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## The Effect of the Second Step Curriculum on the Social-Emotional Development of Second Grade Students

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The Effect of the Second Step Curriculum on the  
Social-Emotional Development of Second Grade Students

A project Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By  
Amy Kremer

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### **Abstract**

Social-emotional learning directly effects students' academic and behavioral success in the educational and home setting. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Casel, 2019). The purpose of this study was to determine the outcome the Second Step curriculum had on the social-emotional well-being of second grade students and to investigate the relationship between SEL and lifelong learning. This study was designed to assess students through the use of formative and summative assessment and observation using the Student Knowledge Assessment and brain builder games, as well as, a frequency and intensity data collection tool. There is substantial evidence linking the success of an SEL curriculum to student academic and behavioral outcomes and this research is an indication of the importance of a strong SEL program in the educational setting.

### **Dedication**

I dedicate my research work to my family and friends who have supported me through this process, I could not have focused my time and energy to my work without your support. A special thank you goes to my husband, Dustin, who encouraged me to keep pushing forward and who spent many hours solely taking care of our daughter while I was completing this important work. I also dedicate my research work to my co-workers at the elementary school, Laure and Lydia, for all they have helped me with. This process has been lengthy and at times stressful and these people have helped me to remember the reason I started and to propel me forward. I am very fortunate to have wonderful, loyal friends and family that have cheered me on from day one, thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to determine the effects the Second Step curriculum has on the social-emotional development of second grade students. Social-emotional learning has a direct effect on academic achievement and behavior of primary aged children. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Casel, 2019). The Second Step Curriculum is being implemented in school districts around the world as studies are being done to measure the social emotional effect this application has on primary aged students as it relates to learning and behavior. This research summarizes information regarding a social-emotional learning program and its effects on student achievement in educational settings.

As a primary general education teacher, I have seen the negative impact that children's behavior has on their academic success. In contrast, I have seen and felt the positive effects that a socially and emotionally competent student has on their own educational successes. I am concerned that educators today do not realize the positive academic and behavioral effects that a social and emotional learning program can have on their students. I believe that by implementing the Second Step curriculum in my classroom, I can research and collect data to prove that the social-emotional well-being of students is extremely important to the improvement of students' educational and home lives.

“Good social-emotional competence is related to many positive outcomes of development, including prolonged attention span, better memory, and self-regulation, which are all crucial for academic success” (Wong, Li-Tsang, & Siu, 2015, p. 57). Students who have strong social-emotional skills are better able to manage their emotions and stress, have improved classroom and social behavior, more positive attitudes about themselves, peers, and school, and are more self-aware. A social-emotional program implemented in a classroom will have the ability to promote academic success, assist in building meaningful relationships and empathy skills, and can also teach responsible decision making. In this study, I sought to learn more about the impact of social-emotional development on second grade students. Comparing studies will lend a profound insight into the importance of social-emotional learning in education. Learning how the Second Step Curriculum effects social-emotional development of second grade students helped me achieve a deeper understanding of the importance of social-emotional skills in my classroom and the teaching profession overall.

### **Brief Literature Review**

There have been many studies conducted about student’s social-emotional development and the importance of these skills being taught in the educational setting. I believe that SEL programs should be infused into teacher education curriculums because students who are socially and emotionally competent will be lifelong learners due to the skills they have been taught in primary grades. According to Wong, Li-Tsang, and Siu (2015), “To adapt well in modern societies, it is important to learn to become compassionate and responsible individuals who are able to manage emotions effectively, to be resilient, to communicate effectively, and to build friendships with others” (p. 57). The skillset that is acquired after an SEL intervention not only applies to student’s academic success but to their overall social and emotional state.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of my research was to determine the effect SEL, taught through the Second Step curriculum, had on the social-emotional development of second grade students. I implemented the Second Step curriculum while collecting data on the progression of the social-emotional skill development in a sample of the second-grade students in my classroom. Students were instructed through a series of whole group, small group, games, and role-playing activities where they were engaged and interacted with one another and myself. I collected data before the intervention began with a pretest, during the lessons via Brain Builder games, and after the lessons concluded to measure the progress that students made while participating in the activities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

I conducted this study to research the impacts that social emotional learning had on student's achievement both academically and behaviorally. This area of education is becoming increasingly more important because I am seeing the trend rise where student behavior is impeding their learning and academic success. Social-emotional learning is essential to the skill development and well-being of individuals of all ages and even more crucial for young children to gain a strong foundation of these skills to assist them in all areas of their lives. This research is significant for me because I have witnessed students in the past who have struggled socially and emotionally in school and this had a negative impact on their academic as well as social outcomes. As a teacher of a primary grade, I feel that I can have a positive impact on the social-emotional well-being of students that I serve by giving them the tools and strategies they can use throughout their lives. By conducting this research, I have evidence of the significance that social

emotional learning has for students and hopefully provide insight to other educators as to the importance of this aspect of a child's learning.

### **Research Question(s)**

The interest I hold for the development of social-emotional skills for students in second grade led me to develop the following research question.

1. What is the impact the Second Step curriculum has on social-emotional development of second grade students?

**Definition of Variables.** The following are the variables of study:

The independent variable that I implemented is the Second Step curriculum which is provided through my school district. The dependent variable of this study is the social-emotional development that occurs through the use of this curriculum. For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

- **Second Step Curriculum:** a program rooted in social-emotional learning (SEL) that helps transform schools into supportive, successful learning environments uniquely equipped to encourage children to thrive (Secondstep.org, 2019)
- **Social-Emotional Learning:** the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Casel, 2019)
- **Social-Emotional Development:** includes the child's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others (Cohen and others, 2005)

- Scaffolding: a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process. Teachers provide successive levels of temporary support that help students reach higher levels of comprehension and skill acquisition and the supportive strategies are incrementally removed when they are no longer needed, and the teacher gradually shifts more responsibility over the learning process to the student (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015)
- Differentiation: tailoring instruction to meet individual needs (Tomlinson, 2000)
- Whole Child: ensures that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement and provides for long-term student success (ASCD, 2019)

### **Significance of the Study**

The participants in this research study benefited from the lessons and activities included in the Second Step curriculum by gaining the knowledge, skills, and strategies that accompany a socially emotionally competent individual. Students who were randomly selected to participate in this study had the opportunity to practice and incorporate their new learning into scenarios throughout the school day. This research is significant for me as a practitioner because it shows the importance of social-emotional learning in the classroom setting. I am very passionate about educating the whole child and social-emotional development is a vital piece in the maturation of children. I believe through this research, teachers will come to the realization that social-emotional learning is as important as academics in the classroom. If students are lacking these skills, learning will be more challenging. Studies establish that addressing the social and emotional functioning of students not only improves students' achievement, but also improves

the learning environment and students' experiences in school (Martinez, 2016). Students need to feel welcome, safe, and significant in order for learning to occur and a rigorous SEL program can provide strategies to help students achieve.

## **Research Ethics**

**Permission and IRB Approval.** In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study will be sought from the school district where the research project will take place (See Appendix E).

**Informed Consent.** Protection of human subjects participating in research is assured. Participant minors were informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix G) that the researcher read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants are aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's Master's Degree Program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both, verbally and in writing.

