". Continued data collection would need to occur to explore this further.

Because students sometimes referred to adults not seeing the whole picture, it becomes evident that teachers must understand all of the ways that children gather social information. Vygotsky proposed that children first learn through social interactions with

others; then they apply them to their own, individual thinking (Crain, 2005). Piaget pointed to disagreements children have with one another as fostering greater perspective taking. Bandura added that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977).

As people become socialized, they depend less on external rewards and punishments and increasingly regulate their own behavior (Crain, 2005). Evidence of Bandura's social/observational learning theory included Andrew's comment that "You see what other kids do and if it's really bad you say, 'I'm definitely not doing that' and if it's good then you want to learn to do that too". Sarah said, "You do learn from both, and you outgrow some behavior, like you realize tantrums are embarrassing and you can't get your way...kids watch and learn and see other people don't do some kinds of stuff". In social settings, Bandura thinks, we learn a great deal through imitation, and imitation involves cognitive processes. We acquire considerable information just by observing models, mentally coding what we see (Crain, 2005). These students explained what Bandura refers to as vicarious reinforcement. Observation teaches the probable cause of new behavior and is a cognitive process as expectations are formulated about the outcomes of behavior without any direct action on the observer's part (Crain, 2005). Howard Gardner (2008) noted the impact of observation on the development of the ethical mind. From an early age, of course, young people are influenced by what they see around them, what is rewarded, what is written about, what is ignored or disparaged. Participants also revealed observational learning in the following ways;

- Girls don't like show-offs or if someone is annoying, if someone is being mean we will exclude them, then they deserve it.
- You learn by watching how others act and from your parents.
- Kids watch and learn and see other people don't do some kinds of stuff.
- They just do it when there are adults around to make them look mature but they don't mean it or care and then they carry out the fight after adults leave.
- They want to be cool. They are influenced by others.
- He thinks he's being cool and he's really just being dumb.
- The ones who make bad choices are just trying to be cool.

Occasionally students referred to the need to re-learn skills because when in the midst of a conflict they tended to forget how to implement strategies or which strategies to try. "People just forget to care about each other". And, "You have to relearn not to be mean, 'cause it can just be a bad habit". Practice and reflection could support this need. Meeting circles allow both students and teachers to see where further practice is needed.

The children were honest about their interactions and how teachers respond to them. They have some clear opinions about what teachers do and say. At one point in this study, Maggie said, "Adults should *never* make kids apologize 'cause they just say it and don't mean it. It's better to say, 'how can we solve this?' then usually they will apologize but may really mean it that time". The participants occasionally expressed some doubt in adult help. "Adults don't always fix it, they just try and end it". Teachers who incorporate gatherings into their practice have reported that the structure has created a sense of community in their classrooms, helped them get to know their students, reduced

classroom conflicts, and improved equity and access during learning time (Johnson, Poliner & Bonaiuto, 2005).

Is There Enough Evidence to Suggest that Social Skills Education is Effective? And, do Students who have been Engaged in an Established Social-Emotional Program Exhibit Behaviors that are a Result of that Program?

Based on the data listed in all twelve social skills component categories, it is reasonable to say that these students do exhibit behaviors that are a result of the social-emotional learning program within their school. Throughout the study they have demonstrated where and when the strategies impact relationships and their sense of growing self-efficacy is evident in their responses. They are able to express when they feel a sense of empowerment and when they still face some frustration. They were very articulate in expressing their views both in focus group discussions and on student surveys. They were extremely honest. They were quick to recall specific incidences and also demonstrated social-emotional learning behaviors during observations. Their parents and teachers added an important layer of understanding in viewing the students as social beings within their social world.

