

A CAUSAL-COMPARISON STUDY OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AT PRIVATE
ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH AND WITHOUT RESTORATIVE
PRACTICES AFTER COVID-19

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a quantitative, causal-comparative study to determine if there was a significant difference in social-emotional learning between students at elementary and middle private schools with and without restorative practices after COVID-19. There is limited research investigating the integration of social-emotional learning and restorative practices and their effects on private elementary and middle school students. This study was important to pinpoint whether integrating social emotional learning and restorative practices has a significant benefit on student's self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The study includes 128 students from grades three-eight. Students were selected from two K-eight grade private schools in northeastern North Carolina. These students took the Social Skills Improvement System Social Emotional Learning assessment to determine their level of social emotional learning proficiency. A two-way ANOVA was used to analyze if there were any significant differences in student's self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making between students at elementary and middle private schools with and without restorative practices after COVID-19. The results indicate there are no significant differences in student's five social emotional learning competencies between students at elementary and middle private schools with and without restorative practices after COVID-19. Based on these findings, it is recommended that more research be conducted on the integration of social emotional learning and restorative practices in private elementary and middle schools over a period of three years to collect longitudinal data.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, restorative practices, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making

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List of Abbreviations

Restorative Practices (RP)

Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)

Social-emotional Learning (SEL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to determine if there is a difference in social-emotional learning (SEL) between students at private elementary schools with and without restorative practices (RP) after COVID-19 and students at private middle schools with and without RP after COVID-19. The history of SEL and RP is explored. The theoretical frameworks are based on the SEL theory and restorative justice theory. This chapter will present the problem statement and purpose statement. The significance of this study will be outlined, and the chapter concludes with the research questions and definitions.

Background

SEL and RP would not be current concepts addressed in schools worldwide if the COVID-19 pandemic had never occurred (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Bond, 2020; Kaspar & Massey, 2022). COVID-19 has sparked a rise in the importance of SEL in schools nationwide (Bond, 2020). SEL is not new but has become a fairly popular term since COVID-19 revealed concerns about children's mental well-being (Bond, 2020). The pandemic has allowed educators to realize that social and emotional skills are just as critical as teaching academic skills and has helped identify that these needs should be met before a child is expected to engage in retaining academic knowledge (Kaspar & Massey, 2022).

SEL is the process in which students learn to integrate their thinking, feelings, and behaviors to achieve essential life skills (Mondi et al., 2021). Many schools have begun to incorporate SEL through RP. RP aims to promote prosocial behaviors in schools by helping students build social and emotional skills, including empathy and awareness (Lodi et al., 2021). SEL programming supports the goals of RP by providing students with a systematic approach to

recognizing and managing their emotions, understanding others' perspectives, establishing goals, and making responsible decisions to maintain healthy relationships (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). SEL and RP go hand in hand with building a positive school climate, positive relationships among students and staff and assist students with developing SEL skills, including communication skills, kindness, empathy, and caring (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018).

Historical Overview

SEL backdates to thousands of years ago, but the term SEL was not always used. The term was once known as a holistic curriculum and stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968; Plato, 1943). The idea of SEL predates back to ancient Greece. Plato wrote about the idea of SEL in his book *The Republic*, where he discussed the idea of a holistic curriculum to equip students in physical education, arts, math, science, character, and moral decision-making (Plato, 1943). SEL resurfaced when Erikson (1968) addressed the importance of SEL in his identity versus identity confusion phase of his eight stages of development. Erikson (1968) stated that the most critical factor impacting development among youth was finding a social environment in which children could create meaningful relationships with others. In the early 20th century, many educators began advocating for teaching psychology alongside education (Effrem et al., 2019). Dewey (1938) saw the importance of social learning and engaging students in developmentally appropriate social learning experiences. Dewey (1938) promoted a student-centered approach to schooling that focused on helping the whole child's development, including developing students' social skills, not just academic skills.

In the 1960s at Yale School of Medicine, Dr. James Comer also followed in the footsteps of Dewey (1938) by focusing on the whole child to ensure the development of student's language, social skills, ethics, physical, cognitive and psychological abilities (Darling-Hammond

et al., 2018). James Comer described that a child's experiences at home and in school affect their psychosocial development, which plays a significant role in their academic achievement (Comer, 1988). During this time, James Comer and the Yale Child Study Center piloted the Comer School Development Program (SDP) at a New Haven elementary school focused on low-achieving African-American students and implemented social programs alongside academics (Panjwani, 2011). The idea of the SDP was to establish developmental stages for children's learning that focused on academics, six pathways to healthy child development, and academic success, which included learning and caring for students' SEL skills (Comer et al., 2004). The Comer SDP increased students' math, reading, and writing standardized test scores, attendance rates increased, and student behavior problems declined (Panjwani, 2011). This led to the SEL movement and theory. Dr. James Comer found that if schools focused on psychosocial development at school, children's chances of success increased (Effrem et al., 2019). Yale School of Medicine played a significant role in SEL. This led to The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which included individuals determined to add the missing piece of social and emotional needs in education. In 1994, CASEL started a new movement to highlight the importance of SEL being taught alongside academics, and the term was officially coined SEL (Shanker, 2014).

In the 1990s, when SEL began to come to the forefront of education, RP also became a popular topic. RP originated in the criminal and juvenile justice system and was initially known as restorative justice. Restorative justice is a set of procedures based on indigenous peacemaking practices to reduce and guide adequate harm reparation (Pavlacic et al., 2021). Due to the effectiveness of restorative justice in the judicial system, school systems began implementing RP in the 2000s to replace zero-tolerance discipline policies (Fronius et al., 2019). Educators began

to notice that RP is a way to implement SEL. With the integration of RP and SEL, RP drives the development of SEL skills, including communication skills, teaching students how to show empathy and kindness, and how to care for others (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018).

Society-at-Large

RP and SEL in schools teach students how to build the skills needed to thrive in school, their community, and society (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). SEL evidence-based programs teach students social skills, how to identify their feelings and others' feelings, and behavioral coping skills needed in and outside school to flourish in society (Lawson et al., 2019). In the education system, implementing evidence-based SEL programs has increased students' test scores and grades while decreasing students' behavior problems (Kanopka et al., 2020). Research shows that SEL is critical to positive life outcomes even after school because it teaches students early in life how to control and recognize their emotions and behaviors, a skill necessary to thrive in one's community and society (Kim et al., 2022). RP teaches positive conflict management through community-building circles, restorative conversations, and mediation that can be implemented in schools, one's community, and society (Lodi et al., 2021). Teaching SEL and RP as a public health approach in education will most likely increase students' college readiness, positive relationships in school, their communities, and society, as well as improve individuals' overall mental health (Geesa et al., 2022).

Theoretical Background

SEL theory examines the effectiveness of SEL at elementary and middle private schools with RP and elementary and middle private schools without RP. CASEL (2003) defines SEL theory as recognizing and managing emotions, solving problems effectively, and educating individuals on establishing positive relationships with others. SEL theory will help understand

what SEL evidence-based programs should include to meet the needs of students' social and emotional well-being.

The SEL theory identifies that the SEL evidence-based program at the elementary and middle private schools in this study should have five key components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Similar studies have used SEL theory to understand the effectiveness of school-wide SEL programming (Weissberg et al., 2015). There are many assessment tools to assess SEL. However, SEL theory helps with the understanding of which assessment tools are best to assess the effectiveness of SEL implementation on students learning the five SEL components necessary for positive emotional and social well-being (McKown, 2017).

Restorative justice theory examines the differences in SEL between elementary and middle private schools with RP. RP in schools is derived from the restorative justice theory (Lodi et al., 2021). Restorative justice theory involves all parties in an offense to identify harm produced and reconcile relationships with victims and the community to make things right (Zehr, 2002). Three pillars categorize restorative justice: addressing harm and needs, fulfilling obligations, and engaging affected parties and the community (Zehr, 2002). This theory has led to the popularity of RP in schools. SEL and restorative justice theories help us understand the critical components of SEL and RP in schools today. COVID-19 has placed an importance on students' mental health (Mirilović et al., 2022). It has brought both SEL and RP to the forefront to improve students' emotional and social well-being to thrive in their schools, community, and society as a whole (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018).

Problem Statement

COVID-19 has pushed SEL to the spotlight as educators and parents noticed that students' emotional and social well-being was just as concerning as students' academics during the pandemic (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). COVID-19 took a toll on students' mental health and social well-being, and students of all ages began to display worsening behavior issues, an inability for students to make social connections, and an increase in student mental health emergencies (Rosanbalm, 2021). COVID-19 spiked the rise in SEL research, beginning with early education interventions (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). Recently, a study was conducted on fostering SEL through early childhood intervention, and it was established that there is a high need for longitudinal research on SEL after students leave early childhood programs, enter elementary school, and move on to middle school (Mondi et al., 2021).

Literature reveals that SEL programs are increasingly being implemented in elementary schools to facilitate the development of social competencies, decision-making skills, empathy, and emotion regulation to prevent poor life outcomes (Calhoun et al., 2020). In this same study containing Baltimore elementary schools with students from high-crime, low-income and trauma environments, students receiving Promoting Alternative Thinking Patterns (PATHS) SEL intervention exemplified great benefits throughout the program (Calhoun et al., 2020). However, when the PATHS intervention concluded, benefits plateaued after the intervention ended, suggesting that positive effects may not be sustained over time without ongoing SEL programming (Calhoun et al., 2020). Only a few studies have been able to track long-term SEL benefits on students because SEL interventions are not continuous; therefore, there is a critical need to conduct ongoing SEL research throughout various grade levels (McCormick et al., 2020). Literature has examined SEL intervention benefits for children and recognized that K-8th grade

SEL interventions are essential but only beneficial if students receive SEL intervention that is developmentally appropriate, continuous, and geared towards students' developmental stages each consecutive school year (McCormick et al., 2020; Murano et al., 2020).

Studies show that SEL is often implemented in early elementary but practiced significantly less in middle schools (Calhoun et al., 2020). Middle school, however, is also a critical time to teach SEL skills, but there is less literature examining SEL in middle schools compared to elementary schools (Calhoun et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2022). There is an ongoing need for implementation of evidence-based middle school SEL programs to further determine the benefits of SEL and its effects on middle school aged students (Rosen et al., 2022).

According to research, RP exposes students to the five SEL competency skills, but more research is needed to understand the direct association between RP and SEL. It is vital for researchers to explore the connections between RP and SEL to determine if integrating the two concepts has a significant impact on students' SEL competencies. There is currently minimal information on integrating SEL and RP, specifically among K-8th grade students who do not attend public schools. Literature has failed to address the effectiveness of integrating SEL through RP in elementary and middle private schools. The problem is that the literature has not fully addressed the difference between SEL in elementary and middle private schools with RP and elementary and middle private schools without RP (McCormick et al., 2020).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study is to determine if there is a difference in SEL in students at elementary and middle private schools with and without RP. The study will use a causal-comparative research design to determine if there is a cause-and-effect relationship between SEL and RP. The dependent variable is the student's five SEL competency

skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, to quantify their level of SEL. This study defines SEL skills as learning outcomes based on the five CASEL competencies above (Gresham & Elliot, 2017). Self-awareness is defined as the ability to recognize one's emotions and thoughts accurately; self-management will analyze the regulation of one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations (Gresham & Elliot, 2017, p. 17). Social awareness is defined as the ability for individuals to empathize with other's perspectives from different cultures and backgrounds to understand social and ethical norms (Gresham & Elliot, 2017, p. 17). The final two competencies, relationship skills and responsible decision-making will analyze the ability of students to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and the ability for one to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards (Gresham & Elliot, 2017, p. 17).

The first independent variable in this study is school levels comprised of two groups of students including students at private elementary schools and private middle schools. The second independent variable is the use of restorative practices encompassing two groups, private schools that incorporate RP into their curriculum and private schools that do not. Private schools in this study are classified as schools that are not state-funded and are supported by private organizations. The elementary student population will consist of third, fourth, and fifth grade students in this study. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students will represent the middle school. The participants in this study were from one low-income private school and one upper-income private school in a southeastern state.