**Limitations.** While conducting educational research, researchers occasionally face limitations. A limitation that arose while I conducted my study was that of data-collector bias. I administered the assessments and collected the data as well as provided the intervention and of

course I was hopeful the intervention was successful. Also, instrumentation effects lead to changes in the conditions of the data collection. During the intervention data collection phase, I collected as much data as possible and the instrumentation effect limitation is the need for an extensive number of data collection periods as seen by the data collector. I also believe that the sample size of my study was a limitation because as the classroom teacher I attempted to provide rigorous and intense instruction to each child in my classroom, not just the select sample group.

### **Conclusions**

Chapter one introduced the purpose and significance of this study, the statement of the problem, a brief introduction to the literature review as well as the guiding research questions that helped focus the data collection. Chapter two will focus on research that has been done in regard to the focus of this study. I provided a synthesis of articles about the themes of the research and the theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Social-emotional learning in schools is as important as academic instruction. SEL has been shown to improve student achievement, improve student-teacher interactions, and teachers are able to provide higher quality instruction because students are well-equipped with skills and strategies to face and correctly manage many scenarios. This study focuses on the impact that the Second Step curriculum has on the social emotional development of second grade students.

#### Body of the Review

**Context.** Social-emotional competency has proven to impact a person throughout their lives in numerous ways. There is a positive correlation between social-emotional learning (SEL) and lifelong learning. As cited in Akcaalan's research (2016), Pullman defines lifelong learning as a cycle which starts early ages and continues through adulthood and a process including all the stages of formal and distance education regardless of any kind of certification (2002). This study was done to investigate the relationship between lifelong learning and social-emotional learning with the help of statistical methods in undergraduate university students. Subdomain levels of social and emotional learning including task description, peer relationships, and self-regulation were used to determine the directions of the correlations.

Akcaalan used convenience sampling to gather 590 undergraduate students (200 males and 390 females) from Sakarya University Education Faculty as members in his study. The participant's age range was from 18 to 36 years old and the number of years in undergraduate programs ranged from 1 to 4 years. The Lifelong Learning Scale, which is a 16-item measure,

was used to determine the current level of participant's lifelong learning. The Social and Emotional Learning Scale was used to determine the participant's level of social-emotional learning. The research demonstrated a significant positive relationship between lifelong learning level and sub dimensions of SEL such as task description, peer relationship and self-regulation.

This research evaluated the effect of SEL programs on primary aged students who had difficulty in social and emotional management. According to Wong, Li-Tsang, and Siu (2015), "To adapt well in modern societies, it is important to learn to become compassionate and responsible individuals who are able to manage emotions effectively, to be resilient, to communicate effectively, and to build friendship with others" (p. 57). The SEL program being implemented with participants in this research study was based on Strong Kids in the United States which incorporates a range of methods to promote the characteristics that Wong, Li-Tsang, and Siu suggest are important in modern societies. This study takes place in Hong Kong where 27 males were selected from churches and primary school districts with lower incomes using convenience sampling. The students were in grades one through three and had difficulties in social-emotional management. Fourteen males were randomly assigned to the intervention group where the remaining students were assigned to the control group. Among these 27 males, four were diagnosed with a learning disability and three were diagnosed with ADHD. Parents of the participants were also asked a series of 55 items about their child's social skills and problem behaviors.

The outcome measure that was used during this research study was the elementary version of the Social Skills Rating System from Gresham and Elliott produced in 1990. The Social Skills Rating System is a norm-referenced, standardized instrument designed to evaluate the social skills and problem behaviors of students from Grade K to Grade 12 (Wong, Li-Tsang,

& Siu, 2015). This tool compares and classifies the individual's level of social skills and behavior in comparison with the standardized sample using terms such as "fewer", "average", or "more". Of the 27 participants, 62.96% of the participants were found to have fewer social skills and more problem behaviors while the remaining participants showed the average level of skills and behaviors. The students in the intervention group had some improvement but it was less than significant. The control group did not show changes in the second assessment they were given. As a trend, there were reduced problem behaviors and improved social skills, but they were not significant findings.

A randomized efficacy trial was conducted in 7 preschools and 6 Head Start programs over a four-year period. The trial investigated the effects of the Second Step Early Learning program on the end of preschool executive functioning and social-emotional skills in low-income students. 770 total children, three to four and half years of age, were assessed for social-emotional and executive functioning outcomes before entering kindergarten. The sample was evenly divided by sex but was quite diverse. These participants were spread between sixty-seven classrooms on thirteen different sites, each assigned cohort one or two.

Teachers were asked to complete weekly curriculum reports on how much of the curriculum they taught and to what extent they followed it. Upshur, Wenz-Gross, Rhoads, Heyman, Yoo, and Sawosik (2018) stated, "The second assessment, the Social/Emotional & Executive Functioning Activities Scale (SEEF), was a study-developed observational scale...designed to detect the rates of types of EF and SE activities observed in a 2-hour visit" (p. 150). 770 four-year-old children were assessed for EF and SE skills in the fall and spring of their pre-kindergarten year. Each of the outcomes was analyzed by three-level hierarchical linear

models. The effect size of 0.15 was found for the executive functioning assessment where there was a nonsignificant effect size for social-emotional skills.

According to Martinez (2016), “This study is focused on identifying the conditions that support teachers’ development and implementation of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and practices”(p. 6). The participants of this study were the teaching staff at a high achieving charter school in a disadvantaged urban community in California. There were 16 classroom teachers and 4 specialists participating with the majority (90%) being female. The charter school had 400 students in Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade and was very diverse and set in a high-crime community.

The staff used a practitioner-driven method of Action Research to engage in an inductive process of reflection and action. They worked to address the social and emotional needs of students being served and then create a plan of implementation. Qualitative content analysis was completed throughout the research process due to the interactive progression of Action Research. The findings of this study showed the evidence that teaching SEL had a positive influence on teacher’s pedagogical thinking about SEL and on the belief that educating the whole child is best practice.

Waajid, Garner, and Owen (2013) used qualitative methods to research if infusing social-emotional learning into undergraduate curriculum and instruction courses would impact prospective teacher’s views on the importance of SEL in the classroom. The participants in this study were enrolled in a curriculum and instruction course titled ‘*Contemporary Approach to Curriculum Development*’ at mid-Atlantic universities. There were 15 participants who were all African American, between the ages of 20 and 24 with twelve being female and three of the male gender.

A qualitative case study format was used to collect data and examine students' experiences in their teacher preparation course that was infused with social-emotional literacy. Teams were selected and comprised of 5 members: one male and four females within the course. At the course end, students were to write a reflection paper discussing the impact the course had on their teaching views, what they learned, and what they believed the influence SEL has on student learning. The reflections were analyzed, and researchers extracted quotes related to the research questions. The researchers agreed upon three themes that represented the data overall. They found that there was a connection between social-emotional competence and academic learning, the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogy, and the desire for continued learning related to social-emotional constructs. Overall, these findings show that infusing SEL into undergraduate curriculum helps to facilitate preservice teacher's understandings of the importance of student's social-emotional learning in the classroom.

