

AN EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
LEARNING PROGRAM:
KELSO'S CHOICE

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to the Faculty of
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in
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mom, Edie, who has been an emotional support, reminds me of who I am and has sacrificed her own financial needs in order to help me achieve my dream; and to God, who took a little girl who barely passed high school and gave her the strength and perseverance to never give up and to continually keep pressing towards the prize.

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ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM: KELSO'S CHOICE

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There is an increasing number of studies and reviews that demonstrate the benefits of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for students. These benefits include improved academics, increased prosocial behaviors and feelings of school connectedness, decreased aggressive and disruptive behaviors and reduced dropout rates in high school. Despite these benefits, few schools are implementing SEL curricula and, of those schools implementing curricula, less than half of them are evaluating their programs for success. More SEL evaluation research is needed, especially regarding the use of these programs with culturally diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.

The current study is a program evaluation of Kelso's Choice, a SEL curriculum designed to promote peaceful conflict resolution by teaching positive conflict resolutions skills. Participants were 176 kindergarten and first-grade students, the majority of whom were Hispanic

or Latino and socioeconomically disadvantaged. The study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design with a delayed treatment group. Behavioral data was collected using the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS). Student Learning Surveys were also created and administered as a measure of student learning. Results suggest that, while all students learned the program content, behavior only improved for students in first grade who had received treatment for multiple years and whose Social Behavior had been identified as at risk by their classroom teachers on the SAEBRS. Previous SEL research has shown similar findings. Although current findings are promising, more research on the effects of SEL curriculum implemented with culturally diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged students is still needed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Recent media reports of events such as school shootings, teen suicide, and bullying, have made the social and emotional well-being of students in schools an increasingly important topic across the nation. In response to these concerns, research regarding the effects of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula on student performance and well-being has increased over the last two decades.

Collectively, the research findings have been promising and numerous positive outcomes for students have been found to be associated with SEL programs that are well-implemented over a number of years (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). Student outcomes have included more positive attitudes towards school, higher academic aspirations, increased coping abilities and more demonstrations of prosocial behaviors. There have also been decreases in emotional distress as well as in aggressive and disruptive behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Elias, & Greenberg, 2003). Additionally, students' academic achievement increased by an average of eleven percentile points on standardized state tests, and high school completion rates increased by six percent (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Given these benefits, there is growing recognition of the importance of implementing good SEL programs in schools, and evaluating them to ensure their effectiveness for students.

Program evaluation is an important part of the SEL program implementation process for several reasons. First, the results of an evaluation can be used to improve current program

implementation to increase student success. They can also be used to identify waste in school resources (Funderburk & Shepardson, 2017; Guyadeen & Seasons, 2018). Additionally, program evaluation provides data that can be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of a program in order to increase staff, parent and community involvement and support of school programs (Atramovich, 2016; Funderburk & Shepardson, 2017). Finally, program evaluation contributes to the growing knowledge regarding SEL program implementation and outcomes for students. By evaluating programs as part of the implementation process, schools are contributing to better educational systems at a local, state, national and, in some cases, international level (Spaulding, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the emotional, behavioral and academic benefits of SEL program implementation, 43% of school practitioners report that their schools are not using any type of SEL curriculum. Furthermore, of the schools that are using a SEL curriculum, 30% do not assess their programs for success in meeting their intended objectives (Education Week Research Center, 2015). So, there is a need for more program evaluations of SEL curriculum and their effects on student populations. This is especially true in regards to students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority of the studies conducted previously have either included participants who are predominantly Caucasian and socioeconomically advantaged, or the evaluation failed to report ethnicity and/or socioeconomic data about the sample at all (Durlak et al., 2010). This is an important problem because programs that are effective for white middle class students may not be effective for students from other cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the SEL program *Kelso's Choice Conflict Management Skills* (Kelso's Choice) on a predominantly Hispanic and socioeconomically disadvantaged early elementary school population. This study was interested in answering two questions regarding the effects of the Kelso's Choice program:

1. Did the program increase student knowledge of conflict management skills and program content?
2. Did the students demonstrate behavioral changes after receiving the program?

Definition of Terms

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

The origins of SEL can be found in the collective findings of research in the areas of emotional intelligence, resilience and prevention (Zins & Elias, 2007). It is the learning of social and emotional knowledge and skills, and the application of those skills, that help students build positive relationships, achieve goals and lead successful lives (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2015, p. 5; Zins & Elias, 2007).

Conflict Resolution Education (CRE)

Conflict Resolution Education is a type of SEL education that seeks to teach and model a variety of processes and skills in order to help address conflicts at an individual, interpersonal and institutional level to create safe and positive environments (Association for Conflict Resolution, 2002).

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is the systematic use of the scientific method to monitor, assess and examine the effectiveness of a specific program in meeting its intended objectives (Arora et al., 2017; Astramovich, 2016). This differs from empirical research in that, while empirical research is intended to expand generalized knowledge, program evaluation is specific to informing programmatic modification, refinement and success (Spaulding, 2014).

Limitations of the Study

As with any research, there are limitations to this study. Due to on-site administrator directive and the ethical obligation to administer treatment to students identified as at risk first, a quasi-experimental non-equivalent groups design was utilized in this study. While this methodology is appropriate for program evaluation and the applied setting in which the study was conducted, it is not ideal for research purposes. Using randomized groups in a true experimental design would offer a greater chance of controlling for confounding variables in future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

With growing national concern regarding the mental health of young people, the field of education is becoming increasingly interested in integrating social and emotional curriculum into the skills being taught in schools. Although there has been an increase in studies on the benefits of social and emotional learning, there is still a significant need for program evaluation research on specific curricula. Especially regarding the effects of these programs on diverse student populations.

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the “process through which children and adults acquire and... apply the knowledge... and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2015, p. 5). In short, it is the learning of social and emotional skills that help students build positive relationships, achieve goals and lead successful lives. The origins of SEL can be found in the collective findings of research in the areas of emotional intelligence, resilience and prevention (Zins & Elias, 2007).

SEL can be broken down into five areas of learning. The first area, self-awareness, is the ability to recognize one’s own emotions and thoughts as well as their influence on behavior. Next, self-management is the ability to manage one’s own emotions, thoughts and behaviors.

The third area is social awareness, or the ability to take perspectives and empathize with others of diverse backgrounds and cultures. Following is relationship skills, or the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships. Finally, responsible decision-making is the ability to make constructive, ethical and respectful choices after evaluating the possible consequences of various actions. For students in school, all five of these components should be taught, reinforced and encompassed within the classroom curriculum and instruction, the school climate and policies as well as the students' families and the community (CASEL, 2015).

Importance of SEL Curricula

SEL is important because the social and emotional development of students affects their feelings of connectedness to school as well as their ability to learn. In a study by Wang, Haertel & Walberg (1993) in which content analyses, expert rating surveys and meta-analyses were performed in order to identify influences on learning for grades K-12. Of the categories identified, eight of the eleven that were most influential on student learning were social and emotional. These social and emotional categories were environmental support, student-teacher interactions, social and behavioral skills, motivation and affective state, school culture and classroom climate (Wang et al., 1993).

Addressing these categories through SEL within the classroom may be important not only for increasing student learning but also for preventing dropouts due to unaddressed social and emotional issues. In a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), it was found that students cited the following social and emotional reasons for dropping out of high school: not liking school (36%), not getting along with teachers (25%), not getting along with peers (20.2%), feeling like they didn't belong (19.9%) and not feeling safe (10.0%).

Taken together, the majority of students that dropped out of school before obtaining a high school diploma did so, at least in part, for social and emotional reasons. Providing universal SEL programs to enhance student social and emotional skills may be a key to preventing this.

Research has shown numerous positive outcomes for school-age children that are associated with SEL programs that have been implemented over a number of years. These benefits include improvements in student attitude, student behavior and academic performance. In regards to attitude, SEL implementation is associated with a higher sense of self-efficacy and increased feelings of school connectedness. Across studies using both teacher and self-rating scales, after participating in SEL programs, students generally developed more positive attitudes towards school as well as higher educational motivations. Students also demonstrated stronger ethical values and an increased understanding of the consequences of their behaviors. Additionally, students demonstrated an improved ability to cope with stressors and their emotional distress decreased (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Elias, & Greenberg, 2003).

In regards to behavior, SEL implementation has been associated with fewer absences, a reduction in conduct problems and decreased rates of suspension. After participating in SEL programs, students' classroom participation increased and greater effort was observed in their schoolwork. Additionally, students increased their involvement in positive school activities such as sports, and they decreased their involvement in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use as well as other delinquent behaviors (Taylor, et al., 2017; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, et al., 2003).

