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REDUCING RECIDIVISM WITH SEL/CE

REDUCING RECIDIVISM AT DAEP WITH SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND
CHARACTER EDUCATION IN RESTORATIVE CIRCLES

By

William Robinson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Education
School of Education

Brandon Bretl, Ph.D., Committee Chair

College of Education and Psychology

The University of Texas at Tyler
June 2024

REDUCING RECIDIVISM WITH SEL/CE

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the impact of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education (CE) in restorative circles on recidivism rates in district alternative education programs (DAEP). It also explores how comprehensive training influences teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL and CE within restorative circles. With an increasing number of students returning to DAEPs, there is concern over the insufficient SEL/CE skills necessary for success in their regular school environments. A mixed-method approach was utilized, incorporating quantitative data on student attendance, discipline, and a Likert survey on teacher perceptions, alongside qualitative data from open-ended questions. Recidivism was measured by tracking the number of students returning to the DAEP during the study. Data collection involved pre- and post-tests for attendance, discipline records, and teacher perception surveys, along with open ended questions from three teachers to gain deeper insights into observed changes. The analysis indicated a reduction in disciplinary incidents and recidivism, coupled with an improvement in student attendance. Although changes in teachers' perceptions were not statistically significant, they showed a positive trend. These findings suggest that incorporating SEL and CE in restorative circles can be an effective strategy for educators, equipping students with essential skills for success both in school and in life.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Character Education (CE), District Alternative Education Program (DAEP), recidivism, restorative circles

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The District Alternative Education Program (DAEP) has witnessed multiple instances of students returning to the program during the same academic year for various reasons. Some students are placed in the DAEP as a mandatory disciplinary measure, while others are placed at the discretion of the campus. All students must acquire essential skills to function effectively in their home school community because “Students who do not have opportunities to learn social and emotional competencies are at risk for a range of negative life outcomes” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 407). Alternative campuses aim to facilitate students in changing their mindset, leading to a productive life both in and out of school. Nonetheless, if teachers are not equipped with the necessary tools to assist students with this change in thinking, the revolving door phenomenon will continue (Booker and Mitchell, 2011, p.194).

Non-traditional educational institutions are designed to serve students who have been expelled or have experienced academic difficulties in traditional schools. Theoretically, “alternative schools exist to advocate and provide optional learning environments for students struggling in the traditional school environment” (Vanderhaar et al., 2014, p.1). Although no standardized models for alternative school programs exist, they are generally designed to create a successful learning environment through features such as low teacher-student ratios, individualized and self-paced instruction, non-competitive performance assessments, and less structured classrooms (Cox, 1999, p.323).

Recidivism refers to the tendency of individuals who have been released from incarceration to re-offend. Recidivism at the DAEP is a significant issue, with some students experiencing multiple returns to the program within the same academic year. Such recidivism could result from various factors in the student's home campus, such as inadequate academic

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resources, a lack of support systems, and a higher concentration of students with behavioral or disciplinary issues. According to McClelland et al. (2017), young children who enter school without sufficient social and emotional learning (SEL) skills may have a hard time learning. In some cases, parents may not teach their children the necessary skills for success at home due to a lack of knowledge about social skills. Additionally, some home campuses may focus more on addressing immediate behavioral issues rather than the underlying causes of such behaviors, such as underlying mental health conditions or trauma. Despite the reasons, students at the DAEPs must have social-emotional learning (SEL) skills because “school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) supports- including direct instruction in SEL strategies and/or teacher training in positive behavior management and stress reduction- have been shown to meaningfully improve children’s social-emotional wellbeing and mental health” (McCoy & Hanno, 2023, p.2).

Problem of Practice

This study evaluates the implementation of SEL/CE in restorative circles and its impact on student recidivism and teacher attitudes as shown on the Logic Model (see Appendix A). The integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into daily lessons is a vital aspect of achieving this objective as it helps students replace negative behaviors with positive ones. According to Kim et al. (2021), targeted SEL programs have a more significant impact than universal ones, with the impact varying based on student-level, program-level, and methodological factors. However, some teachers may perceive SEL as a waste of instructional time. To effectively implement SEL into daily practice, teachers and staff require support to learn how to interact with students, respond to emotional and social challenges, communicate clear expectations for student behavior, and foster supportive school cultures and climates (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

This study highlights the use of a fishbone diagram (Figure 1.1) to visually represent the causes of negative perceptions towards teaching SEL. Gopinath and Santhi (2021) stated that a

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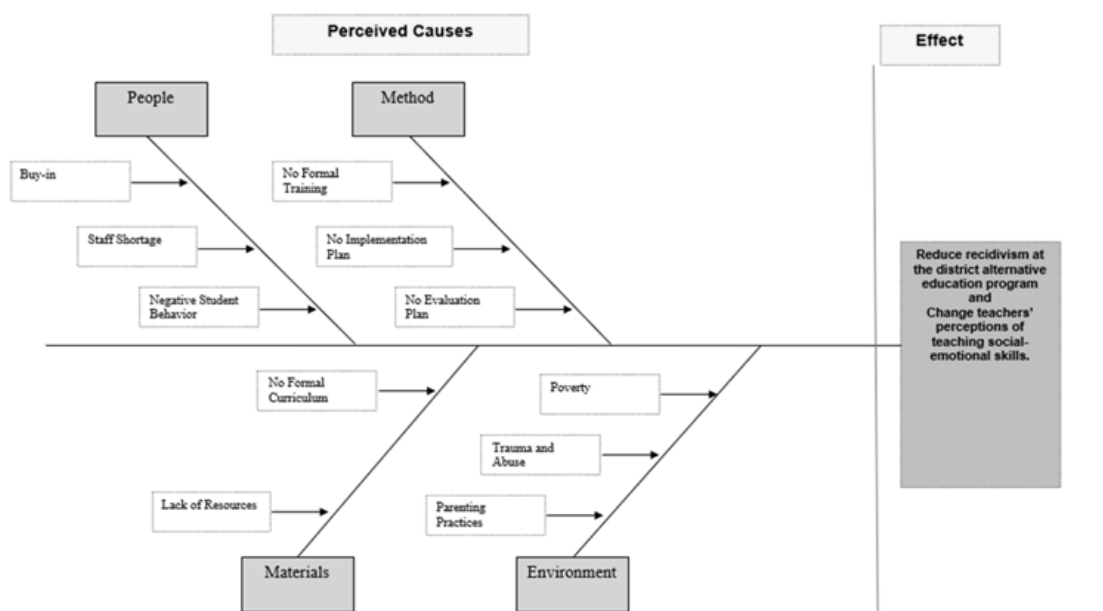
fishbone diagram-based pedagogy helps students visually understand a problem and its root causes and encourages them to solve the problem. The analysis revealed four significant areas of concern: people, method, materials, and environment.

The leading cause of negative perceptions towards SEL implementation was a lack of buy-in from staff, according to the findings. "Teachers' own social-emotional understanding and competencies are influential because they can affect the approach taken to develop social-emotional well-being in students and the interactions they have with students" (Denston et al., 2022, p. 5). Staff shortages also created challenges for SEL implementation as students were placed in classes that led to management issues and negative behaviors. Inadequate formal training, implementation plans, evaluation plans, and resources were identified as problematic areas within the method and materials categories. The materials category suffered from a lack of a formal curriculum, causing pacing issues and less meaningful lessons. In the environment category, factors such as parenting practices, trauma, abuse issues, and poverty hindered students from absorbing SEL knowledge.

Figure 1.1

Fishbone Diagram

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Note. This fishbone diagram shows perceived causes-categorized as people, method, materials, and environment-that hinder reducing recidivism at the DAEP and changing teachers' perception of teaching SEL/CE.

The system map depicted in Table 1.1 serves as a valuable tool for researchers and policy makers to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying factors contributing to a problem, and to identify the complex points of intervention (Kiekens et al., 2022, p. 1). Comprising several subsystems, such as system processes, human resources, information infrastructure, institutional governance, and social-behavioral and psychological support services, the system map provides a comprehensive overview of the various components of the problem.

Within the system process subsystem, two critical issues were identified on the district and campus level - the need for a formal social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum and the availability of resources to effectively teach students. On the human resource subsystem, the district and campus level face a challenge with securing qualified teachers before the start of the academic year while also dealing with teacher frustration due to a shortage of teachers in certain key areas.

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The information infrastructure subsystem, located at the campus level with building leaders serving as key stakeholders, presents five issues that need attention. These include professional development on children of poverty, parenting practices of children of poverty, formal training on the selected SEL curriculum, presenting staff with an implementation plan, and an evaluation plan.

At the institutional governance subsystem, an issue was identified at the district level concerning the allocation of budget to support the SEL curriculum. Meanwhile, the social-behavioral and psychological support services subsystem requires addressing at different levels. Teachers will provide their opinions on SEL and create plans for growth areas at the teacher level. At the campus level, administrators will support teachers during SEL to ensure negative behavior is not an issue. Finally, students who have experienced trauma and abuse will receive support from the district's Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP).

Table 1.1

System Improvement Map

System Process	Human Resources	Information Infrastructure	Institutional Governance	Social- Behavior and Psychological Support Services
Formal SEL Curriculum identified prior to school year beginning	Qualified teachers in high need areas in place prior to school year beginning	<i>Professional development on Children of Poverty</i>	Budget funds for resources to support SEL curriculum	<i>Provide staff the opportunity to share their opinions of SEL to create plans for growth areas</i>
Resources for SEL curriculum identified prior to school year beginning		<i>Professional development on parenting practices for children of poverty</i>		<i>Campus administrators will support teachers with negative behaviors during SEL</i>

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*Formal training
on SEL
curriculum and
expectations*

**LSSP will support
students that
experience
trauma and abuse**

*Share with
teacher's
implementation
plan for SEL*

*Share with
teachers'
evaluation plan
for SEL*

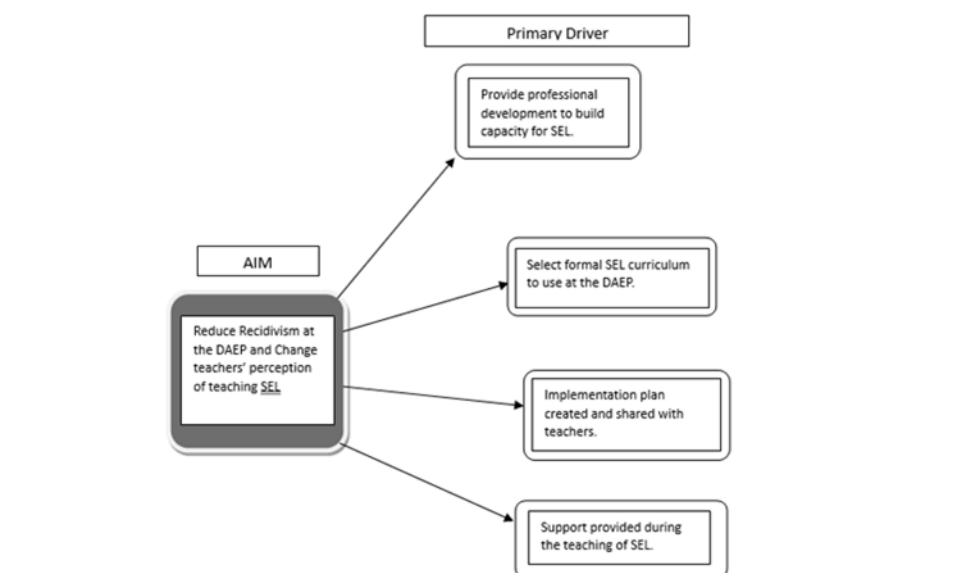
Note. System improvement map showing various levels. Key: *Teacher Level*; *Campus Level*; **District Level and Campus Level**

The campus leaders have skillfully crafted a driver diagram (Figure 1.2) that defines the scope and goals of an improvement project. Critical drivers have been identified on the diagram, such as professional development to augment social and emotional learning (SEL) abilities, a well-structured SEL curriculum, teacher collaboration to facilitate implementation, and teacher support during SEL instruction. By focusing on these factors, a favorable change in teachers' attitudes towards SEL is expected, along with a decrease in recidivism rates at the DAEP.

Figure 1.2

Driver Diagram

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Note. This diagram illustrates the primary drivers aimed at reducing recidivism at the DAEP and changing teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL.

After a thorough discussion, the campus leaders created a driver diagram (Figure 1.3) to determine the purpose of their improvement project. They identified specific areas that require measures to determine the effectiveness of the improvement initiative. The primary drivers that they identified were professional development to build capacity for SEL, a formal curriculum for SEL, sharing of implementation with teachers, and providing support to teachers during the teaching of SEL. The campus leaders believe that addressing these drivers would change the teachers' perceptions of SEL and reduce recidivism at the DAEP.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this mixed-method study is to decrease the rate of recidivism in the DAEP while transforming teachers' attitudes towards SEL. The "revolving door" phenomenon in DAEPs has been identified as a potential concern, along with the high enrollment figures. DAEP campuses are faced with many students exhibiting disruptive behaviors, and teachers are working diligently to educate them despite the difficulties.

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The study aims to address four research questions: 1) How did teachers' views on teaching SEL/CE in a restorative circle change after undergoing extensive training on SEL/CE and restorative circles? 2) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on student discipline? 3) What was the impact of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on student attendance? 4) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on student recidivism in the District Alternative Education Program?

Theory of Change

James Comer

James Comer was an American psychiatrist who became renowned for his work in child development and education. He was born and raised in East Chicago and excelled academically. After studying at Indiana University, he transferred to Howard Medical School, where he became aware of the difficulties that poor colored people faced. This realization shaped his philosophy towards child development by highlighting the importance of social factors in children's mental health.

Comer's work focused on developing a comprehensive approach to education that considers physical, psychological, linguistic, cognitive, social, and ethical factors. He recognized that students from low-income urban communities faced unique challenges that their peers in other communities did not. Comer believed that supporting the development pathways of these students requires a holistic approach, and that schools must go beyond a one-dimensional teaching model.

Comer's work centered around two main areas: creating a trusting climate for students and changing the culture of teachers. He believed in instilling the belief that all students can learn, and this led to the development of The Comer School Development Program to address schools' unwillingness to focus on children's overall development. This program takes a holistic

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approach to education and is based on three foundational teams. The School Planning and Management Team focuses on academic, social, and community programs, while the Student and Staff Support Team analyzes campus issues and devises plans to support students' development pathways, including physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical. The Parent/Family Team creates opportunities for parents and teachers to work together and eliminate cultural gaps.

Comer believed that establishing relationships with low-income students and parents is crucial for transforming the classroom as it helps build trust which is expressed his quote, "No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship" (Comer, 2001). He advocated for creating a positive school culture that promotes a sense of belonging in students, which provides them with the comfort, confidence, competence, and motivation to learn. Comer recognized that attachment is a crucial factor for students, and a positive school culture plays a vital role in fostering this attachment.

In summary, Comer's work emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive approach to child development and education. His philosophy recognizes the unique challenges faced by students from low-income urban communities and highlights the importance of social factors in their mental health. He believed in creating a trusting climate for students and changing the culture of teachers to support students' development pathways. Finally, he recognized the importance of a positive school culture in fostering attachment and promoting student success. According to Comer and Woodruff (1998, p. 506), "The program thought again about the importance of the attachment between child and the adult, imitation, and internalization of the culture that leads to the motivation to learn, and the experiences that children have interacting with adults in a variety of activities that promote learning."

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The Social Skills Curriculum for Inner City Children was created to help students from low-income backgrounds meet school expectations. Mental Health in Schools emphasizes the importance of comprehensive development in social, psychological, physical, ethical, language, and cognitive areas for successful academic learning. However, this can be challenging for children who only get to see their parents briefly due to work obligations.

Research shows that children tend to adopt the ethical standards of their environment if their parents do not teach them ethical behavior. To improve the social climate, level of parental participation, and academic achievement in inner-city elementary schools, James Comer proposed the Social Skills Curriculum Model in his 1977 paper "A Social Skill Curriculum for Inner City Children." Comer recognized that lasting change in social skills teaching requires parental involvement in daily school activities, including learning social skills.

Parents are expected to participate in their children's social skills learning as they are a crucial part of the students' environment. As noted by Comer and Woodruff in their 1998 paper Mental Health in Schools, parents, along with staff, sponsor projects aimed at creating a positive social climate in the school, assist in the classroom, cafeteria, and library, and perform other significant functions within the school.

Plato

Plato drew inspiration from the city of Sparta, which focused solely on producing warriors and neglected the importance of virtues and morals in the upbringing of its citizens. Despite their success in warfare, Sparta was criticized for the moral character of its people. Thus, Plato sought a more comprehensive approach to creating fulfilled individuals in society. In "Rationale for Moral Education: A Reading into Plato's Republic," Segev argued that individuals are born into an inherently unfair world and are called to live justly and morally.

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However, children growing up without a strong emphasis on morality may find it challenging to embrace the light of morality. Nevertheless, anyone can live a life that reflects fairness and justice.

The concept of enlightenment is central to Plato's allegory of the cave. Plato believed that the goal is to reach the idea of the Good, which is the cause of all that is right and beautiful. To act wisely, one must have encountered this idea. According to Plato, those who remain in the cave live in a false reality and have not yet discovered the true essence of justice.

Plato recommended focusing on a single virtue rather than a list of virtues once one emerges from the cave. He believed in practicing the acquisition of virtue to make it a part of one's second nature. According to Jonas, the Platonic approach focuses on developing students' knowledge of the good, which guarantees that they will choose the good.

Plato did not believe in instilling habits of justice in children with morally upright parents. However, if a person experiences enlightenment later in life, habituation is necessary to ensure that justice becomes a part of their daily routine.

