An Examination Of A Social And Emotional Learning Program And Implications For Diversity Development

Chimille E. Dillard
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AN EXAMINATION OF A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR DIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT

Chimille E. Dillard
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
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This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

Program Evaluation Change Leadership Plan Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited
6.20.16
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

AN EXAMINATION OF A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT

EMBEDDING DIVERSITY INTO THE CURRICULUM: FACILITATING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

EMBEDDING RACIAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN STATE MANDATED COMMON ASSESSMENTS: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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This work is dedicated with love to
my heartbeats,
Kamille Briana
and
Kennedy Marina.
I love you both to the moon and back!
ABSTRACT

This paper evaluated the Second Step program used by the Galaxy school district and many of the surrounding school districts in the area as the sole social and emotional learning program for elementary and middle/junior high school students. Research was conducted to discover whether or not the Second Step program addressed the social and emotional skills students need when encountering racial and gender-diverse issues in their everyday lives. Both quantitative and qualitative methods (such as surveys; interviews with teachers, social workers, and administrators; and classroom observations) were used when collecting data throughout the research. It was concluded that the Second Step program does not explore the social and emotional skills needed to address White privilege and how it impacts student’s ability to interact in racial and gender-diverse settings. Additionally, the program stakeholders do not believe the objectives of the program explicitly address diversity issues. Since the Second Step program does not have lessons that explicitly focus on gender diversity and/or racial issues, it is impossible for the delivery of the Second Step program to meet the social and emotional skills students need to implement when in racially and/or gender-diverse settings.
PREFACE

Key lessons learned in year one of my coursework were a) the lack of equitable education for all students, b) evaluating the effectiveness of a program, and c) the importance of taking a professional risk to help students. Throughout the year, an emphasis was placed on the importance of talking about race in order to understand the cultural differences of minority students when analyzing the achievement gap. To learn at high levels, access and supports need to be in place for all students. Additionally, professional development and proper training should be provided for teachers.

Patton’s (2008) research about primary uses of program evaluation findings explained that judgment of a program can inform and support major decision-making in a school district and “determine the value and future of the program” (p. 140). As the instructional leaders, administrators are compelled to use and analyze data (qualitative and/or quantitative), when evaluating a program and suggesting programmatic changes. Communicating with and engaging all stakeholders during the evaluation of a program garners buy-in and cultivates support when decisions or changes are recommended. The most valuable lesson learned during year one of this coursework was the importance of taking a professional risk supported by data to help students, even if the risk is not popular.
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Both my personal and professional experiences nurtured my passion to evaluate and analyze the Second Step program—a social and emotional learning program used in the Galaxy school district. Beland (2008) stated, “The Second Step program is considered to be a universal program designed to promote skills and attitudes that increase students’ social and school success and prevent violence, bullying, and substance abuse” (p. 4). The purpose of this research involved discovering whether or not the Second Step program addressed the social and emotional skills students’ need when encountering gender diversity and racial issues.

Being a middle school assistant principal in a predominantly White, upper class suburban school district north of the Chicago city limits, the researcher looks different than the majority of the people in her building. Students are exposed to very few people of other races—specifically African Americans or people living nontraditional lifestyles in their communities. Nontraditional lifestyle refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. The terms LGBTQ and gender diverse are used interchangeably throughout this program evaluation.

The researcher is an assistant principal at the Galaxy school district where the teacher demographics consist of 96.4% White, 1.1% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian, 0.4% people of two or more races, and 1.1% not reported—which demonstrates nominal diversity among the staff. Student demographics of the district consist of 78% White, 1% Black, 5% Hispanic, 11% Asian, 6% people of two or more races, with 4% from families with low income and 1% English Language Learners.
The school district has approximately 3,600 students between four, Grades K–8 buildings; one, middle school building with Grades 5–6; and one, junior high building with Grades 7–8.

The Galaxy school district implemented the Second Step social and emotional learning program in all of its Grades K–8 classrooms in 2012. The Second Step program is intended to provide a foundation for creating a safe, respectful learning environment. According to Beland (2008), the “Second Step program is based on prevention science research that shows many of the problem behaviors that threaten youth safety and success are driven by common factors” (p. 4). The program has five themes across the monthly scripted 50-minute classroom lessons:

1. Empathy and communication
2. Bullying prevention
3. Emotion management and coping
4. Problem solving, goal setting, and decision making
5. Substance abuse prevention

The adoption of the Second Step program was the first time a prescribed social and emotional learning curriculum had been implemented in the Galaxy school district classrooms. Four years into the implementation, the district has yet to conduct anything but anecdotal reviews of the program’s effectiveness in regards to increasing prosocial behaviors or reducing incidents of bullying and social aggression in Galaxy’s middle school student population.

The students are accustomed to being around White people who typically come from a family structure consisting of a mother and father. The community demographics consist of 84.65% White, 12.4% Asian, 1.49% mixed race, 1.12% Black, 0.08% American Indian, and 0.26% people of other races (U.S. Census, 2010). In addition, there are 0.4% homosexual
households (City-Data, 2016). Demographics of neighboring communities north of Galaxy with similar socioeconomic backgrounds to the community these students reside, are 94.8–97.41% White, 1.3–3.3% Asian, 0.88–1.2% mixed race, 0.28–0.3% Black, 0.08–0.1% American Indian, and 1.63–2.2% Hispanic (U.S. Census, 2010). Many of the students can go through their entire day at school and in their community without seeing or interacting with a minority or gender-diverse peer and/or adult. What many of them perceive as normal (White and heterosexual) is not representative of the United States or the city of Chicago—which is less than 10 miles from where their community. According to the 2010 census, demographics for Chicago are 45% White, 32.9% Black, 28.9% Hispanic, 0.5% American Indian, 5.5% Asian, 13.4% other race, and 2.7% people of two or more races.

With all that is going in the United States regarding gender diversity and heightened racial issues—specifically the racial and gender-diversity issues in the Chicagoland area—students in the researcher’s school and district will be faced with having to demonstrate empathy and tolerance toward others who are different than their status quo. As a district, Galaxy needs to evaluate whether or not it is equipping students with the social and emotional tools needed to be tolerant and appropriately interact with one another and minorities who do not look like them or live in the same manner in which they live. Knowing that diversity issues have an impact on the social and
emotional learning needs of students (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2015), this researcher evaluated whether or not the Second Step program addresses these needs.

**Rationale**

The development of social and emotional skills is necessary for students to effectively coexist in today’s society—specifically when they encounter or interact within a racial and/or gender-diverse setting. Cultivating these skills are important for students to learn in school because they will utilize and need social and emotional learning skills throughout their adult life.

Social and emotional learning is the process 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. (CASEL, 2015)

Research indicates that a strong social and emotional learning curriculum has a positive impact on student grades, peer relationships, and the life decisions that students make. Social and emotional learning programs foster positive relationships for students with their peers, family members, and teachers (Vega, 2012). Marzano (2003) stated, “Safe and orderly environments that encourage and reinforce positive classroom behavior have been identified by research as one of the necessary conditions for academic achievement” (p. 19).

However, many different factors exist that can impact the success of a social and emotional learning program—including the curriculum, how it is delivered, and by whom. Diversity issues also directly impact the social and emotional learning needs of students (CASEL, 2015). This research explores whether or not the Second Step program addresses the
social and emotional learning needs of the Galaxy district and if it is being implemented in a way that ensures the greatest success for its students’ social and emotional learning skills when facing gender diversity and racial issues.

In the winter of 2016, this researcher had the experience of fully supporting a transgender student make the transition to the Galaxy school district. Upon announcing their new name and preferred gender identification for classmates, I immediately found myself pulling two students into another room to discuss the disrespectful and insensitive comments made to the transgender student. The next day, the parents of one of the students who had made the despicable comments called this researcher via telephone with the explicit intention of expressing their bigoted and racial slurs, which they expressed loudly. One proceeded to yell, “Someone like you needs to understand that sometimes separate is equal and we didn’t move to this community to have our kids around a boy who wants to be a girl or a girl who wants to be a boy,” before abruptly hanging up the phone. Stunned by the comment, this researcher frantically started researching more information about transgender children, in order to share it with other parents who had questions, comments, or concerns about the transgender student. According to Ryan (2015), parents can promote their child’s social and emotional learning by modeling behaviors and adopting practices that embrace diversity issues at home.

Being the only African American-certified staff member in the Galaxy school district, this researcher has encountered parents and staff members making insensitive and hurtful comments with no knowledge of how to engage in a healthy dialogue regarding racial and gender minorities. For example, upon learning there was a transgender student in her daughter’s classes, a parent told this researcher, “I don’t want my daughter using the same bathroom as a freak who thinks he’s a girl.” Another time, a teacher asked if the researcher’s hair was real
because he had never seen a Black woman with hair like mine. After telling him it was my real hair, he said, “Oh, you have real good hair that’s not like the other Black people.” Although these examples are not representative of the entire district and community, they lead this researcher to believe that as a district, Galaxy may need to improve upon preparing its students for the diverse world they are sure to encounter—especially if some of the adults residing in a predominantly heterosexual, White, community struggle with interacting appropriately with a Black woman working in the district or hearing about a transgender student being in school with their child.

Black children are generally taught from their parents at a very early age about race and how to appropriately interact with people who do not look like them. According to Ryan (2015), “It’s common in Black households for parents to have frequent and necessary conversations about racial biases in hopes of keeping their children from becoming the next Laquan McDonald, Renisha McBride, or Tamir Rice *” (p. 2).

* McDonald, a 17-year-old African American boy, was fatally shot 16 times by a White Chicago, Illinois cop in 2014. McBride, a 19-year-old African American girl, was shot in a suburb of Michigan in 2013 by a White homeowner after she was involved in a car crash and knocked on his door for help. Rice, a 12-year-old African American boy, was shot in 2014 by White Cleveland, Ohio cops who mistakenly thought he had a gun. All of these incidents represent police violence against unarmed Black people across the nation.
empathetic and sensitive toward differences in others. “Parents who hold more liberal attitudes about gender and provide environments for their children with fewer gender stereotypes have children who also hold correspondingly liberal attitudes about gender” (Chamberlin, n.d., p. 5).

A study revealed that White parents want their children to have the social and emotional skills necessary to interact in a diverse setting, but find it challenging to have these discussions with their children (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). Although society expects middle and junior high school students to display appropriate social and emotional skills, I often wonder if society is indeed preparing them for the racially and gender-diverse learning and work environments they are likely to encounter beyond high school and the communities in which they currently reside.