Significance of the Study

Research suggests that when students' SEL skills are a priority in school, they are more likely to respond to learning at school (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Parker & Hodgson, 2020). This study will help determine the effectiveness of integrating RP and SEL in elementary and middle private schools in grades three to eight. According to Kaspar and Massey (2022), SEL is as critical for all-age children as academic instruction. Implementing SEL correctly can dramatically increase students' academic achievement and social skills. This is especially true for those students who have experienced trauma in their childhood and struggle with thriving in school (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Parker & Hodgson, 2020). Using RP can promote prosocial behaviors through developing SEL skills (Lodi et al., 2021). A similar study promoting SEL in millions of school children revealed positive outcomes in young people's lives through significant improvement in social and emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance (Weissberg, 2019).

Current research recognizes the need for efficient assessments to determine the impact of SEL programming and the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) SEL assessment is a promising tool for PreK-12th graders (Gresham & Elliot, 2017). Many studies have also checked the SSIS SEL assessment using the parent rating assessment (Elliott et al., 2021). This study will assess students' SEL skills through the lens of students, not just parent input.

RP is becoming more common in schools today to teach students to repair relationships and decrease disciplinary issues (Ward-Seidel & Samalin, 2022). Researching students' SEL competencies alongside RP is necessary to understand whether RP in schools can help build students' SEL competency skills. Studies have increased on RP and SEL after COVID-19.

However, limited studies suggest RP in schools is a successful tool for developing students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). More studies are needed to support the significance of teaching students SEL skills through RP. This study will also help reveal if SEL will have significant differences in students at elementary and middle private schools with RP or significant differences in students at elementary and middle private schools without RP.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a difference in social and emotional learning competencies between private elementary and middle school students based on whether restorative practices are provided or not?

Definitions

1. *Relationship skills* – The ability to make and maintain healthy and diverse relationships with individuals and groups (Anthony et al., 2020).
2. *Responsible decision-making* – The ability to make healthy choices about oneself and behavior as well as social interactions that align with social norms and are safe for all individuals involved (Anthony et al., 2020).
3. *Restorative Practices* - processes and practices that build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018).
4. *School Development Program* – the school development plan that was created through the collaboration of Dr. James Comer, the Yale Child Study Center, and the New Haven Schools to improve the way child development is addressed in schools (Panjwani, 2011).

5. *Self-awareness* – the process of continually understanding and being aware of one’s feelings, thoughts, reactions, and personal values toward their self (Carden et al., 2022).
6. *Self-management* – the ability to successfully self-regulate one’s thoughts, emotions, and behavior in any situation and to set and work toward reaching one’s goals (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).
7. *Social awareness* – the awareness of others’ emotions and experiences (Huynh, 2018).
8. *Social-emotional learning* - the process by which individuals obtain skills to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, feel, and show empathy, maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2020).
9. *SSIS social-emotional learning* – A nationally normed behavior rating scale assessment for SEL, with parent, teacher, and student assessments available to rate their five SEL competency skills (Anthony et al., 2020).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to determine what research suggests about SEL, RP, and the integration of the two concepts in schools. This chapter begins with the theoretical frameworks that will guide this study. SEL theory and the restorative justice theory are the two theoretical frameworks that this study will be grounded in. There is a thorough review of literature centered around the five CASEL competencies of SEL, SEL history, and SEL in elementary and middle schools. Literature will also be reviewed on the origin of RP, the three pillars of restorative justice theory, the five concepts of RP in schools, examples of RP, and the integration of SEL and RP in schools worldwide.

Theoretical Framework

SEL theory and restorative justice theory will be the theoretical framework used to guide this study. SEL theory is the ability to identify and regulate one's emotions, teach individuals to problem solve, show empathy, achieve goals, and educate people on how to form positive relationships with others (CASEL, 2003). SEL theory originated in 1995 when findings from the emotional intelligence literature discovered that non-cognitive skills are just as vital if not more important than cognitive skills to help children succeed in life (Goleman, 1995). The concept of SEL was supported by Fetzner Goleman when he argued that character and social skills matter and could be taught to people (Goleman, 1996). SEL theory led to the realization that schools were not addressing students' mental health and social development needs (Ross & Tolan, 2018). This then led to the CASEL framework.

Restorative justice theory is a set of procedures that provide harm-affected parties an opportunity to engage in the resolution process, to repair the damage done, restore the stakeholders to their prior status, and ultimately improve community well-being (Pavlacic et al., 2021; Zehr, 1990). Zehr (1990) is the founding father of restorative justice theory. Restorative justice originated in the criminal justice system, and RP was derived from this theory to implement restorative approaches to improve school discipline (Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). Restorative justice theory includes three components, known as the three pillars that are harm and needs, obligations, and engagement (O'Brien, 2007; Zehr, 2002). RP in schools encompasses the 5 R's that fall under the three pillars. The 5 R's of RP are relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration (Restorative Solutions, 2022).

The SEL and restorative justice theories have advanced literature surrounding SEL skills and RP. SEL theory and the CASEL framework have advanced literature by identifying and pinpointing the definition of SEL and the five competencies that should be taught in schools to improve students' SEL skills (Oberle et al., 2016; Payton et al., 2000). Prior to SEL theory and restorative justice theory, researchers knew SEL skills needed to be taught alongside academics; however, they were not exactly sure how and what to implement in schools to teach SEL skills. SEL and restorative justice theories have helped identify the best practices for teaching and assessing SEL skills in schools, including intervention programs, early intervention, and teaching SEL through RP (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Lawson et al., 2019).

Researching differences in SEL at elementary and middle private schools with RP and elementary and middle private schools without RP relates directly to SEL and restorative justice theory. SEL theory and restorative justice theory directly drive this study because one must first understand these theories in order to understand what SEL skills would need to be measured to

determine the difference in students' SEL skills amongst the elementary and middle private schools with RP and the elementary and middle private schools without RP. This study could potentially extend the SEL theory and restorative justice theory. If SEL skills at elementary and middle private schools with RP are significantly different from SEL skills at elementary and private schools without RP, this could lead to extending these theories to include RP alongside the five CASEL competencies to increase students' SEL skills.

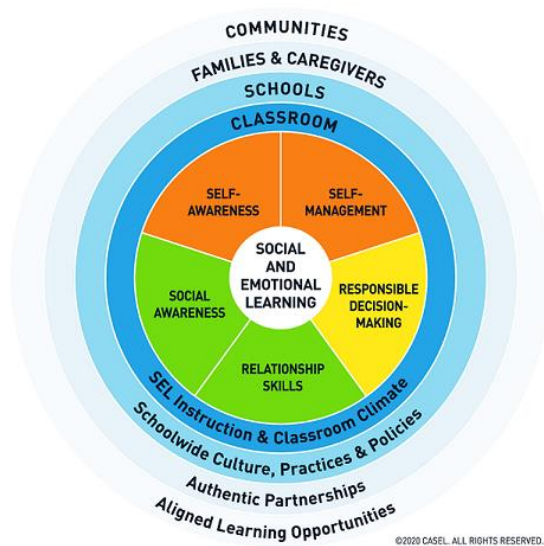
Related Literature

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning

The CASEL framework originated at Yale, but in 1996 it relocated to the University of Illinois at Chicago when Roger P. Weissberg became its director (CASEL, 2003). The CASEL framework was derived when educators from the emotional intelligence field, child development, public health, and bullying prevention fields collaborated to determine the best way to teach SEL skills. The CASEL framework includes five competencies. Figure 1 below shows the competencies that the CASEL framework outline is essential for students from pre-K to 12th grade.

Figure 1

CASEL's Framework Wheel



Note. Adapted from <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>.

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The five competencies are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Oberle et al., 2016).

Self-Management

Self-management is a component of the CASEL framework. Self-management is the ability for students to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively to set goals and achieve them (CASEL, 2020; Lawson et al., 2019; Weissberg et al., 2015). Providing students with self-management techniques can improve students' independence and self-reliance (Cooper et al., 2007; Hoff & Sawka-Miller, 2010). Some elementary self-management strategies include self-rating, self-charting, and reinforcement to help students manage feelings, stay on task, and set and achieve goals (CASEL, 2020; Smolkowski et al., 2022). Teaching self-management is frequently taught to younger students but less commonly taught in middle schools (Bruhn et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022). A study of 2055 students receiving the We Have Choices self-management intervention found that student's self-management skills improved

significantly once taught self-management strategies (Smolkowski et al., 2022). When teaching self-management in middle schools, the focus shifts to helping students manage specific skills, including homework completion, organizational skills, and study abilities (CASEL 2020; Smolkowski et al., 2022).

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to accurately recognize and understand one's emotions, thoughts, values, and the influence it has on one's behavior across contexts (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020). The critical concepts of self-awareness include confidence, self-esteem, self-control, self-image, self-reflection, and self-understanding (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020; Flavian, 2016). Research suggests that children need to develop self-awareness skills early in their childhood to be more successful in school and life (Flavian, 2016). Some skills to develop self-awareness in elementary and middle schools include integrating personal and social identities, demonstrating honesty and integrity, developing students' motivation, a sense of purpose, and teaching students to implement a growth mindset in their everyday lives (CASEL, 2020; Flavian, 2016).

Social Awareness

Social awareness is another component of the CASEL framework. Social awareness is the ability to account for others' perspectives, including diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts, and be able to empathize with them (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020). This also includes the ability for individuals to feel compassion for others and understand social norms across settings (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020). A study of fourth and fifth-grade students found that students at this age have varied social awareness abilities, and they place themselves in other people's circumstances to understand and empathize with them however, not all

students can handle this, and need to be taught how to become socially aware (Huynh, 2018). Teachers, however must receive adequate training on how to teach social awareness as a study revealed only 2% of the elementary teacher preparation courses offer information on social awareness (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2016). Many elementary teachers are opposed to teaching social awareness due to the scarcity of training that is offered on this component of SEL (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2016). Educators, however believe social awareness can simply be taught through literature by reading aloud and having students' journal about multicultural experiences (Linder, 2021; Pérez, 2013).

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills are establishing and maintaining healthy, supportive relationships and thriving in settings with diverse groups (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020). In elementary and middle schools, teachers can use cooperative groups, peer support, conflict management, and resolution to teach relationship skills (Elmi, 2020; Wattanawongwan et al., 2021). Relationship skills components in elementary and middle schools should include effective communication, encouraging teamwork, helping students to problem-solve, teaching leadership, and educating students on how to stand up for what is right at all times (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020). Many argue that elementary and middle school students must have a positive relationship with their teachers in order for this SEL component to be taught effectively and have positive effects on students' relationship skills with others (Hughes & Im, 2016; Rosen et al., 2022).

Responsible Decision Making

The last element of the CASEL SEL framework is responsible decision-making. Responsible decision-making is the ability for individuals to make constructive and caring choices regarding personal behavior and social interactions (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020;

Chen et al., 2021). Research suggests it is important for elementary students to gain important decision-making skills before puberty emerges in middle school (Kaskaya et al., 2017). In a study of fourth grade students between the ages of nine and ten, it was found that TV, media, close family/friends, and student's neighborhoods can affect their decision-making (Kaskaya et al., 2017). However, teachers can attempt to intercept these factors by teaching students how to consider ethical standards and safety concerns and how to make reasonable judgments (CASEL, 2020; Weissberg et al., 2015). Reasonable decision-making must also educate students to anticipate and evaluate the consequences of their actions as well (CASEL, 2020; Weissberg et al., 2015).

The History of SEL in Schools

The CASEL framework was the turning point in introducing SEL as an educational movement in schools to focus on students' SEL development in addition to academics (Allbright et al., 2019; Beaty, 2018). In the last decade, SEL has spread and increased in schools worldwide (Beaty, 2018; Bond, 2020). In 2004, Illinois was the first state to create SEL learning goals and standards for kindergarten to high school students (Beaty, 2018). Some school districts in the United States have added learning standards, specific goals, and benchmarks for students based on grade level and have also specified what SEL components students should know and be able to exemplify in each developmental stage (Beaty, 2018).