It is important to consider that these students are given opportunities to talk things out and to reflect during the day. Everyone is given a voice and a sense that their concerns and ideas are valued. These data indicate that this group has a safe place for trial and error *and* failure. This leads the principal investigator to the belief that a school does not have to follow any “canned” social and emotional learning program, but instead need only make the commitment to becoming a community dedicated to compassion before content. This idea is completely in line with Maslow’s theory of motivation. Self-

actualizers have attained a certain independence from their culture, they are not confined to conventional, abstract, or stereotyped modes of perception (Crain, 2005). This principal investigator believes that these students are on their way to self-actualization because they have been given a foundation that meets their immediate needs. Their teachers recognize the need to deal with interpersonal conflict before moving on with their day, including their educational agenda. Their enthusiasm, sense of caring and creativity were evident throughout this study and throughout their daily relationships. There is a depth of compassion and expectations evident in such comments as, “you should try to play with people who do not play nice” and such actions as when Dominique ran to Dakota’s aid on the playground, clearly seeing that her friend was upset about something and in need of help. According to their study, Taylor and Dymnicki (2007) found that social and emotional learning interventions had strengthened positive outcomes like school connectedness, prosocial behaviors, and achievement test performance, and had weakened negative outcomes such as disruptive conduct, substance abuse, and violence and aggression. The students in this study demonstrated a significant connectedness not only to their peers but also to their partners and students in other grades. The principal investigator never observed any behaviors that would be considered disruptive, violent or aggressive.

The teachers have an understanding that strategies do not work every time and give children a forum for working through such difficulties. Therefore, by allowing students to recognize the shortcomings of a strategy and the complexities of social interactions, teachers reach out further by fostering a sense of resiliency and an understanding that

challenges are not personal failures, but situations that can usually be resolved in some manner.

Whether or not students are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated is not yet clear. It is different for each child and within each component. There is evidence that students have the tools they need, as they are able to explain expectations and even philosophical reasons for certain expected behaviors. This question was also considered in Johnson, Poliner & Bonaiuto's (2005) research when they realized their students had accomplished cognitive change but had failed to change their behavior. They concluded that they also needed to find ways for students to practice those skills throughout the day. The students in this study demonstrated that they are a step ahead, as they were observed using appropriate strategies more often than not and they are given multiple opportunities to practice and reflect on their skills.

It is critical that students have teachers who consistently model such strategies and behaviors and truly believe in the process of helping students find their way in the social world. Research shows that any successful change that is to take place at the school is directly related to the skill and ability of the teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1996). This is crucial. Social and emotional learning cannot be successfully taught as an isolated skill. It must be embedded and addressed as needed throughout the day. In fact, Viadero's (2007) research suggests that teachers take time out of the curriculum to teach students to manage their emotions and to practice empathy, caring, and cooperation – and their academic achievement could improve in the bargain.

Ultimately, it must be noted that students have a lot of faith in the Golden Rule and expressed so in this study. There is a certain amount of irony in the simplicity of the rule

and the innocence of children as they grow and try to find their social niche. The clear message of the Golden Rule is one that very young children can understand and internalize. The suggestion from one student that teachers should *just* teach the Golden Rule should not be overlooked. The principal investigator believes this comment helps to answer the final question, Is there enough evidence to suggest that social skills education is effective? The comment came from a third grade student who believed that if everyone simply followed that rule, there would be no problems. This is a student who has thought about the significance of social skills. He has an understanding of the importance and value of social relationships. He seems to have weighed the strategies and thinks it is worth further consideration. This analysis, on his part, exemplifies the reflective understanding these children demonstrate that shows an empathy and compassion for the successful social experiences of their classmates. A classroom observation of fifth graders provided additional evidence that social skills education is effective in this setting. The class was expressing concern about moving on to middle school. When one child noted that she and her classmates really care about each other even when they disagree, she validated the efforts of the social and emotional learning at this site.

The information that the participants in this study provided suggests that social skills education is effective. The students demonstrated an awareness of the strategies they employ, which strategies work and which do not. They expressed an understanding of their role within a social group and where they face challenges. It should be noted that students did provide evidence of a need for continued practice and reminders, both of which are part of social and emotional learning. Some of the challenges to consider are;

- We learned, “your friend’s friend is your friend” but that doesn’t always work.

- People just forget to care about each other, ‘cause ya know when we talk about it we know it is awful but when it is happening it just keeps happening.
- People who don’t back down are impossible.
- People who say “forget it, we are not friends anymore” instead of “sorry”.
- If they steal your friends, that’s hard, ‘cause then you have no one to go to for help.
- She is torn by the risks that one must take to stand up to others.
- He argues his point without hearing others’ views.
- Nathan still only sees situations from his perspective.
- He is a follower when others poke fun at or bully a particular classmate.
- He tends to react before thinking in social arenas.
- Sharing is difficult when put into a group that doesn’t have boys in it.
- A group of third graders lined up on the edge of the field. It was apparent to this observer that they would have liked to join in, but they did not ask and none of the fifth graders invited them to play either.

