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PassageWorks: The Impact of a Social-Emotional and
Spiritual Learning Program among Adolescents

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of
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Keene, New Hampshire



Department of Clinical Psychology

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE PAGE

The undersigned have examined the dissertation entitled:

**PASSAGEWORKS: AN EXAMINATION OF A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND
SPIRITUAL LEARNING PROGRAM AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN A CLASSROOM
SETTING**

presented on June 25, 2012

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Rachael Kessler, whose creative dream and persistence continues to touch the lives of students and their teachers both in and out of the classroom. Her spirit lives on.

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First, I'd like to thank Roger Peterson, my dissertation chair, advisor, and mentor throughout my training at Antioch. I appreciate your listening to all of my unrelenting anxiety and, more importantly, helping me to laugh at myself. I'd also like to thank David Hamolsky and Lorraine Mangione for serving on my committee. David, your meticulous attention to detail and edits saved me in the eleventh hour! Lorraine, I'll always remember starting this experience as beginning in my interview with you—"we can't return we can only look behind from where we came and go round and round and round in the circle game."

Next, I want to thank my entire family. Thanks to my mom for supporting me in this entire endeavor: from providing a roof over my head to helping finance my love for clothes even as a poor graduate student. You were definitely my first and my best supervisor. To my dad and step-mother who both instilled in me the value of persistence and hard work without which I am certain I would not have been able to achieve my doctorate. Thanks to my brother for reminding me the importance of play alongside work and to my sister for continuously being my greatest cheerleader! Much gratitude to my mother-in-law for continued encouragement, support, and understanding.

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Abstract

Adolescence is a crucial developmental period in one's life. Unfortunately, our nation's youth are afflicted by high rates of risky behavior and psychiatric disorders that impact their ability for a successful future. Research indicates that school-based preventative social-emotional learning (SEL) programs can play a large role in improving the lives of adolescents. Despite this, few documented SEL program evaluations have examined their applicability to the fast growing Latino population. Latinos have been identified as more vulnerable to the problems among our youth than any other group. Identifying SEL programs that hold potential for decreasing these vulnerabilities is critical. Additionally, SEL research has not investigated programs that integrate a spiritual component. A growing body of adolescent research supports the potential of spirituality to enhance psychological wellness and mental health. The purpose of this dissertation was both to describe the underlying framework of PassageWorks, a school-based, social-emotional, and spiritual learning program, and examine the impact of the curriculum on a predominantly Latino adolescent population. This study evaluated the influence of PassageWorks on participants' resilience, interpersonal relationships, quality of life, and spiritual wellness. A total of 26 students from two different PassageWorks classrooms participated. A single non-experimental pre-post case design was employed. Results indicated that participants' sense of mastery and spiritual wellness significantly increased following participation in the PassageWorks program. No significant findings were determined in the interpersonal relationships or quality of life domains. Research implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: social-emotional learning; adolescents; program evaluation; spiritual learning

PassageWorks: An Examination of the Impact of a Social-Emotional and Spiritual
Learning Program Among Adolescents in a Classroom Setting

Chapter 1

Students who feel connected don't need danger to feel fully alive. They don't need guns to feel powerful. They don't want to hurt others or themselves. Out of connection grow both compassion and passion—for people, for students' goals and dreams, for life itself. – Rachael Kessler

This chapter offers a brief overview of the mental health needs of adolescents and some current efforts to address these concerns. The need for culturally sensitive social-emotional learning programs and the usefulness of positive psychology concepts are summarized. Some rationale for this doctoral dissertation research is provided. Research questions are proposed at the end of this chapter.

The Purpose

Adolescence is a specific developmental stage that is characterized by unique challenges and opportunities (Antaramian, Huebner, & Valois, 2008; Lindsay, 2007). Although this can be an exciting time filled with increased independence and self-discovery (Antaramian et al, 2008), adolescents must negotiate many transitions, such as changes in their bodies, hormones, peer relationships, primary caregiver relationships, and educational responsibilities (Lindsay, 2007). Developmental psychologists such as Erikson (1968) and Piaget (1951), assert that issues of identity, guilt, and self-esteem become complex and important, which promotes a more difficult level of self-consciousness (Lindsay, 2007). As a result, adolescence is a period filled with vulnerabilities and a recent analysis of US data demonstrated that high rates of mental health disorders and high-risk behaviors, such as violence, drug use and sex, are afflicting our nation's adolescents (Irwin, Burg, & Cart, 2002).

In response to this, there has been an increase of prevention and intervention school-based programs that work to ease the above challenges for adolescents, improve resilience in students, and better their quality of life. Many schools are carefully scrutinizing their educational philosophies with the understanding that school success can only take place in the context of social and emotional wellness (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Wallberg, 2004). These schools hold the hope that the integration of certain social-emotional learning (SEL) programs into the curriculum will have a deep impact on students and their eventual contributions to society.

The increasing cultural diversity of our Nation's youth has given rise to a new set of challenges for educators (Castro-Olivo, 2010). Among the largest and fastest growing minority group is the Latino population (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000 as cited by Castro-Olivo, 2007). Latino youth are often faced with added life stressors related to poverty, immigration, family separations and linguistic differences. For this reason, it is crucial that SEL programs implemented in schools are culturally sensitive and effective among students of these backgrounds. Unfortunately, little research has been done in examining the effectiveness of various SEL programs among minority populations. Therefore, there is minimal understanding regarding the impact of culture on these school-based interventions.

SEL programs focus on equipping students with a specific skill set that will later aid them to engage with society in a productive, meaningful, and healthy manner. Though there is a plethora of research supporting the benefits of SEL programs (Durlak & Wells, 1997; Gueldner, 2007; Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004), few have considered ways to move the programs beyond learning the

basic social and emotional competencies. There is much to be gleaned if one consults the growing body of literature in the field of positive psychology. Research demonstrates that though we cannot teach students to be happy, there are three paths to happiness: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2002). Spirituality is an important ingredient in the paradigm of positive psychology and thought to be a useful way to achieve meaning, purpose, connectedness, and self-transcendence (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). This lifelong work deserves more attention from the field of psychology and education, as it is a core aspect of psychological development. Many postulate that a spiritual starvation is a contributing factor to the ills afflicting our youth. As David Myers (cited in Goldstein, 2007) explained:

More than ever, we have big houses and broken homes, high incomes and low morale, secured rights and diminished civility. We excel at making a living but often fail at making a life. We celebrate our prosperity but yearn for purpose. We cherish our freedoms but long for connection. In an age of plenty, we feel a spiritual hunger. (p. 1002)

Rachel Kessler at The PassageWorks Institute created a secular, school-based program that integrates social-emotional competencies with a student-approach to spirituality. The Passageworks program focuses on supporting students and fostering growth through the transitional years of adolescence and believes this to be a critical ingredient in cultivating future resilience and success (Kessler, 2000). Kessler's curriculum, to be implemented in schools by trained instructors, aids adolescents in cultivating a sense of meaning and renewal, and in developing an increased capacity for listening, focus, motivation, and connection to themselves, peers, teachers, and school.

This program has been implemented in many classrooms and among diverse populations, ranging from low SES minorities at inner city schools to gifted classrooms in alternative programs. Although this program appears to be extremely beneficial in improving the future lives of adolescents, there has been limited quantitative data examining the extent to which the program is effective. The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the underlying framework of the PassageWorks program and measure the impact of the curriculum on a pre-dominantly Latino adolescent population.

Potential Stakeholders

The longstanding knowledge that adolescence is a time of great risk has increased a demand for adolescent preventive mental health care (Heywood, Stancombe, Street, Mittler, Dunn, & Knoll, 2003). Despite the awareness that many adolescents could benefit from therapeutic care, financial hardship often prevents this opportunity. Though some families are supported by managed care, most plans typically support very minimal therapeutic treatment. Additionally, the unique challenges imposed on the growing minority population require educators to pay attention to the cultural relevance of preventive interventions. There are many positive implications for a school-based program that can play a significant role in improving the lives of an ethnically diverse adolescent population.

Parents may gain some relief knowing that the PassageWorks program is effective. Parents are likely concerned that they cannot afford mental health services for their children and would feel some reprieve to know that they are engaged in a program that may address some of these needs. School administrators and school boards would also be interested in the effectiveness of the PassageWorks program. Perhaps they are

struggling to afford school social workers and/or school psychologists, but want to provide more overall emotional support for their students. Because educators implement the PassageWorks program, it allows an option to improve emotional wellness without having to spend money on more mental health workers. Instructors themselves would also benefit from the program's success. According to Kessler (2006), students will experience increased motivation and concentration in regard to their schoolwork while being exposed to the PassageWorks curriculum. Community-based and managed care organizations that value a prevention-oriented approach to public health will also be interested in understanding the impact of PassageWorks. An effective school-based program with the potential to be implemented nationally among diverse populations could make a large impact on adolescents in our country. Additionally, if specific factors that impact change are identified, new programs may be created that embody some of these factors. Clinical psychologists and educational psychologists would also take interest in the outcome, as it may provide some clue into what they may do to help improve life for diverse youth. PassageWorks appears to be an ideal means of improving psychological wellness in schools throughout the country.

Research Goals and Questions

This study investigated the use of PassageWorks as an intervention to increase resilience, improve quality of life, better interpersonal relationships and foster spiritual wellness. The study aimed to expand on the existing evidence that supports the value of implementing an SEL curriculum in a standard educational setting by examining the usefulness of integrating spirituality into an SEL program and clarifying the effectiveness of a particular program among a pre-dominantly Latino population.

Given this rationale, the study proposes to examine the following research questions:

1. Does participation in PassageWorks increase resilience and, therefore, decrease vulnerability to high-risk behavior?
2. Does participation in PassageWorks improve quality of life?
3. Can PassageWorks help to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships?
4. Does PassageWorks promote a sense of spiritual wellness?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review is intended to provide a comprehensive background to aid in understanding current issues among adolescents and the development of my research hypothesis. An overview of the PassageWorks curriculum is also offered.