Plato's beliefs delve deeply into the necessity of children developing social emotional learning (SEL) and character education (CE) skills. "Plato believed that good citizenship, social justice, and bolstering a student's natural talents should be the focus of education" (Dussault & Thompson, 2024, p. 3). He emphasized the acquisition of virtues such as wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice in his philosophical works. Plato argued that a just society depends on the moral and intellectual development of its citizens, asserting that these virtues should be instilled from childhood. SEL and CE initiatives aim to cultivate virtues and interpersonal skills crucial for navigating various social contexts and making informed decisions. By integrating Plato's emphasis on moral and intellectual development with SEL and CE into educational

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practices, educators can establish an environment where children not only excel academically but also contribute positively to society. In the educational setting, students will develop habits aligned with moral values, intellectual growth, and sound decision-making, enabling them to function effectively as citizens. The formalization of these skills is anticipated to result in a decrease in recidivism rates as students diminish the occurrence of earned placements.

Methodology

Research Design

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) on students' performance and behavior using a mixed-method approach involving surveys and quantitative analysis. A survey will be conducted for adult participants to determine their perception of SEL's impact on students' recidivism, discipline, and attendance at the DAEP. The quantitative component will compare discipline, recidivism, and attendance data with the same information from the previous year to determine if SEL has been successful in reducing recidivism.

After implementing SEL, post-surveys will be conducted among teachers to identify any new characteristics they notice in their students and the strategies they use to engage them in the lesson. The information collected will be shared with the students' home-campus teachers. The ultimate goal of this study is to reduce recidivism by implementing SEL in restorative circles, decrease discipline incidents, and improve student attendance and teacher perception of SEL as a teaching tool.

Justification of using Mixed Methods

The research methodology was thoughtfully selected for several reasons. Firstly, relying solely on qualitative surveys may result in a limited sample size, which can make it challenging to draw broader conclusions. According to Creswell and Plano (2018), "employing a mixed

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methods approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (p. 4). However, by integrating quantitative data, the study becomes more robust, allowing for replication or expansion, resulting in greater generalizability. Secondly, this approach yields more nuanced conclusions as qualitative data provides a more comprehensive understanding of the findings. Quantitative data can be difficult to interpret, but including qualitative data offers readers a richer understanding of the results. Lastly, using various methods of data collection enhances the study's validity, allowing researchers to obtain a more accurate and complete picture of the subject matter through triangulating data from multiple sources.

As part of the qualitative study, a survey will be conducted to gain teachers' perspectives on discipline, attendance, and SEL before the intervention. The researcher aims to determine whether teachers exclusively relied on punishment or attempted to teach new behaviors. This is a crucial aspect of the study since social-emotional learning (SEL) requires dialogue and challenging students' beliefs to bring about change. Unfortunately, punitive measures have been ineffective, with students continuing to make poor choices and ending up in disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs).

On the other hand, the quantitative study will involve comparing data from before and after the intervention, examining discipline, attendance, and recidivism rates. While improvements in these areas will indicate some success, the true test will come when students return to their home campuses and face the same peer pressures.

Mixed Method Design

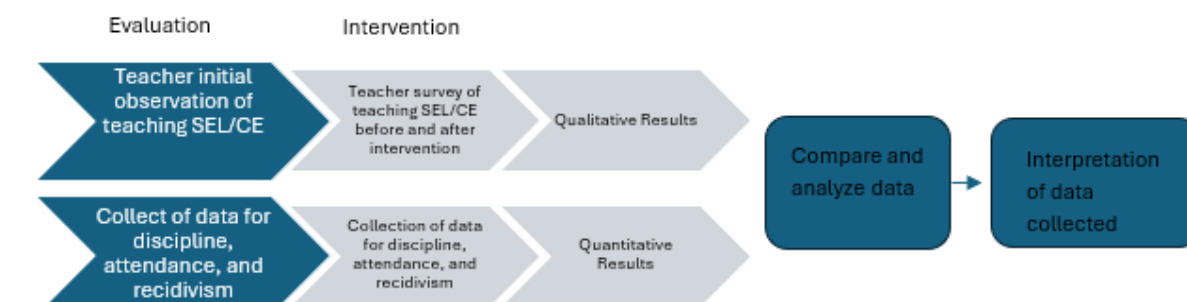
The research study employs a mixed-method design known as the triangulation convergence model, which is chosen for its various benefits. This approach involves integrating multiple sources of data on the same subject gathered by the same staff members at different times, using identical instruments. By combining and analyzing this data, the study aims to

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identify any changes in teachers' perceptions, along with data on discipline, recidivism, and attendance. A detailed visual representation of the study's triangulation design - the convergence model - can be found in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3

Triangulation Design: Convergence Model



Note. This model outlines the steps used to accurately measure the results of the study.

Description of Design-Based Implementation Research

Design-Based Implementation Research (DBIR) is an effective approach for addressing practical school issues. DBIR is an approach within educational research that focuses on designing, implementing, and refining educational interventions in real-world settings to address complex problems. According to Adam et al. (2017), DBIR embodies four guiding principles: A focus on persistent problems of practice from multiple stakeholders' perspectives; a commitment to iterative, collaborative design; a concern with developing theory related to both classroom learning and implementation through systematic inquiry; and a concern with developing capacity of sustaining change in systems (p. 81). DBIR aims to bridge the gap between research and practice in education by creating interventions that are both theoretically grounded and practically relevant. Recidivism - the tendency of students to repeatedly return to the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) - is a significant problem in some districts. DBIR's flexible approach, without any defined steps, is seen as the best solution.

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By leveraging DBIR, teachers can use various methods to implement the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum to achieve specific outcomes. These outcomes include reduced recidivism, fewer discipline referrals, and increased attendance. DBIR's collaborative nature makes it suitable for addressing this issue. Teachers can work closely with researchers to enhance the implementation of SEL. In the field of education, working alone is not recommended, and the DBIR approach values the expertise of others.

Justification for using DBIR Design

The DBIR approach allows researchers to collaborate and engage in iterative processes to achieve research objectives because "DBIR aims to advance both theory and practice through iterative, systematic inquiry in real-world settings" (Penuel et al., 2011, p. 334). This study aims to address the issue of high student recidivism rates in the district, specifically among students who return to the DAEP. Successful implementation of this study has the potential to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and reduce recidivism rates. Studies have shown that students who attend the DAEP are more likely to have interactions with the law. By developing social and emotional skills, students can make better decisions and reduce interactions with the law.

To ensure that students acquire the necessary skills to reduce recidivism, the study is committed to making iterative changes throughout the process. This approach provides flexibility, enabling the study to achieve the desired results. The study aims to develop theories and knowledge related to classroom learning and implementation through systematic inquiry. Data collected at each implementation step will be analyzed to ensure that research questions are answered. Once the study produces the desired results, the knowledge of social and emotional learning (SEL) can be used to enhance students' SEL capacity.

Investing in effective SEL curricula and teaching students SEL skills, particularly those experiencing behavioral difficulties on campus, is critical to maintaining positive change in

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educational systems. The study has the potential to transform district discipline, but generalizing the results requires ongoing effort and investment in SEL education.

Iterative Design

The study comprises three phases - Plan, Study, and Act. The teachers have been provided with relevant information, and those involved will receive training on the Boys Town curriculum to develop an effective implementation plan.

At the beginning of the school year, the teachers will conduct a survey on SEL and collect data on recidivism, attendance, and behavior to establish a baseline for the study. The curriculum will then be implemented for the students.

At the mid-point of the semester, data sources associated with this study will be analyzed to determine if any modifications are required for effective curriculum implementation. This process will be repeated to make any necessary adjustments to the curriculum.

Data Analysis

To establish a baseline for their study, the researchers planned to collect data on discipline and attendance during the first week of school from the fourth grading period of the previous school year. Additionally, surveys were conducted among teachers to gather their perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning and Character Education as preventive measures.

Starting from the second week of school, the researcher taught Social-Emotional Learning Skills and Character Education while collecting data on discipline and attendance. At the end of the first grading period, they will compare the collected data with the baseline data from the first week of school. This data will serve as a basis for comparison at the end of the next grading period.

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The data collected from the first and second grading periods enabled the researchers to make informed decisions for the study. If no significant changes in student behavior were observed, they considered exploring alternative interventions, such as utilizing the discipline classroom. The study team reviewed discipline and attendance data, and teachers received refresher training on SEL and its impact on student behavior in the Spring semester.

Towards the end of the third grading period, the researchers compared the data from this period to that of the second grading period to determine if there had been any improvement in student thinking and actions. Additionally, they compared the data from the last grading period to the data collected at the beginning of the previous year's study to understand student progress.

Positionality

As educators, it is essential to recognize that many black and brown boys may lack the basic skills necessary to navigate society. At alternative schools, students often struggle with uncontrolled emotions, which can lead to negative labeling and exacerbate negative stereotypes. Unfortunately, even teachers can fall into the trap of stereotyping their students and labeling them as "thugs" or otherwise. When educators hold these beliefs, they may not provide the necessary support to help their students succeed, which can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. This is especially true when students lack adequate support at home. It is a pervasive problem across the country, with alternative campuses often serving predominantly Hispanic and African American male students.

As the current state of prisons is analyzed, it becomes evident that schools are failing students significantly. Educators believe that schools should do more to prepare students for life beyond their walls. If parents cannot provide students with the necessary skills, educators must equip them with social-emotional skills to help them succeed.

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For instance, let's take the case of a fictional student named Tim who experienced DAEP for the first time in 7th grade. His first DAEP placement was due to fighting and persistent misbehavior. The DAEP program in his district was run by a program called Community Education Partnership (CEP). This campus should have offered social services or SEL lessons to students. Instead, it housed students Houston ISD did not want on its traditional campuses. There needed to be accountability for teaching these students the necessary skills to function on their home campuses and in their everyday lives. Consequently, this young man remained in a revolving door at the DAEP.

Tim's last incident with law enforcement, at the age of 17, earned him a 40-year sentence. If he had been given the opportunity to learn the skills needed to make healthy choices, maybe this could have been avoided.

Participants

This study involves the participation of three experienced teachers, each possessing a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers specialized in math and science instruction, while the other was an expert in teaching English and social studies. Two of the teachers teach third and fourth-grade students while the other teacher is responsible for teaching a self-contained classroom for fifth-grade students.

Context

Motion ISD serves as the pseudonym for the district studied. The Motion Learning Center is an educational institution located in Houston, Texas, within the Motion Independent School District. Its primary goal is to provide an alternative education program for students who may be struggling with their behavior or require a different learning environment than a traditional classroom setting due to violating the district's code of conduct. The campus caters to

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students from grades 3-12 and offers SEL and character education programs to remediate students' poor choices on their home campuses.

The Motion Learning Center prides itself on fostering a nurturing and organized learning environment that promotes academic and personal growth. It provides valuable resources, such as Man Up mentoring services and Restorative Practice Circles, to equip students with the tools to overcome obstacles and cultivate constructive relationships. The campus has a team of devoted educators, administrators, and support staff collaborating to deliver top-notch education and tailored assistance. With an emphasis on student success and imparting constructive alternatives to negative conduct, the campus prioritizes equipping students with essential skills for lifelong achievement.

According to the latest report from the Texas Education Agency for 2021-2022, the Motion Independent School District has a student population of 45,828. Among this population, 26,662 students identify as Hispanic, while 12,399 are African American, 1,550 are White, 306 are American Indian, and 4,662 are Asian. Notably, a significant portion of the student body, precisely 38,452, are economically disadvantaged.

The student population at the Motion Learning Center is diverse. Among the students, 44% are English learners. Additionally, 5,347 students are receiving Special Education services, and 35,539 students are considered at-risk. In terms of disciplinary action, 830 students committed infractions that warranted placement in DAEP, while 919 students served such placements. Additionally, 31 students committed offenses that required attendance at the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP). During the 2021-2022 school year, 8,323 students were placed in in-school suspension, while 4,645 students received out-of-school suspension. Interestingly, while TEA data indicates that 4,645 students received out-of-school

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suspensions, 2,727 actions or referrals actually warranted such suspension, meaning that 1,918 students received multiple out-of-school suspensions. Lastly, 4,079 students received multiple in-school suspensions, while 89 students served multiple placements at the alternative campus.

Limitation of Research

It should be noted that there are certain limitations to the research conducted. One of the major limitations is that due to low enrollment numbers, the district reduces staff at the start of each school year. As a result, teachers and paraprofessionals may be sent to other campuses to assist in areas of need, which may limit the ability to gather data. Additionally, the appointment of a new principal can also create limitations; if the new principal is not on board with the study, it can cause significant setbacks in data gathering.

Moreover, staff retention can also impact the study. If there is a shortage of teachers, it can lead to an inability to teach social skills as the remaining teachers may become overwhelmed by focusing on academic subjects. This can be further compounded by issues with buy-in. Many teachers at the alternative campus have been there since the beginning of their teaching careers and are accustomed to punitive disciplinary measures, which can make it difficult for them to adopt restorative practices and teach social skills. Additionally, if there is a staff shortage, teachers may be asked to teach multiple subjects, which can lead to frustration and a lack of buy-in. These factors can disrupt the study and create an unfavorable learning environment.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools across the country are currently struggling to address the rise of problematic behavior among students. Incidents of violent behavior and drug use have increased, leading school administrators to explore potential solutions for tackling these issues. One such solution being considered is the reintroduction of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) programs.

SEL programs focus on nurturing emotional and social skills in students, such as managing emotions, forming healthy relationships, and making responsible decisions. These skills can help students better cope with personal issues and prevent impulsive behavior. On the other hand, CE programs aim to intentionally develop good habits and virtues in children, going beyond just academic content and skills.

In the article "Moral Education and Character Education: Their Relationship and Roles in Citizenship Education," character is defined as the interplay between habits and the consequences of actions on those habits (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006, p. 497). The term "character education" (CE) refers to the deliberate development of children into virtuous and good individuals, rather than just teaching them academic content and skills (Nygren & McDermott, 2021, p. 2).

If students are unable to demonstrate these skills on campus, disciplinary action may be taken, such as being placed in alternative schools. However, possessing SEL and CE skills can increase the chances of successfully exiting such programs and avoiding recidivism. To understand how these skills can bring positive change, it is important to examine decision-making, self-management skills, and moral development. Restorative circles can be a valuable tool for promoting these skills among students.

United States Discipline

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The provided text discusses the concerning trend of many students being sent to alternative campuses due to their disruptive behavior in schools. According to a study titled "National Analysis of the Disciplinary Exclusion of Black Students with and without Disabilities," during the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 2.7 million K-12 students received one or more out-of-school suspensions (OSS) across the country. This number has been consistently increasing since the early 2000s when systematic reporting began (Gage et al., 2019, p 1754). These students often violate the school district's code of conduct due to their poor decision-making skills, which may lead to their placement in alternative campuses.

In Texas, Senate Bill 1 is a state law that mandates schools to assign students to alternative campuses for certain offenses such as drug or weapon-related incidents. However, the placement of students in alternative campuses was not mentioned as a concern by the federal government, despite its efforts to reduce the number of exclusionary practices.

The article "Preparing for Prison" aptly states that schools are dynamic social environments where different functions are continuously negotiated, structural constraints are subjectively interpreted, and responses are hotly contested and inconsistently implemented (2008, p. 95). Many students at alternative campuses struggle to conform to the norms that govern schools because they lack the necessary skills, leading them to try to make sense of the world around them in the best way they can. However, the conflict between societal norms and their way of living can be a challenging task to accomplish when they are not adequately prepared. This is a common experience for many students sent to district alternative education programs nationwide.

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The Office for Civil Rights reported that nearly 2.7 million public school students in the United States were suspended from school at least once in 2015. The history of discipline dates back over 65 years, with the discipline through democracy model being the norm in the 1950s, and the assertive discipline model taking over in the early 1970s. According to Rainbolt et al. (2019), the key to maintaining a stable and effective learning environment in a classroom is a teacher who is firm and assertive but not aggressive. This approach is still implemented in some schools to this day.

The Gun-Free School Act, passed by Congress in 1994, made federal funding of public schools contingent upon the adoption of zero-tolerance policies for firearm possession. This policy became more prevalent after the Columbine High School massacre in 1999. By 2001, at least 80% of schools in the United States had adopted at least one element of a zero-tolerance policy for the following offenses: bringing a weapon to school, which included items like nail clippers and toy swords; bringing drugs or alcohol on campus, which included tobacco and over-the-counter medications; fighting, which included minor scuffles; making threats or perceived threats toward students or teachers; insubordination; and behaviors considered disruptive, like cutting in the lunch line. However, a greater issue was brewing in the background - the racial discipline gap.

Schools are now utilizing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a three-tier model based on evidence, designed to improve systems and practices to affect student outcomes, in response to this issue. Data-driven decision-making is at the core of PBIS. However, some teachers still believe in punishment over prevention. Educators who see schools as the solution rather than the source of the problem are more likely to implement new initiatives as a result. According to Dhaliwal et al. (2023), most educators are resistant to changes when

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they don't fully understand the purpose of new policies. Therefore, policymakers should provide greater explanations to get complete buy-in from educators.

Texas Discipline

During the 2020-2021 academic year, Texas had a student body of 5,539,732 across 1,227 school districts, including charter schools. However, it was difficult to determine how many students were referred for disciplinary action as many schools aimed to maintain their reputation by avoiding referrals.

Of the 250,975 students who were disciplined, 17,091 were placed in DAEP due to mandatory violations such as possession of controlled substances, being under the influence on campus, or having alcohol. Meanwhile, 20,514 received discretionary placements determined by school administration.

Unfortunately, many students who ended up in DAEP were repeat offenders, with some visiting multiple times in a single academic year. The increasing violence on school campuses had led to stricter laws, but this has also criminalized schools instead of teaching students how to make better choices.

While not all districts face these challenges, inner-city districts often struggle to reduce recidivism. As noted in the article "Preparing for Prison," "the problems that once invoked the idea and apparatus of student discipline have increasingly become criminalized" (Hirschfield, 2008, p.83).

Motion ISD Discipline

Recent data from the Motion Independent School District (Motion ISD) has shown that during the 2020-2021 academic year, the district had a student population of 45,553, with 1,241 students being a part of the discipline population. Additionally, 2,049 students had disciplinary records, with 59 of them being mandatorily placed and 99 voluntarily placed. Although the study

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did not show the number of students who received repeated placements, it is likely that there has been some recidivism, as seen in neighboring districts. Most campuses in the district prioritize academic studies, while a few dedicate time to teach students crucial social-emotional skills that are vital for their success in school and life. However, these campuses face a challenging task due to the impact of a child's home life, which is their first opportunity to learn social skills.