In regards to academic performance, SEL programs that are implemented for multiple years have been associated with higher student academic achievement. More

specifically, students' academic performance increased by eleven percentile points on average on standardized state tests (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Additionally, students' study skills, problem-solving and planning improved (Zins et al., 2003).

Finally, high school completion rates increased by six percent on average for schools implementing SEL programs (Taylor et al., 2017).

Conflict Resolution Education

Within the broad spectrum of SEL curriculum are specific subsets of SEL. Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) is a type of SEL education that seeks to teach and model a variety of processes and skills in order to help address conflicts at an individual, interpersonal and institutional level to create safe and positive environments (Association for Conflict Resolution, 2002). Although the foundations of CRE were laid decades earlier, there has been significant growth in the number of CRE programs implemented in schools in the U.S. since the 1990s. This growth has coincided with the increases in incidences in school violence over the last couple of decades (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Although there are CRE programs for all settings (e.g. juvenile detention centers and adult programs), the focus of this study will be CRE programs implemented within the school setting.

CRE programs in the school setting aim to improve student problem-solving skills as well as increase students' emotional awareness and management. These programs are intended to increase students' perspective taking skills and their use of constructive conflict solving behaviors (Jones, 2004). Like other types of SEL programs, CRE curricula seeks to provide explicit SEL and behavioral instruction as well as prevent problems before they escalate to a need for intervention (Lane-Garon, Yergat, & Kralowec, 2012).

CRE programs provided schools have four main goals. First, CRE programs seek to create safe learning environments. This includes decreasing school violence, decreasing conflict between groups, and decreasing absenteeism and dropout rates related to unsafe learning environments. CRE programs also endeavor to create constructive learning atmospheres by improving school and classroom climates through increasing respect and caring and reducing the need for teacher discipline by increasing student self-discipline. Third, CRE programs aim to create constructive conflict communities, meaning that parent and community involvement in the schools is pursued in order to decrease community tension and violence. Finally, CRE programs seek to enhance students' social and emotional development by connecting features of CRE to the features of SEL (Jones, 2004).

There are four types of CRE programs that can be implemented within a school setting. Peer mediation involves bringing in two parties in conflict with an objective third party, often another student, who has been trained in constructive conflict resolution skills. This type of program is usually implemented at the middle and high school level. Process curricula devotes specific time within the classroom for explicit conflict resolution lessons. Each lesson teaches or reviews one or more of the problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. The Peaceable Classroom approach, also known as an infusion approach, involves embedding CRE principles into academic curriculum, such as English or Science, as well as into classroom management strategies. Lastly, the Peaceable School approach represents a whole school program that typically combines peer mediation with other CRE approaches and intervention efforts in order to build students' social and emotional skills (Crawford & Bodine, 1996; Jones, 2004). Since this study involves the evaluation of a process curriculum CRE program, process curricula will be the focus of this review.

CRE process curricula are typically structured with three dimensions. First, procedures and roles for handling conflict are established with students. Second, there are both explicit and implicit components of instruction within the curriculum. Explicit components involve the direct teaching of CRE concepts and skills while implicit components often include modeling and role-playing peacebuilding possibilities. The third dimension of CRE curricula is that it should challenge and reinforce students to change patterns of interpersonal and community relationships (Bickmore, 2003; Gerrard & Lipsey, 2007). In addition to these three dimensions, for both SEL and CRE programs, there are further general curriculum and implementation features that can increase program effectiveness.

SEL Curriculum and Implementation

Implementing a generalized SEL or more specific CRE program does not ensure that students will receive the benefits associated with these curricula. The significance of the impact of a SEL program depends upon two overarching factors: the features of the SEL program itself and the way in which the program is implemented. According to CASEL (2015), the most effective SEL programs contain five principal features within their curricula.

First, the program should be grounded in theory and research using strategies and information that has been shown to be effective and adaptive. Theories and strategies of particular importance are dependent upon the social and emotional skills being taught. For example, in regards to CRE education, there has been a large amount of research on peer mediation programs, and many of these programs have been found to be effective for mediating interpersonal conflicts at the middle and high school level (Jones, 2004). CASEL (2012, 2015) has also published lists of SEL programs that have undergone rigorous program evaluations.

Schools should make efforts to choose these programs that have been shown to be effective (CASEL, 2015). In addition to choosing programs that have undergone research and evaluation, as with teaching any new material, there are components that all programs should have that improve student learning (see the information on SAFE below).

Second, the program should contain components for involving the whole school, families and the community. Programs whose interventions extend beyond the classroom are more effective than those that are only taught within the classroom (Durlak et al., 2011; Dulak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). The risk factors for students developing antisocial or maladaptive behaviors involve components of both individual characteristics as well as characteristics of the environment across multiple settings including the home, the school and the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). SEL programs that include components for involving families, whole schools and communities create opportunities for students to be reinforced for demonstrating newly learned social and emotional skills across multiple settings. This increases the likelihood that students will continue to use these skills because they have become adaptive in multiple environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Therefore, the most effective programs will contain components that extend their lessons beyond the classroom into other contexts (Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995).

The third component of effective programs is that they directly teach all five components of SEL (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness). To produce more positive attitudes and behavioral outcomes, developing skills in all five components is most effective. Becoming more self-aware is most useful if one can further learn to self-manage and make responsible decisions.

Additionally, learning those skills enables students to become more socially aware of others and develop their relationship skills (CASEL, 2015).

Fourth, the curriculum of SEL programs that obtain the most significant outcomes follow the acronym SAFE (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2010). More specifically, the lessons of good SEL programs are *sequenced*, meaning that they connect and build on one another in order to develop social and emotional skills. Additionally, this sequencing should extend over a period of multiple years in order to develop more complex social and emotional skills over time. The lessons of good SEL programs should also be *active*, meaning that students should be given ample opportunity to practice their new skills in order to master them. New skills are best learned when modeled and then practiced in situations in which students are reinforced for their use (Kemerer, 1991). The lessons should also be *focused*, or sufficient time should be given to learning the new skills. Finally, the curriculum of a good SEL program is *explicit*, meaning that children are aware of the specific SEL components that they are learning and practicing (CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011).

The fifth feature of a good SEL program is that it includes a component for evaluation in order to ensure that the program is effective for the student population on which it is being used. In general, program evaluation is a method of determining the success of a program as well as whether modifications are needed to improve the program or program implementation (Spaulding, 2014). Therefore, the best curricula will include a method for determining whether students are meeting intended program objectives. As the focus of this study, program evaluation will be discussed in further detail later as part of the implementation process.

Once a good program is identified, the way in which it is implemented is a significant factor in the level of success that can be achieved by a program (CASEL, 2003; Durlak et al., 2011; Weare & Nind, 2011). There are number of implementation procedures that contribute to effectiveness. As it relates to the scope of this study, there are six main features of implementation that will be discussed.

First, SEL programs are most effective when taught by classroom teachers with adequate class time devoted to it (CASEL, 2003; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2010). Classroom teachers are more effective than other service providers on campus, such as school counselors, because they have the most opportunity to reinforce students for utilizing their newly learned skills and behaviors. Additionally, classroom teachers are able to embed SEL curriculum into other lessons throughout the day. For example, social skills lessons can be introduced through Physical Education or English assignments by teachers. This creates deeper, more meaningful learning and is more likely to be retained by students as they connect and generalize their social and emotional learning into other subject areas (CASEL, 2003; Durlak et al., 2011).

Second, SEL programs are most effective when on-going teacher training is provided in order to ensure implementation fidelity. Contrary to intuition, programs have been found to obtain the most significant effects when followed closely rather than being adjusted to fit creative preferences or teaching styles (CASEL, 2003). Providing on-going training and coaching on program implementation results in a greater likelihood that curricula will be followed. Coaches can provide guidance that allows teaching styles to be respected without compromising program fidelity (CASEL, 2003; CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011).

The third feature of effective SEL program implementation is that there is a commitment to implement the program over a period of multiple years. Implementation of a

program over one year has not been shown to yield the previously discussed positive outcomes in behavior, attitude and academic performance. These benefits are often only obtained after implementing a good SEL program over a period of multiple school years (Zins & Elias, 2007).

Fourth, if a good SEL program contains components for involving families, whole schools and communities, then effective implementation should utilize these components. SEL implementation is more successful when implemented as part of a positive behavioral interventions and support program (PBIS; Zins & Elias, 2007). This program model is the social, emotional and behavioral piece of a multi-tiered system of support (Horner, 2009). Using this model, there are three tiers at which a SEL program can be implemented.