Mental Health Among Youth

Data collected from our Nation's adolescents have provided concerning results. Approximately 20% of adolescents experience mental health problems over the course of a school year (Coie, Miller-Johnson, & Bagwell, 2000; Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias, 2003). Among those struggling with these problems, approximately 7-10 % meet criteria for depression (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; SAMHSA, 2012). Of these affected adolescents, 50-80% are unable to receive treatment for these issues (Greenberg et al., 2003; SAMHSA, 2012). Without effective intervention, these adolescents are left vulnerable. They are often forced to deal with school failures and relationship difficulties, frequently leading them to resort to high-risk behaviors (Michael & Crowley, 2001). According to the 2007 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 29.1% of surveyed high school students had ridden in a car with an intoxicated driver in the past year and 18% had carried a weapon (Eaton et al., 2007). Even more disturbing, 28% reported feelings of hopelessness that led them to stop their normal activities and 16% reported having both suicidal ideation and intent in the past year. The adolescent population is clearly in great distress, and the United States spends billions of dollars annually in response (Coie et al., 2000). Though a discussion of the potential etiologies are beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that society pays an

overwhelming social, emotional, and monetary cost for the issues of our youth (Merrel & Gueldner, 2010).

Prevention and Intervention Solutions in Schools

The past decade has brought a shift towards viewing adolescents as resources to be developed, rather than problems to be managed (Kurtines, Ferrer-Wreder, Berman, Lorente, Silverman, & Montgomery, 2008). Prevention efforts are understood as the optimal way to prevent these future problems from happening (Coie et al., 2000). The cost of supporting prevention programs is far less than the cost of providing treatment for chronic mental health problems and high-risk behavior. According to Coie et al. (2000), the matter is complicated by a current shortage of mental health professionals willing to help the adolescent population. It is crucial our society uphold our ethical responsibility to provide evidence-based prevention programs to vulnerable populations. Thankfully, evidence points to preventive interventions that have already proven promising in clinical and school settings (Michael & Crowley, 2001).

Schools offer an optimal venue for providing prevention and intervention services to adolescents. Of the 16% of youth receiving mental health services, 75% have received them in schools (Hoagwood & Erwin, 1997). Schools provide an access point for reaching adolescents. Prevention programs can be integrated directly into the school curriculum so that all students are part of them. This decreases the stigma associated with participation in these programs and, if effective, can lessen the financial burden of mental health services. According to stage-environment fit theory (Eccles et al., 1993, Gutman & Eccles, 2007), adolescents have specific developmental needs that should be met in their social environments to facilitate positive mental health and behavioral outcomes. Gutman

and Eccles (1993) offer strong support that there is frequently a developmental mismatch between school environment and adolescent needs. Effort should be placed towards providing a better fit to reverse some of the negative psychological consequences of poor individual-environment fit.

Instituting school-based preventive programs holds potential to be even more valuable among underserved populations. Research indicates that minority groups have less access to quality mental health services than members of the mainstream culture (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Serprell, Claus-Ehlers, & Lindsey, 2007; Vega & Rumbaut, 1991 as cited by Castro-Olivo, 2010). Additionally, stigma and shame in seeking services may impact members of certain populations to seek help (Serpell et al., 2007 as cited by Castro-Olivo, 2010).

Despite evidence that social-emotional learning aids tremendously in negotiating life's challenges and reducing the risk of mental health problems (Coie et al., 2000, Merrell & Gueldner, 2010), there is controversy regarding the degree of social-emotional learning and academic learning that should take place in the classroom. Evidence points to a steady decline in SAT scores and a lowered ranking of the U.S. on the international literacy list (Peterson, 2003). Programs such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have been implemented in response to poor standardized test scores, which call for increased emphasis on traditional academic skills and frequent standardized assessment (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010).

Regardless, many professionals in the fields of mental health and education acknowledge the importance of preventive programs in shifting the negative direction of youth development (Michael & Crowley, 2001). There is an increasing belief that schools

are focused too heavily on academics due to the pressures of standardized tests (Faulpel as cited in Ohl, Mitchell, Cassidy, & Fox, 2008) and this emphasis may cost students in emotional wellness. Many educators believe dealing effectively with the everyday stressors of life requires emotional awareness, decision-making skills, and successful social interaction and schools offer the optimal environment for students to learn these skills (Coie et al., 2000).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Some have identified social-emotional learning (SEL) as the key to adolescent success both in school and in life (Zins et al., 2004; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2004). Social-emotional learning is defined as the process in which individuals learn to recognize and manage emotions, develop consideration for others, make sound decisions, act responsibly, experience positive relationships, and avoid problem behaviors (Elias, 2004). Merrell and Gueldner (2010) offer a coherent definition of SEL by teasing out the social, emotional and learning components:

The *social* aspect of SEL indicates a concern for fostering positive relationships with others, such as peers, teachers, and family members. This part of SEL reflects *interpersonal* development. The *emotional* aspect of SEL indicates a concern for fostering self-awareness or self-knowledge, especially involving emotions or feelings, but also by implication, the cognitions or thoughts connected to our emotions. This part of SEL essentially reflects *intrapersonal* development. The *learning* aspect implies that both social and emotional growth and adjustment can be taught and learned through instruction, practice and feedback. (p. 7)

Learning these skills aids students in meeting their interpersonal needs, discovering their interests and passions, and facilitates the ability to learn in a classroom and, ultimately, make positive contributions to society. A student that feels depressed, isolated, overwhelmed, angry and irritable is going to have a difficult time both engaging fully in the classroom and completing homework. SEL is based on the belief that if school curriculums include the development of social-emotional competencies, then increased amounts of academic learning will take place (Merrel & Gueldner, 2010). In addition to improvement in social-emotional competency and academics, SEL skills are associated with better attitudes, behavior, and overall school performance (Zins et al., 2004). These include a students' motivation to excel, level of attachment to the school community, attendance and study habits.

Integration of SEL into academic curricula. Social and emotional learning programs have increasingly been incorporated with academic curricula in support of student learning (Elias, 2004; Zins et al., 2004). In the CASEL review (2003) of 80 SEL programs nationwide, 34% incorporated academics into the curriculum. For instance, the Child Development Project is a SEL program focused on strengthening community in schools (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). This program includes an integration of SEL values with a diverse reading and language arts curriculum that promotes student consideration of humanistic values and behaviors in a wide variety of fictional situations. The CDP includes a strong focus on literacy and the development of early literacy skills. The program has received strong empirical support, particularly among low-income, underserved, multi-cultural communities. A series of outcome studies performed by the CDP also evidences a strong relationship between community building and academic

improvement (Schaps et al., 2004).

Similarly, in the Social Decision Making and Problem Solving (SDM/SPS) program an SEL framework is applied in the context of academic content areas. Several studies have provided evidence that the SDM/SPS programs are effective in many domains, including improvement in obtaining academic skills as well as the automatic application of problem solving to academic work (Zins et al., 2004). The PassageWorks program integrates into an academic curriculum. Although a specific period is set aside for PassageWorks instruction each week, effort is placed into synthesizing the values and skills taught in all courses (Weaver, Greenwald, & Hirschberg, in press). Additionally, teachers are trained through PassageWorks to maintain a particular teaching presence. This presence is to be applied by teachers not just when engaging in a PassageWorks lesson, but throughout academic courses as well.

Competencies for SEL. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has described the primary competencies necessary to promote youth social and emotional development (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000). The key competencies identified were: awareness of self and others, positive attitudes and values, responsible decision making, and social interaction skills (Payton et al., 2000). Additionally, CASEL did a thorough review of the SEL prevention programs and identified those that effectively included the primary competencies. In examining these programs, CASEL teased out the most important features that enhance SEL competencies. These components include: program design (such as clarity of rationale, promotion of effective teaching strategies, and utility of implementation monitoring tools), program coordination (school-wide coordination, school-family

partnership, and school community partnership), educator preparation and support (teacher training and technical support), and program evaluation. All of these characteristics are included in the PassageWorks program, which will be delineated later in this paper. This study intends to improve the final component by conducting a careful program evaluation.

Standards for SEL. In order to obtain optimal results from a SEL curriculum, the program implemented must have a theoretical and evidence-based framework (Greenberg et al., 2003). In 2002, the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* demanded increased accountability for student performance from schools. Mandates were set forth to integrate theory-driven and research-based methods into instruction. These standards pertain to both academics and social and emotional learning (Gueldner, 2007). It is worthwhile for schools utilizing SEL instructional curriculums to implement programs that have research supporting improved behavioral, emotional and academic outcomes (Zins et al., 2004). Additionally, it is the basic right of all students to receive the best instructional practices to guide them in becoming lifelong learners that can love, work, and contribute positively to society (Cohen, 2006; Gueldner, 2007; Merrel & Gueldner, 2010).

Unfortunately, many schools decreased their focus on emotional wellness and mental health prevention as a result of NCLB due to increased focus on standardized test scores (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010). However, there is strong evidence that illustrates the positive impact SEL has on academic performance (see in-depth discussion below). Therefore, schools need to exercise caution when adopting the attitude that SEL detracts from academics (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010).

Research in SEL. Research has provided much promise in the effectiveness of SEL (Merrel & Gueldner, 2010). The following sections provide a review of SEL research in the domains of academic achievement, self-regulation, emotional well-being, and problem behavior reduction. An additional section on SEL research among minority populations is also included.

SEL and academic achievement. Though educators and policy makers tend to view academic performance as separate from social-emotional competencies, a great deal of evidence demonstrates the connection between them. Examples of social and emotional barriers to academic success range from alienation and low self-esteem to inattention and family difficulties (Zullig, Koopman, & Huebner, 2009). All of these instances can be linked to school failure and/or drop out (Zins et al., 2004). Fortunately, a growing body of evidence illustrates improved academic performance is a benefit of implementing SEL programs in schools (Durlak & Wells, 1998; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Zins, 2004).