**Second Step Curriculum.** The role of the Second Step Early Learning (SSEL) Curriculum on kindergarten readiness was the subject of interest for Melodie Wenz-Gross, Yeonsoo Yoo, Carole C. Upshur, and Anthony J. Gambino. Wenz-Gross et. al stated, "Efforts to improve the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers has led to the development of classroom interventions and curricula to increase executive functioning (EF) and social-emotional skills (SE), thought to be foundational for learning (2018). In this study, 972 children within 13 low-income Head Start or community preschools were individually tested at the beginning and end of preschool and followed into kindergarten. However, SSEL significantly increased EF, and as expected by SSEL's theory of change, growth in EF predicted gains in both pre-academics (particularly in pre-math), and on-task behavior in preschool (Wenz-

Gross, 2018). The growth in EF skills had effects on kindergarten readiness and the Second Step Early Learning curriculum is to thank for that.

The Second Step curriculum has many programs to offer educators to implement in their schools and districts. Violence prevention is an important subject in intermediate grades and a study was done on acceptability and students' outcomes of a violence prevention curriculum. Edwards, Hunt, Meyers, Grogg, and Jarrett state, "Significant positive changes were also found for Behavior Assessment System for Children items reflecting student use of problem solving as well as report card items indicating respectful and cooperative behavior (2005). The students were interviewed at the conclusion of the program and they indicated that the positive changes they witnessed were directly connected to the components of the violence prevention curriculum. As stated in Edwards et. al, Bogdan, Dye, Leitner, & Meersman (1996) say that Second Step systematically and purposefully teaches skills that are needed to prevent children from being placed at risk for social, emotional and learning problems. When students are presented with a problem, they can recall the SEL skills they were taught in order to address the situation in an empathetic and calm manner.

A study was conducted about the two-year impact of a universal social-emotional learning curriculum, Second Step. Low, Smolkowski, Cook, and Desfosses (2019) states, "The study examined the impact of a commonly adopted elementary universal social-emotional learning program, Second Step, on student social-emotional and academic outcomes following 2 years of implementation" (p.1). This study included 9,000 early elementary students whose developmental trends of social-emotional skills were examined across two years is one of the largest school-based SEL evaluations to date. Students with more conduct problems such as inattention and peer issues and those with skills for learning deficits improved much more during

the implementation of the Second Step curriculum than did those students who perform higher. The outcomes were evaluated over multiple years so that students had more time to practice and be reinforced for their appropriate behavior and use of social skills. The improvements in social-emotional skills lead to gains over time in academic success.

Many students starting school do not have the social and emotional skills that facilitate learning and enable them to maintain engagement in the learning process. This issue has prompted schools to adopt an SEL curriculum to teach students the social-emotional skills needed in order to be successful in an educational setting. Participants in this study were 7,300 students kindergarten through second grade across six school districts. The study showed significant improvements in social-emotional competence and behavior for children who started the school year with skill deficits. As noted in Low et. al., Gresham, 1986; Merrell & Gueldner, 2012, “Social-emotional skills combine to enable social-emotional competence, which represents an overall evaluation of a child’s ability to meet the social and emotional demands from the environment” (p. 463). The Second Step curriculum provides students with the skills that strengthen their ability to learn, manage emotions, have empathy, and solve problems.

The study conducted by Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, and Hirschstein examined the effects of the Second Step curriculum and addressed the relations between social cognitions and prosocial and antisocial behavior. The students who received the intervention were less aggressive and more cooperative, preferred prosocial goals, and required less adult intervention than those students in the control group. Teachers spend a considerable amount of time regulating disputes among students which are often aggressive, oppositional behaviors that are likely to be associated with later school problems. Prosocial behavior, like that taught in Second Step, is linked to higher test scores, grades, academic and behavioral success, and social inclusiveness.

According to Grossman, Neckerman, and Koepsell (1997), “The Second Step violence prevention curriculum appears to lead to a moderate observed decrease in physically aggressive behavior and an increase in neutral and prosocial behavior in school” (p. 1,611). The Second Step curriculum uses 30 lessons to teach social and emotional skills related to anger management, impulse control, and empathy in its Violence Prevention Curriculum. These lessons are explicitly taught to students incorporating games, stories, role play, music, and other activities that engage different types of learners in a classroom. Parents and teachers reported that aggressive behavior decreased, and prosocial behavior increase changes were measured 2 weeks and 6 months after the intervention took place. Grossman et. al. reported, “However, the behavior observations did reveal an overall decrease 2 weeks after the curriculum in physical aggression ( $P=.03$ ) and an increase in neutral/prosocial behavior ( $P=.04$ ) in the intervention group compared with the control group. Most effects persisted 6 months later” (1997, p. 1,609). This study shows that the SEL curriculum that was implemented does have positive outcomes for students.

A theme of the Second Step curriculum, as stated in the article written by Frey, Hirschstein, and Guzzo (2000), “Second Step, a primary prevention program designed to deter aggression and promote social competence of children from preschool through Grade 9” (p. 102). Lesson features, teacher training, and classroom instruction that promote the learning and use of specific behavioral skills are at the center of the organization of the curriculum focused on social-emotional competency. If a child shows signs of aggression, it could predict later high-risk behaviors. Second Step instructs children in acquiring and practicing skills and tools related to feeling and showing empathy, social problem solving, and anger management that they can use in social situations.

A controlled research study was conducted to assess the effects of the Impulse Control and Problem-Solving unit of the Second Step curriculum on third and fourth grade students. The study was conducted using a repeated measures design to assess the level of change in knowledge of social-emotional skills. The results state that change was evident from pre- to post-test for these students. Third grade students receiving the intervention demonstrated significantly more knowledge growth than third grade control students. Notably, fourth grade students receiving the intervention demonstrated a similar level of knowledge growth as the fourth-grade control students (Hart, Dowdy, Eklund, Renshaw, & Jimerson, 2014). Young students have difficulties controlling their impulses and solving problems independently so I believe this unit would be incredibly beneficial to this age group of students.

**Social-Emotional Learning.** In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, children need more than just traditional academic skills to thrive. Many people believe that children need social-emotional skills to complement the challenges of academic learning, reduce the risk of negative behaviors, prepare them for the future workplace, and to enhance their well-being. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) advanced a theoretical model often referred to as the CASEL five which includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills. The CASEL model has influenced a multitude of school-based intervention programs in the United States and an entire national curriculum for Australia. The Social Emotional Learning Screening Assessment (SELA) is a new time-efficient, sensitive, and reliable measure that identifies students at-risk socially and academically. This new SELA model is based on the CASEL five but is undergoing research to extend these findings to educators in US schools.

The need for SEL is becoming more evident to parents, teachers, health care practitioners and community members alike although the term has been around for many years. Jones and Doolittle (2017) stated within Swartz's article that research has demonstrated that SEL is key to important life outcomes, such as school and career success, because it fosters the ability of children to integrate thinking about their emotions and behaviors in ways that lead to positive academic and social outcomes (2017). Swartz also discusses the CASEL five competencies related to SEL skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Research has indicated that these social-emotional skills are extremely meaningful and important to implement in schools and other settings to help children have improved academic and life outcomes.