These challenges are very real and yet, overall, the positive social skills students revealed far outweigh the negative. Social skills training is an ongoing process and the challenges are evidence that embedding social skills throughout the day is essential in creating an effective learning environment. To create such an environment may mean reevaluating whether or not the classroom routine is conducive to consistent, positive social support.

Johnson, Poliner and Bonaiuto (2005) concluded in their study that consciously rethinking our structures, routines, and practices has produced immense payoffs. They noted that their previous routines and schedule created a rushed and disjointed day that

led to rushed and disjointed behavior. They stressed that changing students' social and emotional behavior requires more than skill lessons – it requires attention to the environment in which students learn.

Future Research

Future research may need to consider what it takes for social skills to become embedded be at an intrinsic level, possibly studying children who have made a transition to a new social circle, or consider the same children in 3 or 4 years to examine the “staying power” of the social skills learned at this site. In their study, Taylor and Dymnicki (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 44 studies that included follow-up data collected six months or more after interventions ended. Their findings demonstrated that social and emotional instruction and supportive environments can enhance participants' development beyond the duration of the intervention.

Additional research may be necessary to further examine the impact of social and emotional learning on cognitive growth. The connection to cognitive growth cannot be ignored. Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective gives credence to the ways in which a child's social and cultural environments foster cognitive growth (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Viadero (2007) noted that the nearly 6-year-old No Child Left Behind Act calls on educators to employ scientifically based educational practices and research findings in education and other fields, such as brain science, seem to be converging on the benefits of social and emotional instruction, and programs based on the concept have a small but growing presence in schools.

Consideration of gender differences in social and emotional learning may be worthy of future research. Gilligan (1982) found discrepancies in Kohlberg's stages of moral

reasoning. She noted that females develop a morality that emphasizes a greater concern for others' welfare, whereas males are more likely to look at a situation in terms of someone's rights being violated. Results from such research could suggest a model for understanding specific strategies and an even greater need for perspective taking.

Additional research is necessary to understand what it takes to achieve intrinsic motivation in social and emotional relationships. Is it attributable to development or is it based on whether or not students believe it works? Believing in social and emotional learning is critical to its' success and research into teachers' faith in an embedded approach would also be helpful in understanding program needs.

Other Considerations

The principal investigator also believes that by focusing on behaviors and solving problems together, not only do children avoid blame and shame but they separate themselves from the problem. This allows them to reflect on the situation more logically and to avoid internalizing the behavior to mean they are "good" or "bad" as a pre-conceived *and permanent* label. This may allow them to maintain a sense of belief in themselves, an optimistic attitude that can have an enormous impact during critical social development. Bluestein (2001) in her book, *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools* explains:

In general, young children are extremely optimistic, many of them seemingly immune to hopelessness. When they can retain their optimism, they tend to be more resilient, more resistant to upsets and less likely to give up in frustration than pessimistic kids. They see their successes as being global, long-term, meaningful and attributed to hard work. (Pessimists explain their successes as local, short-term and accidental.) By the same token, optimistic kids see their

failures as short-term and related to specific causes or lack of personal effort.

(Pessimists see failure as more global, long-term and significant. They are more likely to blame their failures on others or some other permanent, unchangeable flaw, like being stupid, ugly or untalented. (p. 241)

The students in this study identified times when they “forgot” that they cared about each other as times when their communication broke down or frustrations rose up. They held on to their core belief of caring and supporting each other and blamed themselves for getting caught up in the moment of conflict. Bluestein (2001) would view this as short-term failure related to lack of personal effort in the eyes of optimistic children. These children know that social interactions are not always easy and strategies take practice. They also value opportunities to discuss and reflect on social challenges which may allow them to hone their skills. Beyond that is the idea that they believe they have a voice, that their being a successful member of their social group is important and valued by everyone. They also know it comes with a responsibility, because they are given that voice, they must allow others to have a voice, too. Understanding reciprocal social skills and acceptance also fosters resiliency. A good teacher models reciprocal social skills and acceptance throughout the day. Role models demonstrate this through interactions with peers. Because modeling can have a strong impact on behavior, it has significant promise as a therapeutic device (Crain, 2005). Participants in this study expressed a serious commitment to their responsibility as role models for younger students. While Piaget divided development into stages and felt that children learn primarily on their own, driven by interest that is primarily intrinsic, Bandura argues that children’s thinking can be altered by modeling influences and that learning is environmental (Crain, 2005). This