Social Emotional Learning

The acquisition of social-emotional competencies during early schooling has been found to be positively correlated with successful transition to elementary school (McCormick et al., 2016, p. 365). Emotional expression is not innate in children and their initial emotional responses are usually related to their basic physiological needs, such as hunger or discomfort. Children learn emotional expression through early interactions and imitation of their caregivers. According to Weissberg and Cascarino (2013), social-emotional learning (SEL) begins at home, where children first develop their ability to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (p. 10). Family instability, developmental timing, and child development are critical elements that influence a child's SEL development. Positive parenting and a stimulating environment can enhance a child's developmental outcomes, particularly for children living in poverty (Saitadze & Lalayants, 2021, p. 289).

Inadequate social skills have been associated with various behavioral and psychiatric disorders, including depression, alcoholism, and juvenile delinquency (Hon & Watkins, 1995, p. 527). However, family dynamics, such as divorce, can impede a child's SEL development. This type of family change can lead to depression and financial stress, which can be internalized by children, affecting their emotional development and academic performance (Cavanagh & Huston, 2008, p. 1260).

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Living in persistent poverty can hinder the development of social skills. Children who experience chronic poverty face stressors from their families, which can negatively affect their cognitive and socioemotional well-being. As noted in a study titled "Duration and Developmental Timing of Poverty and Children's Cognitive and Social Development From Birth Through Third Grade," poverty, particularly when it is chronic, affects children's cognitive development and socioemotional well-being because inadequate income increases parent-child exposure to negative life events and stressors, which in turn produce psychological distress that diminishes the capacity to provide sensitive, responsive parenting and increases the likelihood of punitive, coercive parenting styles (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005, p. 795). Families experiencing chronic poverty are more likely to project their frustrations onto others, including family members, which can negatively impact social skills learning.

Children who are acquiring social skills can suffer even more when poverty and divorce occur. In most cases, children live with their mothers with very little participation from fathers. According to Baker (2014, p. 20), "African American fathers who are highly involved and provide positive opportunities for learning and development in their homes prior to school entry have children with enhanced academic competence." The absence of a father in a family, especially when poverty is involved, can have a significant impact on a child's socioemotional well-being. Father-child bonds have shown positive social-emotional skills, particularly among African American boys. When parents are involved in their children's lives, behavioral outcomes improve due to the development of social skills, which positively affects academic performance.

Social Emotional Learning Initiative

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SEL has emerged as a crucial component of a comprehensive education system in recent years. SEL is defined as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspective of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively. According to Denham et al. (2012), "Young children's emotional knowledge contributes to their overall social competencies. It is related to their positive peer status and their ability to react in a prosocial manner to the emotions of peers and adults" (p. 179). These competencies help students to overcome challenges and succeed in life, both academically and personally.

Systematic instruction is necessary for students to internalize SEL skills. Teachers can create a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel valued and address five areas of interest in SEL lessons: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as seen in Figure 2.1. According to Denston et al. (2022), the role of teachers as an influential factor on student emotions in the classroom, as well as in the development of social-emotional wellbeing in students, has been clearly identified in research (p. 2). Mastery of these skills leads to positive social behaviors, good conduct, less emotional distress, and improved academic performance.

Schools are increasingly recognizing the importance of SEL and its potential to positively impact student outcomes. According to Choquette et al. (2024), "several jurisdictions and leaders, such as within the United States, are advocating for social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction to be limited in schools" (p. 142). In 2015, the HR 850 bill was introduced to the House, which aimed to amend Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

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The bill proposed training for teachers and principals to address students' social and emotional development needs, including classroom and school-wide initiatives.

Furthermore, schools and districts are pushing for politicians to prioritize students' success in a complex, globalized world. Over 200 pieces of legislation were introduced to Congress in 2019, calling for social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies for local schools. Texas Senate Bill 123 (2021) ensures skills needed to manage their emotions are integrated with prior SEL and CE initiatives in schools while House Bill 1525 allows school districts to use compensatory funds initiatives to help students establish positive relationships and making decisions. The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been at the forefront of promoting SEL and defines five domains that help students develop social and emotional learning skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Research suggests that students who possess these skills are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as happiness, self-efficacy beliefs, academic achievement, and positive social behavior. As such, SEL is an essential component of a well-rounded education system, and its inclusion can lead to significant benefits for students.

Figure 2.1

SEL Core Competencies

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Note. This diagram illustrates the core competencies of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Adapted from "Core SEL Competencies," by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2020, CASEL. Copyright 2020 by CASEL.

Classroom teachers have a crucial role to play in helping students develop social and emotional learning (SEL) skills that impact their daily lives. According to Schonert-Reichl (2017), "Teachers are the driving force behind social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices in schools and classrooms; their own social-emotional competence and well-being strongly influence their students" (p. 138). By integrating these skills into their lessons, they can empower students to achieve success in five critical areas: social skills, home life, school life, classroom life, and everyday life. While there is ample research to support the effectiveness of SEL initiatives, not everyone is convinced of their benefits.

Critics argue that education is often plagued by buzzwords that are used to get a response without substantial evidence of their efficacy. For instance, restorative practices have gained significant popularity in Texas. However, some believe that an overly inclusive or generic

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definition of the cause being advanced allows others to use it for their own projects. This can lead to a "raft of malarkey being peddled by consultants, vendors, education school faculty, and plenty of others in the name of SEL" (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020, p. 53). Consequently, some campuses may claim to be implementing SEL without a clear understanding of what it entails, as has happened with restorative practices.

Despite concerns over the hype surrounding SEL, it is crucial that educators continue to teach these skills to all students, especially in their early years. It is important to avoid focusing on immediate results and instead prioritize high-quality instruction that takes time to implement. Additionally, influential figures must advocate for quality SEL initiatives to ensure their effectiveness in empowering students. While some skeptics may argue that SEL is a cure-all for student misbehavior, rigorous research supports only a small percentage of classroom interventions and school or district initiatives that have significant, positive effects on students (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020, p.53). Furthermore, equity issues have arisen in the SEL space, with a majority of studies being conducted by white researchers and targeting black and brown students in urban districts. To ensure that all students benefit from SEL initiatives, educators and stakeholders must remain vigilant about the quality and efficacy of SEL programs.

Teachers Beliefs of Teaching SEL

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education (CE) in students. The incorporation of engaging lessons is essential as it increases students' investment in learning, leading to better attention and application (Zinsser et al., 2014, p. 478). According to Zinsser et al. (2014), teachers' roles are critical in constructing an environment within which children can strengthen their abilities to regulate their own emotions and respond appropriately to others' feelings. While some experienced teachers may view SEL

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and CE as a way for students to avoid consequences for their actions, such a perspective is not accurate. The skills developed through SEL and CE are necessary for students to function successfully in today's society, regardless of their background. Therefore, promoting the growth of SEL and CE competencies should be a universal priority. Teachers who understand the purpose of instilling these skills in students know what is necessary for success, while those who do not may set their students up for failure.

It is understandable that some teachers may focus on academic subjects due to pressure from their superiors. Politics has influenced education, prioritizing test scores over building good citizens. However, school leaders who resist political pressure understand that students can become agents of change and allies for school improvement if schools create and nurture authentic relationships. By doing so, students can perceive themselves as essential and legitimate contributors to achieving their health and academic success.

To create an ideal learning environment, students need to be in a healthy mental state. Unfortunately, many schools use a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't work for everyone. This can cause frustration for teachers, who often face constant pressure and may struggle with their social-emotional skills. While some adults have developed coping mechanisms, they may lack the social-emotional skills needed to be effective in all aspects of their lives. Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills can help individuals address issues proactively and make a positive difference in their lives.

Due to educators playing a critical role in implementing effective SEL, their social-emotional competence and well-being strongly influence their students. Hanson-Peterson et al. (2016) stated that teachers with less developmentally appropriate emotional beliefs are more likely to react negatively (e.g., use punitive practices, minimize students' emotions to their

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students' negative emotional expressions (p. 13). Teachers need to model good social-emotional skills and be willing to make changes to ensure their students receive the best education possible. Modeling is an essential tool for teaching students as they learn by visually seeing what their teachers do. Even if teachers feel unsure about teaching social-emotional skills, they can incorporate them into their lessons to ensure their students get an opportunity to interact with the concept.

Unfortunately, education has shifted its focus away from preparing students to be successful citizens. Teachers have become hesitant to teach what they believe should be taught at home. This has led to stress for many teachers who may feel responsible for solving their students' emotional problems. However, the goal of teaching social-emotional skills is to prepare students to handle their emotional problems healthily and effectively. By understanding this, teachers can be better equipped to implement social-emotional learning in their classrooms.

Evidence-based approaches to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) are most effective when implemented using specific techniques such as the RULER approach. This approach was created by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence in partnership with Dr. Marc Brackett and Marvin Maurer. The RULER approach focuses on five foundational skills as described in the article titled "Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teaching SEL" by Barnes and McCallops (2019) which are (1) recognize emotions in oneself and others, (2) understand the causes of emotions, (3) labeling emotions accurately, (4) Expressing emotions in socially appropriate ways, and (5) regulating emotions effectively.

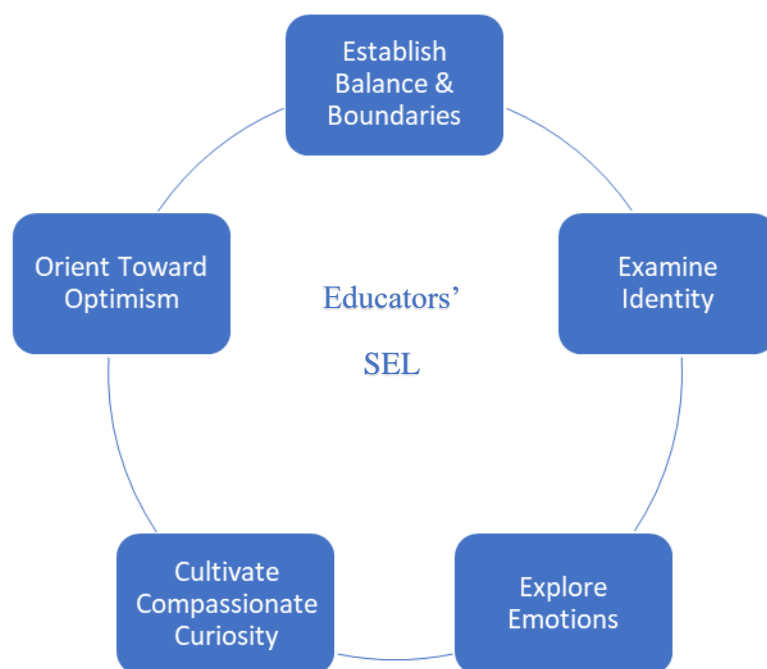
By developing personal social-emotional skills, teachers can enhance their capacity for positive interactions and effective communication with their students. This is especially important for new teachers. According to Choquette et al. (2024, p. 2), "Teachers involved in

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social and emotional learning (SEL) experience improvements in their own social-emotional competencies (SEC), self-efficacy, positive career-related experiences (e.g., higher job satisfaction, reduced burnout, less stress), and relationships." Learning these skills can also benefit teachers in their personal lives, making it easier for them to teach what they are practicing. Providing teachers with a well-thought-out implementation plan can help overcome their anxiety about teaching SEL to students. Figure 2.2 presents the essential qualities of social and emotional learning (SEL), which teachers need to create a safe and supportive learning environment. By developing these qualities, educators can effectively teach, model, and coach students' SEL, resulting in overall well-being and a positive emotional state in the school.

Figure 2.2

Educator SEL



Note. This diagram illustrates key practices a teacher needs to foster social-emotional learning in the classroom. Adapted from "Practices for Transformative SEL," by Transforming Education, 2020, TransformingEducation.org. Copyright 2020 by Transforming Education.

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As part of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), educators need to examine their values, mindsets, and actions to ensure they align with SEL principles. Unconscious biases and stereotypes can hinder teachers from building strong relationships with their district and students. To foster deeper communication, teachers must first recognize their own biases. Stressful situations can cause teachers to react poorly, straining relationships within the classroom. By acknowledging physical reactions and responding thoughtfully, teachers can model SEL skills for their students.

To cultivate compassionate curiosity and encourage positive outcomes and engagement, teachers should focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. Listening with empathy is a key part of this process, and they must adopt a positive attitude towards themselves and others. They should train their brains to detect positivity in people, rather than fixating on negative experiences dictated by their past, present, and future life situations.

Establishing balance and boundaries is also essential to avoid compassion fatigue when teachers become emotionally depleted. To effectively serve students, they must be in a healthy emotional state to help them address their emotional crises. If compassion fatigue occurs, it is recommended that teachers ask for help or say no.

Boys Town

In December 1917, a boys' home was established in Omaha, Nebraska by Father Edward Flanagan with the purpose of providing care for neglected and impoverished boys. Father Flanagan was driven to help the poor due to his firsthand experiences of witnessing the poor living conditions in Shilgo, and his encounters with young boys on the streets begging for money. He was determined to find ways to alleviate the suffering he witnessed. Father Flanagan believed that individuals could serve God by writing letters for the homeless and desperate, and

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even visiting condemned, terminal cases in hospitals of the poor. His academic background also led him to study classical works on the subject, including novels, demographic studies, and educational treatises, which further fueled his conviction to help the poor.

During the tornado of 1913, Father Flanagan saw an opportunity to help those in need. Later, he garnered support from prominent citizens, businessmen, doctors, and lawyers to further his cause. Despite opposition, Father Flanagan was determined to help those in poverty, and even went as far as stating that withholding surplus treasures from those in dire need was a mortal sin. Father Flanagan's commitment to help the poor resulted in the establishment of a boys' home, which provided a safe haven for boys who had experienced neglect and poverty. However, due to the lack of support from the citizens of Omaha, Father Flanagan had to rent a larger home with a school attached.

To fund his new project, Father Flanagan and his secretary embarked on a publicity campaign that resulted in nationwide recognition. The boys' home became synonymous with his name, and prominent individuals such as Jack Dempsey, Babe Ruth, and Will Rogers voiced their support. The boys' home became a beacon of hope for boys who had nowhere else to go, and the home's growth prompted Father Flanagan to purchase a farm on the outskirts of town where he could be entirely independent in his actions. This location became known as Boys Town.

Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, and later Boys Town, was unique in that boys were not seen as wards of an institution, but as citizens with dignity and rights. Boys were given freedom, but with enough discipline to cultivate a growing sense of responsibility. Every boy had the opportunity to thrive and grow into responsible citizens. Father Flanagan's Boys' Home was a

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testament to his unwavering commitment to help the poor and his belief that everyone could make a difference in the world.

Character Education

The text discusses the importance of character education in K-12 curriculum in the Western world, according to Jeynes (2019, p.33). In the past, schools aimed to produce productive citizens and emphasized academic excellence. Xia and Shen (2022) pointed out that "Although we can trace its history back to the Ancient Greeks, a recognized CE movement occurred in the United States in the late 1920s" (p. 3). Teachers integrated character education into their classroom lessons and held students responsible for their actions. The aim was to develop a well-rounded student, which was the original objective of education pioneers.

The text also elaborates on the views of education pioneers like Plato, Cicero, and early Christians, who believed that creating loving, compassionate, and self-disciplined individuals was more important than creating intellectually sophisticated people (Jeynes, 2017, p.33). In those days, education was only accessible to the elite, and most students were preparing for manual labor jobs that didn't require an education. The top priority was to become a productive citizen.

Historically, character education was taught to students to help them conform to society's expectations and continue their family's legacy. The McGuffey Readers, a series of school reading books, played a crucial role in shaping the country's moral values during the 19th century and helped standardize the English language in the United States. At that time, moral instruction was just as important as academic instruction.

The rise of school violence has prompted educators to seek interventions that can help transform campus culture. One possible solution is Character Education, which was popular in the past but phased out of schools in the 1950s due to the fear that teaching morality would be

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equated with teaching religion. The separation of church and state continues to influence education today, as some people believe that teaching morality cannot be separated from religion. However, given the current state of school violence, it is clear that students are not receiving adequate character education.

According to Berkowitz and Bier (2017, p.73), character refers to "the complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent." These psychological characteristics include gratitude, optimism, zest, and persistence. When students embody these traits, they tend to experience more positive outcomes in life, including better academic performance.

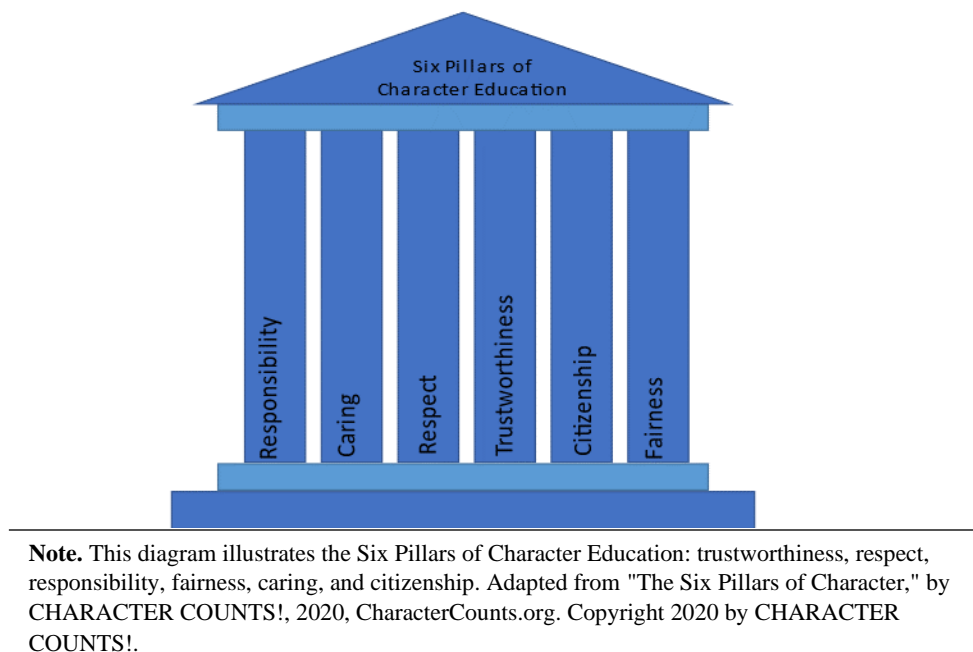
In the past, the middle class aimed to maintain and teach public order, particularly to the working class. Religion was the guiding force that taught people how to be good, and the middle class saw it as their responsibility to provide moral guidance to the lower class. However, some middle-class Christians eventually left the faith while retaining strong moral standards, attempting to ground ethics in reason rather than revelation.