Social-emotional learning is defined similarly in many areas of the world and has risen as a topic of interest in many countries, for example, Northern Ireland (NI). Sheard, Ross, and Cheung authored an article titled Educational Effectiveness of an Intervention Programme for Social-Emotional Learning where they conducted a three-year longitudinal study of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) curriculum which can be categorized under SEL. The article reports how the analysis of data obtained produced complementary and contrasting results of the effectiveness of a relatively new SEL intervention program, PATHS. Sheard et. al. states, "The PATHS (NI) curriculum consists of teacher-delivered age-appropriate lessons for all age groups in school, dealing with recognizing emotions, expressing feelings, coping with negative feelings such as anger, and reacting to social problem-solving situations" (2012, p. 265). The focus of the study was to identify how PATHS impacts children's pro-social behavior, social and emotional development, and mutual respect and understanding. Swartz reports, "Analysis of teachers' responses to interview questions around the impact of the

programme on pupils' social-emotional development and behavior showed very positive reported effects after a relatively short period of implementation" (2012, p. 271). Teachers also reported increased positive behavior, self-esteem, awareness of feelings, management of frustration and ability to calm down, showing mutual respect and understanding, increased complimenting, and increased competence in social problem solving. Parents also noticed an increase in prosocial behavior in many areas of their children's lives. SEL implementation in the educational setting is an important addition to the traditional academic curriculum but there is always a need for further development of resources and strategies.

Classroom climate and emotional support are other factors that increase the likelihood of having socially and emotionally competent young people in the education setting. McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, and McClowry discussed using causal methods to explore classroom-level mechanisms and their effect on the social-emotional learning and academic achievement of students in schools. McCormick et. al supposed, "Understanding more about mechanisms of SEL programs would entail identifying and testing how interventions improve proximal outcomes (or mediators), which in turn link to more distal outcomes like academic achievement" (2015). Understanding more about what an SEL intervention program entails assists educators in supporting students to become more socially and emotionally competent with resources for support.

Students have an awareness of their own social-emotional skills and students in intermediate and middle school have a higher level of SEL skills awareness than high school students. The article written by Nickerson, Fredrick, Allen, and Jenkins studies the social-emotional learning practices in schools and the effects on perceptions of bullying victimization. Students who felt they had not been a victim of bullying had negative relation between student

self-reported SEL skills and perceptions of bullying at their school. Students who reported experiencing high levels of victimization self-reported their SEL skills related positively to perceptions of bullying at school. School perceptions are critical to school climate, if a student has a positive perception of their school, their social-emotional well-being will be higher and more positive. SEL instruction and the use of praise and rewards are related to students' positive perceptions of school and an overall optimistic school climate.

A positive classroom climate and emotionally supportive teachers helps to decrease aggressive behavior throughout the school year. Implementing an SEL curriculum has shown to have a positive relationship with students' emotional well-being and regression of aggressive behaviors. When a classroom is an emotionally supportive learning environment, students feel safe, able to trust adults, valued, included, and important. Fostering a healthy student-teacher relationship is at the basis for a high-quality learning environment where students' needs are met and they can improve their social-emotional state and be fully engaged in the SEL and academic curriculum. Portnow, Downer, and Brown (2018) indicate that results of multiple regression analyses indicated that across teacher-reported measures of aggressive behavior, more classroom emotional support over the course of the school year predicted less aggressive behavior in spring, particularly for children whose hostile attribution bias decreased over the course of the year. Students learn strategies and skills to help them cope with aggressive or negative feelings within an SEL curriculum. They get to see these skills modeled and implemented within the lessons and are given many opportunities to practice in and out of the educational setting.

A strong social-emotional learning curriculum benefits students, teachers, parents, the school climate, and community stakeholders by assisting students or future community members in acquiring the skills necessary to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, be

empathetic, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible choices.

Assessments within the school can provide data to improve students' SEL and implementation of the curriculum as well as improve teacher effectiveness. This data can also provide a guiding path for improving learning environments and instructional practices. According to Stillman, Stillman, Martinez, Freedman, and Leet (2018), "Teachers used data to help both youth and adults increase self-awareness, make better choices, and create a more supportive learning community." By strengthening the SEL program in the school, all members can benefit because the school climate improves when children and adults alike are emotionally healthy.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has derived a theoretical model of five well-accepted components of SEL but there are few assessments that measure these components. The Social Emotional Learning Screening Assessment is a new universal measure that aligns well with the CASEL model. The results indicated the teacher-completed SELA is well aligned with the CASEL model and offers educators a time-efficient, sensitive, and reliable measure that effectively identifies students at-risk socially and academically (Elliot, Davies, Frey, Gresham, & Cooper, 2018). SELA was found to be a user-friendly and reliable teacher measure of children's social-emotional learning and was found to accurately discriminate students who were at-risk for social and academic difficulties from students who were not at-risk.

Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, and Pachan (2008) summarized the findings from three large-scale reviews of research on the impact of SEL programs on elementary and middle school students. The studies showed that the SEL programs generated multiple benefits and were effective in both school and after-school settings and for students with and without behavioral and emotional issues. Payton et. al. also states, "SEL

programs improved students' social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, and academic performance; they also reduced students' conduct problems and emotional distress" (2008, p. 3). I believe that implementation of a strong SEL program from a supportive teacher who is also working to create an emotionally healthy learning environment is as important as the academic content being taught. The review of these studies also showed the improvement of students' academic scores from 11 to 17 percentile points which shows that an SEL program also has educational benefits. I agree with Payton et. al. in saying, "Given these positive findings, we recommend that federal, state, and local policies and practices encourage the broad implementation of well-designed, evidence-based SEL programs during and after school" (2008, p.3).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study focused on improving student's social-emotional health and well-being through the use of the Second Step curriculum. One theory that I have is that students' social-emotional competence will improve, and they can better understand, manage, and express emotions and empathy, develop positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social-emotional learning can be defined as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Casel, 2019). Through implementation students gained strategies and techniques to boost their confidence, set and achieve positive and realistic goals, collaborate with peers, and be able to understand and navigate their surroundings more effectively. The variable of social-emotional development of second graders was measured by the instruments I chose such as the Student Knowledge Assessment, Brain Builder Observational Forms and the Frequency and Intensity Data Collector.

Other researchers have studied the correlation between a social-emotional learning program and the outcome of student achievement both socially and academically and their findings are conclusive with my theory of a positive outcome for students, teachers, and classroom climate. McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, and McClowry state, "Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have demonstrated positive effects on children's social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, as well as classroom climate" (2015, p. 1).

### **Research Question(s)**

My passion for educating the whole child has led me to the interest in the social emotional aspect of education. I formulated a research question to guide my data collection during this research study. My research question;

1. What is the impact the Second Step curriculum has on social-emotional development of second grade students?

### **Conclusions**

There has been a multitude of studies conducted on social-emotional learning in the educational setting and this chapter aimed at synthesizing that information. I have provided a review of articles that are related to the variables in my research question. The third chapter discusses the methods used during the research study such as research design, who will participate in the research, the setting in which the research will take place, and the data collection instruments and analysis of the findings.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This research study is about determining the effects the Second Step curriculum has on the social-emotional development of second grade students. Social-emotional learning has been shown to have a direct effect on academic achievement in children, so it is essential for educators to implement in the educational setting.