CASEL has been conducting CASEL State Scans to keep track of SEL development competencies, standards, goals, and benchmarks in the US since 2011 (Dermody & Dusenbury, 2022; Dusenbury et al., 2018). In 2017, all 50 states had standards for preschool-age children, and eight states had standards for kindergarten-twelfth-grade students (Allbright et al., 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2018). Fourteen states adopted SEL competencies and standards in 2019 and 18

in 2020 (Yoder et al., 2020). Another state scan conducted by CASEL took place in 2022. This CASEL State Scan indicated that 27 states now have K-12 SEL competencies, a 50% increase since the last two years (Dermody & Dusenbury, 2022; Dusenbury et al., 2018; Yoder et al., 2020).

The CASEL State Scan data only focuses on state schools, not nonpublic schools (private schools), which are often considered independent schools and not state-funded or administered. However, Connecticut is one of the few states that passed the Public Act 19-166, which identifies members from public, nonprofit, and private settings to collaborate on school climate and SEL initiatives (McKee et al., 2022; Yoder et al., 2020). The number of SEL adoptions in state schools has risen over the past few years due to COVID-19 (Bond, 2020; Gresham et al., 2020; Rosanbalm, 2021).

SEL and COVID-19

SEL came to the forefront due to the isolation and stress that COVID-19 caused for many children worldwide (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Bond, 2020; Gresham et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Rosanbalm, 2021). The pandemic disrupted learning for over 55 million students worldwide, affecting their academic growth and mental and emotional health (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Mahmud, 2022). COVID-19 was deemed the worst disruption to education, which caused many students to lose social skills due to the inability to go to school in person during the pandemic (Santomauro et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

In 2020, the prevalence of depressive disorder and anxiety disorder skyrocketed due to COVID-19 and the inability of individuals to congregate with other individuals outside of their homes due to lockdowns and school closures (Santomauro et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

School closures negatively affected students' SEL skills (Li et al., 2021; Santomauro et al., 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). During COVID-19, students lacked relationships with peers and educators, student's mental health and wellness declined, and students exhibited signs of loneliness and isolation (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Li et al., 2021; Rosanbalm, 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

During the pandemic, student's mental health and social well-being declined significantly, but there were still lasting effects even after the pandemic ended and students returned to school for in-person learning (Hamilton & Gross, 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). After the pandemic, there was an increase in suicidal attempts among children (Hamilton & Gross, 2021; Naff et al., 2022; Oberg et al., 2022). In March 2021, visits for attempted suicides were 50.6% higher compared to 2019, and there was an increase of 26.2% in suicide attempts made by girls ages 12-17 (Hamilton & Gross, 2021; Oberg et al., 2022). There was also a rise in students' withdrawn, depressed, and attention-seeking behaviors after the pandemic (Hamatani et al., 2022; Naff et al., 2022; Oberg et al., 2022). The lasting effects of COVID-19 have led schools worldwide to focus on their responsibility to teach students with trauma from the pandemic by incorporating SEL (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Wang et al., 2023). SEL plays a huge role in children's development, well-being, and skills to cope with traumas and stressors that the pandemic has brought to the surface (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Zieher et al., 2021).

Implementation of SEL in Schools

Adopting SEL standards, competencies, goals, and benchmarks was the first step to implementing SEL in schools, but schools are now trying to determine the best way to implement and assess SEL skills worldwide (Allbright et al., 2019; Bond, 2020). Research suggests that

implementing SEL programs in schools is the most promising approach to equip students with vital social and emotional competencies needed for all students after the pandemic (Gagnier et al., 2022; Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Lawson et al., 2019). A national survey in July 2021 revealed that 84% of educators believe incorporating SEL programming and curriculum in schools has become even more critical since the COVID-19 pandemic (Rosen et al., 2022). SEL has been implemented in PK-12 grades worldwide to attempt to teach students SEL skills that may be lacking due to COVID-19 and the social isolation caused during the pandemic (Hamilton & Gross, 2021; Yuliandri & Wijaya, 2021).

After COVID-19, SEL became a hot topic in education as educators realized SEL was at an all-time low in students worldwide (Bond, 2020; Gresham et al., 2020). Integrating and teaching SEL skills in schools worldwide became the solution to help students recover from the dramatic effects of the pandemic (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Bond, 2020; Gresham et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Rosanbalm, 2021; Wang et al., 2023; Zieher et al., 2021). There is an abundance of research that explores the impact and effects of SEL implementation in schools (Blewitt et al., 2018; Djamnezhad et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2021; Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Mondy et al., 2021; Wigelsworth et al., 2022).

Current SEL Practices Available

Schools wanted to implement SEL practices following the pandemic but were unsure how or where to begin (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022). There are opposing views on implementing SEL in schools for this reason (Kaspar & Massey, 2022). Individuals who are opposed to SEL implementation argue that SEL takes away from academic time (Kaspar & Massey, 2022). Others believe SEL is a manipulative way to mold student personalities, which takes away from student individuality (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Zhao, 2020). However, on the CASEL database,

over 70 SEL programs were publicly listed on their website to help push the movement of SEL implementation in schools (Scott et al., 2021).

Many SEL curriculums are now available for purchase following the pandemic (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Scott et al., 2021). (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Scott et al., 2021). Research suggests that the best practice for implementing the SEL curriculum is to ensure the curriculum aligns with CASEL's five social and emotional competencies (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Mariani et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2021; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). Some of the most common curriculums that ensure students are receiving the five CASEL SEL competencies are student success skills (SSS), caring school community, PATHS, positive action, resolving conflicts creatively, responsive classroom, second step, social decision-making/problem-solving program, and steps to review (Mariani et al., 2022). Current SEL practices are also designed with an equity approach in mind. To ensure SEL programs exemplify equity, educators are encouraged to address SEL through a culturally responsive approach and a social justice-oriented approach, also identified as an RP approach (Gagnier et al., 2022; Gay, 2018).

The SEL programs that are the most common have many similar components, in addition to them all including self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Mariani et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2021; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). These SEL practices require holistic and contextual thinking (Gagnier et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2021; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). These programs and curricula require teachers to develop a contextual and holistic way of thinking by understanding the whole child and how their family and environment shape a student's thinking, development, and needs (Gagnier et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2021). These SEL curriculums also allow general education teachers to add a daily component of SEL (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Wigelsworth et al., 2022).

Building relationships, trust, and connecting with students are vital components of these SEL curriculums (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Mariani et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2021). Though these curriculums have much in common, they are not all developmentally appropriate for all ages (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Mariani et al., 2022).

SEL for Elementary Schools

When selecting the SEL curriculum and programming for elementary students, it is also important to make sure the selected curriculum is developmentally appropriate for K-5th grade students since elementary encompasses a wide span of grades and ages (Ferreira et al., 2021; Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Lawson et al., 2019). At the elementary age, it is vital to ensure programs include direct, explicit skills instruction (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Lawson et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2021). Ideal SEL programs for elementary schools offer a multi-year approach to build on and expand the curriculum each year (Lawson et al., 2019; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). Some of the popular SEL programs that include these components are Incredible Years-Incredible Teachers, PATHS, I Can Problem Solve, Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving, MindUp, Competent Kids, Caring Communities, Open Circle, Positive Action, Raising Healthy Children, Resolving Conflict Creativity, Steps to Respect, and Too Good for Violence (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Lawson et al., 2019).

A few studies summarize the evidence and impact of SEL in elementary schools (Kaspar & Massey, 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). Studies suggest that one con to teaching SEL in elementary school is not properly training teachers to implement SEL correctly (Oliveira et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl & Zakrzewski, 2014). In a study of nine elementary curriculums, the research found that with effect sizes between 0.21 and 0.70, these nine programs can effectively promote SEL skills if the

curriculums are followed correctly (Wigelsworth et al., 2022). A study conducted on K-12 students found that SEL implementation affected elementary-age students more than middle and high school students (Kim et al., 2022).

SEL for Middle Schools

SEL must continue in middle school to get longitudinal data on the effectiveness and benefits of SEL. Early adolescence and the transition to middle school is a critical developmental period in which students experience cognitive and social changes (Green et al., 2021; Neth et al., 2019). During middle school years, it is also common for students to experience a decrease in self-efficacy, social awareness, self-regulation, and self-management, making SEL even more critical (Green et al., 2021; Rosen et al., 2022). In addition to the CASEL competencies, SEL for middle school students should include a curriculum that adapts to students' identities, lived experiences, and values (Green et al., 2021; Rosen et al., 2022). Middle school SEL programs are also designed to teach coping skills (Green et al., 2021; Neth et al., 2019). Some of the commonly used middle school SEL curriculums and programming include Strong Kids, Speaking to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience Inside Every Kid (SPARK) Pre-Teen Mentoring Curriculum, and Second Step (Green et al., 2021; Neth et al., 2019).

A study focused on middle school students found that SEL for adolescents reduced their behavioral problems and improved social adjustment, school engagement, and academic achievement (Kim et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2022). Research suggests that SEL in middle school has improved social relationships and students' psychological well-being (Kim et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2022). Studies also indicate that middle-school SEL competencies promote students' overall well-being and the school climate, improve test grades, and increase high

school graduation rates and college attendance (Kim et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2017).

SEL in Private Schools

There are very few studies on SEL in private schools. Countries outside of the United States, including Vietnam, Britain, and India, have conducted most of the current studies on private schools' use of SEL programs (Huynh et al., 2021; Kaur & Sharma, 2022; Stumm & Plomin, 2020). One study conducted in Britain determined that privately educated children achieve better school grades, are more likely to obtain higher degrees, and are more likely to attend prestigious colleges than state schools (Stumm & Plomin, 2020). However, there is no difference in students' SEL skills and well-being when comparing private and public school students (Stumm & Plomin, 2020).

There is minimal research on the impact of SEL in nonpublic schools, such as private schools. There is a gap in the literature that exists in SEL and nonpublic schools. A study comparing public and private SEL revealed that private school teachers have better knowledge about the competencies of SEL than public preschool teachers (Kaur & Sharma, 2022). This same study showed that private preschool teachers' self-awareness knowledge is comparatively more than public preschool teachers' knowledge (Kaur & Sharma, 2022). This same study showed that private preschool teachers' self-awareness knowledge is comparatively more than public preschool teachers' knowledge (Kaur & Sharma, 2022). More studies are needed to determine SEL's impact on students in private schools.

History of Restorative Practices

Restorative practices in schools originated from the restorative justice system that was first used in the criminal justice system (Fronius et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021;

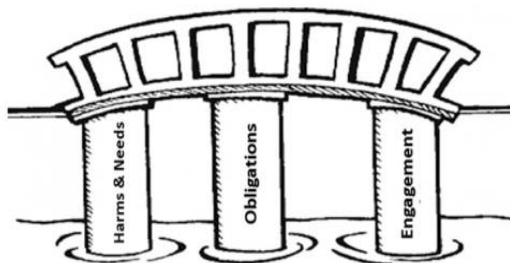
Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Initially, restorative justice was used to reduce incarceration and a program for convicted offenders (Fronius et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2019). The goal of restorative justice was to end punitive punishment and shift to repairing harm, fixing relationships caused by criminal actions, and collaboratively solving problems (Fronius et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2019; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). School violence and daily disruptive and dangerous behaviors increased in schools. School leaders began to search for disciplinary measures outside of zero tolerance policies, suspensions, and expulsions that were ineffective and harmful to student behavior (Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). In the 1990s, due to the success of restorative justice in the criminal justice system, the transformation from the judicial system to the school system was initiated, and schools began to adopt the idea of implementing restorative justice into schools to replace zero-tolerance policies (Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). This is now known as RP.

Three Pillars of Restorative Justice

Figure 2 shows the three pillars of restorative justice categorized by Zehr (2002) in, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*.

Figure 2

Pillars of Restorative Justice



Note. Adapted from *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (p. 22) by H. Zehr, 2002, Good Books.

Copyright 2002 by Good Books

These pillars include harm and needs, obligations, and engagement (Vogt, 2012; Zehr, 2002).

The stakeholders and the community restore justice through these three phases. Harm and needs, obligations, and engagement occur in a sequential order.

Harm and Needs

The first component of restorative justice is harm and needs. Harm and needs focus on who was harmed by an offender's actions and what harm was caused (Vogt, 2012; Zehr, 2002). From a restorative justice perspective, a criminal act harms the relationship between the offender and victim as well as the community (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021; Wilson et al., 2017). The goal of this phase is to do more than punish an offender for their actions; instead, the goal is to do more to address the victim's needs (Maryfield et al., 2020; Zehr, 2002).