Today, the six pillars of character are considered a way to promote healthy social norms. Every positive behavior of an adult falls into one of the six pillars. Figure 2.3 illustrates the six pillars of Character Education that serve as a "moral compass meant to guide thoughts and actions that are genuine and constructive, not selfish and destructive" (Dayhoff, 2015, p. 41). Open discussions regarding these pillars should be held to give students a chance to express themselves and learn from their peers.

Figure 2.3

Six Pillars of Character Education

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Teaching character education is considered an essential component that should be imparted to students across all socioeconomic communities. According to SEL, educators are the primary source of delivering this information to students. To achieve this objective, schools should permit school counselors to present lessons on character development every month. Additionally, teachers should recognize and appreciate positive character traits exhibited by students in their daily lives.

Miliren and Messer (2009, p. 21) emphasize that teachers should take advantage of every opportunity to reflect on students' character components and reinforce their life choices. By doing so, acknowledging students' positive behavior and explaining the positive character trait exhibited will increase the likelihood of repeated behavior.

The 11 Principles of Character Education (Figure 2.4) assist schools in focusing on inspiring students to strengthen and demonstrate these characteristics in schools, the workplace, and as citizens. As Schaeffer (1999, p. 4) rightly states, the objective is to create an environment

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that encourages practices in the values our society needs. Campuses should deliberately integrate all aspects of these principles, including the curriculum, sports, service learning, and interpersonal relationships among adults and students.

Figure 2.4

Eleven Principles of Character Education

11 PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

PRINCIPLE 1: The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character.

PRINCIPLE 2: The school defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing.

PRINCIPLE 3: The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.

PRINCIPLE 4: The school creates a caring community.

PRINCIPLE 5: The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.

PRINCIPLE 6: The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.

PRINCIPLE 7: The school fosters students' self-motivation.

PRINCIPLE 8: The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.

PRINCIPLE 9: The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.

PRINCIPLE 10: The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

PRINCIPLE 11: The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character.

Note. This diagram outlines the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education. Adapted from "11 Principles of Effective Character Education," by Character.org, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Character.org.

Restorative Practice

Defining Restorative Practice (RP) can be a challenging task since there is limited research conducted on it. RP is a set of tools that educators can utilize to establish positive relationships with all students and stakeholders. According to Procter-Legg (2022), restorative justice is defined as "a broad term that encompasses an array of non-punitive relationship-centered approaches for addressing and avoiding harm" (p. 2). It is an approach that responds to

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zero-tolerance policies that have left many students feeling excluded and degraded. Educational groups have called for school districts to reduce suspension rates, especially among students of color, and give all students an equal chance at a quality education.

Dhaliwal et al. (2023) stated that over the last decade, the federal government, state government, and community groups have urged school districts to lower their suspension rates (p. 89). Exclusionary practices serve only to isolate students and make them feel unwelcome in a place where they should feel wanted. The importance of administering discipline that does not dehumanize the student is stressed in research literature. Discipline requires educators to teach students how to behave, not scold them for lacking knowledge. Exclusionary discipline, including school suspension and, is thought to be an essential component of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Restorative practices offer a non-punitive expulsion approach to addressing discipline. Schools that utilize Restorative Practices proactively work to deter misbehavior by developing relationships between students and educators. With strong relationships, students work to repair the harm caused to another person when misbehavior occurs. When students experience situations where they must make amends for their actions, they learn from their poor decisions and develop the skills needed to help them address future issues. Lodi et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of preventing harmful behaviors aimed at creating a future characterized by safety, trust, responsibility, and well-being for all parties involved (p. 1). One of the skills learned is empathy, which allows students to put themselves in another person's shoes to see how their actions affect another human being. Figure 2.5 illustrates the Restorative skills that schools should strive to instill in students.

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Figure 2.5***Restorative Practice Skills***

Note. This diagram illustrates the skills essential for restorative practices. Adapted from "The Skills of Restorative Practices," by Restorative Justice on the Rise, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Restorative Justice on the Rise.

The concept of conflict as a teachable moment, which challenges students' belief systems, has the potential to lead to positive change. Despite limited research on Restorative Practices, they have shown positive results. However, some educators remain skeptical of the concept, citing difficulties in maintaining order and complying with state initiatives. For Restorative Practices to become more widely accepted, it is essential for leaders to demonstrate courage and heart in implementing them. Watts and Robertson (2021) stated that the implementation of Restorative Practices requires significant effort, and research suggests that restorative approaches work best when appropriate practices are ingrained into the culture and reflected in policies and procedures (p. 128). RP circles are a powerful tool in building relationships among students and

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preventing them from ending up in prisons. They are founded on a communication model that promotes connection, equity, and power-sharing, and are a key component of restorative practices in schools. During RP circles, all students can participate, and they are afforded the same level of respect as adults. In the work by Ortega et al. (2016), it is stated that "The goal of restorative circles is to create a space that fosters understanding, self-responsibility, and action" (p. 460). The circles are ritualistic, with a talking piece that encourages respect and equity of voice. Students can maximize the effectiveness of RP circles by learning as much as possible about them. Most circles have a centerpiece that helps focus students' attention and symbolizes the group's values. The structure of the circle may vary depending on the circle leader.

The structure of a circle typically involves an opening, such as a poem, story, or quote that helps to focus the students' attention on the topic of the circle. Circle members then review the values that are important to the circle, including speaking from the heart, respecting the talking piece, and listening with an open heart. At this point, the circle leader can ask thought-provoking questions to encourage students to reflect on their actions or future actions. The circle concludes with a summary of the group discussion.

As emphasized in the SEL section, teacher participation or modeling is crucial to the circle's success. Students are sensitive to the teacher's attitude, and genuine teacher participation can prompt students to participate with greater enthusiasm. When answering questions, teachers who share personal stories can inspire students to do the same, leading to a more candid and honest dialogue.

Restorative Practice also includes Check-ins and Check-outs, which help ensure that students are emotionally prepared for the school day. By engaging in decision-making,

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explaining the rationale, and understanding the expectations they must follow, students can be better prepared to participate in the school's academic and social activities.

Benefits of Restorative Practices, SEL, and Character Education

The combination of Restorative Practices and Social-Emotional Learning/Character Education has been shown to be effective in reducing behavior issues in schools. Recent research conducted in low-income, urban schools found that this intervention resulted in a decrease in absenteeism and helped mitigate a natural increase in students' disaffection with learning. Teachers reported that their students demonstrated greater growth in academic motivation and ability, which are strong indicators of long-term academic achievement and school completion.

The study implemented a school-wide social-emotional and character development program called PA, which proved particularly effective for students who were receiving free and reduced lunch, African American boys, and those who were at high risk of dropping out of school. The study also found that the social-emotional learning (SEL) skills taught alongside focused motivation lessons were crucial to the program's success.

Consistent with another study conducted three years earlier, students in the intervention group scored higher in reading and math compared to the control group students. Additionally, absenteeism and suspension rates were significantly lower in the students who participated in the PA intervention.

The meta-analysis study revealed that students who participated in school-based SEL interventions continued to demonstrate significant, positive benefits in seven outcomes collected, on average, from 56 weeks and up to 195 weeks following program participation. The program's effects had a lasting impact on students' academic progress to advanced grades, with an effect size of 0.33, which is comparable to other academic interventions. During the follow-up, the students showed improvement in attitude, behaviors, and educational performance. The findings

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showed that targeting individuals' social and emotional strengths significantly improves long-term adjustment and their ability to handle external stimuli that arise with their internal capacity.

Preventive practices such as restorative practices and social and emotional learning (SEL) can reduce the need for punitive practices, like suspension and classroom removal. These practices equip students with the skills to address personal issues, helping them move beyond their problems and improving the learning environment.

Restorative circles have been found to be effective in creating a safe space for students to speak up. Teachers have also reported benefiting from the interventions, stating that the RP framework gave them the skills to manage students' behaviors in a calmer manner, allowing them to teach more effectively without disruptions or power struggles.

While the research on these interventions has been limited, they show promise in transforming the educational landscape and fostering the development of better individuals. By utilizing social-emotional learning and character education to transform discipline through restorative circles, it may be possible to reduce school violence across the country.

Conclusion

This chapter critically synthesizes the integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) to address recidivism, attendance, and disciplinary issues at the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP). The literature highlights the profound impact of SEL and CE on fostering a supportive learning environment, which significantly improves student outcomes.

Research indicates that SEL and CE are vital for developing essential life skills, including emotional regulation, decision-making, and forming healthy relationships (Johnson et al., 2022, p. 91). These skills are crucial for students to succeed academically and personally, particularly in alternative education settings. The incorporation of SEL/CE within restorative circles was

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found to be effective in reducing disciplinary incidents and improving attendance, suggesting that a holistic approach to education can address underlying behavioral issues (Lui & Loeb, 2021, p.347).

The chapter underscores the importance of comprehensive training for educators, which enhances their perception and implementation of SEL/CE, leading to better student engagement and reduced recidivism rates. The literature revealed improvements in student discipline and attendance, demonstrating the effectiveness of SEL/CE in creating a positive school culture. Additionally, qualitative insights from previous studies highlighted the benefits of creating a safe space for students, making SEL/CE relevant to their lives, and involving parents in the educational process.

Overall, the chapter concludes that SEL and CE are essential components of a well-rounded educational system. They not only support academic success but also contribute to the overall well-being and personal development of students. The findings advocate for continued professional development for teachers and the integration of SEL/CE into the curriculum to foster a more inclusive and effective educational environment. This comprehensive approach has the potential to transform educational settings, reduce recidivism, and promote positive student outcomes, making a compelling case for policymakers and educators to prioritize SEL and CE in their programs

CHAPTER 3: EVALUATION OF CURRENT PRACTICE

In today's rapidly changing school environment, individuals face the challenge of adapting to an atmosphere that is no longer predictable and secure. According to Sousa et al. (2023), school climate is defined as the social atmosphere of a learning environment that encompasses students' diverse experiences, including teaching and learning quality, school community relationships, organizational structure, and institutional features (p. 2407).

Adolescence can be particularly challenging for students who lack the skills needed to navigate the evolving school system. When students exhibit behavioral difficulties, schools must analyze their behaviors and systems to determine where the disconnect lies.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. According to CASEL (2020), “SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation” (p. 12). Social skills enable students to manage their emotions, which is the leading cause of behavioral disruptions (Jones et al., 2017).

Teachers play a critical role in driving SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argue that teachers are “typically responsible for identifying students' social-emotional needs since they spend more time with them than their parents do” (p. 491). The intensity and duration of targeted interventions depend on the type of behaviors displayed daily in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers' own social-emotional

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competence can significantly influence the classroom environment and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The long-term objective of teachers is to help students learn the skills they need to be successful in their home school culture and climate. Social skills are the tools that teachers need to teach to increase students' awareness of self and their emotions. As Denham et al. (2012) highlight, “children’s ability to regulate emotion, attention, and behavior has been found to be related to their school/classroom adjustment and academic achievement” (p. 180). This integrated approach underscores the importance of fostering a positive school climate through SEL, which in turn supports students' overall adjustment and academic success. Jones et al. (2017) further assert that “educators’ social and emotional skills are vital to learning,” emphasizing the necessity for teachers to model and promote these skills in the classroom (p. 62).

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on key components for the study. The Boys Town Social Cognitive Model emerges as a framework designed to address behavioral issues among youth by emphasizing skill development in social, emotional, and cognitive domains. Developed by the Boys Town organization, this model aims to equip young individuals with the necessary tools to navigate interpersonal relationships and manage conflict effectively. Conversely, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) advocates for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a fundamental aspect of education. Founded in 1994, CASEL has played an instrumental role in advancing research and practice in SEL. Additionally, Restorative Practices emerge as an alternative approach to discipline, emphasizing the significance of repairing harm and restoring relationships in school settings. Restorative practices gained

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traction in modern education during the 1970s and have since evolved into a widely recognized framework for fostering a sense of belonging and accountability within school communities.

Tools for Social Emotional Learning

A variety of tools are available for educators to instill habits in their students to excel in acquiring the skills needed to regulate their emotions. This study focuses on several tools deemed appropriate for the educational setting and the demographics of the participants. The Boys Town Social Cognitive Model and the five core competencies outlined by CASEL, along with restorative practices, are the tools selected for this study.

Boys Town

Father Edward J. Flanagan established a home in Omaha, Nebraska for boys who were orphans or had been abandoned and were considered throwaways. He sought to provide these boys with an opportunity to thrive and succeed in life. According to Stevens (2010), "Instead of the prevalent educational concept in his own time, which involved maximum discipline and minimum freedom, he provided every boy with an environment of genuine freedom, along with enough discipline to instill a growing sense of responsibility" (p. 96). At the home, the boys received a loving, patient, and understanding environment that was safe and healthy. Father Flanagan created an alternative school that focused on vocational training and self-government, revolutionizing the way people thought about troubled children in the 1920s and 1930s.

Today, Boys Town is the largest child and family service organization in the United States, providing a comprehensive continuum of care. The Boys Town Education Model emphasizes the importance of teaching children appropriate conduct in social settings, such as school campuses and classrooms. The study titled "The Turnaround Test" employed the Boys Town Education Model, which utilizes a specific discipline strategy with defined behaviors that students must exhibit and includes a step-by-step process for interacting with misbehaving

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students (Karp, 2013, p. 54). Rather than relying on punitive measures, Boys Town emphasizes the importance of the environment and the development of social skills. Schools are encouraged to teach replacement behaviors, build relationships, and create positive experiences. Recent research highlights the need for character education and social skills in schools as a means of preventing violence and improving safety.

Boys Town Specialized Classroom Management (SCM) is a program specifically designed for educators who work with students requiring intensive behavioral interventions. This research-based program helps teachers build strong connections with their students, motivate them, and teach them important life skills necessary for success. The most effective way to implement SCM is by developing healthy relationships with students. Positive social relationships influence how students view themselves as learners, how much accountability they take for their actions, and how well they perform academically. Teachers should prioritize developing and maintaining quality relationships with their students because it positively impacts the classroom climate. A supportive and positive classroom environment promotes effective teaching, motivates students, and rewards them for positive behavior. The SCM's approach to building relationships with students focuses on two strategies: firmness and compassion. Students find this approach engaging, appealing, and deserving of respect.

Psychologist Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory posits that individuals tend to emulate the behaviors of significant others, who are perceived as competent, trustworthy, and a source of support. This theory is highly applicable in educational contexts, where the social dynamics between students and teachers play a critical role in shaping behavior and learning outcomes. Teachers who establish healthy connections with their students can provide the necessary support, direction, and reinforcement to encourage positive changes in their behavior.

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In turn, students learn by observing and emulating the behavior of those closest to them, including their teachers. According to Rutledge et al. (2015), learning in schools is a social process, in which both adults and students benefit from environments that cultivate and encourage their social-emotional well-being. This observation is supported by research, which suggests that the establishment of healthy relationships between teachers and students leads to growth in behaviors (Lamke et al., 2015).

The Social Cognitive Model proposes that behavior is always a result of a sequence of events, which includes an antecedent, behavior, and consequence. The antecedent refers to the events or conditions that occur before the behavior, while the behavior is the action that is not desirable, and the consequence refers to the action taken by an adult near the event. To make the consequences effective, they should be specific, consistent, brief, and as pleasant as possible. However, while giving consequences, social skills should also be considered, as they play a critical role in shaping behavior positively.

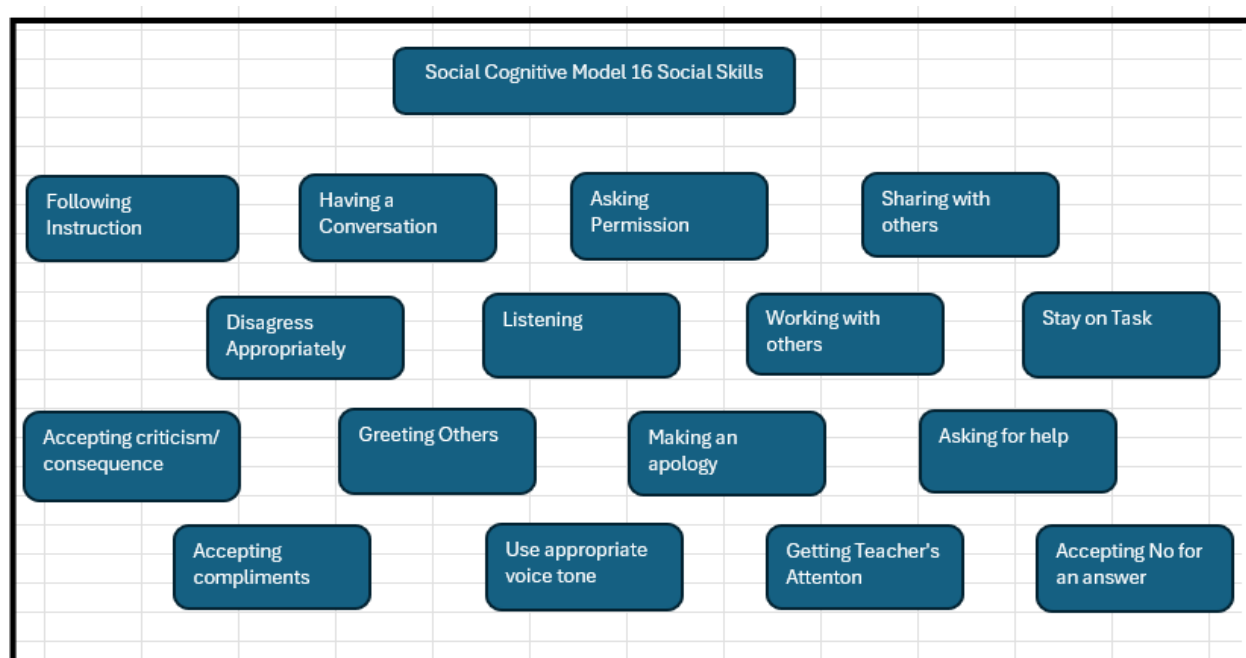
Schools are complicated environments that present significant challenges for students, especially those who struggle with academic performance and socialization. Teaching social skills can help students learn healthy ways of thinking, reduce repetitive behavior, and create a positive classroom and school environment. According to Lamke (2015), schools should take a comprehensive approach to social skill development, including specific and observable steps. The Social Cognitive Model has identified 16 social skills that are foundational to a healthy classroom and school environment, which can be seen in Figure 3.1. These skills include following instructions, accepting criticism or consequences, greeting others, getting the teacher's attention, making an apology, accepting compliments, having a conversation, asking for help,

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asking for permission, staying on task, sharing with others, working with others, disagreeing appropriately, listening, and using an appropriate voice tone.