#### Research Question(s)

The research question that closely relates to this study is of great importance in the educational setting and states: What is the impact the Second Step curriculum has on social-emotional development of second grade students?

#### Research Design

The design of this research study is the single-subject A-B design. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, “They are most commonly used to study the changes in behavior an individual exhibits after exposure to an intervention or treatment of some sort” (p. 302). I selected this design because I conducted research on a small group of five students out of the nineteen that are in my classroom. This small group acted as their own control because they were subjected to two phases during the research. The first phase is the pretreatment condition or baseline period which is identified as A, where the subject is pretested so that I may be able to determine the participant’s understanding of social-emotional skills before the intervention is implemented. The second phase is the intervention phase or B, where the intervention was introduced and maintained for a period of time. By analyzing the patterns of scores from baseline

to intervention, I was able to determine the effectiveness of the Second Step curriculum on the social-emotional development of my students.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted at an elementary school located in eastern North Dakota. The district consists of approximately 11,000 students in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade. There are two high schools, two middle schools, and fifteen elementary schools located in the district. The following ethnicities were reported: 76% Caucasian, 4% Asian, 13% African American, 4% Hispanic, 3% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 0% Pacific Islander. 28.84% of students in the district qualify for free or reduced priced meals (West, 2018). The town the study is being conducted in is known for commercial activities and festivities and has many employment and leisure opportunities.

### **Participants**

The subjects of my study were five randomly assigned second grade students from my classroom of 19 students. Three of the students were females and two of the students were males. They varied in developmental level and performance level. All subjects are 7 or 8 years old. Of the five students, all are Caucasian and none of the subjects are on record as English Learners.

**Sampling.** The participants in this research study were selected by simple random sampling from the population of my class. A simple random sample is one in which each and every member of the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected (Fraenkel et. al., 2012). I used a table of random numbers to select my sample of five students. Student names have been changed to numbers to protect participant identity and provide confidentiality during the study.

**Instrumentation**

During this study I utilized three instruments for data collection. The first tool was the Summative Knowledge Assessment provided on [secondstep.org](http://secondstep.org) and was used to assess baseline data prior to the intervention and used again post-intervention as a summative assessment. The Summative Knowledge Assessment is a ten-question multiple choice test that assesses students on their knowledge of how the two students on the picture card are using their skills for learning and how to use certain SEL strategies. This assessment took students approximately 20 minutes to complete. The second instrument I used was the Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment Form B. The purpose of this data is to assess the five students on their development of the social-emotional skills taught during lessons while they are participating in a Brain Builder game or activity. The Brain Builder games typically are played within 20 minutes before the lesson concludes. The third data collection tool I utilized was the Frequency and Intensity chart that I developed. On this chart, I listed the target behavior such as being respectful, focusing attention and listening, using self-talk, and being assertive. In the intensity table, I recorded how intense the behavior noted was with 0 being no behavior that day to 3 with an extremely positive target behavior. In the frequency table, I marked off each time the behavior occurred throughout the day and circled the last number at the end of the day. After collecting this data, I connected the circles to graph the frequency of the target behavior over a period of time. These three assessments are valid because they measure exactly what they were designed to measure, the progression of social-emotional development over a period of time as well as the frequency and intensity of the behavior. They are also reliable because these instruments yielded similar results over multiple uses.

The instruments that I used in this study were consistent with the data that I sought to collect. Each instrument had its purpose and served it well. The pre and posttest were designed to assess student's knowledge of various strategies and to recognize a situation that required the use of certain SEL skills in order for the child on the picture card to be successful. The Frequency and Intensity Data collector was used to record how often and to what degree the focus student used the target behavior in the classroom. The data collected from the Brain Builder game observations were beneficial to me because I was able to reflect on how often a student was participating and to what extent they understood the directions and content in the game. I was able to perceive the fluctuations in student effort very plainly while collecting data using the Frequency and Intensity Data collector because as the week progressed, their target behavior frequency tended to decrease.

**Data Collection.** The data collection process was done by a combination of observation and assessment. I observed the five participants more closely than the other fourteen students and recorded their progression of their SEL during the Brain Builder activities and with the use of the Frequency and Intensity Data collector. I also administered the Student Summative Knowledge Assessment as a pre- and post-assessment to my entire class but only focused on and recorded the data from the small sample.

**Data Analysis.** The Summative Knowledge Assessment scores were compared from October to November using a bar graph to show baseline to intervention data to display the scores of students in the small group. The Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment data was collected during the Brain Builder games and recorded on the observational form B. The Frequency and Intensity data was shown on two tables to present the change over time of each

student's progression separated by frequency and intensity. This data determined the progression of students' SEL development over the course of the study.

### Research Question(s) and System Alignment.

Table 3.1.  
*Research Question(s) Alignment*

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
What is the impact the Second Step curriculum has on social-emotional development of second grade students?	IV: Second Step curriculum  DV: social-emotional development	Single-Subject A-B	IV: Second Step curriculum lessons within units  DV: Student Version of the Summative Knowledge Assessment presented in the Appendix A (from secondstep.org)  DV: Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment presented in Appendix B (secondstep.org)  DV: Frequency and Intensity Data collection tool presented in Appendix C		Assessment Observation	Secondstep.org

### Procedures

This research study was administered during a four-week period from October 21<sup>st</sup> to November 22<sup>nd</sup>. To begin my study, I utilized a table of random numbers to select my five participants. Baseline data collection began October 21<sup>st</sup> when I administered the Student

Summative Knowledge Assessment. As the intervention phase began, I collected data each day for four weeks using the Brain Builder and Frequency and Intensity Data collection forms. The lessons were taught during our morning meeting time each day as a whole group and as I gathered data, I met with this small group of students for review or additional practice with the strategies learned during morning meeting time. At the conclusion of the study, I reported my findings to generalize the results of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants in this research study were protected from physical and psychological harm as well as danger and discomfort. Fortunately, almost all educational research involves activities that are within the customary, usual procedures of schools or other agencies and as such involve little or no risk (Fraenkel et. al, 2012). The focus of this research was implementing a curriculum that is typically taught in a school setting, so the likelihood of risk was very low. I obtained informed consent from parents so they were aware that I was conducting research and their child was invited to participate.