This evaluation will be important to the Galaxy school district stakeholders (board of education, district staff, parents, students) because it will inform everyone whether or not the district is truly preparing students for life within and beyond their community. Although this community is a predominantly homogenous one, the school district and many of the parents sincerely want the students to be successful and equipped with the social skills and emotional tools needed to be tolerant and appropriately interact with people from all walks of life. Cultures change through dialogue, engagement, and addressing social and emotional needs. When social and emotional needs are not met, learning does not occur (CASEL, 2015).
Goals

Social and emotional learning should address diversity issues because, according to CASEL (2015), “social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker” (p. 1). The researcher’s goal involves evaluating whether or not the Galaxy school district’s implementation of the Second Step program is addressing students’ social biases—specifically their gender diversity and racial biases—and how to deal with those biases when interacting with people different from them. An analysis to identify gaps between the Second Step curriculum materials, delivery of the Second Step lessons to students, and student behavior data for the past 4 years may lead to valuable additions, deletions, or modifications to the school district’s social and emotional learning curriculum. This analysis will also expose any curricular gaps regarding gender diversity and race in the classroom. Exposing curricular gaps will show Galaxy where it needs to intentionally find ways to infuse the topics of gender diversity and race in the curriculum, so Galaxy can create a platform to ensure its students become socially aware of biases and to gain the knowledge that leads to more successful social interactions in the future.

Although Galaxy is unable to control what is or isn’t taught to its students when they go home, Galaxy has the responsibility, as a school district, to educate all of its students and promote tolerance—as it pertains to gender and racial diversity. Ultimately, the researcher’s goal involves exploring if the Second Step program is providing students with the tools needed to be open-minded and tolerant when interacting with others who
don’t look like them or their household members—specifically individuals of different races and members of the LGBTQ community. This research proposes to address five research questions.

**Research Questions**

The primary research questions consist of the following:

1. Is the delivery of the Second Step program meeting the social and emotional skills the Galaxy school district students will need to implement when they are in racially and gender diverse settings?
2. In what ways do the Second Step program objectives address diversity issues across its social and emotional learning curriculum?
3. Do the Second Step program stakeholders believe the objectives of the program address diversity issues?
4. What areas of the Second Step program, if any, explore the social and emotional skills needed to address White privilege and how it impacts student’s ability to interact in racial and gender-diverse settings?
5. In what ways does the Second Step program promote diversity development and challenge the Galaxy school district students to think of how they could change or act on the biases they may have about gender diversity and race?
SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section reviews research examining best practices in social and emotional learning curriculum. Various types of literature focusing on the importance of diversity issues being addressed in social and emotional learning programs are analyzed. With the daily curriculum having the greatest impact on social and emotional learning (Gurung and Prieto, 2009), the importance for school communities to intentionally create opportunities for dialogue about racial and gender diversity to organically occur within the everyday curriculum are examined as well. Then, various types of literature focusing on White privilege and how it correlates to colorblindness and a lack of empathy, sensitivity, and tolerance toward minorities and members of the LGBTQ community are analyzed. Finally, literature emphasizing the significance of proximity for White teachers who plan to stimulate social awareness is dissected.

Ultimately, this research examines ways to assist students in learning about tolerance—given the range of issues related to diversity they will encounter in society. Throughout this review of literature, a comprehensive framework to understand the importance of infusing racial and gender-diversity issues into the social and emotional learning curriculum will be developed.

Illinois State Board of Education Social and Emotional Learning Standards

A team that consisted of teachers; school administrators; student support staff; human services professionals; and parents with expertise in child development and learning, curriculum design, and instruction wrote the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) social and emotional learning goals, standards, and benchmarks. The team’s task
was to “develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as part of the Illinois Learning Standards” in accordance with Section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495 (ISBE, n.d.).

As a result of the Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003, ISBE adopted the Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards after the writing team revised them based on public comment and feedback received.

According to the ISBE:

Drafting of the 10 SEL standards, along with goals, age-appropriate benchmarks, and performance descriptors, was a collaborative effort between ISBE and the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership with technical support from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (ISBE, n.d., Climate & Culture Social and Emotional Learning, 3rd para)

The 10 Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards are:

1. Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.
2. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
3. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.
4. Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
5. Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
6. Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
7. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
8. Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.

9. Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.

10. Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.

It is highly recommended that these social and emotional learning standards be integrated into systems and practices within schools. Integration can occur by embedding social and emotional learning instruction into existing curricula. It can also occur by taking advantage of teachable moments that occur naturally throughout the day and societal current events. Students’ feelings of autonomy and belonging to the school culture and community should also be promoted. Opportunities should be provided for students to practice social and emotional competencies through enrichment activities, such as field trips and community service projects. The ISBE (n.d.) stated, “Quality SEL instruction in which students learn to process, integrate, and selectively apply SEL skills in developmentally, contextually and culturally appropriate ways in conjunction with a safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climate can result in positive outcomes” (ISBE, n.d., Climate & Culture Social and Emotional Learning, 2nd para).

Elements of a Social and Emotional Learning Program/Curriculum

The CASEL (2015) stated that social and emotional skills are vital to being a good student, member of society, and employee/employer. Social and emotional programming should begin in preschool and continue through high school. One of the most impactful ways these skills are best developed is through strong classroom instruction. The CASEL (2015) identified five core competencies students need to develop social and emotional skills:

1. Self-awareness—ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior.
2. Self-management—ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations (i.e., stress management, impulsivity control, self-motivation, and goal setting).

3. Social awareness—ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures and understand social and ethical norms for behavior.

4. Relationship skills—ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

5. Responsible decision making—ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms.

Elias (2003) shared that when social and emotional learning is combined with academic learning, students receive the educational balance they need. The random yet all too common acts of violence committed by youth and adults in the United States and around the world demonstrate the necessity for social and emotional programming to be intertwined in academic programming.

For example, the killing of nine innocent Black people in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina by Dylann Roof in 2015. Roof, a high school dropout and drug user, told investigators he wanted to start a race war. A high school classmate shared that although Roof had a few Black friends, he was known to make racist comments but would claim he was joking; his White friends didn’t see anything wrong with the racist comments (Sanchez & Payne, 2015).
Another example is when in 2012, George Zimmerman killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager who was drinking a can of tea and wearing a hoodie at the time. George Zimmerman reported to police that Trayvon Martin looked “real suspicious and like he was up to no good or on drugs” because he was a Black male walking around the gated community. Prior to disobeying police orders not to approach Martin, Zimmerman said to the police dispatcher, “He’s a Black male, something’s wrong with him, these assholes, they always get away” (Weinstein, 2012, p. 2).

These are just two of many examples demonstrating that social and emotional learning is a crucial piece to educating the whole child, so they have the ability to attain success in life. “When schools implement high-quality social and emotional learning programs effectively, the academic achievement of children increases, incidences of problem behaviors decreases, and the relationships that surround each child are improved” (Elias, 2003, p. 9).

**Racial and Gender Diversity Issues in the Curriculum**

In Gurung and Prieto’s (2009), *Getting Culture: Incorporating Diversity Across the Curriculum*, Abrahamson discussed the daunting challenge for people to see beyond their individual perspective because people naturally connect their experiences and culture to what is learned in the classroom. Abrahamson went on to say that teachers in any discipline or content area can and should adapt their lessons, assignments, and projects to provide all students with diverse experiences. Storytelling interwoven into lessons can help students relate to and learn about diverse experiences. Cross-cultural enrichment opportunities, such as community service projects or field trips, can expose students to hands-on aspects of racial and gender diversity. Infusing things like this into the curriculum can provide an opportunity to integrate racial and
gender diversity into students’ understanding of course content, while concurrently fostering their social and emotional skills.

In Gurung and Prieto’s (2009), *Getting Culture: Incorporating Diversity Across the Curriculum*, Crowley shared the importance of not alienating LGBTQ students in the classroom because many of them do not feel comfortable speaking up and contributing to class discussions. “How a classroom is arranged physically might or might not matter, but who is or is not in the classroom, who is spoken or listened to, who is spoken about, do matter” (Gurung & Prieto, 2009, p. 145). Crowley stated that although there are politics surrounding gender diversity, identities still clearly matter in order for students to be successful in the educational setting and society.

Also in Gurung and Prieto’s (2009), *Getting Culture: Incorporating Diversity Across the Curriculum*, Matsumoto discussed that teachers have to deal with the problem of how students deal with racial and gender-diversity issues. He commented that the White heterosexual perspective is taught as the norm and the non-White, nonheterosexual perspectives are unusual and/or different. This is one of the reasons it is challenging to get students to understand they have prejudices and biases that lead to negative judgments. He suggested teachers focus on the similarities as well as the differences when teaching about racial and gender diversity.
Gurung and Prieto (2009) stated that the world is more diverse than it has ever been in the history of humankind, which is why it is imperative for students to be educated about racial and gender diversity regardless of their background. Gurung and Prieto firmly believe racial and gender diversity should be infused into the curriculum, so students have the required social and emotional skills to interact in diverse environments. Gurung and Prieto advised keeping the following seven key items in mind when including racial and gender diversity into the curriculum (pp. 18-19).

1. Make it explicit—Do not avoid the truth and uncomfortable facts.
2. Make it safe—Set ground rules for class discussion and provide alternatives to raising one’s hand.
3. Model appropriate behavior—Be prepared to respond to inappropriate statements and comments.
4. Make it relevant—Use current events in conjunction with historical information.
5. Make it credible—Use video clips or guest speakers, if you only have secondhand experience.
6. Make it active and experiential—Get students actively involved in their learning and provide them with ways to directly engage with racial and gender-diversity information.
7. Make it count—Measure whether or not students’ receptivity to diversity changes from before they were taught about diversity to after they learned about diversity.

In a Washington Post commentary, Strauss (2015) shared how a White, fifth-grade English language arts and social studies teacher, Emily Smith, started integrating diversity into her curriculum. When she realized her whiteness was driving the curriculum, Smith implemented
literature, documents, videos, discussions, and images embodying racial and gender diversity.

Smith and her students analyzed diverse literature and history from the lens of both historical and current events. Smith commented:

Looking back, I think that my prior hesitation to talk about diversity stemmed from a lack of social education in the classroom. A lack of diversity in my own life that is, by no means, the fault of my progressive parents, but rather a broken and still segregated school system. (Strauss, 2015, p. 2)

Smith shares that all teachers can change the way they teach in an effort to instill empathy and understanding in the hearts of all students.

**White Privilege**

White privilege is defined as “A right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases from certain burdens or liabilities” (Clark, n.d., p. 1). DiAngelo (2012) stated, “the term privilege refers to rights, benefits, and resources that are purported to be shared by all but are only consistently available to the dominant group” (p. 52). Overall, it is the absence of barriers and the presence of advantages because the assumed right is not granted to everyone. White children grow up being taught the way they look, live, and think are normal, which teaches them that minorities racial and gender diversities are not normal. This sense of normalcy leads them to believe they are inevitably better than those who are not part of their normal. Ultimately this leads to oppression.

