

**AN EVALUATION OF PERCEPTIONS, APPLICATION, AND OUTCOMES OF
SECOND STEP IN A SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

Successful social and emotional learning (SEL) programs have established methods with teacher and peer support that improve prosocial behavior. Research has shown intervention programs that incorporate these skills reduce antisocial behaviors, but implementation in schools may vary and therefore affect outcomes. The purpose of this non-experimental program evaluation study was to understand the perceptions of implementation, impact, acceptability, and effects of Second Step within a suburban elementary classroom in the northeastern United States. The participants were teachers in a suburban elementary school near a large northeastern US city. A questionnaire, observations, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data (e.g., Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) testing) were used to answer the research questions.

Participants reported perceptions that Second Step had positive effects on academic performance. PSSA data showed that student academic performance appeared to be minimally affected or unaffected by Second Step. Results from the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group suggest teachers believed Second Step improved student behavior. However, the school did not collect behavioral data (e.g., suspensions, referrals, detentions, etc.) prior to or after Second Step adoption. Limited training and other factors may explain why reported fidelity to the curriculum appeared inconsistent with observational measures. Participant bias may have also influenced interview and focus group data.

Despite limitations, schools that adopt Second Step should rely on evaluations to determine whether intended impacts are realized. Also, Second Step and other SEL

curriculum researchers should consider providing guidance about implementation, assessment, and cost-benefit analysis. Researchers could investigate systematic changes to lesson content and delivery in ways that allow teachers to adapt or modify instruction without compromising curricular effects.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Students' overall development is important to both schools and teachers. Parents, educators, and students need to be sensitive to and analyze children's mental, emotional, physical, and social needs. These needs are equally important as academic ones, and can be detrimental to both the educational process, and to the child's potential for success (Professional Development Service for Teachers [PDST], 2013). School programs are part of the foundation behind the development of students. Successful prosocial intervention programs have demonstrated that a system approach with teachers and peer support significantly alleviates antisocial behaviors (Stanbury, Bruce, Jain, & Stellern, 2009, p. 4). Intervention programs are needed to prevent undesirable behaviors and the effects they have on students. Second Step is one intervention program that is research-based, teacher-informed, and classroom-tested to promote social-emotional development, safety, and well-being (Committee for Children, 2021). Second Step is a social and emotional learning (SEL) program that is designed to promote prosocial behaviors while reducing antisocial behaviors by teaching students' emotional concepts and behaviors.

SEL programs are designed to help students learn life skills about others, learn about relationships as well as recognizing and managing emotions. These skills are important for a positive classroom community and classroom experience. When implemented with a coordinated, community-wide approach, SEL can build stronger communities and support inclusive, equitable learning (Committee for Children, 2021). SEL is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible

decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively (Moy & Hazen, 2018, p. 19). Goals of SEL instruction typically entails self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making which are all interrelated to cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies (Durlak, et. al, 2011). Some SEL curricula like Second Step also include assessments teachers can use to determine whether students learned the specific skills. These knowledge assessments help teachers and school administrators determine students' skill progress in acquiring social-emotional concepts being taught in Second Step.

Empathy, Prosocial Skills, Cognitive Development, and Behavior

Teaching prosocial skills and empathy can help students understand another's point of view and their feelings in different situations. There is increasing evidence that social-emotional skills in conjunction with cognitive skills facilitate school success (Low, et. al, 2015). Prosocial behavior is a voluntary action that is intended to help another individual or a group (Dar, 2015). Empathy is an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition and that is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation (Dar, 2015). Empathy is the capacity to share the emotional state of another.

A connection between prosocial behavior and empathy is established in various studies. In 2016, Dar conducted a case study that was significant in terms of raising the importance of prosocial skill awareness and empathetic awareness in education in schools which could prepare helpful and caring individuals for society. Empathy predicts altruistic behaviors and elementary students' prosocial classroom behaviors (Frey et. al, 1997). Research has consistently linked social-emotional skills to important educational

and life outcomes (Low, et. al, 2015). Since empathy has been found to negatively correlate with aggression and aggressive children have difficulty with perspectives and emotions, schools that implement Second Step may encourage a caring environment.

Good cognitive skills like problem solving depend on the development of social and emotional skills. Students who lack social-emotional competencies become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to middle and high school, and this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, behavior, and health (Durlak, et. al, 2011). Durlak et. al (2011) found SEL significantly improved student social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance.

Prosocial intervention programs prevent undesirable behaviors and the effects it has on all involved, while promoting students' SEL. Research shows that social and emotional skills can be taught and, more importantly, that acquisition of core social and emotional competencies reduces aggressive behavior in youth (Frey et. al, 1997, p. 102). When aggressive children lack behavioral skills needed in school, they are unable to respond to social problems beyond school environments. Research suggests that emotions account for much of the relationship between cognition and aggressive behavior that when young people manage their emotions and emotion-related behavior, they are less likely to behave aggressively and are more likely to behave in a socially competent way (Frey et. al, 1997). Teachers may positively affect social and emotional development with programs that teach students to resolve conflict and promote positive relationships.

Social and Emotional Learning Programs

Classroom climate impacts students' success. Social and emotional development is the child's ability to interact with others, including helping themselves and self-control. SEL programs are designed to help students learn life skills about others, learn about relationships, as well as recognizing emotions, and learning how to manage them. These skills are important for positive classroom community and classroom experience. Akgun & Araz (2014) found that programs lead to enhanced students' social competencies such as emotional regulation skills and communication. Along with a positive change in classrooms and communities, research on SEL programs has generated empirical evidence for positive impacts on schools and students. Mariani et al. (2015) found that intervention programs that teach cognitive, social, and self-management skills increased prosocial skills, reduced bullying, and promoted a positive classroom climate. When schools implement these programs, this helps students deal with emotions individually and as a community with promotes that sense of classroom climate.

Social and emotional learning intervention programs include three features: (1) a focus on increasing participants' knowledge of socially and emotionally competent behavior, (2) a prosocial orientation whereby increase social and emotional competence can be used in daily interactions, and (3) reliance on prosocial orientation to prevent disruptive, antisocial, or harmful behaviors (Moy & Hazen, 2018, p. 19). Using systematic instruction, modeling, and practice, along with these three features in mind; schools can achieve positive social behaviors as well and better academic performance. These components are critical for students to feel valued, to experience greater intrinsic

motivation to achieve, and to develop social-emotional competencies that facilitate better academic performance and promote health behaviors (Durlak, et al, 2011).

Social and emotional skills have been linked to positive development trajectories, such as improved academic outcomes and protection against negative outcomes (Moy & Hazen, 2018, p. 19). Just as there are variations in school academic readiness, there are variations in social-emotional readiness. Students who begin school without social-emotional readiness are at a disadvantage. Sprague et al. (2001) found that treatment schools using Second Step fared better regarding changes in office discipline referrals and improvements in student social skills. Although SEL plays important roles in influencing these nonacademic outcomes, it also plays an important role in improving students' academic performance as well as lifelong learning (Zins, 2004).

Effects of Social and Emotional Learning Programs

Social emotional learning programs have been studied over the past few decades and found different outcomes. Some programs have found very positive results while others only show small or no improvements. For example, positive results from Taub (2002) showed that on teacher ratings on the School Social Behavior Scales (Merrell, 1993) there were significant improvements in ratings of social competence and antisocial behaviors at the intervention school when compared with students at the nonintervention school. However, studies such as Cooke et al. (2007) examined the impact of implementing Second Step and found mixed results. Cooke et al. found significant improvements in positive approach-coping, caring-cooperative behavior, suppression of aggression, and consideration of others. However, they found no significant changes in aggressive-antisocial behaviors, behavioral observations, and disciplinary referrals. This

discrepancy suggests that changes in knowledge acquired via SEL programs may not translate to changes in student behavior.

Studies have been conducted and have led some researchers to meta-analyze this corpus. For example, Moy et al. (2018) conducted a single-program meta-analysis in order to determine the effects of Second Step. This meta-analysis explored moderators of program effectiveness on prosocial and antisocial behavior and knowledge of emotions. These moderators included: program saturation, dependent variable source, grade range, metro area, and geographical location of twenty-seven studies with 18,847 participants. They found significant and large improvements on student knowledge and attitudes of violence, but very small effects on increased prosocial behavior and decreased antisocial behavior. Moy and Hazen's (2018) systematic review of the Second Step research inform local decision making by providing an estimate of the overall effects Second Step on a variety of student outcomes. They included twenty-four primary research studies that included randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, or single case experimental studies. Each study was coded for program content knowledge, outcomes related to prosociality, and antisociality. Findings from the review corroborated those from Moy et al. (2018)—Second Step led to increased knowledge and prosocial outcomes, but did not find evidence the program decreased antisocial behavior.

Although many SEL programs show improvement with students' social and emotional outcomes, program selection and adoption remain difficult and often problematic. The difficulty comes when trying to find the best fit for their specific students based on demographics, local context, and student needs (Moy & Hazen, 2018). It is important for schools to determine the program that best fits their school-wide goals

while making a significant impact on students' behavior and academic learning. Schools must also take into consideration the time and effort needed to implement a SEL program, and the ability to implement it with fidelity to the program's goals and instruction. Meta-analyses may help school administrators and teachers identify effective SEL (Moy & Hazen, 2018), but it may be unclear to stakeholders whether a SEL program will benefit their students because such studies may include different students and be conducted in different contexts. Specifically, it is unclear whether students with disabilities benefit from SEL programs.

Students with Disabilities

Students with special needs are more likely to be victims of bullying because their behaviors or characteristics may make them more vulnerable to bullying (PDST, 2013). Students with special educational needs (including exceptionally able and dual exceptionality students) are more vulnerable to bullying and other forms of victimization, perhaps because social competence and language processing deficits make difficult their recognition and response to such treatment (PDST, 2013). Students with disabilities are more likely to have limited understanding of social cues; social, language and communication skills emerge, which are key to their development of SEL.

Some students' disabilities directly affect their behavioral development. Espelage et al. (2015) studied Second Step to determine if it reduced bullying, physical aggression, and peer victimization among students with disabilities. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders engage in higher rates of proactive and reactive aggression than other subgroups of students (Espelage et al., 2015). Students with behavior-oriented disabilities like emotional and behavioral disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity

disorders engaged in higher levels of perpetration and received more behavior referrals than other subgroups of students studied (Espelage et al., 2015). Similarly, students with autism have social impairments that limit their value for social interactions, inhibit social knowledge, and negatively affect social competence (American Psychological Association, 2014). Espelage et al. (2015) also noted that students with autism experience higher rates of victimization than students with other disabilities. Students with learning disability may lack social competency and problem-solving skill and may be less likely to be selected as friends by peers (Baumeister et al., 2008).

Social and emotional learning programs may be an effective way to promote these outcomes, however, relatively few studies have included students with disabilities. For example, Sullivan et al. (2015) included participants with speech and language impairments, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, and other health impairments (e.g., medical diagnoses and attention problems). They used a cluster-randomized design with twenty-eight classrooms that were randomly assigned to intervention (i.e., Second Step) or control conditions. They tested the degree to which the intervention effects differed between students with and without disabilities. Although they did not find main effects for the intervention, subgroup analyses suggest that the effects differed based on gender and disability status (Sullivan, 2015). Specific effects of Second Step were found for decreased relational victimization for students with disabilities in intervention versus control classrooms at posttest. They also found greater decreases in overt aggression from pretest to posttest for students without disabilities in intervention classrooms. One reason for the decreases in relational victimization for students with disabilities in the intervention classrooms may be related to information

learned in Second Step on communication and problem solving. These skills are practiced and the skills are applied within a context of peers. A reason for the greater decreases in overt aggression for students without disabilities than students with, may reflect the skills learned through Second Step in addition to skills on perspective taking and empathy. These positive effects are promising, but it remains unclear whether these and other potential benefits of SEL programs like Second Step will benefit most students with disabilities or a subset of them (e.g., students with autism; students with learning disability).

Effective interventions should be culturally relevant and should focus on specific student populations (e.g., students with disabilities) for the greatest effect (Houchins et al., 2016). Future research might be helpful if researchers controlled for the prosocial opportunities in schools that are available among students with disabilities. Promoting proactive schoolwide interventions can create positive school climates, encourage social awareness (Rose et al., 2011). Many schools are integrating SEL programs, but few studies appear to include subgroup participants such as special education students. Schools must consider targeted intervention programs for students with disabilities who either perpetrate anti-social behaviors, such as bullying or are at greater risk for victimization (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011). Second Step is one SEL program that may support positive SEL outcomes for students with disabilities because it uses explicit instruction (Committee for Children, 2021).

Second Step and Instruction

There are a variety of SEL programs and each of these programs enhances students' success in a variety of ways, including improved attendance, school

connectedness, and test scores (Taylor & Dymnicki, 2007). Second Step is a SEL program designed to promote prosocial knowledge and behavior. Second Step is designed to prevent problem behaviors, peer rejection, impulsivity, antisocial behavior, and low academic achievement by developing students' self-regulation skills, self-emotional competencies, and school connectedness (Committee for Children, 2011). The aim of a universal program like Second Step is to foster development of the social-emotional skills necessary for students to lead successful and satisfying lives (Frey et. al, 1997, p. 102). It is designed to teach students how to recognize and understand their own and others' emotions, as well as think about goals to successfully at manage their reactions.

Second Step includes identification of physical, facial, verbal, and situational cues related to emotions. These basic emotions include feeling happy, sad, angry, surprised, scared, and disgusted. Emotions can facilitate or impede children's academic engagement, work ethic, commitment, and ultimate school success (Durlak et al, 2011, p. 405). Relationships and emotions affect how students learn and these skills are important for a positive classroom community and classroom experience. Second Step includes short stories to show students key concepts in emotional understanding.

Second Step is a classroom-based social skills program that has designed lessons to promote school success, school connectedness, and safe and a respectful school climate that will help students to build empathy and understanding for students in preschool through middle school. Second Step is designed to promote these concepts by directly teaching students the skills that strengthen their ability to learn, have empathy, manage emotions, and solve problems. Second Step addresses three core competencies:

empathy, impulse control (problem solving), and anger management. Second Step addresses empathy by teaching students to recognize feelings in oneself and others, consider others' perspectives, and respond emotionally to others. Empathy is taught by practicing perspective-taking skills, role playing common social problems, and sharing experiences.

Social problem solving is a key component of Second Step. Second Step incorporates a five-step problem-solving strategy in order to address the issues researchers found when students lack social problem-solving skills. These five steps include: identifying the problem, brainstorming solutions, evaluating solutions, selecting, planning, and trying solutions, and evaluating if the solution worked and what to do next. These strategies are taught in school using stories and context clues, with the intent that they would be used in real life situations. Second Step uses "self-talk" as a strategy to remind students to control impulses, think about consequences of their actions, and reinforce their own behaviors (Frey et. al, 1997). Students practice these skills and then evaluate solutions based on safety, fairness, people's feelings, and effectiveness. Establishing positive norm may enhance children's problem-solving skills (Frey et. al, 1997). Second Step teaches students to select and practice problem-solving behaviors as well as reflect on how well a solution worked.

A final key component Second Step is anger management. Strategies to control anger pair well with problem-solving strategies in the Second Step program. Throughout the unit on anger management, Second Step teaches strategies to help students recognize their own anger cues, use positive self-talk, and stress-reducing strategies. Children are taught to recognize their triggers and what makes them angry through repeated modeling

and rehearsal. An example of this includes “self-talk” to cool down in the moment and later reflect on the incident, and evaluate one’s response to the situation (Frey et. al, 1997).

Second Step requires teachers to administer a knowledge assessment to students at the beginning and end of each school year to determine the specific skills were learned via the program. The knowledge assessments help teachers and school administrators determine students’ skill progress in acquiring social-emotional concepts being taught in Second Step.

Second Step is designed with lessons that are meant to be taught twice a week by classroom teachers or school counselors who have been trained in the program implementation. In the elementary grades, Second Step provides video-based lessons, skill-step posters, and family overview videos. The family overview videos are used to encourage and engage parent support. Lessons are accompanied by notes to teachers about child development, transfer-of-training ideas, and extension activities (Frey et. al, 1997). At the middle school level, Second Step emphasizes student attitudes and beliefs about aggression, and focuses on social dilemmas. Like the elementary grades, videos are used during lessons as well as classroom activities and group discussions. These approaches to instruction have resulted in a corpus of studies that suggest Second Step is an effective SEL curriculum.

Outcomes and Contexts of Second Step Research

Schools may adopt Second Step because studies have reported positive effects. Second Step is designed to help students build their social and emotional skills. This study examines how this program is implemented which will affect the students’ overall

outcomes of the program. Low et al. (2016) found that high-quality implementation showed above average fidelity to lessons and integration activities, and strong engagement with students. Similarly, Brown, et al (2012) found that there was a significant increase in both social and emotional knowledge and behavioral and emotional risk following the implementation of Second Step. Cook et al. (2007) found that students showed significant improvements in positive approach/coping, caring/cooperative behavior, suppression of aggression, and consideration of others when teachers implemented Second Step. However, positive effects in research may not always translate to positive effects for districts that adopt Second Step because contexts may be dramatically different.

Different factors in schools and districts may influence how well the program is received by teachers, staff, and students. Studies have been conducted on Second Step in a variety of different settings, with different racial demographics, and with participants from different levels of socioeconomic status. Some studies include students with disabilities while others either exclude disabled students or mention them in their participant group but do not explain further their levels or disability status. Instructors training as well as teachers willingness to implement Second Step and the fidelity of the implementation place a critical role in the outcomes of the program and the effects on student participants. These overall differences show a need to understand whether schools that differ in important ways experience the benefits documented in the Second Step research literature. An evaluation of a school could reveal how some of these and other contextual factors influence reception, implementation, and outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

Students who experience healthy social, emotional, and behavioral development experience greater school and post-school success. Researchers have therefore investigated the effects of various SEL programs and curricula, but may not include the types of students that many schools serve (e.g., students with disabilities). Also, SEL studies may be conducted in schools and districts that are fundamentally different from schools where such programs are adopted. Second Step is one such SEL program that is supported by research, but results may not translate to schools where participants and contexts are distinctly different. Accordingly, it is unclear whether Second Step will be effective, and school leaders may not know how to select and evaluate the effects of Second Step.

The purpose of this dissertation research is to understand and investigate Second Step in school contexts. This research began with a systematic review of the Second Step research literature to understand various aspects of settings, participants, and measurement approaches that are associated with positive program outcomes. Specifically, the review aimed to understand school and participant characteristics as well as methods used to measure program outcomes. The results will be used to understand various aspects of a school's Second Step initiative.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following literature review provides a relative framework for this study, which will focus on a combination of a program evaluation and mixed methods research design to examine the implementation of Second Step. The purpose of this review is to examine the literature that examine effects of Second Step, prosocial skills, such as empathy. Results will inform research questions and guide the research study. The review was conducted in two distinct ways. First, a systematic review of Second Step research was conducted to identify relevant studies and extract specific details for synthesis. The approach used was based on PRISMA (2020) guidelines for systematic reviews. The process included multiple search strategies to locate relevant articles, data collection processes (i.e., coding procedures), and analyses for synthesizing results. To support a contextual understanding of the synthesized results, a narrative-based review also was conducted focused specifically on prosocial skills outcomes, empathy skills, and impacts of the program on students. The method used for the systematic and narrative reviews is described below and is followed by results for each and a discussion section where results are interpreted.

Search, Screening, and Inclusion Criteria

Article selection procedures consisted of electronic, hand, and ancestral searches for relevant literature. A comprehensive search for studies was conducted using academic databases to identify studies that investigated the effects of Second Step. I used the following sets of search string terms to identify potential articles in electronic databases: [“Second Step” AND “school program” OR “school-based program”],

[“Second Step” AND “school intervention” OR “school-based intervention”] and [“Second Step” AND “implementation”]. The first two search terms used were based on Moy & Hazen’s (2018) systematic review of Second Step. They explained that “Second Step” is a general phrase likely to show up in numerous articles unrelated to this research and returned a high number of irrelevant articles. Thus, this search combined “Second Step” with other relevant terms using the word “AND.”

I searched the following electronic databases: ERIC ProQuest, APA PsycINFO, and Academic Search Complete which yielded 1,926 articles. The set of search strings used above were applied to the full text of studies, and results were date limited between 1984 and 2020 in the literature review stage of my research. The results prior to 1984 were not included in this research since Second Step was first published that year. Dissertations were excluded from the search since they have not gone through the peer-review process. Screening entailed reading the titles and abstracts to determine whether they were relevant to the topic of study. Articles were excluded if they were not studies based on Second Step or conducted in a school setting. Seventeen studies remained after screening was completed. The vast number of articles returned via electronic search were studies of school-based programs other than Second Step, commentary, or unrelated to school-based research.

Studies that met the following criteria were included: empirical study of Second Step using an experimental, case study, or mixed methods design, published in English in a peer-reviewed journal between 1984 (when the first Second Step study was published) and 2020 (when the search was conducted). The full text of the seventeen potential eligible articles that remained following screening was examined to determine whether

the article met inclusion criteria. Each potential article was subjected to inspection for evidence it met inclusion criteria. A checklist was created based on the inclusion criteria and articles were included when all items were met. This resulted in fifteen articles included for coding and analysis. These fifteen articles were also used to inform ancestral and hand searches.

Additional searches were conducted to ensure all relevant studies were located and properly considered. Hand and ancestral searches were conducted following application of the inclusion criteria and procedures (described below). The hand search entailed identifying journals where two or more included studies were published and examining the table of contents for each issue since 1984. Titles were examined for indications the study investigated Second Step. The abstract for any potentially relevant source was then examined to determine (a) whether the article had already been considered or was included and (b) whether the study met inclusion criteria. Two journals were searched— School Psychology Review and Journal of School Violence. The hand search yielded three articles that met inclusion criteria; however, all three articles were already identified during the electronic search (i.e., duplicates). An ancestral search was also conducted within the reference lists of included articles (n = 15). References lists from coded articles were examined to find any additional articles with the words “Second Step” in the title. The ancestral search yielded twenty-two sources for consideration. Screening of titles and abstracts revealed most sources were guides, dissertations, poster presentations, or studies conducted in other countries and were excluded. Four remaining sources were closely inspected and one met inclusion criteria. This resulted in a total of sixteen articles including for coding and analysis.

Analysis Criteria and Procedures

A database was created for analysis purposes. Each included article was examined for specific details about the study. Article information including authors, title of article, year of publication, article abstract summary, and journal name were extracted from each study and added to the database. Additional analysis categories were developed based on the research questions. Specifically, categories were selected to obtain information relevant for understanding where Second Step studies occurred, who the child and professional participants were, as well as who trained Second Step instructors. Additional categories were created to identify details about how training was provided to Second Step instructors, whether researchers measured fidelity to Second Step, and how researchers measured the outcomes of the Second Step program. Each of these analysis categories and coding procedures are described in more detail below.

Setting and Participants

Studies were analyzed according to setting in order to understand the setting where Second Step interventions were conducted and who participated. Study setting included school type and grade level. Specifically, school type included: (a) public school, (b) private school, (c) charter, (d) online/virtual, and (e) other. The studies conducted in public schools included any school that was supported by public funds. Private schools included those supported by a private organization or individuals rather than government. Charter schools were any school that was a publicly funded independent school. Online and virtual schools include those that are conducting lessons online either virtually or asynchronously. Analysis for school type was based on author report. When school type was not described by the authors, school type was coded as

unclear. Specific grade levels were also coded as elementary (grades K-5) and middle school (grades 6-8). Participants were first analyzed as child participants or professional participants.

Disability status as well as race were coded for child participants using the following categories: (a) disability status, (b) number of students with disability, (c) disability type, and (d) at risk students. If information was provided about these categories by the author a number one (1) was used as a code. If information was not provided or was unknown, then participant sample size was coded as unknown (0). If a total sample was given and percent for each disability and racial category was provided, then I used a formula to convert percent to number of participants. Race was categorized as (a) white, (b) black/African American, (c) Hispanic/Latino, (d) Native American or Alaskan Native, (e) Asian, (f) Native Hawaiian/Asian/Pacific Islander, (g) other. Race was analyzed for each category and, if possible, number of participants in each group was calculated as described above. Low socioeconomic status (SES) percentages and types were also analyzed. Low socioeconomic status was determined by the researchers' description of participants. I coded first whether any participants were described by the original authors as belonging to a low socioeconomic status group. If participants were described as low socioeconomic status, a one was used as a code. If no information about socioeconomic status of child participants was provided, then this was coded as unclear and given a zero. If authors described participants as belonging to a low SES group, then the percent of participants as well as the factor that was used to determine this percentage (e.g., free and reduced lunch, family structure (single family parent, low income, etc.)

also was recorded in the database. English as a Second Language was also analyzed, but was a very small percentage of the studies examined.

To further understand who participated in Second Step studies, I analyzed for professional participant types. The categories analyzed for professional participants included: (a) administration, (b) general education teachers, (c) special education or resource room teachers, (d) school psychologist, (e) school counselor, (f) and any other professional participant that was not listed in an individual category. When analyzing professional's participants as "other," a note was added to label the professional type. If the original study authors referred to the participants using a particular label, then that label was recorded in the notes. If no label was provided, one was generated based on the description. If the description was insufficient to apply an accurate label, then the note recorded was "unclear."

Intervention Agents

Intervention agents for each study were analyzed to better understand the training and delivery of Second Step lessons and instruction. Intervention agents were those individuals who provided training, support, and or resources to participants who implemented Second Step. For example, if teacher participants received training from a research team member, then the research team member was considered the intervention agent. In some cases, researchers might have provided the lessons directly to student participants and therefore were considered intervention agents. Finally, because I was interested in who delivered instruction to student participants, studies were analyzed to identify instructors. Intervention agents who trained instructors were analyzed in the following categories: (a) expert researchers, (b) graduate student researcher, (c)

administration, (d) professionals, and (e) other. Agents who delivered the lessons to students were analyzed in the following categories: (a) general educators, (b) school psychologists, (c) school counselor, (d) special educator, (e) health or PE teacher, (f) administrator, (g) expert researcher, (h) graduate student researcher, (i) consultant, and (j) other. If other agents were used in the study, they were described in this section.

The Second Step authors recommend that instructors be trained before implementing the program. Each study used various ways to implement this training. Accordingly, type of training as well as timing of training were analyzed in order to understand how study authors prepared instructors to use the program. First, I analyzed whether training was provided. If training was evident, then training type was analyzed using the following categories: (a) didactic, (b) modeling/demonstration, (c) observation and feedback, (d) coaching, and (e) other. If the training type was “other,” then the specific methods used was recorded in a note’s column. The Committee for Children, Second Step authors suggest that schools contact and rely on them for training which should provide guidance for presenting the program to teachers and supporting implementation. This training includes: online training, lesson support, a community of others using the program, and family outreach. The amount of time in training included the following codes: (a) less than a half day, (b) half day, (c) one full day, (d) more than one full day, (e) three or more days. I anticipated that some studies might provide intermittent or ongoing training. Accordingly, frequency of training also was analyzed as once, intermittent, ongoing, and other.