The first tier is the universal tier and represents the SEL program that all students would receive. This tier focuses on prevention and includes the behavioral expectations and the social and emotional lessons that every student would be taught. A good tier 1 should effectively produce the desired behavioral expectations in 80-90% of the student population (Office of Special Education: Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [OSEP], 2010; Horner, 2009). Tier 2 involves more targeted interventions such as small groups or check-in and check-out procedures. These targeted interventions are provided to students who are identified as being at-risk through universal screening and/or progress monitoring in the first tier. A good Tier 2 should be effective for 5-15% of the student population (OSEP, 2010; Horner, 2009).

Finally, tier 3 is intensive intervention, such as an individualized behavior intervention plan (BIP) or regular individualized counseling services, for students with extreme social, emotional and behavioral needs. A well-implemented SEL program in tier 1 and tier 2 should prevent 95% of students from needing tier 3 services and lessen the strain on school resources (OSEP, 2010; Horner, 2009).

The fifth feature of effectively implemented SEL programs are that they are fully supported by administrators who participate in the execution of the program. Administrators are the driving force of good SEL implementation. They have the power to ensure staff support through providing ongoing coaching and training. Administrators also lead the way through modeling and providing directives in school-wide programming. Additionally, administrator support and participation can increase staff and student buy-in regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum (CASEL, 2003; OSEP, 2010).

Finally, if good programs contain methods for evaluation, then the most effective implementation practices would utilize those components (CASEL, 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). Program evaluation will be the focus of this study and will now be explored in greater detail.

Program Evaluation

A program is a short-term set of activities implemented as a potential solution to an existing problem within a community. Programs have quantifiable goals and objectives related to these issues (Spaulding, 2014). Therefore, program evaluation is the systematic use of the scientific method to monitor, assess and examine the effectiveness of a specific program in meeting its intended objectives (Arora et al., 2017; Astramovich, 2016). This differs from empirical research in that, while empirical research is intended to expand generalized knowledge, program evaluation is specific to informing programmatic modification, refinement and success (Spaulding, 2014).

There are two types of program evaluation: formative and summative. Formative evaluation provides regular feedback to those implementing the program while it is ongoing. Its purpose is to inform the immediate improvement of program quality and implementation fidelity.

Summative evaluation occurs after the program is completed in order to examine the short term and long term effects of program implementation on a given population (Spaulding, 2014; Funderburk & Shepardson, 2017). Summative evaluation will be the focus of this study.

Summative evaluations are a useful and important tool in program implementation for several reasons. First, summative evaluations provide information concerning whether or not a program is meeting its intended objectives (Funderburk & Shepardson, 2017). In other words, it provides answers regarding a program's success in achieving expected student outcomes, the adequacy of the training that the staff has received and whether certain groups are benefiting more from the program than others (Gill, Kuwahara, & Wilce, 2016). Once this information is gathered through the evaluation process, it can be used for decision-making purposes to determine if modifications are necessary in order to increase program effectiveness or if the given program is worth the continued use of school resources (Astramovich, 2016).

Second, summative evaluation demonstrates the magnitude of the impact of the program on students to program stakeholders such as parents, teachers and the community. If a program is shown to be effective, then this information can be used in order to maintain or increase funding and resources for program implementation (Astramovich, 2016; Funderburk & Shepardson, 2017). Additionally, when the community sees that a school is implementing a program that is benefiting students, it builds trust and connection with families as well as with community members (Metz, 2007).

Third, program evaluation provides systematic accountability. In a school setting, data that demonstrates whether or not a program is meeting its intended objectives can be used to improve implementation fidelity among staff as well as to establish the credibility and the importance of the programs being implemented (Astramovich, 2016; Guyadeen & Seasons,

2018). In other words, program evaluation allows administrators to identify areas in which their staff is demonstrating strength in program delivery as well as where they may need more support and training in order to increase the likelihood of the success of the program (Astramovich, 2016; Metz, 2007).

Finally, although SEL program evaluation is intended to inform implementation practices and program effectiveness, it also contributes to expanding the knowledge base on SEL curricula and outcomes. Contributing to the research base for SEL programs and curricula not only benefits the school that conducts the evaluation but, when made available to the public, benefits the education of students everywhere. When schools commit to evaluating their programs, and sharing their results, the education knowledge base is broadened and can be used to make program and policy decisions that improve our educational system both nationally and internationally (Astramovich, 2016).

Prevalence and Challenges in Evaluation

Despite the emotional, behavioral and academic benefits of SEL program implementation, 43% of school practitioners report that their schools are not using any type of SEL curriculum. Furthermore, of the schools that are using a SEL curriculum, 30% do not assess their programs for success in meeting their intended objectives at all. This means that less than half of school practitioners are reporting that their school is using a SEL program and evaluating it in some way to ensure that it is effective (Education Week Research Center, 2015).

Given the benefits of SEL and the usefulness of evaluation outcomes, it is important that program evaluation be included as part of the implementation process. However, there are several legitimate concerns often cited by administrators and program directors that

contribute to less than half of schools evaluating their programs. Nevertheless, these concerns can be readily addressed in a way in which the benefits of evaluation far outweigh the risks.

First, there is often concern that evaluation diverts resources away from implementing the program (Peek et al., 2014). Because education is often stretched for resources already, this can be a major deterrent from conducting any type of program evaluation. While it is true that evaluations require the use of some resources, the knowledge gained from the evaluation can actually save schools time and money. This is especially true in regards to ineffective programs or implementation procedures. Only by conducting an evaluation can a school determine if a program is using its resources efficiently. Once this information is gathered, then resources can be devoted to programs and implementation procedures that are both effective and efficient (Spaulding, 2014).

Second, there is concern that the evaluation processes are too complicated. However, in actuality, evaluations can be simple and straightforward (Astramovich, 2016). They can be created collaboratively by staff, or done by one person who oversees the program (Metz, 2007). Additionally, trainings and education in program evaluation procedures can increase staff competence and confidence in evaluation procedures (Astramovich, 2016).

An additional concern is that the evaluation may produce negative results, showing that a program with a great deal of school resources invested into it is not working (Metz, 2007). While this is a very possible and alarming result, it is just as important to show what is not working as it is to show what is working. It may not bring in funding or community collaboration, but it allows educators to make decisions that will. Rather than continuing to waste resources on a program that isn't working, or implementing a program another year without

providing additional needed training for staff, the program can be replaced or improved so that the students will benefit from it (Arora et al., 2017; Spaulding, 2014).

Finally, administrators and staff often wonder why evaluation is necessary when they are already progress monitoring (Metz, 2007). However, a summative program evaluation and progress monitoring are not synonymous. Summative program evaluation differs from progress monitoring in that progress monitoring assesses whether a program is in compliance with specific performance standards. In other words, progress monitoring primarily addresses implementation fidelity and quality. In contrast, a summative program evaluation assesses students' short term and long term outcomes as they relate to the intended objectives of the program (Spaulding, 2014).

In sum, although there are concerns regarding program evaluation, the potential benefits of implementing and evaluating a SEL program far outweighs the risks. The current study will attempt to demonstrate that conducting SEL program evaluations is manageable and can be incorporated as part of standard program implementation procedures with little use of additional school resources.

Previous CRE Evaluation Findings

Given schools' growing interest in CRE curriculum programs over time, there have been an increasing number of evaluations of these programs within schools. In general, the findings for CRE curriculum programs have been similar to that of other good SEL programs. For K-12 schools, CRE programs have contributed to increased student academic achievement, positive attitudes towards school, increased prosocial behaviors and better self-control. Additionally, decreases were shown in students' aggressive behaviors, the number of office

discipline referrals written, suspension rates and dropout rates (Jones, 2004; Crawford & Bodine 1996).

In one particular study of the Peaceful Early Childhood Social-Emotional (ECSEL) program, CRE curriculum was implemented with preschoolers ages two through six with randomly assigned conditions. Students who participated in this program in which both staff and parents were trained in the skills being taught showed significant increases in assertiveness, cooperation and self-control and significant decreases in aggressiveness and socially withdrawn behaviors (Sandy & Boardman, 2000).

