

Social and Emotional Learning in Preschool: An Evaluation of Strong Start Pre-K

Leslie Gunter, Paul Caldarella, Byran Korth, and
K. Richard Young

Brigham Young University
USA

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Social and Emotional
Learning in Preschool:
An Evaluation of
Strong Start Pre-K



Leslie Gunter, B.S., Ed.S. in progress

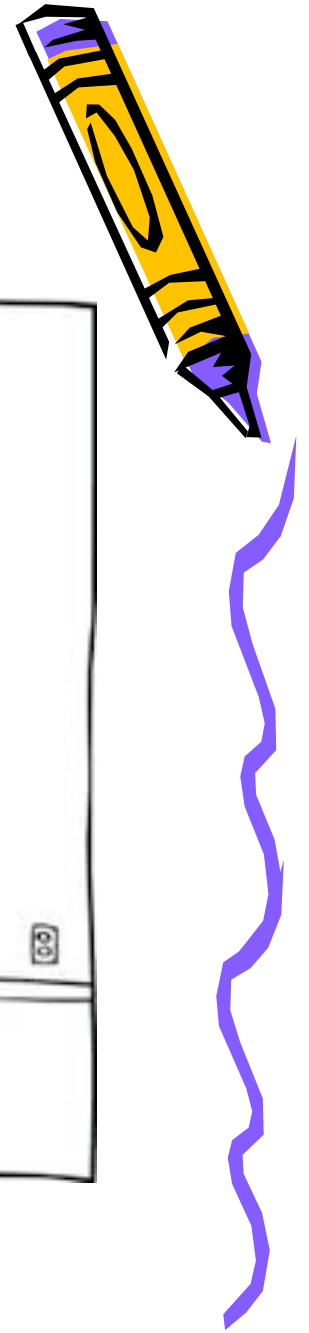
Paul Caldarella, Ph.D., Byran Korth, Ph.D., K. Richard Young, Ph.D.

Brigham Young University

March 3-4, 2011

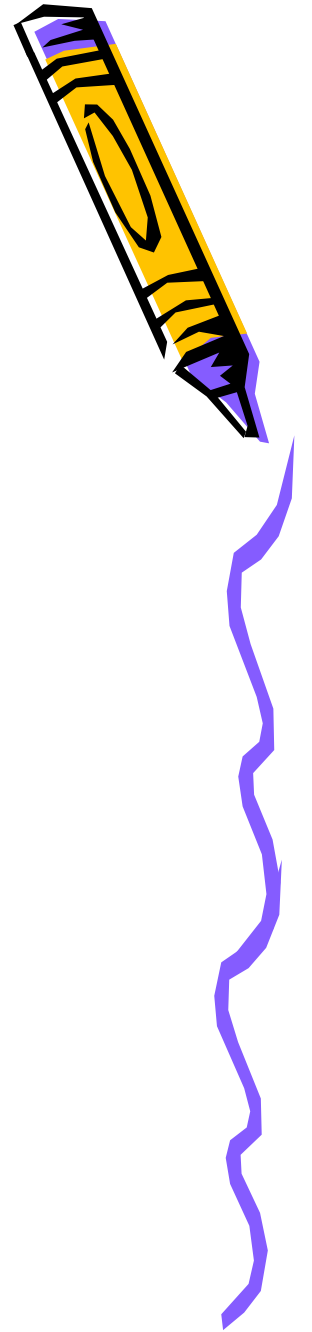
In the words of a child:

"If I face
my fears,
they go
away."



Risk Factors

- Societal Factors
- Lack of Family Stability
- Child Maltreatment
- Poverty
- Parental Stress
- Poor Physical or Mental Health
 - Of the child or the parent



A Stumbling Block

- When a student experiences two or more of such risk factors, the negative psychological consequences are multiplicative, rather than additive, suggesting that certain life circumstances can be major stumbling blocks to a child if they lack the skills to manage the situations.

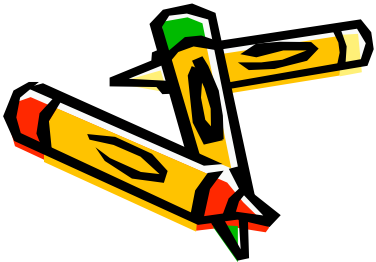
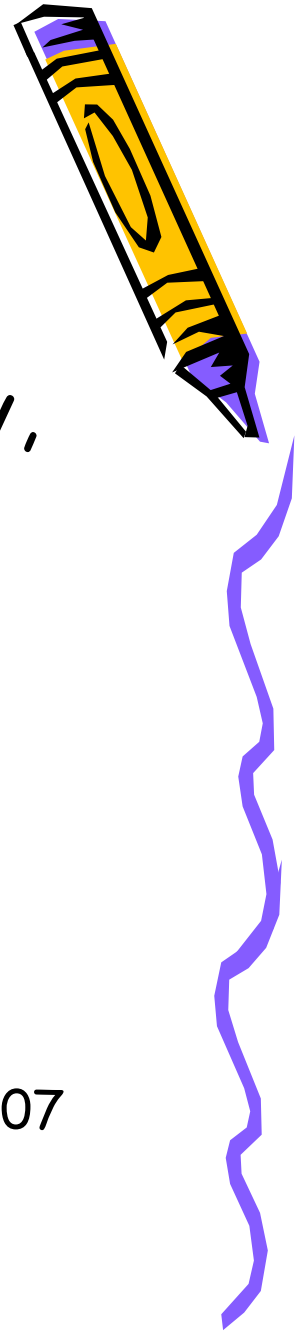
• Doll and Lyon (1998)



Each Day in America...

- 2,482 babies are born into poverty, 1,154 babies are born to teenage mothers, 2,421 children are confirmed as abused or neglected, 18,221 public school students are suspended, and 3,477 children are arrested

- Children's Defense Fund, 2007



Our goal:

- Even though we cannot change the world, we can make a difference in the life of a child.
- Relationships matter

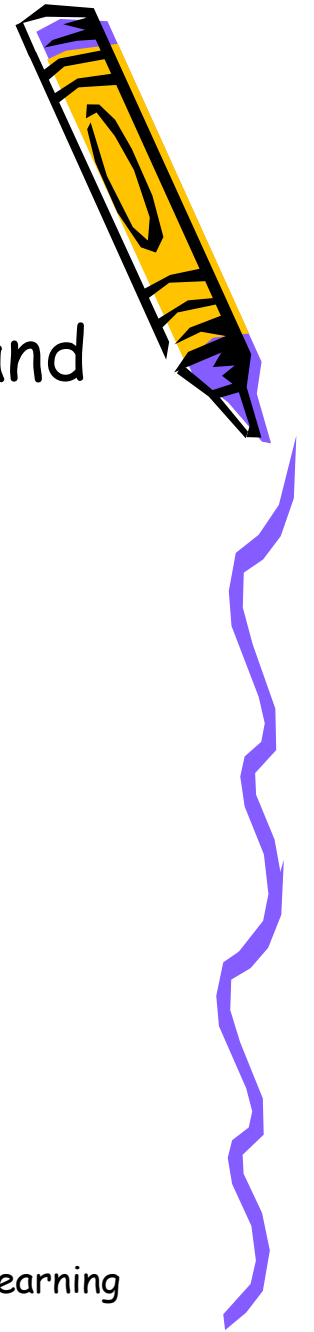


Social Emotional Learning

- SEL is a process for helping children and adults develop the fundamental skills.
- These skills include:
 - recognizing and managing our emotions,
 - developing caring and concern for others,
 - establishing positive relationships,
 - making responsible decisions, and
 - handling challenging situations.