Fidelity to Second Step

Adherence to Second Step and lesson procedures is necessary for drawing conclusions about its effectiveness, but also for understanding feasibility of implementation in school settings. Accordingly, fidelity of Second Step lessons was also analyzed for measurement and reporting type. First, I analyzed whether authors measured fidelity of implementation and, if so, what percent of sessions or lessons were used for fidelity measurement purposes. I also analyzed whether authors measure using an alternative fidelity system. When fidelity was reported, I analyzed whether an observer measured or an instructor self-reported adherence to the program and/or lesson procedures. Any additional relevant notes about fidelity were recorded in additional columns for future reference.

A variety of assessments are often used to evaluate school-based interventions. I analyzed whether researchers used formal and informal assessments to evaluate the effects of Second Step. Formal assessments were coded into the following categories: (a) Endorsement of Aggression, (b) Perceived Social Difficult Scale, (c) Illinois Bully Scale, (d) University of Illinois Victimization Scale, (e) University of Illinois Fighting Scale, (f) Cyberbullying Perpetration, (g) Sexual Harassment Perpetration, (h) Homophobic Name-Calling Perpetration, (i) Self-Reporting Delinquency, (j) The Maslach Burnout Inventory, (k) questionnaire, (l) checklist, (m) The Caregiver Interaction Scale, (n) Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Revised, (o) Sutter-Eyberg Student Behavior Inventory-Revised, (p) Child Development Inventory, (q) Social Interaction Observations System, (r) Teacher Version of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Second Step Edition, (s) Strengths Difficulties Questionnaire, (t) Behavioral Observation of Students in

Schools, (u) Proactive Classroom Management Rating Form, (v) Curriculum-based measurement, (w) Aggressive Behavior Teacher Checklist, (x) Second Step Implementation Checklist, (y) Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Checklist, (z) Second Step Lesson Completion Record, (aa) Oregon School Safety Survey, (bb) Assessing Behavioral Support in Schools Checklist, (cc) Discipline Point System, (dd) Prosocial Behavior Rating System, and (ee) School Social Behavior Scales. The following informal assessments were analyzed in the following categories: (a) office discipline referrals, (b) observational data, (c) student work samples, (d) student grades, (e) Knowledge Assessment for Second Step, (f) Behavioral and Emotional Screening System, (g) other (e.g., researcher created questionnaires, surveys, interviews). If any other informal assessments were used, then the name or type was recorded in the database along with notes for reference.

Outcomes

Articles were examined for statistically significant effects as well as author reported improvements (i.e., effect size, descriptive findings). In order to analyze for statistically significant improvement, authors must have compared measurement results to determine whether differences at pre- and post-intervention were significant. If at least one result was reported by original authors as statistically significant, then the study was analyzed as having detected an effect and a note was recorded (usually copy/pasted from the article). A zero was used if no results were described by authors as statistically significant or if significance test results were unclear. If an effect size was reported by original authors, then the value(s) were recorded in the database to better understand the significance of the program effects. When original researchers described or interpreted

improvements, they perceived were resultant of Second Step, the specific outcomes were copied and pasted into the database.

Analysis of Literature

The data was analyzed in several ways to answer research questions. In most cases, the number and percent for each category was calculated to better understand similarities, differences, and details across all included studies. Setting was analyzed by obtaining a percent of school types and grade levels. For example, total number of public-school settings were summed and divided by the number of studies to obtain a percent of public schools represented in the included studies. This was repeated for private, charter, online/virtual, and other school categories. Similarly, percent of studies conducted at elementary and/or middle schools also was calculated. The total number of studies conducted elementary (and middle) schools was divided by the number of studies to obtain a percent of studies conducted in elementary (or middle) school settings.

Child participants were analyzed by calculating the percent of participants in each disability and racial status category. This was repeated for at-risk students. For example, the number of studies where authors reported disability status of participants was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of studies that included students with disabilities. Also, the number of participants with disabilities was obtained for each study (when reported) and was divided by the total number of participants across all studies to obtain a percent of participants with a disability. The number of studies in which authors reported racial status of participants was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of studies that reported participant race. When race was reported, the total number of students and the percent of students in each racial category was obtained for

each study. The total number of participants in each racial category across all studies was then calculated. Finally, the percent of participants across all studies was calculated for each racial group.

Professional participants were analyzed by obtaining a percent of participants in each professional category. For example, the number of administrators who participated in the studies was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of studies that reported administrators as professional. This was repeated for general educators, special educators and resource room teachers, school psychologist, school counselors, and any other professional mentioned in the research. I then calculated the percent of participants in each category across all studies. For example, there were 114 general educators included across all studies, and the total number of all participants for all studies was 749. Thus, general educators were 15.2% of all professional participants in the included studies.

Intervention agents were analyzed by calculating the percent of participants who trained instructors. For example, the number of studies where authors reported expert researchers trained instructors was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of those who included expert researchers as trainers. This was repeated for graduate student researchers, administrators, professionals, and any other participants who trained instructors. Intervention agents (who delivered SS lessons to student participants) was calculated for each study, then summed across all studies within each agent category. The percent of agents in each category was then calculated. For example, the number of general educators who delivered lessons to students was divided by the total number of agents to obtain a percent. A percent was calculated for school

psychologists, school counselors, special educators, health or PE teachers, administrators, expect researchers, graduate student researchers, consultants, and any other professional instructor mentioned in the research.

Training was analyzed by obtaining a percent of training types and training amounts. For example, total number of studies where didactic training was used was divided by the total number of included studies that provided training. These results were then used to obtain a percent of studies that used this type of training. This was repeated for modeling/demo, observation and feedback, coaching and any other type of training. Similarly, percent of studies that reported specific training amount also was calculated. For example, the total number of studies where training was provided for a total of one-half day was divided by the number of studies to obtain a percent. This was repeated for one full day training, less than one full day training, three or more days training. Also, frequency of training was similarly calculated for each category (i.e., once intermittent, ongoing, or any other frequency).

Fidelity was measure based on the authors reporting of the instructors' adherence to the Second Step lesson procedures, if the authors did not measure adherence to the Second Step, or if it was unclear. Fidelity was analyzed by obtaining a percent of studies that reported measuring instructor adherence to Second Step lesson procedures in each article. For example, the number of sessions/lessons measured for fidelity where authors reported this information was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of the article that included sessions and lessons measured for fidelity. This process was repeated for alternative fidelity measures. Alternative fidelity was analyzed by obtaining a percentage of studies that reported measuring some sort of adherence to Second Step

program or procedures. For example, the number of lessons measured for alternative fidelity where authors reported this information was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of the article that included sessions and lessons measured for alternative fidelity. When analyzing the reporting types (i.e., observer measure fidelity and self-report) the percentage of studies that reported using these types of measures was dividing the total number of studies to obtain a percent of articles that included those specific reporting types.

Formal/normed assessment was analyzed by calculating the percent of studies that used formal/normed assessment to evaluate Second Step effects. For example, the number of studies that used a formal or normed assessment was divided by studies that did not to obtain a percent. Informal assessment also was analyzed by calculating the percent of studies. For example, the number of studies where authors reported using office discipline referrals was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of those studies that used discipline referrals to evaluate effects of Second Step. Similarly, the number of studies where authors reported using student work samples was divided by the total number of studies to obtain a percent of those studies that included student work samples. This was repeated for observational data, student grades, Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (KASS; Committee for Children, 2004), Behavioral and Emotional Screening System, and any other informal assessment used.

Statistically significant improvement was analyzed by obtaining a percent of studies that reported this information. For example, the number of studies that obtained statistically significant improvement was summed and divided by the number of studies

to include studies that found statistically significant information. This was repeated for effect size and effect size statistics (usually Cohen's *d*).

Finally, narrative summaries of each included study were developed to provide added context and support interpretation of results. Summaries included details about study rationale, method, results, and interpretations according to prosocial and empathy skills, both of which are primary focus of Second Step. Additionally, narratives were developed that describe study details and the measured or perceived impacts on students. Summaries are presented after the synthesized results.

Results of Literature Review

Setting

Implementation of Second Step was most often conducted in a public-school setting. Specifically, 87.5% of the studies took place in a public-school setting. Only 5.9% took place in charter schools and an additional 6.3% took place in preschools. Second Step can be used in preschool, elementary school, and middle school settings, but the majority ($n = 13$; 81.3%) of the studies were conducted in elementary school. Five (31.3%) studies were conducted in middle schools. The grades range from preschool to eighth grade.

Child Participants

In the seventeen studies evaluated for this study, four (25%) included students with disabilities (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012; Cook & Low, 2018; Hussey & Flannery, 2007; and Hart et al., 2009). Authors of these four studies explained their samples included students who were receiving special education services and/or students with developmental delays, but specific disabilities were not identified in any study. Of those

studies that included students with disabilities, approximately 9.03% were identified as having a disability. This represented approximately 2.3% of all participants across all included studies (i.e., those who did and did not include students with disabilities). Three studies included students who authors described as being at-risk. Marco Munzo (2002) looked at single parent family structure with academic achievement and concluded that these students were at-risk. Wenz-Gross and Upshurs (2012) included participants who they described as at-risk due to factors such as percentages of children with behavioral problems, developmental delays, and low income. Sprague et al. (2001) analyzed schools by profiles that included at-risk and high-risk students, among other factors.

Fewer than half of included studies reported the racial demographics for participants. Of those studies where authors reported racial demographics, 28.4% were White, 11.9% were Black or African American, 46.1% were Hispanic or Latino, 1.5% were Native American or Alaskan Native, 4.8% were Asian, 0.4% were Native Hawaiian/Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6.8% were described as Other. Race was used to obtain a better overview of the school dynamic and background. Across all studies, authors described the racial demographics for approximately 44.9% of participants. Specifically, 12.7% were White, 5.3% were Black or African American, 20.7% were Hispanic or Latino, 0.6% were American or Alaskan Native, 2.1% were Asian, 0.2% were Native Hawaiian/Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3.0% were described as Other (this included: multi-ethnic groups, other ethnicities, other races, and ethnicities, more than one race, biracial, on-white, and minorities).

Socio-economic status of participants was infrequently reported. The majority (n = 14; 87.5%) of the studies included participants with low socio-economic students.

Specifically, 10.6% of the participants were described as having low socio-economic status. Across the studies, authors described socio-economic status according to students receiving free and reduced lunch, family structure which included single parent families, predominately low-income, household income amount, students who reside in economically disadvantaged families, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and population of mostly poor white students.

Professional Participants

Researchers included a variety of professional participants who were responsible for implementing Second Step. In the sixteen included studies, all but one (Munoz, 2002) listed the professional participants that were involved in the study in some way. Seven studies (43.8%) included administrators and fourteen (87.5%) of studies included general education teachers. These two categories made up most of the professional participants since these two groups work closely with students and work together to implement programs in the classroom or school-wide. Special Education teachers were included in only one study. School Psychologists were only included in one study and school counselors were included in three studies.

Intervention Agents

Intervention Agents Who Trained Instructors

Intervention agents were those who trained school personnel to provide Second Step lessons to participating students. The “other” category was the largest category which was taken from nine studies (56.3%) that used “other” intervention agents who trained instructors. For example (Taub, 2002) included principals who modeled a lesson for teachers on how to deliver the intervention and guidance counselor who had regular,

ongoing contact with teachers as needed to discuss questions or concerns about delivery of the intervention. Others also included: technical assistance personnel (Sprague et al., 2001), certified Second Step trainers (Cooke et al., 2007), extensive training provided to school psychology doctoral students (Brown et al., 2012), study staff (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012), contracted consultants (Ableser, 2003), and faculty members (Espelage, 2015). “Other” also included statements such as “the training was consistent with standard support operations provided by Committee for Children” (Low et al., 2016 and Cook & Low, 2018) without further detail about the training. One article (Hussey & Flannery, 2007) did not include who did the training just that there was some type of training completed.

Intervention Agents Who Delivered Lessons to Students

Instructors were individuals who were trained to provide Second Step lessons to participating students. Agents who delivered the Second Step lessons to the students were an integral part of the implementation as well as the research conducted during these studies. In the sixteen studies evaluated for this study, twelve (75%) reported general education teachers were instructors for Second Step lessons. Four studies (25%) included instructors categorized as “other” (i.e., were not general educators, school psychologists, counselors, etc.). School counselors and Health/PE teachers both delivered Second Step lessons in two of the sixteen studies. School Psychologist, Special Education Teachers, Administration, and Graduate students each delivered Second Step lessons in one study, respectively.

Training

Training was conducted in a variety of ways. Of the sixteen included studies, eleven (68.8%) reported using some form of training to prepare instructors. Three studies (18.8%) used modeling or demonstrations as the primary method of training. Four (25.0%) studies used coaching as their form of training, while one study (6.3%) used observation and feedback. “Other” training was used most often. Specifically, seven studies (43.8%) used one more of the following methods: three day and one day trainings by the Committee for Children and/or Second Step trainers (i.e., original Second Step developers), interviews, group coaching sessions, training webinar, extensive training in social and emotional assessment and intervention, training, and consultation as well as intervention components, and training for trainers.

The amount of training used in each study evaluated is an important concept to examine when determining the effectiveness of the implementation. Eleven (68.7%) of studies reported the amount of training provided. Five studies (31.3%) used a full day training session method which was the most popular between all the studies evaluated. Three studies used more than a half day training, which accounted for 18.8% of the evaluated studies. Only one study (6.3%) used three or more days of training, while two studies used intermittent (12.5%) and another two studies (12.5%) used ongoing training sessions in order to help with the implementation of Second Step. The “other” category was also one of the larger categories consisting of 31.3% of the studies. One study (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012) with training categorized as “other” used a two-hour initial training session provided by the research team and the lead teachers/administrators who attended their “train the trainers” workshop. This study also included monthly 90-

minute evening group coaching sessions between November and June (year 1 of the study); and every other month evening group coaching sessions (year 2 of the study). The teachers in this study were compensated \$12.00 an hour for those evening sessions. Another study (Brown et al., 2012) used school psychology doctoral students with extensive training in social and emotional assessment and intervention to be the primary teachers of the Second Step lessons, so no training was provided. Cooke et al., (2007) used a series of three one-hour training sessions for teachers that focused on the three program components, a series of four one-hour workshops for parents, and flyers to help parents and community members remember to model and reinforce specific skills being taught. The study by Sprague et al. (2001) used 1-2 times-per-month training sessions which accounted for approximately 20 hours of formal training. Technical assistance was also provided as needed to solve problems, conduct planning, etc. for 25-40 hours across the implementation year. Another study (Taub, 2002) evaluated, used a 2-day workshop and at least 6 hours of instruction for training to help with the implementation of Second Step.

Fidelity to Second Step

Studies were evaluated if they measured instructor adherence to Second Step lessons. Of the sixteen studies evaluated, ten (62.5%) measured fidelity by reporting lesson instructors' adherence to Second Step procedures. Authors of five studies (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002, Ableser, 2003, Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012, Cook & Low, 2012, and Hart et al., 2009) used observations to measure instructor fidelity to lesson procedures. One of these studies (Ableser, 2003) used observation alone. Schoiack-Edstrom et al. (2002) had the developer of Second Step regularly consult with

teachers and observe lessons. Teachers were provided with assistance and coaching in order to ensure they implemented Second Step with integrity. Ableser (2003) used observations to measure instructor fidelity based on a conceptual framework that guided and their research. Classroom observations took place during regular teaching time and during the consultants' implementation Second Step lessons. Wenz-Gross and Upshur (2012) trained research staff during monthly visits to each classroom and observed delivery of Second Step lessons to rate fidelity on a five-point scale from one (not at all) to five (very much). Cook and Low (2012) used different dimensions of fidelity into their investigation including adherence to lesson procedures (i.e., implementing core components as planned), dosage (i.e., number of lessons delivered), and student engagement to reflect the quality or competency with which Second Step was delivered. During Hart et al. (2009), two co-facilitators were present to ensure fidelity and provide support.

Four studies (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, 2002, Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012, Low et al., 2016, and Cook & Low, 2018) used self-report and observations to check fidelity. Schoiack-Edstrom et al., (2002) had an overall rate of 99% program completion across participating teachers. Teachers completed written evaluation of each lesson, enabling a determination of the rate of lesson completion. Individual exit interviews with the developer were used to determine program completion. Wenz-Gross and Upshur (2012) had teachers complete a lesson checklist at the end of each lesson delivered. The checklist included key activities and tasks used for that lesson. For each activity or task, teachers self-rated whether they completed it fully, partially, or not at all. The study found relatively high overall implementation rates and fidelity in the first two years of the

study, despite significant staff turnover and a planned reduction in site training support in year two (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012). Low et al., (2012) asked teachers to complete weekly self-reporting ratings of their implementation to record adherence to the program, engagement, generalization, and dosage. Adherence to the program had four dimensions including (1) adherence to the key lesson dimensions, (2) measured adaptations or modifications, (3) how many of the daily practice activities were completed, and (4) whether the teacher sent home the HomeLink Activity (Low et al., 2012). Cook and Low (2018) asked teachers to complete weekly implementation logs to record adherence to Second Step, as well as adaptations and student engagement. These authors noted that many teachers made only a few adaptations, but a few made numerous modifications.

Four studies used self-report alone (Espelage, 2015, Hussey, 2007, Cooke et al., 2007, and Taub, 2002). For example, Espelage (2015) had teachers complete online implementation logs after each lesson to assess the teachers' perception of student engagement and what components of the lesson they completed. Hussey (2007) asked the teachers in the study to use a Social-Emotional Learning checklist to measure whether they utilized Second Step activities in their classrooms. The researcher only required that teachers complete the checklist five times during the study because participants reported the checklist was difficult and time consuming (Hussey, 2007). Cooke et al. (2007) explained that the vast majority of teachers (80.7%) reported delivering every Second Step lesson for their grade level during the school year, and more than two-thirds (68.3%) reported implementing extension activities in addition to the required lessons. Nearly 90% of teachers said that they integrated Second Step into other classroom activities and lessons and 80% used Second Step as part of their routine classroom management

strategy (Cooke et al., 2007). Taub (2002) had classroom teachers complete the School Social Behavior Scale at three different times during the study.

Formal Assessments

Out of the seventeen studies evaluated for this study, twelve reported using some form of formal assessment to collect data on the effectiveness of the Second Step. The most common formal assessments were questionnaires (11.8%), checklists (11.8%), and behavioral observations of students in school (17.6%). Wenz-Gross and Upshur (2012) used both questionnaires and checklists in their study. At the end of each teacher training or coaching session, teachers filled out a brief satisfaction questionnaire. At the end of each lesson delivered, teachers completed a lesson checklist. This checklist listed the key activities and lesson tasks. For each of these activities or tasks, teachers rated whether they completed it fully, partially, or not at all. Cooke et al. (2007) used both questionnaires and behavioral observations of students. Students completed both a baseline and follow-up questionnaire and were encouraged to answer each question but could pass if needed and those items were left blank when coding the data. These questionnaires included nine outcomes from four surveys used with school-age children. These four surveys included *Kidcope*, the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, the *Modified Aggression Scale*, and the *Weinberger Adjustment Inventory*. Cooke et al. (2007) used Behavioral Observation of students in the classroom, playground, and cafeteria settings. Each observation focused on one randomly selected student for five minutes. “The only exception to random selection was that students of any ethnicity that represented less than 12% of the class were selected as the first children to be observed from that class, in order to ensure

adequate representation of all ethnicities in each class, and to distribute observations equally across classrooms in the time that was allotted to conduct observations” (Cooke et al., 2007, p. 100). Observations were conducted using categories from the fourth edition of the Social Interaction Observation System for child behavior and teacher behavior.

Sprague et al. (2001) used the “Assessing Behavioral Support in School” checklists at mid-year to rate the effectiveness of the behavioral support used in this study. The checklist asked whether an item is “in place,” “in progress,” or “not started” with individual students, in classrooms, in common areas, and school-wide. Low et al. (2016) and Cook et al. (2018) both used Behavioral Observation of students in schools. Teachers assessed student behavior using the teacher version of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Second Step edition (DESSA-SSE; Devereux Center for Resilient Children (2012). This behavior rating scale assessed students’ emotional competencies including: empathy, emotional management, problem solving, and social-emotional composite. Cook and Low et al. (2018) used behavioral observations to record class-wide and individual student behaviors. Researchers developed a behavioral observation system based on of the Behavioral Observation of Students in Schools. All other formal assessments were only used once in the studies examined.

Informal Assessments

Out of the seventeen studies evaluated for this study, fourteen reported using informal assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the Second Step. Six (35.3%) studies used assessments coded according to the “other” category, which was the largest category of informal assessments. For example, Munzo (2002) used the Evaluation

Interview for Second Step, with a pre- and posttest analysis. Larsen and Samdal (2007) used interviews to understand teacher implementation and adaptations to lessons. Larsen and Samdal (2008) also interviewed principals twice, and teachers were interviewed once following project completion to understand perceived benefits and limitations of the program. Ableser (2003) used pre- and post-questionnaires. Brown et al., (2012) used pre-test data and post-test data of the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step and the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System once the program was completed for that year. Cooke et al. (2007) used student self-reporting questionnaire. Sprague (2001) used a safety survey, student declarative knowledge on Second Step lesson content, and focus group interviews to measure social skill knowledge and to see how schools implemented a school-wide discipline plan. Sprague also measured any changes in office discipline referrals.

Two studies (11.8%) used office discipline referrals to assess the effectiveness of Second Step. Cooke et al. (2007) used discipline referrals to assess aggressive-antisocial and prosocial behaviors. Sprague et al. (2001) used discipline referrals because they were interested in effects on school discipline and safety. Eight studies (47.1%) used observation to evaluate Second Step effects. These studies include: Cook and Low, 2018; Cooke, et al., 2007; Frey et al., 2000; Low et al., 2016; Taub, 2002; Top et al., 2016; Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002; Wenz-Gross and Upshur, 2012. Frey et al. (2000) used direct behavioral observations by trained observers blind to conditions. Low et al. (2016) used observational data to assess classroom behavior such as academic engagement and disruptive behavior. Cook and Low (2018) used direct observations of students' that were on-task and/or showed disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Cooke

et al. (2007) used a student behavior observation checklist and observations to collect data. These observations were conducted in classrooms, playgrounds, and cafeteria settings, and each focused for five minutes on a randomly selected student. The only exception to random selection was that students of any ethnicity that represented less than 12% of the class were selected as the first child to be observed from that class in order to ensure adequate representation of all ethnicities in each class, and to distribute observations equally across classrooms in the time that was allocated to conduct observations. In Top et al. (2016), school behaviors were observed and recorded by teachers. Taub (2002) observed children for fifteen 90-second intervals (60 seconds observe, 30 seconds record). Observed behaviors that related to Second Step curricular goals and included responses to direction from adults, appropriate engagement with peers, bothers/annoys/distracts other students, and fights/argues with peers. These were done on two different days, in a variety of classroom settings over a two-week data collection period.

One study (5.9%) by Cook and Low (2018) used student work samples. Work samples consisted of curriculum-based measurement probes of academic performance (i.e., reading and mathematics). Two studies (11.8%) used student grades when looking at the effects of Second Step. Top et al. (2016) used students' academic achievement which was indexed by grade point averages from school records. Cook and Low (2018) looked at the academic performance on reading and math measures. Three studies (17.6%) used the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (an assessment included in the Second Step manual) to assess students' knowledge of Second Step skills and concepts. Brown et al. (2012), Sprague et al. (2001), and Hart et al. (2009) all used the Knowledge

Assessment for Second Step to evaluate effects. One (5.9%) study by Brown et al. (2012) used a Behavioral and Emotional Screening as pre- and post-assessments to measure the social and emotional knowledge and behavioral and emotional risk of students in the study.

Significance and Improvement

Eleven of the studies (64.7%) reported at least one statistically significant improvement after implementing Second Step. Schoiack-Edstrom et al. (2002) used *t* tests indicating that those teaching the year two program reported teaching significantly ($p < .05$) more lessons per week ($M = 3.00$) than year one teachers ($M = 2.33$). Wenz-Gross and Upshur (2012) used *t* tests or chi-square analyses to examine baseline differences between the two sites used in their study. Descriptive statistics were used to examine training, implementation, and fidelity, as well as teacher satisfaction and bivariate correlations were used to analyze the relation between the implementation and fidelity measures and baseline teacher and classroom characteristics. Results indicated that “across classrooms, the overall mean observed fidelity ratings on the 1 to 5-point scale ranged from 3.11 to 4.25 ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .35$)” (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012, p. 10). Researchers found relatively high overall implementation rates and fidelity, even though there was a high number of staff turnover. “The correlation between observed fidelity and teacher reported percent of main points covered fully was marginally significant ($r_s = .69$, $n = 8$, $p = .058$)” (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012, p. 10). Wenz-Gross and Upshur used a bivariate correlation analysis to investigate the relation between teacher characteristics and classroom characteristics with the number of lessons completed, the percent of lesson points delivered, and the observed fidelity of lesson delivery.

“Moderate to high associations ($r \geq .40$) were evident between many of the teacher and classroom characteristics at baseline and the subsequent teacher success in implementing the lessons (e.g., number of lessons delivered, main points covered, etc.) and the observed fidelity with which they were delivered over the school year” (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012, p. 11). Since there was a small sample size, many of the moderate to high correlations did not reach statistical significance.

Cook and Low (2018) used independent t tests and found that the control group in their study had more disruptive behavior, $t(5952.34) = 2.469$, $p = .014$; but no differences were found for on-task behavior, reading, or math scores. None of the basic models showed a significant relationship between delivery of Second Step and academic-related outcomes. There was a small but significant relationship between spring reading scores and engagement such that 1 SD higher engagement z score was associated with a spring reading score that was .126 SD higher. There was a significant relationship between spring math score and the number of lessons delivered, such that each additional lesson was related to math scores that were .016 SD higher ($p = .048$). Since this study also looked at academic time engaged (on-task behavior) during the spring, authors noted there was a significant correlation with the number of lessons delivered and time engaged. Each additional lesson was related to a .023 SD higher academic time engaged score ($p = .026$); spring academic time engaged was also correlated with fall academic time engaged (coefficient = .111, $p < .001$), but was not significantly related to any other fidelity subscale (Cook & Low, 2018). Spring disruptive behavior was significantly moderate by the engagement subscale such that a one SD higher engagement z score was related to a -.132 SD lower disruptive behavior z score ($p = .046$). Spring disruptive

behavior was also correlated with fall disruptive behavior (coefficient=.107, $p<.001$; Cook & Low, 2018).