The current research available on CRE programs is limited in some areas, however. First, there is a substantial lack of research evaluating the outcomes of CRE programs on students with diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Jones, 2004; Gerrard & Lipsey, 2007). Additionally, the literature for CRE process curricula implemented with early elementary students is sparse. Of those studies that have examined the effect sizes for CRE programs within different age groups, the effects obtained for early elementary students have been relatively small compared to CRE programs implemented with middle and high school students (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Therefore, the current study will attempt to add to the literature through the evaluation of a CRE process curriculum program implemented with students in kindergarten and first-grade who are predominantly of Hispanic or Latino descent and from families with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Kelso's Choice: A CRE Curriculum

The current study is a program evaluation of *Kelso's Choice Conflict Management Skills Program, 4th Edition* (Kelso's Choice, 2011). Kelso's Choice is a CRE classroom

curriculum intended for elementary grades K-5. It was created to be implemented by educators such as teachers and elementary school counselors. The program is intended to teach young children “peace-making skills.” The program emphasizes teaching students the differences between small problems and big problems and tattling versus telling. The program explains to students that small problems are situations in which others are not in danger such as a student cutting in line. Telling an adult about these problems is usually an attempt to get others in trouble and is considered tattling. In contrast, big problems are situations in which students are not safe, such as a student throwing rocks at others. Informing an adult in these situations keeps others safe and is considered telling (About Kelso’s Choice Conflict Management Skills Program, 2017).

Students are then taught that they are “smart enough and strong enough” to solve small problems on their own, and are given nine choices that can be used to address interpersonal conflicts. Students are required to try at least two Kelso’s Choices before telling an adult about a small problem. The program self-reports that it is a tool that can be used for teaching skills related to peace-making and can be effectively used to address anger management and impulse control (About Kelso’s Choice Conflict Management Skills Program, 2017).

When compared to the key features of a good SEL or CRE curriculum, Kelso’s Choice contains many promising components. First, the program directly teaches all five components of SEL (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making). The program does this by teaching students to be aware of how situations make them feel. Then, students are given the nine Kelso’s choices in order to practice self-management and responsible decision making. For example, students can choose to

use “Wait and Cool Off” in response to conflict. Finally, in regards to social awareness, students are taught to be aware of others and practice relationship skills such as apologizing.

The Kelso’s Choice curriculum also adequately follows SAFE. The Kelso’s Choice lessons are sequenced, and build on one another. Additionally, the Kelso’s Choice program builds on itself over a number of years. Kindergarten through third grade students receive a different program and set of choices than fourth and fifth grade students.

The Kelso’s Choice lessons are also active. Each lesson gives students opportunities to use critical thinking skills in order to solve small problems that are contrived within the lesson. For example, many of the lessons include active role-play such as pretending that two students aren’t sharing. The two students, as well as the rest of the class, must practice using Kelso’s Choices to try to solve the problem presented. Additionally, the last several core lessons of the Kelso’s Choice program for the kindergarten through third grade students include a story book and puppets that are used to present conflict scenarios. Students must decide whether the problems presented in these scenarios are big or small and must offer solutions for them using the nine Kelso’s Choices.

Additionally, the Kelso’s Choice lessons provide opportunity for focus. Each lesson is 20-30 minutes long. However, when implemented by classroom teachers, the language can be referred to throughout the day and children can practice solving small problems within the classroom. Additionally, there are supplementary lessons that can be embedded into other areas of curriculum. Finally, the Kelso’s Choice curriculum is Explicit. Each lesson begins by explaining to students what they will be learning about and are expected to know. At the end of each lesson, there is typically a discussion built into the lesson plan in order to allow students to reflect on what they learned that day.

Kelso's Choice also has some limitations. One limit of the Kelso's Choice program is that it does not contain strong components for involving families or the community. For families, a letter is sent home to explain what students are learning, but that is the totality of the family component. Additionally, there is not a component for involving the community. Although the family and community components are not strong, the components for involving the whole school are. The Kelso's Choice program includes large posters of the Kelso's Wheel of nine choices. Additionally, there are cards that can be printed and passed out to all school personnel including adult monitors, bus drivers, etc. in order to remind students of their choices and reinforce their use. There are also supplementary lessons that can be embedded into other activities within the classroom.

A second limitation of the Kelso's Choice program is that it does not contain a method for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, in order to conduct a program evaluation and determine the success of the program, measures would need to be added, which will be the focus of this study.

Previous Kelso's Choice Evaluation Findings

To date, there have been few published studies evaluating Kelso's Choice. There are anecdotal references within books that report Kelso's Choice as being effective or promising (Norbeck, Connolly, & Koerner, 2008), and more of these references and synopses can be found on the Kelso's Choice website on the results page (Kelso's Choice Results, 2017). However, most of the evaluations referred to are informal, contain no citation to the original study and do not provide a PDF or Word document of the original research methods or sample details.

One report available on the Kelso's Choice Results (2017) page references the implementation of Kelso's Choice in three elementary schools for students in kindergarten through third grade. This evaluation gathered teacher responses to a survey in which over 90% of teachers reported incorporating Kelso's Choice into their curriculum within the classroom and that students had been observed to use the Kelso's Choices. Eighty-one percent of the teachers reported that students were coming to them less often with problems. However, this did not appear to be a formal evaluation of the program nor was there any specific information provided regarding the methods of evaluation (Kelso's Choice Results, 2017).

Another evaluation available on the Kelso's Choice website was conducted by the Center for Rural Health and Social Services Development in Illinois. In this study, Kelso's Choice was implemented in one school with first-grade students and an additional school acted as a control group. In a pretest-posttest design, students demonstrated significant increases in their knowledge of conflict resolution strategies on an eight-point survey measuring student learning. However, it was not made clear how the survey was created or what information from the Kelso's Choice curriculum it required students to know. Additionally, there was no measure of behavioral change that indicated student use of program content (Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development, 2002).

An informal evaluation was also conducted while implementing Kelso's Choice with first graders at an elementary school in 2008 (Kelso's Choice Results, 2017). In this evaluation, students demonstrated learning of the Kelso's Choice material by naming the nine choices. Additionally, a teacher survey was conducted and teachers reported positive behavioral changes, improved classroom climates and student use of the program's content. However, this evaluation was informal so no tests for statistical significance were conducted. Additionally, there was no

data regarding sample size, control groups, ethnicity or socioeconomic backgrounds of the students that participated in this evaluation (Kelso's Choice Results, 2017).

Finally, the most promising study available on the Kelso's Choice website was a formal evaluation of the program completed as part of a doctoral dissertation. The longitudinal study examined the program's ability to develop social self-efficacy in third and fourth grade elementary students. The study found that the implementation of Kelso's Choice contributed to students developing social self-efficacy, and that the results were stable over time. It also found that teachers recognized behavioral and social changes within the students before the students recognized it within themselves. Finally, the development of social self-efficacy within the students over time was dependent upon consistent reinforcement for the use of the Kelso's Choice conflict resolution skills (Davis, 2015).

There were some limits to this study, however. This evaluation only examined the development of social self-efficacy in students, or the belief that one has the ability to succeed in social situations. There was no measure of student learning of Kelso's Choice materials. Additionally, the only measure of student behavior used was office discipline referral (ODR) data. Without the use of a systematic referral system such as the School Wide Information System (SWIS), ODR's can be highly limited by implicit biases of school staff as well as by school and classroom climates and procedure differences (Kaufman et al., 2010; Putman, Luiselli, Handler, & Jefferson, 2003; Rusby, Taylor, & Foster, 2007; Skiba et al., 2011; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). It did not appear that the school in this study used a systematic ODR system such as SWIS, which presents a limit to the validity of the data. Finally, the only measurement taken of student learning was an indirect teacher report of student use of Kelso's Choices within the classroom and on the playground. No direct measure of student learning was taken.

The Current Study

The current study will add to existing literature on CRE curriculum programs and Kelso's Choice in several ways. First, this study will be a formal evaluation of the Kelso's Choice materials implemented with early elementary students, for whom there is a lack of formal research within the field of Conflict Resolution Education (CRE). Additionally, this study will measure the program's effects on both student learning and behavioral change. This study will further differentiate itself from previous studies in that student learning will be measured directly by a student learning survey created for the purposes of this evaluation and based on the Kelso's Choice curriculum. Additionally, student use of the materials will be measured in terms of social behavior as measured by a reasonably reliable and valid social and emotional screener. Finally, this study will differ from previous studies on CRE curriculum programs and Kelso's Choice in that the majority of the participants in this sample are Hispanic or Latino and are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

There are two fundamental questions being addressed in this study: 1) Did the students learn, and retain, the Kelso's Choices material being taught, and 2) Did the Kelso's Choice instruction affect social behavior changes across the students?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study was conducted in a rural region located in the Northwestern United States. Within the region, 46.7% of the population is White, 30.5% are Hispanic, 17% are Asian, 4.4% are two or more races and 2.6% are African American. 22.5% of the population is foreign born and 37.2% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. About 17.5% of the population within the region is considered to be in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2016).