Figure 3.1

Social Cognitive Model 16 Social Skills



Note. This diagram illustrates the 16 social skills outlined in the Social Cognitive Model. Adapted from "Social Skills Curriculum" by Boys Town Press, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Boys Town Press.

Boys Town is a school system that adopts a comprehensive approach to social skills development. Unlike traditional schools, which primarily focus on extinguishing unwanted behavior, Boys Town emphasizes teaching students how to replace negative behaviors with positive alternatives, as illustrated in Table 3.1. This approach acknowledges that certain behaviors may stem not from personal issues but from poor social-emotional behaviors experienced at home or in the community. Boys Town's methodology stresses positivity and the integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in lessons, rather than reacting to unwanted behavior when it occurs in the classroom. By being flexible and adopting a team approach, schools can develop plans to address students' needs in a non-rigid manner. This flexibility is

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particularly crucial in the post-COVID-19 era, where students encounter a multitude of challenges and stressors.

Table 3.1

Traditional Campus vs Boys Town Campus

Traditional Campus	Boys Town
View the students as the problem	Focuses on environments, examples and skill deficits
Attempts to extinguish the problem behavior	Develops skills/teaches replacement behaviors
Greater reliance on aversive approaches	Greater emphasis on positive approaches
Goal is compliance	Goal is life-long social emotional competencies
Quick Fix	Flexible enhances implementation
Rigid systems	Team approach
Greater reliance on specialist	

Note. Boys Town Campus based on Social Cognitive Model

Social Emotional Learning

In 1986, a sociopolitical movement acknowledged the importance of teaching non-academic skills to young people. The movement aimed to prepare them for future challenges by equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate the complex social and emotional landscape of the world. In 1997, Elias et al. introduced Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and defined its rationale. SEL aimed to establish a regulatory board to centralize and standardize policies and practices that promote the optimal development of children and youth.

SEL is a process through which individuals acquire and apply core skills in five interrelated areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The inspiration for SEL stems from both the Emotional Intelligence Theory and Bandura's social learning theory. Today, SEL is an educational model designed to enhance the social-emotional competencies of all students. Raimundo and Pinto (2013) stated that most SEL programs focus on universal prevention and promotion, which involves preventing behavioral problems by fostering social-emotional competence (p. 168). It is a long-term education program that connects school, home, and community.

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SEL has become a highly effective framework for many campuses, helping to deter unwanted behaviors in students and fostering a culture and climate conducive to learning. SEL teaches students the skills necessary to overcome poor attitudes, social misbehaviors, and conduct problems in both school and home environments. Additionally, SEL equips students with tools to manage emotional distress, academic failure, dropout, mental health issues, criminal behaviors, and substance abuse.

The five-factor SEL model was proposed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). According to Frye et al. (2024), these CASEL competencies integrate elements from theories of social and emotional development, behavior change and learning theories, and collaborative community-action research (p. 209). The primary goal of CASEL is to create a positive and inclusive classroom environment conducive to learning by collectively addressing feelings and perspectives that influence social behaviors. CASEL was founded in 1914 by Dr. Weissberg and Dr. Maurice Elias, who chaired the Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, comprising researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates. The group emerged from the meeting with the name and mission of CASEL.

The SEL model is based on the idea that positive activities in the home and community can reinforce SEL learning that occurs in the classroom. To ensure that students understand the relevance of what they are taught, schools need to involve these two areas. According to a report by CASEL, effective classroom instruction, student engagement in positive activities both in and out of the classroom, and the involvement of parents and the community in program planning, implementation, and evaluation are the most effective approaches to achieve this. Levin and Segev (2023) argue that "SEL-related processes should not be considered an independent content

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unit but rather an integral part of all educational system-wide relationships" (p. 2). Partnerships must be established with communities and parents to teach students the five interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that will help them develop into productive individuals.

Research conducted by Maurice Elias suggests that the successful implementation of high-quality SEL programs in schools leads to improved academic achievement, decreased problem behaviors, and strengthened relationships among children. To achieve these outcomes, teachers need to explicitly teach social and emotional instruction, integrate SEL with academic curriculum areas, and employ effective instructional practices. When teachers do this, they also benefit from SEL.

Despite the various paths individuals may take to become teachers, little has been done to address students' behaviors and mental health. Teachers' initial training primarily focuses on the academic domain, while explicit training in Social and Emotional Competence (SEC) is lacking. This lack of preparation often leads teachers to leave the field because they are not adequately equipped to address their students' needs. Lee et al. (2019) found that teachers with greater institutional support for SEL, such as professional training and administrative encouragement, implemented it with higher levels of intervention fidelity compared to those with lower support (p. 604). Teachers typically only observe negative behaviors displayed in the classroom, which are merely the tip of the iceberg. They lack an understanding of the deeper psychological stressors experienced by students, often referred to as socio-emotional related events. These stressors underscore the need for social-emotional interventions to enhance teachers' social-emotional competencies.

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When teachers receive proper training in social-emotional interventions, they become better equipped to respond more socially and emotionally to their students' needs. Research has shown that SEL interventions for teachers improve their perceived personal well-being and positive emotions while reducing psychological discomfort and internalizing problems. Such interventions can prevent ill-health issues such as burnout and promote well-being and mental health. Ultimately, SEL interventions for teachers allow them to experience a paradigm shift, perceiving their students differently, which leads them to act differently and expect different results.

DAEP Tracking Sheets

In Texas, it is mandatory for every Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) to have a behavioral tracking system in place to monitor student performance. Motion Independent School District (ISD) has implemented a revised behavior tracking sheet that enables the district to monitor student behavior and tailor interventions to individual needs. The behavior tracking sheet used by Motion ISD focuses on three behaviors, with two encompassing multiple actions. Students receive a "yes" (Y) or "no" (N) for each of the three behaviors, and teachers must redirect students three times before marking an "N" on their tracking sheets.

For the "Dress Code" behavior, students earn a "yes" for each class if they adhere to the dress code, which requires them to wear their pants at their waist with their shirts tucked in. If students refuse to comply with the dress code after three redirections, they will receive an "N."

The "On-Task" behavior refers to students actively participating in classroom activities, such as completing assignments, engaging in discussions, and avoiding disruptive behavior. If students fail to follow instructions and require redirection three times, they will receive an "N" on their tracking sheet.

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The "Following Directions" section requires students to comply with staff directives. Students who fail to do so after three redirections will receive an "N" on their tracking sheet. This section is crucial as it prepares students for their return to their home campus, where they will not have the opportunity to receive multiple redirections. Students who receive multiple "N"s will face consequences.

Figure 3.2

Behavior Tracking Sheet

Student Daily Tracking Sheet

Student Name: _____
Date: _____

Daily Movement Criteria

- Dress Code-2 or more redirects = "N's"
- Off Task Behavior-3 or more redirects= "N's"
- Following Directions-3 or more redirects = "N's"
- 4 or More "N" = 1 DAY LOST

Student ID# _____
Teacher: _____

Daily Movement Criteria

Destroyed Pointsheet

- Loss of 2 Days
- Replaced by Orange Sheet

Days Assigned

Period	Dress Code		Staff Initials	On-Task Behavior		Staff Initials	Following Directions		Staff Initials
Check In	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
1	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
2	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
3	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Lunch	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
4	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
5	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
6	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
7	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
8	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	
Transition	Y	N		Y	N		Y	N	

Total the number of "N" the student recieved

Staff Signature _____

Green - Orientation Yellow Sheet - 1 Day Loss Orange Sheet - 2 Day Loss Pink - Absent

Note. Tracking sheet used to document students' behavior during placement at DAEP

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In compliance with State of Texas regulations, Motion Independent School District (ISD) is required to implement a behavioral tracking system to monitor student performance. To meet individual student needs, the school has adopted a revised tracking sheet that focuses on three key behaviors. The tracking sheet awards a 'yes' or 'no' for each behavior, with teachers required to redirect students three times before marking an 'N' on their sheet. Dress code compliance is also monitored, with students expected to have their pants up to their waist and shirts tucked in. Failure to comply after three redirections results in an 'N' being issued. On-task behavior is defined as active participation in classroom activities, with non-compliance leading to an 'N' after three redirections. The section on following directions is particularly important, as students must comply with staff directives on the first redirection to prepare them for their return to their home campus. Multiple 'N' designations have consequences for students. The tracking sheet utilized by Motion ISD to monitor student behavior is shown in Figure 3.2.

Restorative Practices Circles

Restorative practices encompass a set of formal and informal processes designed to build positive relationships and foster a sense of community to proactively prevent conflict and wrongdoing (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2017). The zero-tolerance approach to discipline in schools has faced criticism for creating a harsh environment for students, particularly those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and for contributing to the discipline gap between students of color and white students (McCatty & Hnilica, 2023). This discipline gap refers to the differential disciplinary practices that result in students of color receiving more frequent and severe punishments than their white counterparts.

In response to these criticisms, restorative practices have been adopted as an alternative approach to school culture that is more equitable and nurturing for all students. This multi-tiered intervention model begins with building a healthy, school-wide community where all students

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can benefit from practices such as affective statements and restorative circles. As students progress through the tiers, additional interventions are provided to meet their specific needs, as depicted in Figure 3.3. Restorative practices aim to develop students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, such as communication, kindness, empathy, and caring. By integrating these approaches, students can learn these skills within the context of their community rather than in isolation.

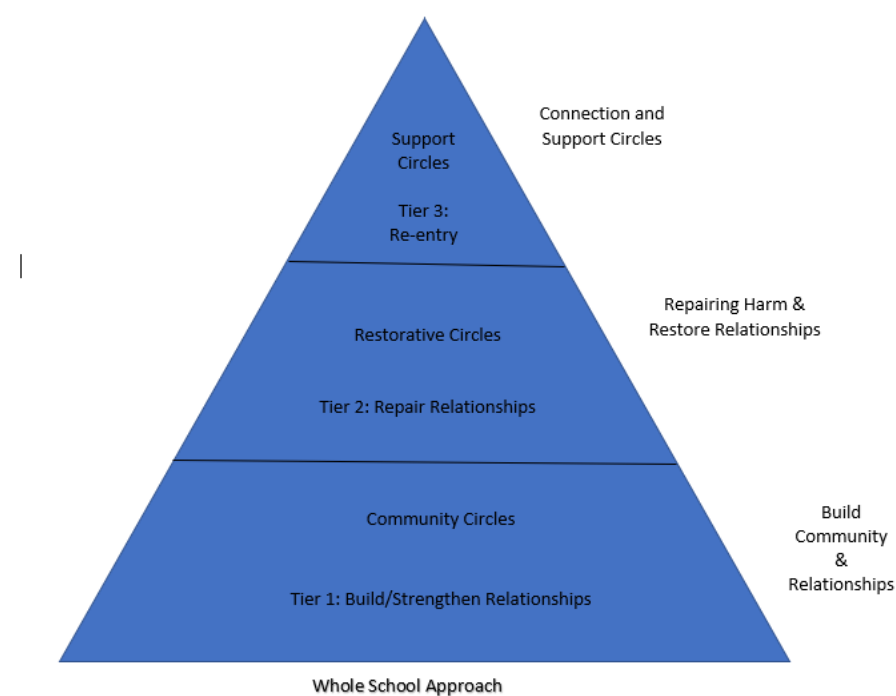
Restorative circles are a core component of restorative practices, providing opportunities for students to share their experiences and perspectives on various social and emotional learning (SEL) concepts. These circles challenge students' beliefs, values, assumptions, and needs as they relate to their personal experiences and environment. This approach empowers students to take control of their emotions and create positive changes in their lives. Studies have shown that restorative practices have led to an increase in students' sense of agency and leadership, as well as their ability to resolve conflicts and provide feedback to their teachers (White & Weiss, 2023).

In conclusion, restorative practices represent a promising approach to creating an equitable and nurturing school culture that benefits all students, regardless of their background or ethnicity. By building positive relationships and fostering a sense of community, restorative practices can help prevent conflict and wrongdoing while promoting social and emotional learning skills essential for success in school and beyond.

Figure 3.3

Restorative Tier for Whole School

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Note. This diagram illustrates the Whole School Approach to restorative practices. Adapted from "Restorative Practices: Whole School Approach," by Reed College, 2020. Copyright 2020 by Reed College.

Problem of Practice

During the 2022-2023 academic year, there was a noticeable increase in the number of elementary and intermediate grade students who were sent to the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) multiple times. In response to this issue, the researcher decided to explore ways to address it and identified that integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) with Restorative Practices (RP) could be a potential solution.

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching SEL in conjunction with RP to reduce the likelihood of students returning to the DAEP during the same or subsequent academic years. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How did teachers' views on teaching SEL/CE in a restorative circle change after undergoing extensive training on SEL/CE and restorative circles?
2. What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE with fidelity on student discipline?

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3. What was the impact of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on student attendance?
4. What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on student recidivism in the district Alternative Education Program?

In summary, the researcher recognized the need to address the recurring issue of students returning to the DAEP, which led to the exploration of integrating SEL/CE with RP. The study aimed to analyze the impact of this approach on various factors such as teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL/CE, students' disciplinary records, attendance, and recidivism rates.

Methodology

Research Design

The research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of current Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) interventions using a mixed-methods design. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data sources. This research methodology allowed for iterative processes to achieve the desired outcomes.

Qualitative data were collected through observations of teachers implementing SEL/CE according to the campus's current expectations. Time was allocated for teaching SEL/CE on the master schedule to ensure that students had the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to function in a school environment. Baseline data were collected to evaluate the impact of the current SEL/CE intervention on students' discipline, recidivism, and attendance. Data in these areas were gathered at the end of the evaluation phase to determine the effectiveness of the current SEL/CE program.

Context of the Study

The study was conducted at a district alternative education program (DAEP) in Houston, Texas, serving students in grades 3-12. The school aims to collaborate with parents and home campuses to provide a challenging academic curriculum that emphasizes social-emotional

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learning and character education skills in a structured environment, with the goal of assisting students in making positive and successful life choices. During the evaluation phase, 48 elementary/intermediate students were enrolled, comprising 22 Black, 23 Hispanic, 1 White, and 2 students of other ethnicities. Forty-one of the students were male, and seven were female. The campus had one administrator assigned to the elementary/intermediate levels and three paraprofessionals to offer additional support.

Recruitment and Participation

The evaluation phase involved teachers assigned to the DAEP elementary/intermediate area. Teachers in grades three through five were invited to participate. Interested and qualified teachers were provided with a summary of the study by the researcher, and any questions they had were answered before the evaluation commenced. Two teachers agreed to participate. One of the teachers had 23 years of experience (Teacher 1) and the other teacher was an Associate teacher (Teacher 2) working on his certification for K-4th grade. All participants were African American, with one female and one male.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The study aimed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to answer four research questions. The second and third research questions (quantitative data) focused on assessing the impact of students' attendance and discipline after they received SEL/CE (Social Emotional Learning/Cultural Education) lessons with fidelity. To obtain attendance data, the attendance clerk provided information on students' enrollment and exit dates, along with the number of placement days given. For example, if a student received a 30-day placement but was physically enrolled in the DAEP program for 40 days, they missed 10 days. Discipline data were monitored by the researcher using the district eSchool software while students were at the DAEP.

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Qualitative data were collected through observations during this phase. In accordance with the observation form developed (see Appendix B), observations of educators delivering SEL/CE focused on monitoring stated learning objectives, student engagement, explicit instruction, opportunities for skill practice, opportunities for reflection, and integration possibilities.

Data Analysis

The study examined the effects of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on students' discipline and attendance within the current campus model. Data were acquired from observations, along with discipline and attendance records from eSchool. Prior to data analysis, the researcher analyzed the campus's expectations for teaching SEL/CE. Student recidivism data were collected at the conclusion of the evaluation phase to assess whether the current Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) interventions are effective in reducing recidivism.

Results

Discipline

While analyzing the discipline referrals, the research found it necessary to examine the behaviors that led to students being placed in the DAEP. Students earned placements for various reasons, ranging from general disruption (GEDN) to possession of weapon replicas (WERP). Studying the causes of students' placements allowed the researcher to determine the needs that must be addressed to reduce the likelihood of repeated behaviors.

A total of 48 discipline referral placements were documented during the evaluation phase of the study. Among these, eight referrals were for physical and/or verbal aggression against district employees or volunteers. These referrals occurred due to students being physically aggressive toward district personnel. General disruptions occurred five times, with students

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creating disturbances in common areas of the building. Four students received placements due to possession of non-illegal knives. There were also incidents involving physical/verbal threats towards others (three cases), bullying (two cases), and fighting (one case).