Hussey et al. (2007) found statistically significant reduction in reactive aggression scores of the Aggressive Behavior Teacher Checklist (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Further analyses by grade levels indicated that children in kindergarten showed the most significant reductions (2.28 to 2.07) on reactive scores ($t=2.002$, $df=74$, $p<0.05$). Correlation analyses showed a weak, but significant relationship between the proportion of lessons completed and pretest-posttest change on reactive aggression, but authors explained this was likely because the overall quality of teacher fidelity implementation was generally high across the project, and there was not enough implementation variation to impact outcomes. Brown et al. (2012) found a significant difference between overall pre- and post-intervention Behavioral and Emotional Risk assessment scores, further analyses by grade revealed that only the change in scores for third grade was statistically significant, $t(53) = -3.45$, $p<.001$.

Cooke et al. (2007) used questionnaire results to determine the effects of the implementation of Second Step. The students showed significant improvements in positive approach/coping, caring/cooperative behavior, suppression of aggression, and consideration of others. Contrary to expectations of the researchers, students demonstrated no change in responsibility and a significant decrease in impulse control over the course of the school year. Students also showed small but significant increases in angry and aggressive behaviors. There was no significant change in fighting behavior. The frequencies of positive, borderline, and negative behaviors decreased from 5.5% to 2.5% from the pre- to posttest but was not statistically significant. Researchers found no

statistically significant change in disciplinary referrals on any of the survey measure used for the specific the sub-group examined.

Top et al. (2016) used a baseline group (Hispanic, female, low SES students in control schools) to determine the effectiveness of their research. They examined the average annual growth rate of problem school behavior and the prosocial school behavior of the baseline group and found that it was statistically significant. Using the Prosocial Behavior Rating System, researchers found that school behavior problems decreased 1.07 per year, prosocial school behavior increased 1.78 per year. However, when looking at the average annual growth rate of achievement (i.e., researchers used grade point average [GPA] to measure rate) of the baseline group, they did not see a statistically significant change. When researchers controlled for student demographics (e.g., gender, ethnic background, and socio-economic status) the difference between the treatment and control schools when looking at growth rate of school problem behaviors, showed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$). The difference between the treatment school and control schools when looking at growth rate of prosocial school behaviors was not statistically significant ($p = 0.28$) when using the Prosocial Behavior Rating System. Difference between treatment and control schools in the growth rate of achievement (using GPA) was statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, which led the researchers to conclude there was a statistically significant difference between treatment and control schools. Top et al. concluded there was an inverse relationship between Second Step implementation and problem school behavior. “Results indicated that implementation of Second Step explained 15% of the variance in the change (increase) of academic achievement (GPA),

and 30% of the variance in the change (decrease) of problem school behaviors across four school semesters” (Top et al., 2016, p. 40).

Hart et al. (2009) looked at the data for their third and fourth grade groups. The analysis indicated a significant difference between pre- and post-test KASS scores for the third-grade intervention group, $t(31) = 16.12, p < 0.00$, and post hoc tests, indicating a significant difference on social skills knowledge between the control and intervention groups while controlling for the initial scores on the pretest measure ($F = 81.43; df = 1, 71; p < 0.01$). Results from the paired-sample t test indicated significant differences between pre- and post-test KASS scores for the fourth-grade intervention group, $t(42) = 5.68, p < 0.00$, but multiple post hoc tests were not significant, indicating there was not a significant difference between the intervention and control groups after controlling for the pre-test KASS scores (Hart et al., 2009).

Taub (2002) found that two of the four analyzed observed behavior variables were statistically significant using an alpha level of $p < .05: 1421 = 7.92, p < .001$). When researchers looked at students engaging appropriately with peers, data was significant on the repeated measures analysis primarily. The observed behavior, Follows Classroom Rules, was not significant ($F[2, 142] = 2.95, p = .056$) (Taub, 2002).

Thematic Analysis of Literature Results

The findings from each study were examined for common themes and categories that focus on prosocial skills, empathy instruction, and SEL. This section includes summaries of relevant study information to better understand study outcomes associated with prosocial skills, empathy instruction, and social-emotional learning. Also, summaries are included pertinent to impact of Second Step on students.

Prosocial And Empathy Skills for Social and Emotional Learning

Schools and teachers continue to be disrupted by behavioral difficulties which has prompted some to find ways to change these outcomes. In the school context, social, emotional, and behavioral problems, present significant, immediate challenges to teaching and learning (Cook & Low, 2018, p. 516). There is growing recognition among those involved in education that student social and emotional well-being is instrumental to academic success (Cook & Low, 2018, p. 516). Since socialization and healthy development of children occur in school daily, it is important for them to promote prosocial and prevent antisocial development of students through social-emotional learning at the class and school level. The literature suggests that students who engage in prosocial behaviors, in general, are more likely to have positive peer relationships, are more attractive to their peers and thus more likely to have continued positive peer interactions (Griese & Buhs, 2014, p. 1053). Current SEL programs are designed to reduce the frequency of undesirable behavior such as bullying, school-wide or within small groups, and with individual support. Early elementary school represents an opportune developmental period to proactively support children to begin developing the social-emotional competence to prevent social and behavioral problems that interfere with learning, as well as enable them to profit from their early learning experiences (Cook & Low, 2018, p. 563).

Social-Emotional Learning is defined as “the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors” (Brown et al., 2012). SEL programs are increasingly being implemented in schools to

address a wide range of problematic behaviors (Espelage et al, 2015). SEL programs use social skill instruction to address specific behaviors and academics to help students build social skills, build empathy, learn positive coping skills, etc. Recent SEL programs have used approaches to assess the effectiveness of school-based conflict resolution skills and social competence, coping and social interaction skills, personal and social skills, and decreased aggression (Akgun and Araz, 2014). Creating connections to the school and teachers, by having a sense of caring, closeness, and empathy will help facilitate prosocial behaviors among students and inhibit anti-social behavior such as bullying (Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana & Evans, 2010). Teachers may be able to influence the classroom climate to help students take action and to reduce bullying and other unwanted behaviors (Raskauskas et al., 2010).

Although there are limitations with SEL programs that use prosocial and empathy instruction, the benefits outweigh those limitations. Griese and Buh (2014) helped future researchers, teachers, and practitioners understand the possible protective factors of SEL instruction, namely the importance of a victim's own prosocial behavior as a potential protective factor, with its effects being significantly above and beyond the influence of peer social support (Griese & Buh, 2014). Promoting proactive school wide interventions can create positive school climates, encourage social awareness (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011).

Many schools are integrating SEL, but may not critically evaluate implementation or outcomes following adoption. A benefit of having a prosocial skill and empathy instruction program is that it may benefit schoolwide prevention of problem behavior, give individualized support for children who experience or engage in anti-social

behavior, and provide proactive strategies for all student populations. Promoting proactive school-wide interventions can create positive school climates and encourage social awareness (Rose et al., 2011). Many schools are integrating SEL programs, but few address how the program is working once it is implemented.

Since many advocates of social-emotional learning programs and schools that use these programs desire a balance between academic learning and social-emotional learning, educators want to find programs that develop students who are self-sufficient and prepared for life and work after school. Second Step is a universal violence prevention and social-emotional learning program based on sound research foundations (Frey et. al, 2000, p. 110). Second Step is a SEL program developed to accomplish two main goals: promoting interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies; and reducing the development of social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Moy & Hazen, 2018). Second Step is designed to teach students at the tier one level (i.e., universal level), about specific SEL concepts in order to reduce antisocial behaviors and improve prosocial behaviors. Second Step includes observation, self-reflection, and positive reinforcement of prosocial behavior. This classroom-based SEL program attempts to prevent aggression by fostering empathy and perspective-taking, problem solving, and anger management skills (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al., 2002). The focus of the lessons include empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management. By providing direction instruction, modeling, and observational learning opportunities, Second Step aims to increase the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills of children exposed to the program (Moy & Hazen, 2018, p. 18). Second Step uses scripted lessons with key concepts, clear objectives, and preparatory activities in a predetermined sequence. Each

lesson includes a warm-up and a video which are both used to help with class discussions. Most lessons include a follow-up worksheet that can be used with small groups, independently, or as homework in order to practice new skills. Teachers are provided with suggestions for connecting lessons to current events. Homework assignments, extension activities, academic integration lessons, and videos all serve to reinforce each skill and to promote skill acquisition (Espelage et al., 2015). The program packages are available for grades PreK through 8th grade and can be taught by a teacher, school counselor, school social worker, or school psychologist, once or twice a week. Second Step has been shown to be effective for young children (including preschool age) in increasing both social knowledge and prosocial behavior.

Moy and Hazen (2018) systematically reviewed studies of Second Step. Their study looked at the program's content knowledge, outcomes related to prosocial skills, and outcomes related to antisocial skills through randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, and single-group repeated measures. They explained that randomized controlled trials and quasi-experiments were used to measure effects between treatment and control groups, but some studies used single-group repeated measures designs (i.e., pre-post) studies to evaluate Second Step effects (Moy & Hazen, 2018). Twenty-four studies were selected and data were extracted for three different outcome effect categories: knowledge, prosocial behavior, and antisocial behavior. The knowledge effect category looked at students' scores on the Second Step Knowledge and Skills Survey which is connected to the program. The prosocial effect category looks at desirable student outcomes, while the antisocial effect category looks at undesirable student outcomes. Program developers, like the developers of Second Step designed their

programs with the intent and desire to maintain for instructors to follow strict adherence and fidelity when implementing the program. Different methods of implementation might influence treatment fidelity. Previous research on school development and change has suggested that the way in which a program is implemented in a school affects the maintenance of the program over time, and thus affects the outcomes of the program (Larsen & Samdal, 2007).

Training

Adequate training and technical assistance are also crucial for implementation success (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012). There were five features commonly cited as important aspects of prevention program implementation: fidelity, duration, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation (Low et al., 2016). Second Step developers and other intervention programs find it difficult to support schools' efforts to implement and develop social-emotional competencies and skills for students. If change wants to be made in schools, a well-designed program like Second Step is not enough. Districts and schools that fail to allocate sufficient time or resources to implementing a social skills program will likely fall short of desired results (Frey et al., 2000).

Implementation Fidelity

With the increased number of schools adopting social-emotional learning programs, there is increased emphasis on the role of implementation in obtaining desired outcomes (Low et al., 2016). This study is aimed at understanding the implementation and effects of Second Step within suburban elementary classrooms. Implementation effectiveness is determined by: 1) the organization's climate for the implementation of

the innovation; 2) staff members perceptions of its fit with their values (Wenz-Gross & Upshur, 2012). However, implementation fidelity can be negatively affected by low levels of acceptability from stakeholders. For example, teachers are less likely to follow guides or protocols for program implementation if they do not believe the program addresses an important need, uses instructional procedures that are unfamiliar or non-preferred, or requires resources that are not available (Carter, 2007; Miltenberger, 1990). Accordingly, acceptability is a prerequisite for implementation fidelity. This means school administrators must ensure high acceptability in order to make possible a high level of implementation.

Cook and Low et al. (2018) found the quality of implementation, specifically a measure of student engagement and dosage showed small but significant improvements in reading and classroom behaviors. Their study used a large-scale randomized control trial to evaluate the impact of the fourth edition of Second Step on elementary students' academic outcomes. Different features of the fidelity of implementation were also examined to determine the impact on academic outcomes. Different dimensions of fidelity were incorporated into this investigation, with adherence (i.e., implementing core components as planned) and dosage (i.e., number of lessons) capturing traditional dimensions of fidelity and engagement (i.e., students' level of engagement) reflecting the quality or competency with which Second Step was delivered (Cook & Low et al., 2018). Cook and Low et al.'s study examined the different dimensions of fidelity (adherence, engagement, and dosage) and the impact they have on academic outcomes. Cook and Low (2018) hypothesized that fidelity of implementation would have a moderate impact on Second Step academic outcomes, especially if stronger fidelity was

used with fidelity dosage, adherence, and engagement. They also hypothesized that teacher competency would also have a moderate effect on the students' engagement of the lessons delivered.

Cook and Low conducted their study in a rural/urban setting with 50-78% of students receiving free and reduced lunch and 64% of students' ethnicity considered as non-white. Researchers collected data three times (fall, winter, and spring), but only used the fall and spring data for analysis. To record class-wide and individual student behavior, a behavioral observation system was developed based on the Behavioral Observation of Students in Schools (Cook & Low et al., 2018). A Curriculum-based Measurement from *Aimsweb* was used to measure potential growth in academic performance as a result of Second Step. In order to evaluate the fidelity of implementation, teachers were asked to complete a weekly implementation log to record their adherence to the Second Step program. This implementation log was also used to record any adaptations to the program as well as student engagement.

Findings from this study provide support for Second Step when implemented in the context of high engagement and higher dosage to have small but potentially meaningful collateral impact on early academic-related outcomes (Cook and Low et al., 2018). When researchers looked at the impact and implementation, they found that specific dimensions of fidelity may be associated with outcomes. A limitation of this study was the lack of research on teacher competency since it was measured by students' engagement. Authors were unable to disentangle the effects to determine whether the positive findings were due to general teacher competency or specific competency related to the implementation of Second Step (Cook & Low et al., 2018).

Larsen and Samdal conducted two studies, one in 2007 and another in 2008, about the implementation and fidelity of adapting Second Step. The first study, finished in 2007 examined fidelity and program adaption while the second study finished in 2008 was a qualitative case study used to interpret the school principals' perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining Second Step. Both studies included participants from four schools. In each study two of the four schools formally implemented Second Step for all teachers (known as the comprehensive group) and the other two schools in each study did not use a formalized approach (known as the selective group).

In the 2007 study, Larsen and Samdal investigated seventeen teachers' use of Second Step and their perceptions of fidelity of implementation through semi-structured interviews. Fidelity was examined through teachers' perceptions, assessment, and experiences and the fidelity of implementation refers to the faithfulness of the teachers following the implementation as the program developers intended (Larsen & Samdal, 2007). They determined that teachers adapted the Second Step program to their own needs in order to meet the needs of the students along with their own beliefs and experiences.

Larsen and Samdal used an interview guide during the interview process. They created a semi-structured interview guide that had an outline of topics they wanted to cover with suggested open-ended questions. After conducting the interviews, two themes emerged which included teachers implementing the program in different ways and their rationale for using the program. Some teachers implemented the program comprehensively while others selected specific parts to implement. Teachers' interview responses were consistent when it came to the rationale for using the program because

they all expressed a need for social competence training in their class to help students learn to behave and interact with their peers.

One limitation of the study was the absence of observational data to support their findings and interpretations. Such data would have enabled a more comprehensive interpretation of the actual use of the program through observing the teaching of the program in the classrooms (Larsen & Samdal, 2007). The findings of this study revealed that teachers adapted the program to some extent, but the selective group adapted it the most. This led the Larsen and Samdal to argue that the implementation of programs often tends to apply to a top-down approach, which led to their next study in 2008 that focused on the importance of school principals and their role in implementing Second Step.

In the 2008 study, Larsen and Samdal noted that principals are important because they are in a position to shape the organizational conditions necessary for successful and sustained program implementation (Larsen & Samdal, 2008). This study focused on the school principals' role in facilitating and maintaining the implementation of Second Step by researching what they did and why they did it this way. When schools do not implement Second Step correctly or according to the program facilitation guide, this could affect the results of the program. It is important that directions are provided, teachers and the school are aligned together towards the same goals, and the school must conduct the activities provided by Second Step. Teacher training is essential and teachers who are specifically trained are more likely to fully implement a program (Larsen & Samdal, 2008). Leadership must be involved in the implementation to structure and facilitate teachers' use of the program.

Larsen and Samdal (2008) hypothesized in the beginning of their research that the principal was the key person in facilitating and sustaining implementation, however if the program is implemented in a fragmented manner with no common vision or direction, leaving the teachers to themselves, the results of the program will be fragmented as well. The key feature of successful implementation seems to be a strong focus on leadership combined with management strategies and a continued and systematic focus on the program over time with a whole-school effort (Larsen & Samdal, 2008). A limitation in this study was a gap in the implementation which showed the need to provide teachers with concrete and specific guidelines for implementation as well as a principal's guide focusing on leadership and management. The significant of both studies is the understanding the importance of the implementation and fidelity when adapting Second Step. Schools, including teachers and administrators, must implement Second Step correctly or according to the program facilitation guide to get the desired results of the program.

Hussey and Flannery (2007) used Child Service Specialists, counselors, and school nurses to implement lessons because teachers expressed concerns about implementation due to being overwhelmed with other academic and non-academic duties. Teachers were encouraged to participate in Second Step lesson sessions so they would be able to reinforce skills learned throughout their classroom and program and were still involved in the data collection and self-reporting. To study how well the students responded to the lessons, researchers averaged the Child Service Specialists, counselor, and nurse ratings of the question, "How well did the students respond to the lesson?" Results from the study indicated a reduction in aggressive behavior. The authors

concluded their use of different intervention agents may indicate higher credibility for the Second Step effects observed during the study.

Ableser (2003) conducted a qualitative study of elementary teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and practices towards Second Step. Using ethnography, Ableser examined teachers from three schools in kindergarten through third grade in a large urban public school district. Intervention agents who delivered instruction to child participants were contracted consultants and not classroom teachers. A different consultant was used for each school to implement the Second Step lessons for roughly thirty minutes on average twice-per-week throughout the research study. Teachers were expected to apply and extend Second Step in their classrooms. Data was collected through pre- and post-test questionnaires, observations, and interviews. "Observation and interview protocols were developed and used based on the conceptual framework to guide and focus the investigators research" (Ableser, 2003, p. 85). Findings indicated consultants did not provide training to the teachers and they did not follow intervention procedures in a number of key implementation areas (Ableser, 2003). The teachers felt that students enjoyed the lessons, and could recall and recite the steps, but did not apply and transfer the skills into their own life experiences. The teachers also did not feel they were knowledgeable about the program. Teachers and consultants agreed that the program should become more integrated and infused into the curriculum of the school.

Formal Assessments

Top et al.'s (2016) longitudinal study investigated the effects of Second Step on 4th-5th grad students' problem behaviors, prosocial behaviors, and schools for four school semesters. The teachers observed and recorded school behavior, and academic

achievement was determined by students' grade point average. Teachers used the Discipline Point System and the Prosocial Behavior Rating System to observe and record students' problems and prosocial school behavior data. The teachers were trained to use both formal assessments. After controlling for demographic variables, results of this study show significant differences between the treatment and control schools on initial levels of problem school behaviors. They found Second Step explained 15% of the variance in the change (increase) of academic achievement (GPA), and 30% of the variance in the change (decrease) of problem school behaviors. One limitation of this study was that teacher variables (years of teaching, certification, gender, teacher/student relationship, etc.) were not considered for in the analyses or interpretations. A qualitative or mixed method design with interviews and focus groups could reveal whether teacher and student perspectives of Second Step influence outcomes of the program.

Informal Assessments

Many researchers use self-reporting to evaluate intervention effects. Low et al. (2016) used self-reporting to measure multiple dimensions of implementation. Their study examined implementation fidelity from teachers who implemented Second Step and their students during the first year of a large cluster-randomized trial. One hour of training was provided to the teachers on Second Step at the start of the school year. Teachers were asked to complete weekly self-report ratings of implementation to record adherence to the program, engagement, generalization, and dosage. Adherence included four dimensions: 1) adherence to the key lesson dimensions; 2) measured adaptations or modifications; 3) a single item asking how many of the daily practice activities were completed; and 4) a single item asking whether the teacher sent home the HomeLink

Activity. Student and teacher measures included: the teacher version of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment – Second Step Editions; Strengths Difficulties Questionnaire; Behavioral Observation of Students in Schools; and Proactive Classroom Management Rating Form.

Low et al. (2016) also used observational data to assess classroom behavior, which included academic engagement and disruptive behavior, as well as teacher fidelity to Second Step lesson procedures and support for generalization. Data were gathered from teacher self-reporting on fidelity to the program. Results showed that poor adherence to the lesson procedures was attributed to teacher adaptations and not necessarily omissions, and that program effects were positive because adaptations and adherence were associated with student engagement. Low et al. concluded that lesson content may be just as important as competency (quality) in delivery, and adaptations to promote student engagement supported positive connections (i.e., relationships) between students and their teachers (Low et al., 2016).

Hart et al. (2009) used the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (KASS; Committee for Children, 2004) to measure students social-emotional skills knowledge. “The Knowledge Assessment for Second Step is a self-report measure developed by the authors of Second Step to assess knowledge in social-emotional skills” (Hart et al., 2009, p. 106). The assessment consisted of several problem situations and related social-emotional skills knowledge questions in which students needed to respond to after Second Step instruction. When researchers compared the third-grade control students to the third-grade students exposed to the intervention unit of Second Step, they found students exposed to Second Step demonstrated significant increases in social-emotional

skills knowledge. The fourth-grade students did not have the same outcome. While the fourth-grade students also showed significant growth in knowledge scores from pre- to post-test, both the exposed group and control group showed a similar level of growth in social-emotional skills knowledge. One explanation for this might be that the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step was intended to be used after completing Second Step. One limitation of this study was that data were solely collected from the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step pre- and post-tests. Additional measures could have been used to evaluate the effectiveness of Second Step, including qualitative measures, behavioral observations, and fidelity to lesson procedures.

Sprague et al. (2001) examined office discipline referrals prior to and during Second Step implementation. They found reductions in office discipline referrals in the intervention year when compared to the year before the intervention. They also reported greater improvement to comparison schools that did not use the Second Step intervention. Researchers also used the Oregon School Safety Survey to determine school violence and discipline problems, but no meaningful differences were detected between the treatment and comparison schools. Researchers used the Assessing Behavior Support in Schools checklist to determine the quality of implementation of the Second Step intervention from the staff perspective. Grade levels third through eighth showed improvement on this checklist after Second Step instruction. “Average percent correct in baseline was 46% and average scores increased to 55% across all grades” (Sprague et al., 2001).

Second Step Outcomes

Munoz (2002) included 205 students in first and third grade, of which 167 were characterized as at-risk for academic failure or low SES. An evaluation interview was

used to measure the degree of knowledge and/or skills a student had before and after the Second Step intervention. The evaluation interview measured empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management. Twelve elementary schools participated in this study with a mean pretest score of 24.3 and a mean posttest score for 29.1. Posttest scores were statistically significant for district and school levels, suggesting positive effects on knowledge and skills in measured areas. One limitation of this and other similar studies is that beneficial effects may only manifest two years following implementation—changes in behavior also must be sustainable over time. However, Munoz did not collect follow-up data to evaluate the durability of observed effects. Another limitation is that teachers may be resistant to embrace these programs because they require additional training, preparation time, and effort. Munoz suggests providing teachers with information about the benefits of the program implemented in their school. Throughout studies on Second Step, teacher training sessions covering program and delivery are critical to the success of the program (Espelage et al., 2015). Another limitation of this study is that the selection criteria for participation may have resulted in an atypical set of schools, classrooms, and students. A strength of the study was that a majority of participating students received free/reduced lunch (81.5%) and a majority came from a single-family structure (273.2%), which Munoz therefore classified as at-risk for school failure or poor social-behavioral development.

Espelage et al. (2015) examined direct and indirect impact to the Second Step Middle School Program on bullying, cyberbullying, homophobic name-calling, and sexual harassment perpetration over three years. This study included 3,651 students starting in sixth grade and moving through to eighth grade from thirty-six schools in

Illinois and Kansas. The teachers in this study implemented structured lessons that were delivered in either one 50-minute or two 25-minute classroom settings, weekly or semiweekly throughout the school year. After completing each lesson, teachers completed online implementation logs that assessed the teachers' perceptions of student engagement and what components of the lesson they completed (Espelage et al., 2015). Espelage et al., concluded that school psychologists should consider training teachers and supporting their implementations of SEL programs since they are often the ones responsible for intervening in problematic behavior situations. School psychologists are encouraged to not view these programs as "canned programs" that are isolated to a weekly lesson, but instead to reinforce outside of the classroom and outside of the lesson (Espelage et al., 2015).

Discussion

The purpose of the literature review was to understand the Second Step research literature and whether studies sufficiently represent school districts that may adopt this program for SEL. The review also focused on the implementation of Second Step which incorporates prosocial skills and empathy instruction during elementary and middle school. The first sub research question guiding the review was focused on the effects of Second Step on academics and behavior. The majority of included studies reported that Second Step led to statistically significant improvements in academic achievement and behavioral interactions. Some studies used informal measures to evaluate Second Step outcomes. Students' work samples and students' grades were used as an indicator of Second Step effects in three studies (one used work samples and two used grades). Top (2016) found that given the signs of differences in growth rate of school outcomes

(school behaviors and achievement), it might be reasonable to affirm that students in treatment schools have displayed higher achievement and less negative school behaviors. Five studies used observational data to determine improvements in academic achievement and behavioral interactions. These studies used observational data and observational checklists to assess student and classroom behavior (e.g., academic engagement, on-task behavior, and disruptive behavior). Cooke et. al, (2007) used a student behavior observation checklist in classrooms, playgrounds, cafeteria settings, and each focused for five minutes on a randomly selected student. Taub (2002) observed behaviors that are related to the goals of Second Step include three social competencies for prosocial behaviors: responds to direction from adults, engages appropriately with peers, and follows classroom rules; and two antisocial or negative behaviors: bothers/annoys/distracts other students and fights/argues with peers.

The second sub research question guiding this review was focused on the outcomes of Second Step intervention research studies. The majority of included studies reported Second Step led to statistically significant reductions in physically aggressive behavior and/or increased positive social interactions. Most studies used formal and informal measures to evaluate Second Step outcomes. Office discipline referrals were used as an indicator of Second Step effects in two studies, and two studies used direct observations. Indirect measures were common and varied considerably across studies. Direct measures tend to have higher validity and reliability than indirect measures. This means schools that adopt Second Step will need to decide without clear guidance from researchers how to evaluate whether the program is generating a positive effect for their students. Sprague (2001) noted that treatment schools fared better regarding changes in

office discipline referrals and these changes appeared related to perceptions of intervention fidelity and improvements in student social. Discipline referrals and academic achievement scores should also be evaluated when looking at SEL programs, like Second Step.