study suggested evidence from both theorists as students struggled in certain developmental stages *and* expressed their understanding of environmental awareness.

All of the groups in this study expressed challenges with games citing rules as the greatest source of frustration. Piaget noted two basic moral attitudes. He believed that moral heteronomy, a blind obedience to rules imposed by adults, is tied to egocentrism and overcome quite late, at the age of 10 or so, compared to egocentric play, which is usually overcome by age 7 (Crain, 2005). This could explain why coping with rule infractions is so difficult for the participants as they are all between the ages of 8 and eleven which is Piaget's concrete operational stage. The second basic moral attitude is autonomy, reached after the age of 10 or so, where rules are simply seen as mutually agreed-upon ways of playing the game (Crain, 2005). Several of the participants in this study seem to be right on the cusp of autonomy but not quite ready to leave heteronomy behind. Discussions during meeting circles, role-playing activities or support during the actual game are all ways that social and emotional learning can alleviate the frustration as they transition from one stage to another. The conflict brought on by game rules could also be attributed to Kohlberg's level 2 and level 3 of moral development. In level 2 children still perceive rules to be inflexible whereas in level 3 they have an understanding that rules can change if it is better for the sake of the group (McDevitt and Ormrod, 2002).

Summary

Armstrong (2006) views, at the early childhood level, the relationship in terms of student as player, teacher as facilitator; at the elementary level student as worker, teacher

as coach; at the middle school level, student as explorer, teacher as guide. This reflects an acknowledgement of the student first, and the role of the teacher to meet student needs.

The most important message in a school is that the adults in a child's life care, - fully, even irrationally - about that child. Adults must provide support and love for each child, unconditionally, to succeed in the long run in developing youngsters who care about learning and about one another (Gardner, 2000). In light of the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, Shriver and Weissberg (2005) state that we don't have to choose between academic achievement and the development of character. The authors believe that, rather, we should concentrate on both and that a truly effective new policy should include benchmarks for social and civic learning.

The long-term implications can be serious as we consider the future of our students, as they become integral members of our society. In his article, "*Bullying: A Matter of Law?*", Zirkel (2003) states that the real reason for schools to take a strong stance against bullying is not to avoid legal liability. Such efforts are worthwhile simply because, whether it results in grave physical injury or not, bullying is bad – bad for the victims, bad for the perpetrators, and bad for a civil society.

Armstrong (2006) says it best when he mentions all of the social challenges society is faced with today;

You name it; we're dealing with it....How do we best equip our kids to deal with these problems? By worrying them to death about how they're going to do on next week's test? By threatening that they won't graduate if they don't muscle under and memorize the periodic table of elements? By taking away their favorite activity if they don't keep their grade point average up? By taking them out of the

sandbox at age 3 and plunking them down at a computer station? The true survival skills in education are the ones we provide our students that enable humanity to continue to evolve as a species (p. 155).

While social and emotional learning aims to teach students to stand up for themselves and others it should also minimize the negative, cut-throat competition (i.e. grades and test scores) that often brings about resentment and shame. Research such as this may give teachers a stand when they confront administrators who are overlooking children's developmental needs and, in the process, the true spirit of learning and teaching.

Even very young students know when their value as a person is a priority for a teacher. Children are insightful and intuitive, as this study demonstrated. Establishing a kind, supportive learning environment has a ripple effect, reaching out of the classroom - to the school, to the family, to the community and beyond, with endless possibilities.

Children frequently imitate what they see. Through relationships they learn love, trust, caring, support and empathy. These are the social and emotional competencies that become the foundation for learning and healthy development (Cohen, 2001). This study examined the proposition that if students are given opportunities to practice these skills and are learning in a supportive setting, are they are more likely to internalize appropriate strategies and demonstrate expected learning behaviors?