DiAngelo (2012) described oppression as “A set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, cultural stories, and explanations that function to systematically hold down one social group to the benefit of another social group” (p. 44). White people have the ability to
Oppress minorities because their prejudices and institutional power in the United States directly enforce their view throughout the country. Oppression in the United States has created systemic racism, which occurs when advantages are given to some and disadvantages to others based on their perceived racial identity and/or gender-diverse status.

With the roles of those in power and those not in power being seen as normal, White children grow up thinking this is natural and are generally clueless about White privilege, power, and racism. On the other hand, children of oppressed groups generally have a bird’s eye view of society and learn early in life they must understand their own perspective and that of the oppressor. DiAngelo (2012) explained that, “all individuals have prejudice and all individuals discriminate based on this prejudice. However, this is not the same as oppression. Only the dominant group is in the position to oppress the minoritized group” (DiAngelo, 2012, p. 63).

_Someone who does not see a pane of glass does not know that he does not see it. Someone who, being placed differently, does see it, does not know the other does not see it._

_Simone Weil (1987)_

The position that people stand in relation to others in society directly impacts what they can see and understand versus what they cannot see and understand. One’s position in this country has the ability to make them blind or give them 20/20 vision. In her Chicago Tribune commentary, _White Parents Need to Start Talking about Racial Violence Against African-Americans_, Shannon Ryan (2015) wrote that many White parents are silent when it comes to having frequent and necessary conversations about racial biases with their children; and they need to start talking about race. White children are not explicitly taught the full sacrifice
minorities have to make in order to be successful in the United States, which is one of the reasons Whites are clueless regarding their position in society.

DiAngelo (2012) described the following example:

Monteiro, de Franca and Rodrigues (2009) tested 283 white children aged 6 to 7 and 9 to 10 years old. The children were asked to allocate money to white and Black children, sometimes with a white adult in the room and sometimes without an adult in the room, to see if having an adult present impacted their behavior. They found that the 6 to 7 year old children discriminated against Black children in both conditions, and the 9 to 10 year old children discriminated against the Black children only when the white adult was not present. (p. 108)

This example proves that when White children are taught to be colorblind, they do not become less racially biased but they learn how to hide their racism in front of others. White children are taught that being colorblind means they can maintain a nonracist image in public while continuing to perpetuate racism and internalize White superiority because it is ubiquitous in the United States.

The silence of colorblindness and White privilege can simultaneously be deafening and destructive to both White and minority children. African American Ruby Bridges described that after being integrated into William Frantz School, an all-White school in Louisiana in 1960, as a six-year old little Black girl, being surrounded by federal marshals every day from November 14, 1960 until the end of the school year, walking through a mob of hateful segregationists, and being taught all alone for the entire school year, none of this was discussed when she went to the same school as a seven-year old little girl. With the exception of four other White children,
parents of the other 574 White children did not send their kids to school for the entire 1960–1961 school year (Bridges, 1999, p. 31).

Ruby found herself confused when she started school in September 1961 because she expected things to be the same but they were the complete opposite: She went to school without being escorted by federal marshals where there were no screaming mobs outside of the school, and she was in a classroom with at least 20 other kids (even a few Black kids), and a different teacher who Ruby found to be quite mean to her and the other Black children. Although all of these drastic changes occurred, no one spoke about the previous school year and everyone acted as though it never happened. Ruby stated how difficult it was for her to be successful in school because of this. It is evident there were no social and emotional learning standards or skills being taught in the 1960s (Bridges, 1999).
Proximity

Not getting in proximity is what exacerbates the problems of racial and gender-diversity biases. White students need to be affected and changed by the experiences of minorities in order to cultivate their social and emotional skills. As previously stated, social and emotional skills are vital to being a good student, member of society, and employee/employer (www.casel.org).

Bryan Stevenson (2014) expressed the importance of getting proximate to the communities to learn and understand the people in order to eradicate fear, racism, and prejudices against members of the LGBTQ community. In addition, Stevenson (2014) discussed how proximity will assist in changing the narrative because our country has a narrative of fear and anger. The narrative Stevenson (2014) references is the same as Coates (2015), who said, “Schools did not reveal truths, they concealed them” (p. 26). Stevenson’s (2014) narrative also connects to DiAngelo’s (2012) explanation of the effects colorblindness and White privilege have on White student’s lack of social and emotional skills when in racial and gender-diverse settings.

Strauss (2015) shared the experiences of a White teacher, Emily Smith, working in an urban school. During one of Smith’s classroom discussions, one of her minority students told her that she, “Couldn’t understand because she was a White lady” (Strauss, 2015, p. 1). Smith expressed agreement with her student, realizing her minority students knew about White privilege even before she did. Smith forced herself to get proximate by learning about and telling the stories of struggle and victory in the United States. She spoke openly and freely about the racial and gender issues currently taking place in this country as a way to instill understanding and empathy.
Strauss (2015) explained that to develop social awareness (one of the five core competencies needed to develop social and emotional skills) proximity is mandatory. Smith also stated that with the exception of Black History month, American students typically read and analyze literature and study historical figures and events solely from the White perspective. “You may agree that black lives matter, but how often do you explore what matters to those lives in your classroom” (Strauss, 2015, p. 3)? To fully transform social and emotional learning for students, Smith believed that White and/or heterosexual teachers need to put aside their anxieties, accept their natural biases, and get proximate with racial and gender diversity issues.

Children need to hang around a teacher who is asking bigger questions of herself than she is asking of them.

~Donald Graves (Strauss, 2015, p. 3)
SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

Programs need to be evaluated periodically to ensure the intended goals of the program are being enacted during the implementation of the program. According to Patton (2008), “Implementation evaluation focuses on finding out if the program has all its parts, if the parts are functional, and if the program is operating as it’s supposed to be operating” (p. 308). When programs are not implemented as they were intended, the program is destined to fail. Because different stakeholders can have different perspectives on the implementation of a program, many times the evaluator of the program will need to understand the purpose, objectives, and goals of the program. Patton continued, “Implementation is how people translate vision into practice” (2008, p. 308).

This research used a mixed methodology approach where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected when gathering data for the program evaluation. The qualitative data collection approach helped the researcher in answering the research questions because it afforded the opportunity to explore individuals through relationships and describe trends in context using data sources such as interviews and observations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach was also useful since the focus of this study involved answering “how.” The researcher was not in a position to manipulate the behavior of those involved in the program that was evaluated; furthermore, the researcher wanted to cover contextual conditions in the implementation and delivery of the Second Step program because of her belief they were relevant to answering the research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Although neither paradigm (qualitative or quantitative data collection), is more valid than the other for this program evaluation (Patton, 2008, p. 425), the additional quantitative data is important because the
researcher believes it supports and works synergistically with the qualitative data collected. Patton stated, “From a utilization-focused evaluation perspective, both qualitative and quantitative data can contribute to all aspects of evaluative inquiries” (2008, p. 438).

**Participants**

Qualitative data was gathered from specific staff members who voluntarily participated in the Second Step program evaluation. According to Patton (2008), “Qualitative inquiry involves small purposeful samples of information-rich cases” (p. 458). He defined rich as being able to garner an abundant amount of information from a few credible participants. As the evaluator of the Second Step program, the researcher solicited participants with experience delivering the Second Step program to students and observing the students’ everyday social and emotional skills and/or those working directly with the population of students who were lacking social and emotional skills.

Data was gathered from key participants consisting of two administrators, two school social workers, and four classroom teachers who were required to teach Second Step lessons to Grades 5-8 male and female students. This group of participants were chosen because of the diverse responsibilities and perspectives within the Galaxy school district (Patton, 2008).

The two administrators were chosen because of it being their first year in an administrative position. They were classroom teachers in the district for several years and delivered the Second Step curriculum to their homeroom students from the inception of Second Step in the Galaxy school district. This allowed them to provide insight about the Second Step curriculum from both the classroom and administrative perspectives. The school social workers regularly face handling the social and emotional issues the students struggle with, putting them in the perfect position to share their anecdotal data about the effectiveness of the Second Step
curriculum. Since the classroom teachers were responsible for delivering the Second Step curriculum, their perspective about how students were receiving the information taught from the curriculum was significant.

In addition, it was important to dive deep and find if the classroom teachers sincerely believed the Second Step program was impacting students’ social and emotional learning or if they were simply going through the motions when delivering the lessons. The researcher’s plan involved gaining insight surrounding whether or not the Second Step program was impacting Galaxy’s male and female students, Grades 5-8, during the classroom dialogue when the Second Step lessons were taught to students. In addition, the researcher was curious to learn how the students felt about the Second Step program. The idea entailed learning whether or not teachers believed the Second Step lessons increased the students’ social and emotional skills for racial and gender-diversity issues.

**Data Gathering Technique(s)**

The types of data used to gather information were surveys, semistructured interviews, and classroom observations. This allowed the researcher to analyze both qualitative (semistructured interviews and classroom observations) and quantitative data (survey responses). Patton (2008) stated, “The details of data collection are a distinct part of the framework: they must be attended to, but they shouldn’t clutter the focused outcome statement” (p. 249). The researcher intentionally chose to collect data that was useful to her program evaluation (Patton, 2008).

**Interviews**

When discussing instrumentation, Patton (2008) shared the importance of the interviewer remaining neutral throughout the interview process so the interviewee felt comfortable expressing how he or she really feels and thinks when answering the questions. Patton stated,
“The evaluator’s job is to judge the program not the program participants who provide evaluative reflections” (2008, p. 170). For this type of research, the semistructured interviews were a vital component to the overall data collection since information about how human beings were reacting toward the various societal situations they encountered on a daily basis with their peers was being researched. Semistructured interviews also kept the researcher focused on her program evaluation because, according to Patton, “Staying focused on the purpose of the interview is critical to gathering high-quality data” (2008, p. 170).

Interviews were conducted with the two administrators, two social workers, and four classroom teachers lasting no more than 60-minutes. The interviews focused on their perspectives of the Second Step program and whether or not it effectively addressed diversity issues during the social and emotional lessons delivered to students. Interviews were recorded so that the interviewees’ responses could be accurately recalled and the full interviews replayed when the data was transcribed. This ensured the collection of thorough and accurate data.

**Surveys**

Knowing that answers to survey questions often come with an explanation from the individual completing the survey, optional text boxes were included within the survey so the participants could expand on their selection from the Likert scale, if desired. The goal involved ensuring that as many as the explanations as possible were heard so the data collection would be thorough and comprehensive. Surveys afforded the researcher the opportunity to collect data from a large sampling of individuals in a very short amount of time.