A second overarching research question guiding this review was related to school types and grade levels in relevant studies. A very large majority of studies were conducted in public elementary schools, and most child participants did not have special education-related needs. Only 2.3% of students participating in the article had disabilities, but students with disabilities typically comprise 14% of all public school students (Irwin et al., 2021). This means results from included studies may not generalize to most public elementary schools. Those studies that included students with disabilities also did not make clear participant disability type, which further obfuscates whether Second Step can be presume to benefit students with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities. In other words, school leaders should not presume their students with disabilities who receive Second Step will experience measured improvement. This is an important finding given that most students with disabilities, such as ADHD, need intensive interventions to improve social and emotional development rather than behavior interventions or medication alone (Lightenstein, 2016). Overall, the findings related to child participants suggests that perceived outcomes/benefits for students with disabilities might be inflated by research that did not include students with disabilities.

A sub research question guiding this review was how student participant racial demography also varied in representativeness. Notably, fewer than half of the included studies reported racial demographics of student participants. Omission of such

information means schools may adopt Second Step without knowing whether results for their student body are (in)consistent with the racial makeup of participants in Second Step research. In other words, it seems unclear whether schools can reasonably believe positive effects reported in the literature will translate to positive effects in their school. When race was reported, demographics appeared inconsistent with national population estimates. For example, approximately 28% of participants were white compared to national population of 72% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Hispanic or Latino participants represented approximately 46% of study participants but are only 18.4% of the national population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Results across included studies further demonstrate differences between participant demographics and national racial demographics. For example, white students and Hispanic or Latino students represented approximately 13% of all participants. Other discrepancies between student racial demographics in the included studies and national population estimates also were evident, which suggests that schools with varying diverse student bodies may be inconsistent with Second Step research studies. Such differences may mean research findings cannot be presumed to generalize to schools with different racial demographics.

The first sub research question under the third overarching research question guiding this review focused on how intervention agents were trained to implement Second Step. Intervention agents who trained instructors to implement Second Step varied across studies. Different intervention agents were used throughout the articles which shows the inconsistency in the potential training of instructors, which could influence implementation fidelity. Few studies adhered to guidance provided by Second Step authors regarding training (Cook et al., 2018 and Low et al., 2016). Schools that

attempt to train personnel to implement Second Step may need to monitor whether their training is adequate given the included studies used different trainers.

Second Step is a skills-focused social-emotional learning program that emphasizes directly teaching students' skills (Cook et al., 2018). It is not surprising that general education teachers were the largest number of professional participants since they are directly involved in teaching these skills and strategies to students. Principals oversee the overall curriculum in their schools, hence why they were the second largest number of professional participants.

Most studies used in this literature review considered the teachers workload when adding Second Step to the school curriculum and the training involved in implementing the program effectively and with fidelity. Even though training was provided to teachers, amount of training provided was relatively inconsistent with the Second Step authors' recommendations. Training appeared to differ considerably across the studies when looking at who conducted the trainings and what they learned. If studies deviate or vary from the recommended protocol, then it seems unclear what schools should expect to need for training when adopting Second Step. Schools may not get enough training and implementation may then be poor or the effects might otherwise be compromised in some way.

The third sub research question under the third overarching research question guiding this review centered on how researchers measured fidelity to Second Step instructional procedures, and what assessments were used to measure the program effects. In many of the articles coded, researchers checked for the completion of lessons rather than measuring the fidelity of how the lessons were taught. Teachers were asked

to complete weekly self-reporting ratings of implementation to record adherence to the program, engagement, generalization, and dosage. Many studies in this literature review used self-reporting. Self-reporting is convenient, but can be subject to things like social desirability bias where people want to seem good (Khatri, 2015). The accuracy and reliability of reports of one's own behavior and physical state are at the root of valid research in psychology (Garcia & Gustavson, 1997). When using self-reporting it is important to use a variety of question types and no leading questions and make questions relevant to the topic (Khatri, 2015). Even though many researchers realize the complex nature of implementation, the majority of studies only examined one or a few aspects of fidelity. For example, Cook and Low (2018) asked teachers to complete weekly implementation logs to record adherence to lesson procedures. Some authors used a qualitative approach to understand whether followed lesson procedures or made adaptations, but observations were not used to corroborate self-reports. There seems to be a need to directly measure Second Step implementation fidelity in order to have increased confidence that positive outcomes are best explained by the program, but also to understand whether and how teachers adapt lesson content and delivery based on their unique circumstances.

Implications

Second Step can change students' attitudes about empathy and their relationships with others, but merely implementing the program may not be sufficient. Studies in this literature review included child profiles that differed across studies in ways incongruent with demographics of many schools in the US. Also, intervention agents varied as did the type and amount of training they received. Measures of fidelity to lesson procedures was

limited and outcomes were measured in a variety of ways. Collectively, these findings mean researchers should consider investigating how these and other differences influence Second Step effects. Researchers might examine various aspects of adoption, implementation, and measurement using qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, evaluation research may be particularly useful for future studies that attempt to understand how contextual (i.e., school- and district-specific) factors influence Second Step adoption, implementation, outcomes measurement, and effects. Evaluation studies may further reveal how extant experimental findings corroborate or differ from outcomes in schools and districts that differ from those in the included studies. For example, it seems plausible that a suburban and well-resourced school or district might have different outcomes than schools like those in the included studies. A more nuanced and context-specific understanding of Second Step in public schools may help schools decide when to adopt (or abandon) this or other social emotional curricula.

Limitations

The search terms, inclusion criteria, coding criteria, and analysis procedures used likely influenced the results. Studies that use different procedures likely will have different outcomes. However, these decisions were based on research questions and desire to understand the implementation and effectiveness of Second Step. Despite the limitations of data collection and time collecting the data, a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Second Step is imperative to inform schools, administrators, and teachers about the effectiveness of the program. No existing studies cite the combined use of checklists, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups; however, an in-depth

analysis was pursued in order to determine the relevance of Second Step in an education setting to inform others of the benefits.

Summary of the Literature Review

Findings from literature reviews and meta-analyses (Moy et al., 2018 and Moy & Hazen, 2018) suggest that Second Step research has predominantly been conducted in schools where students are racially and ethnically diverse, but has not included students with disabilities. Second Step research has been conducted primarily in public elementary school and some middle schools. Training was usually conducted for a full day or less with intermitted trainings throughout data collection. Findings from my review also indicate that expert researchers were used to train teachers who were the primary intervention agents that delivered lessons to students throughout the research in this review. Fidelity was measured per via observations and/or self-reporting. A variety of different formal and informal assessments were found to be used in this review. A majority of informal assessments included observations and pre and post assessments. Although most researchers reported statistically significant improvement, effect sizes were small and for student knowledge, not student behavior.

What remains unclear is whether and to what extent schools included in the research literature are representative of schools where Second Step is used, and whether outcomes from those studies can be reasonable expected in suburban schools. Researcher involvement in training and support as well as differences in child demographics, particularly the limited number of students with disabilities, evokes questions about whether schools in a district unlike those in the literature can reasonably expect beneficial effects from Second Step implementation. Notably, researchers may find Second Step

improves student knowledge but not contribute to observable changes in student behavior. Schools likely adopt SEL curricula like Second Step in order to promote appropriate student behavior, but it is unclear whether a school can reasonably expect improvements in student behavior following Second Step implementation. Furthermore, differences in training could mean that schools where Second Step is adopted may not benefit from its use if training is inconsistent with the literature.

These and other findings suggest evaluation research of schools where Second Step is used may reveal whether research outcomes generalize to different contexts. If so, then it may be valuable to understand how schools successfully deploy Second Step when adopting schools are very different from schools where researchers studied the program effects. If schools do not appear to benefit from Second Step, then such findings might suggest the research literature does not sufficiently represent typical schools, which would indicate a need for more research to understand why and how such curricula are developed, researched, and disseminated.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

The focus of this research was related to the interactional sociolinguistics tradition. When thinking about this tradition, researchers understand that language works for us, it defines our role, and what we do. This language describes who we are and how we identify with a social group. Our cultural identity is reflected in our speech. Language shapes our thinking, our social reality, and our access to learning. One can change their identity based on what they say or not say, and who they are speaking to. One's position in the dialogue can change their role.

Linguistics provides us with the cues and markers through which such footings become manifest, helping us to find our way to a structural basis for analyzing them (Goffman, 1981, p. 157). Utterances are units of language that are inherently contextualized. They are bounded by breath or pauses as well as the speaker's silence. "The relation of any one such member to this utterance can be called his 'participation status' relative to it, and that of all the persons in the gathering the 'participation framework' for that moment of speech (Goffman, 1981, p. 137). Utterances might be found during the current study. Listening for utterances helps researchers think about the possibilities of what might happen next in the conversation.

Researchers can study social perspective taking since it relates to the topic of empathy and the perspective of teachers. Social perspective taking is the motivation and ability for individuals to discern the thoughts and feelings of others (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Wang, 2012, p. 2). Teachers' perspectives can be created in a variety of

ways. “This perspective views teachers as being either consciously or unconsciously in the process of fashioning and refashioning [their] identities by patching together fragments of the Discourses to which [they] are exposed” (McAlinden, 2018, p. 45). During each interview, the interviewees stepped in the shoes of the students and thought about their feelings of empathy and how Second Step helps build these skills. Dialogue helps individuals see things through others’ eyes without losing site of themselves. Individuals search for other’s understanding in order to know what others feel and think. This is possible through empathy. Empathy is known to help one understand how others feel. Min (2001) and Deardorff (2011) argue that somehow, we can temporarily *become* others (McAlinden, 2018, p. 41). The researcher and interviewees have different points of view, yet still try to understand how others perceive certain situations.

A definition of class discourse requires consideration of class discussions and focus on the content of what is said as well as the social context of the participants ideas. According to McAlinden (2018), “Discourse is a discipline or practice” (p. 44). McAlinden (2018) adopted Gee’s 2000 definition that “Discourses are ways of being certain kinds of people; identity is created and sustained through the process of recognition, and that through Discourse, one’s identity as a certain kind of person is constructed” (McAlinden, 2018, p. 44). Teacher identity is related to discourse because of the ways teachers behave with students, how they value their students, and their interactions with students. When teachers think about their students, the way they speak to their students, and how they use different strategies, this is an example of discourse. During each interview, the participants thought about the questions being asked, based on their own ideas and experiences of Second Step. One thing that was considered with the

data collected, is the unspoken norms of what was not said or what the teachers was implying. Another consideration was the positioning and social perspective of the interviewer. As the researcher, my own biases about SEL programs and Second Step influenced the data collection and analysis.

In order to analyze Second Step in a school environment, the current study used a program evaluation approach with a mixed methods research design to study the effects of prosocial skills and empathy instruction while examining the implementation of Second Step and how effective the program is with the participants. Using data obtained from observations, a questionnaire, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data, I investigated whether teachers adhere to Second Step's instructional procedures as outlined in the program manual while understanding the perceptions about the rationale for and benefits of Second Step. The current study may help researchers consider how Second Step is adopted, deployed, and evaluated, and whether these factors influence the program's effects on student social, emotional, behavioral, empathetic development. I aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the school-measured outcomes of Second Step for elementary school students in a typical suburban elementary school?
 - a. What are the effects of Second Step on academics and behavior?
 - b. What are the effects of Second Step on office referrals and discipline issues within a typical suburban school?
2. What are the perceived reasons for using Second Step and the process used to adopt Second Step in a typical suburban elementary school?

- a. What do stakeholders (teachers and administrators) perceive are the benefits of Second Step on prosocial skills and empathy?
 - b. What do teachers perceive are the impacts of Second Step on student empathy?
3. How were teachers trained to use Second Step and to what extent do they follow the Second Step instructional procedures?
- a. Was training consistent with Second Step research?
 - b. Do teachers who use Second Step believe they have the resources to properly implement Second Step?
 - c. Are teachers using Second Step per author and researcher recommendations (i.e., what is fidelity to the program)?

Research Design

A program evaluation that utilizes a mixed methods research design was used to study the effects of prosocial skills and empathy instruction within a suburban elementary classroom. The primary purpose for using a program evaluation is to delve deeply into the school and data to uncover new insights on the implementation of Second Step and how effective the program is with the participants. “By using an evaluation/mixed method research design, and evaluation will be conducted on the of process measures that assess program implementation and the fidelity of implementation related to essential program components” (Hussey & Flannery, 2007). A broader impact of this dissertation is that the examples of mixing strategies for data analysis could be adopted in research settings more widely within engineering education and beyond (Reeping et al., 2019). Although results from a mixed methods program evaluation is context dependent and

therefore lacks external validity, this approach is appropriate for investigating how a unique school system uses this program in ways that may inform other schools with similar features (Kanno & Kangas 2014).

I included both quantitative and qualitative features in the mixed methods design, data collection, and analysis. Using mixed methods helped me analyze the findings, make inferences, and draw conclusions. My intent was to seek a common understanding through triangulating data from multiple methods and to use multiple lenses simultaneously to achieve alternative perspectives that are not reduced to a single understanding (Mertens, 2015). Using both methods helped answer my research questions that were difficult with just one method. Quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred in a parallel form, in which both types of data were collected and analyzed concurrently.

Data obtained from observations, a questionnaire, interviews, a focus groups, and school collected data were used to answer the research questions. Participants included teachers in an elementary school where Second Step is being used. Classroom observations were used to observe whether a sample of teachers adhered to the Second Step program instructional procedures as outlined in the program manual. A questionnaire was used to understand teacher perceptions about the rationale for and benefits of Second Step. Teachers were interviewed to further understand their perceptions about the rationale, benefits, and challenges associated with Second Step implementation. Each aspect of this study's design is more fully described below.

Setting

Research took place in a district that serves a 75-square-mile suburban, urban, and rural region in central Chester County, Pennsylvania known for its many diversified businesses and beautiful historic countryside outside of a major metropolitan city in the north east (WCASD / Homepage, n.d.). This school district had 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. The district had more than 11,950 students in ten elementary schools (kindergarten through grade 5), three middle schools (grades 6 through 8), and three high schools (grades 9 through 12) (WCASD / Homepage, n.d.). Forty-eight percent of the students were female and 52% male (Niche, 2021). The student body is diverse consisting of: 76.6% white, 6.9% Hispanic, 4.5% Black, 9.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.9% Multi-Racial (WCASD / Homepage, n.d.). The district had more than 950 teachers, 60 administrators and 400 support staff with more than 70% certified teaching staff, and 100% of the administrative staff had advanced degrees (WCASD / Homepage, n.d.). The school had 410 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade (SchoolDigger, 2021). The student body racial demographic was 80.5% white, 10.2% Hispanic, 4.9% Multi-Racial, and 14.9% of the students receive free and reduced lunch (SchoolDigger, 2021). The school has a 12.9 teacher/student ratio (SchoolDigger, 2021).

The participating district was chosen because they used Second Step for several years. Many other nearby districts that used Second Step were still in the initial implementation phase, and other nearby districts used different SEL programs. After emailing the school district, the Superintendent directed me to one of the schools in the district that was one of first schools in the district to implement Second Step.

The suburban school district adopted Second Step for its social and emotional curriculum approximately four years ago. Second Step promotes these concepts by directly teaching students, the skills that strengthen their ability to learn, have empathy, manage emotions, and solve problems. This program is designed to prevent problem behaviors, peer rejection, impulsivity, antisocial behavior, and low academic achievement by developing students' self-regulation skills, self-emotional competencies, and school connectedness (Committee for Children, 2011).

Second Step is a universal social-emotional learning program designed to decrease antisocial behaviors, increase prosocial behaviors, and increase knowledge about content curriculum (Moy, et. al., 2018). The intervention, Second Step uses strategies in a set program that provides opportunities for teachers, direct instruction, and modeling of SEL. These strategies include: empathy, respecting similarities and differences, understanding different perspectives, showing compassion, emotion management, and solving problems, and taking responsibility for your actions, etc. This intervention is used to help all students, but especially those with social-emotional skill deficits, behavioral problems, and exhibit prosocial behaviors. Second Step is designed for preschoolers, kindergartners, and students in grades first through eighth. Each grade level has its own curriculum; however, they are all based on the intervention research surrounding empathy, social problem solving, and anger management (Moy, et. al., 2018). Each grade has a set number of lessons and themes that are scripted, interactive and taught by trained teachers for 50 minute or two 25-minute sessions. The current study will examine Second Step and determine how effective it is in the classroom.

Participants

Schools and teachers play a significant role in their students' overall development. They are the foundation behind the academic and behavioral development of students. The current study examined how Second Step is working on promoting prosocial behavior in students in kindergarten through fifth grade that are enrolled in a suburban school district outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The participants included employees of the district working as elementary education professionals in a suburban school where Second Step is being used. Participants were asked about their current position, years of teaching experience, years teaching at the school, specific training for Second Step (e.g., via conference presentations, university coursework, professional readings, professional development sessions (in-house or external expert), and how many years of implementing the Second Step program. Details about participants were used to inform interview questions and to better understand the context for implementation in the school. For example, it may be that teachers with fewer years of experience are more likely to report satisfaction with and positive effects of Second Step whereas veteran teachers may not (or vice versa). Similarly, the quality of professional development may reveal potentially important reasons why Second Step is implemented consistently (or not) and appears to benefit students (or does not).

Teachers

General Education teachers were recruited to participate because they provide Second Step instruction to the students. The participants included general education teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. All teachers were given pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. There were approximately twenty-four general

education teachers who use the Second Step or serve students who receive Second Step (i.e., special educators are not required to use the program, but they may serve students who receive Second Step in the general education classroom from a general educator). Information about the teachers was collected from those who provide informed consent, including years teaching in current school, grade level, gender, years using Second Step, who performed the training in Second Step.

There were approximately 3-4 teachers per grade, including kindergarten through fifth grade (18-24 teachers total). Observations were conducted for one or two teachers per grade who provided informed consent. One or two observations were conducted with teachers per grade level, which gives a range of five to twenty observations. Observing different teachers in different grades helped reveal their understanding of the materials, adherence to lesson procedures as described by curriculum authors, as well as their preserved changes in behavior from the teachers' perspective. Observations informed questions for individual interviews and the focus group as well as a comparison with other results from the evaluation (i.e., triangulation). Observations lasted between 25-50 minutes, depending on lesson content. Observing multiple teachers allowed me to understand the implementation of Second Step, the fidelity to that implementation, and the possible reasons why teachers might modify lessons. When it was noted that teachers did modify fidelity across contexts, this helped guide the focus group questions, which helped think about how teachers valued fidelity of implementation to Second Step procedures. Since many of the lessons observed were similar, I determined that extra data collection was not needed

for the current study. Details about observed participants were added after they agreed to be observed and provided informed consent (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants Observed, Grade Level Taught, Lesson Number Observed, Gender, Training Received, and Years' Experience with Second Step

Participant Label	Grade Level Taught	Lesson Number	Gender	Training By	Years Using Second Step
O1	K	1	Female	School Counselor	7 years
O2	5 th	9	Female	School Counselor	5 years
O3	4 th	16	Female	School Counselor	5 years
O4	2 nd	4	Female	School Counselor	5 years
O5	3 rd	12	Female	School Counselor	7 years
O6	1 st	11	Female	School Counselor	2 years
O7	4 th	15	Male	School Counselor	6 years
O8	5 th	16	Female	Fellow Teacher	1 year
O9	3 rd	18	Male	School Counselor	6 years

Administrators

The building used for the current study has one principal that was supposed to be recruited to participate in the study since their position oversees the implementing Second Step in the school and makes it a mandatory part of the program, but he was unavailable during the data collection period and due to time constraints was not able to participate. School personnel was also supposed to be included in the research, which would have consisted of the school guidance counselor since she was involved in the original implementation and training of Second Step in her school and district, however, she was also not available during the data collection period either.

Participant Eligibility Criteria

The following criteria was met in order to participate in this study. Participants that were willing to be observed must be classroom teachers who had received training on

Second Step within the last three years. Participants who had not received training were not be observed. This was verified by asking the lead teacher when soliciting participants. Participants who were be included in interviews and the focus group were also be classroom teachers that had general knowledge of Second Step and/or received training on the implementation. This was also be verified by the lead teacher. Adults who are unable to consent, minors, prisoners, and individuals who do not understand English will not be recruited to participate. Women who are teachers, staff, or administrators who are or may be pregnant may recruited to participate.

Procedures

Researcher Background

The origin of my interest in SEL relates to a person experience with bullying. My daughter was the victim of bullying in third grade. This experience underpins my belief and value for promoting social and emotional development to counteract bullying in schools. SEL programs like Second Step are intended to improve student social and emotional development and is therefore relevant to my research interests. As an expert in classroom management, I rely on evidence-based programs to prepare future educators. Second Step is a prominent SEL curriculum and has a substantial body of research indicating positive outcomes. However, I wanted to understand how schools implement and evaluate the effects of Second Step, and understand how and whether schools that use this curriculum improve student empathy.

Institutional Review Board Approval

An application was be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the current study. Approval to recruit participants was obtained from the school

administrator of the school district. I contacted the superintendent of the school district via email, to solicit their support and obtain permission to recruit participants at an elementary school in the district. After district permission was obtained and the IRB application was approved, the school administrators were contacted to invite them to discuss this dissertation research. A school where Second Step was part of the program was be invited to participate. Specifically, consent from the building administration was sought along with permission to recruit teachers.

After permission was obtained from the school district and building administration, recruitment information describing the study was be sent via email. The email briefly explained the study and included the recruitment form. Contact information and days/times of available to meet, to discuss the study, to answer questions, and to review eligibility criteria were obtained via email prior to data collection. A presentation was offered to describe the study purpose, procedures, eligibility, and potential benefits and risks associated with the study to all teachers (e.g., at a faculty meeting); but was declined since the administration and teachers were accepting of the research.

The current research study was advertised as an evaluation of Second Step in the school. I explained that a report would be given to participants and administration after the findings are determined and offered to present these findings at a school faculty meeting after all research is finished if the participants desire more information than the brief report provides. Participants were informed of all study procedures, that no deception was used, and that steps were taken to preserve confidentiality. Participants who were interested in volunteering to participate were instructed via the recruitment information form to contact myself to schedule a meeting. I recruited kindergarten

through fifth grade teachers who were trained to implement the SEL program, Second Step. I explained to all the participants that the study was expected to last throughout the school year. To maintain confidentiality, all personal information was changed and reported with pseudonyms. Each participants' personal information, observation records, questionnaire information, interview and focus group data were kept confidential in a file, kept by myself, and disposed of at the conclusion of the study.

Consent

I was approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board prior to all recruitment and consent procedures are initiated. Consent was obtained from participants via email. All participants were informed of the study procedures. I scheduled appointments to meet with the prospective participants. Questions were asked to ensure participants met eligibility criteria as described above. I reviewed with participants, the study procedures as outlined in the informed consent form and solicited and answered any questions before asking for their informed consent. The following information will be requested about the school and participants: position in the school, training received, years of experience, role with the Second Step program (i.e., does the participant teach Second Step only, do they only support the program, do they reinforce students' skills, do they have no involvement with Second Step, etc.). Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning codes (e.g., pseudonyms, numbers) for all data collected.

Implementation

Regular class time was used to implement Second Step. Teachers instructed Second Step lessons for about forty-five minutes to one hour, one day a week, for the extent of the program. I conducted observations during these class sessions to monitor

students' knowledge, understanding of the program, and how they were affected by the specific lessons. By using a questionnaire, this was another way to collect data about Second Step and how it is working in today's schools. After the observations and questionnaire were completed, interviews were conducted to determine if the overall goals of the lessons were met and how they think the implementation of the ideas helped students with prosocial behavior. To ensure that the current study is implemented with fidelity, I assessed and reported data using direct measures such as observations and interviews, as well as indirect measures such as questionnaires.

Data Sources

In order to capture the data needed to answer my research questions, I used observations, a questionnaire, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data. Second Step has been carefully designed to help students learn, practice, and apply skills for self-regulation and social-emotional competences (Committee for Children, 2011). To help students effectively learn and apply these skills, teachers should implement the four core program components: teaching the lessons, doing short daily activities to practice skills, reinforcing skills every day, and engaging families (Committee for Children, 2011). Teaching the lesson skills and short daily activities to practice skills will be examined during observations in teachers' classrooms.

Observations

The current study was entirely descriptive, no intervention was used. Observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research and is based on the research purpose and questions (Creswell, 2013). Observational data was collected during the implementation of Second Step lessons to determine the extent to which

participants adhered to the prescribed lesson procedures. Observations did not measure student knowledge and Second Step effects on students. Observations allowed me spend an extended period in a setting to develop a rich understanding of the phenomenon under study (DAR, 2016, p. 2409). Conducting observations will allow me to better understand if Second Step was used consistently as described in the program. Qualitative observations differ based on the specific approach and purpose of study, as well as the beliefs of the researcher and the demands of those being observed (Mertens, 2015). Observing teachers through classroom observations, as a method of data collection, allowed me to document the intervention integrity. Classroom observation represents a measurement approach used to characterize teaching quality using an observation protocol (Frey, 2018). A fidelity checklist was used during the observations to ensure that Second Step appears to be implemented according to developer instructions (See Appendix B). I recorded evaluative judgments about the presence or absence of each lesson component using a form that lists a set of statements about teacher and student behaviors as well as implementation of the program (Frey, 2018).

Substantial research has been conducted on the reliability and validity of classroom observations (Frey, 2018). Reliability varies substantially across individual lessons and it has been noted that the quality of lessons can vary substantially over the course of the school year (Frey, 2018). During observations, I did not characterize a teacher's overall performance based on a single lesson or from only one part of the school year. I observed participating teachers one time to understand whether they adhere consistently to the content and procedures. I wrote narrative field notes that accompanied each observation. This was done immediate (as soon as possible) after each

observation. In order to make sure the observations are valid, other measures of data collection were used to compare the observations to other measures such as a questionnaire, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data.

Observations were conducted in classrooms during Second Step lessons for three months and until the data was redundant. I obtained consent for observations from at least one teacher in each grade and each teacher was observed once. The aim was to conduct approximately five to twenty observations and I did nine observations. As a nonparticipant/observer, I was an outsider of the group under study, watching from a distance to make sure not to interrupt the flow of the lesson being observed. Observing different teachers in different grades allowed me to see their implementation of Second Step and determine their fidelity with this implementation as well as students understand of the material based on that implementation. Since Second Step is used in grades Kindergarten through fifth it was important to determine if this program is integrated successfully and with integrity in all grade levels. This variety in observations helped determine if all the steps and procedures were being used in each lesson that was observed.

I also took notes of what did not happen during the lesson implementation. Since Second Step has specific program content goals and implementation design, it is appropriate for the observer to note that those things did not happen during the observations (Mertens, 2015). Notes were taken if content was used but procedures were omitted, as well as if content was omitted but procedures were used. Since content and procedures are inherent to the Second Step lessons, data regarding both were collected. This was completed by using a fidelity checklist that was created based on the Second

Step lesson design. Observations results were used to inform questions and facilitate discussion during the interviews and focus group.

