Impact of a School-based, Social-Emotional, and Character Development Program

Tara Urban, MAT
&
Kimberly Wilson, PhD, CCC-SLP
Professor
Program Chair MAT ECU & Reading Specialist Programs
Intervention Services & Leadership in Education (ISLE)
College of Applied Studies
Wichita State University
Kansas, USA

Abstract

Schools seem to be missing a crucial element to guide students to a future full of success, not only in academics but overall life courses. The present study examined the impacts of a pilot program, CruTime. The study used an interventional design to determine outcomes on social-emotional learning and character development. The researcher collected data from students and proposed that after fifteen lessons students would make statistically significant gains in Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationships, and Decision Making skills. It was also hypothesized that those in the younger grades (K-2nd) would make greater gains than those in the older grades (3rd-5th). First, descriptive statistics were reported for student scores on the pre- and posttest survey, by question. Items on the survey were combined to create composite variables and one sample t tests were computed, and independent samples t tests were computed to examine statistical differences in gains in the composite variables. As predicted, results from the one sample t test indicated that students scored higher in all composite variables at posttest administration than they did at pretest administration. Results indicated that there was no statically significant difference in gains made on Self-Awareness between those in primary and those in intermediate grades. However, results indicated that students in the primary group outgained those in the intermediate group in the remaining composite variables. The results indicate a social-emotional and character development program would benefit all students. Further research is needed to determine how future lessons could be used for effective, long lasting social-emotional and character development.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning, Character Development, Elementary School, School-Wide Approach, Leader in Me

Cru Time: A School-based, Social-Emotional and Character Development

A recent trend has been on the rise with students entering elementary school lacking the basic social skills needed to benefit from academic instruction (Marquez et al., 2014). For decades, schools have been pressured to push academics, common core, and standardized testing in order to make students successful (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). However, academics may not necessarily be the only component for students' future success (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Schools seem to be missing a crucial element to guide students to a future full of success, not only in academics but overall life courses. What could possibly be the missing element? Research has provided growing evidence that social-emotional learning and character development could potentially be the missing piece.

Although the term social and emotional learning is nothing new, an overwhelming outpouring of interest from parents, educators, and policymakers has brought it to the forefront again (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Social-Emotional Learning

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as a process of learning and effectively implementing knowledge and strategies to understand and manage emotions, showing empathy towards others, maintaining positive, healthy relationships, and negotiating conflicts (CASEL, 2016, Raimundo, Marques-Pinto, Lima, 2013, Zins& Elias, 2007).SEL also includes the mental capacity to set and achieve goals, make responsible decisions, resist inappropriate pressures, and not only communicate clearly, but listen (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Although SEL encompasses many aspects, the framework can be broken down into five competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship skills, Social-Awareness, and Decision Making (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Self-Awareness is the ability to identify and recognize emotions and strengths in self and others and also understand that one's own thoughts, emotions and values influence behaviors. Individuals who have Self-Awareness have a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence (CASEL, 2016, Oberle, et al., 2016, Zins & Elias, 2007). Self-Management incorporates one's ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in a variety of different contexts (CASEL, 2016). Self-management also requires one to control impulses, have self-discipline, manage stress, be self-motivated, and work towards reaching previously established goals (CASEL, 2016 & Oberle, et al., 2016). Relationship skills comprise of strategies that help build and maintain authentic, positive, healthy relationships with a diverse group of individuals. Other strategies include social engagement, effective communication and listening skills, cooperation, resistance toward inappropriate social pressures, negotiation during conflicts, and knowledge of when to seek help (CASEL, 2016, Oberle, et al, 2016, Zins & Elias,2007).Social-Awareness encompasses one's ability to take the perspective and empathize with others (Zins & Elias, 2007). There is also an underlying acceptance for diversity and respect for social and ethical norms of others' background and culture (CASEL, 2016 & Oberle, et al., 2016). Decision Making embraces the ability to identify problems, analyze situations, solve problems, evaluate consequences for various actions, and make choices (CASEL, 2016). Decision Making also allows for consideration of well-being for self and others (CASEL, 2016 & Oberle, et al., 2016).