**Classroom Observations**

During the four classroom observations, copious notes were taken on the researcher’s laptop noting exactly what she observed about the students and teacher while the Second Step
lesson was being taught to the class. Each classroom observation was 40 minutes in length. Closely observed was how the teacher delivered their lessons, the teaching strategies that were implemented to teach the lesson, the arrangement of students during the lesson, the behavior of students during the lesson, classroom participation, and whether or not the teacher followed the Second Step lesson curriculum or made modifications to the lesson.

Following the classroom observation, postobservation interviews were conducted with the teachers about the observed Second Step lesson. In addition, information was gathered regarding their insights about other lessons and the Second Step program as a whole. The researcher anticipated each postobservation interview taking no more than sixty minutes [Researcher’s update: Interviews took 30 minutes each] and recorded and transcribed the interviews. Recording and transcribing the interviews allowed for the semistructured interviews, so the overall interview flowed organically. One set of interview questions was asked for the teachers, one set for the social workers, and another set for the administrators (see Appendices A–D).
Data Analysis Technique(s)

Coding is used when the evaluator analyzes the quantitative and/or qualitative data collected and sorts the findings into themes or patterns. The two main types of coding are inductive and deductive (Thomas, 2006).

The purposes for using an inductive approach are to (a) condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; (b) establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and (c) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). This approach is capable of allowing the program evaluator to analyze the qualitative data and garner reliable and valid findings (Thomas, 2006).

Deductive coding is theory-driven and based on finding themes or patterns from the research findings and/or one’s experiences. A hybrid approach was used where “the process of deductive thematic analysis will allow for themes to emerge direct from the data using inductive coding” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2005 p. 4).

The data was analyzed by coding the interviews and observations, looking for themes, and dissecting the descriptive statistics from the surveys submitted. Recorded interviews were replayed and then transcribed so symbols and/or abbreviations could be created to store concrete examples that fell into the coding categories created by underlining relevant words and/or phrases from the interviews. This allowed the results of each interview to be summarized by showing the frequency that each category of responses was given. The coded information from the interviews and observations was used to look for common themes.

The researcher wasn’t sure what themes would evolve from the coded information, since she was unaware of exactly how the interviewees would respond to the interview questions.
However, once the themes were identified, subthemes that developed from the interviews were identified. Finally, descriptive statistics from the survey responses were dissected and patterns sought so the information could be categorized and inserted into some of the themes and subthemes (or additional themes and subthemes created), if needed.
SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Findings

From the online survey, quantitative data was revealed and various themes emerged regarding the Second Step program:

1. The Second Step program is not providing lessons that contain the social and emotional skills the students need when faced with gender diversity and racial issues.
2. Teachers are not sure if the students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with social conflicts.

The qualitative data was revealed from the semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended responses from the online survey. Themes also emerged from the qualitative data collected. The following themes materialized from the semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended online survey responses:

1. The Second Step program does not contain lessons about gender diversity and race.
2. The Second Step lessons are too scripted, which doesn’t make the scenarios relevant and realistic to the students.
3. Teachers need to supplement the Second Step lessons to maintain student engagement.
4. Many students find the Second Step lessons boring and beneath their maturity level.
5. The implementation of Second Step lessons varies from teacher to teacher throughout the district.
6. The Second Step program provides good information in the lessons for students.

Online Survey Data

Out of 118, Grades 5–8 teachers, 28 (24%) agreed to participate in the online survey. All of the teachers work in the Galaxy school district in the middle school and/or junior high school
building. The middle school has Grades 5–6 students while the junior high school has Grades 7–8. The online Second Step Program survey was given to the teachers during their summer vacation in June 2016. The survey had six statements and a Likert scale for participants to choose their responses to each statement. The following tables show the survey statements, response choices, and percent of responses for each choice from the 28 completed surveys.

Table 1

Survey Statement 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I think the Second Step Program provides my students with the social and emotional skills they need.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29.41%</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
<td>52.94%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Table 1, more than half of the respondents disagreed that the Second Step program provided their students with the social and emotional skills they need.

Table 2

*Survey Statement 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I think the Second Step Program provides my students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about race and racial issues.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
<td>70.59%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows a vast majority of the respondents disagreed that the Second Step program provided their students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about race and racial issues.

Table 3

*Survey Statement 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I think the Second Step Program provides my students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about gender diversity (LGBTQ) and gender diversity issues.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29.41%</td>
<td>47.06%</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Almost all of the respondents (see Table 3) disagreed that the Second Step program provided their students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about gender diversity (LGBTQ) and gender diversity issues.

Table 4

*Survey Statement 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with social conflicts.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
<td>58.82%</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 4 indicates that more than half of the respondents didn’t know if their students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with social conflicts.

Table 5

*Survey Statement 5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with racial issues.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>41.18%</td>
<td>47.06%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 displays that almost half of the respondents disagreed their students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with racial issues.

Table 6

Survey Statement 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with gender diversity issues.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>64.71%</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows that a vast majority of the respondents were neutral in thinking their students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with gender diversity issues.
Open-Ended Survey Data

Table 7

*Explanations to Survey Statement 1*

| **I think the Second Step Program provides my students with the social and emotional skills they need.** | • It doesn’t feel authentic when teaching it—it’s canned and cheesy and there’s very little buy-in.
• Second Step hasn’t evolved to meet current needs of students.
• The program is simplistic, and the students completely disengaged because they find it boring.
• I try to create my own lessons around the same Second Step topic for that month because students do not find the Second Step content engaging. It is low level and patronizing. If they aren’t engaged, they really aren’t learning.
• Great lessons, not enough consistent flow of delivery.
• From my experience, the students do not take the Second Step program seriously, even though us teachers do. A lot them simply just want to get through it so we can move on to the next thing. Therefore, I am not sure if it truly provides them with the social and emotional skills they need.
• It covers skills they benefit from but I don’t think the program is taught consistently enough across the district to make the impact it needs.
• My students find the program baby-ish and don’t take it seriously.
• I find myself supplementing in order to make it more meaningful for the students. In addition to that, I’ve found the ideas from the Second Step program serve as a good jumping off point for discussions with my students, and they get more out of the discussions than they do the activities that come with Second Step.
• I believe in social-emotional learning. I think the Second Step program should be used on a consistent basis for 40-minute periods. I think it works, but there has not been any formal training or time to do it. If we were asked to teach Unit 1 during Q1, all teachers would know what and when it is expected.
• Too scripted—not natural.
• I believe there are other experiential exercises useful to teach the concepts other than those presented in our second step presentations. |

Table 8

*Explanations to Survey Statement 2*

| **I think the Second Step** | • It’s not explicit in its discussions about race and racial |

35
Program provides my students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about race and racial issues.

- Not only is the program not explicit enough, teachers aren't trained to teach these skills and discuss more provocative topics with students with differing backgrounds/opinions, so I think they tend to shy away from it, and just ‘keep things light.’
- It’s possible we never made it far enough into the program, but Second Step did not explicitly address the types of behaviors that I see, like more subtle, entrenched forms of racism and bias against various minority groups. It does talk about stereotypes and why they’re damaging in a lesson or two, but it's not specific enough to what the kids actually experience. Also, some of the empathy lessons unfortunately led to more stereotyping because the kids in the video clips do not represent the population in our district.
- I don’t recall any of the activities being directly related to race.
- Information is good. Follow through hard to monitor.
- Although there are actors of color in the videos, the rhetoric of Second Step does not directly address race. The lessons do teach tolerance and acceptance; however, the word ‘race’ is not specifically used, nor do the scripts refer to it, or imply tolerance based on race.
- The Second Step topics that I taught had nothing to do with race and racial issues so that is why I clicked neutral.
- I can’t say that the lessons I have taught this year deal directly with race or racial issues.
- The lessons I have taught do not deal with race—the subjects are empathy, strong emotions within one self, problem solving.
- Again, I think current events and discussions are more relevant and meaningful to the students.
- I don’t think it touches on race near enough.
- I don’t feel like it specifically addresses race.

Table 9

Explanations to Survey Statement 3

I think the Second Step Program provides my students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about gender diversity

- I don’t know if it at all touches upon LGBTQ topics.
- I can’t remember ever seeing a lesson that specifically related to LGBTQ rights, but again, we may never have made it far enough in the time we had.
- I don’t recall Second Step ever discussing gender.
- Again, gender diversity is not addressed, only general tolerance and how to deal with conflict.
• Again, the Second Step topics that I taught had nothing to do with gender diversity and gender diversity issues so that is why I clicked neutral.
• The lessons I have taught this year don’t deal directly with LGBTQ issues.
• It seems like an unsupported “school topic”—I would fear a little bit of controversial backlash from parent community, unfortunately.
• I prefer finding more current resources for the students. I love what we’ve been given from Lurie’s Children’s Hospital.
• I have not seen all of the Second Step, but I have not heard about any teaching regarding those issues. We need to teach about this. How can we and are there other programs?
• Again—too broad. There is no scenario like this in Second Step.
• I don’t believe our program addresses currently developed needs for tolerance and acceptance. The videos/worksheets are outdated.
Table 10

Explanations to Survey Statement 4

My students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with social conflicts.

- I have heard students use words like “ally” so that’s good.
- I don’t know if the students already had the tools or if the program made a difference. Most students struggled with social conflict anyway, and those who handled it better may have other factors, like amazing parents, that played a bigger role.
- I doubt they actually think about it. Second Step is seen as a joke by the students.
- I only see them once a day and am in the classroom only with them. I have no idea what they deal with outside of the classroom.
- I haven’t witnessed my kids using the skills, although I do encourage it and we discuss it.
- I truly don’t know, as I explained in my first answer; a lot of them just want to get through it so I am not sure what they are fully comprehending and applying.
- I honestly don’t know if when a conflict arises, they are going back to what they have learned in Second Step lessons.
- I feel if the teacher uses the language taught within the lesson, students will respond well in many situations that deal with social conflict.
- Some have the skills—but I don’t attribute those fully to Second Step.
Table 11

Explanations to Survey Statement 5

My students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with racial issues.

- There weren’t enough lessons that addressed these issues.
- I’m sure they could if they were actually learning from the program.
- Not observed.
- I would have chosen “I don’t know” for this one as well (since question format is worded like #9).
- Empathy is taught but not specific to race.
- We still have a long way to go regarding race in the district.
- I have not seen any proof of that.
- Many of the individuals who make poor choices are portrayed by the African American actors.

Table 12

Explanations to Survey Statement 6

My students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with gender diversity issues.

- I’m sure they could if they were actually learning from the program.
- Not observed.
- I would have chosen, “I don’t know” for this one as well (since question format is worded like #9).
- Empathy is taught but not specific to gender diversity.
- I don’t believe 2nd step provides enough exposure to the gender or LGBTQ community. That said, I think our students handled the gender diverse HMS student incredibly. I just don’t attribute that to skills from Second Step.
- I don’t think there’s that much for gender diversity in Second Step—especially given our current awareness and media coverage.
- Doesn’t go far enough and specific enough. Fifth and sixth graders need to more closely personalize situations presented.