### **Conclusions**

Chapter three included information about the methods I used to conduct this research study such as the research design I selected, who the participants were and how I chose them, the instruments for data collection and how I analyzed the data after the four weeks of research. I have also included the procedural schedule and the ethical considerations of my research study. Chapter four encompasses the results of my findings from the data I collected during the course of study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Data Collection

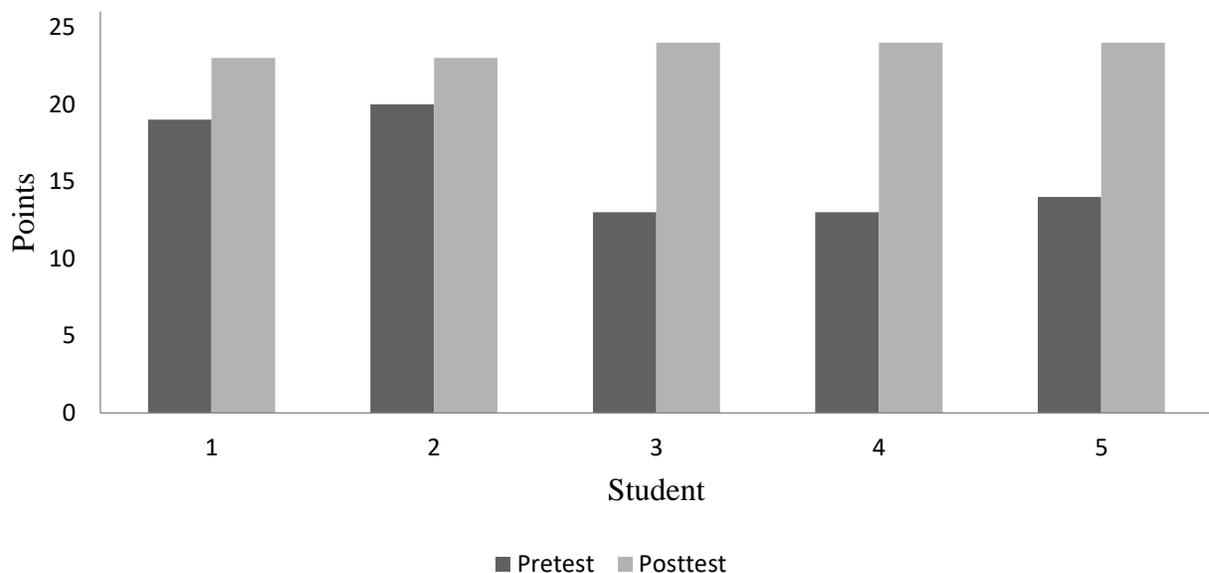
The purpose of this study was to assess the impact the Second Step curriculum (Committee for Children, 2012) has on the social-emotional development of second grade students. Social-emotional learning is crucial for the development of a child to grow into a healthy, well-rounded adult individual. A socially and emotionally competent individual will have many positive life outcomes including self-regulation skills, better memory, longer attention span and more positive views of themselves and others around them, as well as more self-awareness and assistance in building meaningful positive relationships.

Implementation of a social-emotional curriculum in a primary classroom will give students an advantage of learning these essential skills and give them strategies to access in their everyday lives. This study provided observational and formal assessment data on students who were instructed in a social-emotional curriculum to discern the outcomes and importance of such a program. During the course of this study, data was collected on five randomly selected students in a general education second grade classroom. The collection tools that were used were the Student Summative Knowledge Assessment (2011) as a pre and posttest, Frequency and Intensity data (see Appendix C) that was collected daily on the target behaviors of each lesson, as well as Brian Builder (2011) game observations. Each Second Step lesson was accompanied by a Brain Builder game that practiced the skills that were introduced or reviewed from the previous lesson. Data was collected daily and recorded using these instruments to assess the social emotional changes of each child who participated in the study.

## Results

**Research question 1.** What is the impact the Second Step curriculum has on social-emotional development of second grade students?

The data shows that while students are interacting during Second Step lessons, they are learning foundational social-emotional skills to build upon throughout their lives. Student outcomes fluctuated due to extenuating circumstances but overall the data was consistent with the student's perceived level of understanding and learning during implementation of the social-emotional lessons. The first assessment was the Student Summative Knowledge Assessment (2011) pretest. This tool is a multiple choice assessment that asks students to identify how two students on a picture card are using their skills for learning and also asks students to identify different SEL strategies.



*Figure 1.* Student Summative Knowledge Assessment data

The information from the pre assessment was used as baseline data before instruction began in social-emotional learning in the classroom. Student's baseline results are compared to their posttest score in *Figure 1*. The data presented in this figure shows that students had sufficient knowledge from previous years about skills for learning, practicing empathy, emotion management and problem-solving skills. There were twenty-six possible points and students scored between thirteen and twenty points on the pre assessment. Students' scores were compared from the pretest and posttest and the results showed that students gained an ample amount of knowledge during the Second Step lessons. The post assessment shows scores between twenty-three and twenty-four points. The Student Summative Knowledge Assessment is a good indicator of skills gained throughout the duration of the units of Second Step.

Table 4.1  
*Frequency Data*

Participant	Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four
Student 1	7.2	8.2	7.5	7.2
Student 2	7.4	8	6.75	7.8
Student 3	8.4	8.4	7	8
Student 4	6.4	7	7.5	8.4
Student 5	7.6	8.2	7	8.8

The second data collection instrument used was the Frequency and Intensity data collector. This chart identified a target behavior that was the focus of one of the lessons per week. I chose to measure that target behavior for one week to collect data on each student. The tool measures the frequency of the target behavior on a scale from zero to ten and the intensity

that was observed that day on a scale from zero to three. *Table 4.1* depicts the outcome of the frequency data collected on each student throughout the four weeks of data collection. I calculated the average of each week to show the growth over the four weeks of research for each student. For example, student five made considerable growth over the data collection period. They regressed in week three due to the difficult concept of Self-Talk, but made more progress in week four in the lesson about being assertive.

Table 4.2  
*Intensity Data*

Participant	Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four
Student 1	2.6	2.6	2.5	3
Student 2	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.6
Student 3	2.8	2.8	2	2.8
Student 4	2.4	2.2	2.4	3
Student 5	2.6	2.8	2.5	2.8

*Table 4.2* shows the averaged data collected on the intensity of the target behaviors. On the Frequency and Intensity data collector, the scale for intensity ranged from zero, no observed behavior, to three, extremely positive behavior per week for each student.

Brain Builder (2011) games were utilized during each lesson to reinforce the skills that were introduced in the lesson or reviewed from the previous lesson. Secondstep.org provides teachers with an observational form to use to document how the student is comprehending and participating during gameplay. I collected data each lesson on the sample students in my

classroom and found that they were overall very successful during the Brain Builder games (see Appendix D).

### **Data Analysis**

Research shows that teaching SEL can have a positive, lifelong impact on children and improves many aspects of their lives. Wong, Li-Tsang, and Siu (2015) note that, “To adapt well in modern societies, it is important to learn to become compassionate and responsible individuals who are able to manage emotions effectively, to be resilient, to communicate effectively, and to build friendship with others” (p. 57). All of these traits are taught within the Second Step lessons in second grade, and I believe that these, among other important qualities, are characteristics that students should be learning in order to be successful in modern societies.

I was not surprised by the results I attained during this research. I knew that the previous teachers of these students had taught Second Step and my students retained a lot of that information. I was, however, surprised by the outcome of a few data points on the Frequency and Intensity Data collector. I was hoping that the students I included in the study would be able to improve in each week. A few students did not try as hard as the week progressed so their intensity and frequency decreased. Self-talk was the topic in week three and I knew previous to the lesson that this topic would be much more difficult for students based on the concept and my knowledge of the learning styles of my current students.