Obligations

The obligation pillar follows the harm and needs phase. The purpose of the obligation phase is to focus on the offender's obligation toward the victim to repair the harm done (Vogt,

2012; Zehr, 2002). Restorative justice theory seeks to take violations made and create an obligation to make things right (Maryfield et al., 2020). This step seeks to establish accountability for the harm done, hold the offender responsible, and determine what can be done to repair the harm (Wilson et al., 2017; Zehr, 2002).

Engagement

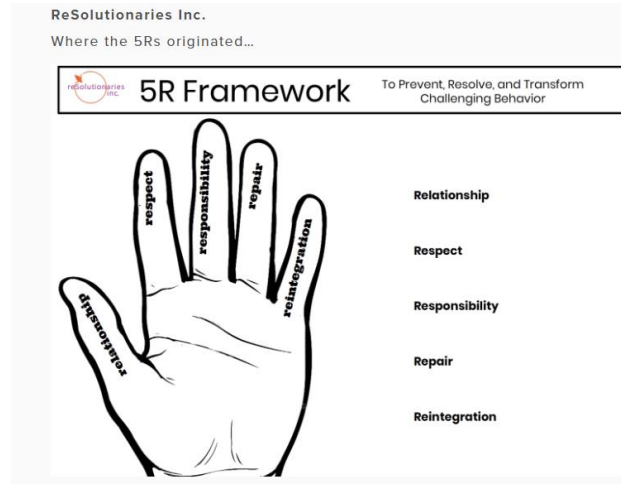
The last pillar of the restorative justice theory is the engagement phase. In the engagement stage, offenders and victims fulfill their roles in the justice system (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021; Zehr, 2002). Support networks that provide all parties with emotional and substantive assistance conduct engagement meaningfully (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021; Vogt, 2012). Any steps to repair harm are carried out and decided by the justice system (Vogt, 2012). The community is responsible for ensuring opportunities for offenders to make amends, which is how RP became popular in the school system (Vogt, 2012; Zehr, 2002).

Five Components of Restorative Practices

Schools could not fully adapt the restorative justice theory solely from the judicial system and apply it in schools. Educators changed the process from the judicial system to one that would work best in a school setting. Figure 3 shows the framework that was created to incorporate RP in schools.

Figure 2

5R Framework



Note. Adapted from <https://www.resolutionariesinc.com/>. Copyright 2023 by ReSolutionaries Inc.

RP can be categorized into the five R's to explain how restorative justice theory has led to the process of RP in schools today. The five R's are relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration.

Relationship

The first thing schools learned from the restorative justice theory is that when wrongdoing occurs, it negatively affects individuals and their relationships with others (Pavlicic et al., 2021; Zehr, 2015). The relationship component of RP is to discover what specific harm has been caused and hold everyone involved in the relationship accountable, including offenders, victims, and community leaders (Marsh, 2017; Zehr, 2015). One of the most important goals of RP is rectifying relationships to the extent possible depending on the offense that occurs (Pavlicic et al., 2021; Zehr, 2002). Stakeholders must also understand that forgiveness and reconciliation with the person causing harm do not have to occur in the relationship phase (Pavlicic et al., 2021; Zehr, 2002).

Respect

The second component of RP is respect. Respect helps ensure the process of RP involves a safe resolution process, allowing for effective communication among all parties (Lodi et al., 2021; Pavlacic et al., 2021). This phase ensures that all willing participants agree to be respectful towards each other even when acknowledging the wrongdoing that took place (Lodi et al., 2021; Pavlacic et al., 2021). This includes listening to all parties' perspectives and being respectful even when disagreeing or confronted with different beliefs and opinions (Lodi et al., 2021; Pavlacic et al., 2021).

Responsibility

Responsibility is the third domain of RP. Responsibility is considered the most important phase of RP (Pavlacic et al., 2021). In this phase, the offender and victim must take responsibility for any harm they caused (Lodi et al., 2021; Pavlacic et al., 2021). The offender takes accountability and responsibility when engaging in RP (Karp, 2015; Pavlacic et al., 2021). Once responsibility is taken, an action plan must be implemented to correct wrongdoing (Pavlacic et al., 2021; Zehr & Mika, 1997).

Repair

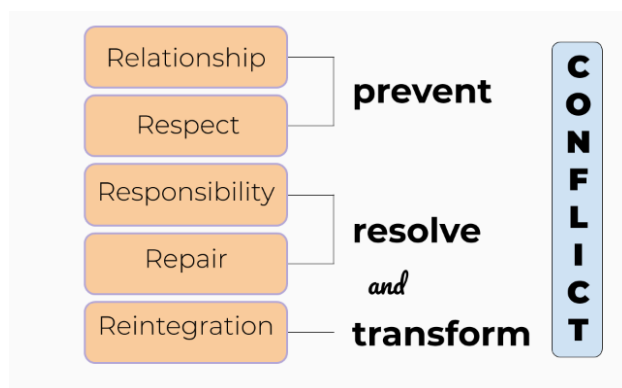
Once responsibility is taken, all parties involved can move to the repair stage. The repair stage aims to restore the outcomes of harmful behavior identified in the previous stages (Pavlacic et al., 2021). It is important to note that in some cases, the harmful behavior may be too extreme to repair (Pavlacic et al., 2021; Zehr, 2015). The overall goal of the repair stage is to restore harm and help stakeholders transfer to the reintegration phase.

Reintegration

Reintegration is the final component of RP. The ultimate goal of RP is to repair relationships, trust to the furthest extent, and reintegrate the offender back into the community (Karp, 2015; Pavlacic et al., 2021). The community plays a vital role in the reintegration step. The community's role is to allow the offender to accept responsibility for their actions and find the most appropriate way to reintegrate the wrongdoer back into the community (Goodstein & Aquino, 2010; Pavlacic et al., 2021). Figure 4 below shows the overall goals of the 5R's when dealing with conflict.

Figure 3

5R's Approach



Note. Adapted from <https://www.resolutionariesinc.com/>. Copyright 2023 by ReSolutionaries Inc.

As shown in Figure 4, relationship and respect are the preventative phases of conflict.

Responsibility and repair are to help students resolve any conflict, and reintegration helps transform students after a conflict has occurred. Relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration are the five principles that have helped shape RP in schools today.

Restorative Practices in Schools

The fundamental principles of RP in schools are to provide students with a space to show accountability, assist them in making things right, support individuals in repairing harm, help students view conflict as a learning opportunity, build healthy learning communities, restore relationships, and address power imbalances (Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). The ultimate goal of RP is to keep students in school, help address the root of behavior issues, and repair and improve relationships among students and school staff (Fronius et al., 2019; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). There are many RP methods that can be used depending on the severity of the problem, including proactive circles, restorative chats, peer mediation, restorative meetings, community building circles, restorative circles, etc. (Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Table 1 shows the RP methods that are incorporated into schools daily and which of the five restorative phases each activity is associated with.

Table 1:*Elements of RP in Schools*

Domain	Elements	Description
Prevention (building relationships and developing community)	1. Affective Statements	Use in response to negative or positive events in the classroom and school
	2. Proactive Circles	Run on daily or weekly basis (e.g., students sit in a circle and discuss a topic that helps build community)
	3. Fair Process	Engage students in decisions, explain the rationale
	4–5. Restorative Staff Community/ Restorative Approach with Families	Model and use restorative practices among school staff and with student families
	6. Fundamental Hypothesis Understandings	Provides a framework to guide daily interactions with the appropriate mix of control and support
	Intervention (repairing harm and restoring community)	7. Restorative Questions
8. Responsive Circles		After a moderately serious incident, students sit in a circle and address who has been harmed and what needs to be done to make things right
9. Small Impromptu Circles		Address negative behaviors by asking the wrongdoer and those harmed to answer restorative questions in front of each other.
10. Restorative Conference Circles		Respond to a serious incident using a scripted approach to facilitate accountability and repair harm
11. Reintegrative Management of Shame		Acknowledge the emotions of the wrongdoers and those impacted by the wrongdoing

Note. Retrieved from “The Promise of Restorative Practices to Transform Teacher-Student Relationships and Achieve Equity in School Discipline” by A. Gregory, K. Clawson, A. Davis and J. Gerewitz, 2016, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* 26(4), p. 330. Copyright 2016 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

RP in Elementary Schools

Research on RP implementation in the United States has commonly been conducted in middle and high schools, even though RP can be used in K-12 settings (Kervick et al., 2020). The literature revealed that some common RP that have been implemented in elementary schools are responsive circles, restorative conversations, circles, conferences, and peer mediation (Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Restorative conversations are informal conversations that use restorative language and are used with less severe incidents (Fronius et al., 2019). Restorative circles are facilitated meetings where students solve problems, complete community-building activities, resolve disciplinary issues, and discuss difficult topics (Fronius et al., 2019; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). Facilitators lead restorative circles where students solve problems, complete community-building activities, resolve disciplinary issues and discuss difficult topics (Fronius et al., 2019; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). Peer mediation uses trained student mediators to facilitate RP between students to address conflict and ways to avoid future conflict (Fronius et al., 2019; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). More research is needed on RP in elementary schools.

RP in Middle School

The middle school ages are vital as young adolescents experience many challenging factors, such as low self-esteem, depression, and suicidal thoughts that can later lead to an adverse effect on student's health and their transition to adulthood (Fergusson et al., 2005; Nakanishi et al., 2019; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Implementing RP in middle school is as vital as implementing these practices in elementary schools. Community circles, responsive circles, restorative conversations, and peer mediation are all appropriate RP to use in middle school

settings (Lodi et al., 2021; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Wang & Lee, 2019). More research is needed in the area of RP in middle schools, as there are minimal studies in this area.

Community Circles

Community circles are a part of the relationship phase of RP in schools. This type of circle helps teachers begin to implement RP by creating a space for students to feel connected, improve relationships, promote healthy ways to deal with conflict and learn social-emotional development skills (Dickson-Gilmore & La Prairie, 2005; Edber, 2022; Katic et al., 2020). This circle also creates positive relationships and trust between students and teachers and helps individuals learn empathy (Edber, 2022; Silverman & Mee, 2019). Circles also provide an opportunity for students and teachers to speak and listen in a safe, nonjudgmental environment to promote equality among all (Edber, 2022; Wachtel, 2016). *Table 2* below details the norms of a community circle.

Table 2

Community Circle Norms and Rationale

Norm	Rationale
Speak only with the talking piece.	A talking piece guards and protects the right for everyone to speak and be heard; intervenes against established patterns of who speaks and who is heard in a classroom context.
100% participation.	Everyone needs to be present and included in the process and to “opt in” to restorative processes. If students do not want to speak, they can take the talking piece when it is their turn and pass it on. They can say “pass” as their speaking turn.
Speak loudly enough to be heard.	Everyone’s voice and participation is valuable enough to be heard.
Listen silently.	No one voice is more important than the next. Everyone’s voice and participation is valuable enough to be heard.
What is said in the circle, stays in the circle.	Confidentiality protects and encourages vulnerability, which is key to address root causes of harm in conflict.

Retrieved from “Community Circles in Response to Restorative Justice Research and Critique” by H. Edber, 2022, *Journal of Educational Research & Practice* 12(0), p. 31. Copyright 2022 by the Journal of Educational Research & Practice.

A community circle is a rich conversation with participants, including teachers and students gathered in a circle with seats or on the carpet while using a talking stick to discuss a topic or various topics selected (Edber, 2022; Silverman & Mee, 2019). The circle begins with the teacher opening with an open-ended question and then passing the talking stick around for all students to have the opportunity to respond only when holding the stick to ensure all students are making eye contact and showing respect to the speaker (Edber, 2022; Raveche Garnett et al., 2020; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Wachtel, 2016). Only one person can speak at a time, and the stick moves in one direction during the circle (Edber, 2022; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Wachtel, 2016).