The statement, The Second Step lessons do not directly address race and gender diversity issues, represents a common theme many respondents stated regarding the open-ended online survey questions:
While many respondents stated the Second Step lessons do not address racial and gender diversity issues, other respondents stated the Second Step lessons are low level and patronizing for middle and junior high students because the lessons fail to meet the current needs of students. This corresponds to the fourth theme, Many students find the Second Step lessons boring and beneath their maturity level. Additionally, respondents felt students are disengaged during the lessons and don’t have buy-in when the lessons are being taught.

**Administrator Interviews**

The first theme, the Second Step program does not contain lessons about gender diversity and race, was evident during both administrator interviews. Both administrators clearly stated they didn’t remember coming across any Second Step lessons that focused on gender diversity and/or race when they were classroom teachers. Administrator One explained:

I don't think it provides the opportunity to go deep enough into, get deep enough at a deep enough level that will really be impactful to change someone's ability to interact with people of other, of diverse backgrounds, of to really to be in that moment and to really change their beliefs. I think the kids, I think students kind of just go along with the program because they know, “Oh, we have to do Second Step,” opposed to being able to actually truly impact how they believe. Now I think if it's utilized on a more consistent basis, if we’re able to have follow-ups, if we’re able to connect it to curriculum, then maybe the answer is yes. But how it's kind of just at its surface, the Second Step program, I don't think allows, I don't think really does, will impact students as far as race, diversity for how they'll go about their lives.

Administrator Two felt the same way, per the following statement, when he said:
I would say probably not. Not that I recall. I think that, again, if you use certain topics and do your own research and integrate that type of material into it then it would be, I think, more prevalent in the lessons. But, you know, having taught the 6th grade Second Step lessons, I don't recall anything regarding gender or race. I don't recall it. And at the 7th and 8th grade, having now taught the lessons, I know the topics reasonably well. But I don't know if any of the topics are directly tied to race- or gender-specific topics.

Both of the administrators interviewed emphasized the third theme, *Teachers need to supplement the lessons to maintain student engagement*, during their interviews. They stressed the importance of classroom teachers supplementing the Second Step lessons with content students find engaging. The administrators made it clear that maintaining student engagement is vital for students to get the most out of the Second Step lessons. Administrator Two shared:

  So I think when, you know, either myself or other teachers would put a little bit more time into it and did a little bit more than what was scripted out for us and showed a little bit more enthusiasm and interest in the topic that that seemed to help.
Administrator One shared the same sentiment as evidenced when he stated:

If I wasn’t able to engage the students in that good discussion, in really thinking about what we’re trying to get out of it, then it wasn’t effective. So I think if someone was just reading script word for word, or just trying to do it, it wasn't effective. But because I knew my students so well, and we were able to make connections outside of what Second Step program did, they were effective.

During their interviews, both administrators stated students are more likely to be engaged throughout the Second Step lessons if the classroom teacher makes relevant connections throughout the lessons versus following the script verbatim. Both administrators shared they felt the Second Step program had good intentions. On the other hand, they believe it needs to be improved since teachers should tweak the lessons to make them relevant to their students.

According to both interviewees, the Second Step lessons do not directly discuss race and gender diversity issues and they believe this is an area the Galaxy school district will have to work on and address. The transcribed interviews can be found in Appendix B.

Social Worker Interviews

The social worker interviews highlighted the fifth theme, *The implementation of the Second Step lessons varies from teacher to teacher throughout the district*. Social Worker One stated:

I don’t think it’s done so consistently here so I think that’s part of the problem. I think the lessons are valuable, but the teacher, like not everybody is doing. Not everybody is doing it the same way. I think the kids, by the time they’re in 7th and 8th grade, I get a little eye-rolling about Second Step, or that the videos aren’t so up to date. But I think the lessons—I think it could be done better maybe. Like if every week, or every time it was
done, everybody was doing the same lesson. So, I think it has the potential to be more impactful than it is. I just, it’s the implementation of it, and that’s not said in a blaming way of like the homeroom teachers or whatever. I know they have a lot. I wonder if they need like a little refresher or we need to change how we do it because I think it’s sort of seen as optional, or presented as optional.

Similarly, Social Worker Two said the following during her interview:

However, I feel, unfortunately, I don’t think it’s been implemented with integrity nor consistency. So a lot of my students aren’t familiar with some of the terminology and things of that nature. I think just in addition, you know, making sure that it’s implemented with integrity, consistently, the language is being used across the board in a school. I know we have characteristics of successful learners, which is great. Just to spin off of that, I don’t know if all of those traits are constant, consistently being used and the kids know them and things like that.

The two Social Worker interviews also emphasized the sixth theme, The Second Step program provides good information in the lessons for students. The following was shared from Social Worker One, “Oh, I think it’s a good program. I think it’s worthwhile.” Social Worker Two stated, “I do think the lessons have great interactive things about them that do, I think, promote, you know, the social/emotional learning.”

Both social workers shared they think the Second Step lessons have the potential to impact students’ social and emotional learning. However, they don’t think the lessons are always implemented with integrity or consistency from teacher to teacher. One of the social workers stated that the Second Step program needs some modifications because it doesn’t address diversity—especially gender and race. The same social worker continued, saying that
emotionality is very important in addition to learning how to navigate social situations in and out of school. The transcribed social worker interviews can be found in Appendix C.

Classroom Teacher Interviews

This first theme, *The Second Step program does not contain lessons about gender diversity and race*, was evident throughout all of the classroom teacher interviews. The fifth-grade classroom teacher said, “You know, so, no, I don’t think they do much there. I think that’s more just general conflict things.” The sixth-grade classroom teacher stated, “Like, I don’t know that it specifically addresses like race and gender.” Very similar to the fifth and sixth grade classroom teachers, the seventh-grade classroom teacher said, “No. Second Step does not address race and gender diversity issues specifically. It would be great to have more resources tied to these important issues.” The eighth-grade classroom teacher shared, “No, I think the materials skip over the facts that face our current society. It takes too broad approach to issues of judgment and bullying.”

The second theme, *The Second Step lessons are too scripted, which doesn’t make the scenarios relevant and realistic to the students*, was also common from the junior high classroom teacher interviews. The seventh-grade classroom teacher stated the following:
The scripted nature of it can be boring for our students. While ‘sticking to the script’ is often an important component of a research-based curriculum, I have observed that kids get more engaged when the lessons are enriched with outside sources and a bit off-script. Likewise, the eighth-grade classroom teachers stated, “I have never been able to use a Second Step lesson the way that it is presented in the materials. They are boring and too young. The approach is not appropriate for eight graders.”

Classroom teachers interviewed also found the fourth theme, Many students find the Second Step lessons boring and beneath their maturity level, commonplace in their classes. One fifth-grade classroom teacher shared the following:

Yeah, I think the songs are tacky. I actually have a little fun with the songs. Like we jam that thing pretty loud and start, you know, singing. I mean, I get the words. But like I said, the kids, you know, we kind of just joke about it a little bit. It’s hard to take 100 percent serious. So that’s my thoughts on Second Step.

The seventh-grade classroom teacher said, “The scripted nature of it can be boring for our students.” Similarly, the eight-grade teachers for this theme repeated (practically verbatim) what the eight-grade teachers had replied regarding the second theme—that Second Step lessons were unusable because they didn’t speak to the students.

Three of the classroom teachers think the Second Step lesson they taught was effective; and one of the classroom teachers did not think the lesson taught was effective. Only one of the four classroom teachers thought the lessons have been impactful to their students’ social and emotional learning. The other three teachers think the lessons are good dialogue starters. All four teachers agreed that students find the lessons boring and are disengaged unless the individual teacher enriches the lessons. Time to deliver the lessons is also a challenge. None of the teachers
could remember a lesson from Second Step that addressed gender diversity and race issues. The transcribed classroom teacher interviews can be found in Appendix D.

**Classroom Observations**

During all four of the classroom observations, most of the students actively engaged in the Second Step lesson dialogue. All of the teachers appeared to have bought-into and be vested in teaching the lesson. At the end of the lesson, each teacher asked for the students’ candid feedback regarding the Second Step program. Themes two (*the Second Step lessons are too scripted, which doesn’t make the scenarios relevant and realistic to the students*, and four (*many students find the Second Step lessons boring and beneath their maturity level*), were commonly shared amongst the students. Students in each grade level (Grades 5–8) unanimously shared thinking the lessons are boring and repetitive from Grades K–4, and does not meet the needs of Grades 5–8. All of the students who gave feedback to their teachers said the lessons are not realistic and relevant to them and the issues they encounter. Additionally, the students don’t find the lessons fun due to them being so scripted. Classroom observation notes can be found in Appendix E.

**Interpretations**

Overall, the findings show that the Second Step program used in the Galaxy school district does not address all of the social and emotional learning standards, specifically, “Recognized the feelings and perspectives of others, recognized individual and group similarities and differences, and use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others” (ISBE, n.d.). The findings also showed that students are missing an important social and emotional relationship skill, which is having the “ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2015). These social and
emotional learning standards and skill are missing due to the absence of gender diversity and racial issues in the Second Step lessons.

Considering the gender diversity and racial issues that currently exist in the United States, the findings about the Second Step program are extremely significant for the Galaxy school district. During the administrator interviews, both administrators stated they didn’t remember coming across any Second Step lessons that focused on gender diversity and/or race when they were classroom teachers. Almost all of the respondents in Table 3 from the online survey data disagreed that the Second Step program provides their students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about gender diversity (LGBTQ) and gender diversity issues. The Galaxy school district has the potential to provide its’ students with the social and emotional skills needed when they are in racially and gender diverse settings, if these findings are addressed.

Recent incidences have proven there are school districts that are not focused on providing their students with these social and emotional skills. For example, some school districts were not allowing transgender students to use the bathroom and/or locker rooms for the sex in which they identified. The denial of transgender students being able to use the facilities for their sex caused a lot of public debate throughout the country over transgender rights. On May 13, 2016, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights notified school districts that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, schools receiving federal money may not discriminate based on a student’s sex, including a student’s transgender status. According to Hirschfield Davis and Apuzzo (2016), “It represents the latest example of the Obama administration using a combination of policies, lawsuits, and public statements to change the civil rights landscape for gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people” (p. 1).
Although the federal government has mandated all school districts abide by this law, there are 11 states suing the federal government regarding the required to allow transgender students to use the washroom of their identified sex in school (Tribune News Services, 2016).