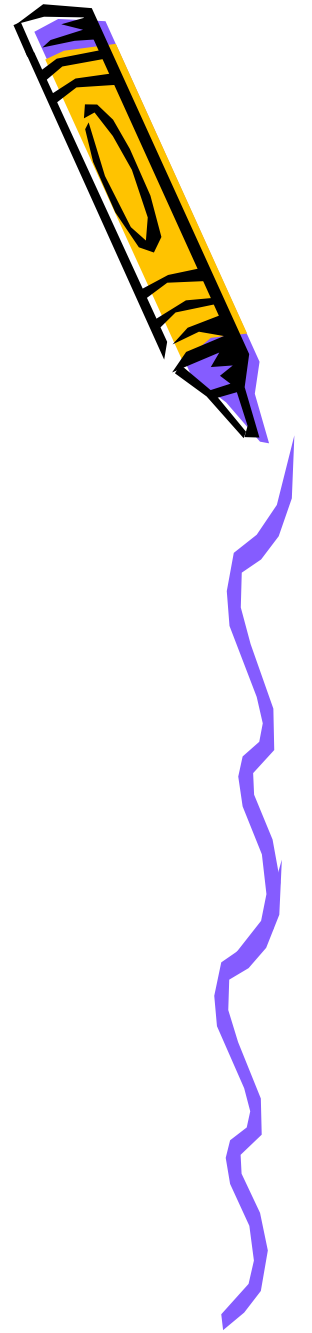


» Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning



SEL Skills

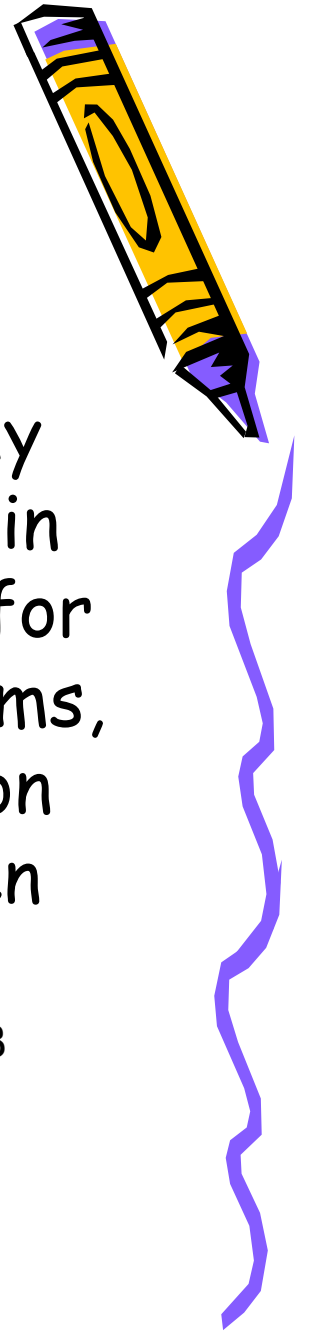
- Can be a buffer, but not immunity
- They are the skills that allow children to **calm themselves** when angry, **make friends**, and **resolve conflicts** respectfully resulting in successful interactions



At-Risk

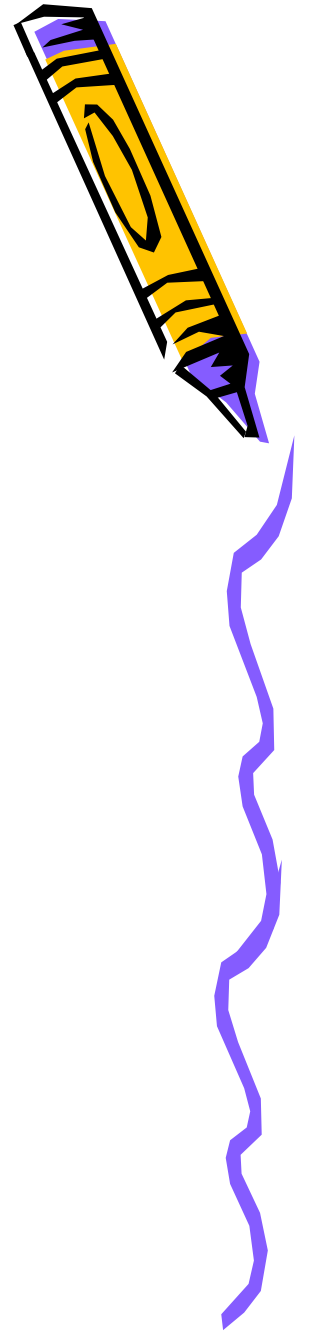
- Children who fail to acquire the empathy or social skills needed to be successful in making and keeping friends are at risk for a variety of social and emotional problems, ranging from isolation and peer rejection to loneliness, poor self-esteem, and even depression.

- Merrell et al., 2009, p. 8



Protective Factors

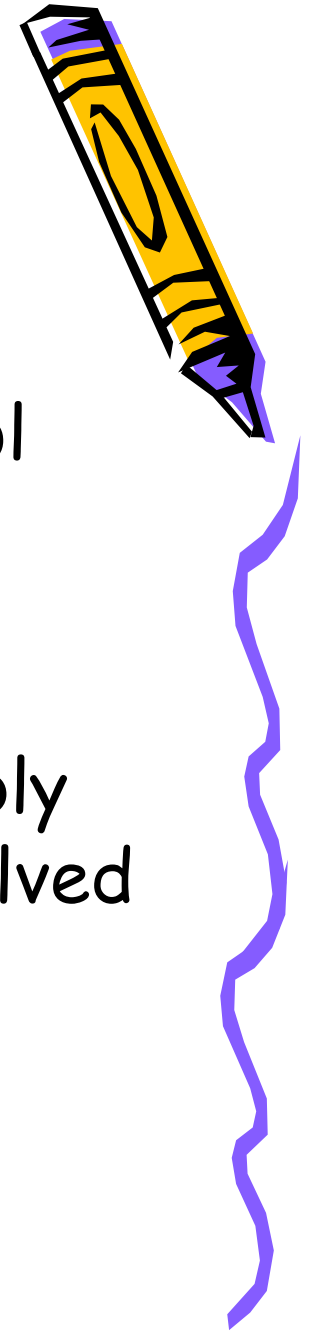
- Positive Temperament
- Positive Social Relationships
- Self- Efficacy
- Self-Esteem
- Connections to Social Institutions
- Emotional Regulation



The Difference

- The knowledge gained in early preschool programs can mean the difference between failing and passing, regular or special education, dropping out or graduating from high school, and possibly staying out of trouble or becoming involved in crime and delinquency .

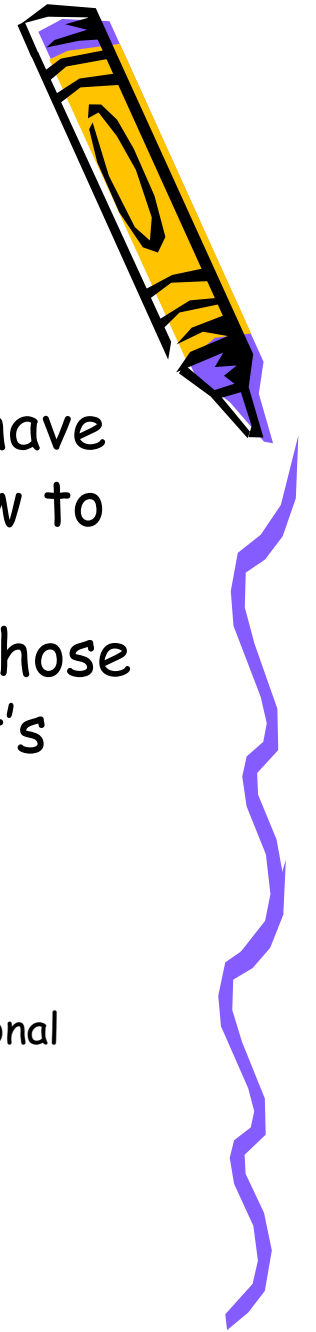
- Barnett, 1995



Words by the United States Secretary of Education

- SEL skills are learned skills and children can have huge challenges but if you **help them learn** how to handle those, deal with them, then you **have a chance**. When you don't, they can't get past those challenges and can't begin to think about what's going on in class but these are **absolutely teachable**, learned skills.

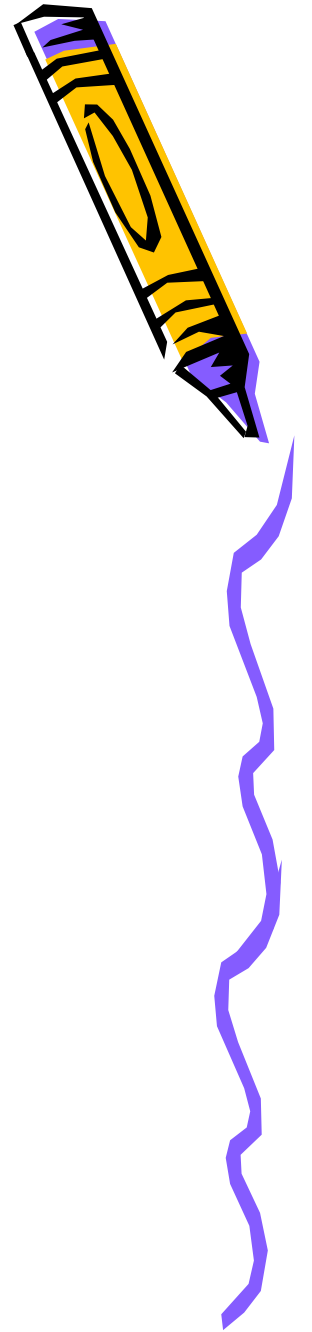
- Arne Duncan, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2010



Emotional Regulation

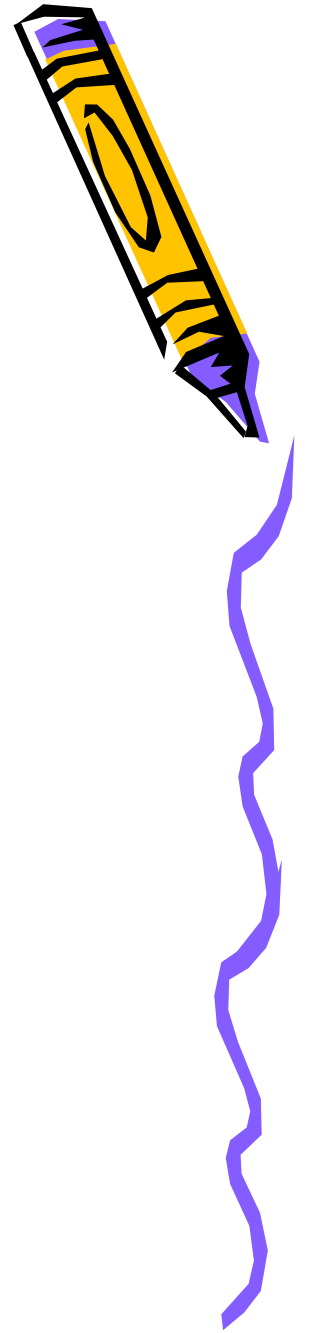
- An essential skill for children
- Children who are able to manage their emotions are better able to learn, pay attention, absorb information, and retain what they have learned.