Research has shown that SEL and character development can be taught and nurtured in schools in a manner in which students learn to integrate thinking, emotions, and behaviors in a positive manner (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).Supporting students' SEL and character development skills reduce behaviors that interfere with the capabilities to learn (Diperna, Lei, Bellinger, & Cheng, 2016). Not only do social skills benefit students in the classroom setting, but establish a foundation for future success in life achievements such as college entry and completion, job placement, and future earnings (Jones & Doolittle, 2017 &Marquez, et al., 2014).

A Title I school in a suburban Mid-Western town has begun to see the same trend of students entering elementary school without the necessary social skills to deal with transitions, peer interactions, and the mental focus needed to learn. Educators are concerned about how they will address students' SEL and character development needs without sacrificing time spent on core academics (Oberle, et al., 2016). The current aim of this study is to fill in the gaps for SEL and character development with students enrolled at a K-5 elementary school. Forty to sixty percent of youth, by the time they enter high school, are chronically disengaged, leading to the conclusion that more than just academics needs to be addressed (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017). Research has shown that skills related to SEL and character development affect how students learn, establish relationships, and approach life's challenges (Zins, & Elias, 2007).

The Cru Time program was designed to meet the increasing need for teaching SEL and character development through the implementation of 15 structured lessons. The researcher wanted to focus on two key factors when conducting the pilot Cru Time program. First, research shows that all students might benefit from structured social–emotional instruction (Zins, & Elias, 2007). Second, the researcher noticed that there is little to no literature reflecting on individual differences in how social-emotional instruction benefits students across grade levels. In order to address the issue, five underlying questions were proposed in regards to social emotional-learning and character development. Does Cru Time influence a student's self-awareness? Does Cru Time influence a student's self-management? Does Cru Time influence a student's social-awareness? Does Cru Time

influence a student's relationship skills? Does Cru Time influence a student's responsible decision-making? The global hypotheses are that here will be statistically significant improvements in all composite variables after the implementation of Cru Time, and that those in the younger grades (K-2nd) would make greater gains than those in the older grades (3rd-5th).

Literature Review

Substantial attention in today's culture has been the forced concentration on academics. With this pinpoint focus, teachers have noticed that students are not always prepared to deal with some of the important day to day activities (Greenberg, et al, 2017).Despite the surmounting evidence that SELand character development is fundamental to academic achievement and later success, policymakers and stakeholders have skepticism about how and if SEL should be taught in schools (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Some hold the belief that schools should solely focus on teaching academics and hold parents responsible for teaching social-emotional skills and character development (Elias, 2009). Others disagree on who benefits from social-emotional and character development training. Although there is controversy, everyone tends to agree that social-emotional skills, academics, and the growth of specific developmental domains are not separate but are interrelated (Jones & Doolittle, 2017&Oberle, et al., 2016).

Social-Emotional Learning& Character Development

As previously defined, SEL is a process of learning and effectively implementing knowledge and strategies to understand and manage emotions, maintain positive relationships, set and achieve goals, make responsible decisions, and negotiate conflicts (CASEL, 2016, Jones & Doolittle, 2017, Raimundo, et al., 2013 & Zins& Elias, 2007). SEL and character development are an important frameworks for promoting positive development in students and potentially counteracting many of the hardships students are increasingly encountering (Oberle, et al., 2016).SEL holds a strong belief that it can be taught, acquired, and practiced in supportive environments with mutual respect and caring attitudes (Oberle, et al., 2016 & Zins & Elias, 2006). SEL has been linked to academic learning and performance and many other positive outcomes for students (Elias, 2009). Since SEL and character development are grounded in relational, social, and emotional skills, it makes perfect sense to implement practices into school curriculum (Elias, 2009). In fact, SEL meets many of the standards outlined in preventive and character-building mandates set for schools (Elias, 2009).

School-Wide Approach

Studies have suggested a school-wide approach to SEL and character development. A school-wide approach views the school as a community unit working cohesively to implement SEL in multiple contexts throughout daily interactions (Oberle, et al., 2016). For a successful school-wide approach, there needs to be a supportive environment with collaboration from all staff, teachers, administration, families and children (Oberle, et al., 2016).