Social skills learning requires time spent exploring, playing, planning and problem-solving. When children don't have appropriate outlets for their sensory-motor needs, or if their need for movement is restricted for a long time, it's not uncommon for them to act out in ways that can be pretty disruptive (Bluestein, 2001). This kind of response can further compound problems and even alienate children from their peers.

The principal investigator believes that one of the most important implications of this study is the importance of helping children become successful, secure people not just successful students. This requires an understanding of child development and developmentally appropriate practices.

Depriving young children of play experiences, and open-ended explorations with the world around them contributes to the acceleration, fragmentation, and deterioration of young children's developmental possibilities (Armstrong, 2006). Therefore, the very singularly focused approach to standardized test taking that students are inundated with currently, impacts their long term growth as learners. Nancy Weber-Schwartz (1987) in her article, "*Food for Thought, Patience or Understanding*," stressed the critical need for greater understanding of developmental stages. She argued,

teachers who understand young children know that they are not time-efficient.

These teachers take time to trust in the natural growth process, to listen attentively, to respond descriptively and appreciatively. They take time to listen to what children are *unable* to say, as well as to expand upon what they *do* say. Such teachers make time to allow children to discover their world and build their reality through interactions with objects and people. When I understand, I accept that each child is worth all the time she or he needs. Because I accept what *is*, I put my energy into effective teaching, not struggling against the reality that children are children.

It is unfortunate that some educators perceive bolstering a student's emotional and social well-being as interfering with or taking precious time away from teaching academic skills (Brooks, 1999). Instead, it is suggested, social and emotional competence is critical to the

acquisition of academic skills. Brooks (1999) found that in addition to his own experience, he has received convincing feedback that strengthening a youngster's self-esteem and self-confidence need not be an "extra" curriculum; if anything, a student's sense of security and self-worth in a classroom provides the scaffolding that supports increased learning, motivation, self-discipline, realistic risk-taking, and the ability to deal effectively with mistakes. This is key to this study.

As described by Maslow's hierarchy, the need for belonging or community is more basic than the need for high achievement, accomplishment and status, much less personal development and self-actualization. In fact these higher-level goals can only be reached once lower-level needs, including the need for safety and belonging are satisfied (Bluestein, 2001).

This leads to another implication. Teacher educators must stress the knowledge of and consideration for human development as a critical aspect of being an effective teacher. It is faculty responsibility to prepare pre-service teachers effectively, this requires teaching the developmental needs of children. Social and emotional learning focuses on allowing students to grow as children, at a pace that respects who they are individually. It is necessary to listen and respond attentively as they find their niche within their social group. Without this key piece education misses the boat because children are not being taught where they are but at some predetermined "one size fits all" point of reference, which shortchanges the students. Realistically, it undermines the profession because it ignores such an important part of what teaching truly is. Coursework and studies that include social and emotional learning are critical to the education of future teachers.

Key to the success of social and emotional learning is embedding it so completely into the students' day that the children believe in the value of the strategies because they see immediate results. They trust their social and emotional needs will be met. When necessary, creating opportunities for children to practice interacting in incremental, positive and rewarding ways with their peers further enhances their skills and builds a sense of environmental trust.

Stacia Tausher (cited in Canfield & Hansen, 2002) stressed, "We worry about what a child will be tomorrow, yet we forget that he or she is someone today". This study suggests that if we focus on the social and emotional success of each child today they will have tools necessary to succeed in all aspects of their school days in the future. We must teach students to value their peers, but also to value themselves, to rise above self-doubt and embrace individuality in themselves and in others. We must give students a voice and truly hear what they have to say.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Teacher/Parent Questionnaire

Please provide some background information about _____.

How does _____ typically react to:

frustration-

problem solving-

conflict-

cooperation-

fairness-

sharing with others-

Appendix B

Reflective Piece - Optional

Questionnaire and Rating Scale

thumbs down

thumbs middle

thumbs up

Situation:

I thought there was a problem when...

My initial reaction helped (thumbs down – thumbs middle – thumbs up) because I...