- Daniel Goleman



Internalizing Behaviors

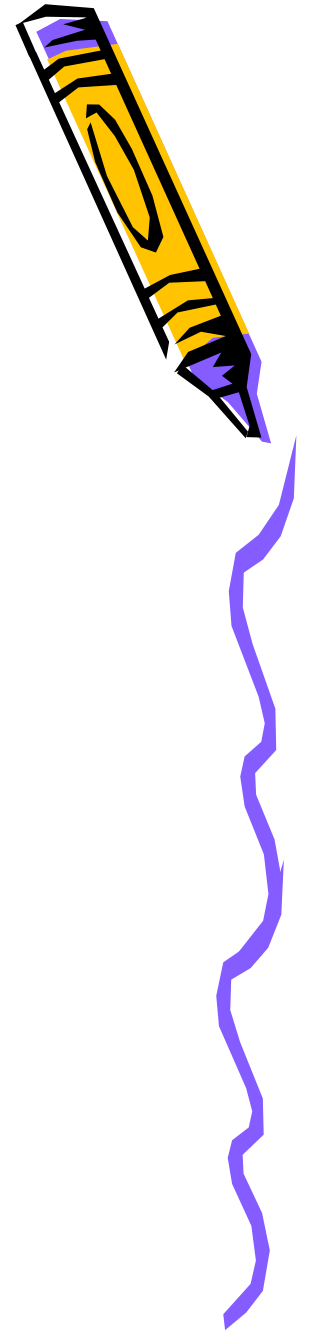
- Can lead to problems later on
- Not as apparent
- Less likely to be identified
- Most common childhood disorder:
ANXIETY



5 Core Competencies

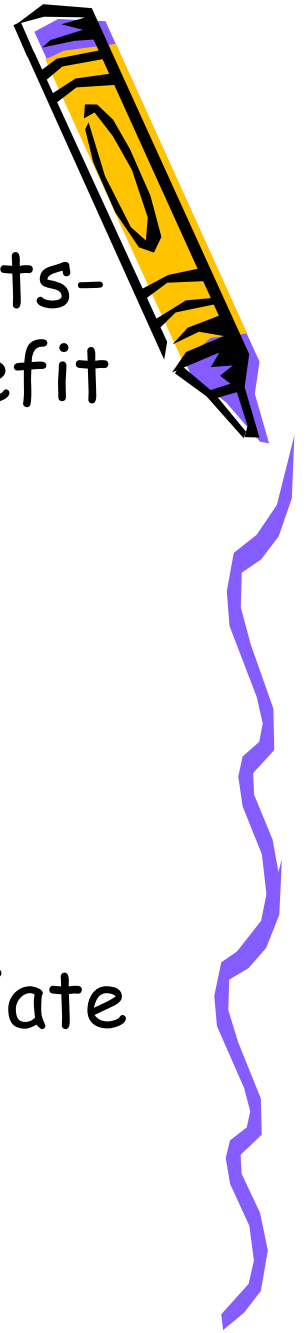
- Self-awareness
- Social awareness
- Self-management
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision making

- CASEL, 2003



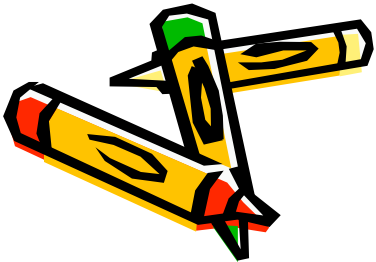
Early Intervention

- Preventative programs for all students- those that need it the most will benefit from it
- Helps children learn to cope with problems
- May prevent further academic and behavioral problems
- Important to directly teach appropriate behaviors



SEL Curricula for Preschool

- *I Can Problem Solve- Preschool*
 - Shure, 2001
- *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies- Preschool*
 - Domitrovich, Greenberg, Kusché, and Cortes, 2004
- *Safe and Caring Schools: Skills for School, Skills for Life*
 - Petersen, 2005
- *Strong Start Pre-K*
 - Merrell, Whitcomb, and Parisi, 2009



Strong Start Pre-K

- Merrell, Whitcomb, & Parisi (2009)

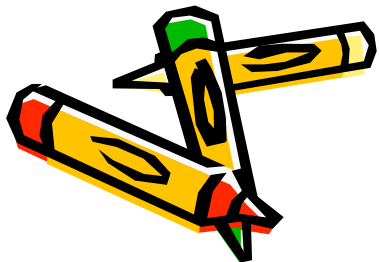
1. Feelings Exercise Group

2. Understanding Your Feelings part 1

3. Understanding Your Feelings part 2

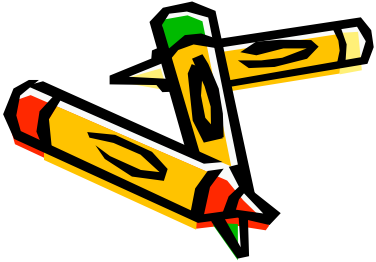
4. When You're Angry

5. When You're Happy



Strong Start continued...

6. When You're Worried
7. Understanding Other People's Feelings
8. Being a Good Friend
9. Solving People Problems
10. Finishing UP!
 - Booster 1
 - Booster 2



Research Questions

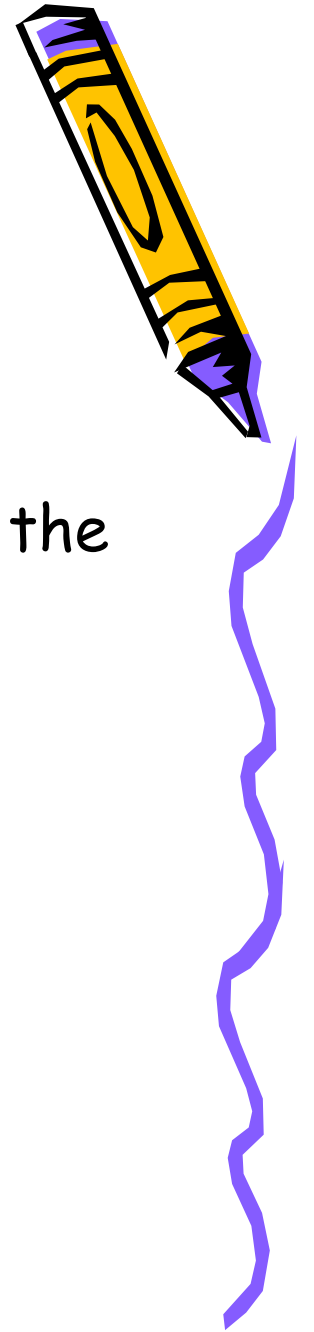
- What effect does *Strong Start Pre-K* have on teacher ratings of the social and emotional competence of preschool students? Specifically, do teachers report a **decrease in students' internalizing behaviors** and an **increase in emotional regulation**?
- Is a preschool teacher able to implement *Strong Start Pre-K* with **fidelity**?
- Do teachers view *Strong Start Pre-K* as **socially valid**?



Methods

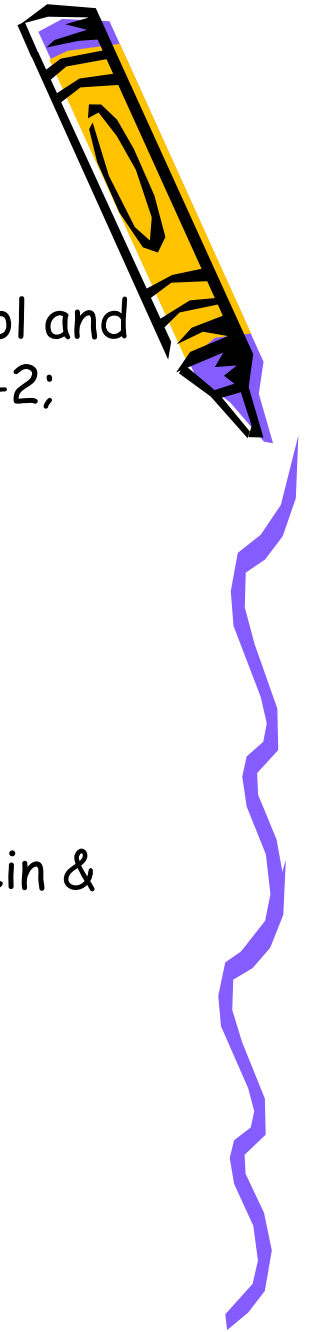
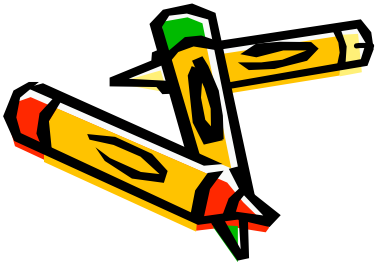
- Non-equivalent control group design
- 10 lessons taught 2x a week for 5 weeks
- 2 booster lessons taught 6 and 7 weeks after the conclusion of the core lessons.