In contrast to the region, 78% of the student population within the school district are socioeconomically disadvantaged (2016 APR Glossary-Accountability Transition Report, 2016). Socioeconomically disadvantaged is defined by the California Department of Education (2006) as “students where both parents/guardians have not received a high school diploma; or students who are eligible for the free or reduced-price meal... or students who are migrant, homeless, or foster youth” (pp. 1).

Additionally, English Learners make up 22% of the student population. In regards to behavior and disciplinary rates, suspensions within the district have risen within the following sub-groups: Hispanic, White, Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED), English Learners and Students with Disabilities. The Local Education Agency determined that there is a need for repurposing the services being provided to students who are struggling academically and emotionally within the most recent Local Control Accountability Plan (California Department of Education, 2016). Therefore, the implementation of SEL curriculum and evaluations has become important and timely within the district.

The evaluation of Kelso's Choice was conducted in one school within the district. Participants were 206 kindergarten and first-grade students. In contrast to the region and the district, participants within the school were 73.5% Hispanic or Latino, 15.6% White, 3.3% Asian, 0.4% Black or African American, 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native and 4.6% two or more races. In regards to socioeconomic status, 61.2% of the students were socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Data was collected as part of program implementation, and the existing data was analyzed. 10 students were omitted due to being absent for one or more Student Learning Surveys. 19 students were omitted due to moving to a different school. Finally, one student was omitted due to a teacher survey being filled out incorrectly. After those 30 students were removed from the analyses, there were a total of 176 participants left. Of the 176 remaining participants, 90 were male (51.1%) and 86 were female (48.9%). Additionally, 88 of these students were in kindergarten and 88 students were in 1st grade.

Instruments

Two measures were used in the evaluation of Kelso's Choice in order to determine first, if student knowledge of the Kelso's Choice Conflict Management materials increased after receiving the program, and second, if student social behavior improved after program implementation. A Student Learning Survey was created based on the Kelso's Choice materials in order to measure student acquisition of the program's content. Additionally, to measure behavior change, a rating scale, SAEBRS (Kilgus et al., 2013) was completed by teachers about each of their students.

Student Learning Survey

The literature suggests that well-implemented programs contain evaluation procedures to measure the effectiveness of a program in increasing student knowledge (CASEL, 2003). As previously stated, the Kelso's Choice curriculum does not provide a measure for evaluating student learning outcomes. Therefore, a Student Learning Survey was created in order to investigate the success of the program in achieving student learning objectives.

The survey items were based directly on Kelso's Choice materials. More specifically, a nine-item dichotomous scale was created to measure whether the students could discriminate between big and small problems, tattling and telling and whether one should inform an adult about a problem or "Handle it Myself." Due to the developmental level of the participants and limited writing abilities, scenarios were provided in both words and pictures on the surveys. The surveys were then read aloud and presented in the same way to each class. The students were asked to circle one of the two choices provided, which were also presented as both text and pictures and read aloud. After the first administration of the survey, it was determined that item one was irrelevant to the curriculum, and the scale was reduced to eight items.

Social, Academic and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS)

The SAEBRS (Kilgus et al., 2013) is a 19-item teacher rating scale designed to be a brief and affordable screening tool that provides a measure of behavioral and emotional risk in K-12 students. Items on the SAEBRS state a behavior (e.g. Arguing) and teachers are required to rate the frequency at which students display the behavior on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e. 0 = Never, 1 = Sometimes, 2 = Often and 3 = Almost Always). It takes teachers approximately 2-3 minutes to fill out each rating scale per student. Additionally, the measure is affordable to use and can be downloaded at no cost. For the purposes of this study, data was collected and

analyzed by the practitioner implementing the program as part of standard program implementation procedures.

There are three constructs measured within the SAEBRS tool: Social Behavior, Academic Behavior, and Emotional Behavior. Total Behavior, a combined composite of the Academic, Behavior and Emotional subscales, can also be calculated. All of the scales contain items that measure both adaptive and maladaptive behaviors (Kilgus, Chafouleas, & Riley-Tillman, 2013; von der Embse, Pendergast, Kilgus, & Eklund, 2015).

The Social Behavior scale contains six items and is designed to measure whether the student demonstrates behaviors that are consistent with the ability to maintain age appropriate relationships with both peers and adults. Scores between 0 and 12 on this scale are considered to be at risk and indicate that the student may demonstrate behavior that limits their ability to build and maintain appropriate relationships (Kilgus et al., 2013).

The Academic Behavior scale contains six items and is designed to measure observed behaviors that are consistent with the ability to be prepared for, participate in and benefit from academic instruction. Scores between 0 and 9 on this construct are considered to be at-risk and indicate that the student's behaviors may be limiting their ability to be prepared for, participate in and benefit from academic instruction (Kilgus et al., 2013).

The Emotional Behavior scale contains seven items and provides a measure of the student's ability to regulate their internal state and adapt to changes within the environment. Scores between 0 and 17 on this construct are considered to be at-risk, and may indicate that the student is struggling within the classroom to regulate their emotions, adapt to change or to respond appropriately to stressful events (von der Embse et al., 2015).

Finally, the Total Behavior construct provides a measure of the student's overall functioning within the learning environment. It is comprised of the Social, Academic and Emotional scales. Scores that are between 0 and 36 on this scale are considered to be at risk and may indicate that students need additional support in one or more areas ((Kilgus et al., 2013).

The Social, Academic and Emotional constructs of the SAEBRS were created in a multi-step process. For each construct, authors started by creating a pool of items based on existing literature on positive behavior interventions, behavior assessment, internalizing/externalizing behaviors, social-emotional competence, resilience and emotional wellness. Then, items were narrowed through a content validation process using experts in the field of applied behavior, school psychology, counseling, etc. Finally, items for each scale underwent an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and were eliminated if their factor loadings were too low, they loaded onto multiple constructs, the distribution of the item was non-normal or if the item was found to be redundant (Kilgus et al., 2013; von der Embse et al., 2015).

A number of studies have been conducted in order to establish the reliability and validity of the SAEBRS. Internal consistency scores within the SAEBRS constructs were within an acceptable range for elementary samples (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79 - .94$) (Kilgus et al., 2013; Kilgus et al., 2016). Additionally, validity measures have indicated moderate to strong concurrent validity and accuracy using the following behavioral screening measures: the *Student Risk Screening Scale* ($r = .84 - .94$), the *Student Internalizing Behavior Screener* ($r = .85 - .97$) and the *Behavioral and Emotional Screening System* ($r = .72 - .90$) (Kilgus et al., 2013; Kilgus et al., 2016). In regards to predictive validity, existing studies indicate that the SAEBRS cutoff scores have effectively differentiated between groups identified as at risk versus groups

identified as not at risk in regards to academic outcomes with moderate to large effect sizes (von der Embse et al., 2015; Kilgus et al., 2016).

For the purposes of this study, only results from the Social Behavior subscale were analyzed. Kelso's Choice is intended to teach conflict resolution skills related to constructively solving interpersonal conflicts between students. Therefore, it is expected that this curriculum would most directly affect students' immediate social behaviors (About Kelso's Choice Conflict Management Skills Program, 2017).

Procedure

This study used a quasi-experimental design with a delayed treatment control group. Site administration chose the program Kelso's Choice for implementation the previous year in order to address interpersonal conflicts within the school. Grades K-1 were referred to the practitioner for program implementation. First-grade students had received the Kelso's Choice program the prior year and would be receiving treatment for a second time this year.

Because this research was conducted as a part of applied teaching and assessment in a school setting, classrooms identified as having students with the most interpersonal conflict were chosen for immediate participation by both the teachers and the on-site administration. Therefore, the groups were non-randomized and non-equivalent. There were a total of four classrooms for both kindergarten and first grade, or eight classrooms in total. Half of the classrooms (two kindergarten classes and two first-grade classes) were in the early treatment group and received the program in the fall. There were 44 kindergarten and 45 first-grade students in the early treatment group. The other half of the classrooms acted as a control group for the early treatment group in the fall, and then received the intervention in the spring as the

delayed treatment group. There were 44 kindergarten and 43 first-grade students in the delayed treatment group.

The Kelso's Choice core curriculum consists of eight lessons. The first three lessons contain the foundational knowledge and skills of the program and are intended to be implemented as separate lessons and in order. These lessons are about 20 – 30 minutes long. The last five lessons of the core program are short story readings that involve discussion and application of the program materials. These lessons are approximately 10 – 15 minutes in length, and can be administered in any order. Due to time constraints of the school year and the short duration of the last five lessons, the last 4 sessions were combined into two sessions for a total of 6 Kelso's Choice lessons for each classroom. Additionally, each classroom received large Kelso's Choice posters containing core program materials that were hung in prominent places within the classroom, and each student received a Kelso's Choice card to keep at their desk. These cards and posters were not made available to students during data collection.