Community circles allow students and teachers in a classroom to have open and honest discussions, even those concerning emotional topics (Silverman & Mee, 2019; Wachtel, 2016). This circle and talking stick format helps eliminate arguments among participants, teaches students to wait patiently to speak until they receive the talking piece, and helps students learn to speak less and listen more (Costello et al., 2010; Wachtel, 2016). In community circles, it is also important to discuss accountability and any harm caused by students in the circle, as students who cause harm are often unaware of how the harm affects individuals and their community (Silverman & Mee, 2019). Overall, community circles allow students and teachers to learn about one another, allow individuals time to express their feelings in a healthy manner, and result in a community of respect to allow all members in a group to co-exist in a healthy way to meet learning outcomes yearly (Gregory et al., 2016; Silverman & Mee, 2019).

Community circles can be conducted in a variety of ways. This includes conducting them during homeroom, advisory time, once a week on Mondays or Fridays to open or close the school week or daily (Silverman & Mee, 2019). Elementary and middle schools can use community circles, but the most critical part is finding the time to incorporate them during the school day and starting them early in the school year (Silverman & Mee, 2019; Wachtel, 2016).

Responsive Circles

Responsive circles are another type of circle used in the RP process. This circle is a part of the responsibility and repair phases of the RP process. Responsive circles can also be called conflict resolution, problem solving, and repairing harm circles (Wachtel, 2016; Wang & Lee, 2019). These circles aim to address harm in a manner that promotes accountability, trust, repair harm, and rebuild relationships (Kervick et al., 2020; Wang & Lee, 2019). Unlike community circles, these circles do not include all students and teachers in a classroom. Participants in these circles are specific to individuals who have caused harm to someone, the person who has been harmed, people whom the harm may have impacted, and support people for the individuals involved (Kervick et al., 2020; Wang & Lee, 2019).

Responsive circles are still led in the same format as community circles, where participants sit in a round formation (Edber, 2022; Wachtel, 2016; Wang & Lee, 2019). The goal of this circle is to identify any harm that has been caused, work to address the harm by working through a series of restorative questions, understand what happened and how individuals were affected, and how to make things right (Kervick et al., 2020; Wang & Lee, 2019). There is no script provided for this type of circle, instead, the use of restorative questions helps guide the circle (Costello et al., 2010; Wang & Lee, 2019). At the start of the responsive circle, the circle

facilitator gives the terms and then introduces the talking piece to begin the responsive circle with the participants (Wang & Lee, 2019).

Restorative Questions/Conversations

Restorative questions and conversations occur in the repairing and restoring phase, as seen in Table 1. Restorative conversations are any conversations that take place using restorative questions to help students approach situations with an open and transparent mind. These questions allow individuals who are harmed and those who have caused harm to reflect on the situation by answering questions posed in a restorative manner (Gregory et al., 2016; Wachtel, 2016). Questions are posed differently for the person harmed and the individual who has caused the harm, as seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3*Restorative Questions*

<p>Restorative Questions I</p> <p><i>To respond to challenging behavior</i></p> <p>What happened? What were you thinking of at the time? Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way? What do you think you need to do to make things right?</p> <p><small>International Institute for Restorative Practices, www.iirp.org</small></p>

<p>Restorative Questions II</p> <p><i>To help those harmed by other's actions.</i></p> <p>What did you think when you realized what had happened? What impact had this incident had on you and others? What has been the hardest thing for you? What do you think needs to happen to make things right?</p> <p><small>International Institute for Restorative Practices, www.iirp.org</small></p>

Note. Adapted from <https://www.iirp.edu/news/time-to-think-using-restorative-questions>.

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The ultimate goal of restorative questions and conversations is to encourage students to reflect on their behavior and how it may have affected others to figure out how to restore things, come to an agreement, and move forward (Gregory et al., 2016; Wachtel, 2016).

Peer Mediation

Peer mediation is also a part of the restoration and repair phases of the RP process. Peer mediation is used for minor conflicts (Lodi et al., 2021). Peer mediation is a conflict resolution process that is run by peers whom their teacher can train to lead peer mediation sessions to help

other students resolve conflicts that they are unable to resolve on their own (Adigüzel, 2015; Lodi et al., 2021; Strawhun et al., 2014). Studies suggest it is vital for schools to train students in peer mediation practice so students can learn to manage conflict independently, repair and rebuild relationships (Lodi et al., 2021; Pavelka, 2013).

Students must be taught nonviolent conflict resolution skills and social competencies to eliminate violence during this process (Adigüzel, 2015; Pavelka, 2013; Strawhun et al., 2014). The job of the mediator during a peer mediation session is to help individuals involved in the process communicate effectively and respectfully to negotiate and problem-solve in order to come to an agreed-upon resolution (Chittooran & Hoenig, 2005; Strawhun et al., 2014). The mediator must remain neutral throughout the process and does not decide anything for either party involved (Adigüzel, 2015; Lodi et al., 2021; Strawhun et al., 2014). Conflicts can be referred to mediation by teachers or students in most school settings that practice this RP tool to attempt to bypass administration involvement if it is not necessary to involve them (Adigüzel, 2015; Strawhun et al., 2014). Students can benefit from peer mediation by encouraging them to understand their peer's perspectives, teaching them to use non-violent resolution skills, and effectively communicating healthily (Adigüzel, 2015; Strawhun et al., 2014). Peer mediation is one of the most common restorative processes and the most accepted tool nationwide (Adigüzel, 2015; Pavelka, 2013).

Restorative Conferences

Restorative conferences are considered formal during the repair and restore phase of RP (Kervick et al., 2020; Norris, 2018; Wachtel, 2016). Restorative conferences are structured meetings that include individuals who have been harmed and the person who caused the harm, parents, friends, and facilitators (Lieberman & Katz, 2019; Wachtel, 2016). Restorative

conferences are similar to circles but are typically implemented when serious conflict arises in place of a restorative circle (Lodi et al., 2021; Wachtel, 2016). The facilitator uses a conference script that includes restorative questions, as seen in Table 3 above (Lieberman & Katz, 2019; Norris, 2018; Wachtel, 2016). After the facilitator goes through the series of restorative questions, the victim in the conference is asked what they would like the outcome of the conference to be (Wachtel, 2016). Some outcomes of restorative conferences include making amends between the two parties, providing an opportunity for healing for victims and offenders, or continuing ongoing support for either party involved by conducting follow-up meetings (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001; Wachtel, 2016). Reintegration occurs when both parties involved have a chance to agree; a contract is then written and signed by all parties involved to close out the restorative conference and reintegrate students back into their school community (O'Connell et al., 1999; Wachtel, 2016).

Impact of RP in Schools

Research suggests that implementing RP has many positive effects on students and school communities (Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Literature reveals that schools that implement RP have less misconduct, school crimes, more positive behaviors, and a decrease in suspensions (Fronius et al., 2019; Kervick et al., 2020; Kohli et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). RP, in comparison to schools that use traditional discipline systems, has a reduction in aggression and bullying, less substance abuse with smoking and alcohol, and an overall improvement in students' psychological well-being (Bonell et al., 2018; Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). Literature also explains that RP in schools improves student relationships, teacher and student relationships,

connectedness, social skills, emotional skills, accountability, and empathy (Fronius et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

RP and SEL Integration

In recent literature, RP has also been combined with other nonpunitive discipline approaches, such as SEL and PBIS (Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021). Research suggests that combining RP and SEL programs has positive outcomes for students, teachers, and school communities (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Kennedy, 2019). RP and SEL differ in approaches but complement one another because they share the same goals, to strengthen relationships, improve school climate, and improve students' SEL skills, including communication skills, kindness, empathy, and caring (CASEL, 2020; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Petrokubi et al., 2019). More research is needed to explore the integration of RP and SEL and its impact on students' SEL skills.

Summary

SEL theory and restorative justice is the theoretical framework used to guide this study. Research has revealed that SEL came to the spotlight after the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Bond, 2020; Gresham et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Rosanbalm, 2021). SEL is composed of five competencies that are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2012; Oberle et al., 2016). These SEL competencies are being implemented in schools worldwide as early as preschool and extending to 12th grade. More research is needed in the area of SEL implementation in elementary and middle schools, specifically in elementary and middle private schools.

RP has also become a popular approach in K-12 schools. RP stemmed from the restorative justice theory and the three pillars containing harm and needs, obligations, and engagement (Zehr, 2002). RP in schools today typically embraces five components: relationships, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration (Zehr, 2015). Building relationships and respect in a school community is the starting point of the RP process (Gregory et al., 2016; Lodi et al., 2021). Building relationships and respect in elementary and middle schools can be accomplished through the implementation of circles such as community circles, which is a popular RP tool used in many schools today (Edber, 2022; Lodi et al., 2021; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Wachtel, 2016). It is crucial to build relationships at the start of the RP process to be proactive in preventing conflict (Gregory et al., 2016; Lodi et al., 2021; Silverman & Mee, 2019). Conflict is a natural part of life, but if conflict is not handled appropriately, it can cause harm to relationships (Zuure, 2014). Conflicts managed positively through RP interventions result in development change, understanding, knowledge, progress, and peace, but when negatively managed, conflicts give students repeated negative results and a negative connotation towards conflict (Bell et al., 2000; Zuure, 2014).

Beyond RP's relationship and respect phases, schools must also be prepared to have tools to overcome conflict available to guide students through the intervention and resolution phases of RP, including the responsibility, repair, and reintegration stages. Elementary and middle schools can use responsive circles, restorative questions and conversations, peer mediation, and restorative conferences to successfully walk students through resolving minor and major conflicts in a healthy manner (Adigüzel, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Lodi et al., 2021; Strawhun et al., 2014; Wachtel, 2016). Restorative questions are vital in the responsibility and repair phase of RP. Restorative questions allow both parties in a conflict to reflect on the harm that was

caused and how the harm affects individuals or a community to help students build social competencies, including self-awareness, relationship skills, and empathy (Adigüzel, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Pavelka, 2013; Strawhun et al., 2014; Wachtel, 2016).

The integration of RP and SEL has been studied, and studies found that the concepts of RP and SEL overlap and can be used together to strengthen student's SEL skills (CASEL, 2020; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Petrokubi et al., 2019). Studies have also revealed positive outcomes when RP and SEL are integrated into schools (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Kennedy, 2019). With the increase of SEL and RP since COVID-19, research is still developing in the area of integrating the two concepts in schools worldwide. A gap in the literature exists, and research is explicitly needed to determine the differences between students' SEL skills in private elementary and middle schools that practice RP and private elementary and middle schools that do not.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to determine if there is a difference in social-emotional learning between students at elementary and middle private schools with and without RP. This chapter describes the methods used to address each research question and corresponding null hypotheses. The research design, participants, settings, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis are all described in this chapter.

Design

A quantitative, causal-comparative design was used for this study. A causal-comparative design is an appropriate study to explore cause-and-effect relationships (Gall et al., 2007). Causal-comparative research explores the relationships between independent and dependent variables in studies where the researcher has no control over assigning or manipulating groups, but the groups are already defined. The independent variable is the cause, and the dependent variable is the effect (Gall et al., 2007). One key component of this design is that the independent variable is categorical (Gall et al., 2007). This design attempts to highlight a change in the effect variable(s) when the causal variable(s) cannot be manipulated for practical or ethical reasons (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004). In this type of research design, the researcher can have one independent and dependent variable or choose to have multiple (Gall et al., 2007).

There are a few limitations that exist in a causal-comparative design. When using this research design, there must be a pre-existing independent variable that the researcher cannot manipulate (Hill, 2019). Often, other variables can affect the dependent variable instead of the independent variable (Hill, 2019). There is also a lack of randomization in this design (Hill, 2019). Despite the limitations of no control, pre-existing groups, and a lack of randomization,

this study is the most appropriate to identify SEL differences between students at elementary and middle private schools with RP and without RP. The study is similar to research conducted by Abali and Yazici (2020) and Mondri et al. (2021).

In this study, the cause-and-effect relationship investigated whether SEL between students at private schools with RP and students at private schools without RP differs. The first independent variable in this study is school levels comprised of two groups of students, including students at private elementary schools and private middle schools. The second independent variable is the use of restorative practices encompassing two groups: private schools that incorporate RP into their curriculum and private schools that do not. The dependent variable is one SEL composite score that combines the student's five SEL competency skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, to examine their level of SEL. The dependent variable is continuous.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a difference in social and emotional learning competencies between private elementary and middle school students based on whether restorative practices are provided or not?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no difference in social-emotional learning competencies for 3rd-8th grade private school students between those attending schools with restorative practices and those without restorative practices, as measured by the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition.