- Start of school to pretest: 8 weeks
- Pretest to post test: 6 weeks
- Post test to post test: 8 weeks



Dependent Measures

- Internalizing Behaviors subscale on the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavioral Scales- Second Edition (PKBS-2; Merrell, 2002)
 - Does not respond to affection from others
 - Has problems making friends
 - Is afraid or fearful
- Emotional Regulation subscale on the Preschool Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (PreBERS; Epstein & Synhorst, 2009)
 - Controls anger toward others
 - Reacts to disappointment calmly
 - Takes turns in play situations



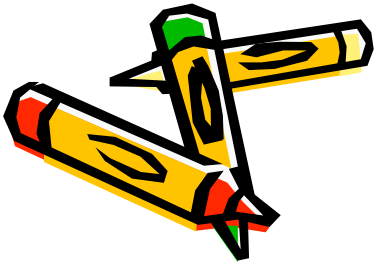
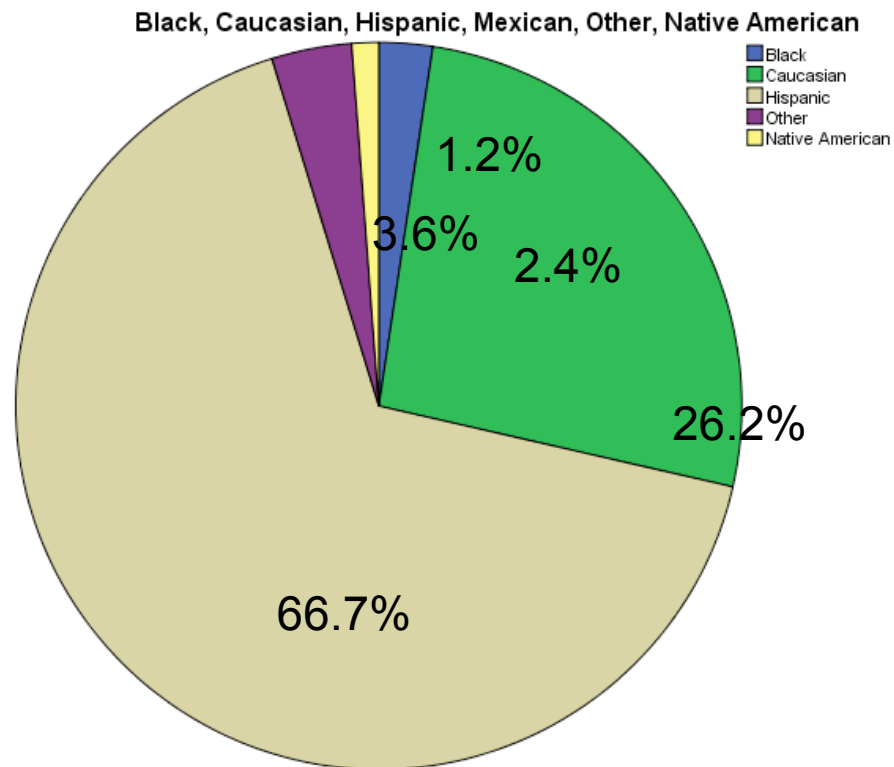
Dependent Measures

- Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS; Pianta, 2001)
 - I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child.
 - Dealing with this child drains my energy.
 - This child is overly dependent on me.

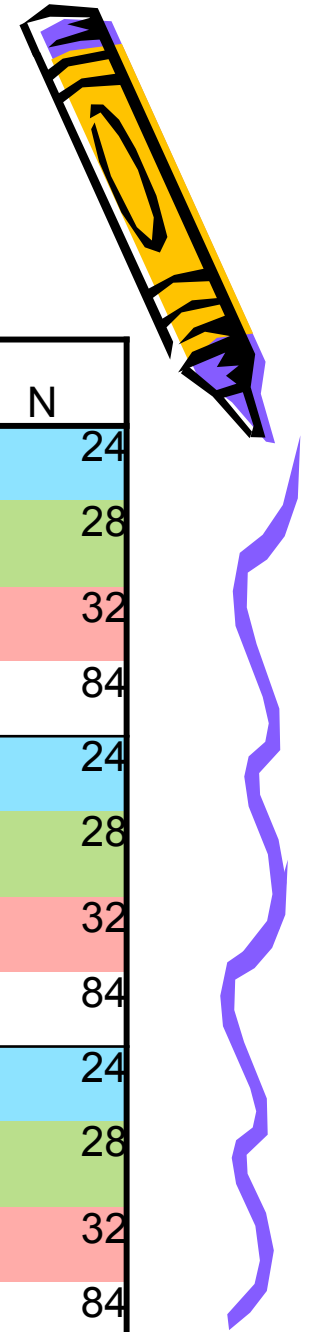


Participants

- Title I Preschool: 4 teachers, 84 students
- 3 Conditions: Treatment Group: 24; Treatment Group + Boosters: 28; Control Group: 32
- 42 boys
- 42 girls



Internalizing Behaviors

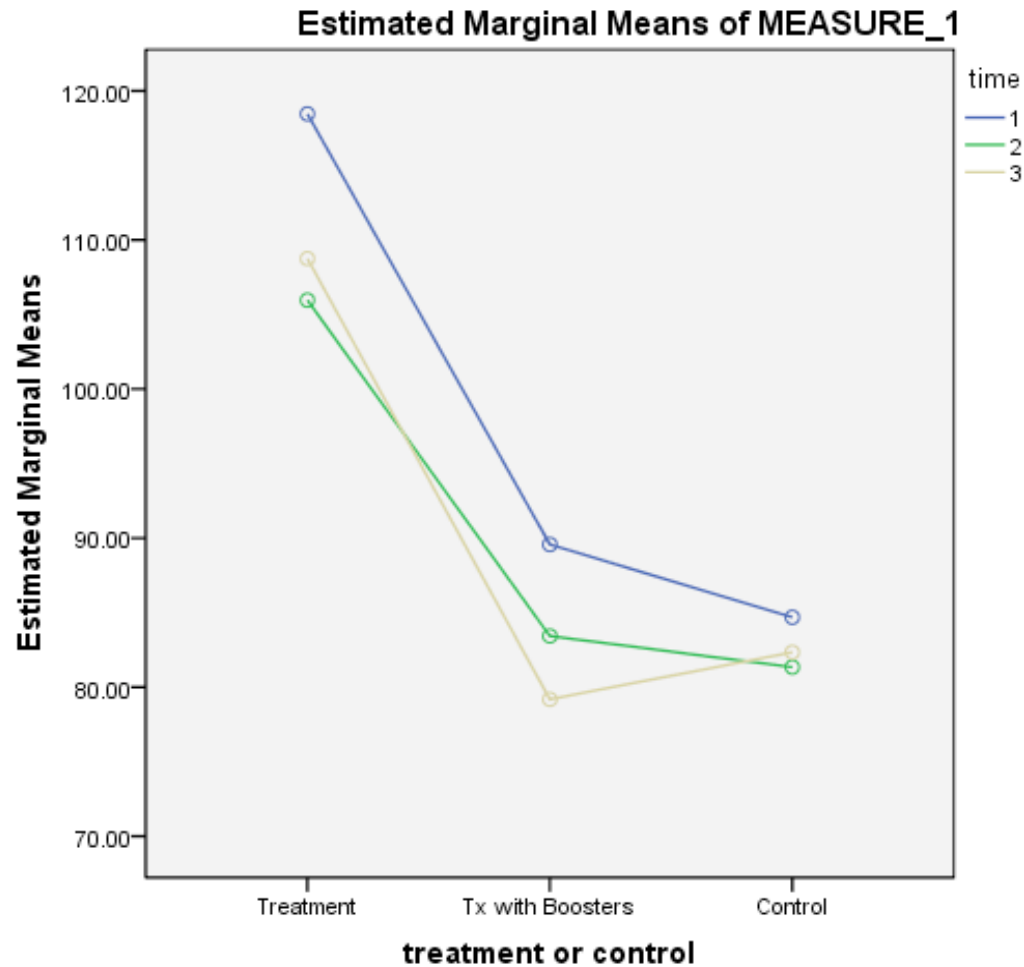
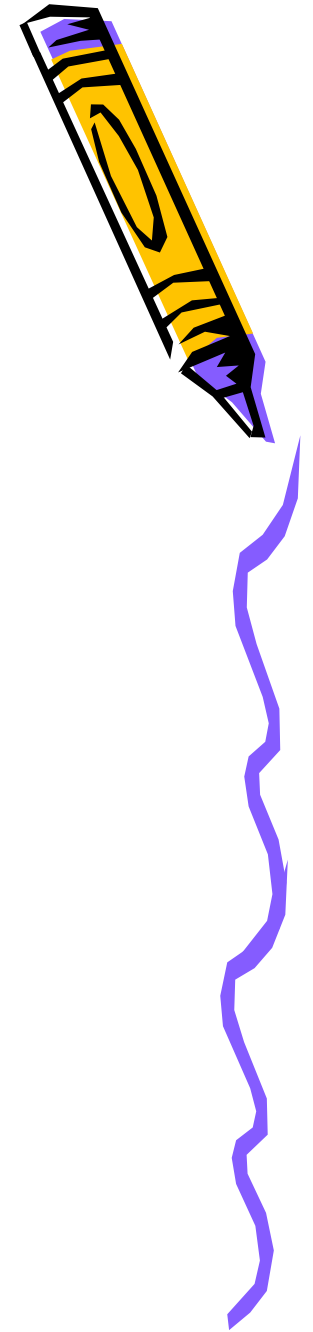