There has also been an outcry from the Black community for people in this country, specifically White people, to discuss and address the damaging effects of racial biases toward minorities in the United States. Working in predominantly Black and White schools over the past 20 years, the researcher has witnessed White students getting away with things that Black students are punished for. She has listened to White teachers defend White students’ misbehavior by saying things like, “They are just being a kid,” “They are having a rough day,” or “They are really a good kid, so something must be wrong.” The same teachers quickly punish Black students for the same types of misbehavior and say things like, “He looks really scary,” “Those kids need to learn how to behave,” or “They probably come from a single-parent household.”

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, stated, “You also can’t talk about school discipline without talking about race” (Gathman & Baker, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) stated “Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students” (School Climate and Discipline: Know the Data, 2nd para).

The findings prove that gender diversity and racial issues are not explicitly addressed in the Second Step lessons. The researcher hypothesizes this is because these issues were not topics the authors thought were necessary components for a solid social and emotional learning program. As stated in the review of the literature, the position that people stand in relation to others in society directly impacts what they can see and understand versus what they cannot see and understand. One’s position in this country has the ability to make them blind or have 20/20 vision.
Heifetz (2009) described the balcony perspective as “gaining the distanced perspective you need to see what is really happening” versus staying on the dance floor (p. 7). For example, the White mother of a White transgender student told this researcher that now she understands the true meaning behind the *Black Lives Matter* movement. She shared that having a transgender child opened her eyes to the racial biases and discrimination all Black people encounter in this country because of the gender diversity biases she and her child deal with. Would this mother have the same level of empathy and awareness about racial biases if she weren’t in the position of being a mother with a transgender child?

Overall the results from the online survey; the classroom observations; and the classroom teacher, social worker, and administrator interviews demonstrate that the Second Step program authors didn’t have a balcony perspective when developing the program. In all of the interviews conducted, classroom observations, and surveys, findings showed that racial and gender diversity issues are omitted from the Second Step program. This doesn’t mean there aren’t aspects of the program that address social and emotional learning skills that are helpful to students’ social and emotional development. It simply means the Second Step program doesn’t address racial and gender diversity issues and how they directly impact social and emotional learning skills students need to possess when in diverse settings.
SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgment(s)

The research shows that the Second Step program does not explore the social and emotional skills needed to address White privilege and how it impacts student’s ability to interact in racial and gender-diverse settings. Additionally, the program stakeholders do not believe the objectives of the program explicitly address diversity issues. A vast majority, 76.47% of the online survey respondents, disagreed that the Second Step program provides their students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about race and racial issues. Almost all, 70.59% of the online survey respondents, disagreed that the Second Step program provides their students with the social and emotional skills needed to be tolerant and empathetic about gender diversity (LGBTQ) and gender diversity issues.

The research also showed that the Second Step program does not challenge Galaxy district students to think of how they could change and/or act on the biases they possibly have about gender diversity and race. A little more than half, 52.94% of the online survey respondents, disagreed their students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with racial issues. A majority, 64.71% of the online survey respondents, were neutral in thinking their students are able to apply what is taught in the Second Step lessons when dealing with gender diversity issues. Since the Second Step program does not have lessons that explicitly focus on gender diversity and/or racial issues, it is impossible for the delivery of the Second Step program to meet the social and emotional skills Galaxy district students will need to implement when they are in racially and/or gender-diverse settings.

Throughout the data collection process, a majority of the participants did not agree or strongly agree the Second Step program provided students with the social and emotional skills
they needed. With all of the participants acknowledging that Second Step does not contain any lessons about gender diversity and racial issues, it made a lot of sense they didn’t think the program provides students with the necessary social and emotional skills to effectively handle gender diversity and any racial issues they may encounter.

There were some participants who mentioned how the Second Step program is quite intentional about providing students with the social and emotional skills needed to handle different bullying situations. One participant shared how the Second Step program does a great job of embedding vocabulary about bullying into the lessons and students seem to know and understand bullying vocabulary. Although bullying incidents are not extinct, one participant believed knowing the bullying vocabulary aides in students using their social and emotional learning skills to make responsible choices.

**Recommendation(s)**

Gender diversity and racial issues need to be addressed and taught so students don’t go through school without learning the social and emotional skills needed to properly interact with all human beings—regardless of gender diversity and/or race. School districts can work toward minimizing gender diversity and racial biases by equipping students with the social and emotional skills needed as they matriculate through school and move into adulthood. Bringing these issues to the forefront and making a concerted effort to educate all district stakeholders, staff, students, and parents, about the impact of gender diversity and racial biases represents the first step toward minimizing gender diversity and racial biases.

Since the Second Step program does not address gender diversity and race issues and does not seem to meet the social and emotional learning needs for students in Grades 5–8 in the Galaxy school district, I recommend the Galaxy school district begin this process by explicitly
working toward addressing these diversity issues as an ongoing district initiative. This should be an initiative that becomes part of the fabric and culture for the Galaxy school district so all students who matriculate through the district receive the social and emotional learning skills needed when faced with gender diversity and/or race issues.

Sending staff members and administrators to a National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project training would be a first step in working toward addressing the diversity gaps in the Galaxy school district. The National SEED Project is a professional development program that trains individuals to facilitate seminars at their schools and districts with a focus on equity and diversity. SEED leaders create seminars where they share personal reflection and testimony and listen to reflection and testimony of participants, so everyone can learn together through experiences of all participants. This approach provides SEED participants to connect their lives to one another and to society by acknowledging systems of oppression, power, and privilege (National SEED Project, 2016).

Since an initiative like this can be viewed as controversial and/or political by some, it would probably be most effective to begin by introducing it to the district Community Review Committee (CRC) comprised of teachers, administrators, and community members on the committee. The CRC serves as advisors to the Galaxy School Board by researching specific topics leading to improvements in teaching, learning, and/or managing the district’s operations. My recommendation would involve the CRC using the upcoming school year (2016–2017), to find out if racial and gender diversity are being taught to students. Involving teachers and community members in the initial conversations and planning will foster the much needed buy-in for a diversity initiative that emphasizes gender diversity and race.
Following the 2016–2017 school year research findings, the district CRC should ensure the initiative has ongoing professional development components for all staff and community members with students in the district starting with the 2017–2018 school year. While my recommendations have implications for diversity development, I will continue exploring how to address the implications when working on my change leadership plan. My ultimate goals entails lobbying for the district to develop and adopt a school board approved diversity statement that is displayed on the district website by the end of the 2016–2017 school year and start embedding diversity in the everyday curriculum by the start of the 2018–2019 school year.
REFERENCES


Leininger, J. (2016). Gender Diversity 101 Presentation


Savage-Williams, P. (2016). Beyond Diversity Presentation


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Classroom Teacher Interview Questions

1. Do you think the lesson was effective? Explain.

2. Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning? Explain.

3. What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

4. Do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students’ need when they are faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? Explain.

Social Worker Interview Questions

1. Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning? Explain.

2. What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

3. Do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they are faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? Explain.

Administrator Interview Questions

1. Do you think the Second Step lessons you taught were effective? Explain.

2. Do you think the Second Step lessons were impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning? Explain.

3. What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?
4. Do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they are faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? Explain.
APPENDIX B: ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS

Administrator Interview One

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons that you taught when you were teaching 8th grade were effective?

Male: I think some of them were. I think the concepts, I think what the goals of each lesson are good. I don't think every lesson word for word, how it's scripted out is effective for 8th graders.

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons were impactful to your students' social and emotional learning?

Male: Again, yes and no. Yes, I think, again, the concepts. And I think when we were able to -- I think the discussions that we did were really effective. I think we had some, I think we did have some really good moments. If I wasn't able to engage the students in that good discussion, in really thinking about what we're trying to get out it, then it wasn't effective. So I think if someone was just reading script word for word, or just trying to do it, it wasn't effective. But because I knew my students so well, and we were able to make connections outside of what Second Step program did, they were effective.

Interviewer: What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program? And you can use your knowledge from being an 8th grade teacher and as an administrative.

Male: Will you repeat the question?

Interviewer: What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

Male: My overall opinion is, again, I think it does a nice job of really bringing important, the important things that we all talk about: empathy is a big one, communicating effectively and perspective. I think that for some of the younger grades, I think some of the videos and scripted questions are more effective. Then as you get older, I don't think the older kids think of it the same way. I think they're ready, 7th and 8th graders are ready for more meaningful conflict than some of the conflicts and examples that the Second Step program does. So overall, I think it has really good intentions. I think it needs some improvements in making it more applicable for the certain grade levels.
Interviewer: And final question: Do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they are faced with race and gender diversity issues in our country today and even just within the community here?

Male: Overall, no, because I don't think it allows us to get deep enough into -- I don't think it provides the opportunity to go deep enough into, get deep enough at a deep enough level that will really be impactful to change someone's ability to interact with people of other, of diverse backgrounds, of to really to be in that moment and to really change their beliefs. I think the kids, I think students kind of just go along with the program because they know, "Oh, we have to do Second Step," opposed to being able to actually truly impact how they believe. Now I think if it's utilized on a more consistent basis, if we're able to have follow-ups, if we're able to connect it to curriculum then maybe the answer is yes. But how it's kind of just at its surface, the Second Step program I don't think allows, I don't think really does, will impact students as far as race, diversity for how they'll go about their lives.

Interviewer: Thank you.

[End of recording]

Administrator Interview Two

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think the Second Step lessons that you taught were effective last year when you were teaching?

Male: Yes, I believe they were effective. I think that the topics themselves were relevant to what the students were experiencing or stressed skills that they would be able to utilize as they went through their 6th grade year.

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons were impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning?

Male: I think they were. So the answer would be yes for that. I think that the lessons themselves in a vacuum, like if you just taught and went specifically word for word through the lesson, there would probably, they would less effective, and they would seem less genuine to the students. So I think when, you know, either myself or other teachers would put a little bit more time into it and did a little bit more than what was scripted out for us and showed a little bit more enthusiasm and interest in the topic that that seemed to help.

Interviewer: Okay. What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program? And you can add in, you know, your perspective from last year, your perspective in your role now as well.
Male: I think, and I think I somewhat, you know, gave my thoughts on it in the prior question, but I think the program itself is good because it does give the teachers and the administrators a tool to point to, to help address social/emotional learning and skills that our students have such a wide range of skill sets in. So to be able to have a curriculum and have a resource for teachers during their homeroom time is something that is effective. Now is it perfect? No. I think like, as I said before, I think that the teachers have to cater it, tweak it to ways that will fit their classroom a little bit better. I think the timing at the middle school in particular is difficult because, if you are talking about, or even at the junior high I should as well, I think the skills themselves are more beneficial if it's more front-loaded. And there's just not necessarily the time, especially at the junior high. You could maybe do a lesson or two per month. So if you're talking about finishing up the Second Step curriculum when you're already in May, I don't know that that's necessarily as ideal, especially if it is a new skill that would've been better utilized earlier in the year. So that's why I think it's important that the teachers are very familiar with the curriculum and try to implement them as much as they can, not only in homeroom, but if there's also ways to utilize and stress them throughout the other classes in the day, I think that's the most effective way to use it. But as I said, I think like all the topics themselves are relevant. But the lessons themselves can be a little dry, and they are very scripted, which is great because you don't always have a lot of time to put into developing the lessons because you've got your other curricular areas that are important as well. So when you have those opportunities, and you do, again, put some extra time into it, I think that they can help support social/emotional learning for a middle school student.