During the evaluation period, DAEP staff wrote a total of 48 referrals. The referrals ranged from general disruption to physical/verbal threats against others. Two referrals were specifically for physical and/or verbal aggression against district employees or volunteers, both involving the same student. Notably, seven out of the 48 students accounted for 37 of the referrals, indicating a need for targeted interventions.

Attendance

Attendance was not a major issue for most students during the evaluation phase, with an average of two absences per student. However, certain attendance patterns were noteworthy. One student had a total of 19 absences during the evaluation period, prompting multiple phone calls from the classroom teacher and attendance clerk to encourage the parent to improve the child's attendance. Another student missed eight days of school during their placement. Notably, both students with high absences were not behavior issues during their placement days. A total of 19 students had zero absences during their placements. Additionally, one student had seven absences, one student had six absences, three students had five absences, four students had four absences, six students had three absences, three students had two absences, and 10 students had one absence.

Recidivism

At the end of the evaluation period, a total of five students in the elementary/intermediate area at the DAEP returned during the same school year, while one student returned from the previous school year.

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Qualitative Results

During the observations, teachers displayed a lack of understanding in teaching SEL/CE. Each teacher was teaching according to their individual perceptions, making it difficult to establish consistency in SEL/CE within the elementary/intermediate area. Teachers were not facilitating connections between the content and students' lives, hindering the generalization of learned skills.

Teacher one used students' SEL/CE time to share personal stories about making the right decisions, including anecdotes about having both parents at home, which was unfamiliar to most students. Her motherly approach, though well-intentioned, lacked depth and organization in SEL/CE lessons. This method caused students to disengage as no interactive activities were used to facilitate connections.

Teacher two was inconsistent in teaching SEL/CE, alternating between delivering lessons and lecturing students on their poor decisions. His management style was more reactive, often focusing on pointing out mistakes rather than using them to guide skill development. Several teachable moments in his classroom were missed opportunities to advance students' SEL/CE due to his tantrums for poor behaviors. He was eventually released from the district due to unprofessional conduct with a parent.

Overall, all teachers lacked guidance in their SEL/CE instruction due to their inability to connect SEL/CE competencies to the behavior displayed in the classroom. Their lessons lacked engagement, which is essential for helping students connect learning to reflection. Without the ability to reflect on what they have learned; students cannot generalize knowledge to other areas of their lives.

Discussion

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The evaluation data highlighted the need for more training on SEL/CE to help teachers tailor their actions to meet students' needs. While some students' behaviors were challenging, others required more targeted SEL/CE lessons to address disruptive behavior. Observations of SEL/CE lessons revealed that teachers also need improvement in their SEL/CE skills. Teacher two demonstrated emotional deregulation when students did not comply with his directions, opting for forceful compliance rather than addressing students' needs in that moment. This approach prevented students from connecting with the material because his emotions became deregulated highlighting the need for teachers personal SEL to improve.

Regardless of lesson topics, essential elements must be utilized to help students internalize presented information. To enhance learning, it is essential for students to understand what they are learning and why. Once this is established, skills should be taught, and students should be allowed to interact with the material in engaging ways to facilitate real-life connections.

Conclusion

The evaluation phase of the study indicates that the current system needs improvement. Guidance is essential to support both students and teachers who deliver the intervention. Without a solid understanding of SEL/CE and its potential to create positive changes in students, teachers will continue to produce the same outcomes from the current system.

Despite the number of referrals some students receive from teachers lacking emotional regulation, teachers are crucial in reducing classroom incidents. Students have diverse needs, yet those placed in the DAEP during the evaluation phase received uniform interventions.

Differentiating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) lessons within restorative circles, rather than repeating the same material, enables teachers to cater to individual needs and potentially reinforce previously learned SEL/CE skills.

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Areas of concern will be addressed during the intervention phase to guide SEL/CE in restorative circles and improve students' overall well-being in their school environments.

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION OF INTERVENTION

Educators are expected to teach various subjects and receive extensive training to ensure successful implementation. Depending on the perceived importance of the subject, multiple training sessions may be offered. However, social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education often receive less priority due to the academic testing environment. Teachers responsible for teaching SEL and character education must thoroughly understand 'implementation fidelity,' which refers to the degree to which a treatment is implemented as prescribed or the level of adherence to the specific procedures of the intervention. Adequate training allows teachers to obtain answers to their questions before implementation, providing a clear purpose for the intervention.

In a study on STEM, understanding teachers' perceptions could aid in anchoring their progress in teacher education, facilitating data-driven decision-making, and optimally designing and implementing STEM programs. Similarly, for SEL and character education to reduce recidivism, teachers must clearly understand why they are teaching these subjects and how to implement them according to fidelity standards. The purpose and data are essential to substantiate the need for SEL and character education interventions, and the evaluation data supports this study. Thus, professional learning is essential in enhancing teachers' knowledge of SEL and character education implementation, which can alter their perception of teaching these interventions.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines professional learning as a belief or opinion based on how things seem. According to Brackett et al. (2012), three scales can assess teachers' beliefs in SEL: their comfort level with teaching SEL, their commitment to learning about SEL, and their perception of whether their school culture supports SEL. The focus of SEL training is to equip

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teachers with the skills needed to develop a level of comfort and commitment. These skills will help teachers instill social skills in students, such as emotion recognition and management, positive goal setting and achievement, empathic thinking, positive relationship development and maintenance, and responsible decision-making. For SEL to effectively reduce recidivism at the DAEP, teachers' perception of teaching SEL must be transformed.

Literature Review

According to academic literature, combining restorative practices with social and emotional learning (SEL) or character education can produce positive outcomes in addressing school behavior concerns. In a matched-pair, cluster-randomized controlled trial conducted in low-income, urban schools, the implementation of a school-wide SEL program called Positive Action (PA) led to a reduction in absenteeism, mitigated a natural increase in disaffection with learning, and improved academic motivation and ability. Bavarian et al. (2013) noted that these outcomes are positive indicators of long-term academic achievement and school completion. The study's success was attributed to the SEL skills taught and the focused motivation lessons. Similarly, a study conducted three years earlier found that an SEL and Character Development program led to higher academic performance and attendance, as well as lower disciplinary problems and grade retention (Snyder et al., 2010). Regardless of how the interventions are used and combined, they appear to produce positive results for the campus. Lustick et al. (2020) noted that preventive practices like restorative practices and SEL can reduce the need for reactive discipline, including punitive practices such as classroom removal and suspension. These interventions equip students with the skills needed to address personal issues and speak openly about matters that may have troubled them for years. Restorative circles have been described as creating a safe environment for students to share their thoughts and feelings.

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Interventions that help teachers develop positive relationships with their students can lead to fewer behavioral disruptions and power struggles. According to Kehoe et al. (2017), the Restorative Practice (RP) framework can equip teachers with skills to manage students' behavior in a calmer manner. Although there is limited research on the effectiveness of these interventions, they show promise in changing the school environment and students' behaviors. If all students are motivated to become better individuals, school violence will become a thing of the past. Based on the research gathered in this study, themes emerged that must be acquired to maximize the effects of SEL/CE in restorative circles.

Teacher Comfort

According to research conducted by Collie et al. (2015), teachers' beliefs closely relate to their teaching practices, experiences, and student outcomes. Teachers confident in their ability to teach a subject tend to be more energetic and compassionate, which benefits students as their experiences become part of the lessons. Additionally, such teachers are more open and transparent with their students, making use of teachable moments. Recent studies suggest that teachers with positive attitudes toward Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula tend to deliver lessons more frequently, thereby enhancing their students' SEL components (Miller & Li, 2023).

However, the adoption of SEL curricula can be challenging, especially when teachers lack the necessary training (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). In such cases, the filter of information can be distorted, and the framing of situations and intentions can be affected. Furthermore, teachers' comfort level with SEL depends on their personal SEL skills, which can be improved through professional education and training (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). Teachers are the

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primary role models for SEL within their classrooms, and their beliefs and attitudes toward SEL significantly impact the implementation of SEL components.

Teachers who are comfortable with their personal SEL and teaching the components tend to challenge their students' assumptions and beliefs that lead to poor choices in and out of school. Lee and Zuilkowski (2022) found that teachers more comfortable with Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) enjoyed teaching it more and taught it more consistently compared to those with lower comfort levels. Therefore, they are better equipped to proactively instill SEL components into their students by utilizing teachable moments and responding effectively to SEL-related situations.

Teachers feel comfortable receiving the necessary skills and material to support students' SEL/CE such as detailed lesson plans to followed while presenting SEL/CE in restorative circles (see Appendix C). Districts are "building the capacity of educators to support students, showing how to weave together the academic, social and emotional dimensions of learning" (Bouffard, 2021, p. 5). Seamlessly integrating SEL/CE into all aspects of the classroom allows teachers to truly experience the essence of teaching, benefiting both the teachers and the district. Job-related stress is reduced as teachers can focus on their classroom responsibilities. Consistently addressing stressful situations can "undermine a teacher's ability to provide consistent and emotionally supportive classroom environments" (Zinsser et al., 2019). Teachers' ability to feel comfortable in the classroom environment leads to a greater commitment to serving students.

Teacher Commitment

According to Brackett (2012), educators who prioritize social-emotional learning (SEL) are more effective in implementing SEL programming and modeling the skills it promotes in children. This suggests that teachers who understand the importance of SEL recognize that some

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students require more than just academic content to succeed in life. By focusing solely on academic subjects, the needs of students may not be fully met, potentially hindering their academic progress.

Incorporating SEL into different school subjects is an effective way to promote the development of social-emotional skills. For instance, Lee and Zuilkowski (2022) note that committed teachers find ways to incorporate SEL into different school subjects, such as using perspective-taking in history classes. For example, reenacting a legislative debate can help students understand the motivations and emotions of different stakeholders. While teaching SEL during scheduled hours is important, teachers can also use it within subject areas to help students better understand the content being introduced in the classroom, especially in subjects like ELA and History.

Poulou and Garner (2023) contend that teachers committed to learning about and using SEL teaching practices are more likely to modify their teaching methods to meet the individual needs of their students in ways that facilitate positive learning opportunities. In contrast, uncommitted teachers may only present SEL curriculum to occupy time without making meaningful connections for their students.

It is essential for teachers to understand that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has the potential to make a significant positive impact on their students' outcomes. As argued by Aidman and Peter (2018), many of the most effective SEL lessons occur without overt instruction because excellent teachers and schools create an environment and culture where these characteristics are encouraged and strengthened.

Teachers committed to improving their students' outcomes and thinking creatively can leverage the potential of SEL to great effect. Moreover, it is crucial for schools to prioritize SEL

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and provide the necessary support to enable teachers to incorporate it effectively into their teaching practice. SEL should not be viewed as an add-on or a luxury but rather as an essential component of the educational experience.

Formal training in SEL/CE provides teachers with the skills needed to transform students' lives. The more teachers are exposed to SEL/CE, the stronger they become in delivering the content. Teachers become more confident in their teaching methods when they understand that children's learning styles and preferences are primarily influenced by their emotions, which significantly affect how they prefer to learn and engage with content (Waajid et al., 2013, p. 42). This enables teachers to identify factors that influence or elicit emotions conducive to learning, which benefits students academically. Understanding others and their backgrounds reduces fear, fostering empathy and respect (Marsay, 2022). Being well-versed in SEL/CE allows teachers to look beyond surface behaviors, focus on the child's relevance, and build meaningful connections with their students. When teachers display a level of comfort and commitment, the campus is truly ready to advance social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education (CE) to support the whole child.

School Culture Supporting SEL

Advocates of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) maintain that schools should prioritize the implementation of SEL behaviors into every aspect of school life, including policies, curricula, instruction, and interactions between all who work and learn there. According to Bumbarger (2015), implementation is defined as "the capacity to effectively implement an evidence-based intervention" (p. 1118). Social-Emotional Learning must be given utmost importance, especially during implementation. School leaders should strive to create an environment based on evidence-based research that fosters emotional expression and well-being

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for both teachers and students. For instance, including SEL training in staff meetings can provide teachers with an opportunity to acquire new skills and exchange ideas about how to implement SEL throughout the school. When SEL is part of faculty meetings and placed on the master schedule, teachers recognize the importance of creating a caring school culture. A school environment that prioritizes social-emotional development can prepare students for a successful life and participation in democracy. It can also meet the needs of younger children and adolescents and foster moral development. As the school year progresses, students gradually develop SEL components and use them daily with their peers and school staff. Teachers also develop a commitment to providing students with lessons that promote SEL learning. Yang et al. (2019) define curriculum as the cornerstone of early childhood education, guiding children toward specific learning goals (p. 36). When SEL components are seamlessly integrated into all academic disciplines, teachers can influence the learning environment by creating conditions that foster a sense of safety and support among students. A lack of commitment to SEL in schools can cause conflicts between classrooms, as students may feel comfortable in some classes but not in others. Therefore, consistency of SEL is essential campus-wide to ensure that students and staff receive support on an SEL level.

Campuses can help create a supportive environment by making students feel welcome and fostering a sense of belonging. "Teachers can cultivate a sense of belonging by ensuring they know their students socially, culturally, and academically to create an optimal environment for academic engagement, collaboration, relevant learning, and academic success" (Ibarra, 2022, p. 7). Connections between students and teachers allow them to challenge beliefs and assumptions as they grow together with SEL/CE in restorative circles.

Problem of Practice

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Recidivism rates have been increasing due to students' inability to function in their home campus environments. Poor decisions are made repeatedly, and campuses are too eager to move students with undesirable behaviors to Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) campuses. To address the rising recidivism rates, a study was conducted to evaluate teachers' perceptions of teaching Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) in restorative circles at DAEP. As part of this study, comprehensive training was provided to teachers on the rationale and methods for teaching SEL.

The objective of this study was to reduce recidivism rates, increase student attendance, and decrease disciplinary incidents on campus. The study aimed to address the following research questions: 1) How did teachers' views on teaching SEL/CE in restorative circles change after undergoing extensive training on SEL/CE and restorative circles? 2) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles with fidelity on students' discipline? 3) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles with fidelity on students' attendance? and 4) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles on students' recidivism at the DAEP?

The evaluation of the teachers' completed surveys indicated some positive trends that could be further explored to help teachers feel more comfortable and committed to teaching SEL/CE in restorative circles, thereby enhancing students' well-being.

Methodology

Research Design

Design-Based Research (DBR) is an approach created by educators to enhance the impact, transfer, and application of education research in practice (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012, p. 16). By analyzing the recidivism rates of students at the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP), school administrators can identify the students' needs and propose evidence-

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based solutions for implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) in restorative circles. The effectiveness of these solutions can be evaluated, and the results can be shared with other institutions to reduce recidivism rates broadly.

To address the first research question, the study investigated how teachers' views on teaching SEL/CE in restorative circles changed after undergoing extensive training on SEL/CE and restorative circles. Pre- and post-training Likert surveys were conducted to allow teachers to express the changes in their perceptions due to the intervention received by students.

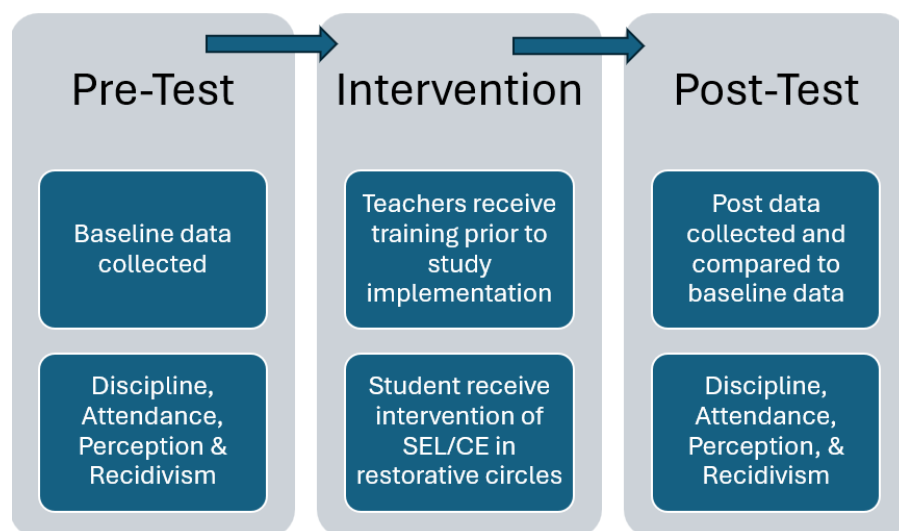
Regarding the second research question, the study examined the effect of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on student discipline. Similarly, for the third research question, the study investigated the effect of delivering SEL/CE with fidelity on student attendance. Discipline and attendance data were collected from the DAEP campus in Motion ISD using eSchool. To determine recidivism, the researcher tracked the number of placements received by students during the study. A list of placements was compiled, and students who received multiple placements were identified.

To ascertain whether teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL influenced students' recidivism rates at DAEP, a mixed-method study was conducted. This study used a quasi-experimental model, pre-test and post-test evaluations, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, as well as input from open ended responses in evaluating participants' attitudes or perceptions regarding an event or to assess comfort and confidence in applying the information presented in a training session or with the introduction of new concepts.