Descriptive Statistics

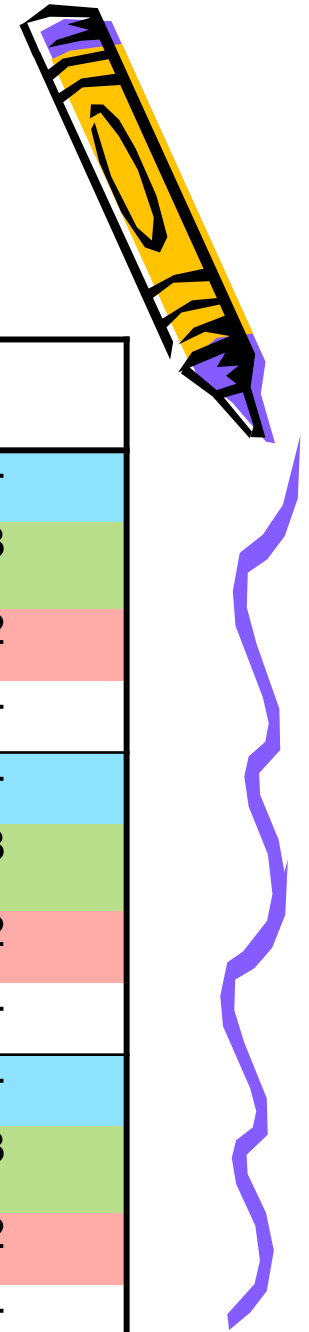
	Treatment or control	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest Standard Score- Internalizing Behaviors (117=moderate risk, 126= high risk)	Treatment	118.4583	16.17292	24
	Tx with Boosters	89.5714	9.21524	28
	Control	84.6875	12.93267	32
	Total	95.9643	19.27946	84
Posttest1 Standard Score- Internalizing Behaviors (immediate)	Treatment	105.9583	18.87367	24
	Tx with Boosters	83.4286	2.42561	28
	Control	81.3437	5.39181	32
	Total	89.0714	15.08992	84
Posttest2 Standard Score- Internalizing Behaviors (maintenance)	Treatment	108.7500	17.58025	24
	Tx with Boosters	79.1786	4.99669	28
	Control	82.3437	7.22723	32
	Total	88.8333	16.60297	84



Results- Internalizing Behavior



Emotional Regulation



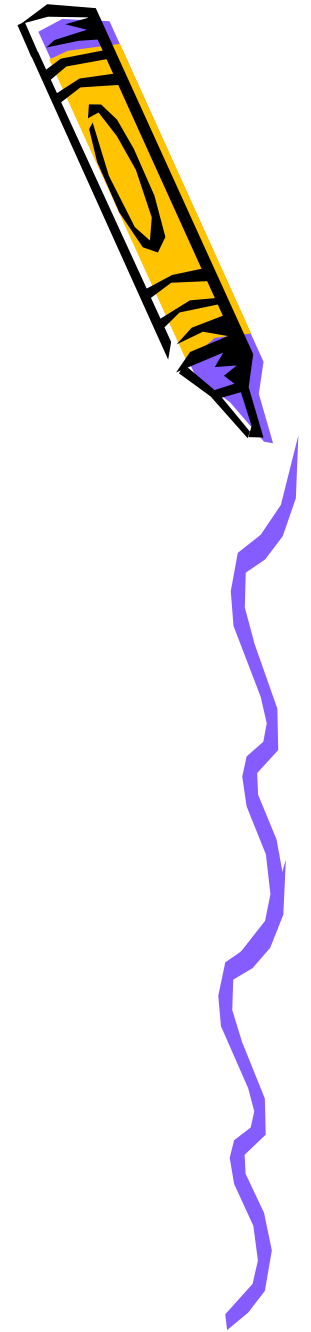
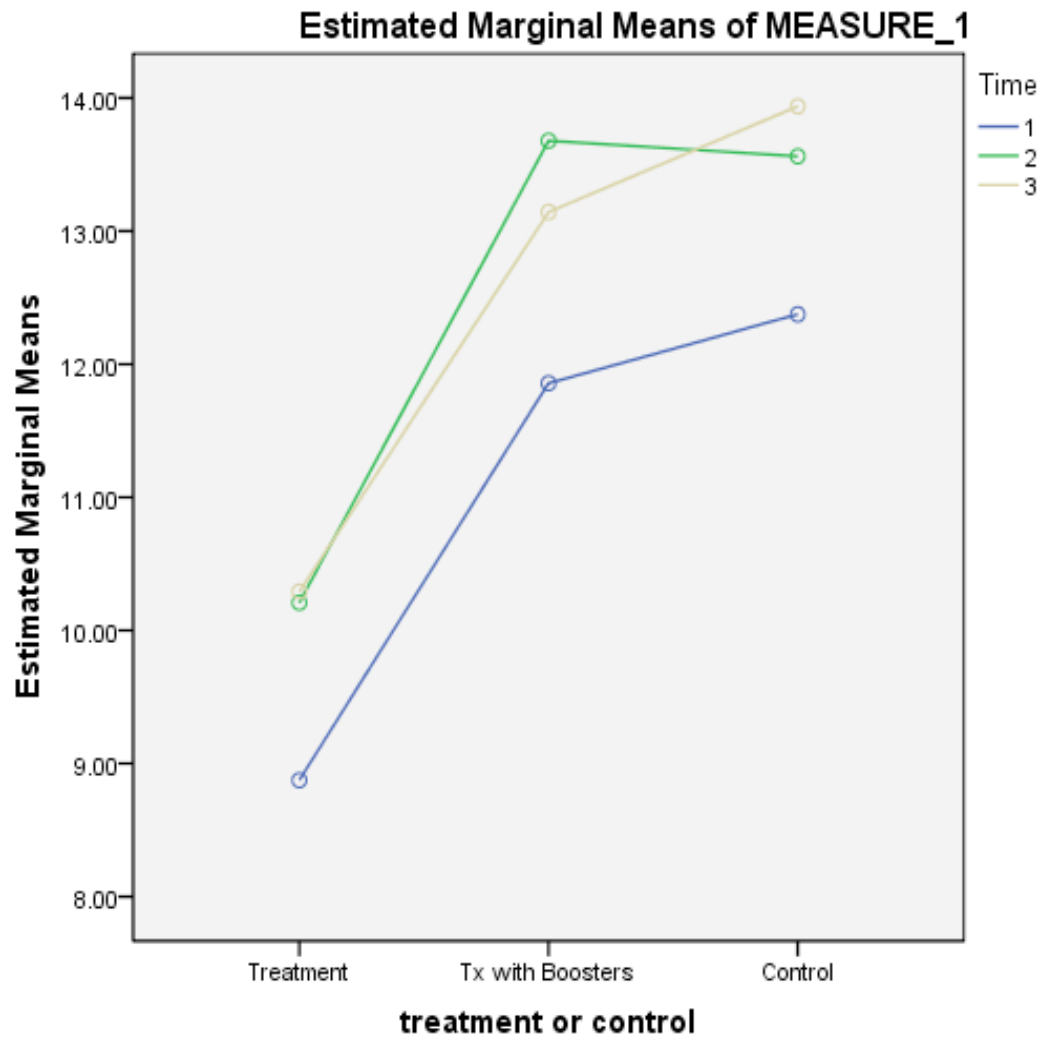
Descriptive Statistics

	Treatment or control	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest Standard Score- Emotional Regulation (preschool by gender; the higher the better)	Treatment	8.8750	2.64267	24
	Tx with Boosters	11.8571	1.69344	28
	Control	12.3750	2.39287	32
	Total	11.2024	2.69216	84
Posttest1 Standard Score- Emotional Regulation (immediate)	Treatment	10.2083	2.90396	24
	Tx with Boosters	13.6786	1.12393	28
	Control	13.5625	1.41279	32
	Total	12.6429	2.42796	84
Posttest2 Standard Score- Emotional Regulation (maintenance)	Treatment	10.2917	2.57883	24
	Tx with Boosters	13.1429	1.40671	28
	Control	13.9375	1.16224	32
	Total	12.6310	2.30651	84