H₀₂: There is no difference in social-emotional learning competencies between elementary (3rd -5th) students attending private schools and middle school (6th - 8th) students attending

private schools as measured by the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition.

H₀₃: There is no significant interaction between school level and incorporation of restorative practices on social-emotional learning skills competencies, as measured by the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition.

Participants and Setting

The population and participants are outlined in detail below. This section will also include the sampling technique and sample size. The section concludes with a description of the setting.

Population

A sample of third through eighth-grade students located in northeastern North Carolina during the fall semester of the 2023-2024 school year were selected to participate in this study. According to the North Carolina Private School Statistics, 115,311 students across grades K-12 enrolled in private schools in the state during the 2021-22 school year (Dillion, 2022). Participants were selected from two private schools in the Inde school district. The sample came from two different private K-eight schools in the district. Private school #1 is a low-income urban school, and private school #2 is an upper-income urban school. Private school #1 consisted of 171 total students. Private school #2 had 193 total students. The total population of private school #1 for the 2023-2024 school year consisted of 5.2% White students, 53 % African American students, 2.8% Hispanic students, and 39% Asian students. Private school #2 had a total of 2.4% White students, 95.8% African American students, 1.8% Hispanic students, and 0% Asian students enrolled for the 2023-2024 school year.

Participants

This study used convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling in which the researcher announces the study, and participants decide if they wish to participate (Stratton, 2021). For this study, the sample size was 128, which exceeds the required minimum. According to Gall et al. (2007), statistical power of .7 at the .05 alpha level, 126, is the minimum number of participants required for a medium effect size. At each school, all students in grades 3rd-8th were given the opportunity to participate in the study, but only students who returned consent forms were included in the study. Please see Table 4 for the sample information for the total participants.

Table 4

Total Participants

Grade Level	Male	Female	White	African-American	Hispanic	Asian
3 rd	8	12	2	14	0	4
4 th	8	12	0	15	0	5
5 th	11	9	0	16	1	3
6 th	9	11	3	12	0	5
7 th	11	13	0	17	2	5
8 th	12	12	0	18	2	4
Total	59	69	5	92	5	26

There were 64 total students that participated from private school #1. Please see Table 5 for the total number of participants from private school #1.

Table 5*Private School #1 Participants*

Grade Level	Male	Female	White	African-American	Hispanic	Asian
3 rd	4	6	1	5	0	4
4 th	4	6	0	5	0	5
5 th	3	7	0	6	1	3
6 th	5	5	1	4	0	5
7 th	5	7	0	6	1	5
8 th	7	5	0	7	1	4
Total	28	36	2	33	3	26

There were 64 total students that participated from private school #2. Please see Table 6 for the total number of participants from private school #2.

Table 6*Private School #2 Participants*

Grade Level	Male	Female	White	African-American	Hispanic	Asian
3 rd	4	6	1	9	0	0
4 th	4	6	0	10	0	0
5 th	8	2	0	10	0	0
6 th	4	6	2	8	0	0

7 th	6	6	0	11	1	0
8 th	5	7	0	11	1	0
Total	31	33	3	59	2	0

Setting

The setting for this study took place at two K-8th grade private schools. The surveys were conducted on paper at both schools in student's SEL class and homeroom classrooms. Surveys were taken in the third quarter during the spring semester. The K-8th grade school that incorporated RP had a school setting that included community circles daily in student's homeroom to begin the school day, restorative chats, responsive circles and restorative discipline throughout the day as needed.

The daily community circles were scheduled for 15 minutes and included a talking stick, a teacher selected topic and healthy conversations to build classroom community. Responsive circles were used in place of community circles when conflict arose within a homeroom classroom. Restorative chats took place as needed with teachers and students during lunch or recess using questions from table 3 as an escalation to misbehavior. Restorative chats were also used with the Dean of Students and children when discipline escalated beyond the classroom to find a resolution to restore students back in the classroom. The school setting at the K-8th grade private school that did not incorporate RP did not include any RP or restorative language within their school.

Instrumentation

The validated instrument used for this study was the SSIS SEL Edition Student Forms (Gresham & Elliott, 2017). This instrument assesses students' five SEL competencies to

compose one SEL composite score (Gresham & Elliott, 2017). See Appendix B for the SSIS SEL instrument. The purpose of this instrument is to measure a student's five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills (Gresham & Elliott, 2017). After SEL arose to the forefront of education through the CASEL movement, a universal system to measure SEL that aligned with the CASEL competency framework was needed, which led to the development of the SSIS SEL Edition (Elliott et al., 2021). This measurement is appropriate because, unlike other measures, it does not just measure a select few of the SEL competencies but was specifically designed to measure all five SEL competencies. This instrument was also designed for students ages 3 to 18 (Gresham & Elliott, 2017). This instrument was used in numerous recent studies (Neth et al., 2019; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Sandilos et al., 2022).

In a psychometric study of the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form, reliability was determined. The coefficient alphas for internal consistency for males and females ages 5 to 12 were 0.94 and 0.95, respectively, on the SEL Composite Scale, and the coefficients for 13- to 18-year-old males and females were 0.95 (Gresham et al., 2020). Students between the ages 8 to 18 rated a second time on the student form to check test-retest reliability, and scores ranged from the mid .70s to the .80s, and mean scores for administration were mostly around .10, which indicated stable and consistent ratings (Gresham et al., 2020).

The instrument consists of 46 questions and uses a four-point Likert-type scale to indicate the degree of trueness rather than frequency of demonstration: (0 = Not true, 1 = A little true, 2 = A lot true, 3 = Very true) (Gresham et al., 2017). The subscales that make up the 46 questions on the assessment align with the five SEL competencies. The possible composite score on the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form can range from zero to 138 points. A score of 0 points is the lowest

possible score, meaning that a student does not display any SEL skills, and a score of 138 points is the highest, meaning that a student displays SEL skills frequently. There are seven self-awareness questions, nine self-management, seven social awareness items, 17 relationship skills questions, and six responsible decision items on the student form. Permission was granted to use this instrument. The SSIS SEL Edition Student Form is attached and can be located in Appendix B. See Appendix B for administration instructions. It can take approximately 20 minutes or less for students to complete the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form (Gresham & Elliott, 2017).

Procedures

IRB approval was secured prior to this research being conducted. See Appendix C for IRB approval. Participants were recruited by reaching out to the Head of School at private school #1 and an administrator at private school #2 to ask for consent to have their 3rd-8th grade students complete SSIS SEL Edition Student Forms. Once permission was given for the study to be conducted at both schools, a recruitment form and opt-out form were sent home to all 3rd-8th grade students. The participant's parents and guardians received a detailed information letter describing the study and a description of the role their child would be playing in the study. See Appendix D for the recruitment form. The official participants that were included in the study were 3rd-8th grade students at the two private schools who did not return and opt out form. See Appendix E for the opt-out form and Appendix F for the assent form.

Assessments were taken on paper student forms during the SEL block (30-minute class period where students receive SEL instruction) at private school #1 and during homeroom in the general education classroom at private school #2. Forms were then picked up, and scores were manually entered into the Pearson Q-global scoring site. Hard copies were stored in a locked file cabinet. Once the information was entered into the Q-global scoring site, information was stored

on a password-protected computer. Data was also stored on a thumb drive in the same locked file cabinet as the student form hard copies.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using a two-way ANOVA. According to Gall et al. (2007), a two-way ANOVA features two independent variables, each with two or more categorical groups and one dependent variable that is measured on a continuous scale. The researcher began by screening the data and removing outliers. The chosen analysis was most appropriate for the study since two independent variables were investigated, and the design met the requirements of the first three assumptions: the assumption of homogeneity, assumption of no significant outliers or inconsistencies and assumption of normality. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test. A box-and-whisker plot was used to test the assumption of no significant outliers or inconsistencies. The Shapiro-Wilk test determined if the assumption of normality was met. The alpha level $\alpha = .05$ was used. Once the assumptions tests were completed, the researcher calculated effect size using Eta squared, and descriptive statistics were computed. Chapter four discusses the specific details and outcomes pertaining to this study's two-way ANOVA analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to determine if there is a difference in SEL between students at private elementary schools with and without RP after COVID-19 and students at private middle schools with and without RP after COVID-19. Third-eighth grade students from two different private schools were asked to complete the SSIS survey to determine students' SEL competencies. A total of 128 total students completed the survey. In this chapter descriptive statistics and results will be examined to determine if the null hypotheses should be rejected or fail to be rejected based on the data collected.

Research Question

RQ1: Is there a difference in social and emotional learning competencies between private elementary and middle school students based on whether restorative practices are provided or not?

Null Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no difference in social-emotional learning competencies for 3rd-8th grade private school students between those attending schools with restorative practices and those without restorative practices, as measured by the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition.

H₀₂: There is no difference in social-emotional learning competencies between elementary (3rd -5th) students attending private schools and middle school (6th - 8th) students attending private schools as measured by the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition.

H₀₃: There is no significant interaction between school level and incorporation of restorative practices on social-emotional learning skills competencies, as measured by the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition.

Descriptive Statistics

The first research question investigated whether there was a significant difference in SEL competencies between private elementary and middle school students based on whether RP are provided or not. 128 students were surveyed. One survey was flagged as an outlier due to the survey being incomplete, resulting in a total of 127 surveys used for data analysis. This survey was removed, because the student did not complete nine survey questions. 63 surveys were completed by private elementary and middle school students who were taught RP, and 64 surveys were done by private elementary and middle school students who did not receive RP.

The study consisted of two independent variables and one dependent variable. The two independent variables were school levels and RP options. The dependent variable was based on student's SEL score from the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form that assessed the five CASEL standards. The mean SEL score for students at private elementary schools that were taught RP ($M = 93.17, SD = 10.69$) was higher than the mean SEL score for students at private elementary schools without RP ($M = 91.90, SD = 18.27$). The opposite was true for students at private middle schools. The mean SEL score for students at private middle schools with RP was ($M = 92.88, SD = 15.44$) and the mean SEL score for private middle school students without RP was ($M = 98.53, SD = 16.86$). When comparing all students who received RP ($M = 93.02, SD = 13.36$) to all students without RP ($M = 95.43, SD = 17.71$) the mean SEL score was higher for students who were not taught RP. See Table 7 for descriptive statistics.

Table 7*Descriptive statistics – School Level and Restorative Options*

School Level	Restorative Options	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
PE	RP	93.1724	10.68734	29
	NO RP	91.9000	18.27444	30
	Total	92.5254	14.91742	59
PM	RP	92.8824	15.44249	34
	NO RP	98.5294	16.85812	34
	Total	95.7059	16.29491	68
Total	RP	93.0159	13.36159	63
	NO RP	95.4219	17.71181	64
	Total	94.2283	15.68954	127

Results

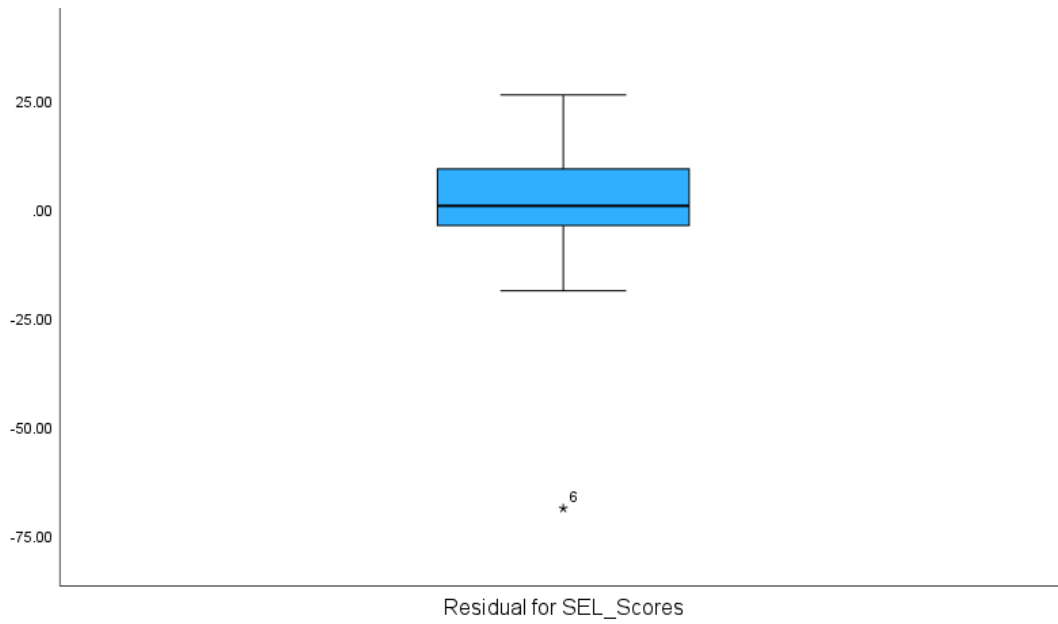
Data Screening

The first research question investigated whether there was a significant difference in SEL competencies between private elementary and middle school students based on whether RP are provided or not. 128 students were surveyed. One survey was flagged as an outlier due to the survey being incomplete, resulting in a total of 127 surveys used for data analysis. This survey was removed, because the student did not complete nine survey questions. 63 surveys were completed by private elementary and middle school students who were taught RP, and 64 surveys were done by private elementary and middle school students who did not receive RP.