Figure 4.1

Quasi-experimental Model with Pre- and Post-test

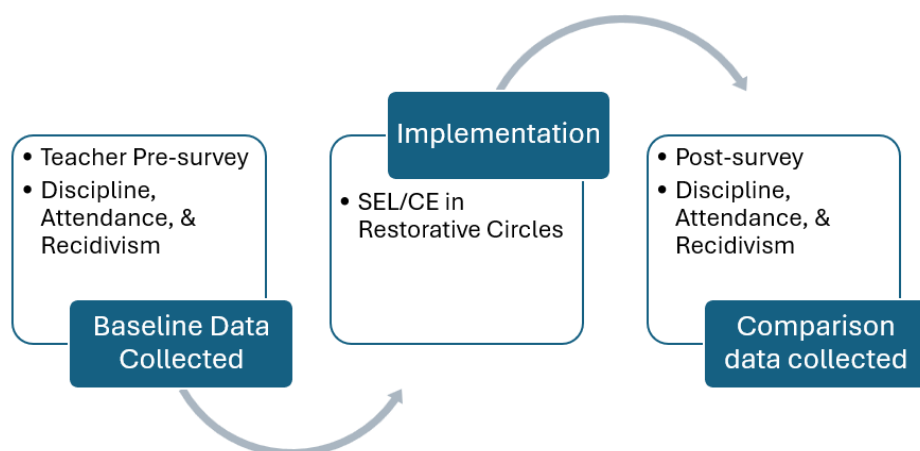
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The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the study's progression through different stages as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

Stage of the Study



Context of the Study

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Motion Learning Center, located in Houston, Texas, within the Motion Independent School District (ISD), is an alternative education campus designed to provide a unique learning environment for students experiencing behavioral difficulties or requiring a non-traditional classroom setting due to violations of the district's code of conduct. The center offers Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Character Education (CE), and Restorative Circles to help students address poor choices made on their home campuses and develop the necessary skills for academic and personal success.

The Motion Learning Center fosters a supportive and structured learning environment dedicated to helping students achieve academic success and personal growth. It provides Man Up mentoring services, Restorative Circles, and SEL/CE to assist students in developing the skills needed to navigate challenges and build positive relationships. The center is staffed with a team of dedicated educators, administrators, and support staff who collaborate to deliver high-quality education and personalized support. The campus emphasizes student achievement and the teaching of replacement skills for negative behaviors.

The Motion Independent School District (ISD) is a large urban district in Texas. According to the most recent data from the Texas Education Agency (2021-2022), the district has a student population of 40,642. The largest group of students in the district are Hispanic (58.8%), followed by African American (26.7%), White (3.3%), Asian (10.1%), American Indian (0.7%), Pacific Islander (0.1%), and students of two or more races (0.3%). Approximately 83.2% of students enrolled in Motion ISD come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, while 49.6% of the student population are English learners. Additionally, 10.3% of students are listed as receiving Special Education services.

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During the 2022-2023 school year, 1,210 students committed infractions that required placement in the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP). Sixty-seven students committed offenses that necessitated attendance at the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP). A total of 4,007 students were placed in in-school suspension, and 3,072 students were placed in out-of-school suspension.

According to data from the Texas Education Agency, the discipline referral count for the intervention phase was 14,161, while the discipline population count was 5,705. This statistic indicates that some students received multiple referrals entered into the PEIMS system during the same school year. The demographics for the DAEP included 647 Hispanic students, 492 African American students, 27 White students, 23 Asian students, 14 American Indian students, and seven students of other races.

Participants

Two new teachers were hired for the elementary/intermediate wing of the campus, making a total of three teachers asked to participate in the study. All three teachers who were approached agreed to participate, and they were all highly experienced in their field. One of the third/fourth-grade teachers (Teacher 1) had 17 years of experience, while the other third and fourth-grade teacher (Teacher 2) had six years of experience. The fifth-grade teacher (Teacher 3) had 23 years of experience, who participated in the study during the evaluation phase. All participants were African American, with two females and one male. Each teacher had graduated from a university-based teacher education program and was considered highly qualified in their areas of study according to the state of Texas.

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During the intervention phase, a total of 50 students were placed at the DAEP. Of these 50 students, 14 were female and 36 were male. The demographic breakdown of students included 21 African American, 24 Hispanic, two students classified as White, and three categorized as other. Thirty of the students were 5th graders, nine were 4th graders, and 11 were 3rd graders.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A mixed-method study was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data during the fall, winter, and spring semesters on discipline, attendance, and recidivism rates.

Quantitative data were collected from students' attendance and discipline records to answer two research questions: (1) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles with fidelity on students' discipline? and (2) What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles with fidelity on students' attendance? The attendance clerk provided the researcher with students' attendance records, and the researcher monitored the students' attendance throughout the program. Additionally, the researcher monitored discipline and attendance data using the district eSchool software while the students were at DAEP.

The first research question focused on teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL/CE in a restorative circle after receiving comprehensive training. The researcher employed pre- and post-Likert surveys to answer this question, as illustrated in Figure 4.3. The questions were generated from a CASEL school-based staff survey on schoolwide SEL implementation and focused on teachers' beliefs about SEL, job satisfaction, and family involvement.

Figure 4.3

SEL/CE Pre and Post Survey

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SEL Survey for Reducing Recidivism
Pre-Survey/ Post-Survey

Survey questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I strive to promote students' SEL/CE competence.					
I prioritize promoting SEL/CE competency in my students.					
I believe that SEL/CE competence is related to students' academic success.					
I believe that SEL/CE competence is related to students' civic engagement.					
I believe that SEL/CE competence is related to students' career preparation.					
I plan on utilizing SEL/CE in all of my classes in the future.					
SEL/CE has a clear benefit for students at this school.					
I feel excited to come to work each day.					
I feel frustrated by my job.					
I seek input from families about how to best meet their child's social and emotional needs.					
I communicate with my students' families as a way to build positive relationships.					
I involve my students' families in meaningful decision making.					
I model problem-solving strategies that students can use to resolve conflicts.					
I have participated in professional learning on how my interactions with students can promote their social and emotional competence.					
My lessons in my class provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies.					
When opportunities arise for my students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, I act on them.					
My teaching practices make connections to my students' lives.					

What is your perception of how SEL and CE benefit students that display behavior concerns in your classroom?

How would you make connections with SEL and CE to your students' lives?

What connections have you made with your students' families?

Would you want your child taught SEL and CE skills in school? If so, why?

What was the biggest take away from teaching SEL and CE to your students?

Years of teaching: _____

Grades taught: _____

Note. This diagram shows the pre- and post-test results for social-emotional learning outcomes. Adapted from "Assessment Tools for SEL," by CASEL, 2020. Copyright 2020 by CASEL.

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The researcher collected quantitative data on a five-point scale. The scale ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with neither disagree nor agree (3) in the middle. Although non-Likert scales are considered to have higher reliability and validity, the researcher used the Likert Scale due to the availability of clarifying questions. The five points on the scale increased the variance in responses and reliability.

Qualitative data were collected from open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to determine the participants' thinking before and after the study. Each pretest question was reviewed and compared to the post-test question to determine if any changes in thinking occurred during the study. The questions were simple but had the potential to capture the participants' inner thoughts. The pretest comprised five open-ended questions, while the post-test had six.

The participants answered several questions, such as: What is their perception of how SEL and Character Education (CE) benefit students who display behavior concerns in their classroom? How would they make connections with SEL and CE to their students' lives? What connections have they made with their students' families? Would they want their child taught SEL and CE skills in school, and what was the biggest takeaway from teaching SEL and CE to their students? An extra question was added to the post-test to allow the researcher to clearly understand changes during the study: What changed from the pretest?

In conclusion, the study employed mixed methods to investigate the impact of SEL and CE on academic and behavioral outcomes among students in grades three to five. The study findings are expected to inform and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on best practices for implementing SEL and CE in school settings.

Data Analysis

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The researcher conducted paired sample t-tests to compare the pre- and post-intervention data concerning students' attendance, discipline, and teachers' perceptions of teaching Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) from the Likert scale survey. The validity of the tests was ensured by assessment of assumptions. However, the data was found to have a non-normal distribution, which violated the assumptions. Therefore, the Wilcoxon nonparametric test was used to determine the impact of SEL/CE in restorative circles on both students' discipline and attendance and teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL/CE.

Furthermore, the researcher used inductive reasoning techniques to evaluate open-ended qualitative questions and draw general conclusions from the participants' responses. After receiving and reviewing pre- and post-test surveys, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the participants' perceptions of the study and their experiences.

Results

Recidivism

One of the research questions examined whether delivering Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) lessons with adherence impacted students' recidivism rates at the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP). A total of 50 students received placements and interventions during the study. At the conclusion of the study, only one student from the elementary/intermediate area experienced recidivism at the DAEP, compared to five students in the evaluation year. The recidivist was a female student in the 5th grade, whose first placement offense was assault causing bodily injury and the second was fighting. Teachers were able to challenge students' beliefs and assumptions, leading to changes in their decision-making.

Discipline

The second research question further investigated the impact of SEL and CE lessons on students' discipline records. The analysis indicated that the median discipline score before the

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intervention was 1 ($SD = 2.458$, $SE = 0.348$, *Coefficient of Variation* = .859), and the median score after the intervention was 0 ($SD = 1.340$, $SE = 0.190$, *Coefficient of Variation* = 1.675).

A Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed that the discipline scores were significantly different before and after the intervention ($W = 1263.5$, $Z = 6.043$, $p < .001$) with a large effect size ($r = .98$). Thus, the intervention had a statistically significant effect on students' discipline when they received SEL and CE lessons in restorative circles.

Attendance

The analysis revealed that the median attendance score before the intervention was 1 ($SD = 3.204$, $SE = 0.453$, *Coefficient of Variation* = 1.618), and the median score after the intervention was 0 ($SD = 1.278$, $SE = 0.181$, *Coefficient of Variation* = 1.776).

A Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that the attendance scores were significantly different before and after the intervention ($W = 347.0$, $Z = 3.796$, $p < .001$), with a large effect size ($r = 0.84$). Therefore, the intervention had a statistically significant effect on students' attendance during this study.

Perception

To gain a clear understanding of the study's impact, the researcher will address the first research question that guided the study: How did the provision of comprehensive SEL, CE, and restorative circle training impact teachers' perception of teaching SEL/CE in a restorative circle? Teachers were presented with pre- and post-Likert Scale surveys to determine the impact of the training on their perception of teaching SEL and CE with restorative circles.

Before the intervention, the median perception score was 53 ($SD = 7.50$, $SE = 4.33$, *Coefficient of Variation* = 0.131), and after the intervention, it was 74 ($SD = 4.72$, $SE = 2.72$, *Coefficient of Variation* = 0.062).

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A Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that the perception scores were not significantly different before and after the intervention ($W = 0.0$, $Z = -1.6$, $p = .25$), with a large effect size ($r = 0.554$). Thus, the training received prior to the implementation did not have a statistically significant effect on teachers' perception of teaching SEL and CE in restorative circles.

Teacher One's pretest score was 53, which increased to 74 after the intervention. The areas of concern for Teacher One included the belief that SEL/CE is not related to civic engagement and career preparation. Once the teacher made connections with SEL/CE, they understood how SEL/CE conversations can add to a student's civic engagement and career preparation. Discussions during restorative circles gave the teacher a different perspective on using civics and career preparation to motivate students to create goals for their chosen occupation and participate in civic duties. She utilized civic duties as a method to assign tasks, enabling students to collaborate in a community-type setting. This approach not only promoted teamwork but also encouraged students to engage in civic responsibilities, which are critical for fostering a sense of community and citizenship.

Teacher Two's pretest score was 66, which increased to 81 after the intervention. This teacher was open to utilizing SEL/CE in restorative circles and had worked hard to meet students' needs within the classroom before and after the intervention. His openness enabled him to transform adverse disciplinary situations in the classroom into teachable moments for acquiring replacement skills. This method effectively managed immediate behavioral challenges while also promoting sustained learning, providing students with alternative techniques for resolving conflicts and overcoming obstacles.

Teacher Three's pretest score was 53, which improved to 72 following the intervention. Initially, Teacher Three did not incorporate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) or Character

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Education (CE) in the classroom due to her extensive years of service. Her experience had led her to rely on traditional methods of classroom management. Nevertheless, the training facilitated a recognition of the importance of integrating SEL/CE and enhancing home-school connections which will enable students to apply SEL/CE in everyday environment.

Individual teacher responses varied; however, all final scores indicated a positive trend in teachers' perceptions of teaching Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) in restorative circles. This suggests that the training provided facilitated a paradigm shift, leading to improved student outcomes.

Qualitative Results

To address the first research question, how did teachers' views on teaching SEL/CE in restorative circles change, qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions. The questions focused on the human component and instructional strategies for teaching SEL/CE effectively.

The first open-ended question asked teachers about the benefits of teaching SEL/CE to their students. From the responses, the theme of consciousness emerged. All three teachers emphasized the importance of creating a safe space for students, where they could feel comfortable sharing and interacting with their peers while increasing their social awareness and self-management of their emotions. After the intervention, Teacher One observed that students were functioning civilly within the class without much prompting behaviorally. Additionally, Teacher Two noted that students can learn to properly manage their emotions appropriately and not let it affect their academic success (2024).

The second open-ended question asked teachers how they made SEL/CE relevant to their students' lives. From the data, the theme of relevance emerged. All three teachers incorporated

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relevant material into their lessons that allowed students to connect to the learning and apply it to their school and home life. They learned about their students to ensure that the material was applicable to their lives. Teacher Two responded about the relevance of the study, noting that discussions challenged students' beliefs and assumptions, leading to changes in their lives. Additionally, Teacher One stated that SEL connections were made by recreating real-life experiences that paralleled with ELC content fitting into everyday life (2024).

The third open-ended question asked teachers how they connected with their students' families. From the data, the theme of connection emerged. All three teachers made frequent connections with students' families using a variety of sources to make contact. Participants in the study felt that parents could help reinforce students' learning if they held them accountable for the same information learned in SEL/CE. Teacher Two stated, "I remind them that I have a family and children, and I care for their child just like I care for mine" (2024).

The fourth open-ended question asked teachers about their comfort level with their child's learning of SEL/CE. The data analysis revealed an essential skills theme, with two of the three teachers examining the components of SEL as outlined by CASEL. By studying the different components of SEL, these teachers were able to determine the essential skills required by students and effectively implement them in a restorative setting. To express their comfort with teaching SEL/CE, Teacher Two stated that they were able to meet the needs of their students and then move them academically. Similarly, Teacher One affirmed that SEL and CE skills presented in their child's social development would meet his needs (2024).

The fifth open-ended question aimed to understand the benefits teachers receive from teaching SEL/CE with fidelity. The data analysis identified the theme of purpose, with two of the three participating teachers designing lessons to develop relationships that are essential for

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enabling students to communicate their needs and express concerns. On the post-test, Teacher One stated that they were able to focus on teaching instead of redirecting, while Teacher Three emphasized the importance of building relationships (2024).

Discussion

The present study provides valuable insights into the impact of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education on students' attendance, disciplinary behavior, and teachers' perception of SEL/CE teaching to reduce recidivism at the DAEP. The findings indicate an improvement in students' attendance and disciplinary behavior, leading to a decrease in recidivism at the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP). The study also suggests that teachers' perception of teaching SEL/CE improved due to the comprehensive training received before the study's initiation. However, the results of the analysis yielded no statistically significant effect on teachers' perception of teaching SEL/CE in restorative circles.

The study's results corroborate the findings of Ibarra's (2022) study, which suggests that teachers play a crucial role in creating a positive social and emotional learning climate in the classroom. The study shows that teachers' perception of SEL/CE teaching trended positively as they gained a better understanding of the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment which is “crucial to ensuring students feel safe and welcome” (Ibarra, 2022, p. 1). All participants in the study agreed to use SEL/CE in their future classes. The findings reveal that teachers encouraged healthy communication with students, allowing them to express themselves freely and communicate their needs. The teachers made conscious efforts to connect the lessons with the students' lives and engaged them in discussions around interpersonal conflicts and ethical concepts.

The study's findings are consistent with the research of Broughs and Barkauskas (2017), which suggests that engaging students in discussions around interpersonal conflicts or ethical

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concepts can help develop a critical moral perspective in them. The study's findings also suggest that teachers expressed a keen interest in helping students create a sense of autonomy in their thinking, which would enable them to resolve situations they experience in their personal lives. A systematic approach was used by the teachers to help students understand how social and emotional learning (SEL) could be used to control their emotions and decision-making.

The teachers who participated in the study provided positive feedback about teaching SEL/CE to increase students' outcomes. They emphasized the need for relevant training to assist teachers in making connections with the material presented and understanding the importance of teaching Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE). According to Haymovitz et al. (2017), systematic SEL programming is necessary and fundamental for students to learn, rather than being considered supplementary or extracurricular. The present study caused a paradigm shift in the perception of teachers regarding why SEL is essential in the classroom, rather than considering it an additional burden.

Conclusion

During the research study, unexpected findings came to light. Of the three teachers who took part in the study, two reported feeling highly frustrated on their pre-survey. However, following the implementation of the intervention, all participants reported significantly lower levels of frustration when dealing with their students. The study also uncovered that teachers' frustrations within the school were often concealed due to the specific nature of the students they served.

For future iterations, it is recommended that survey questions be administered to students to conduct a phenomenological analysis of their responses, which can then be used as data to guide next steps. The results of this survey can be used to assist other DAEPs in expanding the implementation of SEL/CE strategies to their students. In addition, this information can be

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leveraged to aid traditional campuses in implementing SEL as a comprehensive school initiative, fostering an environment that cultivates productive members of the school community.

Therefore, it is vital for teachers and schools to equip students with the necessary skills to manage their needs effectively. Behaviors exhibited by students are often symptoms of more profound issues in their lives. Hence, teacher commitment and comfort to teaching SEL/CE is paramount because it influences their attitudes and motivation toward teaching. Teachers must fully understand the importance of SEL/CE as it affects their motivation and attitude toward teaching.

As affirmed by Mosenthal and Ball (1992), good teaching relies on the teacher's subject matter expertise. When teachers have a deep understanding of the subject matter, they can become better facilitators of student learning. In the context of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE), teachers must develop a personal connection with the curriculum and utilize their own experiences to encourage student learning. This connection with the subject matter allows teachers to conduct lessons efficiently and effectively in restorative circles and make necessary adjustments based on student needs.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study explores the effects of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) on recidivism in Restorative Circles at an alternative school. According to Johnson et al. (2022), character refers to the extent to which an individual consistently thinks and behaves in a prosocial manner (p. 88). Character education is incorporated into lessons by teachers to provide students with a foundation to learn from past strategies that people have used to navigate through life. Walton et al. (2022) define Social Emotional Learning as individual capacities reflected in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that can be developed through formal and informal learning experiences (p. 1). These skills help students regulate their emotions and make positive life choices. Restorative Circles provide a means for students to establish healthy relationships with their peers and teachers. When combined, these three interventions aim to improve the overall well-being of students in the school environment.