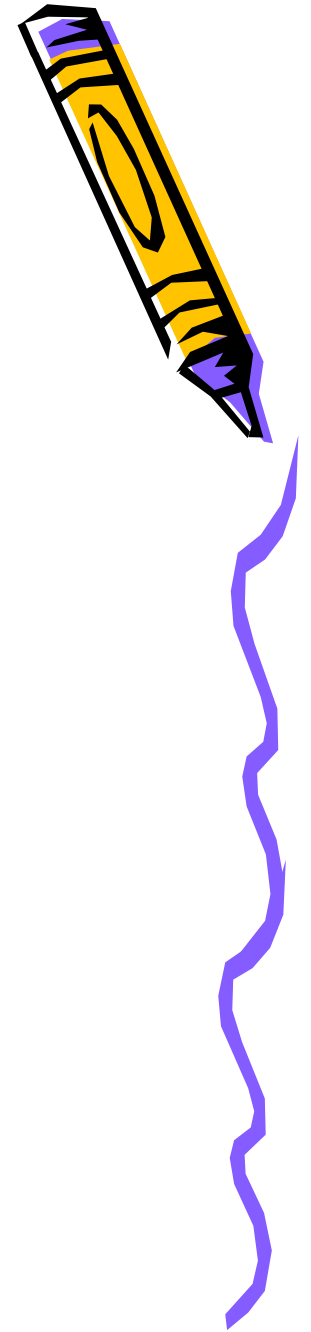
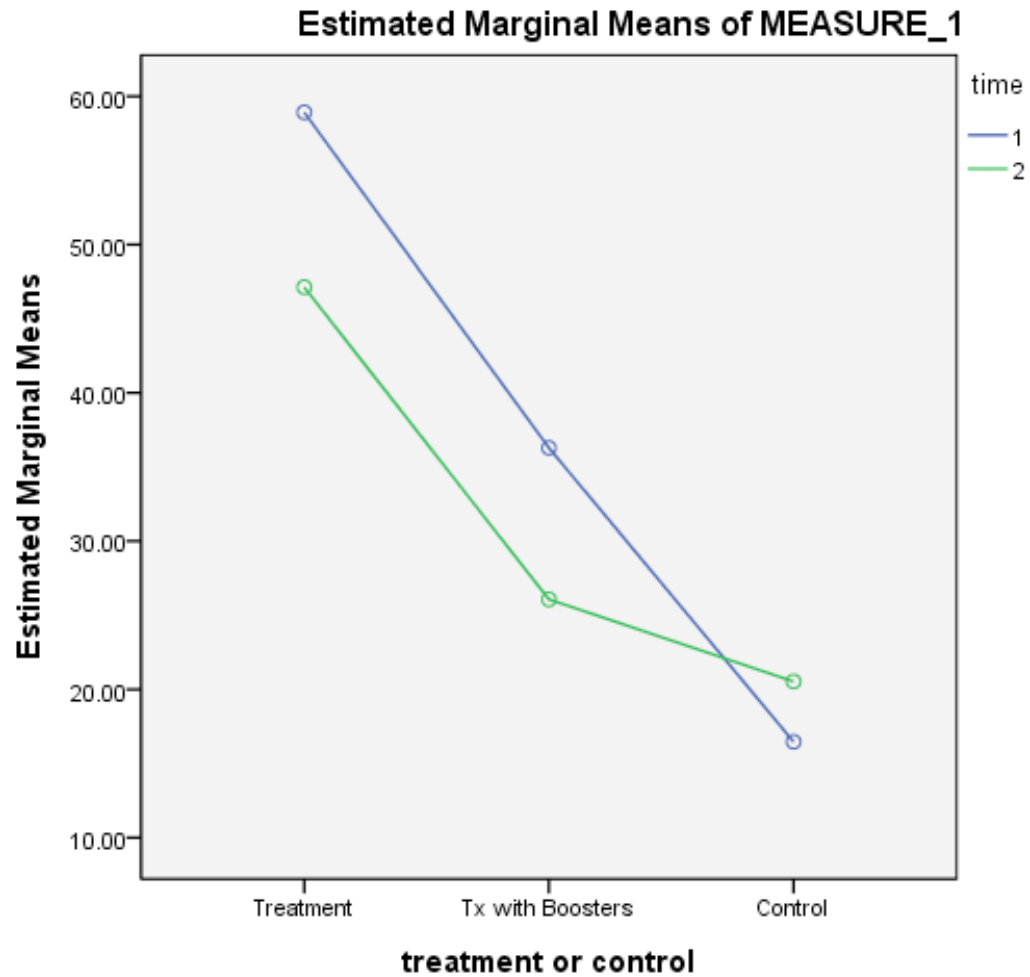


Results

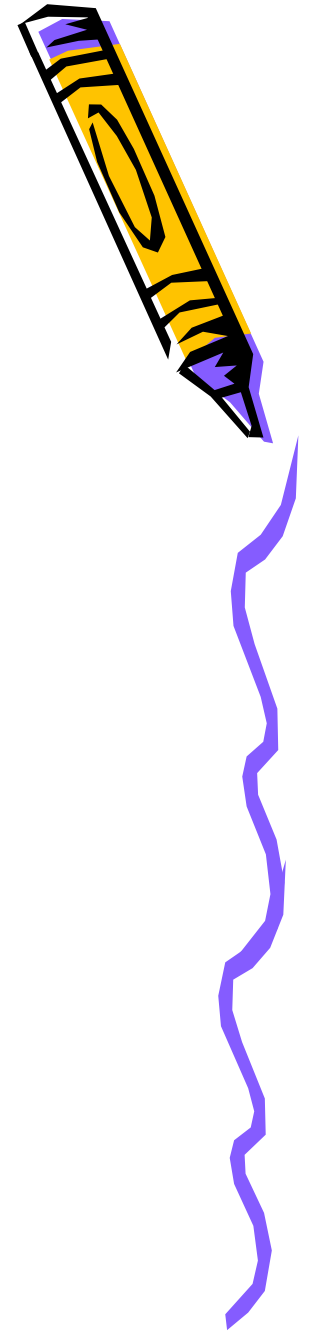
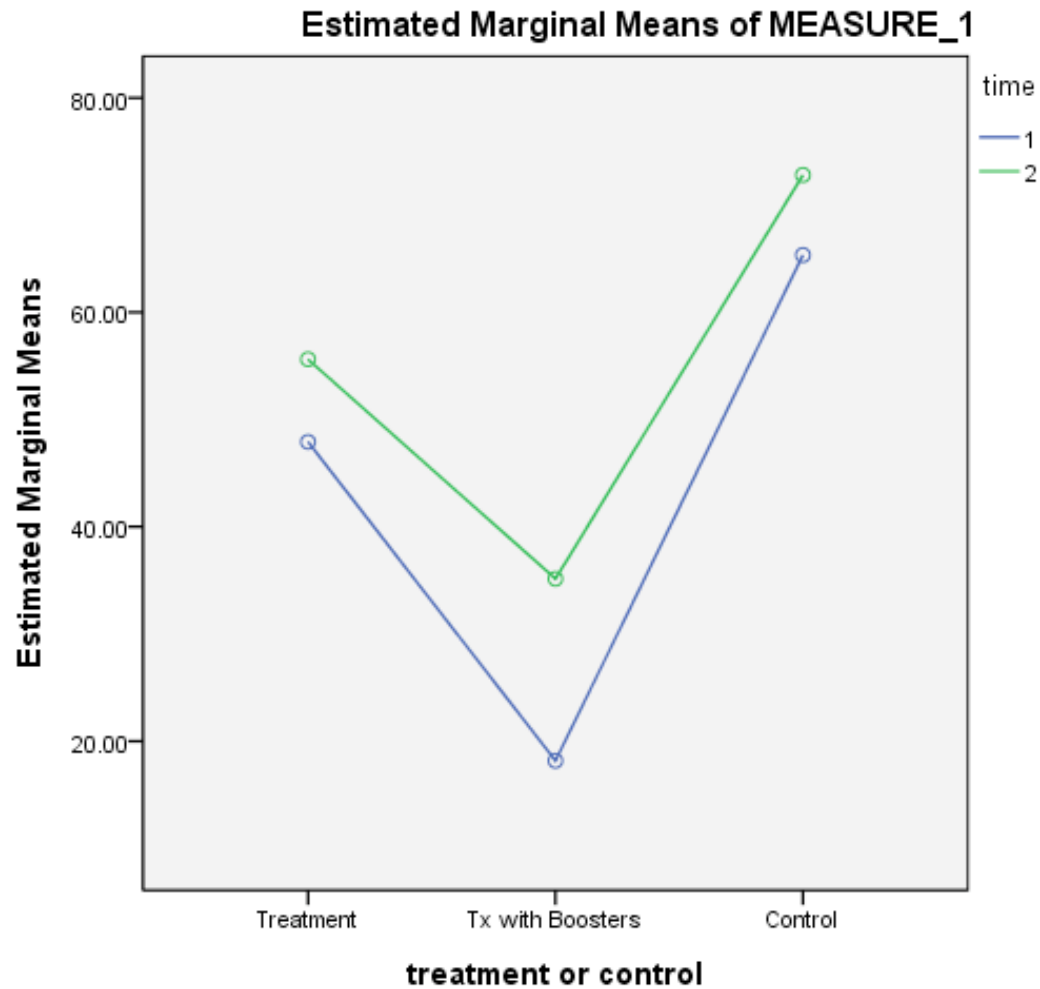
Emotional Regulation