Support for the impact of SEL programs on academic achievement naturally follows research on pro-social behavior in schools. Positive social interactions have been linked with positive intellectual outcomes (DiPerna & Elliot, 1999; Feshbach & Feshbach, 1987; Haynes, Ben-Avie, & Ensign, 2003; Pasi, 2001 as cited in Zins et al., 2004) and are predictive of scores on standardized achievement tests (Malecki & Elliot, 2002; Welsh, Park, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Wentzel, 1993 as cited by Zins et al., 2004). This evidence parallels a recent meta-analysis of more than 200-school based studies on the impact of SEL interventions on students between five and 18-years old that revealed an 11% increase in scores on achievement tests (Durlak, Weisberg, & Pachan,

2008). Similarly, a study by Spier, Cai, Osher, & Kendiziora (2007), found the degree of a student's connectedness with their school correlated with gains on achievement tests. Other studies have demonstrated that, in addition to an increase in standardized test scores, students also benefit from improved grades after participating in SEL school-based interventions (Catalano, Mazza, Harachi, Abbott, Haggerty, & Fleming, 2003; Fleming, Haggerty, Brown, Catalano, et al., 2005). Improved school attendance, which increases the likelihood of academic success, is another benefit of the implementation of SEL programs. A meta-analysis of 165 school-based prevention programs demonstrated increased school attendance resulting from specific programs that utilized social and emotional learning.

There is also evidence that illustrates the impact of negative social and emotional conditions on academics. Roeser, Eccles, and Strobel (1998) summarized studies on the relationship between the level of emotional distress in children and academic achievement. They found that students with a higher frequency of internalized distress (sadness, anxiety, depression, etc.) displayed lower academic performance, while students with a higher frequency of externalized distress (anger, frustration, fear, etc.) demonstrated more school difficulties, such as learning delays and poor achievement. Other studies have provided support that depressed adolescents are at increased risk for school and academic impairment (Asarnow et al., 2005) and increased feelings of sadness and hopelessness are negatively correlated with declines in reading, mathematics, and language test scores (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004). A study in bullying and victimization in schools also proved a strong association between academic performance and social/emotional adjustment (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007).

SEL and reduction of problem behaviors. Several research studies have been published on the impact of SEL programs on reducing troublesome and high-risk behaviors. In a meta-analysis of 165 school-based prevention programs, Wilson et al. (2001) concluded SEL programs are effective in reducing drug and alcohol use, reducing dropout and truancy, and reducing other conduct problems. They also noted increase in behavioral and cognitive self-control and social competence, factors that likely help students resist peer pressure to engage in high-risk behavior. Another study associated improved emotional regulation with decreased vulnerability to psychological disorders and decreased psychosomatic complaints (Mavroveli, Petrides, Rieffe, & Bakker, 2007). Moreover, adolescents that report feeling more aware of their emotions and better able to regulate these emotions report less depression and physical pain (Mavroveli et al., 2007).

A different meta-analysis of 130 primary prevention programs indicated a significant reduction of problem behavior resulted from instituting SEL curriculums in schools (Durlak & Wells, 1998). Of the interventions surveyed, most programs were employed in primary or secondary school settings. Among these improvements was a decrease in levels of internalizing and externalizing problems, as well as improvement in academic performance. The aforementioned meta-analyses combined include more than 300 separate programs (Merrel & Gueldner, 2010). The consistencies between these findings are impressive and provide solid evidence that SEL programs in schools provide a great deal of benefits both socially and emotionally.

Also interesting is Durlak and Wells (1998) finding that there is increased empirical support for prevention programs that are conceptualized according to intervention level (person-centered vs. environment-centered), types of transitions

encountered (divorce, school entry, etc.), and mental health promotion. This finding implies that primary prevention programs should distinguish themselves conceptually and concisely in order to be effective. Interestingly, the PassageWorks program is both environment-centered and person-centered. Depending on the curriculum utilized, a particular transition is the focus. In the senior curriculum the transition is high school graduation, whereas the ninth grade curriculum focuses on the transition into high school from middle school.

SEL, social competence, and self-regulation. Research has demonstrated that emotional regulation and social competence are greater predictors of grade point average than cognitive-related abilities (Gumora & Aresenio, 2002; Teo, Carlson, Mathieu, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1996). Additionally, socially rejected students are at a higher risk for academic underachievement, school dropout, criminal activity and psychiatry problems (Lopez & Dubois, 2005; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Parker & Asher, 1987 as cited by McKown et al., 1009). Therefore, strengthening social competence and emotion regulation abilities in students is critical. Socially competent behavior is defined as “cooperative, assertive, socially appropriate behavior, and skillful participation in group activities” (McKown et al., 2009, pp. 859). Several studies have provided support for the correlation of increased SEL skills with self-regulation, social competence, and peer acceptance (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1998; Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2007; Gumbiner, Russo, & Lipton, 2009; McKown et al., 2009).

In two different studies, McKown et al. (2009) identified specific social-emotional skills that relate to social success, such as an ability to deduce what others are feeling from nonverbal behavior (nonverbal awareness), and the ability to

engage in social problem solving. They identified three specific SEL domains that improved social competence. These included how social-emotional information is encoded, how information is interpreted, and how higher order reasoning may be recruited to solve social problems effectively (McKown et al., 2009). Both studies provided evidence that self-regulation is positively correlated with social competence. This finding implies that in addition to “skillfully encode, interpret, and reason about social and emotional information, children’s ability to regulate (inhibit) their behavior is an important determinant of social outcome” (pp. 868).

SEL, relationships, and well-being. Students engage better with learning when an optimum state of subjective well-being is achieved (Bird & Sultmann, 2010). A significant amount of research demonstrates that a higher level of well-being correlates with less instances of high risk behavior (Keyes, 2006). Subjective well-being has been defined as

the evaluations and declarations that individuals make about the quality of their lives that are based on the review, weighting, and summation of the quality of experiences, accomplishments, relationships and other culturally relevant and valued ways of functioning in life (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002 as cited in Keyes, 2006)....Although mistakenly equated with happiness, subjective well-being consists of two compatible traditions: one that focuses on feelings toward life (hedonic well-being) and another that focuses on functioning in life (eudaimonic well-being). (Keyes, 2006, p. 395)

Well-being has also been described as a positive state of affairs in which needs and aspirations are fulfilled and the values of self-determination, participation, community,

and capacity building are emphasized (Lerner, 2004). Additionally, resilience, psychological health, and a sense of meaning and purpose have been outlined as basic ingredients in well-being (Antramian, Huebner, & Valois, 2008). The degree of emotional literacy in both individuals and organizations is reflective of the degree of well-being experienced by individuals and organizations (Bird & Sultmann, 2010). SEL is an effective way developing emotional literacy within a caring and engaged community (Elias et al., 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that the research supports the role of SEL in improving subjective well-being.

Relationships have also been found to have a strong impact on social/emotional outcomes and subjective well-being (Murray-Harvey, 2010). Family relationships and peer relationships influence well-being and social-emotional learning outcomes in adolescents (Pianta, 1999; Wong, Dudley, & Cusick, 2002). SEL programs facilitate improved relationships between peers in the classroom, as well as provide students with tools to improve family relationships. Interestingly, data obtained from 888 students across 21 middle schools demonstrated that school well-being is most strongly determined by the quality of relationship between teacher and student (Murray-Harvey, 2010). This data parallels extensive findings from the psychotherapy outcome studies that a good psychotherapeutic relationship is the strongest predictor of positive success (Horvath & Greenberg, 1994; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Orlinsky, Grawe & Park, 1994). In both cases, it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly makes a relationship effective. However, the inclusion of specific relationship-building competencies in SEL programs, such as the Teaching Presence course included in the PassageWorks program, should be highly valued. The unambiguous contribution of a strong teacher-student relationship to

optimal student well-being reinforces the necessity of school-based programs that nurture connections between teachers and students.

SEL and Latino Youth

Despite the fact that the Latino population is the largest growing minority group in the United States they are not equally represented in different levels of social status (Castro-Olivo, 2007). Unfortunately, Latinos have been identified as more vulnerable to the problems among our nation's youth than any other group. Research illustrates that Latino youth are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to gain a high school diploma (Rumbaut, 2004) with as many as 30% dropping out of high school (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Moreover, a greater number of suicide attempts are reported among Latino youth than Caucasian or African-American (CDC, 2000). Statistics from 1999 illustrate 7.3% of Caucasian and 6.7% of African American reported attempting suicide, as compared to 12.8% of Latino youth.

Some studies have documented factors contributing to success, academic achievement and resilience among the Latino population. Not surprisingly, academic encouragement from parents and support from peers have been linked with success (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Martinez Jr., DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Interestingly, both feeling welcome at ones' school and a sense of belonging to ones' school proved to be equally important. This may partially be due to the influence of a collectivist culture, which places added value on feeling accepted and part of a group (Castro-Olivo, 2007). A concerning study illustrated the large extent to which lack of trust in teachers inhibits Latino youth from engaging in help-seeking behaviors, such as getting academic support

(Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This lack of trust creates a major barrier to achieving school success.

SEL preventative programs are an ideal means to increase resilience and improve outcomes among Latino youth. Though some SEL interventions have been conducted among diverse populations, few have sought to validate the effectiveness specifically for Latino students. The Migrant Education Program (MEP) is one of the few interventions for Latino youth that have integrated social-emotional components with academics (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). This federally funded program directly addresses factors that prevent the migrant student's ability to achieve school success. Included in the framework is a "deliberate and active merging of students' multiple worlds, which serves both to empower students and to validate the crucial relationships that exist between home, school, and community" (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002, p. 171). Extensive evaluation of the program has illustrated its' effectiveness in improving academic outcomes, increasing a sense of school belonging, and raising self-esteem (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). Furthermore, caring student-teacher relationships, positive group membership, culturally-sensitive community support and a space to explore new and old identities, were all deemed critical factors to the program's success (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002).

There is much to be gleaned from MEP in understanding how schools can be better structured to meet the needs of vulnerable youth. MEP is not available in all schools across the nation, therefore, it is important to identify and utilize other programs that can provide the same impact. A recent evaluation of a culturally adapted 12-week social emotional learning program, *Strong Kids*, yielded no intervention effects but did have social-emotional knowledge gains. The brief duration of the program may have

prevented it from fostering the needed sense of community that MEP creates. The PassageWorks program has the potential to help youth in a similar way as MEP. Caring student-teacher relationships, positive membership of a group, culturally sensitive support and a space to explore identity are all key ingredients of the curriculum. The present study was conducted in the hope of understanding the effectiveness of the PassageWorks program on a pre-dominantly Latino population.