The SAEBRS and the Student Learning Survey were administered for data collection at three points during the school year. Data was collected once before any group received the intervention in the fall. Data was collected again in the winter after the early treatment group had received the intervention. Finally, data was collected once more in the spring after the delayed treatment group had received the intervention in order to measure long term effects of the program on the early treatment group as well as behavioral and learning changes within the delayed treatment group.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the SEL program Kelso's Choice Conflict Management Skills on a predominantly Hispanic and socioeconomically disadvantaged early elementary school population. Effectiveness of the Kelso's Choice program would be shown by increased student knowledge of conflict management skills and program content (i.e. student learning) and behavior changes showing improved social behaviors.

Student Learning

To measure kindergarten learning after one year of exposure to the Kelso's Choice program, a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the effect of time of administration (time) and early versus late treatment group participation on student learning.

Success of the program would be shown by a main effect of time and an interaction between time and early versus late treatment groups. If successful, the interaction would show that the early treatment group demonstrated learning increases only between fall and winter and maintained their learning between the winter and spring. In contrast, the delayed treatment group would show learning increases only between winter and spring. Results showed a main effect of time of administration $F(2, 172) = 63.23, p < .000, \eta = .65$ (see Figure 1) with learning increases from fall ($M = 43.2, SD = 20.9$) to winter ($M = 62.9, SD = 18.8$) and from winter to spring ($M = 73.4, SD = 21.8$).

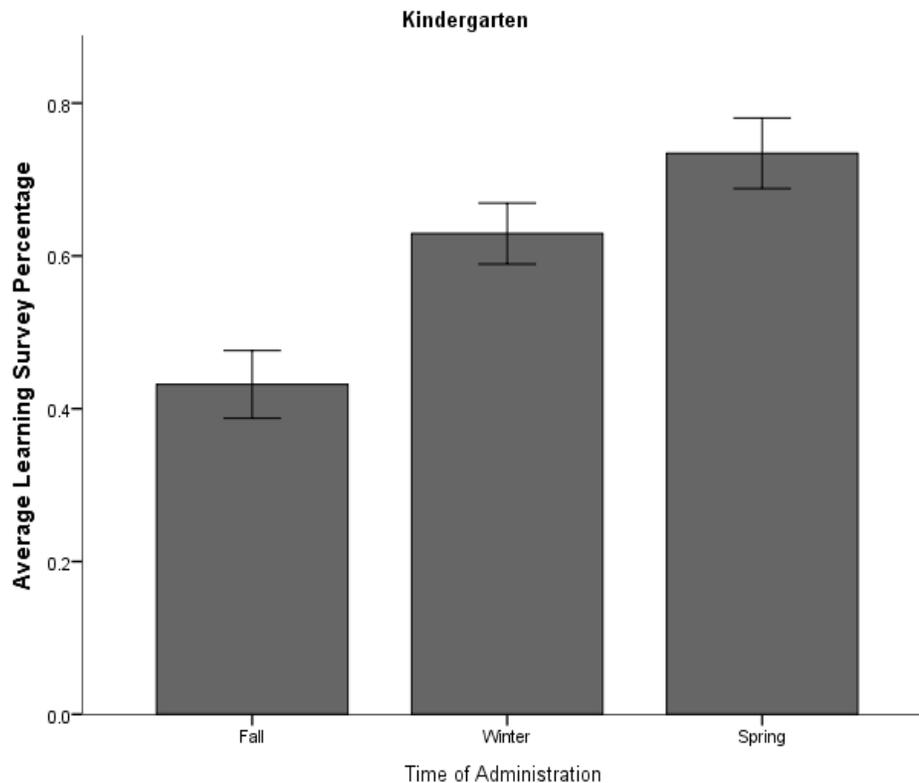


Figure 1. Kindergarten learning survey main effect.

Additionally, there was a significant interaction between time and early versus delayed treatment group $F(2, 172) = 6.18, p = .003, \eta = .26$ (see Figure 2). To investigate this interaction further, planned comparisons were performed revealing that the early group showed significant ($p < .000$) learning increases between fall ($M = 47.5, SD = 18.5$) and winter ($M = 63.4, SD = 19.1$) and maintained their learning from winter to spring ($M = 68.2, SD = 21.8$). The delayed treatment group also showed significant ($p < .000$) improvement between fall ($M = 38.9, SD = 22.4$) and winter ($M = 62.5, SD = 18.7$) before receiving treatment and then continued to improve their learning from winter to spring ($M = 78.7, SD = 20.6$).

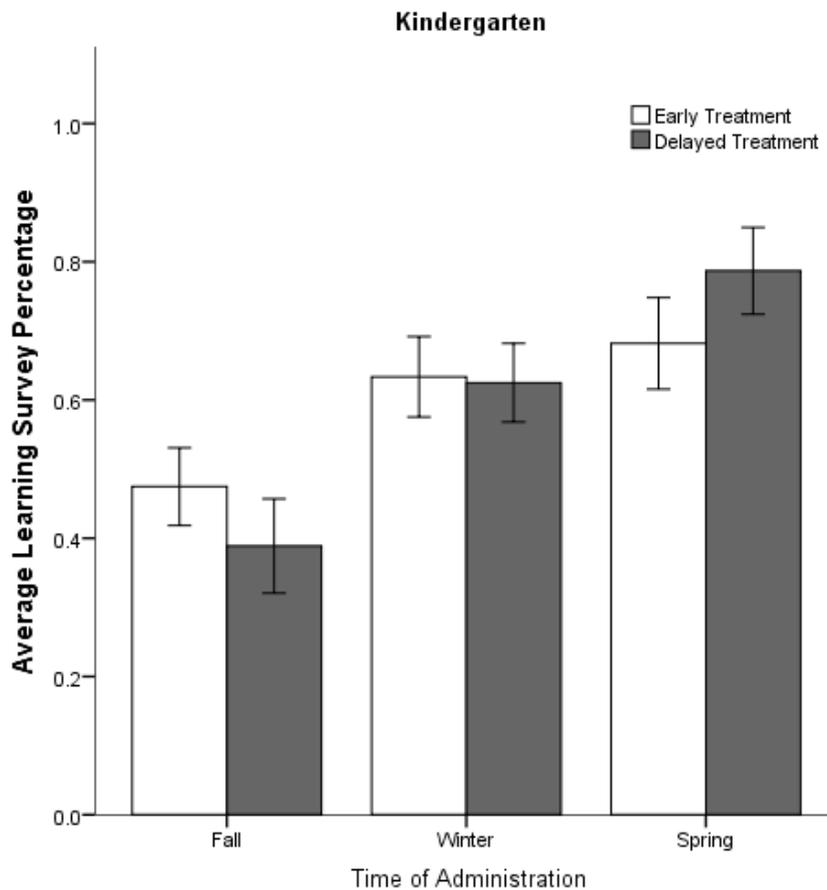


Figure 2. Kindergarten learning survey interaction.

In sum, both the Early and the Delayed Treatment Groups demonstrated increased knowledge of the Kelso's Choice material as predicted. However, the delayed treatment group unexpectedly demonstrated learning increases between fall and winter before receiving treatment.

To investigate first grade student learning after a second year of exposure to the Kelso's Choice program, the analyses performed with the kindergarten groups were repeated with similar predictions for success for the first graders. Results showed a main effect of time F

(2, 172) = 57.15, $p < .000$, $\eta = .63$ (see Figure 3) with learning increases from fall ($M = 55.1$, $SD = 18.4$) to winter ($M = 74.3$, $SD = 22.0$) and from winter to spring ($M = 79.3$, $SD = 18.1$).