Structured observations with teachers were conducted at a preselected time and classroom. Observations were conducted in person. Reliability was enhanced because field notes were used with the observation fidelity checklist. Using the same fidelity checklist for each observation allowed for consistent data collection. With a reliable measure, such as the observation checklist, one can arrive at a true estimate of the attribute that the instrument purports to measure (Mertens, 2105). I checked each item on the fidelity checklist with point-by-point reliability (a percent by item). The measures used during this research were calculated on an interval-by-interval (or "trial") basis. Observations were discontinued after the ninth observation due to redundancy of teachers' instruction of Second Step lessons which was determined by the information obtained on fidelity checklist.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was offered to all the teachers in the school in order to determine how most teachers are implementing Second Step. The questionnaire was given to all teachers since observations were limited to only a sample of willing participants. The questions in the questionnaire were determined prior to the research, based on the goals of the Second Step program implementation and the overall research questions for the current study. When a priori questions are generated, they should be informed by the overall research questions and relevant literature (Nastasi & Hitchcock, 2016). Closed questions were used for this questionnaire. Participants were assured of the anonymity of their reporting by using generic participant numbers.

This questionnaire was used to understand teacher perceived reasons for using Second Step. The questionnaire was developed to determine if teachers implement lesson skills, if teachers reinforced skills every day in other lessons and activities, and what their perception of family engagement was with Second Step. When using Second Step, teachers are given scripted lessons in order to implement specific skills of the program. The questionnaire checked the fidelity of this implementation. Second Step suggests that teachers reinforce the specific skills taught through each lesson during daily activities and interactions. The questionnaire was used to check if these concepts are being taught in other subjects or in isolation of Second Step lessons. The questionnaire recognized teacher's perception of family engagement with the Home Link Reminders. Home Links are fun activities designed to encourage interaction between students and their adult family members or other important adults (Committee for Children, 2011). The questionnaire determined whether teachers think the Home Link activities are being used by their students and parents. The questionnaire items also included questions about years of experience with Second Step, grade level, class size, and whether the school requires the implementation of Second Step.

The purpose of the questionnaire was used to obtain further data about the implementation of Second Step that might not be witnessed during classroom observations, especially since only a limited number of observations will be conducted. These results were compared with results from observations to identify consistencies and discrepancies in lesson implementation across teachers. Second, the questionnaire included items aimed at understanding teacher perceptions about Second Step effects on student empathy. By using a consistent instrument to collect data, the results were

reliable. The more reliable the questionnaire, the better estimate the instrument measures what is necessary for the research (Mertens, 2015). Finally, results from the questionnaire were used to inform additional questions to be posed during the focus group. These results were used to identify consistent and discrepant perceptions of Second Step effects on students in the school.

The questionnaire was formatted in an organized numbered list with clear instructions. Since this questionnaire was sent through Google Forms, it was appealing while not distracting the participants. Sufficient thought was given while developing the survey instrument in terms of visual layout because it is known that even small variations in the visual presentation can change how participants respond to items (Mertens, 2015). Questions were organized so that they are easy to answer (Mertens, 2015). Each item and page were numbered for the questionnaire to be easy to follow. Questions were arranged in a logical sequence, in which related items were grouped together. The questionnaire began with engaging and nonthreatening questions and I made sure not to put the most important items at the end (Mertens, 2015). Brief and clear instructions were given to specific questions as to what to do for each response. Participants had directions as to who the questionnaire goes to and how to return it. (See Appendix C)

Interviews

Interviewing provided information that would not otherwise be available to research (Rock, 2004). Questions were provided to all participants in advance to preview before the interview. Notes were taken during all interviews and they took place in the workplace of the participants. The interviewees answered questions that were open-ended, general, and focused on teachers' classroom information and teacher practices

(See Appendix D). Using very general open-ended questions allowed for the respondent's concerns and interests to surface (Mertens, 2015).

Interviews were used to understand teachers' perceived implementation and impact of Second Step lessons. This form of data collection helped determine if teachers used Second Step skills in every day instruction as well as if the participants believed there was family engagement with the Home Link resources. Questions were asked to gather information about the perceived reasons for implementing this program, perceived benefits of the program, and perceived impact on students. Some interview questions were asked to compare information obtained from the questionnaire and observations. Specific questions helped compare the data obtained. These questions included: information about resource use (as well as the Home Link usage); time; reinforcement of skills previously taught; teachers' perceptions of students prosocial and empathy skills; classroom, school, and community behaviors; office discipline referrals; PSSA testing results; as well as questions about specific sections of the lessons; and any adaptations or modifications teachers made. Interviews were used to understand teachers' perceived understanding of students' experience of empathy and prosocial skill behavior. These questions helped understand the teachers' perspective students' experiences of empathy and prosocial skills and how this program has impacted those experiences. Teachers that were observed and not observed were interviewed (See Appendix D). The administration (principal) was not included in the interviews because he was not available to participate as originally planned. The principal's time was consumed with a Covid-19 outbreak in the school that lasted over a month during the research period.

Table 2. Participants Interviewed, Interview Length, Grade Level Taught, and Years in the School

Participant	Interview Length	Grade Taught	Years in building
I1	30 min	4 th	20
I2	30 min	4 th	1
I3	25 min	1 st	2
I4	30 min	3 rd	16
I5	45 min	2 nd	26

Focus Group

The focus group was used to triangulate the data. A focus group is a group interview that relies not on a question-and-answer format of interview, but on the interaction within the group (Mertens, 2015, p. 382). The focus group helped determine a group perspective of Second Step and its implementation. A focus group allowed for interaction between participants which helped elicit more of a participants' point of view than would be evident in more interviews (Mertens, 2015). Since I was conducting the interviews and focus group, I made comparisons between the data collected. Using the focus group as the last form of data collection, helped compare and confirm the information discovered during individual interviews and from the results of the questionnaires. Although focus groups have been used extensively in market research, they can also be used in needs sensing for training and service programs, for instrument review, and for many other research purposes (Mertens, 2015). A focus group worked well for a review of the implementation of Second Step. The same recording, transcription methods, software, and storage was used as interviews.

Questions were provided to all participants in advance to preview before the focus group. Notes were taken during the focus group and will take place in the workplace of

the participants. The participants in the focus group answered questions that were open-ended, general, and focused on teachers' classroom information and teacher practices (See Appendix E). The focus group was based on similarities in positions in the school and based on the use of Second Step. Having a variety of participants answer questions helped obtain a better perspective of everyone's views of Second Step, if it is implemented properly, and how it was working.

No member checks were used during the interviews and focus group because of time constraints. The interviews took longer than expected to set up because the observations took longer than expected. Time for both observations and interviews were affected by the Covid pandemic since teachers were absent for extended periods of time during my data collection. The focus group was conducted near the end of the school year and many teachers were stressed out and were not as willing to participate. Member checks would have helped confirm my impressions. Member checking would have confirmed the notes taken during observations, interviews, and the focus group.

Table 3. Focus Group Participants

Participant	Grade	Years Using SS
F1	4 th	6
F2	4 th	2
F3	1 st	6
F4	3 rd	7

Note. Focus group interview was 30 min duration.

School Collected Data

Administrative data, such as disciplinary actions, suspensions, and absenteeism were supposed to be collected. Although I did not review the associated documents, I

requested them from the school administrator. I requested the yearly frequency of office referrals and related disciplinary actions including parent conferences, detention, suspensions, expulsion, other actions, but the school does not keep a record of that information since the numbers are small. No school wide positive behavior intervention plans are used for students with behavior issues, since most are minor in the school. Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data were obtained from a state website for years 2015-2021 and used as school collected data to help answer research questions for the current study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All data was password protected and deidentified store on a private computer. I made sure to use adequate recording procedures when conducting the interviews. The interviews were reviewed and transcribed as soon as possible, so the information was easy to recall and remember. Data was stored on one laptop computer with individual files for each interview and transcript. Backup copies of the computer files were be made and saved on a zip drive and Google cloud. All data was password protected and deidentified stored on a private computer. Codes were used to identify transcriptions of interviews. Key of code – names were kept in a separate password protected file. I protected the anonymity of participants by masking their names in the data (Creswell, 2013). Data that will be destroyed will include any printed or paper material and all electronic copies of data.

Participants were assured of the anonymity of their reporting by using generic participant numbers when reporting data in the dissertation. Names were not be mentioned in my study, only grade level information for instructional practices.

Participants comfort level with the data collection was important. They were reminded of the purpose of this study and if at any time they felt that the questions made them feel uncomfortable, they could choose not to answer that question or end their participation in the study.

Participants did not have direct access to the observation data, interview data, and transcriptions. The participants and the school did not have direct access to the observation data, interview data, and transcriptions but they will get a summary of my findings. This summary of my findings will be provided in a short report that includes any information I discovered during the research process.

Subject Compensation

Participation was voluntary; there was no cost to the participant associated with being in the study. One “token of appreciation” was given to the Lead teacher who helped set up the connection to the research school and was always there with supporting words and advice. A \$100 Visa gift card was given to the Lead Teacher at the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis

While reviewing and reflecting on the data, I transcribed all the research myself so that I was interacting with the data in a detailed way. I was able to bring my own point of view to the research since I was the researcher conducting the data collection and analyzing it. Transcribing research data was interactive and engaged the reader in the process of deep listening, analysis, and interpretation (Mertens, 2015, p. 438). By being actively engaged with the research material from the beginning of the data collection

process, I was aware of my own impact on the data collecting process which is a valuable research opportunity.

When analyzing the questionnaire, I aggregated descriptive statistics for each item on the questions. I looked at the mean score for each item individually. This gave me an overview of how Second Step is perceived and implemented. I also compared the questionnaire to the observations and interviews. For example, I looked to see if the teacher answered the questionnaire in one way and then did something different during the observation, or said something different during the interview. I looked for differences and similarities between the data. I used an excel spreadsheet to record the comparisons. This data was organized, which helped me look for patterns and trends in those answers.

When analyzing the observations, I used the fidelity checklist to find the percent of lessons taught with 100% fidelity by each teacher; the percent of lessons taught with 100% fidelity across all teachers; and the percent of lesson steps missed/omitted; etc. By obtaining comprehensive antidotal notes during the observations, reliability was increased. In qualitative research, reliability often refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets (Creswell, 2013, p. 253). Once I had all the information collected from the fidelity checklist, I compared them to the results of the questionnaire. By comparing these two data sources, it helped strengthen the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data collection. I also looked for themes in the observations among the teachers being observed.

Coding the interviews with specific mark ups was necessary to help understand the meanings of the answers given. Locating evidence to document a code and theme from data sources, showed triangulating information and providing validity to the

findings (Creswell, 2013). In order to examine the resulting data in more detail, the data was analyzed by coding each interview. During the analysis, themes and codes emerged and reflected the views of the participants. “The aim of the research was considered while performing coding, and accordingly codes were developed (Kesicioğlu, 2015, p. 333). Open coding was used. The themes and codes were charted, interpreted, and then organized into themes. The themes related to the current study research questions. Themes are broad units of information that consist of codes aggregated to form a common idea (Creswell, 2013). I individually examined the interviewees answers based on themes and codes and recorded this information on a table to analyze whether answers corroborated or opposed each other. The last column of the table was used to show the agreement between different forms of data. The term yes and no were used to show consistencies and inconsistencies. See tables in Chapter 4 for this information. Descriptive analysis was used with direct quotations from the interviewees for validity. A chart with themes and codes, meaning, examples, and sources can be found in Appendix F. A focus group was used to confirm the information learned from the interviews. The same coding and themes were used for both the interviews and focus group.

The theme, reassurance, emerged from the codes: word choice and questioning response choices because assumptions were made that the interviewees and focus group participants were using the terms from Second Step. Assumptions were made that participants were making meaning of the questions and figuring out their response. Reassurance was given to encourage participants to respond honestly. The theme, fidelity, emerged from the codes adapt and modify. Teachers made changes to their

lessons to meet students' needs. The theme, building community, emerged from the codes: classroom management and empathy for community building. Teachers felt that students' empathy, classroom management, and building community were all positive impacts of Second Step. The theme, building community and the code empathy for community building emerged from the data collected during the current study.

Interviewees and focus group participants felt that Second Step improved empathy and prosocial skills.

Five codes evolved while coding the interviews and focus group, while considering the aim of the research. The five codes include: word choice, questioning response choices, adapt and modify, classroom management and empathy. The first code, word choices was used when teachers had to think and possibly change their answer, repeat words mid-sentence or mid thought, and use words and time to pause their thinking. The second code, questioning response choices was used when reassurance was given to teachers because they were unsure their answers were acceptable. The third code used, adapt and/or modify was used to determine if teachers use all aspects of the Second Step lessons with fidelity or if they made changes as they taught each lesson. Since community is one aspect of SEL, classroom management was the fourth code used. This code was used to determine if classroom management was an important aspect of Second Step's effectiveness. The fifth and final code was empathy. Empathy is a key vocabulary word in Second Step and throughout this current study.

School discipline records: number of suspensions, etc. per year were supposed to be examined but the numbers were so low that it was suppressed. Triangulation of the multiple sources of data collection was necessary to provide corroborating evidence

(Creswell, 2013). Using a variety of sources revealed information on themes and perspectives necessary to analyze the data. I compared responses from participants to see if the questionnaire, observations, and interviews were consistent or inconsistent. Using multiple forms of data collection allowed me to see the congruency between the forms of data as well as an organized way to triangulate participant responses. Many responses corroborated with each other while others conflicted the responses given. I also compared the responses across participants, to see if there is fidelity with the items reported on the questionnaire compared to fidelity observed during observations, and to the fidelity when documenting and transcribing the interview responses. In order to ensure validity, I met with my university advisor to check in during the process of data collection which helped me achieve a higher level of accuracy and consensus.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The focus of this analysis was associated with interpretivist and social constructivist paradigms. Interpretivists believe that knowledge arises from situations and is not reducible to simplistic interpretation. They also believe that knowledge is gained through personal experience (Mack, 2010). Social constructivist perspectives are commonly applied in qualitative research. Social constructivists hold the assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world and develop subjective meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) gives examples of how interpretivists and Social Constructivists have similar worldviews. Creswell states that social constructivism is often combined with interpretivism. Both espouse multiple perspectives and multiple participants have meaning. The goal of their research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views. Both researchers recognize that their background's shape their interpretation. The analysis for the current study relied on the teachers' perceptions and my interpretation of the data collected.

Before examining the results related to the research questions, preliminary analyses were conducted through a questionnaire, observations, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data. The participants in the current research study consisted of teachers from a suburban public school in the North Eastern part of the United States. This location was chosen because teachers use specifically designed lessons to promote school success, school connectedness, and a safe and respectful school climate that would help students to build empathy and understanding.

After the questionnaire was completed and evaluated, nine teacher observations were conducted using an observation fidelity checklist that consisted of specific items to watch for during the time in the classroom. The observed teachers answered questions about the specific lesson they taught during the observations. After the observations were examined and evaluated, interview questions were created to determine if the data collected from prior sources would be similar or different. Five interviews were conducted for approximately 30-45 minutes each. A focus group of four teachers was used to triangulate the data collected. Two of the teachers were also interviewed and observed. Two of the participants were not interviewed or observed. This focus group included teachers that were from different grade levels that implemented Second Step.

Questionnaire

Eighteen teachers completed the questionnaire. Fourteen of those teachers completed the entire questionnaire and four stopped after the first few questions because they do not use Second Step because they are the speech-language teacher, PE teacher, English as a Second Language teacher, and the building reading specialist. The number of students in each teacher's class ranged from 18-25 and the teachers reported their experiences using Second Step ranged between two years (new teacher) up to 10 years (school counselor). Thirteen respondents have been using Second Step for five to six years and one respondent stated that it was her first year using it. The amount of training and the type of training varied among the teachers completing the questionnaire. Figures 1 and 2 shows results from the questionnaire.

Figure 1. Training Amount

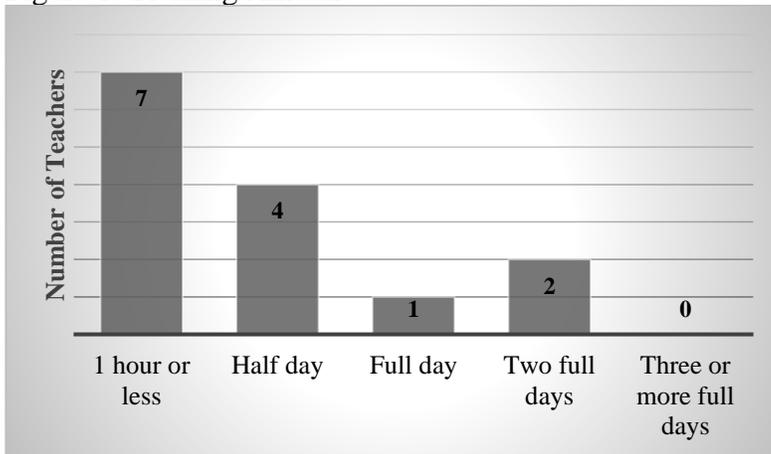
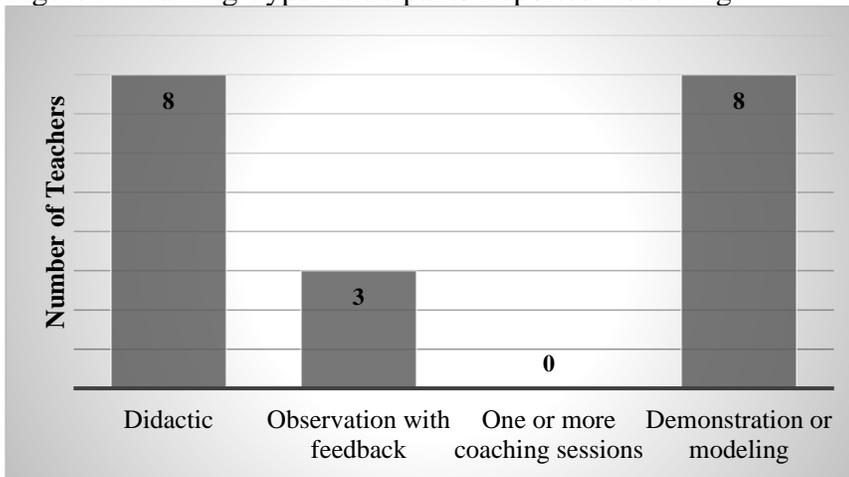


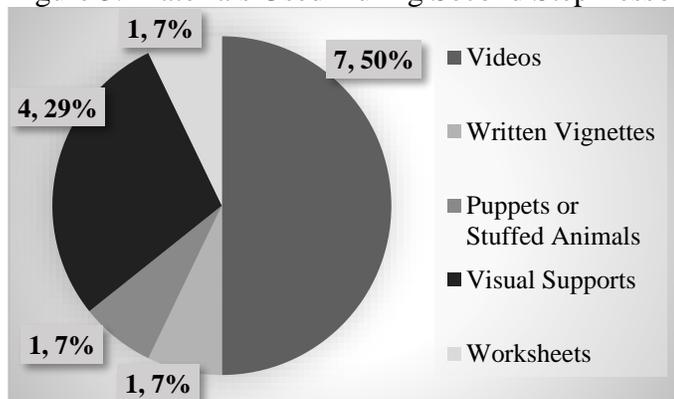
Figure 2. Training Type Participants Reported Receiving



All but one teacher received the training in one session. The other teacher stated that their training was intermittent. Eleven of the teachers were trained by the school counselor who was trained by an expert/independent Second Step consultant. Two teachers were trained by a fellow teacher and one teacher learned the program during her student teaching (she did not have any other formal training since this was her first year teaching her own class).

Nine teachers agreed or strongly agreed that Second Step provided enough resources, while three disagreed. The questionnaire asked if teachers had sufficient time to implement Second Step each week. Six teachers strongly agreed that they did have time, while two teachers strongly disagreed. When teachers were asked about how much time they spend each week implementing Second Step, ten teachers stated they use it less than one hour per week, while four teachers said they use it between one to two hours a week. Figure 3 below shows what materials teachers reported using during Second Step instruction.

Figure 3. Materials Used During Second Step Lessons



In response to a questionnaire item, eight teachers mentioned SEL and/or emotions as their perceived reason why the school adopted the program. Two teachers strongly agreed that Second Step lessons increased their students' prosocial skills, while eight agreed and four disagreed. Three teachers strongly agreed that Second Step increased empathy, seven teachers agreed, and four teachers disagreed. Eleven teachers agreed and three teachers disagreed that the school's administrators reported to them or

fellow teachers that Second Step increased the student prosocial skills and/or empathy.
See Table 4 for a comparison of data.

Table 4. Research Question (2a) Results Related to the Adoption of Second Step

Data Collection	Answers Observed Teacher (OT)	Consistency or Inconsistency	Agreement
Frequency of the term empathy during observations.	OT1 = 0 OT2 = 2 OT3 = 6 (Lesson Topic on Empathy) OT4 = 1 OT5 = 0 OT6 = 2 OT7 = 0 OT8 = 2 OT9 = 0	#11 Questionnaire: What motivated your school to adopt Second Step? Response: “Our school district adopted the Second Step program to be implemented in all the elementary schools in the district. Second Step can help students better understand and identify their emotions; it can help them develop empathy, increase self-control, and manage stress. It also helps them build better relationships and interpersonal skills that will impact their academic success in school and beyond.”	Yes
#14 Questionnaire: School's administrators reported that Second Step has increased our students' prosocial skills and/or empathy.	11 teachers agreed with the statement while 3 teachers disagreed	5 Interviews: all said their principal has not said anything about Second Step or students' prosocial skills and/or empathy.	No
#34 Questionnaire: Please share any	“The Second Step lessons have brought more	Interviewed Teacher (IT) IT5 Q4 Reasons your school adopted Second Step? Response: “Um...I think they	Yes

comments, concerns, or enthusiasm about the Second Step.

awareness to students in regard to empathy and recognizing and understanding others' points of view.”

felt like, the school district, felt like they needed an official program. Um, especially coming out of an increase in bullying, um school shootings. I think it stemmed from there and parental concerns over the amount of bullying. So, I think they got...purchasing an actual program that could be implemented across the board in all the elementary schools.

Teachers were asked if problem behaviors have decreased as a result of Second Step in their classrooms, school, and community. The questionnaire also asked if office discipline and referrals decreased as a result of Second Step implementation. Figure 4 shows the results related items regarding school behavior and discipline. Teachers were then asked to rate if student academic performance was improved as a result of the school's implementation of Second Step. One teacher strongly agreed, two teachers agreed, and eleven teachers disagreed. Figure 5 shows academic performance.

Figure 4. Teachers’ Perceptions About Decreases in Inappropriate Behavior

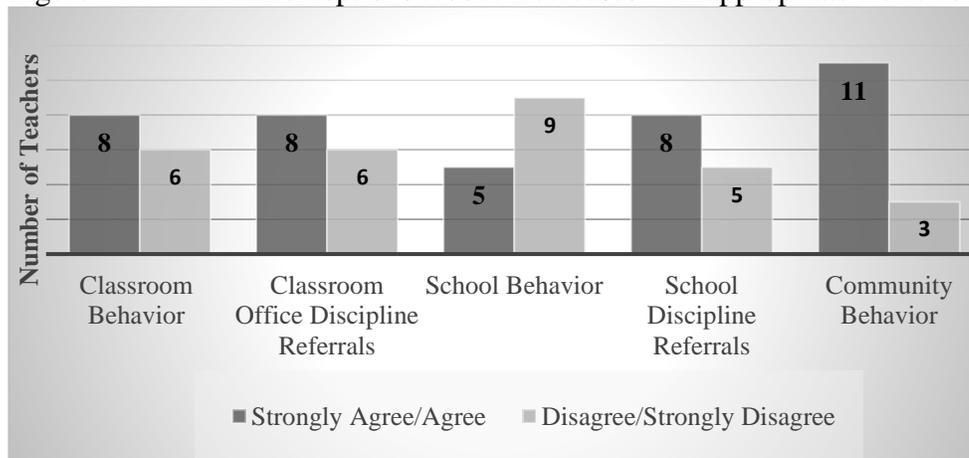
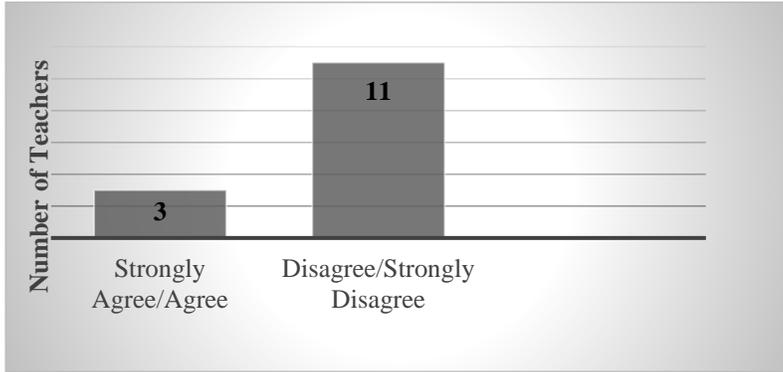
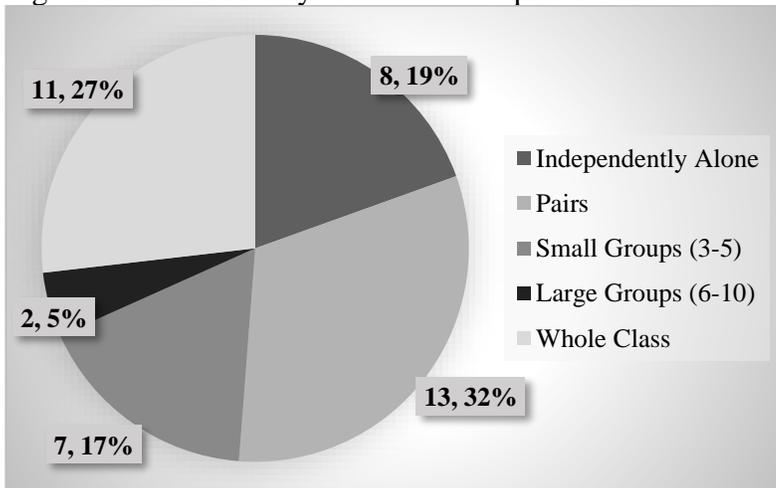


Figure 5. Number of Teachers Who Reported Perceptions That Second Step Improved Student Academic Performance



Seven teachers said they always review previous content, three said they usually do, and four said they sometimes do. Teachers reported that their students complete Second Step assignment independently/alone, in pairs, in small groups, in large groups, as a whole class, or in combined ways. Figure 6 shows the different ways students completed lesson activities.