Guidelines for delivering culturally responsive SEL. When delivering any social-emotional curriculum to students of diverse backgrounds, it is important to make culturally-sensitive adaptations. This allows the material to become more accessible to students so they may better generalize their skills (Castro-Olivo, 2010). Students also feel valued when their culture is considered, which increases motivation to engage with the teacher and the curriculum. Drawing from the 2003 American Psychological Association guidelines, Castro-Olivo (2010, p. 95) outlined some general principles and suggestions for delivering social-emotional curriculum in a culturally responsive manner.

Recommendations include: asking students directly about their cultural heritage and identity, modifying language used in lessons so students can easily understand key ideas, changing examples in the curriculum to match the lives of students in varied cultural groups, encouraging and practicing tolerance, adapting assessment tools to address cultural differences, and consulting community members about the adaptations. The PassageWorks facilitators are trained in cultural sensitivity and the curriculum delivered in this study was modified in a culturally sensitive manner.

Positive Psychology, Spirituality, Relatedness, and Mental Health

In the past decade, the field of Positive Psychology has gained increasing popularity. Positive Psychology is the study of positive emotions (subjective well-being), traits (citizenship, altruism and work ethic), and institutions (families and schools) (Cohen, 2006; Huebner, Gilman, Reschly, & Hall, 2009). The foundation of positive psychology is the belief that mental health is far more than simply the absence of mental illness (Seligman, 2008). Instead, mental health consists of “positive emotion, engagement, purpose, positive relationships, and positive accomplishments” (Seligman, 2008, pp. 6-7) and is also measurable and predictable. The field has established links between positive psychology and physical health as well by demonstrating that increased levels of subjective well-being are strongly correlated with decreased physical illness (Seligman, 2008). Thus far, the application of positive psychology to schooling has been limited (Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

Positive psychology, happiness, and positive school experiences. Promoting happiness is an important area Positive Psychology researchers are just beginning to focus on (Cohen, 2006). Evidence-based findings illustrate that happy people are healthier, more successful and more interpersonally engaged (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Happiness is just beginning to get addressed in the field of education (Morris, 2009; Noddings, 2003). Though research has demonstrated that happiness cannot be taught, three paths to happiness have been identified: positive emotion and pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2002). Furthermore, of these three constructs, meaning and engagement are evidenced to lead to the longest lasting experiences of well-being (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). This type of engagement evolves from

the capacity to listen, to be reflective and to be life-long social-emotional learners. The PassageWorks program, in addition to addressing SEL competencies, incorporates these three paths to happiness in their framework.

Measurements from positive psychology research in schools. The limited research that has been conducted in the field of positive psychology and schools has been centered on School Satisfaction (SS) and Life Satisfaction (LS). In these studies, substantial evidence supports that high levels of School Satisfaction (SS) are associated with higher GPAs, a greater sense of agency, fewer psychological symptoms and lower levels of problem behaviors (Huebner & Gilman, 2006). Most relevant to this proposal, the field of Positive Psychology has contributed reliable and valid measures of subjective well-being as it relates to schools (Huebner et al., 2009). Measures of SS allow for assessment between students' perceived goodness of fits between their needs and educational environments. Specifically, the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale [MLSS] (Huebner, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1998) has been validated for students in grades 3-12 and allows assessment of multiple domains, such as family and school (Huebner et al., 2009). The MLSS school subscale enables measurement of satisfaction with school experience as a whole and is one of the measures utilized in this study.

Characteristics of positive schools. Though limited, research in schools and positive psychology offer support for schools conceptualized as empowering institutions that promote subjective well-being (Huebner et al., 2009). This implies that schools should move away from problem-centered approaches in schools and toward models of wellness that increase engagement of students in their community and provide helpful

interpersonal relationships. Huebner et al. (2009) outlines several specific characteristics of positive schools after a review of current research. These include an appreciation of the importance of subjective well-being to academic success, regular efforts to implement assessments to measure levels of student well-being, planning intended to maximize the goodness of fit between the school and the needs of every student, the facilitation of supportive teacher-student relationships, and an emphasis on enhancing student involvement in instruction (pp. 565-566).

Positive psychology, spirituality, and PassageWorks. Included in Positive Psychology are studies on spirituality. Spirituality has tended to be a controversial topic in the field of Psychology. Typically, the trends have been to ignore spirituality, view it as pathological, or reduce it to a basic psychological, social, and physiological function (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). Fortunately, these trends have begun to shift and Positive Psychology has contributed several empirical studies on spirituality and its relationship to well-being.

A major challenge to the study of spirituality has been creating a universal definition. Defining the term “spirituality” as separate from religion has been a major roadblock. Some have implied that religion includes adherence to a specific system of faith and worship that includes membership in a group of people that share similar beliefs about God, observance and holy doctrines (Davis, Kerr, & Robinson-Kurpius, 2003). Others have characterized religion as institutional, dogmatic and restrictive, in contrast to the personal and subjective nature of spirituality (Elkins, 1995; Emblen, 1992). Though very separate constructs, spirituality is generally felt to be an important function of religion (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). Spirituality, as addressed by the PassageWorks

program, is separate from religion. For the purpose of this paper, spirituality can be best understood as shifting attention from mundane concerns to the larger universe and one's place within it (Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005) and the process of cultivating transcendence, connection with all living things and the universe, a sense of purpose, awe, gratefulness, compassion and/or a fostering of inner peace (Pargament & Saunders, 2007). More simply, spirituality is a "search for the sacred" (Pargament, 1999, p. 12).

Several studies within the field of Positive Psychology have provided evidence that one's connection with spirituality is linked to beneficial outcomes. Those that engage in frequent prayer and meditation experience a sense of connectedness with the sacred, and draw more on spirituality as a mechanism for coping, enjoy greater health and well-being and feel less stressed than those that do not (Goldstein, 2007; Koenig, McCulloch, & Larson, 2001; Pargament, 1997; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Other studies have demonstrated the usefulness of spirituality in relieving psychological symptoms associated with specific disorders. For instance, McCorkle, Bohn, Hughes, & Kim (2005) found significant improvement in participants suffering from Social Anxiety Disorder following an increase in cultivating sacred moments and discovering deeper connections to their own sense of spirituality.

Spirituality offers much to contribute as a resource for living. The field of American Psychology has already offered a great deal in helping people to gain a greater sense of control over their lives (Pargament, 2007). Guiding people in exposing unconscious motivations, improving behavioral and cognitive controls, and empowering the disempowered are all helpful control-oriented interventions (Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). However, life is complex and throughout a lifespan one is inevitably faced with

situations beyond one's control such as deaths, life transitions, and illness. Spirituality offers a means to better cope with the inherent existential challenges of the human condition. Fortunately, certain components of spirituality are beginning to integrate into the field of psychology.

Spirituality and adolescents. In the earlier part of the decade, less than 1% of articles published in the field of adolescent social science addressed the impact of spiritual development (Benson, 2004). In contrast, a great deal of research has been conducted on the impact of religion on adolescent functioning and the construct of spirituality as defined by religious belief (Huculak & McLennan, 2010; McNamara, Burns, Johnson, & McCorkle, 2010).

Recently, members of Congress and leading educators have pointed to a spiritual void afflicting our nation's youth as the major source of high-risk behavior (Kessler, 2000). This void is characterized by feelings of emptiness, meaninglessness and disconnection. Indeed, the quest for meaning, purpose, connectedness, and transcendence is an important part of all human life. Adolescents who perceive themselves without purpose are more prone to engage in unsafe sex, delinquency, substance abuse, and suicide (McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1993).

The growing body of adolescent research supports the potential of spirituality to enhance psychological wellness and mental health. A higher degree of spirituality has been shown to be associated with positive adolescent outcomes including lower levels of depression (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006; Cotton, Larking, Hoopes, Cromer, & Rosenthal, 2005), less involvement in high-risk behaviors (Cotton et al., 2005), lower trait-anxiety

(Davis et al., 2003), improved coping responses (Young, Cashwell, & Shcherbakova, 2000) and better socio-emotional adjustment (Bert, 2011).

These findings are the beginnings of important research in the domain of adolescent psychology, especially given the belief that spirituality can be cultivated and learned (Kessler, 2000). Rachel Kessler recognized the importance of this domain. As described below, PassageWorks places emphasis on the quest for the sacred.

Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS). Along with the struggle for an accepted, universal definition of spirituality is the dearth of measurement tools to be used in research. However, support has been garnered for Howden's (1992) Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS), which was used in this present study. The SAS incorporates the following four dimensions of spirituality: meaning and purpose, inner resources, transcendence, and positive interconnectedness (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006; McGee, Nagel, & Moore, 2003). In addition to the findings that the SAS has high internal consistency, reliability and validity (McGee et al., 2003), the four dimensions are all stated to be part of the PassageWorks program. This measure can be particularly useful in discovering if the program is facilitating aspects of the participant's lives that it intends to.

Brain Research, Emotions and Learning

Kessler (2000) cites findings from brain research, learning, and emotions as support for the usefulness of PassageWorks. Most important is the conclusion that "emotion drives attention, which in turn drives learning and memory" (Sylwester, 1994, p. 60). Schools historically have been unable to successfully integrate emotion into the classroom (Sylwester, 1994). The past two decades has brought advances in our

understanding of the psychobiology of emotion. These new findings support the role of emotion in learning, and encourage the need for programs like PassageWorks to be implemented in the classroom. As the field of neuropsychology continues to advance, our understanding of how to best teach students in the classroom will deepen. Though a thorough review of the science of the brain is beyond the scope of this project, outlined is a brief summary of the main points cited as evidence for the success of the PassageWorks program.

Brain research and PassageWorks. One important finding PassageWorks integrates is the influence the limbic system has on student learning. The limbic system is the part of the human brain responsible for emotion, motivation, memory and learning (Sternberg, 2009). Because humans have more neural fibers extending from the limbic system than the part of the brain involved with reason, emotion is a stronger drive for behavior than logic (Sternberg, 2009; Sylwester, 1994).