Interviewer: And finally, do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they’re faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country and their community also?
Male: I would say probably not. Not that I recall. I think that, again, if you use certain topics and do your own research and integrate that type of material into it then it would be, I think, more prevalent in the lessons. But, you know, having taught the 6th grade Second Step lessons, I don't recall anything regarding gender or race. I don't recall it. And at the 7th and 8th grade, having now taught the lessons, I know the topics reasonably well. But I don't know if any of the topics are directly tied to race- or gender-specific topics. I guess you could argue that just social conflict, social skills, you would hope that that is something that can be tied into that as well. But I think given the climate of, you know, the political environment outside of school, I think, that seems to be something that's kind of creeping into the schools a little bit more. So there's, you know, something that we'll all have to work on to address that.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Male: You’re welcome.

[End of recording]
APPENDIX C: SOCIAL WORKER INTERVIEWS

Social Worker Interview One

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning?

Female: Okay. You want yes or no. I'm going to say it's depends. I don't think it's done so consistently here so I think that's part of the problem. I think the lessons are valuable, but the teacher, like not everybody is doing. Not everybody is doing it the same way. I think the kids, by the time they're in 7th and 8th grade, I get a little eye-rolling about Second Step, or that the videos aren't so up to date. But I think the lessons -- I think it could be done better maybe. Like if every week, or every time it was done, everybody was doing the same lesson. So I think it has the potential to be more impactful than it is.

Interviewer: Okay. What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

Female: Oh, I think it's a good program. I think it's worthwhile. I just, it's the implementation of it, and that's not said in a blaming way of like the homeroom teachers or whatever. I know they have a lot. I wonder if they need like a little refresher or we need to change how we do it because I think it's sort of seen as optional, or presented as optional. I don't know.

Interviewer: And do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students’ need when they are faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country and in the community?

Female: Well, I'd like to say yes. But we've had huge issues about race and gender and stuff here this year, and lack of tolerance. So I don't know. But I don't know that one program is going to address that. I mean, I think these kids, we can give them -- I think it does address it, but I don't think it's going to solve. I think they're -- yeah, it just needs to be done in a broader scope. I don't know what to do. The other social worker and I talk about this all the time. What are we going to do? And I don't know what the answer is. I think it's a worthwhile program, but I think the way the teachers -- I think the way it's presented too. The kids are like, "Eehh, we don't care about this." Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female: I'm guessing the other social worker felt the same way.

Interviewer: That was it. Thank you.

[End of recording]
Social Worker Interview Two

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to the students that you serve to their social and emotional learning? And if you could explain.

Female: I do think the lessons have great interactive things about them that do, I think, promote, you know, the social/emotional learning. However, I feel, unfortunately, I don't think it's been implemented with integrity nor consistency. So a lot of my students aren't familiar with some of the terminology and things of that nature.

Interviewer: What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

Female: I think there should be some modifications made. I don't think it really addresses diversity, especially, you know, with gender, race and things like that. I also feel just working in a middle school with 5th and 6th graders that it can be a little young, especially some of the videos. The kids, I think, at times -- and I don't want to speak for them, but this is what they've shared -- kind of find it a little like patronizing and talking down to them.

Interviewer: Do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they're faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country?

Female: At this time, no, I do not.

Interviewer: And you can explain.

Female: No, I think it -- you know, it really focuses on problem-solving and, you know, putting yourself in other people's shoes and bullying and things like that. But I don't think it addresses those issues.

Interviewer: And now, could you elaborate, is there anything you'd like to share that, you know, from your knowledge about the program, the kids that we serve, that sort of thing?
Female: Yeah. I mean, I think, like I said, I love that it's a tier one, implementing all that. It's district-wide. All students receive it because we are on a tiered model. However, I do feel there can be some changes and modifications made to the program to address some of those things we've been talking about. And I also feel teachers need to really understand the importance of social/emotional learning. If you cannot be in an emotional place then you won't be able to learn. So emotionality is very, very important and learning especially how to navigate some of these social situations that our students are just kind of starting to, you know, face as middle-schoolers. You know, there's more autonomy. They're pulling away from their parents. They're becoming independent people. And we really want to promote these skills because they're life skills. And they're something that, you know, they will take with them not just to junior high or high school or college but throughout their whole lives. And research has shown, you know, early intervention is always the best way to go. And we just really want to be proactive. So.

Interviewer: Did you want to add anything else?

Female: I think just in addition, you know, making sure that it’s implemented with integrity, consistently, the language is being used across the board in a school. I know we have characteristics of successful learners, which is great. Just to spin off of that, I don't know if all of those traits are constant, consistently being used and the kids know them and things like that. So, yeah.

Interviewer: Thanks.

[End of recording]
APPENDIX D: CLASSROOM TEACHER INTERVIEWS

5th Grade Classroom Teacher Interview

Interviewer: All right. So, do you think the Second Step lesson that you taught was effective?

Male: I've taught more than one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Male: No, not really. I don't feel they're as effective. I mean, I have -- I know they use that strategy with like students that have behavior issues, that stop, think about your problem, calm down, breathe, do ten counts. That seems more like a social work thing than anything. I watch at recess and other stuff, seeing kids when they get agitated. I rarely see a kid, "Oh, oh, I’m mad. I feel sad." I never see that stuff.

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning?

Male: I think they’re good conversation pieces.

Interviewer: Okay.

Male: They’re good for, we'll talk about some of the stuff they mention. They say, okay, where would this happen? The lunch line, this happens all the time and, you know, or the bus or whatever. So they're good for if a teacher needs a talking point. But a good teacher shouldn’t need those. They should already know these things. And I’m observant of it. But I use them when they're there. I’ll say, "okay. Let's talk about when this happened."

Interviewer: Okay. What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

Male: I don't know if it's used consistently across the district, if it's a district program. That, is it being taught from kindergarten all the way through 8th grade? My child goes to a district where, or both of my kids do, where they have rules for their school and expectations for all the behaviors. And it's district policies. I don't think it comes out of any special program. But they know from kindergarten until they're at the high school what all the rules and expectations are and how to deal with things and how to treat people. And I can honestly say District 39 doesn't have that at all. They don't have a discipline policy. They don't have a set of expectations that are across the board because it's not, to the district office, it may not be that big of an issue, or they don't think it's that big of an issue. But I think any good district, and we're a good district, should have a system that's district-wide. It doesn't matter what grade you are in. You tailor it a little bit. But the expectations for any behavior of any student in the hallway, in the cafeteria,
wherever you're at is the same. So then when another teacher talks to you about it, it's not, "Oh, I didn't know that was the rule."

**Interviewer:** Do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they’re faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? And when I say gender diversity, I'm talking the LGBTQ.

**Male:** I think the LGBTQ, if I said all the acronyms correctly, is more prevalent over the last couple of years on the news than it has been. It's always been there. And I think it's just more prevalent now. The news is making a bigger, in my view, a bigger deal out of it than it needs to be sometimes. They’re going after any little thing they can find for schools and stuff, and nothing is going wrong at all. I'll give you an example. In my hometown, they had a student, who was transgender, and she wanted to be female, and that's fine. And they made a big deal that she was running for prom queen . . . Who cares? If you want to treat every kid exactly the same then why isn't that on the news about every other kid? And they made a big deal that she didn’t win. Who cares? Nothing in there said that kids were mistreating her or anything like that. So why is that a news story? You know, I'm a big believer in, you know, you treat everyone the way you want to be treated, and you treat people with respect. No matter what the differences are, whether you agree politically with them, or religiously with them, or whatever, you still treat them. And in the educational world, you treat every kid the same with the same respect and everything. Now you understand differences they may have. You may be a little more sensitive to certain things that come up with them or may not 100 percent understand everything that goes on in their lives because you’re not that religious background or race or whatever, but you try. And you teach all your kids the same thing. Whatever novel we're reading in the class, whether it's a novel or social studies or science, whatever, they're always talking about gender and race and religion. Anyone can do these things, and how you treat others, and what we learn from it. And it still goes on today. But I do believe the media glamorizes and makes such a big deal about these things. And when I look at Second Step, I don't think they touch much. in all the ones I’ve done, like all of them, I can't recall there's one on gender or race or religion, you know, or sexual orientation. Because that, sexual orientation, to me, should not be taught in public schools period. That's like religion, you don't touch religion, and you don't -- what the hell do I care what someone does outside of school? You can have sex with whoever you want, whatever age you are. My job is to educate you on your body. And at this age, at 5th grade, is to educate the kids on they understand their body and know what could happen to them if they start to do some of the things that are more adult-oriented. The same with drugs and alcohol, like that. That's, what you do outside of this place is your choice. And I don't know why that has to come into play. Using the restroom and stuff, I understand that when you talk about transgender and stuff. That is an uncomfortable thing for some. And I think we should be respectful of everyone, not just the kids that say they’re being transgender, not say they are, but who have become transgender and accept that. But also understand there are kids that don't feel comfortable that way either, and
you shouldn't make those kids feel bad either of what they want to do. But I don't see really any of that in Second Step. Second Step really deals more just how do you deal with conflict. That's what I get, you know, and that's what I get mostly out of it. But I come from kind of a conservative side. There are just things I won't touch in the classroom, and I don't care if the district ever tells me to touch them. I'm not going to touch it. So I've done all these trainings on LBGT, and I've done the trainings on race and this and that. I think I do a good job of teaching about being respectful of others and not trying to single someone out and say, "Oh, this person is this and that." You know, so, no, I don't think they do much there. I think that's more just general conflict things.

Interviewer: Do you want to add anything else?