Schools have a vital role in promoting the growth and development of children and preparing them for the future (Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, &Gravesteijn, 2012). Since the 1990's, there has been a significant cultural shift and children's life conditions have dramatically changed (Greenberg, et al., 2017). Students are constantly facing situations and challenges that can negatively affect the development of social-emotional and academic skills (Zins, & Elias, 2007).Students are bombarded with adult issues and agendas, media influences, greater social and economic pressures, and access to information from various technologies (Elias, 2009 & Greenberg, et al.,2017).

The public school system was not initially founded to teach academic skills (Greenberg, et al.,2017).In fact, founders established the public school system to produce students who could be competent citizens and critical thinkers that would work well with others to create positive impacts on society (Greenberg, et al.,2017).Recently there seems to be a missing piece to American education policies; a lack of connection being made between students' academic ability and social-emotional and character development, and how the relationship could possibly be combined for future successes (Elias, 2009). Ongoing research is showing that in order to keep students up to par with societal changes, students need more than just academia but an approach that encompasses both academics and SEL (Greenberg, et al.,2017 & Sklad et al., 2012).

More and more schools are being identified as the ideal setting for incorporating social-emotional learning and character development programs for a variety of reasons (Oberle, et al., 2016). For one, students spend a

significant portion of their day, and essentially their life, in a classroom setting (Greenberg, et al., 2017). Next, research has indicated that SEL and character development can be taught. A school based SEL and character development program can provide students the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to excel socially and academically. A school-based approach can help students learn how to develop and obtain goals, learn to understand and cooperate with others, manage emotions, and deal with everyday challenges and conflicts (Greenberg, et al., 2017).

Leader in Me

Over several years, a variety of social-emotional and character development programs have been piloted in schools and incorporated into classroom instruction (Sklad et al., 2012).A universal school wide social-emotional and character development program that has earned significant recognition lately is The Leader in Me. The Leader in Me was created by Franklin Covey, and based upon Dr. Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014). The popular universal program has been used in K-12 schools worldwide (Cummins, 2015). The Leader in Me program came to fruition in 1999 when A.B. Combs Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina was struggling with enrollment and maintaining magnet status. A. B. Combs knew that something needed to change to attract more students and point students in a more successful direction (Covey et al., 2014).

The belief that schools are going to solve problems with the same exact model of thinking that created the problems is only going to perpetuate the cycle (Covey, et al., 2014). The Leader in Me program challenges the model of thinking and offers a fresh approach to school involvement, student empowerment, and life skills (Cummins, 2015).The mindset of fixing what is wrong with students needs to change to identifying and amplifying strengths, virtues, positive traits, and the idea that all students can be leaders. (Covey, et al., 2014& Cummins, 2015).

Every school that has chosen to implement The Leader in me program looks a little bit different but all agree that no two children are alike. (Covey, et al., 2014). The program tries to meet three challenges while teaching 21st-century skills that will enable students to reach their fullest potential in academics as well as in life (Cummins, 2015 & Dethlefs, Green, Molapo, Opsal, Diehl Yang, 2017).Students' families as well as business leaders have identified fundamental skills that students should have for future societal changes. Some of the fundamental skills include knowing and managing one's emotions, listening and communication skills, teamwork, managing conflicts, seeking and giving help, and making decisions (Elias, 2009). In the book, *Leader in Me,* the authors also identified skills that are needed for future success such as honesty, integrity, self-motivation, analytical skills, problem-solving, empathy, and accepting responsibility (Covey, et al., 2014).

The Leader in Me outlines three predominant challenges that schools must face: academics, culture, and life skills (Covey, et al., 2014& Cummins, 2015). However, schools tend to focus on academics while neglecting the other two challenges. The Leader in Me takes the perspective that the three challenges are not independent of each other, but rather an interrelated network working together (Covey, et al., 2014).

Habits and skills can be taught and embedded in the school curriculum, traditions, cultures, and systems that fall outside of the walls of school (Covey, et al., 2014). Through the daily use of these habits, students gain critical life and leadership skills that will help them to be more productive in academics and create a positive school culture (Covey, et al., 2014& Cummins, 2015). Students will begin to see that the habits and skills are more than just another subject to learn but also part of their everyday lives (Covey, et al., 2014). Ultimately teaching the habits and skills lead students to share what they have learned with family and community members (Covey, et al., 2014).

Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning and Character Development

Over the last two decades several studies have been conducted on social-emotional and character development programs. Many of the studies have generally yielded a number of positive outcomes (Sklad, et al., 2012).When programs focus on social-emotional and cognitive processes and allow for opportunities to practice, several positive outcomes begin to emergeespecially in social-emotional competencies (Bierman et al., 2010 &Lewis et al., 2016).

Research has revealed that as students become proficient at using social-emotional skills they are better equipped to negotiate social pressures, stress, and change (Catalano, et al., 2003). Students first begin to recognize and understand emotions as they relate to self and others (Oberle, et al., 2016&Sklad et al., 2012).Once students have an understanding of emotions, researchers have found a correlation of increased positive self-image, self-esteem, and a sense of self-efficacy (Sklad et al., 2012).

Positive outcomes are not just limited to oneself but also to peer relationships. McClure, Chinsky, & Larcen, (1978) presented evidence that students who participated in social training programshad improved social adjustment. When students engage in appropriate behaviors, they tend to have more positive peer relationships (Marquez, et al., 2014). Students who can competently recognize and manage emotions, are capable of also effectively communicating with others (Oberle, et al., 2016). Positive peer-related social skills delay the onset of unhealthy behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse (Marquez, et al., 2014).Many studies have even shown a reduction in aggressive behaviors, classroom disruptions, lower rates of conduct problems, and fewer hostile negotiations (Zins & Elias, 2007). Social-emotional learning and character development also promotesprosocial problem solving, and cooperation (Sklad et al., 2012).

Listening, staying on task, and following directions are key to succeeding in the classroom (Marquez, et al., 2014).Social-emotional learning has been able to improve student academicachievement in a variety of areas such as math, language arts, and social study skills(Zins, & Elias, 2007). Students are better at setting and working towards academic goals, problem-solving and non-verbal reasoning. Overtime, improvements in standardized test scores have been witnessed (Oberle, et al., 2016, Sklad et al., 2012& Zins& Elias, 2007).

Schools that have been able to integrate social-emotional learning programs have seen several desirable outcomes school-wide (Sklad et al., 2012). Oberle, et al. (2016) found that students who were socially and emotionally competent were better integrated into the school culture and able to focus than students who exhibited difficulties with social and emotional skills. Overall, students have reported more positive attitudes towards school and feel a better sense of community (Sklad, et al., 2012). Teachers have expressed an increase in student engagement and participation, greater trust and respect being shown by students, and an increase understanding of consequences (Sklad et al., 2012, Zins, & Elias, 2007). Studies have also affirmed a decline in student absences and fewer referrals and suspensions (Zins& Elias, 2007).

Finally, research has also found indirect effects of implementing social-emotional programs. The indirect outcomes are typically smaller than social-emotional competencies but worth noting. Analyses have pointed to significant reduction in emotional distress, conduct problems, and decrease of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Sklad et al., 2012). The indirect outcomes also carry over into adolescence and adulthood with lower rates of drug abuse, felony charges, and sexual activity (Catalano, et al., 2003).

Social-Emotional Learning in Action

Just as no two children are alike, no two social-emotional learning and character development programs are the same (Sklad, et al., 2012). The scope of implementation and delivery to teach students skills can be categorized in three specific ways: direct instruction, integrated instruction, and modeling (Covey, et al., 2014& Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Integrated instruction happens when educators apply social information into a variety of contexts such as through reading literature orincidents on the playgroundor during lunch (Diperna, et al., 2016 & Zins and Elias, 2007).During direct instruction, educators teach a specific curriculum such as *The Leader in Me,* or a concept like responsibility (Covey, et al., 2014). Direct and integrated lessons are important, but so is modeling. Modeling involves portraying the skills and behaviors educators expect the students to obtain (Covey, et al., 2014). No matter the method schools choose to use for implementing SEL and character development, reviews of effective programs suggest that content and method of delivery needs to be developmentally appropriate and addresses multiple factors to promote positive behavior(Catalano, et al., 2003 & Jones &Doolittle, 2017). Students should be actively engaged in the learning process and have the opportunity to practice and evaluate the skills they are learning (Zins & Elias, 2007).

Methods

This study used an interventional design to assess the impacts of the Cru Time program on Kindergarten through 5th grade students at a Title I school in a suburban Mid-Western town. The interventional design allowed the researcher to evaluate changes that could be correlated to participating in Cru Time. The researcher taught15

lessons over the course of the 2018-2019 school year. A Likert scale pre-and-post-survey was used to measure SEL and character development at two different points in time. A t-test analysis was used to determine potential outcomes across the board, as well as grade level differences.