Another important discovery PassageWorks draws upon is the impact chemical messengers, such as cortisol and endorphins, have on behavior (Sylwester, 1994). Cortisol is released in response to threatening situations. This reaction is critical when responding to dangerous situations such as fleeing from violence. However, teachers and students often unnecessarily release cortisol in response to minor threats that arise in the classroom as in the example below:

A 2nd grader refuses to complete an arithmetic assignment. The irritated teacher's stress response system inappropriately responds by releasing clotting elements into the blood, elevating cholesterol levels, depressing the immune system, tensing large muscles, increasing the blood pressure-and much more. It's a

response that makes sense only if the recalcitrant student is also threatening with a knife or gun. (Sylwester, 1994, p. 63)

Maintaining high levels of cortisol over the long-term cause damage to neurons involved with learning and memory (Vincent, 1990 as cited by Sylwester, 2009). Therefore school environments that stimulate high levels of stress in both students and teachers are undermining their ability to thrive and learn. In contrast, endorphins are peptides that increase positive feelings (Sternberg, 2009; Sylwester, 1994). Endorphins are released during positive social interactions such as meaningful conversations and hugging. Generating positive behaviors in the classroom induces the release of endorphins, which facilitate student learning. The PassageWorks curriculum includes activities that decrease emotional stress in the classroom and boost positive social interactions, thus facilitating increased endorphin release and decreased cortisol release.

General implications for the classroom. Several implications can be drawn from brain research regarding how to best facilitate student learning in the classroom (Sylwester, 1994). Most important, is the sheer power of emotions. It is crucial that students learn the skills to regulate their emotions so they can best use their logical processes. Emotional understanding should be integrated into classroom learning and students should learn to freely express feelings in a useful way. Similarly, using activities that increase the release of endorphins will help create more positive feelings in the classroom and improve student learning. Interactive activities that improve relationships are important. Also, because memories are contextual teachers should “draw out emotions-simulations, role playing and cooperative projects that will help students recall the information during closely related events in the real world” (p. 65). Finally, schools

should consider adopting a less authoritarian and highly evaluative stance as these attitudes contribute to emotionally stressful school environments that are, ultimately, counterproductive to learning. The PassageWorks curriculum offers a means to integrate all of the above into the classroom.

The PassageWorks Program

The PassageWorks program was first created by Rachel Kessler in the mid-1980s as a unique approach to social-emotional learning that incorporated social, emotional, and spiritual development within an academic environment (Greenwald, Hirschberg, & Weaver, in press). In the 1990's, the idea was further developed pulling from the foundation of Howard Gardner's (1993) ideas on emotional intelligence and Daniel Goleman's (1995) research that demonstrated the correlation between student success and increased interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Additionally, Kessler integrated findings from the field of brain research that demonstrated the integral role of emotion in motivation and learning (see Sylwester, 1995 for a thorough overview). Finally, in 2002 Kessler created The PassageWorks Institute, an organization designed to increase the model's impact in schools nationwide.

The PassageWorks approach provides educators with tools and frameworks for addressing the inner life of young people in the classroom and to cultivate "teaching presence" (Greenwald et al., in press). Inner life refers to the essential aspect of human nature that yearns for connection, grapples with questions about meaning, and seeks a sense of genuine purpose, authenticity and self-expression. Teaching presence refers to the capacity to teach with an open heart, to hold respectful discipline, to be emotionally and intellectually present, and to develop an expanded emotional range. The

PassageWorks program involves meeting weekly, for at least 50 minutes, with a trained teacher facilitator of the curriculum and a group of students. Through these meetings, the goal of reaching greater self-awareness, self-acceptance and emotional intelligence is strived for. Instructors are trained in the curriculum by attending intensive, experiential training courses at the Institute and receiving ongoing supervision throughout implementation. The PassageWorks curriculum has been developed for students in grade K-12, but is adapted differently for various age groups.

Rachel Kessler, founder of the PassageWorks program, brought her personal history to her development of the PassageWorks program. As the child of Holocaust survivors that immigrated to the United States, she experienced first-hand the experience of isolation, disconnection and alienation that many young people feel (Greenwald et al., in press). As an adolescent, she embarked on an exchange program in the Philippines and began to discover the power of authentic relationships and community connection. Through her early work with both pregnant teens and high school students in Los Angeles, she witnessed the ways alienation and disconnections were often at the core of risky behaviors. Kessler was motivated to address this void in young people. In 2000, she published her book *The Soul of Education* that advocates for a student-centered approach to spirituality and meaning making. The following year she founded The PassageWorks Institute in Boulder, Colorado. Over the last decade, this approach has continued to grow and expand to support thousands of educators across the country with curriculum, professional development, and consulting.

A student-centered approach to spirituality. Kessler (2000) based her conceptual framework for the PassageWorks program on years of experience in listening

to the stories, questions, experiences and wisdom of students she worked with. She created a map (see *Appendix A*) for her conceptual framework described as the “Seven Gateways to the Soul of Education” out of the stories from her students. Each of these domains is considered a path for nourishing the inner lives of adolescents. They are not distinct pathways, but fluid and can overlap differently for each student. The seven gateways are as follows:

1. The yearning for *deep connection* describes a quality of relationship that is profoundly caring, is resonant with meaning, and involves feelings of belonging or of being truly seen and known. Students may experience deep connection to themselves, others, nature, or a higher power.
2. The longing for *silence* and *solitude*, often an ambivalent domain, is fraught with both fear and urgent need. As a respite from the tyranny of “busyness” and noise, silence may be a realm of reflection, of calm or fertile chaos, an avenue of stillness and rest for some, prayer or contemplation for others.
3. The search for *meaning* and *purpose* concerns the exploration of big questions, such as “Why am I here?” “Does my life have a purpose? How do I find out what it is?” “What is life for?” “What is my destiny?” “What does my future hold?” and “Is there a God?”
4. The hunger for *joy* and *delight* can be satisfied through experiences of great simplicity, such as play, celebration, or gratitude. It also describes the exaltation students feel when encountering beauty, power, grace, brilliance, love or the sheer joy of being alive.

5. The *creative* drive, perhaps the most familiar domain for nourishing the spirit in school, is part of all the gateways. Whether developing a new idea, a work of art, a scientific discovery, or an entirely new lens on life, students feel the awe and mystery of creating.

6. The urge for *transcendence* describes the desire for young people to go beyond their perceived limits. It includes not only the mystical realm, but experiences of extraordinary in the arts, athletics, academics, or human relations. By naming and honoring this universal human need, educators can help students constructively channel this powerful urge.

7. The need for *initiation* deals with rites of passage for the young—guiding adolescence to become more conscious about the irrevocable transition from childhood to adulthood. Adults can give young people tools for dealing with all of life’s transitions and farewells. Meeting this need for initiation often involves ceremonies with parents and faculty that welcome them into the community of adults. (Greenwald et al., in press, pp. 2-3)

The PassageWorks curriculum includes practices that invite students to engage with these pathways in the classroom. Kessler (2000) and other teachers that utilize the curriculum report that it increases student focus, motivation, academic performance and resilience (Greenwald et al., in press). Kessler cited the emerging evidence from brain research as scientific proof regarding for the success of the PassageWorks program. Despite Kessler’s observation, no formal quantitative research has been conducted on the efficacy of PassageWorks on these particular domains.

PassageWorks practices and values. The following is an excerpt from an article (Greenwald et al., in press) that describes some PassageWorks core practices:

Deep Listening and Authentic Speaking: (Council, Sharing Circles and Dyads) In this practice, students take turns deeply listening to one another as their peers speak for a prescribed time on a theme introduced by the teacher. Council is a one particular form of deep listening that supports the cultivation of the inner life. Diverse cultures have used Council for meaning making, communication and community building since ancient times. In Council, students and facilitator(s) sit in a circle and pass a talking piece—the person with the talking piece has the opportunity to speak on a particular theme for a prescribed period of time while the others in the circle listen without interrupting the speaker. The four intentions of Council are to: listen with an open heart, speak from the heart, speak leanly, and speak spontaneously. Council provides students the opportunity to feel seen, heard and known.

Active and Reflective Focusing Activities: This practice involves beginning and ending a class with a brief activity that assists students to come into presence and “learning readiness,” or to acknowledge a learning or connection they have had that day. Focusing activities also provide a necessary transition between classes. Examples are journaling on a relevant theme, taking a moment of silence, engaging in a playful, kinesthetic team-building activity, or writing a note card to the teacher.

Creative and Symbolic Expression: These practices foster self-awareness and critical and creative thinking. Examples include students creating a personal

symbol for their hopes and dreams or using symbolic objects to discuss what it is important in their lives or what they need to feel safe to risk intellectually and emotionally in the classroom.

Systematic Building of Classroom Community: This practice involves the scaffolding and sequencing of lessons to build trust amongst classmates, develop communication skills, and support intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness. One essential component of this process is creating student-based classroom agreements.

Inclusion of Developmental and Social and Emotional Themes: This practice asks educators to link content to their students' personal lives, to include lessons that assist students to develop awareness about the transitions they are undergoing, and to offer tools for stress, change, and anger management.

The Mystery Questions: This practice, offered half-way through year after a community of trust has been established, involves asking students to anonymously write down what they wonder about in regards to their own self, peers and other people, and life and the universe. These questions are not to be answered, but are later shared anonymously in an environment of reverence and respect.

Rites of passage model. Underlying the PassageWorks approach is a deep belief in the potency and danger of the developmental transition years in young people (Greenwald et al., in press). Kessler (2000) observed that risky behaviors increase any time there is a developmental or school-initiated transition. In PassageWorks, students are offered an intentional and structured rite of passage in order to transform a period of

increased risk into an opportunity for growth, learning and empowerment (Greenwald et al.). The Passageworks approach offers specific and intentional support for students entering and leaving elementary, middle and high school by providing a rites of passage curriculum.

Kessler structured her rites of passage curriculum on Van Gennep's (1961) anthropological framework for initiation. Van Gennep identified the three major phases of transitions. They are Severance, Threshold, and Reincorporation. Severance describes the time when one separates from an old identity. Threshold is characterized as the in-between place where the old identity is no longer, but the new one has not yet been formed and Reincorporation involves integrating the knowledge and understanding of the Severance and Threshold experiences to benefit one's life and community.