The studies I researched had an overall recurring theme in that the authors knew the importance of implementing SEL in the classroom but found that students were not well equipped with the necessary skills. Teachers have also found that teaching SEL influenced positive thinking about their practices and the importance of educating the whole child. I have had many professional development experiences in my career learning about educating the whole

child and I agree that taking this approach will best prepare students for life in the future. Teaching the social-emotional skills that are included in the Second Step curriculum will aid in educating the whole child and giving them useful strategies to apply in all situations in their lives. Research has also uncovered the connection between social-emotional competence and academic learning, the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogy, and the desire for continued learning relating to social-emotional constructs.

A difficult concept for the sample of students that I selected was being able to choose more than one answer on the Student Summative Knowledge Assessment (2011). A small number of students only chose one answer when there were up to three correct answers to any one question. The majority of students retained a fair amount of knowledge from previous years that aided in answering the pretest questions. I found the data collection method enjoyable and I appreciated witnessing my students learning new skills and strategies to use throughout their lives.

### **Conclusions**

I sought to find answers to how implementing the Second Step social-emotional curriculum impacted second grade students and my results were convincing. Students need a social-emotional learning curriculum in the primary grades because it enhances their understanding of empathy and emotion management as well as provides them with a skill set to become conscious learners who are able to adapt and navigate complex situations in their educational and social environments. In my opinion, my findings were conclusive and adhered to the discoveries that other researchers have made. Students need more practice implementing these strategies in their everyday lives at school and at home. Teachers are wonderful resources and facilitators of this learning and can provide situations or scenarios for students to exercise

their newfound approaches to social conditions. The results from the data collection that took place in my classroom proved that the Second Step curriculum has a favorable outcome for primary aged students and will continue to serve their social competency into adulthood due to the fact that they are building a strong foundation of skills at such a young age.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

#### **Action Plan**

This research was conducted to measure the effects the Second Step social-emotional curriculum had on second grade students in a general education classroom. Several methods and strategies were utilized to conduct the investigation, collect data, and instruct students during the research phase of this study. The plan of action for this study helped me grow as an educator, reflect on my professional teaching practices, and realize the impact a strong social-emotional learning program had for children, parents, the community, and the overall school climate. I believe the influence of a well implemented SEL program can have numerous benefits for children, not only in school but in their social and personal environments as well.

The use of the data collection tools and my research greatly impacted my teaching practice due to the realization that the Second Step curriculum was highly effective in teaching students how 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. While conducting this research, I planned to collect data for four weeks using three data collection instruments. Through observation, informal, and formal assessment, I have seen students make innumerable gains in recognizing and understanding their own and others' social-emotional state and what strategies they now have available to help in certain situations. The first lesson I taught this year was about focusing attention and listening skills. By teaching and reviewing this information, students were more aware of the skills they already had and some they exercised in order to pay closer attention during a lesson in our classroom.

I have grown as an educator by conducting this research because it has strengthened my focus on the importance of educating the whole child and I feel much more invested in ensuring that each child has a solid social and emotional foundation when they leave my classroom. I have also learned that conducting research is a valuable learning opportunity for every professional and that by focusing on this topic I have gained knowledge and insight into the significance SEL holds for each child. From this year on in my professional career, I will be an advocate for showing educators the importance that a strong social-emotional learning program can have for children in every classroom.

Parents and guardians will also glean the benefits of a robust social-emotional learning program that is implemented in the school setting. During the Second Step lesson, students were taught how to practice and use the strategies in school, at home, and in other environments. Students encounter conflicts in many areas of their lives and Second Step prepares them for managing their emotions during a trying situation as well as teaches the skills to make responsible and respectful decisions to keep themselves and others safe. The school in which I teach is invested in providing students with the skills and tools to be a responsible, respectful, and safe student, therefore enhancing our entire school climate. In my opinion, our school has a very warm and welcoming atmosphere where students and staff are respectful and courteous. Students are learning how to improve these skills during Second Step lessons and I believe that our positive school culture has dramatically increased since the implementation of Second Step social-emotional lessons in the classrooms.

### **Plan for Sharing**

Disseminating my research findings is essential to sharing the hard work that was put into planning, implementing, collecting data, recording the research findings and reflecting upon my

study. I first decided that my audience was other educators, administrators, and educational researchers who seek to collect data or strive to learn more about the role social-emotional learning plays in a child's life. My goal for sharing this study was to display the impact and significance that the Second Step curriculum had on the social-emotional learning of primary aged students. I also wanted to share the importance that social-emotional skills played in educating the whole child and preparing them for life.

The first space that I plan to share my conclusions is at my weekly professional learning community meeting which typically consists of my grade level team and principal. Having the support of these professionals will propel me towards disseminating my results to a larger audience. I also plan to discuss my results with other teachers to encourage them in noticing the benefits of providing such education to children at a young age. I believe that the educational field pertaining to social-emotional learning is ready for additional research providing educators with practical evidence supporting social-emotional learning in schools. In the future, I would be delighted to share the knowledge I gained while conducting this study to inspire teachers to recognize the impact that a social-emotional learning program has on second grade students.

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Appendix A  
Student Knowledge Assessment

**Grade 2****Student Version****Summative Knowledge Assessment**

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### Directions

1. Look at the photo.
2. Listen to your teacher read the questions.
3. Check the best answer or answers.
  1. Check off all the ways that tell how Estela and Kareem are focusing their attention and listening.
    - a. Looking at the speaker
    - b. Ignoring distractions
    - c. Interrupting
    - d. Being still
  2. Check off the skill for learning that Estela is using to help her remember directions.
    - a. Focus attention
    - b. Listen
    - c. Use self-talk
    - d. Be assertive
  3. Check off all the clues that help you tell that Kareem and Estela have different feelings about how to work on math.
    - a. Their faces
    - b. Their fingerprints
    - c. The situation
    - d. Their bodies
  4. Check off how you think Estela is feeling.
    - a. Scared
    - b. Frustrated
    - c. Happy
    - d. Surprised
  5. Check off all the Calming-Down Steps you learned in your *Second Step* lessons.
    - a. Say "Stop"
    - b. Name your feeling
    - c. Break your pencil
    - d. Calm down

## Appendix A, continued

**Summative Knowledge Assessment****Student Version****Grade 2**

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6. Check off the answer that tells how to belly breathe.
- a. Breathe a few times. Check your belly.
  - b. Put your hands on your belly. Breathe in and out slowly.
  - c. Breathe in and out as fast as you can.
  - d. Rub your belly with your hands. Take a breath.
7. Check off all the Problem-Solving Steps Estela and Kareem can use to solve their problem.
- a. T: Think of solutions
  - b. D: Decide who is to blame
  - c. E: Explore consequences
  - d. S: Say the problem
  - e. P: Pick the best solution
8. Check off each answer that says what "respectful" means.
- a. Treating others how you think they'd like to be treated
  - b. Being polite
  - c. Being bossy
  - d. Being kind
9. Check off each answer that says what it means to explore the consequences of a solution.
- a. Think of the positive things that could happen.
  - b. Think about how other people might feel.
  - c. Think of the quickest one to do.
  - d. Think of the negative things that could happen.
10. Check off the answer with the best solution to Estela and Kareem's problem.
- a. Copy the answer from another group.
  - b. Don't do the problem.
  - c. Ask the teacher for help in a calm, firm voice.
  - d. Count to 10.