Figure 6. Different Ways Students Completed Lesson Activities



When asked if teachers believe that most parents review the Home Link activity with their child(ren), two teachers strongly agreed with the statement, two agreed with the statement, six disagreed with the statement, and four strongly agreed with the statement. Teachers were asked, if they believe the Home Link encourages interaction between children and their adult family members or other important adults. Three teachers strongly agreed with the statement, while two agreed with it. However, eight teachers disagreed with it and one teacher strongly disagreed with it. Teachers were asked, if they reinforce the skills throughout the day that are taught through Second Step lessons and activities. Two said they always do, eight said they usually do, and four said they rarely do. One teacher said they always adapt or modify instruction, four said they usually do, seven said they sometimes do, and two said they rarely do. The questionnaire concluded with an open-ended item for teachers to share any comments, concerns, or enthusiasm they have about the Second Step curriculum, its use in your school, effects it has on students, or support you receive for implementation. The responses varied among the teachers. See Table 5 for the teachers' responses.

Table 5. Questionnaire Responses from Question 34

Teacher (T)	Questionnaire Response - Share any comments, concerns, or enthusiasm you have about the Second Step curriculum, its use in your school, effects it has on students, or support you receive for implementation.
T1	I do enjoy using the Second Step curriculum. I do think that some of the content could be updated to support current students. (Ex: pandemic, anxiety, depression)
T2	The Second Step Lessons have brought more awareness to students regarding empathy and recognizing and understanding others' points of view.
T3	Students do use the language introduced in the program. However, with everything kids have been through in the past two years, they do need additional SEL resources even though Second Step is a good starting point.

- T4 Like the program but have difficulty making time for it on a consistent basis with all the curriculum we have and the lack of dedicated time and space for it.
- T5 None
- T6 I believe it is a good program. It must be taught consistently across all grade levels so there is a good understanding of the concepts. Children need to practice the strategies they learn too.
- T6 The videos can seem out of touch for students because the recordings are older and the situations happening in the videos can seem silly to students. As well as the songs given for students to learn essential skills are often reacted to negatively rather than in a positive way.
- T7 Most of the children really love the program! They really enjoy the videos and songs. The children participate actively in lessons and often refer to skills learned when working with me individually or in groups in my office. This program helps to develop a cohesive classroom community. I believe that this program has had a big impact on positive social behaviors in our school. We have very few discipline referrals.
- T8 I really enjoy teaching Second Step. We have a lot of good conversations and I definitely see a difference in students knowing how to handle different situations. I wish there were more lessons! I do circle back to the lessons taught throughout the year.
- T9 I have not seen the carry-over from the lessons to actual situations.
- T10 None at this time.
- T11 Students really enjoy the lessons and discussions that stem from the lessons.
- T12 I think the strategies are useful and have real world practical application for the students in terms of managing difficult emotions and solving problems.
- T13 Although I do not dedicate enough time to Second Step, I do feel that it has value. I typically incorporate a read aloud and discussion to continue concepts that are taught.
- T14 All the research that I have read in my field supports the use of a classroom-based curriculum so that social skills support can be incorporated into the classroom environment. I have seen and heard positive impacts from Second Step.
- T15 None
- T16 I hear students use the vocabulary in settings other than their regular education classroom. There seems to be good transfer.
- T17 I feel like the second step program does help students carry over and apply what they are learning.
-

Table 6. Questionnaire Questions and Responses

Question	SA	A	D	SD
7. Second Step includes enough resources to effectively teach my students the targeted skills.	3 (21.4%)	6 (42.8%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)
8. I have sufficient time during the week to implement Second Step.	6 (42.8%)	4 (28.5%)	2 (14.2%)	2 (14.2%)
12. The Second Step lessons have increased my students' prosocial skills.	2 (14.2%)	8 (57.1%)	4 (28.5%)	0 (0%)
13. The Second Step lessons have increased my students' empathy towards each other.	3 (21.4%)	7 (50.0%)	4 (28.5%)	0 (0%)
14. My school's administrators have reported to me or fellow teachers that Second Step has increased our students' prosocial skills and/or empathy.	0 (0%)	11 (78.5%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)
15. Problem behaviors in my classroom have decreased as a result of the Second Step curriculum.	0 (0%)	8 (57.1%)	6 (42.8%)	0 (0%)
16. I have had fewer office discipline referrals and student suspensions in my classroom since we began using Second Step.	2 (14.2%)	6 (42.8%)	6 (42.8%)	0 (0%)
17. Problem behaviors in my school have decreased as a result of the Second Step curriculum.	1 (7.1%)	4 (28.5%)	7 (50.0%)	2 (14.2%)
18. There are fewer office discipline referrals and student suspensions in my school since we began using Second Step.	1 (7.1%)	8 (57.1%)	5 (35.7%)	0 (0%)
19. Problem behaviors in the community have decreased as a result of the Second Step curriculum.	0 (0%)	11 (78.5%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)
20. Student academic performance has improved as a result of our school's implementation of the Second Step curriculum.	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.2%)	11 (78.5%)	0 (0%)
29. Most parents of my students review the Home Link activity with their child(ren).	2 (14.2%)	2 (14.2%)	6 (42.8%)	4 (28.5%)
30. I believe the Home Link encourages interaction between children and their adult family members or other important adults.	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.2%)	8 (57.1%)	1 (7.1%)

Observations

Observations of nine different teachers at a preselected, mutually-convenient time were conducted, in person for about 30-60 minutes, depending on lesson content and grade level. Observations were concluded once redundancy of teachers' instruction of Second Step lessons was determined by the fidelity checklist. The teachers being observed followed the lessons with high fidelity, so there was no need for more observations. Eight out of nine teachers reviewed the concepts and skills covered in the previous lesson before moving onto the lesson that was observed. Those same eight teachers described the importance of the concepts and skills prior to instruction. All nine teachers used some form of an interactive introduction to the lesson's concepts. Each Second Step lesson included behavioral objectives on the lesson plan from the manual. Six of the nine teachers stated the behavioral objectives during the observation. Each lesson plan had a variety of materials that accompanied the lesson. Three out of nine teachers used all the materials provided. The other six teachers used some, but not all the materials. Some materials were not observed including class handouts, posters, learning cards, and chart paper.

Different sections of the lesson plan were included on the observation fidelity checklist. These sections included: story and discussion, skill practice activity, activities used, handouts, wrap up, and Home Link. See Table 5 for a percentage of those sections. The activities were either completed individually, in pairs, or as a whole class. Each of the nine teachers instructed the whole class during most of the observation. Six of those teachers used both whole class and pairs. One of those teachers used whole class, pairs, and individual instruction. Each lesson includes at least one handout that was supposed

to be completed during the activity section of the observed lesson. The teachers that used the handout read through the directions with students in order to clarify any confusion about what is required before they began working. If students asked a question about activity expectations, these teachers that used the handout did provide an example or further explanation of what was required. They also monitored students while completing the handout. The overall average percentage of fidelity used to implement the lesson plan was fifty-five percent. The highest two percentages were ninety-two percent and one hundred percent. The lowest two percentages were fifteen percent and thirty percent. Table 7 includes those lesson component percentages.

Table 7. Percentage of Lesson Components Used During Observations

Lesson Component	Percent of Lesson Components Observed
Story discussion	88.9%
Skill practice activity	66.7%
Whole Class Activity	100.0%
Handouts	33.3%
Wrap up/Review	77.7%
Home Link	11.1%
Overall Fidelity to Second Step Procedures	55.0%

Interviews and Focus Group

Interviews of five different teachers at a preselected, mutually convenient times were conducted on Zoom video conferencing software for about 30-60 minutes.

Teachers were given questions prior to interviews and focus group. During the interviews, some questions were skipped if there was a time constraint and/or if the teacher felt as though they had already answered the question. Teachers reported they

progressed through the Second Step lessons at different rates with different dosage. The primary grade teachers, such as Kindergarten progressed through the lessons faster than the intermediate grade teachers because the lessons were shorter and there was more SEL during free and play activities. The intermediate grade teachers taught more difficult and longer content, so they did not progress through the lessons as quickly. The focus group took place on Zoom videoconferencing after all five interviews were completed. The same themes and codes were used for all five interviews and the focus group. Focus groups were used to triangulate information obtained from the interviews. This helped determine how reliable and accurate teachers' answers were during interviews and the focus group. This triangulation of data helped determine which themes and codes were appropriate to use. See Table 8 for codes and Table 9 for themes and explanations for each.

Table 8. Codes Used, Meaning, and Associated Themes

Code	Meaning	Associated Theme
Word Choice	Some teachers think and change their answer or repeat words mid-sentence and mid thought.	Reassurance
Questioning Response Choices	Reassurance was needed when teachers thought their answers were not what I wanted to hear.	Reassurance
Adapt and modify	Teaching Second Step with fidelity while making modifications and accommodations to meet the students' needs.	Fidelity
Classroom Management	Building community impacts instruction.	Building Community
Empathy for Community Building	Empathy is an important aspect of community building. Talking about empathy and discussing respect is key to the Second Step program.	Building Community

Table 9. Themes

Themes	Meaning	Sources to Clarify
Reassurance	Reassurance was frequently need throughout data collection. Teachers were nervous about their answers and if the administration would get results. Reassurance was needed and confidentiality was promised.	Interviewees were making meaning of the questions and figuring out their responses. Reassurance was given to encourage participants to share their idea and/or experiences, and to be honest.
Fidelity	Fidelity to Second Step lesson implementation was evaluated during all forms of data collection. Did students make adaptations and modifications during lessons? Why were changes made? Where they necessary to meet students' needs?	Teachers adapted or modified lessons to meet their students' needs, and to manage behavioral issues, time constraints, and students' interest in the activities.
Building Community	Classroom management and building community are imperative for a safe school environment and community. When students feel safe, they are more likely to be engaged and excited about their learning.	Teachers mentioned classroom management and building community as a positive impact of Second Step. Teachers reported that classroom management and building community was an important part of being a successful teacher and making Second Step work for their students.

The code, word choice, was used because it was assumed that some of the words used during the interviews and focus group were not formal words since both were casual and informal via zoom. It was also assumed that they chose specific words based on their thoughts about empathy and Second Step. Some teachers would change their answer or repeat words mid-sentence. Teachers seemed to need to think about the questions and what their response would be or needed to be. Some teachers also spoke very quickly during the interviews and focus group. Teachers answered similarly or their ideas had similar focus. Many used words like “empathy,” building community,” “SEL,”

“emotions,” and many others. The assumption was made that the interviewees were using the terms and vocabulary from Second Step. Words such as: “like,” “um,” and “you know” were also used multiple times. The assumption was made that the interviewees were making meaning of the questions and figuring out their response when using these words. The code, questioning response choices, was used when teachers sought reassurance from myself about their responses. For example, some teachers asked repeatedly throughout the interview and focus group, “Is that ok,” “You know what I mean,” “Does that make sense,” and “You are familiar with the program right?” Some teachers were concerned that their administration might find out about their opinions and experiences using Second Step because they knew information would be shared at the end of the research. I needed to reassure them, that all information was confidential. The theme, reassurance, emerged from the two codes: word choice and questioning response choices.

Teachers stated they follow the Second Step lessons with fidelity, but they do not always use all the activities. Fidelity was the theme for the code adapt and modify. Teachers modified or adapted their lessons by changing the lesson content, shortening the lesson, incorporating additional material, using different assignments and/or activities, and omitting the Home Link, homework, worksheets, or activities. The figures and tables below show these adaptations and modifications.

Figure 7. Specific Lesson Components

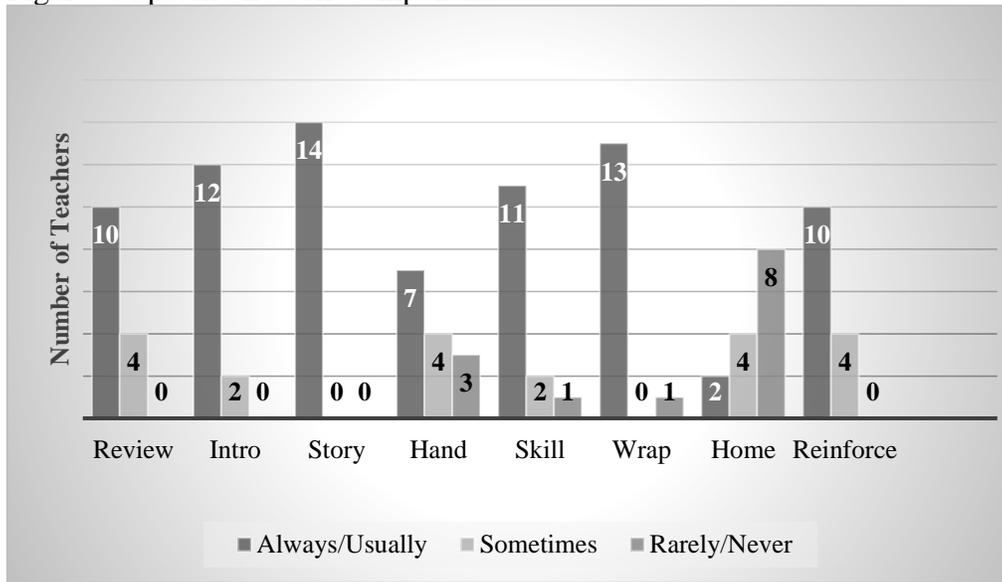


Figure 8. Lesson Adaptations or Modifications

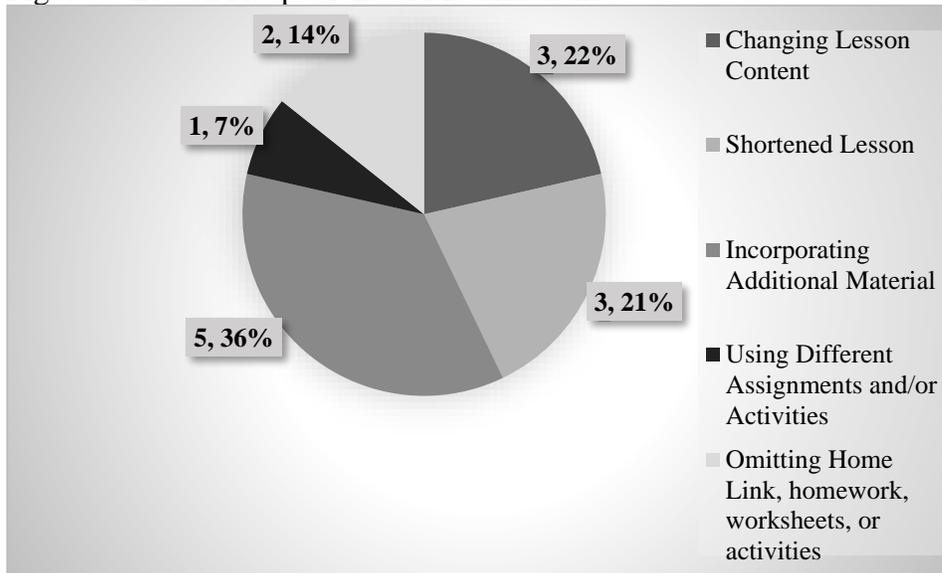


Table 10. Handout and Home Link Adaptations

Questionnaire Items	Answers	Consistency or Inconsistency	Agreement
#25 Questionnaire: I use the handouts provided.	3 always, 4 usually, 4 sometimes, 3 rarely, 0 never	During the focus group (FG), FG1 responded: “I don’t find it to really be that necessary, but I don’t always really like the activities that they offer with the um...they don’t always seem appropriate or engaging.”	Yes
#28 Questionnaire: I send home the lesson’s Home Link activity.	1 always, 1 usually, 4 sometimes, 6 rarely, 2 never	FG3 responded: that both are a “great opportunity not only for the kids to practice whatever, you know, it is that we learned for that particular week, but also an opportunity for the parents to then see as well...um what we are covering in Second Step because it requires a parent signature at the bottom.	No (only one teacher out of 5 gave the Home Link

Table 11. Data Collection Agreement

Questionnaire Item	Interview Items	Focus Group Items	Agreement
# 32 Questionnaire: I adapt or modify instruction. Answers: 1 always, 4 usually, 7 sometimes, 2 rarely, 0 never.	Interview Questions: Q14, Q16, & Q39 – Q49 Q40: Do you make any modifications to the implementation lessons? What parts are the most effective and why? IT4 responded: I do make modifications; I do not necessarily do all the activities. I am very choosey about the warm up activities because I think about my time element and what I might get through to them. I do love the discussion cards; I do love the seeing the picture and discussing the problem and I will read off the back.	#7 Why do you make changes and modifications? FG2 responded: I think I have made some modifications to the activity like the follow up activity to make it more relevant to what they are going through or like more relevant to what is going on right now in the world or what they are going through. Or things I have	No

<p>Q42: Do you modify the lessons? How? Why? Why do you think other teachers modify? IT3 responded: Um, I definitely modify because like I said, I have some of those Special Ed kiddoes and some of the Life Skills kids in my classroom, so I have to modify to make sure that I'm getting across to my highest students and my lowest students, you know just making sure that the concept that's being taught is available in all ways.</p>	<p>seen in the classroom, or I just change the order of what lesson I am teaching, like I moved something up because I was like, "we need to talk about this because they were struggling with something."</p>
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Classroom Management was used as a code since the term was said often during the interviews and the focus group. Teachers reported that classroom management and building community was an important part of being a successful teacher and an important part in making Second Step work for students in their classrooms. During the focus group, one teacher (FG1) stated that "students opening up about things that you would not just naturally talk about in an inclusive way, that would not alienate people. Teachers felt as though Second Step supplements but cannot replace their other classroom management strategies. During an interview, one teacher (T4) stated, "Second Step can enhance that (classroom management) but it really cannot stand alone. Figure 9 and Table 12 look at teachers' perspective of behavior on the questionnaire and other data sources, while Table 13 looks at those effects of behavior. These examples are all linked to classroom management and community.

Figure 9. Reported Perceptions About Decreased Student Inappropriate Behavior

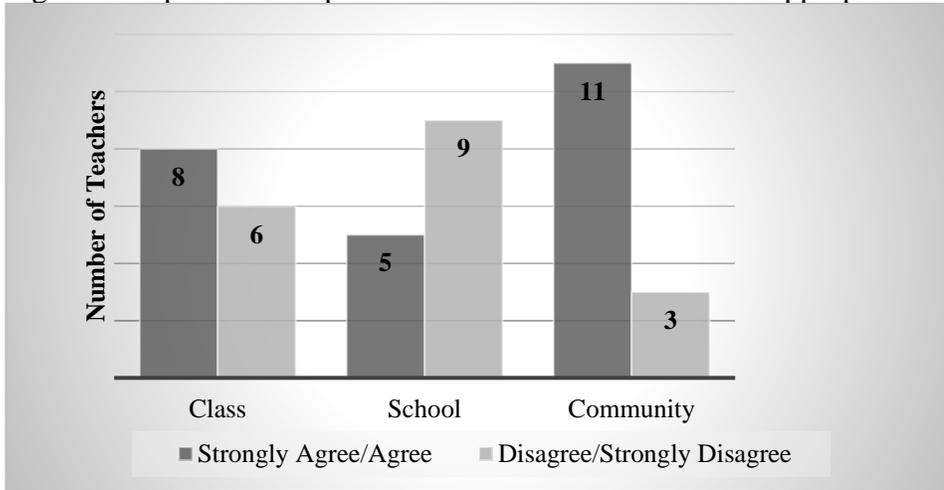


Table 12. Teachers' Perception of Behavior

Questionnaire Item	Questionnaire Ratings	Other Corresponding Sources	Agreement
#15 Questionnaire: Problem behaviors in my classroom have decreased.	0 strongly agree 8 agree 6 disagree 0 strongly disagree	Interview Q23: Approximately half of the questionnaire respondents agreed behavior in their classroom has improved as a result of Second Step. Why do you think half believe this is true or not true?	Yes
#17 Questionnaire: Problem behaviors in my school have decreased.	1 strongly agree 4 agree 7 disagree 2 strongly disagree	IT1 responded: "I think it is all a matter of classroom community that is created by the teacher...um, who is in charge and how they kind of foster that on their own. Um... Second Step alone is not going to do that, they also have to have ...um the teachers have to build personal skills and their willingness to craft that kind of environment."	
#19 Questionnaire: Problem behaviors in the community have decreased.	0 strongly agree 11 agree 3 disagree 0 strongly disagree	To determine why there was a discrepancy among questionnaire, interview Q26:	

Although approximately half of respondents said classroom behavior has improved following Second Step, the majority of respondents said they believed Second Step did not decrease problem behaviors in this school. What do you think explains this discrepancy? Or, why do many people believe behavior in their classroom is better but not behavior in the school? was asked.

IT1 said: Um...I think they (teachers completing the questionnaire) may be looking at their classroom versus other teachers' classrooms. I do not know...um (laughing). They might be looking at hallway behavior. You know behavior in the school overall is pretty good. Um...so...you know, but everyone has different management styles.

Table 13. Effects on Office and Discipline Referrals in Teacher Classrooms

Data Collection	Answers	Consistency or Inconsistency	Agreement
#16 Questionnaire: I have had fewer office discipline referrals and student suspensions in my classroom.	2 Strongly agreed, 6 Agreed, 6 Disagreed, 0 Strongly disagreed	Interviews – all 5 teachers stated that referrals and discipline issues have decreased. Interview Q24: Approximately half of the questionnaire respondents agreed discipline referrals and suspensions decreased in their classroom as a result of Second Step. Why do you think half believe this is true? IT1 responded: Once again, I think well...there are a couple of	No

things that impact that, number one I think is the um... the classroom management, um...expertise of the teacher, I think the other issue is the make-up of a given class in a given year, um... but once again I also think it has to do with the kind of environment that is fostered within a classroom by a given teacher.

Interview Q25: Have you had fewer discipline referrals and suspensions as a result of second step? Why (not)? IT1 responded: Umm...I would say so overall, I do not really send kids to the office so um...I would say that... you know...I do not know if that is a result of Second Step or not, but I am sure that Second Step has helped.

Similar questions were then asked in the questionnaire and other data sources about the overall school discipline, referrals, and suspensions. Table 14 shows some inconsistencies with the data collected for the current study.

Table 14. Comparison of Effects of Second Step on Office Referrals and Discipline Referrals in Teacher Classrooms

Data Collection	Answers	Consistency or Inconsistency	Agreement
#18 Questionnaire: There are fewer office discipline referrals and student	1 Strongly agreed, 8 Agreed, 5 Disagreed, 0 Strongly disagree	This is contradictory with the interviews. Interview Q27: Most respondents said they believed Second Step did not decrease problem behaviors in this school, but a majority believe there are fewer	No

suspensions in my school.	office discipline referrals and student suspensions in the school. Why do you think people seem to believe problem behavior has not decreased in the school but also think there are fewer referrals and suspensions? IT4 responded: I guess maybe it is the tolerance of the people that are judging that behavior. Um, you know kids are coming in with some degree of self-regulation and plus it is also the population we service here is affluent, so they are not scrapping and arguing for things. So, I think it could be too, that make up, the socioeconomic level and the make-up of the kids. Because if you go to a school that has a lower socioeconomic, you tend to find more troubled students...just because of how they navigate their lives outside of the world, I mean outside of the school.
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Empathy for Community Building was used as a code since it is a key term related to community building and Second Step. Talking about empathy and discussing respect are key to Second Step. Teachers stated that when good classroom management and community is established, less redirection is needed. Teachers' perceptions of empathy, prosocial skills and administrator's beliefs about these skills are in Table 15.

Table 15. Teachers' Perceptions of Second Step Impact

Data Collection	Answers	Consistency or Inconsistency	Agreement
#12 Questionnaire:	2 strongly agreed, 8 agreed,	This is consistent with the data obtained from the interviews (Q3, 17, 18, 19, 20, & 21) and	yes

The Second Step lessons have increased my students' prosocial skills.	4 disagreed, 0 strongly disagreed	the focus group (Q2 & 6). Most interviewees and teachers in the focus group felt that Second Step improved empathy and social skills.	
#13 Questionnaire: The Second Step lessons have increased my students' empathy towards each other.	3 strongly agreed, 7 agreed, 4 disagreed, 0 strongly disagreed	IT4 responded: We do not typically get feedback about Second Step...um it is kind of something that we just do, but it is not something that gets talked about often, so not a whole lot of information.	yes
#14 Questionnaire: My school's administrators have reported that Second Step has increased our students' prosocial skills and/or empathy.	0 strongly agreed, 11 agreed, 3 disagreed, 0 strongly disagreed	IT1 responded: Ugh...from administration? Um...non that I know of.	no

During the interviews, teachers were asked questions about their perceived benefits of Second Step, their perceived impact of Second Step, the impact of empathy and prosocial skills on students, and if those skills have increased in students since the implementation of Second Step. During the observations, eight out of nine teachers observed had an empathy poster (See Appendix H) hanging in the front of their classrooms and referred to the poster during these observations. The empathy poster is part of Second Step and is given to each teacher with their lesson plans and resources.

Empathy is one of the benefits of Second Step that teachers feel have impacted their students in a positive way. Teachers shared their perceptions of Second Step impact during the interviews. See their key points for each question in Table 16 below.

Table 16. Quotes From Teacher Responses to Respective Interview Questions About Perceived Impacts of Second Step

Participant ID	Q3 Benefits of SEL	Q17 Benefits of Second Step	Q18 Perceived impact of Second Step	Q19 Impact on empathy & social skills	Q20 Increased prosocial & empathy
IT1	Be able to communicate, to work collaboratively and to show empathy	Benefits are the idea of empathy, help students understand others perspective	Using the count to ten method or stepping back in a heated situation.	Empathy is where is all starts	*Skipped thought it was similar to Q19
IT2	Building on skills year to year	School wide, getting the same lesson is helpful for discipline and expectations	A recess situation, role-playing, good baseline	It does an ok job of discussion empathy and prosocial skills	Small increases with empathy
IT3	Whole school social and emotional learning, same language	Stop and think, with choices, beneficial since it is consistent through the years	Lessons on empathy and coping skills are effective	Reinforce empathy through the lessons, empathetic to someone else	Students know the program from year to year
IT4	Resolving conflicting and accepting disappointment	Self-regulation of ones' behavior	The need to revisit lessons when those issues arise	Empathy is strong and is taught in the beginning of the year	Reading other stories to supplement lessons
IT5	Coping and communica-	Setting goals for behavior,	Students playing	Empathy is a big part	*Skipped because of

tion skills, social conflict, and problem- solving skills	builds class comradery, empathy, and kindness	football at recess	time constraints
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Teacher’s answers to specific questions about benefits, impact, empathy, and prosocial skills were mainly positive. Most teachers felt as though Second Step made improvements in these areas. When asked about perceived benefits during the focus group (Q2), one teacher stated:

FG1 responded: So, I can answer that...so I really do love the Second Step program and I really um..., I use it and I spend a lot of time teaching the lessons. I think that it is...I think that in fifth grade, it really helps them with the problem-solving strategies. I love the way it starts, the empathy and really caring about people. It really sets the stage for like everything that is going on in the world.