Participants

The researcher collected data from students enrolled at an elementary school. The elementary school was a Title I public school located in a suburban Mid-Western town. The school population was predominantly made up of middle-class socioeconomic families. Approximately 35% of the students received free or reduced lunches.

The elementary schoolhouses three sections of Kindergarten to 5th grade students and 2 Prekindergarten classrooms. PreK students did not participants during the pilot study due to scheduling conflicts. N=390 students (192 male and 198 females) partook in the Cru Time program. The student population is 86.8% White, 4.8% Hispanic, and 3.9% African American.

Materials

Cru Time was a new program being implemented during the 2018-2019 school year. Administration and staff believed it was crucial to implement a program that would teach students skills that would make them more successful in the academic environment, as well as, outside of school. The Cru Time program was focused on teaching students social-emotional learning skills and developing positive character traits. The Cru Time program used many of the same ideas outlined in the Leader in Me and 7 Habits of Happy Kids.

The principal for the elementary school gave consent to the researcher to conduct the pilot program during the 2018-2019 school year. The researcher provided the principal with the Cru Time Survey and weekly lesson plans. After reviewing the materials, the principal signed a letter of support and it was sent in with the IRB application. All data collected from the students was kept confidential, and no defining information about students was included in the final written report.

A 6-point Likert scale survey was assigned to each student prior to Cru Time implementation and again at the conclusion of the program. An exact copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B. The survey was adapted from the Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM), The Leader in Me 4.0 Survey, and Center for Educational Transformation (Covey, 2018, Dethlefs, et al., 2017 &Squires, 2014). The Likert scale survey asked students to rate statements from strongly disagree to strongly agree with corresponding faces. Some of the survey statements included: "If I make a bad choice, I quickly blame someone else for my actions," "When I get into an argument with a friend, I solve the problem in a way that will make both of us feel good, and "I understand that my actions can have positive or negative consequences."

The Cru Time program also included fifteen structured lesson plans focused on teaching students the fundamentals of social-emotional skills and character development. Included in Appendix A is a table that gives an overview and description of each lesson that was conducted during Cru Time Implementation. The main topics that were discussed during lessons were being proactive and responsible, making good decisions, and setting and achieve in goals. Students also were taught strategies for focusing on priorities, showing fairness, compassion, and kindness to others, and working towards the greater good.

Procedure

The program was offered fifteen structured lessons to all students from Kindergarten through 5th grade. Students participated in the program on Thursdays and Fridays for approximately 25 minutes. Grade levels were on a rotating schedule to ensure that each class participated in at least three Cru Time lessons per month.

During the first two weeks of school, students completed the Cru Time survey to rate his/her current level of social-emotional learning and character development. The initial survey served as the baseline for the Cru Time Program. Prior to the start of the survey the research explained the directions to all of the students. A brief description of how the marking process should be completed was given, and definitions of possible choices were provided.

Students in Kindergarten and first grade were placed into groups of five with either the researcher or a paraeducator. The researcher or par educators read the survey aloud to avoid discrepancies in reading ability.

Students were provided a page marker to help keep track of which statement was currently being read. Students then marked the face that corresponded to their feelings about each statement. Faces depicted a range of strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Students in 3rd grade through 5th grade were given an identical survey, but were allowed to read and fill it out on their own. The researcher also read each statement to avoid discrepancies in reading ability. All responses to the initial survey were kept confidential and no defining student information was revealed to anyone other than the researcher. The results from the first survey attempt were stored for future analysis.

After the completion of the survey, the researcher began administering lessons to all Kindergarten through 5th grade students. Students participated in at least three Cru Time lessons a month which began in early September and concluded in mid-March. Lessons were categorized by an overlying theme related to the 7 Habits, SELand character development. The researcher taught the lessons using mixed method approaches; researcher direct teaching, group discussions, demonstrations, hands-on activities, and role-playing. Students participated in the program on Thursdays and Fridays for approximately 25 minutes on a rotating schedule. At the conclusion of the Cru Time program in March, all participants completed the Cru Time Survey once again. The pre-survey and post-surveys were then compared and analyzed in relation to the research questions.