This situation turned out (circle one)– thumbs down – thumbs middle – thumbs up

Appendix C

Student Initial Survey (written responses from students)

(There is no right or wrong answer – this survey is interested in your attitudes and beliefs.)

1. What do you think is the most important attribute of a friend? _____
(characteristic)
a teammate? _____ and a classmate? _____
2. What makes a good friend?
3. Do you think friends are fair _____, patient _____, always
kind _____?
yes/no/sometimes yes/no/sometimes yes/no/sometimes
4. How do friends stick up for each other?
5. What is hard, for some kids, about being a good friend?
6. How would you recommend someone deal with a bully?
7. When there is a conflict, how do students usually react?
8. What is the hardest part of being involved in a conflict (disagreement)?
9. Do students usually solve the problem, ignore it, or get an adult to help?
10. If students usually solve it themselves, how do they solve it?
11. How should someone react if they feel excluded?
12. Do students usually feel confident with their peers?
13. Why do you think some kids feel confident and others don't?
14. How do you know how to solve problems with your peers?

Appendix D

May 15, 2007

Mrs. Laureen Nelson
Assistant Professor
Luhrs School/Teacher Education department
Shippensburg University

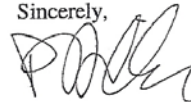
Re: approval to conduct research at GBLUES

Dear Mrs. Nelson,

Your proposed research, "How do students use strategies learned in social skills education and how do they use those skills at different developmental levels?" is appropriate for the Grace B. Luhrs University Elementary School at Shippensburg University.

Participation in such research is clearly one of the most important reasons for the existence of the campus elementary school. Please plan to meet with the other teachers at your earliest convenience to describe your work and to elicit support. You can begin the work as soon as you receive approval from your dissertation committee.

Sincerely,



Phillip Diller, Ed.D.
Director

Shippensburg University

1871 Old Main Drive
Shippensburg Pennsylvania 17257
717 477 1612

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child, with your permission, is invited to participate in a research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision as to whether or not to have your child participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Your child is eligible because he/she is a student at the laboratory school on the campus of Shippensburg University and is in third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade and was also at this school for kindergarten, first and second-grade.

The purpose of this study is to see how students apply strategies learned in social skills education throughout their school day. Participation in this study will not affect grades in any way. Students will be observed participating in their typical school day. They will also be invited to participate in grade level focus discussion groups that will meet once a month for approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. Group discussions will be an opportunity to share information and ideas about social interactions. This will give the researcher an opportunity to note which strategies students find most useful in their peer interactions. Students will always have the option to not participate. Another piece of this study will involve optional journaling, which will encourage students to reflect on strategies and attempts at problem solving. Students will be asked to, confidentially, complete a survey.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You, or your child, are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your/his/her relationship with the investigator, the school or IUP. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you/he/she are otherwise entitled. If you choose to have your child participate, you/he/she may withdraw at any time, even midway through, by notifying me, personally by mail, phone call/message, email or through a letter presented to the central office. Upon your request for withdrawal, all information pertaining to your child will be destroyed. If you choose to have your child participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on his/her academic standing or services received from the laboratory school. The information obtained in the study will be retained for at least three years in compliance with federal regulations and may be published in educational journals or presented at educational meetings but all identities will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the study by using pseudonyms for each student. If you give permission for your child to participate please understand that they may or may not be selected as a participant. There will be approximately ten students involved in the study so spaces are limited and your child's daily schedule will be considered. It is my intention to limit any interruptions to a minimum. The study will include participants who reflect a diversity of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic and academic ability based on information gathered from teachers and the central office.

If you are willing to have your child participate in this study please sign the statement on the next page and return it to the school office in the envelope provided. Keep the extra copy for yourself.

Project Director:

Mrs. Laureen Nelson, Principal Investigator
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705
Phone: (717)477-1612 or 1660
E-mail: lenels@ship.edu

Dr. Monte Tidwell, Faculty Sponsor
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328 Davis Hall
Indiana, PA 15705
Phone: (724) 357-2651
E-mail: mtidwell@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone:724/357-7730).