The study aims to ascertain the impact of SEL and CE in restorative circles on recidivism in the district's alternative education program. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did teachers' views on teaching SEL/CE in a restorative circle change after undergoing extensive training on SEL/CE and restorative circles?
2. What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles with fidelity on students' discipline?
3. What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE in restorative circles with fidelity on students' attendance?
4. What was the effect of delivering SEL/CE lessons with fidelity on students' recidivism in the District Alternative Education Program?

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In this chapter, a detailed analysis of the study's results, implications for practice, future research, and correlation of the study to the improvement science framework is provided. The findings of this study may have practical implications for educators who aim to integrate SEL and CE into their curriculum. Furthermore, these results may be relevant to policymakers and school administrators who strive to improve the well-being of students in alternative education programs. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the effectiveness of SEL and CE interventions in educational settings.

Discussion of Prior Results

Teacher Perception

In the evaluation study, the impact of teachers' attitudes towards teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education (CE) in a restorative circle was investigated after they received extensive training on SEL/CE and restorative circles. The findings showed that the training significantly affected teachers' perceptions of teaching SEL/CE. However, the absence of a control group posed a challenge in comparing the results obtained from the comprehensive training provided to teachers on other campuses where SEL/CE is not part of their instructional practices. In the participants' classrooms, the inclusion of SEL and CE has become a staple because they experienced the importance of equipping children with the necessary skills to achieve success both inside and outside of the school environment.

Teacher One

The following excerpt explains the implications of a pre-test administered to a teacher referred to as Teacher One, which assessed their perspective on promoting social and emotional competencies in the classroom. The results showed that Teacher One placed higher importance on academic subjects over addressing students' social and emotional well-being. Neglecting to meet needs in these areas can lead to disruptive behaviors in the learning environment.

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Additionally, Teacher One showed a lack of understanding of the significance of fostering a learning climate centered on SEL principles to promote students' social and emotional well-being (Ibarra, 2022).

Furthermore, Teacher One's report showed a lack of attention to the components of SEL, which may have contributed to their belief that SEL is unrelated to civic engagement and career preparation. However, it is important to note that SEL competencies are essential for individuals to be successful contributors to society and promote the common good (Elias, 2014). Therefore, the lack of emphasis on SEL in Teacher One's classroom may not equip students with the necessary skills to address future challenges.

Additionally, Teacher One's report revealed a lack of professional learning on how interactions with students can promote their SEL. This may have contributed to their difficulty in connecting teaching practices to students' lives without formal training. However, after receiving comprehensive training on SEL, Teacher One's views on SEL changed significantly. They began to prioritize SEL components in their lessons, and family communication improved as they collaborated to support their child's education.

Teacher Two

An experienced educator, Teacher Two, underwent professional development to enhance their pedagogical practices and bring SEL to the forefront of their teaching approach. According to Zulauf-McCurdy and Zinsser (2019), parental involvement is instrumental in promoting a child's holistic development, particularly in their early years. Teacher Two adheres to this finding by seeking parental input before implementing any SEL interventions and by incorporating SEL into classroom lessons by connecting it to students' personal experiences. Furthermore, Teacher Two prioritizes SEL in every aspect of their classroom and understands the components of SEL

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in enabling students to manage their emotions and make judicious decisions, particularly in times of stress.

Teacher Three

Prior to the intervention, Teacher Three faced challenges with their teaching and needed to develop a deeper understanding of the advantages of teaching social and emotional learning (SEL) to their students. Despite having established positive relationships with parents, communication was infrequent. Instead of seeking input from parents, Teacher Three relied on personal experiences to model problem-solving strategies. However, it was essential to consistently prioritize and promote SEL competencies in the classroom. Teacher Three's beliefs about the potential of SEL to promote academic success, civic engagement, or career preparation were not robust. Consequently, students did not have sufficient opportunities to practice social and emotional competencies because teachable moments for SEL were infrequent. Although Teacher Three attempted to connect with students' lives, they did so with misguided beliefs about SEL and its impact in the classroom.

Following the implementation of the intervention, Teacher Three's perspective on SEL underwent a transformation. They began to prioritize and promote SEL in the classroom, enabling students to practice competencies. The comprehensive professional learning opportunity enabled Teacher Three to recognize that SEL could positively impact students' academics, civic engagement, and career preparation. Although their relationships with parents remained strong, they now actively seek input to support student decision-making strategies. Teacher Three's enthusiasm for their work has increased since the introduction of the intervention. Previously, they did not plan to utilize SEL, but now they will incorporate it into their teaching practices.

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Overall, the results suggest that professional learning on SEL can significantly influence teachers' views and practices concerning promoting students' social and emotional competencies. Consequently, students may benefit from comprehensive teacher training, which facilitates a more focused approach to Social Emotional Learning (SEL). This focused approach could lead to improved behavioral and attendance outcomes as well as enhanced social and emotional success.

Results for student Attendance, Discipline, and Recidivism

Student Attendance

Research has shown that the incorporation of Social and Emotional Learning and Character Education (SEL/CE) can have a positive impact on student attendance. Lui and Loeb (2021) assert that teachers are the most crucial factor in the school environment (p. 344). Teachers who implement SEL/CE are able to establish positive relationships with their students, leading to greater feelings of connection to school and peers. By providing SEL/CE instruction, teachers assist students in regulating their emotions and feeling more comfortable within their school community.

According to the study, students are more likely to attend school and engage with their peers and teachers when teachers demonstrate genuine care for their well-being. Santibanez and Guarino (2021) found that the most significant negative correlations are associated with absences due to self-management and self-efficacy (p. 394). The study also found that quality interpersonal relationships characterized by trust, respect, and fairness among staff, teachers, and students create positive developmental assets that provide a buffer against risk factors causing absenteeism. In this way, social capital, positive social norms, and emotional support systems are generated that help reduce school avoidance.

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The increase in attendance during the study was attributed to the combination of teachers' comfort and commitment to SEL/CE instruction and the school's culture that supported SEL/CE. Before the study, twenty students had a median attendance of 3.5. However, once the interventions were applied, that score was reduced to zero, indicating that an attachment to the campus or teacher was formed during the intervention.

Student Discipline

The implementation of Social and Emotional Learning/Character Education (SEL/CE) has been found to have a positive impact on student behavior in the classroom. White et al. (2023) stated, "When social and emotional learning (SEL) is combined with efforts that promote universal values such as compassion, mutual support, and community service, it may reduce the level of distress and disconnection experienced by students in school" (p. 2). Teachers who are comfortable and confident with SEL/CE can facilitate emotional crises and help students resolve personal issues that may lead to disciplinary incidents. This is because students often resort to disruptive behavior when they lack the skills to regulate their emotions and organize their thoughts.

Creating a supportive environment for students is necessary to allow them to make mistakes without being shamed. According to Mak and Therriault (2022), such an environment can help students feel more confident in tackling problems more openly and effectively in the future, instead of pushing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to more covert spaces (p. 61). This safe space not only allows students to address their needs without causing harm to the school environment but also fosters autonomy for decision-making that can generalize to other areas of their lives.

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The decrease in disciplinary incidents among students can be attributed to an increase in teachers' comfort and commitment to SEL/CE, as well as the school's culture supporting SEL/CE. The results suggest that SEL/CE should be considered an essential part of the curriculum to support students' emotional and behavioral development. Before the study, twenty students had a median discipline score of 1.5. However, once the intervention was applied, that score was reduced to zero, indicating that the interventions were effectively changing students' thoughts and emotions.

Student Recidivism

According to a recent study, a positive perception of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education (CE) among teachers can significantly reduce recidivism at the DAEP. The students who received SEL/CE became equipped with the necessary skills to assimilate into their home campus culture, which helped them avoid violating the student code of conduct and prevented placement at the DAEP, with the exception of only one student. The study emphasizes the crucial role of teachers' comfort and commitment, as well as the school culture that supports SEL/CE, in decreasing students' recidivism at the DAEP. These results have important implications for educational policy and practice, highlighting the need to invest in SEL/CE programs to improve the academic and behavioral outcomes of students.

Recommendation for Practice

Comprehensive training for teachers should be conducted both prior to and during implementation. Many districts fail to build the capacity of teachers to properly implement initiatives due to the continuous addition of new initiatives. Without addressing the teacher's understanding of what, why, and how, a lack of continuity will exist between the teacher and student. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, Teacher Three faced various challenges in their role and exhibited a lack of understanding of the benefits of teaching social and

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emotional learning (SEL) to their students. Although Teacher Three had positive relationships with parents, communication was infrequent, and problem-solving strategies were based on personal experience instead of seeking feedback from parents. There was a lack of consistency in prioritizing and promoting SEL competencies within the classroom, and Teacher Three did not believe that SEL could foster academic success, civic engagement, or career readiness. There were few opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies, and teachable moments were rare. Despite their efforts to connect with students, Teacher Three's beliefs regarding SEL and its influence in the classroom were misguided.

After the intervention, Teacher Three's perspective on SEL changed significantly. SEL competencies were prioritized and promoted in the classroom, giving students the opportunity to improve their social and emotional skills. The comprehensive professional learning opportunity helped Teacher Three recognize the positive impact that SEL can have on students' academics, civic engagement, and career readiness. While continuing to build strong relationships with parents, Teacher Three now actively seeks input to facilitate student decision-making strategies. The intervention has reinvigorated their passion for their work. Previously, SEL was not integrated into their teaching practices, but now it will be fully incorporated.

Recommendation for Future Study

Elias et al. (2007) posited that character and moral education focus on values, while social and emotional learning (SEL) concentrates on the attitudes and skills required to navigate social environments (p. 168). This highlights the importance of schools as social environments where students must function as middle-class citizens, since societal norms are based on middle-class norms. However, this can be a challenging task for students from low-income communities. Therefore, schools must address this issue to equip students for life beyond the classroom.

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Unfortunately, schools often face challenges that lead to students being placed in disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP). To support students' development, schools must create environments that promote their growth and enable them to reflect on their identity and life purpose (Hatchimonji et al., 2022, p. 21). Further research should be conducted to determine how schools with similar demographics can establish environments that foster student development and enable them to conform to school expectations while remaining true to themselves.

It is crucial to conduct extensive research on alternative activities for students who violate the code of conduct. Instead of transferring such students to alternative institutions, schools should provide them with replacement behaviors that prevent them from being excluded from the learning community. However, this necessitates the modification of school policies to prioritize students' well-being. As such, policymakers should consider developing innovative policies, programs, and systems that build trust, share experiences between teachers and students, humanize students, and foster stronger school-community ties (Welsh & Little, 2018, p. 783). This will foster trust, increase social and emotional learning and character education skills among students and educators, and eliminate the issue of discarding students deemed unworthy by society. Consequently, offering alternative activities instead of exclusionary consequences will enhance students' faith in schools.

Conclusion

Throughout the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) phases of this study, the primary objective was to improve teachers' perceptions of implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) through restorative circles. This approach aimed to reduce instances of misbehavior, increase attendance, and decrease recidivism at the DAEP.

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In the evaluation phase, the current system for teaching SEL/CE was analyzed to determine teachers' perception of teaching SEL/CE. Teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching SEL/CE tend to make it more personal and engaging for students. Those teachers who treat SEL/CE as another initiative focus more on occupying the time instead of enlightening students' minds. Observational data showed teachers were not adequately prepared to address the needs of students through SEL/CE. A lack of cohesiveness in their instruction was noted. As an outsider, the researcher felt the teachers were complying due to the classroom visit. Data was also gathered on recidivism, attendance, and discipline to determine if SEL/CE, being taught in its current state, had statistically significant effects on these variables. The findings showed the current state of teaching SEL/CE needs improvement based on the numbers gathered.

In the intervention phase, comprehensive training was provided to educators, equipping them with the necessary knowledge to conduct restorative circles that emphasized SEL/CE components. Based on data collected from eSchool, a significant decrease in discipline referrals, an increase in attendance, and a decrease in recidivism from five to one were observed. Survey responses emphasized the importance of formal professional learning for teachers before implementing SEL/CE in restorative circles effectively. This indicates that educators need a deeper understanding of the subject to conduct relevant circles for students.

Given these results, the focus was on professional learning for the first iteration of the study. The implementation of SEL in restorative circles had a significant positive impact on recidivism, disciplinary incidents, and attendance at the DAEP. As a result, the institution will continue implementing the SEL framework in restorative circles as a deterrent for recidivism.

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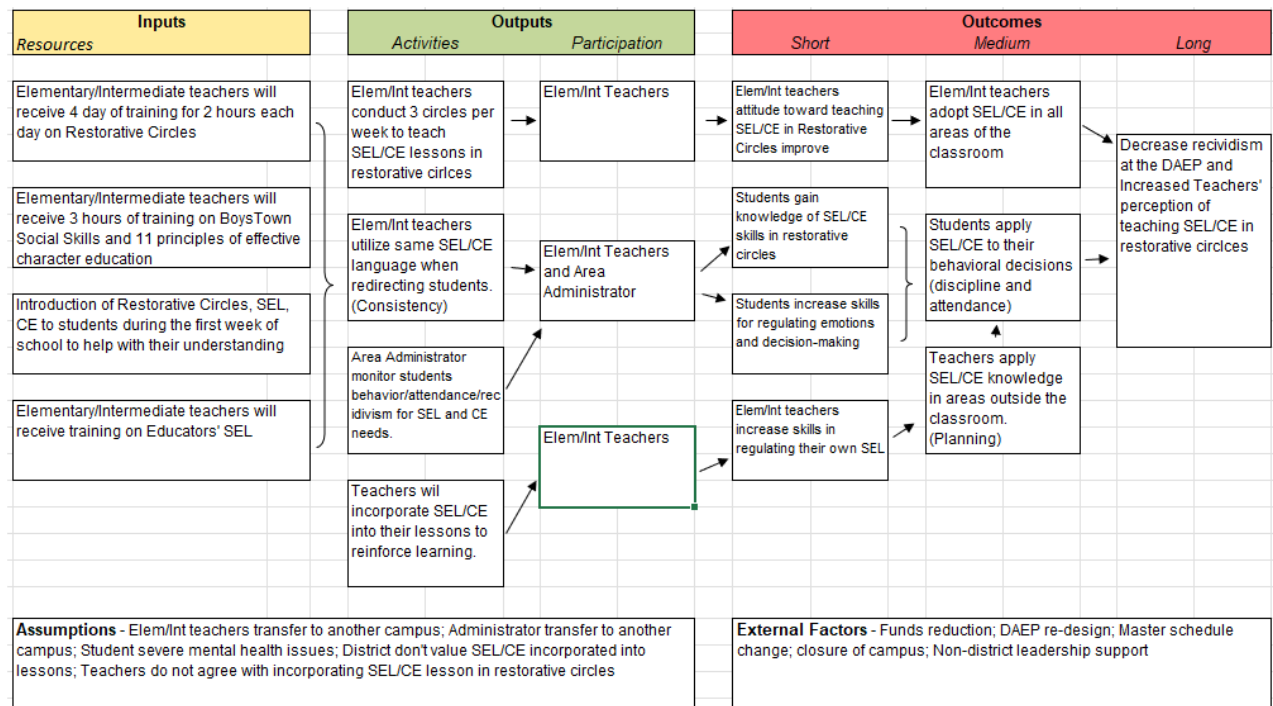
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Appendices

Appendix A

Logic Model



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Appendix B

SEL/CE Observation Form

Teacher Name: _____

Date of Observation: _____

Social Emotional Learning and Character Education Observation Form

Category	Responses			Comments
	Yes	No	N/A	
Engagement				
1. Students actively engaged in dialogue				
2. Students actively listening to others				
3. Teacher actively involved in lesson				
Explicit Instruction				
1. Teacher share SEL/CE insight on topic				
2. Teacher used probing question to expand learning				
3. Teacher remains focused on SEL/CE content				
Skill Practice				
1. Students get opportunity to practice SEL/CE skills with role play or scenarios				
Reflection				
1. Students given activity to help with reflection				
2. Students given opportunity to discuss reflection				
Integration				
1. Teacher uses real-world examples to assist with skill practice for the classroom				
2. Teacher uses real-world examples to assist with skill				

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practice outside the classroom				
Learning Objective				
1. Was the “Why” shared with students during lesson				

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Appendix C

SEL/CE in Restorative Circle Lesson Plan Template

**Social Emotional Learning/Character Education
Responsibility Sample Lesson**

Facilitator:	Date/Period:
Objective of Circle: Respect-students will develop an understanding of the concept of responsibility	
Prep/Materials Needed:	Talking Piece:
Boys Town Social Skill Review: Following Instructions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the person • Say "Okay" • Do what you have been asked right away • Check back if needed 	Reflection of Social Skills: How can you use this information to make better choices in the classroom?
<p style="text-align: center;">Agenda</p> <p>Opening: Select the opening of your choice.</p> <p>Introduction/Review Agreements (and Ask for Agreement to Agreement)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect the talking piece • Speak from the heart: share your experiences, perspective, and feelings • Listen from the heart: let go of stories that make it hard to hear one another, be open and non-judgmental • What happens in the circle stays (should stay) in the circle? • Trust you will know what to say: there is no need to rehearse • Say just enough: be considerate of the time when sharing <p>Introduce Talking Piece: Select how you will rotate around the room to let students talk.</p> <p>Remember, we have to Social Distance!!!!</p> <p>Probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you show responsibility at home, school, or with your friends? • Why is it important to take responsibility for your actions? • Can you give an example of a time when being responsible made a positive difference? <p>How can being responsible help you achieve your goals?</p> <p>Activity:</p> <p>How can you show responsibility in the following areas? (Be prepared to discuss)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family 2. Neighborhood 	

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3. School
4. Country
Closing: Select the closing of your choice
Thank group for their time and effort!!