Data Collection

The researcher provided each student participating in the Cru Time program the same pre-survey, fifteen structured lessons, and a post-survey. Prior to the implementation of the CruTime program, participants were given a survey to rate their current level of social-emotional learning and character development. Following the completion of the CruTime program, participants were given the same survey to assess potential impacts. The survey used was a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data was organized by overall impacts, gender differences, and grade level. Appendix C includes a table that corresponds a research questions to survey statements.

Results

Entire Sample Results

To examine the impact Cru Time had on social emotional and leadership skills, several analyses were conducted. First, descriptive statistics are reported for student scores on the pre- and posttest survey, by question. Aggregate data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Entire Sample

Variable	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Q1	3.4	1.5	3.5	1.5
Q2	3.5	1.4	3.8	1.4
Q3	4.1	1.2	4.1	1.2
Q4	3.7	1.1	3.8	1.3
Q5	3.9	1.3	4	1.3
Q6	3.8	1.3	3.9	1.3
Q7	4.1	1.4	4.4	1.2
Q8	3.9	1.2	4.1	1.3
Q9	4	1.2	4.1	1.2
Q10	3.9	1.3	3.9	1.4
Q11	4.1	1.1	4.2	1.3
Q12	3.8	1.2	3.9	1.4
Q13	4.2	1.1	4.3	1.2
Q14	4	1.3	4.2	1.3

Q15	3.1	1.5	3.3	1.5
Q16	2.8	1.5	3	1.6
Q17	3.7	1.4	3.8	1.5
Q18	4.4	1.1	0.5	1.3
Q19	3.8	1.4	3.8	1.5
Q20	4.1	1.1	4.4	1.1

Note. N=451

Next, composite variables were computed due to conceptual appropriateness. Items on the survey were combined to create the following composite variables: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationships, Decision Making. Descriptive statistics for the aggregated sample are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Composite Variable

Variable	Pre-Test Mean	SD	Post Test Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	14.7	3.2	15.5	3.8
Self-Management	14.0	3.3	14.5	3.7
Social-Awareness	16.3	3.2	16.9	3.6
Relationships	16.1	3.3	16.3	3.7
Decision Making	15.3	3.3	15.6	3.7

Note. See Appendix C for alignment of survey items to composite variables.

To determine if the intervention of Cru Time statistically improved social emotional skills and leadership skills in children, one sample t tests were computed for each composite variable. As predicted, results from the one sample t test indicated that students scored higher on Self Awareness at posttest administration than they did at pretest administration (M=15.5 SD=3.8, $t(402) = 82.4$, $p<.001$). As predicted, results from the one sample t test indicated that students scored higher on Self-Management at posttest administration than they did at pretest administration (M=14.5, SD=3.7, $t(402) = 78.8$, $p<.001$). As predicted, results from the one sample t test indicated that students scored higher on Social Awareness at posttest administration than they did at pretest administration (M=16.9, SD=3.6, $t(402) = 94.6$, $p<.001$). As predicted, results from the one sample t test indicated that students scored higher on Relationships at posttest administration than they did at pretest administration (M=16.3, SD=3.7, $t(402) = 87.8$, $p<.001$). Finally, as predicted, results from the one sample t test indicated that students scored higher on Decision Making at posttest administration than they did at pretest administration (M=15.6, 3.7 SD=3.6, $t(402) = 90.3$, $p<.001$).

Grade Level Results

To explore the notion that there may be grade level differences in the impact the intervention has on children's social emotional and leadership skills, data were disaggregated by grade level. Table 3 provides an overview of the frequency distribution of students by grade level.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution by Grade level

Grade level	N	Frequency (%)
K	59	15.1
1	66	16.9
2	57	14.6
3	67	17.2
4	69	17.7
5	72	18.5

Next, descriptive statistics for pretest data by each grade level are reported in Table 4. Descriptive statistics for post-test data by each grade level are reported in Table 5.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics: Pretest Data by Grade Level