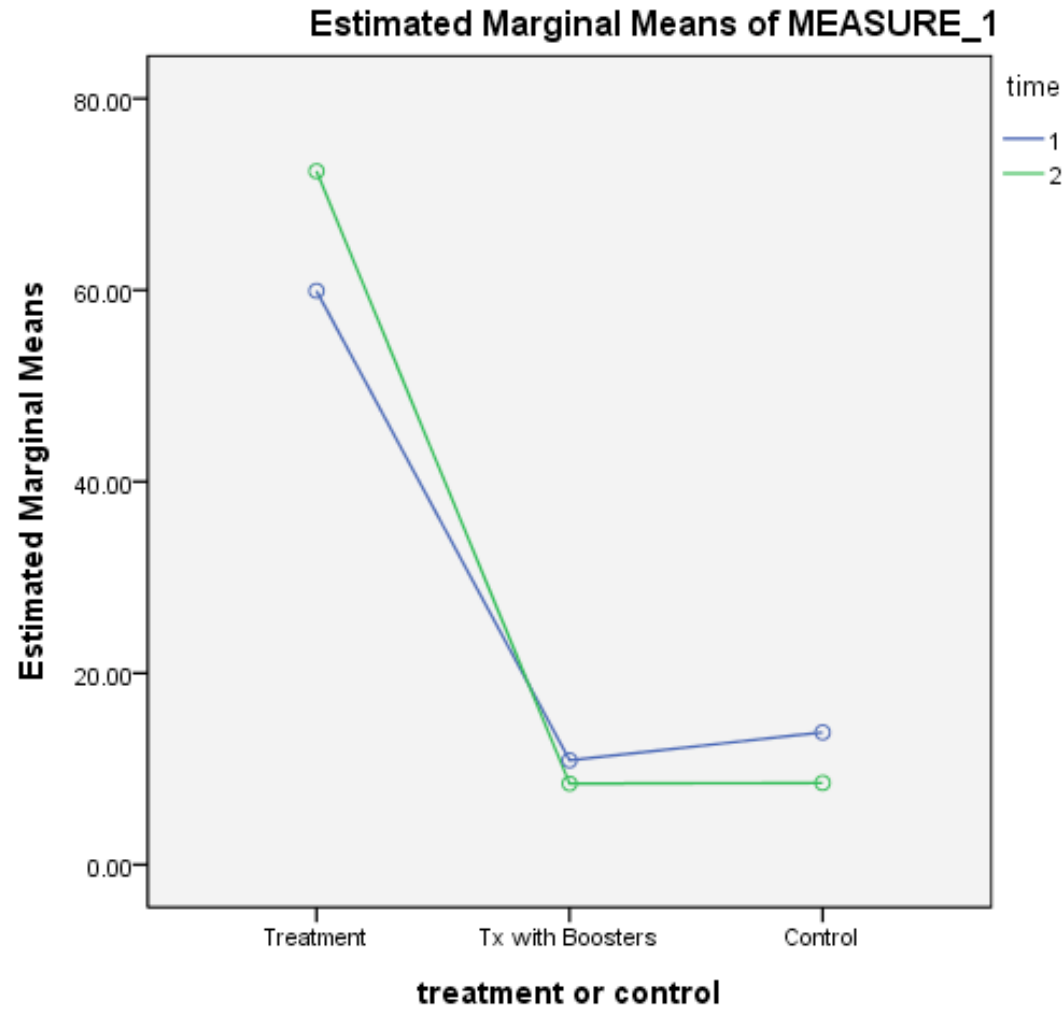
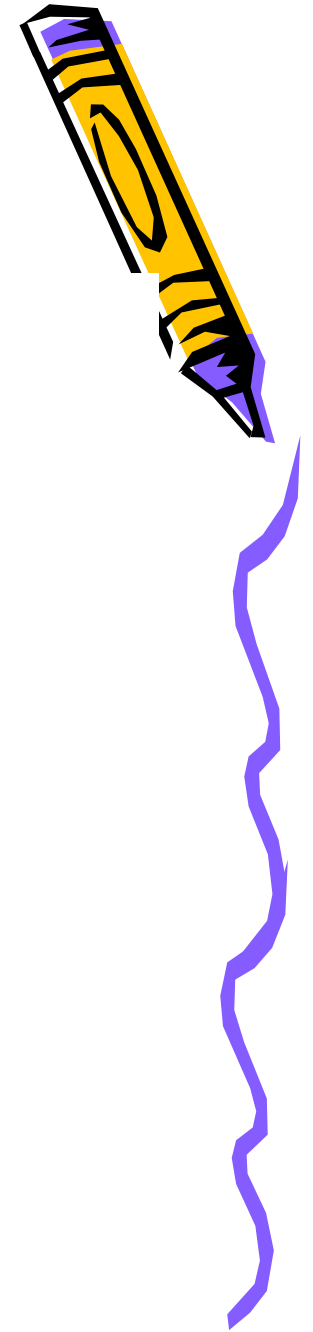
STRS- Conflict



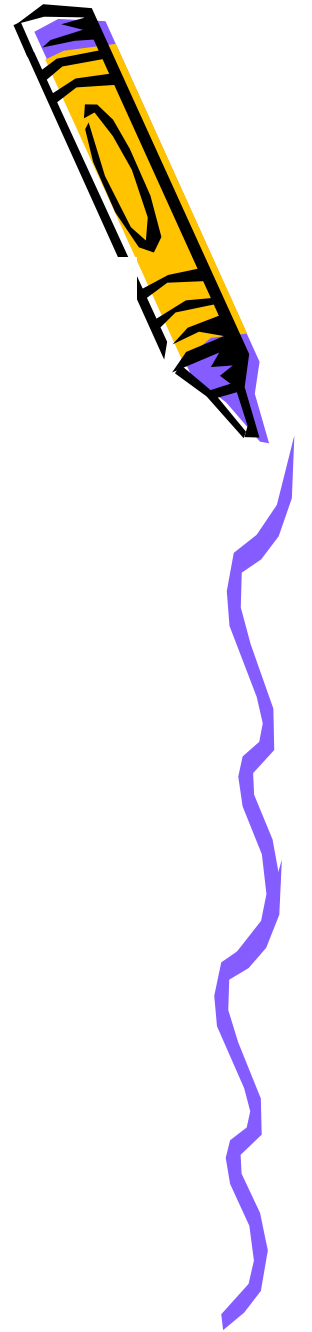
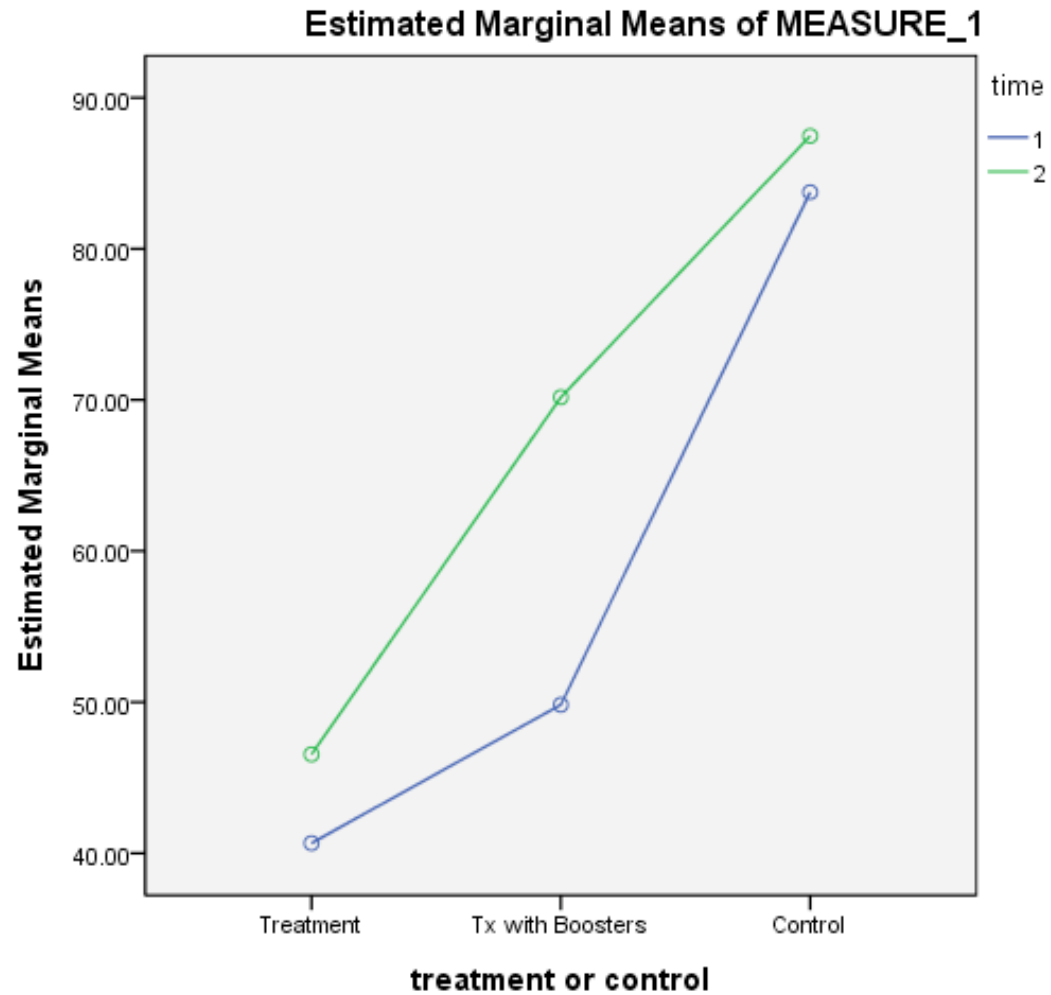
STRS- Closeness