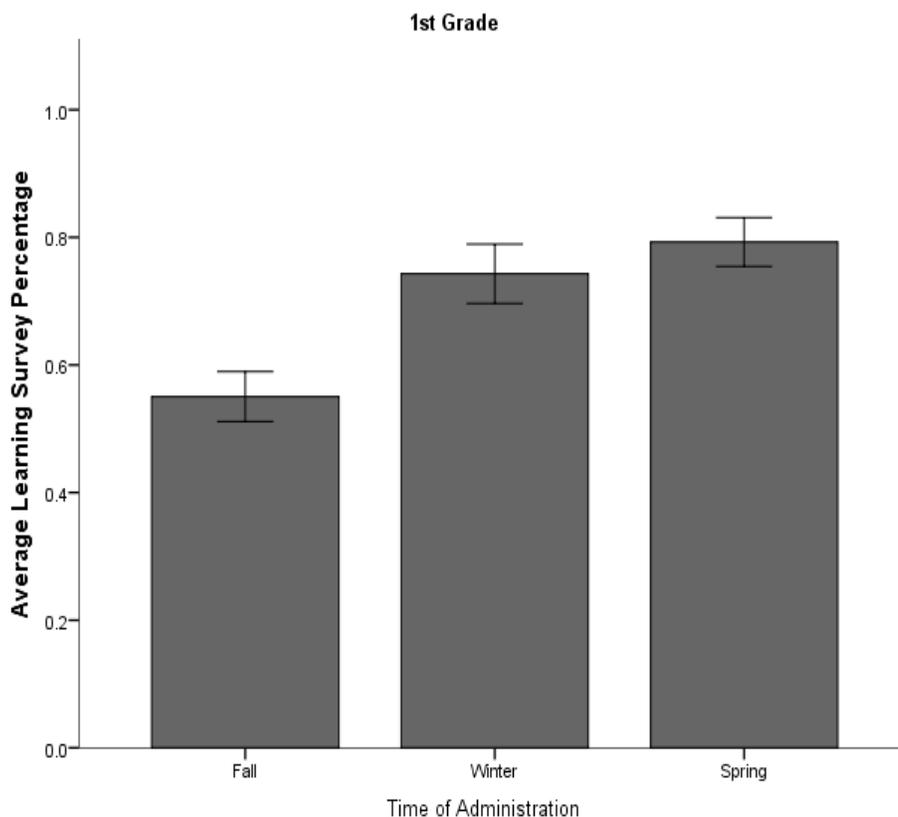


Figure 3. First-grade learning survey main effect.

Additionally, there was a significant interaction between time of administration and early versus delayed treatment group $F(2, 172) = 18.8$, $p < .000$, $\eta = .42$ (see Figure 4). To investigate this interaction further, planned comparisons were performed revealing that the early treatment group showed significant ($p < .000$) learning increases between fall ($M = 52.1$, $SD = 18.2$) and winter ($M = 85.3$, $SD = 18.1$) and maintained their learning through the spring ($M = 80.8$, $SD = 19.3$). Additionally, as predicted, the delayed treatment group showed significant ($p < .000$) improvement only between winter ($M = 62.8$, $SD = 19.8$) and spring ($M = 77.6$, $SD =$

16.7). In sum, these results suggest that the Kelso's Choice program was effective in increasing student knowledge of the program materials and conflict resolution strategies.

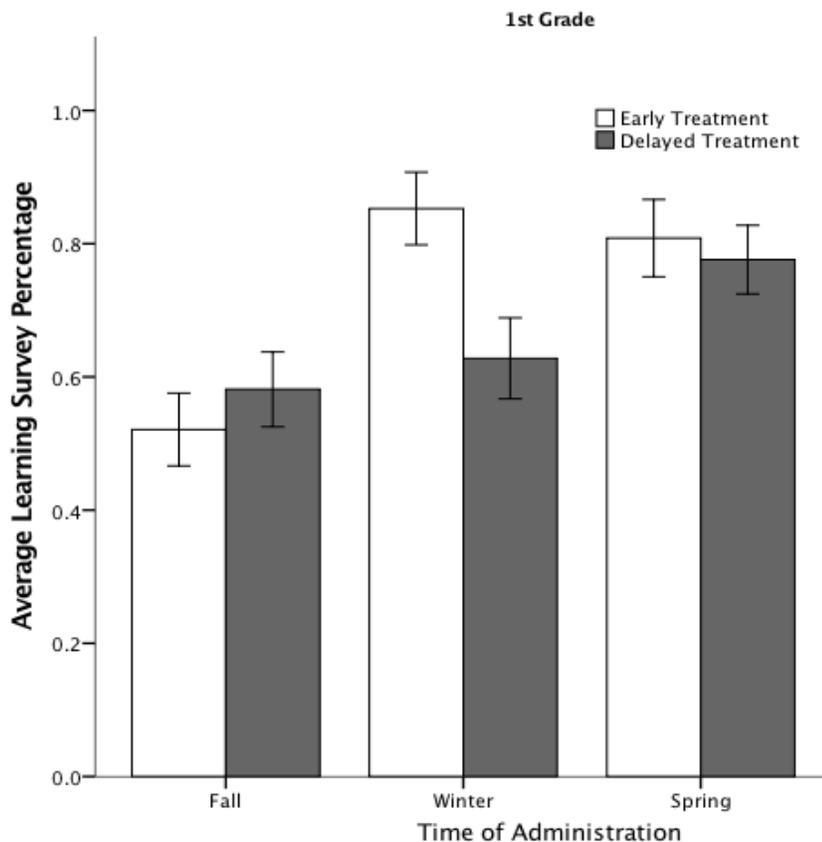


Figure 4. First-grade learning survey interaction.

Student Social Behavior

As part of the program, teachers were asked to fill out the SAEBRS for each student in their class in the fall, the winter and in the spring. Kelso's Choice is most reasonably expected to directly affect social behavior given that the curriculum is focused on teaching children interpersonal conflict management skills. Therefore, only the Social Behavior construct score was examined as part of this analysis.

To investigate the effects of the Kelso's Choice program on kindergarten students' social behavior after one year of treatment, a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted examining the effect of time of administration and early versus late treatment group participation. Success of the Kelso's Choice program would be shown by a main effect of time and an interaction between time and early versus late treatment group. If successful, the interaction would show that the early treatment group showed social behavior improvement (i.e. score increases) between fall and winter and maintained their improved scores through the spring. In contrast, the delayed treatment group would show social behavior improvement only between winter and spring.

Contrary to predictions, there was not a significant main effect of time of administration nor an interaction between time of administration and early versus delayed treatment group. Neither kindergarten group showed any significant changes in Social Behavior scores across fall, winter or spring. However, the early and delayed treatment groups did remain significantly different from each other in the fall and winter with the early treatment group receiving lower (i.e. worse) scores than the delayed treatment group. After receiving the intervention in the spring, there was a non-significant decrease in the delayed treatment group's Social Behavior scores, making the difference between the early versus delayed treatment groups statistically equivalent in the spring. In sum, kindergarteners showed no significant behavioral differences after being exposed to the Kelso's Choice curriculum for the first time.

To investigate the effects of the Kelso's Choice program on first-grade social behavior after a second year of treatment, the analyses performed with the kindergarten groups were repeated with similar predictions for success for the first graders. Results showed that there was a significant main effect of time $F(2, 172) = 8.59, p < .000, \eta = .3$ (see Figure 5) with social

behavior improvements from fall ($M = 11.90$, $SD = 4.72$) to winter ($M = 13.55$, $SD = 4.25$) and a non-significant change from winter to spring ($M = 13.31$, $SD = 5.27$).

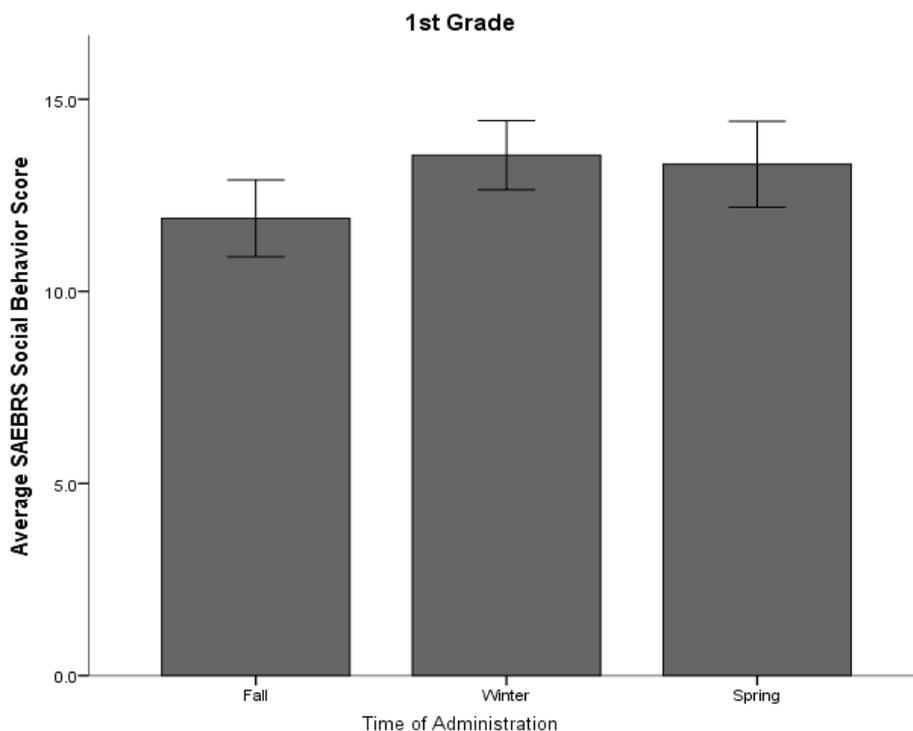


Figure 5. First-grade social behavior main effect.