Variable	KPretest Mean	SD	1st Pretest Mean	SD	2nd Pretest Mean	SD	3rd Pretest Mean	SD	4th Pretest Mean	SD	5th Pretest Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	12.8	2.3	13.8	3.4	15.7	2.8	14.6	3.3	15	3.4	16.2	2.8
Self-Management	11.7	2.9	12.8	3.6	14.7	3.2	14.5	3.2	14.9	3.1	15.4	2.6
Social-Awareness	13.8	3	14.4	3.7	16.9	2.7	17.1	2.6	17.4	2.6	17.5	2.2
Relationships	13.8	2.7	15.5	3.5	17.4	2.2	17	3.2	15.7	4	17.1	2.5
Decision Making	12.3	2.6	14.4	3.6	16.3	2.8	16.4	2.8	15.1	3.3	16.7	2.2

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics: PostTest Data by Grade Level

Variable	KPosttest Mean	SD	1st Posttest Mean	SD	2nd Posttest Mean	SD	3rd Posttest Mean	SD	4th Posttest Mean	SD	5th Posttest Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	14	5	14.9	4	16.8	3.1	15.8	3.8	15.4	2.8	16.1	3.2
Self-Management	12.9	4.7	14.1	4	15.1	3.3	15	3.4	14.9	2.9	15	3.4
Social-Awareness	15.6	4.9	16.2	4.7	17.4	2.7	17.4	3.2	17.4	2.1	17.5	3
Relationships	15.9	5.2	16.7	4.6	16.9	2.8	16.1	3.7	16.1	2.5	16	3.2
Decision Making	14.6	4.9	15.5	4.6	16.4	3.4	16.1	3.6	15.3	2.8	15.8	2.9

Next, to examine gains made by each grade level, gain scores were computed. This is a score that accounts for the growth in a child's score from pre to post-test. Descriptive statistics for gains made, by grade level, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics: Gain Scores by Grade Level

Variable	K Gain	SD	1st Gain	SD	2nd Gain	SD	3rd Gain	SD	4th Gain	SD	5th Gain	SD
Self-Awareness	1.4	5.1	1	5.3	1.5	3.6	1.3	4.8	0.2	3.4	-0.2	4
Self-Management	1.2	5.2	1.3	4.8	0.8	3.6	0.6	4	0.1	3.1	-0.3	3.5
Social-Awareness	1.9	5.6	2	5.5	0.8	2.9	0.3	3.9	0.01	2.4	-0.1	3.4
Relationships	2.3	5.6	1.3	5.3	-0.3	2.9	-0.5	3.4	0.4	4	-1.1	3.5
Decision Making	2.7	5.2	1.3	5.5	0.4	3.4	-0.2	3.7	0.3	3.4	-0.1	3.5

To examine differences in gains made by grade levels, it was hypothesized that those in the younger grades (K-2nd) would make greater gains than those in the older grades (3rd-5th). Students were coded as being in primary (1) or intermediate (0) and a series of independent samples t tests were computed to examine statistical differences in gains in the composite variables. Results from the t test indicated that there was no statically significant difference in gains made on Self-Awareness between those in primary and those in intermediate grades. Results from the t test indicated that students in the primary group outgained those in the intermediate group in Self-Management (M=1.1, SD=4.6, $t(372) = 2.4$, p<.01). Results from the t test indicated that students in the primary group outgained those in the intermediate group in Social Awareness (M=1.6, SD=4.9, $t(372) = 3.5$, p<.01).Results from the t test indicated that students in the primary group outgained those in the intermediate group in Relationships (M=1.1, SD=4.8, $t(372) = 3.4$, p<.01). Finally, results from the t test indicated that students in the primary group outgained those in the intermediate group in Decision Making (M=1.5, SD=4.9, $t(372) = 3.9$, p<.01).

Discussion

The Cru Time program was designed to meet the increasing need for teaching SEL and character development through the implementation of fifteen structured lessons. There were two hypotheses that the researcher focused on. First, there would be statistically significant improvements in all composite variables after the implementation of Cru Time. Second, those in the primary grades (K-2nd) would make greater gains than those in the intermediate grades (3rd-5th). To determine if the intervention of Cru Time statistically improved social emotional skills and leadership skills in children, the researcher identified five composite variables.

After analyzing Cru Time results, the interventional design provided evidence that this frame work promoted positive social-emotional and character development in students. As predicted, statistically significant main effects were found within the entire sample. Results indicated that students scored higher on Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationships, and Decision Making at posttest than they did at pretest administration. Significant main effects were also evident in grade level analysis in which the primary grades out gained those in the intermediate group in all composite variables except for Self-Awareness.