The assumptions for a two-way ANOVA were checked for the assumption of homogeneity, assumption of no significant outliers or inconsistencies and assumption of normality. After all survey data was collected, data screening took place. The first step of data screening was to examine box-and-whisker plots to identify outliers. There was one outlier, as assessed as being greater than 3 box-lengths from the edge of the box in a boxplot (Laerd Statistics, 2017). See figures 5-8 for the box-and-whisker plots that identified the outlier.

Figure 4

Boxplot Private Elementary with RP

**Figure 5**

Boxplot Private Elementary Without RP

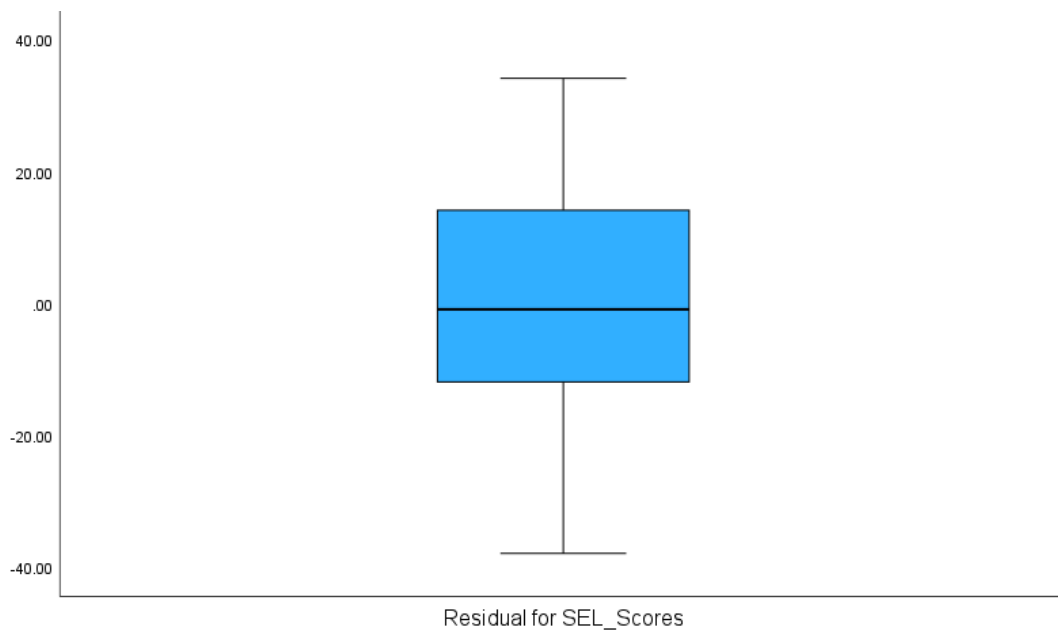
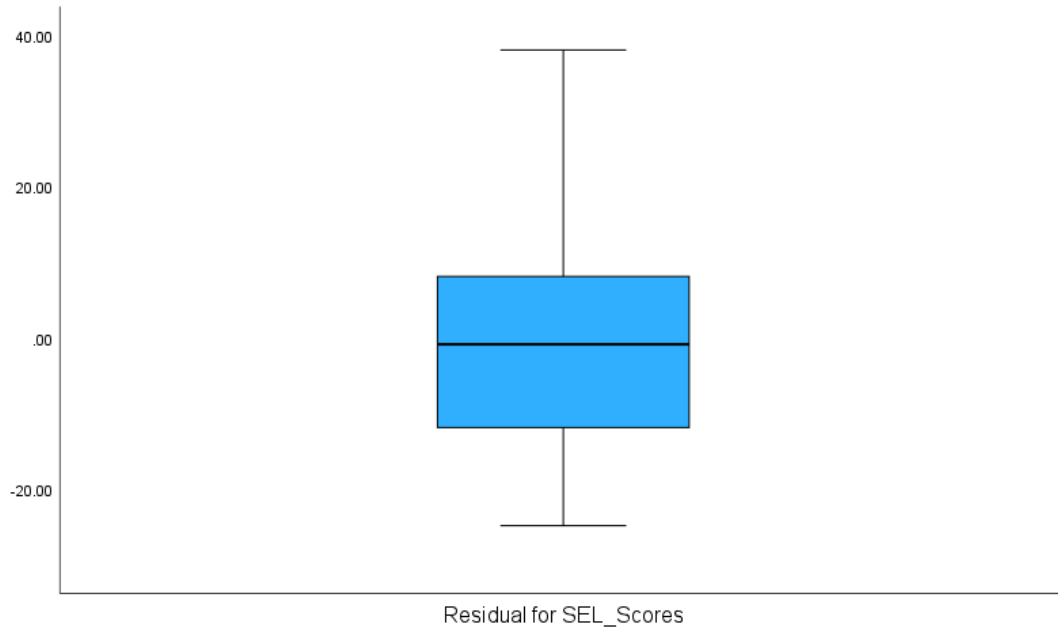
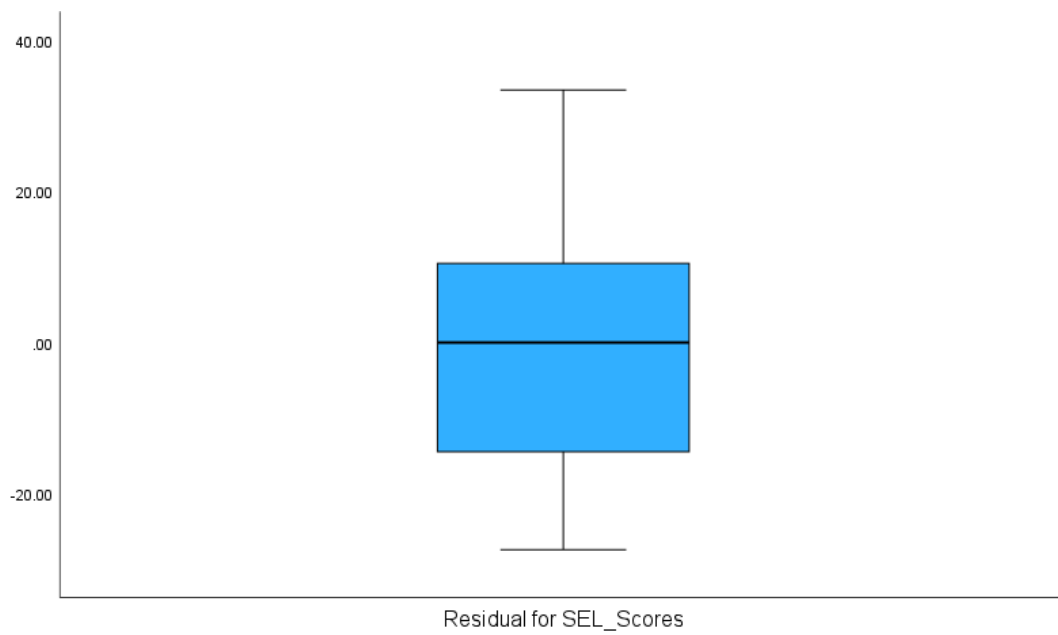


Figure 6*Boxplot Private Middle With RP***Figure 7***Boxplot Private Middle Without RP*

After examining the outlier's survey, it was determined the surveyor did not complete nine questions, so the outlier was removed from the data and marked as incomplete. The Levene's test was used to test for equality of variances. There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances, $F(3, 123) = 2.470$, $p = .065$ (see Table 8).

Table 8

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
2.470	3	123	.065

The Shapiro-Wilk test determined if the assumption of normality was met. Data was normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$) (see Table 9).

Table 9

Test of Normality

Shapiro-Wilk				
School Level	Restorative Options	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
PE	RP	.986	29	.963
	NO RP	.983	30	.899
PM	RP	.976	34	.640
	NO RP	.967	34	.377

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Null Hypothesis One

The first null hypothesis stated there is no difference in SEL for 3rd-8th grade private school students between those attending schools with RP and those without RP, as measured by

the SSIS SEL Edition. A two-way ANOVA was used to analyze this hypothesis at an alpha level of .05. The results from the two-way ANOVA indicated there was no statistically significant difference in SEL competencies for private elementary and middle school students with and without RP, $F(1,123) = .62$, $p = .43$. A small effect size $n^2 = .01$ was found. The mean SEL score for students with RP ($M = 93.02$, $SD = 13.36$) was less than the mean SEL score for students without RP ($M = 95.43$, $SD = 17.71$). This null hypothesis was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis Two

The second null hypothesis stated there is no difference in SEL competencies between elementary (3rd -5th) students attending private schools and middle school (6th - 8th) students attending private schools as measured by the SSIS SEL Edition. This hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way ANOVA at an alpha level of .05. The results from the two-way ANOVA indicated there was no statistically significant difference in SEL competencies based on school levels, $F(1, 123) = 1.29$, $p = .26$. A small effect size $n^2 = .01$ was found. The mean SEL score for 3rd-5th grade students ($M = 92.52$, $SD = 14.91$) was less than 6th-8th grade students attending private school ($M = 95.70$, $SD = 16.29$). The null hypothesis stating there is no difference in SEL competencies between elementary (3rd -5th) students attending private schools and middle school (6th - 8th) students attending private schools was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis Three

The final null hypothesis stated there is no significant interaction between school level and incorporation of RP on SEL competencies, as measured by the SSIS SEL Edition. A two-way ANOVA at an alpha level of .05 was conducted to examine school levels and RP on SEL competencies. There was no statistically significant interaction between school levels and RP on student's SEL competencies, $F(1, 123) = 1.54$, $p = .22$. A small effect size $n^2 = .01$ was found.

As a result, the null hypothesis of no interaction between school level and incorporation of RP on SEL competencies was not rejected.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to investigate if there were differences in SEL competencies between private elementary and private middle school students based on whether RP was provided or not. The goal of this study was to fill the gap in the literature surrounding the integration of RP to improve SEL competencies for 3rd-8th grade students attending private schools. This chapter will outline the study's results and discuss the implications related to the literature reviewed, SEL and restorative justice theories. Limitations of the study will be presented and recommendations for future research regarding SEL and RP will be made. The chapter will conclude with a conclusion and summary of the results as they relate to previous literature.

Discussion

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to investigate if there were differences in students' SEL competencies between private elementary and private middle school students when RP was incorporated and when RP was not. In the literature reviewed, limited studies found positive outcomes when RP and SEL were integrated into schools (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Kennedy, 2019). However, RP and SEL recently became a popular topic after COVID-19, so more studies were needed to determine the correlations between RP and SEL, specifically in private elementary and middle schools that practice RP and private elementary and middle schools that do not (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). There is minimal research on the impact of SEL in private schools, and the only research that exists has been conducted in countries outside of the United States (Huynh et al., 2021; Kaur & Sharma, 2022;

Stumm & Plomin, 2020). Research on RP implementation in the United States has commonly been conducted in middle and high schools, even though RP can be used in K-12 settings (Kervick et al., 2020). This study fills the gap by determining if differences exist in SEL competencies between 3rd-8th grade private school students with or without RP.