Though transitions are present throughout a human life, beginning in birth and ending with death, our culture has a tendency to avoid the emotions and experiences that naturally emerge during these times (Greenwald et al., in press). Transitions are fraught with anticipation, exhilaration, uncertainty and fear and give rise to important questions about meaning and purpose, love, beginnings and endings. The PassageWorks curriculum places emphasis on acknowledging and honoring the importance of a transitional period so that students resist falling into a place of regression, cynicism, anxiety or confusion (Greenwald et al., in press). Conversely, the rites of passage curriculum strives to celebrate change and utilize the opportunity to develop new capacities and growth within students.

The need to study PassageWorks. Limited quantitative and qualitative research has tentatively established some benefit to the impact of PassageWorks in a classroom

setting (Diggs, Connors, & Walters, 2009; Parmley, 2009). One 3-year evaluation offered strong quantitative and qualitative support for PassageWorks effectiveness in training teachers to develop “teaching presence” (Parmley, 2009), which is a construct defined by embodiment of PassageWorks principles in the classroom (See *Appendix B*). Teacher reports also illustrated the belief that PassageWorks improves students’ lives in several domains. Another study examined the extent to which student self-efficacy and connections to school increased after participating in a pilot PassageWorks program (Diggs et al., 2009). Findings demonstrated a less than significant improvement in overall levels of student self-efficacy. However, two of the subscales (Caring Adult and Future Efficacy) did yield a statistically significant increase. Students experienced a higher degree of belief that an adult at school cared for them and felt more hopeful about future success upon completion of the PassageWorks program. Both evaluations recommended that further research is needed to investigate the impact of the curriculum on students using valid and reliable measures.

The literature review in this chapter suggests that most SEL programs will be effective in improving academic achievement, reducing problem behaviors, developing social/emotional competence and increasing subjective well-being. PassageWorks contributes a unique dimension to the standard SEL programs by integrating a spiritual component. Early research from the field of positive psychology implies this may increase the benefit of the curriculum as compared to its’ traditional SEL program counterparts. Systematic research is needed to understand if the PassageWorks curriculum is truly influencing the areas it intends. This dissertation studied the impact of the PassageWorks program in a high school classroom to determine if students obtain a

higher state of subjective well-being, improved interpersonal relationships, increased resilience and greater spiritual wellness following participation in the PassageWorks program. With attention being paid to the benefits of using SEL programs in schools, and the added new possibilities of integrating concepts of positive psychology into education, it is timely, appropriate and useful to evaluate the effectiveness of the PassageWorks program.

The Unique Community of Lexington, Nebraska

Lexington, Nebraska, the town where the participants in this study reside, has an interesting history. Following a severe farm and debt crisis in the 1980s, the state of Nebraska lost a large portion of their population. In the decade between 1980 and 1990, 100,000 more residents left the state than entered it and the population of Lexington decreased by 11% (Gouveia & Stull, 1997). The town suffered a record number of farm bankruptcies, and had to shut down most of their downtown businesses. In 1990, after the opening of one of the largest meatpacking plants in the country, the population increased by 52%, and consisted mainly of Latino immigrants seeking employment in the meatpacking industry (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2000). By the year 2000, Latinos comprised 25.36% of Lexington's population as compared to 3.28% in 1990. The Latino community continues to thrive in Lexington. Lexington High School, the setting where this research study took place, has a student body that is 72% Latino. Many of the students are first generation in this country. This provided the ideal natural environment to investigate the effectiveness of PassageWorks among a predominantly Latino population.

Variables and Measures

The four general variables identified for evaluation in this study were Resilience, Subjective Well-Being, Interpersonal Relationships, and Spiritual Wellness. The process of determining these particular variables was two-fold. First, variables were identified from carefully reviewing the PassageWorks literature (Kessler, 2000) and visiting the PassageWorks Institute in Boulder, Colorado to speak with the staff. This provided an understanding of the main goals of the PassageWorks curriculum, as well as the variables that the program hoped to impact. The second part involved reviewing the existing research delineated earlier in this chapter to find evidence of a positive correlation between these variables and the mental health of adolescents. Based on the research reviewed increased resilience, improved subjective well-being, satisfying interpersonal relationships, and higher degrees of spiritual wellness all contribute to bettering the lives of adolescents. Listed below are explicit definitions for each variable and the description of the analogous instrument.

Resilience. Resilience was measured using the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA; Prince-Embury, 2008). The RSCA was created based on theoretical concepts from resiliency research, social learning theory, psychosocial theory and development psychopathology. Personal resilience is defined by the degree to which a person experiences a sense of mastery (MAS), a sense of relatedness (REL), and their level of emotional reactivity (REA). These factors correspond with the three self-report scales measured by 64 items on the test (Prince-Embury & Steer, 2010). The MAS is comprised of three subscales that measure Optimism, Self-efficacy, and Adaptability; the REL is comprised of four subscales that measure Trust, Perceived Social Support,

Comfort, and Tolerance; and the REA is comprised of three subscales that measure Sensitivity, Recovery, and Impairment. Rather than outputting one number of overall resilience, a separate score is issued for each of these three scales. Recent research supports the use of the RSCA among a diverse population. The instrument was found to be free of general bias across racial and ethnic groups (Prince-Embury, 2009). An illustration of the scoring chart for the RSCA is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Resiliency Scale Qualitative Classifications and T-Score Ranges

T-Score Range	Qualitative Classification
60 or greater	High
56-59	Above Average
46-55	Average
41-45	Below Average
40 or lower	Low

Quality of life. Subjective well-being was measured using the Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale (MLSS) as constructed by Huebner (2001). This 40 item self-report instrument was created based on research that demonstrated the significance of life satisfaction on the subjective well-being of children and adolescents. Subjective well-being is defined as “a basic satisfaction with oneself and one’s existence or life satisfaction” (Cohen, 1991, pp. 404 as cited by Huebner, 2001). Life satisfaction is further defined as “a global evaluation by the person of his or her life” (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991, pp. 150 as cited by Huebner, 2001). The MLSS offers a multidimensional understanding of child and adolescent life satisfaction judgments. It allows for a profile of student satisfaction in five specific domains: family, friends, school, living environment and self. The measure is also designed to assess general overall life satisfaction. An illustration of the scoring chart for the MLSS is listed in

Table 2.

Table 2

Multi-Dimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scoring Scale

Scores	Qualitative Classification
6	High Satisfaction
3	Average Satisfaction
1	Low Satisfaction

Several studies have supported the used of the MLSS across age ranges and cultural groups (Huebner, Gilman, & Suldo, 2007). Various factor analyses have demonstrated the instruments usefulness among students of the United States, Spain, Korea, and Canada (Gilman et al., 2005; Casa, Alsinet, Rosich, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2001; Park et al., 2004; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997 as cited in Huebner et al., 2007). Though extensive research on the MLSS implies reliability and validity among different cultural groups, some variation in reliability coefficients suggests that individual items may be interpreted differently (Huebner et al., 2007). Still, this instrument appears to be the best choice for this population at this time.

Interpersonal relationships. The perceived quality of interpersonal relationships was measured using Bracken's (2006) Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relations (CAIR). The 35-item self-report instrument was created based on several different theoretical models of interpersonal relationships that assert interpersonal relationships of children and adolescents predict later psychosocial adjustment and are related to functioning in other domains. The CAIR assesses the perceived quality of relationships between adolescents and their parents, adolescents and their peers and adolescents and

their teachers. Relationships are defined by having the characteristics of companionship, emotional support, reliance, trust, understanding, empathy, acceptance and conflict (Bracken, 2006). The total relationship index (TRI) measures the subject's general relationship patterns. An illustration of the scoring chart for the CAIR is listed in Table 3. The CAIR was standardized on 2,501 children and adolescents of both genders. Adequate evidence of the instrument's reliability and validity among all racial and ethnic groups is provided in the examiner's manual.

Table 3

Interpersonal Relationship Qualitative Classifications and T-Score Ranges

T-Score Range	Qualitative Classification
70-79 or greater	Significant Relationship Strength
60-69	Mild Relationship Strength
40-59	Normal Range
30-39	Mild Relationship Weakness
20-29 or lower	Significant Relationship Weakness

Spiritual wellness. Spiritual wellness was measured using the Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS; Howden, 1992). The construct of spirituality was derived from a thorough review of numerous conceptualizations from literature in philosophy, psychology, sociology, theology and nursing (as cited by Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000). Spiritual health is defined as consisting of four central features: Unifying Interconnectedness, Purpose and Meaning in Life, Innerness or Inner Resources, and Transcendence (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006; McGee et al., 2003), which translate into the four subscales of the SAS. These factors are understood as being interconnected and impacted by demographics and situational events (death, financial difficulties, etc.). The 28-item self-report instrument assesses these four attributes to determine an overall measure of spiritual wellness (Howden, 1992). An illustration of the scoring chart for the SAS is listed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Spirituality Assessment Scale Scoring Chart**

Scores	Qualitative Classification
168	High Spiritual Wellness
133	High Average Spiritual Wellness
98	Average Spiritual Wellness
63	Low Average Spiritual Wellness
28	Low Spiritual Wellness

*Scores range on a scale so numbers are approximates to identify markers in the scale.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Adolescence is a crucial developmental period in one's life. Unfortunately, our Nation's youth are currently afflicted by high rates of risky behavior and psychiatric disorders that impact their ability for a successful future. In response to these struggles, there has been an increase in preventative school-based social-emotional programs aimed to improve the quality of life for adolescents. Latino youth may be particularly susceptible to these vulnerabilities as they are often faced with added life stressors related to poverty, immigration, family separations or linguistic differences. The intent of this study was to assess whether one particular social-emotional program, PassageWorks, could effectively be used as a tool to improve the lives of Latino youth. This chapter outlines the method used for this research study.

Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation was to determine if resilience, quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and spirituality is fostered through the PassageWorks program among a predominantly Latino population. As such, I devised four research questions as the subject of quantitative inquiry.

Research question 1. Does participation in PassageWorks increase resilience and, therefore, decrease vulnerability to high-risk behavior?