Overall, the results of this research are in accordance with previous studies. Cru Time focused on social-emotional and cognitive processes and allowed a means for students to practice the emerging skills (Bierman et al., 2010 &Lewis et al., 2016). As the students became more proficient from pre-test to post-test,the students were better equipped to understand and manage their emotions as they related to themselves and others (Catalano, et al., 2003). Students also made significant gains in setting and achieving academic goals and problem-solving (Oberle, et al., 2016, Sklad et al., 2012, Zins & Elias, 2007).Students showcased their understanding and abilities when multiple grade levels organized, discussed, created, and implemented a project to benefit the school culture through a student led fundraising event. The lack of statistical differences in Self-Awarenesscould possibly be attributed to the fact that students in elementary schools are still in a state of constant redefining of who they are. Students also rely heavily on others to either validate or invalidate their expressed emotions.

Limitations of the Study

The results from the initial pilot study must be interpreted against a number of limitations. First, the number of units for this analysis was limited to students enrolled at one particular school which limits the generalizability of the outcomes. Normally, larger sample sizes are needed to ensure that generalizations can be transferred to other populations.

Second, the researcher used self-reported surveys prior to and after the implementation of the program to collect data. Self-reported data is limited by the fact that it cannot always be verified and that it has to be taken at face value. Students at this particular age often have difficulty in assigning internal and external attributions to themselves which could produce inconclusive results on the gains the students made. Another limitation to self-reporting is the students were aware they were participating in a research project. There is a potential for responses to statements to be exaggerated or over inflated because of their notion of participation in research.

Third, the researcher was unable to control for the influence of any extraneous variables that might have an effect on the dependent variables. Students' progress could be influenced by their own maturation and history between pre-and-post survey times. Students' improvements could have occurred regardless of the intervention. Other external factors such as peer influence, adult interactions, education, and culture could also be attributed to the differences. Finally, due to the limited duration of the study, the researcher was unable to account for long-term benefits of the Cru Time program. The time available for research and data collection was constrained by the deadline of the project.

Ideas for Future Research

The initial aim of this research was to identify statistically significant improvements in five composite variables and the gains made between students in the primary grades (K-2nd) and students in the intermediate grades (3rd-5th). While recognizing the limitations of the analysis, there are implications for additional research. In a future study, the researcher would like to understand the lasting impacts of Cru Time. Does Cru Time still provide statistically significant results three months after implementation? In addition to the lasting impacts, it is recommended that a longitudinal design be used tounderstand the impact of Cru Time overall elementary years. Does Cru Time decrease the number of office referrals? Does Cru Time decrease the number of behavior referrals

for Individualized Education Plans? And finally, Does Cru Time improve students' academic achievement on standardized testing?

Practical Implications

Although the term SEL is nothing new, an increased interest from parents, educators, and policymakers has shined a light on it again (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Key stakeholders are beginning to recognize that students need more than academics to be successful outside of the school setting. Students enter the school system with diverse backgrounds and experiences, and SEL could be an important implication in keeping students from falling through the cracks. The results from the Cru Time program and previous literature support the idea that teaching social-emotional skills positively impact the lives of students. Even though the Cru Time program was a small study in the grand scheme of research, 390 students reported an increase in their ability to manage emotions, understand emotions in themselves and others, form positive peer relationships, effectively problem-solve conflicts, and set goals.

The data from this research could be presented to district stakeholders to gain support for further development of the program. With the support of stakeholders, several other practical implications can occur. Stakeholders can begin to secure community partnerships and learn what employers and colleges are specifically looking for in graduates and future employees. The information gained from partnerships and buy-in could lay the groundwork for cohesive SEL practices in all three elementary schools within the current district. In addition, a school-wide approach could be implemented in which all staff are trained and use a universal language when teaching and supporting SEL and character development.

The present study adds to the growing literature surrounding SEL and character development programs. The Cru Time program provided evidence that SEL and character development can be taught, acquired, and learned in fifteen, twenty-five minute lessons. However, additional research is needed on how Cru Time impacts SEL and character development over students' elementary years. It is also recommended that further research is done on the lasting impacts of Cru Time.

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