Appendix B

Brain Builder Observational Form



www.secondstep.org  
Kindergarten–Grade 5

**Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment Form B**

Brain Builder Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions**

1. Select six students to observe during game-play, and record their names below.
2. Check off how often each student is observed successfully playing the game.

Student Name	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NOT YET

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Appendix D

Brain Builder Observational Forms Student Results

**Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment Form B**

Brain Builder Name: Menu Memory Observation Date: 10-29-19  
 L1

Directions

1. Select six students to observe during game-play, and record their names below.
2. Check off how often each student is observed successfully playing the game.

Student Name	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NOT YET
S1	✓		
S2	✓		
S3		✓	
S4	✓		
S5		✓	

**Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment Form B**

Brain Builder Name: Sentence Switcharoo Observation Date: 11-4-19  
 L2

Directions

1. Select six students to observe during game-play, and record their names below.
2. Check off how often each student is observed successfully playing the game.

Student Name	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NOT YET
S1	✓		
S2	✓		
S3	✓		
S4	✓		
S5		✓	

## Appendix D, continued

**Brain Builder Student Observational Assessment Form B**

Brain Builder Name: Listening Concentration Observation Date: 11-13-19  
L3

**Directions**

1. Select six students to observe during game-play, and record their names below.
2. Check off how often each student is observed successfully playing the game.

Student Name	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NOT YET
S1	✓		
S2	✓		
S3		✓	
S4	✓		
S5		✓	

Brain Builder Name: Doodle Dance Observation Date: 11-15-19  
L4

**Directions**

1. Select six students to observe during game-play, and record their names below.
2. Check off how often each student is observed successfully playing the game.

Student Name	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NOT YET
S1	✓		
S2	✓		
S3	✓		
S4	✓		
S5	✓		
	✓		

## Appendix E

## District Approval Form

## RESEARCH STUDY REQUEST

I hereby request permission to conduct a research study in the West Fargo Public School District during the period from September 2019 to December 2019.

TOPIC: The Effects of the Second Step Curriculum on the Social Emotional Learning of Second Grade Students

If this request is granted, I agree to abide by Administrative Policy 4800: refer to the Administrative policies in each building Administrator's office or in the Human Resources office.

Signature of Researcher: Amy Kremer

Institution of Higher Education: Minnesota State University, Moorhead

Signature of Graduate Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to completing the Research Study Request Form, a copy of the following items are attached for review:

1. Abstract of the project
2. Questionnaire(s) to be used
3. Consent letter to be sent to parents

Endorsement: This request is  approved  disapproved

Approval for Action Research Administrator: Carol Zent

Date: 9-6-2019

*A copy of the approval form must be presented to the school building principal before conducting any survey. The principal has the final approval to conduct a survey in a school building.*

Please **print** your name and the mailing address where you want this form returned:

Name: Amy Kremer

Street Address: 110 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue North

City, State, & Zip: Horace, ND 58047

Appendix F  
Consent Form



Carol Zent.....Principal  
Lyndsey Simonson.....Counselor  
Sue Sundlie.....Administrative Assistant

Both Slette.....Superintendent  
Dr. Allen Bugad.....Secondary Assistant Superintendent  
Dr. Rachel Agw.....Elementary Assistant Superintendent  
Karen Nickel.....Special Education Director  
Jeff Goebel.....Building & Grounds Director  
Robin Hill.....Human Resources Director  
Mark Lemer.....Business Manager  
Ed Mitchell.....Technology Director  
Brad Redmond.....Transportation Director  
Dana Rieth.....Food Service Director

### Consent Form

#### Participation in Research

**Title:** The Effects of the Second Step Curriculum on the Social Emotional Learning of Second Grade Students

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to determine the effect the Second Step curriculum has on the social emotional learning of second grade students and to advance their social emotional development to prepare them to be empathetic, compassionate, and lifelong learners.

**Study Information:** This study will compare student's existing knowledge of social emotional skills to acquired knowledge after classroom lessons have been implemented. Students will be pre-assessed before participation in the study and assessed again after the completed lessons. Participating students will be observed during learning games called Brain Builders as well as during classroom peer interactions using a Frequency and Intensity data collector tool. I will be the investigator looking for evidence that students have acquired the social emotional skills we are learning about in our Second Step curriculum.

**Time:** The participants will complete this study during the regular class period. This study will take place during the fall and winter months of 2019.

**Risks:** Participation in this study is voluntary and will pose no risks to students because they will be participating in regular classroom lessons from a curriculum that is mandatory in our school district. While the purpose of this study is to improve social emotional development of students, the outcome of the study is unknown. Increased social emotional development is not guaranteed to the participant.

**Benefits:** Participation may improve student's social emotional development and help them to gain and practice the skills to become an empathetic and compassionate person by learning how to make friends, manage their emotions, solve problems, and deal with peer pressure as well as building a strong foundation to becoming lifelong learners.

**Confidentiality:** Participants identity will not be shared with anyone beyond the principal investigator, Dr. David Tack, and the co-investigator, Amy Kremer. All individual information will be recorded and tracked under an identification number and not the participant's name.

## Appendix F, continued

**Participation and Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is optional. Students can choose not to participate or choose to withdraw at any time without any negative effects on grades, relationship with the instructor, or relationship with Horace Elementary School.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact any of these people:

<p>Amy Kremer Co-Investigator ph. 701-356-2080 email: akremer@west-fargo.k12.nd.us</p>	<p>Dr. David Tack Principal Investigator School of Leadership and Learning, Lommen 216C College of Education and Human Services Minnesota State University, Moorhead email: david.tack@mnstate.edu</p>
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**Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:**

Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. David Tack, [david.tack@mnstate.edu](mailto:david.tack@mnstate.edu), in the School of Leadership and Learning or else you may contact Lisa Karch, Chair of MSUM Institutional Review Board, at [lrk@mnstate.edu](mailto:lrk@mnstate.edu) or by 218-477-2699. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

**Agreement:**

The purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I understand that I or my child is free to withdraw at any time and the withdrawal will not affect any future relationship with Mrs. Amy Kremer or Horace Elementary.

**In signing this agreement, I also affirm that I am at least 18 years of age or older.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix G  
Method of Assent

I will explain to the second grade students that, “Your parents have given consent for you to participate in a research project that I am conducting. You have the choice to participate or not and if you choose to, you may withdraw without penalty at any time during the study. This is totally voluntary. The only effect this study will have is to help me see the effects the Second Step curriculum has on your social emotional learning throughout the year. Here is what will happen: You will take a pre-test of ten questions that I will use to see what you already understand about social emotional development, and then you will participate in class as usual and will be asked to do some brain builder games as I document your interactions with your peers. In a few months you will take the same assessment again and this will show me what you’ve learned during our class lessons. I will study the results and my observations to determine your social emotional growth due to the classroom lessons you participated in. Do you have any questions?”