Hypothesis: There will be a significant positive difference between the pre and post-assessment scores on all three resiliency domains, including Sense of Mastery (MAS), Sense of Relatedness (REL) and Emotional Reactivity (REA).

Research question 2. Does participation in PassageWorks improve quality of life?

Hypothesis: Participants will report increased overall life satisfaction, school satisfaction and self-satisfaction from pre-post assessment.

Research question 3. Can PassageWorks improve the quality of interpersonal relationships in its participants?

Hypothesis: Participants will report improved quality of interpersonal relationships overall and improved interpersonal relationships with teachers from pre-post assessment.

Research question 4. Does PassageWorks promote a sense of spiritual wellness?
Hypothesis: Participants will report an increased sense of spiritual wellness from pre-post assessment.

Research Methods

Participants and setting. Participants were selected from high school classroom configurations at Lexington High School in Lexington, Nebraska. All participants ranged between 17 and 18-years of age. Lexington High School has approximately 767 students enrolled currently. The racial/ethnic demographics are as follows: 22% of students are listed as White, 4% as Black, 72% as Hispanic, 1.5% as Asian Pacific Islanders and .5% as American Indian/Alaskan Natives. In terms of socio-economic status, 62% qualify for the free/reduced lunch. The PassageWorks curriculum was taught in an elective classroom during a 50 minute time period 5 days a week.

Recruitment. Emails were sent to the principal and teachers of Lexington High School in Lexington, Nebraska to confirm interest in the study and the potential of

teacher and student participants. All emails were replied to with interest. Sam Jilka, PassageWorks Instructor, agreed to use two of his classrooms as subjects for the study.

In the Fall semester of 2011, consent forms in both English and Spanish were sent home to the parents of the high school students in these two classrooms (see *Appendix C*). Students that returned the form with permission from their parents to participate in the research were eligible for the study. Students interested in participating reviewed and signed an Assent form (See *Appendix D*). Both Consent and Assent forms included limits to confidentiality, potential risks involved, and data ownership issues. Twenty-nine of twenty-nine students returned both forms and participated in the study.

Data collection. Data was collected at the beginning and end of the semester. Participants were placed in a quiet classroom with a supervisor that collected and the completed measures. Each participant was assigned a random code to protect confidentiality. The code was copied on the pre and post-measures. Packets were then assembled for each student into an envelope with their corresponding names printed on the envelope. Included in the packet were blank manila envelopes. After the participants completed the measures, they placed them in the blank manila envelope and disposed of the envelopes with their names prior to handing them into the supervisor.

Design

This study employed quasi-experimental within-subjects pre-test/post-test design. The study used paired samples to investigate if PassageWorks affected participants' scores on 9 different scales related to resilience, quality of life, interpersonal relationships, or spiritual wellness. Each student in the group completed the same

measures before and after exposure to the PassageWorks curriculum, and scores were analyzed using the Wilcoxon t-test. Table 5 illustrates this design.

Table 5

Research Design

Group	Time 1: Pretest	Time 2: Posttest
PassageWorks (n=26)	X	X

Independent Variables

PassageWorks is the independent variable for this study. PassageWorks has two levels: pre-PassageWorks (Time 1) and post-PassageWorks (Time 2). At Time 1, the pre-test dependent measures were administered to student participants prior to engaging in the PassageWorks curriculum. At Time 2, the student participants were administered the same dependent measures upon completing the curriculum.

Dependent Variables and Related Instruments

This study included nine dependent variables (Sense of Mastery, Sense of Relatedness, Emotional Reactivity, School Satisfaction, Self Satisfaction, Overall Satisfaction, Teacher Relationship Index, Overall Relationship Index, and Spiritual Wellness). Table 6 summarizes the instruments used to assess each of the dependent variables at Time I and Time II.

Table 6

Administered Measures

Pre-PassageWorks	PassageWorks	Post-PassageWorks
Resiliency Scale for Adults and Children (Sense of Mastery, Sense of Relatedness, Emotional Reactivity) Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relationships (Total Interpersonal Relationships, Teacher Interpersonal Relationships) Spirituality Assessment Scale (Spiritual Wellness) Multi-Dimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Self Satisfaction, School Satisfaction, Total Life Satisfaction)	Semester long intensive PassageWorks Curriculum	Resiliency Scale for Adults and Children (Sense of Mastery, Sense of Relatedness, Emotional Reactivity) Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relationships (Total Interpersonal Relationships, Teacher Interpersonal Relationships) Spirituality Assessment Scale (Spiritual Wellness) Multi-Dimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Self Satisfaction, School Satisfaction, Total Life Satisfaction)

Resilience. The first three dependent variables, Sense of Mastery (MAS), Sense of Relatedness (REL), and Emotional Reactivity (REA) were all measured using the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (Prince-Embury, 2008) as reviewed in the previous chapter. Previous pilot testing has shown that it has an adequate internal consistency rating (Cronbach’s alpha) of between .83 to .93 and evidence that the

measure is reliable and valid. An illustration of the scoring chart for the RSCA is listed in Table 1 (pp. 42).

Quality of life. The dependent variables, School Satisfaction, Self Satisfaction and Overall Life Satisfaction, were measured using the MLSS (Huebner, 2001) as summarized in the previous chapter. Internal consistency has been found to range from .70s to the low .90s, which is acceptable for research purposes (Dew et al., 2001; Gilman & Huebner, 1997 as cited by Huebner, 2001). An illustration of the scoring chart for the MLSS is listed in Table 2 (pp. 43).

Interpersonal relationships. The dependent variables, teacher relationships and overall interpersonal relationships, were measured using Bracken's (2006) Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relations as described in the previous chapter. The CAIR was normed on an ethnically and gender diverse sample of 2,501 subjects between the ages of 9-19 years (Bracken, 2006). The CAIR has strong internal consistency that exceeds .90 for each age group. The TRI coefficient alpha is .96 for each grade level. An illustration of the scoring chart for the CAIR is listed in Table 3 (pp. 44).

Spiritual wellness. The fourth dependent variable, Spiritual Wellness, was measured using the Spirituality Assessment Scale as previously mentioned (Howden, 1992). The SAS has a high validity and reliability with an alpha coefficient of .92 in a study of 189 diverse subjects (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006; McGee et al., 2003; Stanard et al., 2000). An illustration of the scoring chart for the SAS is listed in Table 4.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter includes a description of the analyses used to calculate the data for this study and the results of these analyses. This study was designed to answer the following research questions: a.) Does participation in PassageWorks increase resiliency and, therefore, decreasing vulnerability to high-risk behavior? b.) Does participation in PassageWorks improve quality of life? c.) Can PassageWorks improve the quality of interpersonal relationships in its' participants? d.) Does PassageWorks promote a sense of spiritual wellness? The study employed a quasi-experimental, within subjects, pre-post test design. The pre-post measures were administered to two classrooms of students enrolled in PassageWorks classes at Lexington High School. Students engaged in the PassageWorks curriculum for one class period every day. The students were all 17 and 18-years of age.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are below to better understand participants' characteristics. Measures collected demographic information that included gender, age, and ethnicity.

Demographics of student participants. Table 7 indicates demographic information for the students that participated in this study. Twenty-nine students participated. Out of 29 students, three students were eliminated due to incomplete data. Additionally, each variable measured had incomplete measures in either the pre or post-assessment as listed below. Of the 26 students who participated, 23% ($n = 6$) were male and 77% ($n = 20$) were female. Of these, 73% ($n = 17$) were 17-years old and 14% ($n = 9$) were 18-years old at the time of this study. In terms of ethnicity, 92% ($n = 24$) were Hispanic, 3% ($n = 1$) were Native American and 3% ($n = 1$) were Caucasian.

Table 7

Demographic Information of Student Participants

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Female	20	77
Male	6	23
Age		
17-years	17	73
18-years	9	14
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	24	93
Native American	1	3
Caucasian	1	3

Measures of central tendency at pre-test. Median scores for each measure on the pre-test are listed below to gain a quantitative understanding of participants' self-reported scores on each domain prior to engaging in the PassageWorks curriculum.

Resilience. The Resiliency Scale for Adults and Children (RSCA) was used to assess the level of student participants' resilience (Prince-Embury & Steer, 2010). All 26 students completed the RSCA. At pre-test, measures of central tendency reveal student resiliency scores were in the average to low average range. The median score for Sense of Mastery at pre-test was 45 (Below Average). The median score for Sense of Relatedness was 46 (Average) and the median score for Emotional Reactivity was 49 (Average). An illustration of this data is listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Students' Pre-Test Resiliency Scores

Resiliency Scale	N	Median	SD	Classification
MAS	26	45	7.61	Below Average
REL	26	46	7.23	Average
REA	26	49	9.54	Average

MAS = Sense of Mastery

REL = Sense of Relatedness

REA = Emotional Reactivity

Quality of life. The Multi-Dimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 2001) was administered to evaluate the degree of subjective well-being student participants reported. Twenty-three students completed this measure. The median score for both overall life satisfaction and school satisfaction was 4.4 (High Average). The median score for self-satisfaction was a 5 (High). This data is displayed in Table 9.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Student Pre-Test Life Satisfaction Scores

Domain	N	Median	SD	Classification
Overall MLSS	23	4.4	3.19	High Average
SCH	23	4.4	1.14	High Average
REA	23	5	.85	High

MLSS = Overall Life Satisfaction

SCH = School Satisfaction

SS = Self Satisfaction

Interpersonal relationships. To assess the reported quality of interpersonal relationships, student participants completed the Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relationships (Bracken, 2006). Twenty-three students completed this measure. Prior to participating in the PassageWorks program, the median score for the participants' Total Relationship Index (TRI) was 46, which is in the Normal range. The median score for the Teacher Relationship Index (TERI) was 49, which is also in the Normal range. An illustration of these results is listed in Table 10.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Student Pre-Test Interpersonal Relationship Scores

Index	N	Median	SD	Classification
TRI	23	46	8.29	Normal
TERI	23	49	9.36	Normal

TRI = Total Relationship Index

TERI = Teacher Relationship Index

Spiritual wellness. Student participants were administered the Spirituality Assessment Scale (Howden, 1992) to assess their reported level of spiritual wellness. Twenty two participants completed this measure. The median score of participants at the time of pre-test was 121, which indicates Average Spiritual Wellness. This data is illustrated in Table 11.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Student Pre-Test Spiritual Wellness Scores

Variable	N	Median	SD	Classification
Spiritual Wellness	22	121	9.42	Average

Data Analyses

To analyze the data, a series of Wilcoxon rank tests were used to measure the differences between the repeated-measures, pre-test and post-test scores. A Wilcoxon test calculates the difference between each set of pairs (in this case pre and post-test for each dependent variable) and then analyzes the overall difference. The paired test controls for experimental variability as it assumes that any differences that might impact the data in the pre-test is accounted for again in the post-test. Wilcoxon paired t-tests were used to analyze results from all 9 dependent variables of participants' resiliency, quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual wellness.