When asked about Second Step increasing student empathy during the focus group (Q6), one teacher stated:

FG3 responded: I think it is also something that um...if it were not maybe explicitly taught, unless they have that innate kind of way of being empathetic that um...they often focus on their own perspective of something, so the empathy piece and the others’ point of view kind of come together. I think they recognize that more often now, as a result of Second Step and they are able to understand it and perhaps apply it.

Teachers need to teach these skills with specific language and Second Step provides that language. The theme building community emerged from data coded as relating to

classroom management and empathy for community building. The five codes were organized into three themes: reassurance, fidelity, and building community. These themes came out of the coding in order to help answer my research questions.

Coding and Themes

The reassurance theme emerged from two codes: Word choice and questioning response choices. The assumption was made that the interviewees were using the terms and vocabulary from Second Step. Another assumption was made that the interviewees were making meaning of the questions and figuring out their response which is why they needed to think about their words and questioned their own thinking and responses. Interviewees used words “like” and “um” to pause and think about the questions and to take the time to formulate their answers in a more detailed way. These responses demonstrated the interviewee’s style of speech and comfort with the interviewer.

Teachers often used the words “empathy,” “prosocial skills,” and “emotions” since these are all key terms used in Second Step. Second Step includes specific guidance about terminology, and teachers seemed to use that language during the interviews. I reassured participants that their responses were consistent with the aim of the question— reassurance was given to encourage participants to share their opinions and/or experiences. Phrases such as “is that ok,” “you know what I mean,” showed teachers concerns about their principal finding out what they shared about their experiences and perceptions of Second Step and their implementation of the program.

The fidelity theme emerged from the codes adapt and modify. When speaking, the teachers used the words adapt and modify interchangeably. Teachers used the words adapt and modify when describing the changes, they made to the Second Step lessons.

One teacher (FG4) stated during the focus group, “I just do not use it at all (resources). Sorry, I am being honest!” Teachers adapted or modified lessons to meet their students’ needs and to manage behavioral issues, time constraints, and students’ interest in the activities. During one of the interviews, IT4 responded, “A lot of times I will incorporate um a picture book to go with that or um some follow up um. I do love their videos and their songs, the videos, the kids love that and I use the posters too to refer to.”

The theme “building community” emerged from two codes: classroom management and empathy for community building. Teachers mentioned classroom management and building community as a positive impact of Second Step. Reviewing empathy and understanding other’s feelings is also part of classroom management. During the interview, I asked, “Approximately, half of the questionnaire respondents agreed behavior in their classroom has improved as a result of Second Step. Why do you think half believe this is true or not true?” IT2’s answer was consistent with IT1’s answer:

“Um, I think it is probably situational with the make-up you have of students...um you know I know some teachers have... you know, have a more behavioral needy group, um some academic, um so I think it depends on the kids that you have and how they interact. Um, and I think it is kind of what I was touching on before with what they bring into the classroom...so...um I think it works for those that you know really implement it with fidelity. Um, but it might not work in every situation, with every year, with different classes.”

During another interview with IT4, I asked, “Approximately, half of the questionnaire respondents agreed discipline referrals and suspensions decreased in their classroom as a

result of Second Step. Why do you think half believe this is true?” IT4 said: “...Um...I think again it is just belief in the program. You know and just the style of teaching.”

When continuing the interview process with IT4, they responded to question 25 (Have you had fewer discipline referrals and suspensions as a result of second step? Why (not)?) by saying: “Um...you know what...to be honest with you I really do not have that issue at all. You know, so I cannot say that it is in relation to Second Step or not.”

The theme “building community” and the code empathy for community building emerged from the data collected during the current study. Most interviewees and teachers in the focus group felt that Second Step improved empathy and prosocial skills. One teacher stated the district saw a need for a SEL program “to introduce and model for students coping strategies for emotions they experience (T1 – questionnaire).” Second Step was selected because it meets student needs for prosocial skills, empathy, dealing with emotions, and understanding others’ perspective. Empathy is a benefit of Second Step that teachers feel has impacted their students in an overall positive way. When empathy is explicitly taught with others’ point of view, it helps students recognize their own perspective and the perspective of others which helps them understand their feeling and be able to apply skills to real life.

School Collected Data

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data were obtained from a state website for years 2016-2021. The year 2015 was used to start collecting data because that was the year before Second Step was implemented in the school. The year 2021 included the most recent data available when this research was conducted. No data was collected for 2020 due to the Covid pandemic. The PSSA scores for the participating

school were organized English Language Arts (ELA) and Math proficiency results. These results were organized by grade level and school totals. Results were also listed in two categories: All (i.e., all students) or Historically Underperforming (HU) students (i.e., students receiving special education and students receiving free and reduced lunch). Students' scores will fall into one of the following ranges: Advanced (i.e., superior academic performance), proficient (i.e., satisfactory academic performance), basic (i.e., marginal academic performance), or below basic (i.e., inadequate academic performance). It should be noted that the proficiency summary data did not include students who were enrolled in the school after October 1st for the corresponding academic year or whom were home schooled. English language learners who were enrolled for less than one year in a US school were also excluded from the website data, as well as students who did not attempt the test.

The percent of All students who scored proficient or advanced in ELA declined over the years, and the percent of students who scored basic or below basic in ELA increased. The percent of historically underperforming (HU) ELA students who scored proficient or advanced slightly declined from 2017-2021 (i.e., the percent of HU students who were not proficient in ELA gradually increased from 2017-2021). The percent of All Math students who scored proficient or advanced in Math declined then remained steady, and the percent of students who scored basic and below basic in MATH increased then remaining steady. The percent of HU Math students who scored proficient or advanced declined, then increased, then declined again. The percent of students who scored basic or below basic are increasing, then decreasing, then increasing again.

Teachers’ perceptions of students’ academic skills were also collected during the questionnaire and interviews.

Research findings on PSSA scores and teachers’ perceptions about academic improvement on the questionnaire were consistent. Questionnaire item 20 asked teachers if student academic performance has improved. Two teachers agreed, one strongly agreed, and eleven disagreed. When teachers were shown graphs of PSSA data results, they were given some time to look at the data and share what they noticed. PSSA data showed that student academic performance appeared to be minimally affected or unaffected by Second Step. Table 17 includes teachers’ perceptions of PSSA scores during the interviews.

Table 17. Perceived Effects of Second Step on Academic Achievement

Data Collection	Answers	Consistency	Agreement
#30 Interview: What are some of the perceived benefits of Second Step on academics?	IT1 responded: “Um, I think helping kids manage anxiety. I do not know what the percentage is, but we have a fair share of students on a given year that have anxiety issues... um and I think a lot of those anxiety issues tend to be related to academics. So, um... I think that some of the skills, um... that Second Step helps them with um... helps	#32 Interview: Please take a moment to look at this graph and I will ask you a couple of questions. IT1 responded: “You know what, I can see it helped scores to increase...um...you know not tremendously but somewhat. Once again helping kids to manage test anxiety and those kinds of things.” #33 Interview: Based on this data and what you know about your school, do you think there appears to be any differences in ELA performance in historically underperforming students that could be attributed to Second Step? IT1 responded: “...hum...umm... Yes, I do because I think some of the discussions that	Yes

decrease that anxiety.”

take place during Second Step help to foster higher level thinking.”

#36 Interview: This figure shows that the percent of all proficient and advanced scores in math are declining and then remaining steady while the percent of students who are basic and below basic scores are increasing and then remaining steady. Do you think there appears to be any differences in math performance that could be attributed to Second Step? Why (why not)? IT1 responded: “No, I think the increase once again, the increase in below um proficiency levels for the past couple years is more pandemic related.”

#37 Interview: This figure shows that the percent of HU proficient and advanced scores in math are declining, then increasing, then declining again; while the percent of students who are basic and below basic scores are increasing, then decreasing, then increasing again. Do you think there appears to be any differences in math performance in HU students that could be attributed to Second Step? Why (why not)? IT1 responded: “So once again between 2019 and 2021, it looks like the percentage of proficiency is decreased and um below basic and basic is increasing and there’s your pandemic.”

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

General Interpretations

The current research study used a program evaluation approach to analyze the perceptions, experiences, and outcomes of Second Step in a suburban elementary school in the northeastern US. Data from observations, a questionnaire, interviews, a focus group, and school-collected data were obtained to answer three broad research questions. Previous studies have not looked at the effects of Second Step when implemented with fidelity, or the implementation of Second Step, included training and other important aspects for program success. The current research study was conducted to answer the three overarching research questions and the sub research questions proposed. Each question is answered based on the information obtained from the data collected which included a questionnaire, observations, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data (PSSA testing from 2015-2021).

The first research question was, “What are the school-measured outcomes of Second Step for elementary school students in a typical suburban elementary school?” Two additional sub questions related to this research question also were posed. Specifically, I aimed to understand the perceived or actual effects of Second Step on student academic performance and office discipline referrals. The results regarding impact of Second Step on academics were unclear. Participants reported perceptions that Second Step had positive effects on academic performance. For example, most teachers reported they believed the program had positive impacts on academic performance. This perception was further evidenced by statements by teachers made during interviews and

the focus group. However, the school did not have data to corroborate perceptions that Second Step had positive effects on academic performance. Additionally, PSSA data showed that student academic performance appeared to be minimally affected or unaffected by Second Step. Specifically, PSSA scores for All students as well as HU students in ELA and Math showed declining proficiency since 2016. It may be that Second Step has positive effects on academic outcomes that are undetected by PSSA, but evidence is needed to support perceptions of positive effects.

Research question one also focused on the perceived and measured effects of Second Step on student behavior. Results from the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group suggest widespread beliefs that Second Step has improved student behavior. However, the school did not collect behavioral data (e.g., suspensions, referrals, detentions, etc.) prior to or after Second Step adoption. It may be that teacher perceptions are consistent with actual outcomes (i.e., that Second Step improved student behavior). However, the school does not have evidence for this perception and therefore should not presume the program is contributing to improved student behavior. Accordingly, there does not appear to be compelling evidence of academic or behavioral improvements based on data collected by the school.

The second research question was, “What are the perceived reasons for using Second Step and the process used to adopt Second Step in a typical suburban elementary school?” Two additional questions related to this research question were posed to understand why their school adopted Second Step as well as the teachers’ perceptions of the impact of Second Step on students’ empathy. Teachers were asked an open-ended question about why their school adopted Second Step and 64.2% of the teachers’ used

terms related to SEL in their answers. Most teachers stated during interviews, focus group, or questionnaire that Second Step was useful for teaching students SEL skills. One teacher wrote on the questionnaire, that she believed the district chose Second Step because they (i.e., district administration) were “seeking a social and emotional support program to teach proactively this self-awareness, social, and problem solving/conflict resolution skills.” Teachers also remarked the administration believes Second Step is achieving the intended outcomes. Teachers also wrote or remarked they believed Second Step is effectively improving the targeted skills, but the school does not have data to support these perceptions. Specifically, the school does not conduct assessment, observations, or collect other evidence (e.g., office discipline referrals) that can inform whether Second Step is having an impact on social-emotional development or empathy. Despite the absence of evidence that suggests or clearly demonstrates beneficial effects, many participants endorsed the curriculum and expressed an interest in continued use. For example, teachers were asked during the focus group if the school should continue using Second Step and FG4 stated:

“No, I definitely think we should continue to use Second Step. At least we have something in place for the SEL. I think it is useful and I think kids do get things out of it. Every year, they have to be reminded of that and I like that there is continuity with the program. Because, you know, each year, you know, it seems to cycle through the same exact concepts which they need to hear all of the time. So, I do feel that it is useful.”

The teachers' perceptions of the impact of Second Step on students' empathy was overall positive. 71.4% of questionnaire respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Second Step increased student empathy, while 28.6% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. Each of the five teachers interviewed and the four teachers in the focus group also agreed that Second Step increases students' empathy. During the focus group, FG3 stated, "If empathy was not explicitly taught and unless students have that innate kind of way of being empathetic, they often focus on their own perspective of something, so the empathy piece and the others' point of view come together. I think they recognize that more often now, as a result of Second Step and they can understand it and perhaps apply it." While most of the teachers participating in the current study have the perception that Second Step increased student empathy, there is no data or other evidence to support this perception.

The third research question was, "How were teachers trained to use Second Step and to what extent do they follow the Second Step instructional procedures?" Three additional related questions were posed to understand if training was consistent with the research, resources were properly implemented, and teachers were using Second Step with fidelity. Fifty Percent of teachers reported via questionnaire that they had one hour or less training. Researchers for seven studies (43.8%) included for review in Chapter Two provided three-day and one-day training by the Second Step authors comprised of interviews, group coaching sessions, and training webinars in order to support social and emotional assessment and intervention, consultation, Second Step lesson components, and training for trainers. All participants in the current study received significantly less training than what is recommended by Second Step authors. One teacher reported during

interviews that the school counselor was “always readily available to answer any questions” (IT1). The limited training provided may explain why fidelity to the curriculum appeared inconsistent.

There were a variety of resources provided in the Second Step program that teachers reported using or not using, and resources that were observed being used or not being used during the observations. During interviews, teachers reported there were too many resources that were unnecessary for meeting lesson objectives. For example, most teachers said that they had enough resources, but did not use all of them. Two teachers who reported having received very little training also stated that they did not know each lesson included a handout and/or Home Link and did not know where to find those resources. Teachers reported they decided whether to use materials without guidance or lessons from the curriculum manual or school counselor. Each Second Step lesson includes an introduction, a story and discussion section, a skill and practice activity, a wrap-up, a handout, and a Home Link. Teachers reported and were observed adapting and modifying lessons in ways that deviated from the recommended procedures. Teachers were given notice one-two weeks in advance about the observations and they also knew the observations would be used for research. My presence may have influenced their instruction and their reason for following that specific observed Second Step lesson with more fidelity. The observed teachers selected were suggested by the Lead teacher of the school because they are the most familiar with Second Step, understand the program lessons and goals, and follow and use it well according to the Lead teacher’s perceptions. These teachers were chosen to be observed because they seem to be the most competent, confident, and trained teachers who use Second Step

every week according to the Lead teacher. The Lead teacher's perceptions could be a subjective impression of their teaching skills. These teachers also agreed to be observed, so it is possible that they are the teachers that know the curriculum best and are most likely to have high fidelity to lesson procedures.

Teachers gave various reasons for making adaptations and modifications to the Second Step lessons, but most stated the changes they made were to meet the needs of their students. These adaptations and modifications could also change from year to year based on changing students' needs every year. Most of the changes included: shortened lesson, incorporating additional material, using different assignments and/or activities, and omitting the handout and/or Home Link.

Limitations

Results from this evaluation research should be considered considering several limitations. First, all consenting participants in the school were asked to complete the questionnaire, but not all participants responded. This could mean results are more aligned with those who have high or low value for Second Step—less opinionated participants may not have responded. This means questionnaire results may not fully represent the perceptions and reported practices of teachers in the school. Second, specific teachers were chosen for the observations, interviews, and focus group based on solicitation by the school's Lead teacher. The Lead teacher remarked that most of these teachers used Second Step every week. This could have inflated results in ways that do not fully reflect perceptions of and practices associated with Second Step. Second, data that could have clarified whether perceived effects on behavior and academic outcomes were not available because the school did not collect such data—only PSSA data were

available. It remains unclear whether the children in the participating school experience academic and behavioral improvements resultant of Second Step. Third, observations of Second Step lessons revealed teachers followed the lesson procedures with high fidelity, but results from questionnaire, interviews, and focus group suggests high fidelity was uncommon. This may mean that observational data are not representative of actual practice in the school, and that fidelity to the curriculum may be relatively low. More frequent and perhaps less overt observations may have revealed a more accurate understanding of fidelity to Second Step in the school. Wenz-Gross and Upshur (2012) had teachers complete a lesson checklist which included key activities and tasks used for that lesson, at the end of the lesson. For each activity or task, teachers self-rated whether they completed it fully, partially, or not at all. Using a similar lesson checklist could reveal the extent to which teachers follow Second Step lesson procedures.

Although the school partly adopted Second Step to improve student empathy, the school does not appear to collect information about whether this has happened. Teachers reported that they believed students' empathy and use of prosocial skills improved, but the conclusions about empathy among the students is constrained by lack of information without a specific way to measure that empathy before and after Second Step lessons are taught. An empathy or prosocial scale can be developed and used to help teachers and administrators check for this outcome (Murphy et al., 2018).

When self-reporting, social desirability of teachers' answers is a potential limitation in the current study given the highly social content when self-reporting during interviews and the focus group. It can be difficult to determine whether the participants' responses were accurate representations of perceptions and practices associated with

Second Step. Focus group research shows that participants may misrepresent their understanding and knowledge to fit social norms. Some participants may not have shared their opinions if they conflicted with perceived norms (Mintzer, 2015). McAlinden (2018) suggested that focus group participants may limit participation or represent their opinions in ways that reflect themselves as effective teachers. In the current study, participants may have provided answers that align with the school's administration or perceptions they held about the researcher, and some evidence suggests this may have occurred. Specifically, discrepant results from the questionnaire and interviews were evident, particularly regarding perceived effectiveness as well as fidelity to lesson procedures.

Another limitation with the current study is that no member checks were used during the observations, interviews, and the focus group to confirm from participants that my notes were correct. It would have been helpful to ask participants if my perceptions and conclusions about their responses were correct. There was a Covid outbreak during the data collection, which caused the teachers and students to be absent for extended period of time and some data was collected close to the end of the school year, so many teachers were not as willing to meet with me. Member checks would have been beneficial in confirming my interpretation of the participants' responses.

Implications for Professionals

Despite the limitations of data collection and time collecting the data, a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Second Step was imperative to inform schools, administrators, and teachers about the effectiveness of the program. The overall positive perceptions of participants in this study suggest the school could continue

to implement Second Step. However, school leaders and administrators should observe and document fidelity to lesson procedures and identify ways to adapt and modify lessons to meet the needs of students. More guidance with adaptations and modifications would help with teachers' overall fidelity to the program and to the program changes. Without formal guidance, teachers are likely to adapt interventions to meet student, implementor, and contextual needs, potentially diminishing outcomes (Scheibel et al., 2022, p. 258). Teachers may benefit from knowledge about appropriate adaptations to lessons across grade levels, as well as adaptations with known consequences to the fidelity of the implementation of Second Step. Administrators could also measure effects when these adaptations and modifications are made (e.g., to address social media problems that children encounter and other problems not in the curriculum). Interviewing the building principal or building administrator would be beneficial in determining what is working and what needs to change based on the data they collected.

Teachers spend about 45-60 min to per week on Second Step and it requires minimal preparation if teachers are following the lesson script, which may account for the positive sentiments about the curriculum. However, other sources of data should be used to inform whether actual benefits of Second Step include improved academic performance, behavior and increased in empathy and prosocial skills. For example, tracking referral, suspension, and other behavioral data (e.g., positive behavior intervention support plan tickets given) may reveal whether behavior is improving, declining, or maintaining (and whether Second Step is sufficiently addressing the behavioral needs of students in the school).

Academic achievement can be determined by students' grade point average before and after Second Step implementation as well as academic engagement in lessons through observational data and anecdotal notes. Cook and Low et al. (2018) also used behavioral observations to record class-wide and individual student behaviors. Cooke et al. (2007) used behavioral observation of students in the classroom, playground, and cafeteria settings. Teachers can also use the Discipline Point System and the Prosocial Behavior Rating System to observe and record students' problems and prosocial school behavior data.

When empathy development is a core rationale for adopting Second Step, schools should measure empathy to determine whether the curriculum is serving the intended purpose. Low et al. (2016) and Cook et al. (2018) assessed students' behavior using the teacher version of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Second Step edition (DESSA-SSE; Devereux Center for Resilient Children (2012). This instrument measures student emotional competencies including empathy, emotional management, and problem solving to generate a social-emotional composite score. Similarly, Hart et al., (2009) used the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (KASS; Committee for Children, 2004) to measure students' social-emotional skills knowledge. Such measures may allow schools to determine whether Second Step improves empathy among their students.

Since self-reporting was used during the current study, better ways to use this strategy would be beneficial to teachers and administrators. Low et al. (2016) used self-reporting to measure multiple dimensions of implementation. Their study examined implementation fidelity from teachers who implemented Second Step and their students during the first year of a large cluster-randomized trial. Teachers were asked to complete

weekly self-report ratings of implementation to record adherence to the program, engagement, generalization, and dosage. Adherence included four dimensions: 1) adherence to the key lesson dimensions; 2) measured adaptations or modifications; 3) a single item asking how many of the daily practice activities were completed; and 4) a single item asking whether the teacher sent home the HomeLink Activity. Having this data would help see the benefits of using Second Step.

Many teachers stated in the interviews and focus group that they like the program and see the benefits, but others (mainly from the questionnaire) do not feel the same or use it with enough fidelity to know if it is even working properly. Accordingly, schools and districts should consider the cost-benefit analysis of Second Step since it is valuable to school-decision makers. Economic evaluation, or the evaluation of the time and financial resources consumed during intervention implementation, provides a potentially useful method to supplement empirical evaluation methods with resource considerations (Scheibel et al. 2022). An economic evaluation could reveal whether the costs associated with Second Step adoption and implementation are justified by anticipated and measured outcomes (Scheibel et al., 2022). Second Step users need to determine if the investment and money would be better directed elsewhere to another program that is more beneficial to students overall SEL. See Table 18 is an executive summary with a short explanation of the findings for the research school. These findings will be shared via email to the school principal.

Table 18. Summary of Research Findings

Implications for Professionals	Suggestions
Overall positive perceptions of participants suggests that the school should continue implementing Second Step.	Interviewing administrators would be beneficial.
Determining Academic Achievement.	Track referral, suspension, and other behavioral data (positive behavior intervention support plan, tickets/rewards, etc.) Use indirect and observational data to evaluate curricular effects.
Determining Empathy Development and Improvements in Students' Empathy.	Use the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Second Step edition (DESSA-SSE; Devereux Center for Resilient Children, 2012) to assess students' behavior. Use the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (KASS; Committee for Children, 2004) to measure students social-emotional skills knowledge.
Cost-Benefit Analysis.	Economic evaluation (input vs output). Evaluation of the time and financial resources consumed during intervention implementation.

Implications for Researchers

Research from the literature review in Chapter 2 included child profiles that differed across studies in ways incongruent with demographics of many schools in the US. Also, intervention agents varied as did the type and amount of training they received. Measures of fidelity to lesson procedures was limited and outcomes were measured in a variety of ways. Collectively, these findings mean researchers should consider investigating how these and other differences influence Second Step effectiveness. Researchers might also examine various aspects of adoption,

implementation, and measurement using qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, evaluation research may be particularly useful for future studies that attempt to understand how contextual (i.e., school- and district-specific) factors influence Second Step adoption, implementation, outcomes measurement, and effects. Evaluation studies may further reveal how extant experimental findings corroborate or differ from outcomes in schools and districts that differ from those in the included studies. For example, it seems plausible that a suburban and well-resourced school or district might have different outcomes than schools where Second Step research has occurred. A more nuanced and context-specific understanding of Second Step in public schools may inform decisions about when to adopt (or abandon) this or other SEL curricula.

Researchers should investigate how teachers can effectively modify and adapt the curriculum while maintaining positive effects. Teachers in the current study reported and were observed making changes to lesson content and delivery based on their unique circumstances. However, it is unclear how such changes influence the outcomes and effectiveness of Second Step. Researchers should identify ways for teachers to adapt lessons to meet students' needs while still having meeting lesson goals and having a positive effect on students.

Researchers should identify ways that schools can reasonably measure whether Second Step is improving student outcomes. Since Second Step includes observations, self-reflection, and positive reinforcement of prosocial behavior these can be the basis of the instrument used. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index can be used to provide a multidimensional approach to measuring empathy. There are a total of twenty-eight questions, seven for each construct of Perspective Taking, Fantasy Scale, Empathic

Concern, and Personal Distress (Murphy, et. al, 2018, p. 19). The scale is measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from “does not describe me well” to “described me very well.” Research has shown that this scale has proven to be appropriate for measuring expressions of empathy in social relationships (Murphy, et. al, 2018), but this and other instruments have not yet been recommended by Second Step authors as ways to evaluate the curriculum’s effects.

Conclusion

Schools and teachers take on the task of shaping students’ minds and encouraging them to understand the importance of SEL skills. Successful SEL intervention programs, like Second Step, have established methods with teachers and peer support that improve prosocial behavior and empathy. The current study used a questionnaire, observations, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data (PSSA testing) to answer the research questions posed on the implementation of Second Step. The purpose of this non-experimental program evaluation study was to understand the implementation and effects of prosocial skills and empathy instruction within a suburban elementary school. The participants in the current study consisted of teachers in a suburban elementary school outside of a big city in the northeast. Data obtained was used to understand perceptions of implementation, impact, and acceptability of Second Step.

Even though the results regarding impacts of Second Step on academics were unclear, perceptions were positive. Effects on academic performance and PSSA data showed that student academic performance appeared to be minimally affected or unaffected by Second Step. Participants believed that Second Step has improved student behavior, even though the school did not collect behavioral data prior to or after Second

Step adoption. Even with the absence of evidence, many participants endorsed Second Step and plan to continue using it in their classrooms.

A comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Second Step was imperative to inform schools about the effectiveness of the program. Some suggestions include: more guidance with adaptations and modifications, directives for flexible implementation, adaptations with known consequences to the fidelity, tracking referral and suspension, and using other behavioral data to determine if behavior is improving, declining, or maintaining. Empathy development is a core component of Second Step, so having a tool to measure empathy is important. Having more concrete forms of evaluation would be more beneficial than teachers' perceptions of those benefits. Teachers could complete weekly self-report ratings, while schools consider the cost-benefit analysis of Second Step. Changes and/or additions to the Second Step manual and training program, as well as training, and a system for administrators to use to evaluate whether Second Step is providing a benefit or having a negative effect would be beneficial for researchers. Researchers should find a formal way for teachers to adapt lessons to meet students' needs while still meeting lesson goals and having a positive effect on students.

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APPENDIX A

IRB RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

McKeown, Nicole Fenlon

Call of Participants: Recruitment Flyer

Exciting News!

We are launching a research project in your school to study the implementation of Second Step

- All teachers and administrators will have an opportunity to complete a questionnaire about the implementation of Second Step.
- Select general classroom teachers per grade will be asked to participate in classroom observations about the implementation of Second Step.
- The researcher and Lead teacher will select 1 to 2 participants from each grade for observations.
- Select general classroom teachers, administrators, and the school counselor will have an opportunity to participate in interviews and/or focus groups.