Additionally, there was a significant interaction between time and early versus delayed treatment group $F(2, 172) = 4.23$, $p = .02$, $\eta = .22$ (see Figure 6). To investigate this interaction further, planned comparisons were performed revealing that, as predicted, the early group showed significant ($p < .000$) Social Behavior score increases (improvement) only between fall ($M = 11.53$, $SD = 4.96$) and winter ($M = 14.18$, $SD = 3.67$) and maintained their behavior scores through the spring ($M = 14.02$, $SD = 5.37$). In contrast, the Delayed Treatment Group showed no significant changes in social behavior, even after receiving treatment in the spring.

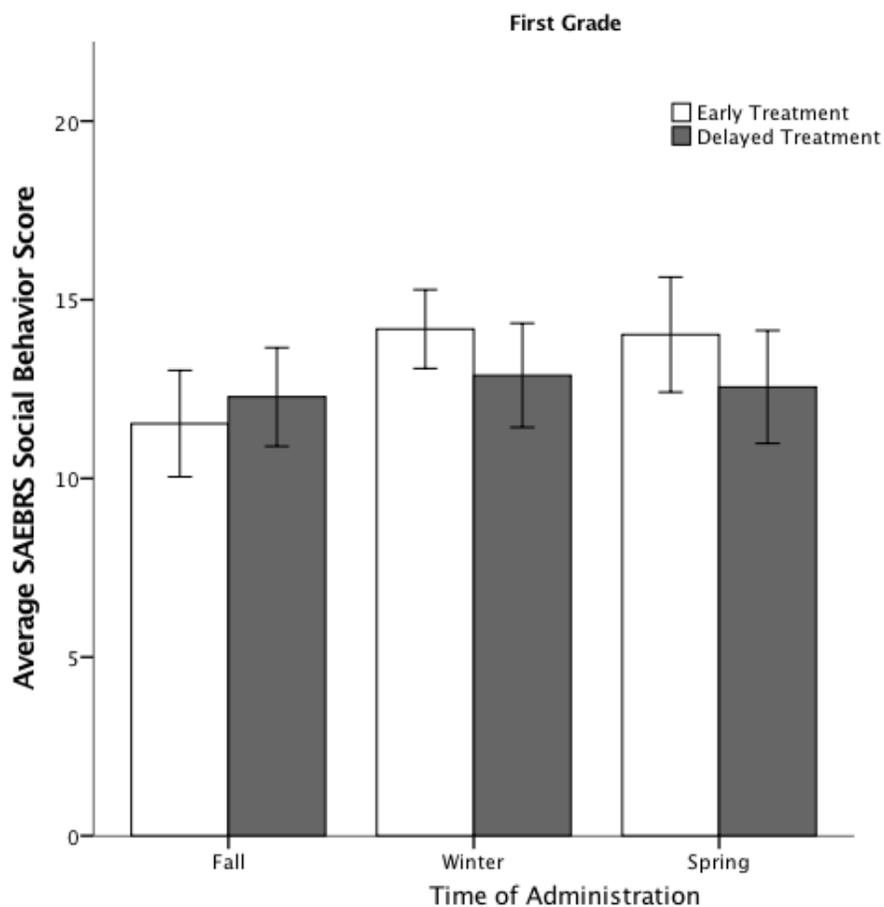


Figure 6. First-grade social behavior interaction.

In sum, while the expected result was found for the early treatment group, the delayed treatment group showed no difference after treatment. This may indicate that student behavior only improves after multiple years of receiving the Kelso's Choice program and is influenced by the identified level of students' social behavior risk.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the program Kelso's Choice on students with diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Two fundamental questions were addressed in this evaluation. First, did the students' knowledge of conflict management skills increase after receiving the program? And, second, did the students' behavior change after receiving the program?

In regards to learning increases, the Kelso's Choice program was effective for increasing knowledge for both kindergarten and first grade students. Students were able to learn and retain knowledge of conflict management skills and program content whether receiving the program for the first time or for the second time. This indicates that, whether or not students apply the materials, they have at least gained knowledge of appropriate conflict management skills after receiving the Kelso's Choice program.

In regards to behavioral changes, findings were more complex. For kindergarteners receiving the program for the first time, no behavioral changes were observed. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which indicates that SEL curriculum does not tend to result in behavioral changes after only one year of treatment.

In contrast, for first-graders receiving the program for the second time, classrooms identified by their teachers as needing the curriculum most demonstrated behavioral improvements after receiving the Kelso's Choice program in the fall and maintained their

improvements from winter into the spring. However, for classrooms not identified as behaviorally at-risk on average by their teachers, the Kelso's Choice program appeared to have no effect. These findings for the first-grade group are interesting and offer preliminary evidence that Kelso's Choice is effective if implemented over multiple years when teacher ratings of student behavior indicate a need for intervention. Given these results, future studies should further investigate the implementation of Kelso's Choice as a Tier 1 universal prevention program for students receiving it for the first time and subsequently, in following years, as a Tier 2 intervention, with more in-depth reviews of the program for students who have been identified as at risk.

Of course, there may also be alternative explanations for the results regarding first-grade behavior. Since behavior was measured by teacher ratings, it is possible that the implementation of Kelso's Choice influenced changes in teacher perception of students within the classroom rather than student behavioral changes. Additionally, adding Kelso's Choice curriculum into the classroom, a program designed to help students manage their own interpersonal conflicts, may have improved overall classroom management by adding additional strategies for use by the teacher. Future research should explore these possible alternative explanations.

As with any research, there are limitations to this study. First, Kelso's Choice did not offer a method of evaluation of student learning. Therefore, a student learning survey was created, but has not yet been validated nor has the reliability of the measure been determined. Second, using teacher rating scales as a measure of behavior is subject to some potential raters' biases. However, the school did not use a systematic office discipline referral procedure and resources were not available for lengthy and systematic observations. Therefore, adding an

additional measure of behavior was not a viable option for this study. Finally, due to the applied nature of this study and the ethical obligation to administer treatment to students at risk first, a quasi-experimental design was utilized. Using randomized groups in a true experimental design would offer a greater chance of controlling for confounding variables in future research.

There were also limits to program implementation. First, the implementation of the program was relatively short in length: six lessons that were about 30 minutes each, for a total of three hours of intervention. Additionally, lessons were implemented by a school practitioner outside of the classroom rather than by the classroom teacher. The literature suggests that increasing the length of time of the intervention, embedding it into other curricula and instruction within the classroom and implementation by teachers would likely improve student outcomes (CASEL, 2003; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2010). Lastly, Kelso's Choice was only implemented within kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. Had the program been implemented school wide with training of all staff to reinforce students for appropriate behaviors, student behavior outcomes might have shown greater improvements (Horner, 2009; OSEP, 2010; Zins & Elias, 2007).

Recommendations

Future research designs should include randomized groups, when possible, to increase the probability of controlling for confounding variables. Future studies might also consider controlling for various co-variables that may influence behavioral outcomes, such as teacher classroom management skills before and after intervention. Additionally, to date, this may be the only study that has conducted a formal evaluation of learning outcomes of Kelso's Choice material by directly measuring student knowledge of the program materials. Future research may

refine these evaluation instruments and further validate current findings. Subsequent studies may also attempt to add additional measures of student behavior beyond teacher rating scales, such as office discipline referral data or brief playground observations conducted by trained observers.

In regards to implementation procedures, it would be interesting to examine the effects of this program on behavior when the intervention period is extended, is conducted by classroom teachers and is implemented as part of a multi-tiered positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) system. In this study, kindergarteners demonstrated learning even before receiving treatment due to other students talking about what they had learned on the playground. Therefore, given these results and the literature, it would be expected that school wide implementation of Kelso's Choice would have greater effects on learning and behavior (CASEL, 2003; CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011, Zins & Elias, 2007).

In conclusion, the benefits of SEL programs in schools include increased knowledge of positive social and emotional skills that, when applied, can help students be more successful socially, academically and emotionally. This study and previous literature has demonstrated that students are learning the social and emotional skills being taught within the classroom. In the future, educational research should continue to seek to identify program features and implementation practices that increase the likelihood that students will apply the skills being taught in order to create positive behavioral changes and improve school climates.

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