Informed Consent Form (continued)

*If consent is given for your child to participate in the study, return the signed form to the researcher or central office. If you or your child does not wish to participate this does not need to be returned.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I give consent for my child to participate in this study. I understand that his/her responses are completely confidential and that he/she has the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Phone number of location where you can be reached

Best days and times to reach you

Child's Assent:

Dear Luhr's 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade student,

Some of you may already know that I go to school on the weekends. I am learning ways to be a better teacher and to help students work together and to solve problems. I would like to work with about four students from each grade to learn more about how students get along and how they solve problems that classmates sometimes have. I would like to invite you to be part of this group. You will never have to talk about anything you don't want to. You can also say you want to be part of the group and then change your mind at any time. You can stop being part of the group by telling your parent you don't want to stay in it or by telling me, either way is fine.

We will meet in groups to talk about ways friends work things out, the third graders will meet together, the fourth graders will meet together and the fifth graders will meet together. You will also be allowed to write in a journal that you do not have to put your name on. So if you know of ways that help friends work out problems or if you are interested in thinking about ways to help each other solve problems you may want to be part of our study group. I'm not sure everyone that wants to be in the group will get to be, it depends on how many "yes's" I get back. So, talk to your parent about it and if you would like to join our study group print and then sign your name below. If you are not interested, or already too busy, that is ok and you do not have to return this form.

Thank you,

Yes, I would like to be part of this study group.

Mrs. Nelson

Print name _____

Signed _____

Appendix F

Teacher Letter

Dear _____(third-, fourth, fifth-grade teacher),

During this school year I will be doing a research project with several of your students. My plan is to analyze how students use pieces of social skills education in their daily school activities and to find out which strategies they find most useful.

This research will involve me spending time observing these students engaged in various activities throughout the day. I will also do some interviewing and we will meet once a month in grade level focus groups, for approximately one-half hour to discuss specific social skills strategies they use. I may use literature to facilitate discussions. These students will be given the option of doing some journaling during the week at a time that you feel is least intrusive to your teaching day. I will also ask you to complete a questionnaire about each child that participates in the study from your class.

If you are willing to participate in this study, we will need to meet to establish a schedule and answer any of your questions. Please sign below if you are willing and able to work with me throughout this research study.

It is my intention to continue this research during the 2007-08 school year. I will be available, now and at any time in the future, to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Laureen Nelson

_____ Yes, I am willing to participate in this study and complete participant questionnaires.

_____ Yes, I am willing to have my students participate in this study.

If you decide to opt out of the study, you do not need to sign and return this form.

teacher's signature

grade

Grace B. Luhrs University Elementary Laboratory School
Shippensburg University

Appendix G

Dear _____,

You recently gave consent for your child to participate in my research study. Your child has been selected to be one of the participants and consideration has been given to his/her daily schedule. I will keep in touch throughout the year and will be available to answer any questions you may have.

I will also take time to explain this activity to your child and what this involvement means to him/her. It is important to me that your child is a part of the whole process, which includes stating whether or not they would like to participate. Please remember you and your child both have the option to withdraw at any time. This can be done by informing me in person, via email, a phone message or submitting a letter to the central office.

Thank you for your support as I embark on this study.

Sincerely,

Laureen Nelson
2nd grade teacher
G. B. Luhrs University Elementary School
Assistant Professor
Teacher Education Department
Shippensburg University

Anecdotal Records/Field Notes

Student's Name _____

Grade _____ Date _____

Location of observation _____

During the observation the observer is:

_____ visible to student _____ not visible to student

Student is:

_____ in class during large group instruction

_____ in class during small group instruction

_____ at recess

_____ in a special (art, music, library, physical education, guidance) all large group

_____ in the lunchroom

_____ in the hallway (transition time)

_____ other (explain) _____

Notes:

Appendix I

Grade Level Focus Group Discussion Topic Form

date _____ grade _____ time _____

Brief review of last meeting:

Can anyone describe a challenging interaction? (This can be one you saw, read about or a fictitious one)

Possible solutions?

What might be the most positive solution?

Overall reactions and responses?

Student driven discussion topics -

Anything to focus on between now and next meeting-

Questions and comments –

List any literature used to facilitate discussion -

Appendix J



These pictures are an example of the Peace Awards mentioned during focus groups. The child who receives the peace award chooses a pipe cleaner and completes it as they like. There are also ceramic peace awards.