The application link (Google Form) is below and the cycle will close on 1/15/22

<https://forms.gle/jmfYeBEZgb9cCCt17>

- Date & Time: December-May, 2022
- Location: East Bradford Elementary
- Workshop Size: 30 to 40 questionnaire, 5 to 20 observations, 5 to 15 interviews
- Focus Group: General Education teachers will be recruited to participate because they provide Second Step instruction to the students. The participants will include general education teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade.
- Primary Focus: The purpose of this non-experimental program evaluation study is to understand the implementation and effects of prosocial skills and empathy instruction within a suburban elementary school.
- Techniques: a questionnaire, observations, interviews, a focus group, and school collected data.

APPENDIX B
FIDELITY CHECKLIST

Items Observed	Yes	No	Notes on items Observed
Did the teacher review the concepts and skills covered in the previous lesson before moving on?			
Did the teacher describe the importance of the concepts and skills prior to instruction?			
Did the teacher use an interactive introduction to the lesson's concepts?			
What objectives were taught for students to accomplish during the lesson?			
Were all objectives taught? If not, which concepts were not taught?			
Did the teachers use all the material provided? If not, what materials were not used?			
Did the teacher use the story and discussion section during the lesson?			
Did the teacher provide time in class for students to do the skill practice activity in the lesson?			
Were the activities completed individually, in pairs, or as a whole class?			
All lessons include at least one handout to complete during the activity. Did the teacher use the handout?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If the handout was used, did the teacher read through the directions with students in order to clarify any confusion about what is required before students begin working on the handout? 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If students ask a question about activity expectations, did the teacher provide an example or further explanation of what is required? 			
Did the teacher monitor students' progress while completing the handout?			
Did the teacher wrap-up the lesson with a review of the skills and concepts taught in the lesson.			
Was the lesson's home link activity (used to encourage interaction between students and their adult family members or other important adults) given?			
Any Additional Notes that are relevant to the research study: A narrative will be written for each observation describes what was observed—content of lesson, student behavior and engagement, disruptions, etc.			

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire Directions: You are invited to complete this questionnaire because you are a teacher, staff member, or administrator in an elementary school that is using the Second Step social-emotional learning curriculum. The purpose of this non-experimental research study is to understand and evaluate how Second Step is used in your school, your perceptions about the program, and its impact on students. The results from this questionnaire will be used along with other information to understand the strengths, weaknesses, resources, and impacts associated with Second Step in your school. Your participation may help the school administration understand how to support implementation of this program and whether it contributes to student social-emotional development.

Please respond to the 34 items below. This questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes complete.

Second Step Response Form	Scale Responses	Number and/or Open-ended Responses
1. Please list the grade(s) you teach. If you are a specialist teacher, please list your area (e.g., PE, Music, Library, Art, etc.).		
2. How many students are in your class or, if a specialist, approximately how many students do you teach?		
3. Please write how many years you have been using the Second Step? If you have never used the Second Step, please write "Never" and stop completing this questionnaire-- no further answers are needed.		
4. Please select the amount and of Second Step training you have received (check all that apply):	1 hour or less A half day (2.5-4 hours) A full day (5.5-8 hours) Two full days Three or more full days of training Didactic (i.e., Lecture presentation)	

	<p>Observation with feedback from peer or supervisor</p> <p>One or more coaching sessions</p> <p>Demonstration/modeling (i.e., you observed another person using Second Step)</p> <p>Other</p>	
5. Please indicate how often you received Second Step training.	<p>Once (before implementation)</p> <p>Intermittently (i.e., once per year)</p> <p>Ongoing/regular (more than once per year for more than one year)</p>	
6. Who trained you to use the Second Step program (select all that apply)?	<p>Independent Consultant, University Professor, or Expert</p> <p>District Administrator or Leadership Personnel (e.g., Behavior Specialist)</p> <p>School counselor</p> <p>School Psychologist</p> <p>School Administrator</p> <p>Fellow Teacher</p> <p>Other</p>	
7. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): The second step program includes enough resources to effectively teach my students the targeted skills.	<p>Strongly Agree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p>	
8. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): I have sufficient time during the week to implement Second Step.	<p>Strongly Agree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p>	

9. Please identify how much time per week you allocate to Second Step instruction.	Less than one hour 1-2 hours 3-4 hours More than 4 hours	
10. Please identify what materials you usually or always use during Second Step instruction.	Videos Written vignettes Puppets or stuffed animals Visual supports (e.g., posters) Worksheets Other	
11. Please explain what reasons you believe motivated your school to adopt the Second Step program.		
12. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): The Second Step lessons have increased my students' prosocial skills.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
13. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): The Second Step lessons have increased my students' empathy towards each other.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
14. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): My school's administrators have reported to me or fellow teachers that Second Step has increased our students' prosocial skills and/or empathy.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
15. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): Problem behaviors in my CLASSROOM have decreased as a result of Second Step.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
16. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): I have had fewer office discipline referrals and student suspensions in my	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	

CLASSROOM since we began using Second Step.		
17. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): Problem behaviors in my SCHOOL have decreased as a result of Second Step.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
18. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): There are fewer office discipline referrals and student suspensions in my SCHOOL since we began using Second Step.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
19. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): Problem behaviors in the COMMUNITY have decreased as a result of Second Step.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
20. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): Student academic performance has improved as a result of our school's implementation of Second Step.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
21. I review the concepts and skills previously covered at the start of each lesson.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
22. I use an interactive introduction to each lesson and relate student responses to the lesson concepts.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
23. I incorporate the story and discussion sections of the lesson during my instruction.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	

24. In what way do students complete lesson activities (check all that apply)?	Independently/Alone Pairs Small groups (3-5) Large Groups (6-10) Whole Class	
25. I use the handouts provided in the curriculum manual.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
26. I provide time in class for students to complete the skill practice activity following each lesson.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
27. I wrap-up the lesson with a review of the skills and concepts taught during the lesson.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
28. I send home the lesson's Home Link activity.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
29. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): Most parents of my students review the Home Link activity with their child(ren).	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	
30. Please rate your agreement with the following statement (2 = agree, 3 = disagree): I believe the Home Link encourages interaction between children and their adult family members or other important adults.	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	

31. I reinforce throughout the day skills taught during Second Step lessons and activities.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
32. I adapt or modify instruction to teach Second Step lessons.	Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never	
33. In what ways do you adapt or modify Second Step Lessons?	Shortened lesson (i.e., omitting lesson content, steps, activities) Incorporating additional materials Changing lesson content (e.g., using different/relevant examples, changing role play scenarios, etc.) Using different assignment and/or activities Skipping lessons or delivering lessons in a different order Omitting Home Link/homework worksheets and activities Lengthening lesson (i.e., adding more content, examples, activities)	
34. Please share any comments, concerns, or enthusiasm you have about Second Step, its use in your school, effects it has on students, or support you receive for implementation.		

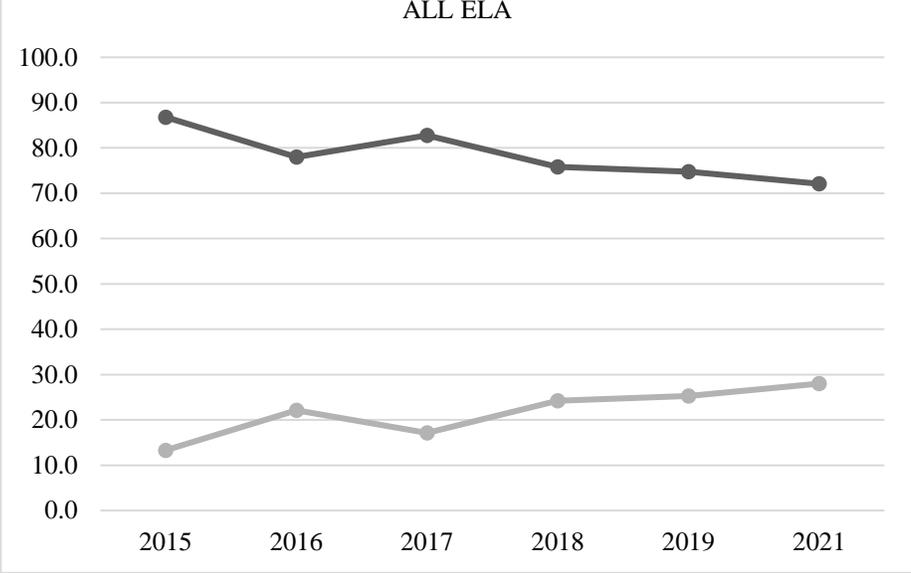
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Question Type	Question	RQ
1.Introduction	“Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Nicole McKeown, and I am conducting my dissertation on the implementation of Second Step at your school. As you know, your participation today is voluntary. You can skip a question, ask to take a break, or stop the interview at any time. Please be honest with all of your responses. Do you have any questions before we begin?”	
2.Background Information	What grade or position do you currently hold? How many years have you been in this school? What is the race, ethnicity, and gender make up of your classroom?	
3.Background Information	What do you think are the perceived benefits of a social emotional learning program, like Second Step, are in your school?	RQ 2b
4.Background Information	What do you think were the reasons your school/school district adopted Second Step?	RQ 2a
5.Background Information	How were you prepared or trained to implement Second Step?	RQ 3a
6.Data Question	Do you have all the materials you need to teach your Second Step lessons?	RQ 3c
7.Data Question	About two-thirds of teachers answered that there are enough resources and one third answered that there are not enough, yet during the observations most teachers did not use all the materials suggested in the lesson plan. Why do you think that is? How do you feel about the materials provided and the materials you chose to use?	RQ 2b
8.Data Question	Most teachers spent 45 minutes to one hour a week teaching Second Step lessons, yet 29% feel as though they do not have sufficient time to teach the lessons, why do you think that is?	RQ 3b
9.Key to Teacher Practices	Do you embed Second Step skills in other lesson plans taught throughout the day or week?	RQ 3c
10.Data Question	According to the questionnaire, 71% of teachers stated that they reinforce skills taught through Second Step lessons throughout the day. How often do you reinforce skills throughout the day?	RQ 3c

11.Data Question	One teacher wrote they believed Second Step "helps students carry over and apply what they are learning." Do you think it helps students? Do you think other teachers feel the same way?	RQ 2a
12.Key to Teacher Practices	How involved are the families in your school with Second Step?	RQ 2b
13.Key to Teacher Practices	Do you think the families in your class go over the Home Links provided from Second Step?	RQ 2b
14.Data Question	It seems like most teachers sometimes or rarely use the home link activity. Why is that?	RQ 2b RQ 3c
15.Data Follow-up Question	How relevant do parents feel Second Step is to their child's education and instruction? What is their perception of Second Step?	RQ 1a
16.Data Question	Most teachers do not give out the Home Link and a majority feel that it does not encourage interaction between children and their adult family. What do you think explains this feeling?	RQ 1b RQ 3c
17.Key to Teacher Practices	What do you think the perceived benefits of Second Step are?	RQ 1a RQ 2b
18.Key to Teacher Practices	What is your perceived impact of Second Step on your students? Can you tell me a story of when it was effective and when it did not work?	RQ 1b RQ 2b
19.Key to Teacher Practices	How well does Second Step discuss empathy and other prosocial skills? What is the impact of empathy and prosocial skills on students?	RQ 1a RQ 2b
20.Data Question	A majority of teachers agreed Second Step increases prosocial skills and empathy; can you give me an example of how these skills have increased with your students?	RQ 2b

21.Date Follow Up Question	Do you believe it increases your students' empathy? How so? What about social skills? How so?	RQ 2b
22.Data Question	Almost 80% of teachers stated that administrators reported an increase in students' prosocial skills and empathy using Second Step? What information has been shared you?	RQ 2b
23.Data Question	Split results here; some report yes, some report no. Approximately half of the questionnaire respondents agreed behavior in their classroom has improved as a result of Second Step. Why do you think half believe this is true? Why do you think half of people do NOT believe this is true?	RQ 1a
24.Data Question	Approximately half of the questionnaire respondents agreed discipline referrals and suspensions decreased in their classroom as a result of Second Step. Why do you think half believe this is true? Why do you think of half of participants do NOT believe this is true?	RQ 1b
25. Data Follow Up Question	Have you had fewer discipline referrals and suspensions as a result of second step? Why (not)?	RQ 1b
26.Data Question	Although approximately half of respondents said classroom behavior has improved following Second Step, the majority of respondents said they believed Second Step did not decrease problem behaviors in this school. What do you think explains this discrepancy? Or, why do may people believe behavior in their classroom is better but not behavior in the school?	RQ 1a
27.Data Question	A majority of respondents said they believed Second Step did not decrease problem behaviors in this school, but a majority believe there are fewer office discipline referrals and student suspensions in the school. Why do you think people seem to believe problem behavior has not decreased in the school but also think there are fewer referrals and suspensions? Is there some other reason why referrals and suspensions have decreased?	RQ 1b
28. Data Follow Up Question	Many people also said they thought there was decreased problem behavior in the community since using Second Step even though they did not think problem behaviors decreased at school. Why do you think people believe problem behavior in the community has decreased but problem behavior in the school has not?	RQ 1a
29.Key to Teacher Practices	What are some of the benefits and limitations of Second Step that you have observed or experienced?	RQ 2b

30.Key to Teacher Practices	What are some of the perceived benefits of Second Step on academics?	RQ 1a
31.Data Follow Up Question (follow up to #4 & #30)	According to the questionnaire, teachers do not necessarily think Second Step improves academic performance, but this program was implemented to meet the Career and College Readiness standards, do you think Second Step meets the standards? These standards include such topics as career awareness and preparation and entrepreneurship. Do any Second Step lessons discuss these topics or lead students to think about these ideas.	RQ 1a
32.PSSA ELA Data Question	<p style="text-align: center;">ALL ELA</p>  <p>This figure shows that the percent of ALL ELA students who were proficient or advanced (in black) as well as ALL ELA students who scored basic or below basic (in grey). Please take a moment to look at this graph and I will ask you a couple of questions.</p> <p>What did you notice about that data?</p> <p>Do you think Second Step adoption explains any changes (or lack thereof) in proficiency scores? (Follow up: Do you think second step caused proficiency scores to improve/decline/remain flat? Why (not)?</p>	RQ 1a

<p>33.PSSA ELA Data Question</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">HU ELA</p> <table border="1" style="margin-top: 10px;"> <caption>Estimated Data for HU ELA Graph</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Proficient and Advanced (Black)</th> <th>Basic and Below Basic (Grey)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015</td> <td>52.0</td> <td>48.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>34.0</td> <td>66.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>51.0</td> <td>49.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>34.0</td> <td>66.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>38.0</td> <td>63.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>45.0</td> <td>55.0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>This figure shows that the percent of HU (historically underperforming) proficient and advanced (black) scores in ELA are declining, then increasing, then declining again, until they are steadily increasing; while the percent of students who are basic and below basic (grey) scores are increasing, then decreasing, then increasing again, until they are steadily decreasing. Based on this data and what you know about your school, do you think there appears to be any differences in ELA performance in historically underperforming students that could be attributed to Second Step? Why (why not)?</p>	Year	Proficient and Advanced (Black)	Basic and Below Basic (Grey)	2015	52.0	48.0	2016	34.0	66.0	2017	51.0	49.0	2018	34.0	66.0	2019	38.0	63.0	2021	45.0	55.0	<p>RQ 1a</p>
Year	Proficient and Advanced (Black)	Basic and Below Basic (Grey)																					
2015	52.0	48.0																					
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2018	34.0	66.0																					
2019	38.0	63.0																					
2021	45.0	55.0																					
<p>34.PSSA Data Follow Up Question</p>	<p>What students receive Second Step instruction in this school? Do self-contained special education students receive instruction in Second Step?</p>	<p>RQ 2a</p>																					
<p>35. PSSA Data Follow Up Question</p>	<p>Are there specialized classrooms for students with disabilities at your school? Do you know if those students also receive Second Step? Do you think they should receive it? Why (not)?</p>	<p>RQ 2a</p>																					

<p>36.PSSA MATH Data Question</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ALL MATH</p> <table border="1" style="margin-top: 10px;"> <caption>ALL MATH Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Proficient and Advanced (%)</th> <th>Basic and Below Basic (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015</td> <td>75.0</td> <td>24.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>62.0</td> <td>38.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>64.0</td> <td>36.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>67.0</td> <td>34.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>68.0</td> <td>32.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>64.0</td> <td>36.0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>This figure shows that the percent of ALL proficient and advanced (black) scores in MATH are declining and then remaining steady while the percent of students who are basic and below basic (grey) scores are increasing and then remaining steady. In other words, the percent who are proficient is declining while the percent of non-proficient is increasing. Based on this data and what you know about your school, do you think there appears to be any differences in MATH performance that could be attributed to Second Step? Why (why not)?</p>	Year	Proficient and Advanced (%)	Basic and Below Basic (%)	2015	75.0	24.0	2016	62.0	38.0	2017	64.0	36.0	2018	67.0	34.0	2019	68.0	32.0	2021	64.0	36.0	<p>RQ 1a</p>
Year	Proficient and Advanced (%)	Basic and Below Basic (%)																					
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2019	68.0	32.0																					
2021	64.0	36.0																					
<p>37.PSSA MATH Data Question</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">HU MATH</p> <table border="1" style="margin-top: 10px;"> <caption>HU MATH Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Proficient and Advanced (%)</th> <th>Basic and Below Basic (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015</td> <td>42.0</td> <td>58.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>20.0</td> <td>80.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>25.0</td> <td>75.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>26.0</td> <td>74.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>38.0</td> <td>63.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>32.0</td> <td>68.0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>This figure shows that the percent of HU (historically underperforming) proficient and advanced (black) scores in MATH are declining, then increasing, then declining again; while the percent of</p>	Year	Proficient and Advanced (%)	Basic and Below Basic (%)	2015	42.0	58.0	2016	20.0	80.0	2017	25.0	75.0	2018	26.0	74.0	2019	38.0	63.0	2021	32.0	68.0	<p>RQ 1a</p>
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2019	38.0	63.0																					
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	students who are basic and below basic scores are increasing, then decreasing, then increasing again. Based on this data and what you know about your school, do you think there appears to be any differences in MATH performance in historically underperforming students that could be attributed to Second Step? Why (why not)?	
38.PSSA Data Follow Up Question	Who do you believe are the students who benefit most and least from Second Step?	RQ 1a
39.Key to Teacher Practices	Do you implement the Second Step lessons with fidelity (exactly as the program is scripted)?	RQ 3c
40.Key to Teacher Practices	Do you make any modifications to the implementation of the Second Step lessons? What parts of Second Step do you think are the most effective and why?	RQ 3c
41.Data Question	Only 36% of teachers said they always or usually modify Second Step lessons, however after observing 9 different teachers, that percentage should be higher since most made modifications during the observations. What do you think explains this discrepancy? Do you think teachers do not want to admit they make modifications to the lessons?	RQ 3c
42.Data Follow-up Question	Most people said they sometimes, usually, or always adapt the lessons. Do you modify the lessons? How? Why? Why do you think other teachers modify?	RQ 3c
43.Data Follow-up Question	Did your training include guidance about how to modify or adapt lessons? If yes, how etc.? If no, how do you decide what modification to make? Is it examples, the skills, and/or the activities?	RQ 3a
44.Key to Teacher Practices	What is more valuable to the students, implementing the Second Step lesson procedures with fidelity or making modifications to meet students' needs. Explain your answer.	RQ 3c

45.Data Question	I observed 100% of teachers using interactive introductions, yet only 36% said they did this always and 50% said they usually did it, why do you think participants said they might not use this part of the lesson?	RQ 3c
46.Data Question	Why do you think the vast majority of teachers in this school use the story and discussion portion of the second step lessons? (Why do you use the story and discussion portion? Why do you think others use this section as well?).	RQ 3c
47.Data Question	It seems like some teachers use the handouts but others don't. Why do you think this is? Do you think it depends on the lesson or do teachers feel the handout is not useful?	RQ 3c
48.Data Question	Is the skill practice activity an important part of the lesson? Why or why not?	RQ 3c
49.Data Follow-up Question	Do you always use this activity or make modifications during lessons?	RQ 3c
50.Conclusion	“Was there anything you wanted to add related to the content of my questions? Is there anything else you want to tell me about what you know about Second Step at your school that you think will help my research? Thank you for participating in this interview.”	

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Question Type	Question	RQ
1.Introduction	“Thank you for participating in this focus group. My name is Nicole McKeown and I am conducting my dissertation on the implementation of Second Step at your school. You can skip a question, ask to take a break, or leave the focus group at any time. Please be honest with all your responses. Do you have any questions before we begin?”	
2.Related to Interview #3	What do you think are the perceived benefits of a social emotional learning program, like Second Step, in your school?	RQ 2b
3.Related to Interview #9 &10	In what ways do you reinforce or see others reinforcing Second Step lessons throughout the day or week in other lessons?	RQ 3c
4.Related to Observations, Questionnaire #25 & 28, and Interview #14 & 16	<p>Data: When asked, on the questionnaire, I use the handouts provided in the curriculum manual; 50% said always or usually, 29% said sometimes and 29% said rarely or never.</p> <p>Data: When asked, on the questionnaire, I send home the lesson’s Home Link activity; 14% said always or usually, 29% said sometimes and 57% said rarely or never.</p> <p>A vast majority of teachers stated during the interview that they don’t use the Home Link and Handouts, and my observations seem to confirm this. Why do you think teachers don’t use these resources?</p> <p>Follow up: Would you consider using the handouts and home link? What beneficially resources would you add?</p>	RQ 3b RQ 2b RQ 3c
5.Related to Interview #17	<p>What do you think are the benefits of using Second Step in your classroom?</p> <p>Follow up: How do you know this?</p>	RQ 1a RQ 2b
6. Related to Questionnaire #13 and Interview #20 & 21	<p>Why do you think most teachers reported that Second Step increases student empathy?</p> <p>Most of the teachers I interviewed said they thought Second Step increases students’ empathy. Do you agree?</p> <p>Follow up: The results from the questionnaire showed that 10 out of 14 teachers strongly agree or agree that Second Step lessons have</p>	RQ 2b

	increased their students' empathy towards each other, while 4 disagreed. Why and how is empathy increased in students? Why has not it increased in some students and is that concerning to you.	
7.Related to Questionnaire #32 & 33 and Interview #40	Why do you make changes and modifications to your Second Step lessons? Follow up: What changes do you think others make? What effects do those changed have on you or your students?	RQ 3c
8.Related to Questionnaire #32 & 33 and Interview #40	What needs to be changed or improved about Second Step, in your opinion?	RQ 3c
9.Conclusion	Should your school continue to use Second Step? Why or why not.	

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW CODING AND THEMES

Codes	Meaning	Examples I = Interview F = Focus Group	Themes
Word Choice	Are teachers' word choices, correct? Some teachers think and change their answer or repeat words mid-sentence and mid thought. What do words when used multiple times during an interview or focus group. Assumptions were made that the interviewees were making meaning of the questions and figuring out the best way to answer (I & F).	Examples include: Like... Um... You know...	Reassurance
Questioning Response Choices	Reassurance was needed when teachers thought their answer were not what I wanted to hear. There is no correct answer, just an opinion or experience. Sharing ideas that are expected rather than someone's own ideas. Reassurance was needed with confidentiality of the answers (I).	Examples Include: Teachers asked: Is that, ok? You know what I mean? Does that make sense? You are familiar with the program, right? Research stated: "I want all of you to be honest (F)!"	Reassurance
Adapt and Modify	Teaching Second Step with fidelity while making modifications and	Examples Include:	Fidelity

	<p>accommodations to meet the needs and relevant topics of students.</p>	<p>I teach the lessons with fidelity, but I do not always use all the activities.</p> <p>Is teaching Second Step with fidelity what makes it beneficial and useful (F)?</p> <p>Everybody is hearing that same language (F),</p> <p>Some teachers do not teach Second Step with enough fidelity for it to be useful (F).</p> <p>Adapt lessons to our students and what we are seeing (F).</p> <p>Tie in picture books, additional stories. (F)</p> <p>Modifications based on management issue of the activity (F).</p> <p>Fidelity with the Home Link: Do not use it! Use it in the beginning of the school year only, just so the parents understand what the program is about, but then my homework becomes very structured use it (F).</p> <p>Fidelity with Handouts: Activities are not appropriate or not engaging but, some I like, I always use and some I do not like, and sometimes it depends on the class (F) Too much, keep it simple (I - M).</p>	
Classroom Management	The importance of building community.	Examples Include:	Building Community

	<p>Building community impacts instruction.</p>	<p>Respecting each other (I). Students opening-up about.</p> <p>When good classroom management and community is established, less redirection is needed (I).</p> <p>Things that you would not just naturally talk about (F).</p> <p>Inclusive way, that would not alienate people (F).</p> <p>When cultures collide conflicts arise, on a personal level in the classroom, with peers, and with siblings (F).</p> <p>Working collaboratively (F).</p>	
<p>Empathy for Community Building</p>	<p>Empathy is an important aspect of community building. Talking about empathy and discussing respect is key to the Second Step program. Reviewing empathy and understanding other's feelings is an important part of classroom community. Having the parents and students involved in the community building will build a whole school community.</p>	<p>Examples Include:</p> <p>Making meaning of having empathy.</p> <p>Understanding others' perspective and walking in someone else's shoes (F).</p> <p>Empathy and others' point of view come together, students recognize that more often now, as a result of Second Step and they can understand it and perhaps apply it (F).</p>	<p>Building Community</p>

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW THEMES AND CODING

Themes	Meaning	Example	Codes
Reassurance	Reassurance was frequently need throughout data collection. Teachers were nervous about their answers and if the administration would get results. Reassurance was needed and confidentiality was promised.	Interviewees were making meaning of the questions and figuring out their responses. Reassurance was given to encourage participants to share their idea and/or experiences, and to be honest.	Word Choice Questioning Response Choices
Fidelity	Fidelity to Second Step lesson implementation was evaluated during all forms of data collection. Did students make adaptations and modifications during lessons. Why were these changes made. Where they necessary for to meet students' needs.	Teachers adapted or modified lessons to meet their students' needs, and to manage behavioral issues, time constraints, and students' interest in the activities.	Adapt and Modify
Building Community	Classroom management and building community are imperative for a safe school environment and	Teachers mentioned classroom management and building community as a positive impact of Second Step.	Classroom Management Empathy for Community Building

	community. When students feel safe, they are more likely to be engaged and excited about their learning.	Teachers reported that classroom management and building community was an important part of being a successful teacher and making Second Step work for their students.	
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APPENDIX H

SECOND STEP EMPATHY POSTER