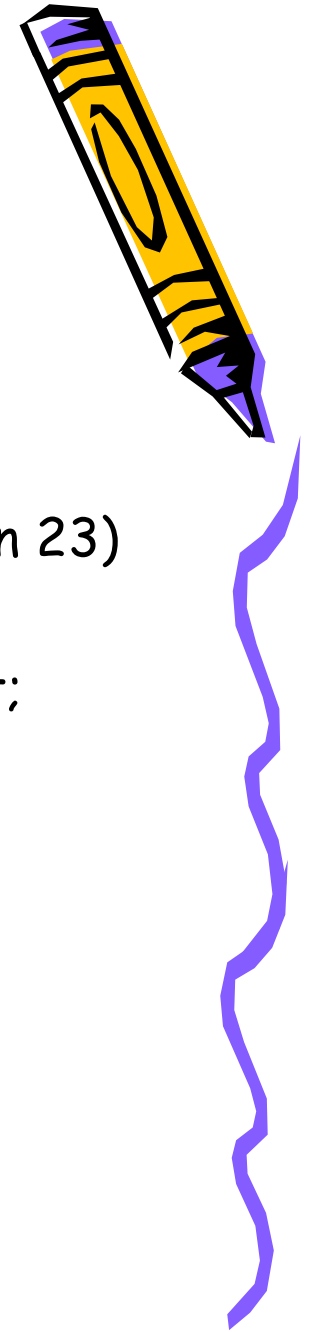
STRS- Dependency



STRS- Total Score



Comments from Teachers



- Problems in curriculum and Suggestions for change:
 - Still too long too sit (aim for 15 minutes rather than 23)
 - more interactive;
 - more hands-on activities where kids can move about;
 - more understandable for younger children
- Changes observed in students:
 - get along better with peers;
 - use words more than actions;
 - able to use "stop, count, breathe in, breathe out"



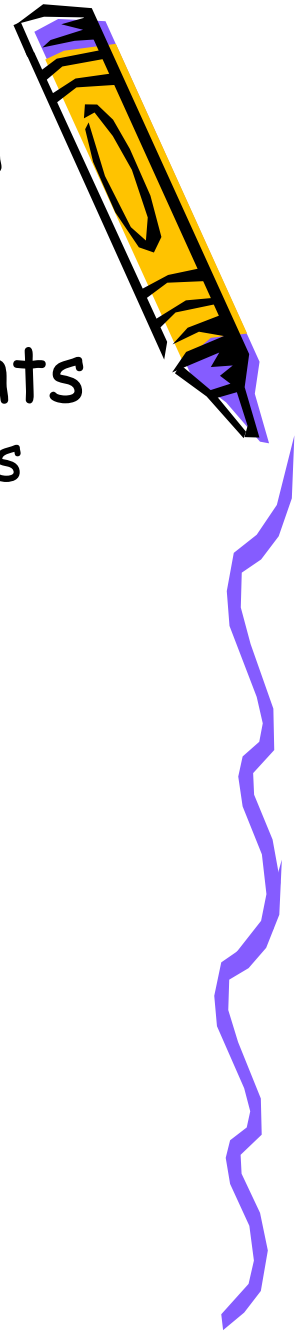
Research Answers- Summary

- Teachers report a **significant decrease** in students' internalizing behaviors and a **slight increase** in emotional regulation.
- A preschool teacher is able to implement *Strong Start Pre-K* with **90% fidelity**.
- Teachers do view *Strong Start Pre-K* as **socially valid** and they would recommend it to other teachers.

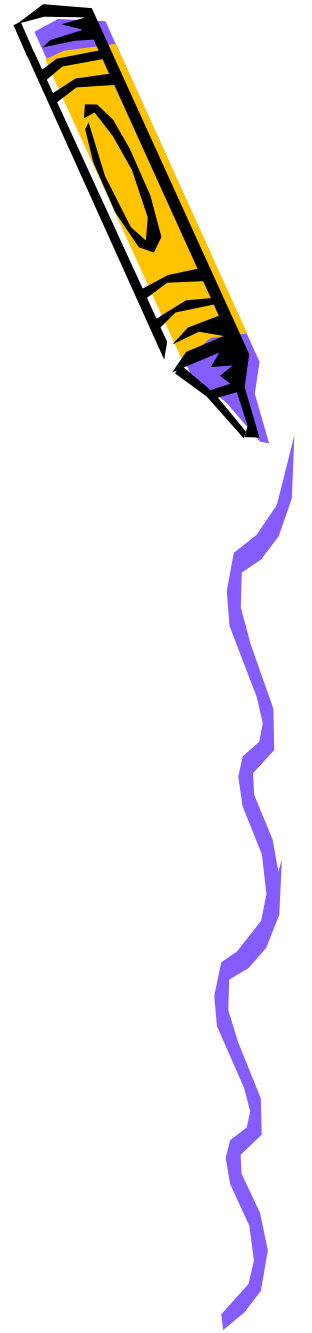


Discussion and Limitations

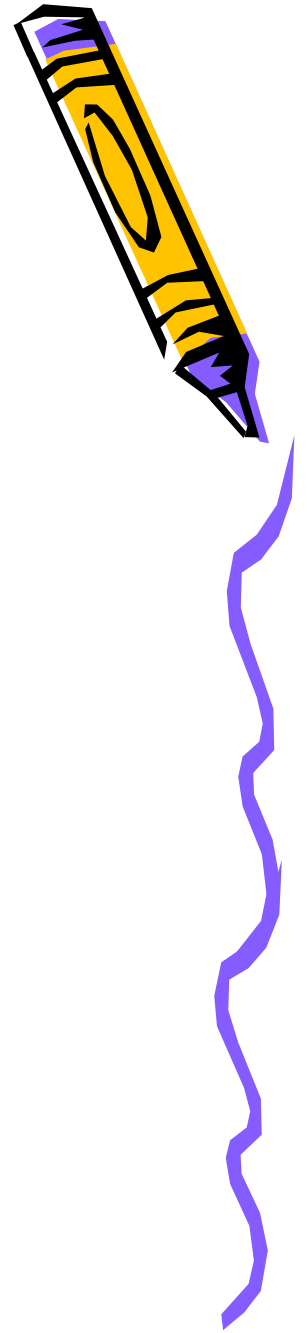
- Nonrandomized treatment assignments due to the nature of research in public schools
- Teachers expecting change as service providers
- Small Sample
- Social Desirability



Questions?

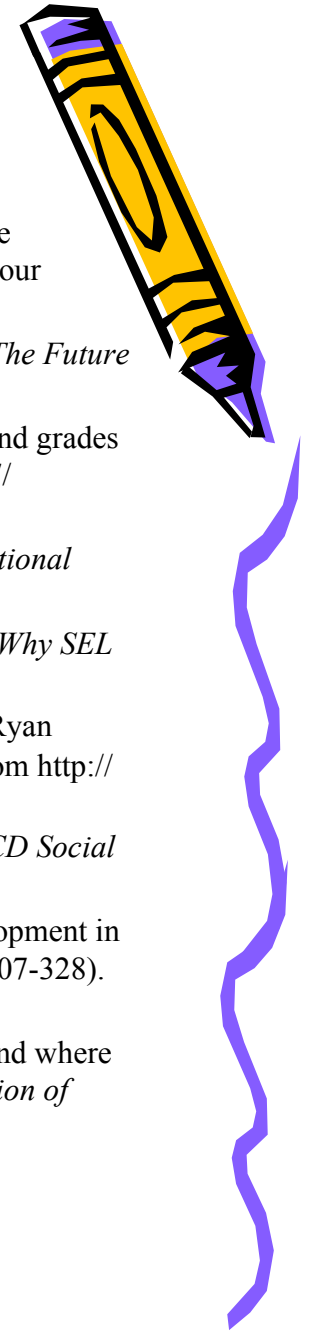


Thank you!



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