Male: And I don't know if they -- because I think what Second Step, some of the stuff seems more elementary. And I don't know if it all seems like to fit with adolescence because your hormones are changing. Your body is changing. All the things are going on in young adolescence. There's a lot there. And you don't always think straight, and that's why you do make mistakes. But it's about learning from your mistakes and not making a severe mistake. I mean, that's what I've learned. And maybe for some kids from watching these, they've tried these strategies and realized the kid is still picking on him. And the teacher is not doing anything about it, or the administration doesn't. They tell someone, and that person has a talking to, and that's it, and then it repeats again. So, you know, as I told my own kid, and I disagree with my wife, who is a teacher as well, and said, "If someone is teasing and bullying you, let an adult know. Next time they do it, and they're still bothering you, if you told an adult, you punch him right in the face. And if the principal has a problem with that, I'll tell the principal and the parent, 'Hey, they asked for help. It didn't stop by doing that. So you kind of get what you deserve.'" If my kid gets his ass beat, he
gets his ass beat too. But my kids also know you will be respectful to other adults and kids, or you'll deal with the consequences at home. That's probably more behavior but that's -- yeah, I think the songs are tacky. I actually have a little fun with the songs. Like we jam that thing pretty loud and start, you know, singing. I mean, I get the words. But like I said, the kids, you know, we kind of just joke about it a little bit. It's hard to take 100 percent serious. So that's my thoughts on Second Step.

Interviewer: Thanks.

Male: Yep.

[End of recording]

6th Grade Classroom Teacher Interview

Interviewer: So do you think the Second Step lesson that you taught was effective?

Female: I think it was. I mean, I think the way Second Step presents it is very kid friendly. So I think the video and the graphics that they use, and then also just the way of kind of explaining what happens when your brain receive a signal and all of that, like it's very easy to understand. So it's not super technical for them so I think they did get it. I think they were, you know, they were affected by it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students' social and emotional learning?

Female: It's hard to say because really I'd only give, I've only administered two of the lessons so I can't say that I'm 100 percent familiar with all of the lessons that they've been exposed to this year. I hear chatter about it every once in a while, but it's not something I hear about, you know, when we have conflicts in the classroom. You know, I had a student, who actually said like, who thought that it was only like my AS class that did it. You know, he was like, "Oh, I'm not in AS. I don't do Second Step." And I'm like, "Well, yeah, you do because you're doing it in all of your classes." And he claimed like he'd never had Second Step before. And I'm like, "I know that's not true." So I think some kids' perception of it is a little bit skewed as well. So maybe because it is kind of piecemeal among multiple classes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female: So, I do think some kids probably take it more to heart. Maybe not the ones that you want to take it to heart. So.

Interviewer: And what is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?
Female: I like it. I mean, I think the goal of it is great. I wish we had more time to be able to implement it. I mean, the lesson that I did, there really are two parts to it. And really, I think I probably could've spent, you know, two hours on it if I wanted to. There just isn't the time built in to be able to do it. But in terms of, is it teaching them good things? Absolutely. So I think it's just a matter of not having the time to implement it maybe as with integrity as it should be. So.

Interviewer: And do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students need when they’re faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? And just so you know, gender diversity issues—I know that you know—but LGBTQ, all those issues.

Female: Sure. Yeah, absolutely. I can't say for sure. Like I don't know that it specifically addresses like race and gender. Like thinking about the two lessons that I did, it didn't really involve those things. I mean, I would hope that if I was given a lesson like that and it didn't, like you would kind of, like I would build that in as needed. Again, like I hope that it is, but I don't know. You know, like I've seen instances this year where, you know, kids are making fun of like a name, like an ethnic name, you know, and like are laughing about it. You know, or I mean, you know that we've had instances in our team where gender issues have surfaced. So I mean, I don't know if there would be more of that without Second Step. So it's hard for me say like is that the cause, or is it just a correlation. So I don't know for sure. So.

Interviewer: Did you want to add anything?

Female: I mean, I feel like I said, you know, the whole, the fact that we don't, I feel, like have the time.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female: You know, I've seen it both ways where, you know, we used to have a Second Step schedule where like once a month we had an extended homeroom. And then, you know -- but then it was the same teacher doing that lesson, you know, or doing the curriculum. So I feel like it was maybe a little bit more consistent in terms of the messages. It's hard to say, having basically administered 25 percent of the lessons that are supposed to be administered this year, I don't know what the other teachers are, you know, implementing in their lessons. So it's a little bit hard to do it that way, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female: But I also see why it was done that way because it's hard to take that time out every month for gen ed. So, yeah.

Interviewer: Thanks.
7th Grade Classroom Teacher Interview

Interviewer: So, do you think the Second Step lesson that you taught was effective?

Female: I think that the lesson was effective in engaging the students in social-emotional learning. My current goal is to make the lessons fun and get kids talking. Students typically think of Second Step as pure drudgery, so I try to modify the lessons a bit to get them engaged. I don’t typically utilize formative and summative assessments to assess the lesson’s effectiveness. I think formal tests would exacerbate the divide between the curriculum and the students.

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning?

Female: I think Second Step is useful for starting a dialogue with our students about important issues that affect them. Some topics that it addresses, which are particularly useful to our students are: negotiating and compromising, disagreeing respectfully, working in groups, and coping with stress.

Interviewer: What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

Female: The scripted nature of it can be boring for our students. While ‘sticking to the script’ is often an important component of a research-based curriculum, I have observed that kids get more engaged when the lessons are enriched with outside sources and a bit off-script.

Interviewer: And do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students’ need when they’re faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? And just so you know, gender diversity issues—I know that you know—but LGBTQ, all those issues.

Female: No. Second Step does not address race and gender diversity issues specifically. It would be great to have more resources tied to these important issues.

Interviewer: Did you want to add anything?

Female: No.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Female: No problem.
8th Grade Classroom Teacher Interview

Interviewer: So, do you think the Second Step lesson that you taught was effective?

Female: Yes, the lesson provided students with critical facts on a topic that they will likely face soon (if not already). Kids were engaged and talking about days after.

Interviewer: Do you think the Second Step lessons have been impactful to your students’ social and emotional learning?

Female: I think Second Step lessons are not impactful to students. While the topics are relatable, the materials are not.

Interviewer: What is your overall professional opinion about the Second Step program?

Female: I have never been able to use a Second Step lesson the way that is presented in the materials. They are boring and too young. The approach is not appropriate for 8th graders. I do like the Home materials, I sent these home every topic; these were completed with an adult at home. They engage parents and kids in topic conversation.

Interviewer: And do you feel the Second Step program is addressing the social and emotional skills students’ need when they’re faced with race and gender diversity issues in this country? And just so you know, gender diversity issues—I know that you know—but LGBTQ, all those issues.

Female: No, I think the materials skip over the facts that face our current society. It takes too broad approach to issues of judgment and bullying.

Interviewer: Did you want to add anything?

Female: No.

Interviewer: Thanks.

Female: No problem.
APPENDIX E: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION NOTES

5th Grade Classroom Observation Notes

- Teacher had an active dialogue with students
- Most students engaged in the conversation
- Teacher had students turn to their partner and share consequences from the scenario with each other
- Students pair-shared with their partner
- Teacher brought class back together and several students shared
- Teacher gave feedback as students shared
- Teacher played the video that went with the lesson
- Students worked on individual handout where they wrote a problem they had and what they needed help with regarding the problem
- Teacher gave general examples of problems
- Teacher put class in groups so they could act out one person’s scenario
- Students moved to groups

Student feedback about Second Step to Teacher:
- More than half of the students have been taught Second Step lessons since Kindergarten
- Don’t like it because it’s all the same unit and it’s repetitive
- Don’t like it because it’s a waste of time because if you have common sense you know how to deal with these problems and it takes away from other things in PE, related arts classes, and world language classes
- Doesn’t think it does anything, it just says to talk to someone about different problems because the issues in Second Step aren’t relevant to them, thinks there should be more realistic topics that are relevant (i.e., drama between friends, gossip)

6th Grade Classroom Observation Notes

- Teacher had an active dialogue with students
- All students engaged in the conversation
- Students watched the video that went with this lesson
- Teacher shared that she liked that video and passed out the handout that goes with this lesson and told students to work on the handout and they could talk to each other
- Almost all of the students were silent and then they eventually started talking to each other about the information on the handout
- After watching the video a second time, the teacher went over the answers to the handout with the class
- The students shared their answers along with the teacher while she went over the answers
- Teacher discussed “fight or flight” with the class and gave an example that explained how people can fight without physically fighting; she described fighting through the emotion
- Teacher started going over the next section and shared a personal story about a fight or flight situation that she had to work through
- A student gave an example and two other students shared their examples
Students’ feedback about Second Step to Teacher:

• Don’t think it’s very helpful
• Sometimes like it and sometimes don’t but not during PE class because it interrupts the fun
• Sometimes she finds herself in situations where she will use some of the Second Step strategies
• Doesn’t think it is beneficial for her
• As he gets older, thinks it will be helpful
• Thinks it can help sometimes but doesn’t help everyone
• Doesn’t cover everything
• Feels like they are being taught the same lessons over and over since Kindergarten
• It can be beneficial and has used Second Step

7th Grade Classroom Observations Notes

• Teacher started with the “serenity now” clip from Seinfeld TV show that showed various stressful scenarios
• Teacher put a difficult situation scenario on the Smart Board and ultimately told students she was Girl B in the scenario
• Teacher told table groups to work with their table groups and come up with a positive response Girl B should have come up with
• Most of the students were talking to their table groups. Three students did not participate and two of them had their head down
• Teacher asked students for their group responses and three students shared an alternate response Girl B could have said
• Teacher asked students how they think Girl B felt and five students raised their hands and answered
• Teacher: “What do you do when you are in a difficult anxious situation; how does your body respond to stress”?
• Seven students gave responses
• Teacher gave students a handout with strategies they can use to calm down in the moment of stress to read and complete alone
• Students worked on answering mindfulness questions on their own and then teacher had them share their answers as she called on them randomly

![](Mindfulness.jpg)

• Teacher wrapped up lesson with discussing mindfulness and how important it is for middle school students to train their brains while they are young

8th Grade Classroom Observation Notes
• Students answered a couple of questions about an example they discussed in a previous lesson about a girl who used meth
• Teacher shared statistics about teen drinking
• When teacher asked questions, students answered
• A boy asked a question about drinking wine at church (he wanted to know if it was bad for them)
• Five different students read the five risks associated with underage drinking from the envelope the teacher gave to them when they walked in the classroom
• The teacher shared myths about drinking
• The teacher shared information about BAC (blood alcohol content) level and explained the stations they would go through
• Each station simulated varying levels of alcohol impairment
• Prior to starting the stations, the kids seemed really excited to participate in the stations
• Students had a lot of fun participating in the stations
• Teacher debriefed with students about activities
  o Several students said they thought it would be more difficult to perform the activities after wearing the impairment glasses
  o All of them said that walking the line was challenging

Student feedback about Second Step to Teacher:
• Didn’t think it was effective because the topics are scripted
• Isn’t hands on enough
• Don’t think the situations presented were realistic to their lives
• Didn’t think it helped at all
• Thought it was okay until 5th and 6th grade and then it got repetitive
• Fine in 5th grade but got repetitive in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades
• Wasn’t engaging
• Having it at younger ages is more effective
• It was fine until 4th or 5th grade