The first null hypothesis stated there was no difference in SEL competencies for 3rd-8th grade private school students between those attending schools with RP and those without RP, as measured by the SSIS SEL Edition. This study's results indicated there is no statistically significant difference in SEL competencies for private elementary and middle school students with and without RP, so the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. The mean SEL score for students with RP ($M = 93.02, SD = 13.36$) was less than the mean SEL score for students without RP ($M = 95.43, SD = 17.71$). However, when reviewing private elementary (3rd-5th) students' data, the mean SEL score for private elementary students with RP ($M = 93.17, SD = 10.69$) was higher than the mean SEL score for 3rd-5th students without RP ($M = 91.90, SD = 18.27$). This confirms previous literature that found SEL implementation affected elementary-age students more than middle and high school students (Kim et al., 2022). Another study found that if elementary SEL curriculums were implemented correctly, they could positively promote SEL skills in elementary age students (Wigelsworth et al., 2022). If research continued overtime to follow these students through middle school with no changes, it is possible that the gap would continue to increase between the mean SEL scores for students receiving RP and those students who do not. This confirms previous research that found a high need for longitudinal research on SEL after students leave elementary school and move on to middle school (Mondi et al., 2021). This allows SEL competencies to be tracked through elementary and middle school to get an

accurate picture of how SEL skills improve over time with implementing SEL programming like RP.

The second null hypothesis stated there is no difference in SEL competencies between elementary (3rd -5th) students attending private schools and middle school (6th – 8th) students attending private schools as measured by the SSIS SEL Edition. The results determined no statistically significant difference in SEL competencies based on school levels, so the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. The mean SEL score for private elementary students with and without RP ($M = 92.54, SD = 14.92$) was less than the mean SEL score for middle school students with and without RP ($M = 95.70, SD = 16.29$). This contradicts past literature that suggested SEL skills decline in middle school years (Green et al., 2021; Rosen et al., 2022). Some possible factors this study did not indicate a decline in SEL in middle school years could be based on whether students received RP or SEL implementation in elementary grades to promote stronger SEL skills in their middle school years.

The third null hypothesis stated that no significant interaction exists between school level and incorporation of RP on SEL competencies, as measured by the SSIS SEL Editions. There was no statistically significant interaction between school levels and RP on students' SEL competencies, so the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. The mean SEL scores for 3rd-8th grade students attending private schools without RP ($M = 95.42, SD = 17.71$) were higher than private elementary and middle school students attending private schools with RP ($M = 93.02, SD = 13.36$). Reviewed literature suggested that schools that implemented RP had less misconduct and more positive behaviors (Fronius et al., 2019; Kervick et al., 2020; Kohli et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2021; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

This study did not measure conduct or specific positive behaviors to confirm or contradict this literature. However, the literature suggested RP and SEL differ in approaches but share the same goals: to strengthen relationships, improve school climate, and improve students' SEL skills (CASEL, 2020; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Petrokubi et al., 2019). SEL theory and restorative justice theory also have an overlap in alignment, as SEL theory is the ability for one to identify and regulate one's emotions, problem solve, show empathy, achieve goals, and form positive relationships with others and restorative justice theory incorporates relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration (CASEL, 2003; Restorative Solutions, 2022). This study failed to confirm that the integration of SEL and RP has a significant positive impact on student's SEL competencies. Much of the previous literature researched SEL and RP as separate components. More research is still needed to explore the integration of RP and SEL and its impact on students' SEL skills.

Implications

COVID-19 caused a spike in students' mental health decline and a decrease in students' social well-being for all ages (Rosanbalm, 2021). This led to increased SEL and RP research as separate components in efforts to improve students' social skills. However, the previous studies focused on early childhood research rather than the impact of SEL implementation on elementary and middle school students (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). The findings of this study helped to determine whether implementing RP in private elementary and private middle schools would significantly impact students' SEL competency compared to 3rd-8th grade students who did not receive RP. Limited studies suggested that RP in schools successfully developed students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). This study did not find that

significant differences exist in SEL competencies between 3rd-8th grade private school students who receive RP or not.

This study's findings helped to close a gap in the literature by adding research targeting elementary and middle school students. This study also added to the existing literature by determining there was no significant difference in SEL competencies between 3rd-8th grade students attending schools with and without RP. The SSIS SEL Edition completed by all 3rd-8th graders in this study aligned with the CASEL framework derived from the SEL theory (CASEL, 2003). The survey questions were based on all five CASEL components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

The survey also included questions directly related to the responsibility and repair phases of the restorative justice theory, including statements such as, "I try to forgive others when they say sorry," "I help my friend when they have a problem," "I tell others when I am not treated well," and "I get along with other children/adolescents", (Gresham & Elliott, 2017). These statements, along with 42 others, were rated by students in this study to determine their SEL competencies to add to the existing literature surrounding RP's impact on improving students' SEL skills. Findings from the study suggest that RP may not be the best approach to improving SEL competencies among 3rd-8th grade students but may be proven effective as a long-term approach to improving SEL skills. This is true, because research suggests it takes three to five years to shift to a RP mindset and school culture (Fronius et al., 2019). Teachers must do a lot of modelling before students can use RP independently to develop SEL skills and this is typically not achieved in one school year (Fronius et al. 2019). This study may help educators determine whether RP is the best approach to improve SEL competencies depending on how soon SEL

growth is expected or required by schools. Overall findings from the study did not confirm significant relationships between school levels, RP, and SEL among private elementary and private middle school students.

Limitations

The results of this quantitative, causal-comparative study investigated the differences in SEL between students at private elementary schools with and without RP and students at private middle schools with and without RP after COVID-19. The study fills the gap in research regarding relationships between school levels, RP, and SEL among private elementary and private middle school students. However, limitations were also present in the study. One limitation of the study was a lack of diversity. Both private schools in this study were located in northeastern North Carolina and classified as urban schools. In the study, 72% of the students were African Americans and 20% were Asian students. Private School #1 had 52% African American students and 41% Asian students compared to Private school #2, which had 92.2% African American students included in the study and 0% Asian. Both schools had less than 8% of White and Hispanic students combined to be included in the study. This study was also specific to 3rd-8th grade students, so the results cannot be generalized to other school settings or student populations.

Another limitation was time constraints. Students were given limited time during school to complete the survey, which may have resulted in students not fully reading through each statement before answering. Students may not have read the statements completely or at all before selecting their answer, resulting in a randomly selected answer instead.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study, recommendations for future research are listed below:

1. Replicate the study with a more diverse population to determine if the results would be similar for students of other races, including White, Hispanic, and Asian students.
2. Conduct the current study allowing the students an unlimited amount of time to complete the survey to help increase student accuracy.
3. Allow the students to complete the SSIS SEL Edition online so they can be notified if a question has been skipped before submitting the survey.
4. Replicating the study with a background questionnaire to screen and ask students to provide the number of years they have received RP prior to completing the survey.
5. Complete the study but include a screening question to ensure students attending a school without RP have not received RP at a previous school.
6. Continue the study with the same group of students over three years to get longitudinal data on student's SEL over a period of time.
7. Conduct the study using an abbreviated SSIS SEL Edition, called SSIS SEL Brief Scales Student Form. This simplified version of the SSIS SEL Edition includes 20 of the 46 questions covering the five SEL competencies from the original version (Elliot et al., 2020).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Permission to Use Instrument

Re: Permission Request to Use Instrument Inbox x



HAS-SAT Shared Dist. and Licensing

to me ▾

Oct 4, 2023, 5:12 PM (17 hours ago)



Hello and thank you for your email. If you only want to use an existing, commercially available version of one of Pearson's instruments in your research project without further adaptation, translation or changes to the instrument, no additional permission or license is required from Pearson regarding your research or the publication of your research results, as long as you (or other qualified purchaser) purchase and use an appropriate quantity of original materials (record forms, etc.) in your research.

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Regards,

Appendix B

SSIS SEL Edition Student Form

Removed to comply with copyright.

Appendix C

IRB approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 4, 2024

Jai'eisha Huntley
Sara Geary

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-568 A CAUSAL-COMPARISON STUDY OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AT PRIVATE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH AND WITHOUT RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AFTER COVID-19

Dear Jai'eisha Huntley, Sara Geary,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: January 4, 2024. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University I am conducting Doctoral Research. I am conducting research to better determine if there are significant differences in social-emotional learning (SEL) between students at elementary and middle private schools with and without restorative practices (RP) after COVID-19. The purpose of my research is to determine if a relationship exists between social-emotional learning and restorative practices in grades three through eight, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. Participants must attend a private school and currently be enrolled in third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh or eighth grade. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Participants, if willing, will be asked to answer questions from the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition Student Form to evaluate their social-emotional competence (approximately 10-15 minutes).

Participant responses and data will be kept anonymous by using the following process:

1. After any opt-out consent forms and the child assent forms are received, teachers will administer the SSIS-SEL student forms to the participants and students will be instructed to not put their name on the survey. The teachers will then give the completed forms to a school administrator.
2. A school administrator from each school will give the data to me, but I will not be able to link the data to individual students.

A parental opt-out document and child assent document are attached to this letter. The parental opt-out document and child assent document contain additional information about my research. If you DO NOT want your child to participate, please sign and return the attached parental opt out document and provide it to your child's homeroom teacher at his/her school. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Researcher/ Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E

PARENT/GUARDIAN OPT-OUT FORM

Title of Research Study: Causal-Comparison Study of Social-emotional Learning at Private Elementary and Middle Schools with and without Restorative Practices After Covid-19.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be enrolled at a private school in grades third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh or eighth grade. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your student to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to conduct a quantitative, causal-comparative study to determine if there is a significant difference in social-emotional learning (SEL) between students at elementary and middle private schools with and without restorative practices (RP) after COVID-19.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to allow your student to be in this study, I will ask her or him to do the following: Take approximately 10-15 minutes to answer questions from the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form to evaluate his/her social-emotional competence.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include addressing the research gap and providing information about how to improve student outcomes (e.g., social-emotional competence and academic performance).

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your student would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept anonymous.

The data will be collected by the researcher anonymously by the following process:

1. Teachers will administer the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form to all students who have NOT

returned this opt-out document to their teachers and then give the completed forms to a school administrator.

2. A school administrator from each school will give the data to me, but I will not be able to link the data to individual students.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

To limit potential or perceived conflicts, your student's school will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers before the researcher receives it. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to allow your student to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on her or his decision to allow his or her student to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your student to participate will not affect your or his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or _____ Schools. If you decide to allow your student to participate, she or he is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your student from the study or your student chooses to withdraw, please inform the teacher that you or your student wishes to discontinue his or her participation, and your student should not complete and submit the SSIS SEL Edition Student Form. Your student's responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jai'Eisha Huntley. If you have questions later you are encouraged to contact her at _____. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sara Geary at _____.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Opt-Out

If you would not like your child to participate in the study, please complete the bottom portion of this form and return it to your child's teacher by _____.

You do not need to return this form if you would like your child to participate.

PARENT/GUARDIAN OPT-OUT FORM

Printed Child's/Student's Name

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date

Appendix F

Child Assent to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?

The name of the study is A Causal-Comparison Study of Social-Emotional Learning at Private Elementary and Middle Schools With and Without Restorative Practices After Covid-19 and Ms. Huntley is doing the study.

Why is Ms. Huntley doing the study?

Ms. Huntley wants to know if there is a cause and effect relationship between social-emotional learning and restorative practices.

Why am I being asked to be in the study?

You are being asked to be in the study, because you are a third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grader at a private school.

If I decide to be in the study what will happen and how long will it take?

If you decide to be in the study you will complete the Social Skills Improvement System Social-Emotional Learning Edition Student Form. It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete the form.

Do I have to be in the study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Signing your name below means you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child/Witness

Date

Jai'Eisha Huntley

[Dr. Sara Geary]

[_____]