Impact of PassageWorks on resiliency. The first research question asked the following: *Does participation in PassageWorks increase resiliency and, therefore, decrease vulnerability to high- risk behavior?* Three Wilcoxon rank tests were conducted on the three repeated dependent variables (Sense of Mastery, Sense of Relatedness, and Emotional Reactivity) identified as impacting resiliency. Table 12 displays the mean positive ranked difference score and mean negative ranked difference score of each subtest to illustrate the size of the effect.

Table 12

Wilcoxon Ranks for Student Resiliency Scores

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-MAS-PreMAS	Positive Ranks	15a	16.03	240.5
	Negative Ranks	10b	8.45	84.5
	Ties	1c		
	Total	26		
Post-REL-Pre-REL	Positive Ranks	14a	12.46	174.5
	Negative Ranks	9b	11.28	101.5
	Ties	3c		
	Total	26		
Post REA-Pre-REA	Positive Ranks	10a	16.05	160.5
	Negative Ranks	13b	8.88	115.5

a. pre < post

b. pre > post

c. pre = post

MAS = Sense of Mastery

REL = Sense of Relatedness

REA = Emotional Reactivity

Analysis of the Wilcoxon test, which evaluated difference between pre and post measures of each subscale is significant for the Sense of Mastery ($Z = 2.10, p < .05$) subscale. This finding suggests a significant positive change in students' sense of mastery following engagement in the PassageWorks curriculum. No significant changes were revealed for Emotional Reactivity ($Z = .82, p = .52$) or Sense of Relatedness ($Z = 1.11, p = 0.27$).

Table 13 illustrates a summary of these findings.

Table 13

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Statistics for Student Resiliency Scores

Subscale	Z-statistic	2-tailed Significance
Post-MAS-Pre-MAS	2.10	.035
Post-REL-Pre-REL	1.11	.27
Post-REA-Pre-REA	.82	.52

MAS = Sense of Mastery

REL = Sense of Relatedness

REA = Emotional Reactivity

Impact of PassageWorks on quality of life. The second research question was the following: *Does participation in PassageWorks improve quality of life?* A Wilcoxon rank test was conducted to analyze the impact of PassageWorks on overall life satisfaction using the data from the Multi-Dimensional Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (MLSS). Two additional Wilcoxon rank tests were run on the subscales of School Satisfaction and Self Satisfaction. Table 14 illustrates the mean positive ranked difference scores and mean negative ranked difference scores for the three tests.

Table 14

Wilcoxon Ranks for Student Quality of Life Scores

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-MLSS-MLSS	Positive Ranks	13a	12.38	161
	Negative Ranks	10b	11.50	115
	Ties	0c		
	Total	23		
Post-Sch-Pre-Sch	Positive Ranks	10a	15.5	155
	Negative Ranks	13b	9.31	121
	Ties	1c		
	Total	24		
Post SS-Pre-SS	Positive Ranks	11a	13.64	150
	Negative Ranks	11b	9.36	103
	Ties	1		
	Total	23		

a. pre < post

b. pre > post

c. pre = post

MLSS = Overall Life Satisfaction

SCH = School Satisfaction

SS = Self Satisfaction

Data from the Wilcoxon tests indicate no significant change in overall quality of life ($Z = .48, p = .5$), school satisfaction ($Z = .62, p = .14$), or life satisfaction ($Z = .14, p = .46$) prior to and following the PassageWorks curriculum (insert data when have Z-statistic).

Table 15 displays the results of these analyses.

Table 15

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Statistics for Student Quality of Life Scores

Subscale	Z-statistic	2-tailed Significance
Post-MLSS-Pre-MLSS	.48	.50
Post-Sch-Pre-Sch	.62	.62
Post-SS-Pre-SS	.14	.46

MLSS = Overall Life Satisfaction
SCH = School Satisfaction
SS = Self Satisfaction

Impact of PassageWorks on interpersonal relationships. The third research question examined the following: *Can PassageWorks help to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships?* A Wilcoxon rank test was conducted to analyze students' total relationship index or reported quality overall of students' interpersonal relationships prior to and after participation in the PassageWorks program. A Wilcoxon rank test was also used to assess if the reported quality of students' interpersonal relationship with teachers changed from pre and post-measures. Table 16 displays the mean positive ranked difference scores and mean negative ranked different scores for both the Total Relationship Index and Teacher Relationship Index.

Table 16

Wilcoxon Ranks for Student Interpersonal Relationship Scores

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-TRI-Pre-TRI	Positive Ranks	7a	9.21	64.5
	Negative Ranks	12b	10.46	125.5
	Ties	4c		
	Total	23		
Post-TERI-Pre-TERI	Positive Ranks	10a	7.06	63.5
	Negative Ranks	13b	11.94	107.5
	Ties	1c		
	Total	24		

a. pre < post

b. pre > post

c. pre = post

TRI = Total Relationship Index

TERI = Teacher Relationship Index

Data from the Wilcoxon tests indicate no significant changes in the reported overall quality of students' interpersonal relationships ($Z = -1.24, p = .24$) or the quality of their interpersonal relationships with their teachers ($Z = -.80, p = .37$). Table 17 illustrates these results.

Table 17

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Statistics for Student Interpersonal Relationship

Subscale	Z-statistic	2-tailed Significance
Post-TRI-Pre-TRI	-1.24	.24
Post-TERI-Pre-TERI	-.80	.37

TRI = Total Relationship Index

TERI = Teacher Relationship Index

Impact of PassageWorks on spiritual wellness. The last question asked the following: *Does PassageWorks promote a sense of spiritual wellness?* One Wilcoxon rank test was conducted to analyze whether a significant change occurred in students' spiritual wellness scores prior to and following participation in the PassageWorks program. Table 18 displays the mean positive and mean negative ranked difference scores for the data collected from the Spirituality Assessment Scale.

Table 18

Wilcoxon Ranks For Student Spiritual Wellness Scores

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-SW-Pre-SW	Positive Ranks	16a	12.16	194.5
	Negative Ranks	4b	3.88	15.5
	Ties	2c		
	Total	22		

a. pre < post

b. pre > post

c. pre = post

SW = Spiritual Wellness

Results from the Wilcoxon test demonstrate a significant increase in spiritual wellness at the post-measure ($Z = 4.05, p = .0003$). Table 19 illustrates these results.

Table 19

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Statistics for Student Spiritual Wellness Scores

Subscale	Z-statistic	2-tailed Significance
Post-SW-Pre-SW	4.05	.0003

SW = Spiritual Wellness

Summary

The data collected to measure the impact of PassageWorks on participants' resilience, quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual wellness indicated statistically significant findings for two of the four research questions. Analyses yielded significantly increased scores in participants' sense of mastery and spiritual wellness. This suggests that resilience and spiritual wellness can be improved by participating in the PassageWorks program.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Extensive research has documented the increasing incidence of high-risk behaviors and emotional disorders among adolescents (Coie et al., 2000; Eaton et al., 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003; Greenberg et al., 2001; SAMHSA, 2012). The development of various school-based, preventative, social-emotional programs has been one solution to combating this issue. Research has provided much promise in the effectiveness of SEL (Merrel & Gueldner, 2010). Benefits to adolescents include improved emotional regulation (McKown et al., 2009), better social competence (Domitrovic et al., 2007; Gumbiner et al., 2009; McKown et al., 2009), increased subjective well-being, and improved interpersonal relationships (Elias et al., 2003). Though this evidence is encouraging, the subjects of these investigations have rarely included students from a predominantly Latino population (Castro-Olivo, 2010). The Latino population is one of the fastest growing groups in the United States and currently comprises approximately 19% of the overall school population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008 as cited in Castro-Olivo, 2010). Given the increased vulnerability often found among Latino groups, it is critical that we understand if SEL programs can be helpful to this population.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of PassageWorks, a social-emotional and spiritual school-based learning program, among a pre-dominantly Latino population. Specifically, this study examined the effect of PassageWorks on participants' sense of mastery, sense of relatedness, emotional reactivity, school satisfaction, student satisfaction, overall life satisfaction, total relationship index, teacher relationship index, and spiritual wellness. This chapter includes a synopsis of the results of this study and their potential implications for educational practice and future research.

It is important to keep in mind all results are preliminary, due to the small sample size ($N = 26$) and the non-experimental case study design. For this reasons, conclusions should be considered to be tentative. The discussion is organized initially around the two positive findings of this study, including their implications and limitations. The remaining insignificant findings are then summarized. Finally, overall limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Summary of Main Findings

Overall, students who participated in the PassageWorks curriculum reported a significant increase in one aspect of resiliency (sense of mastery), as well as spiritual wellness. No significant effects were found on quality of life or interpersonal relationships. It is important to note that participants in this study were exposed to a higher dose of the PassageWorks curriculum than normally is the case. While a typical PassageWorks group meets only once per week in a general education classroom, these particular students met with their PassageWorks groups once daily in an elective classroom.

Positive Finding I

Participants in the PassageWorks program reported a significant increase in one domain of resilience, Sense of Mastery (MAS), but indicated no significant change in the other resilience domains, Sense of Relatedness (REL) and Emotional Reactivity (REA). Sense of mastery is a main characteristic of resilience and it is generally believed that improving sense of mastery in students does increase overall resilience (Prince-Embury, 2006). Research indicates increased resilience leads to a lowered vulnerability to high-risk behaviors (Luthar, 1991, 2003; Masten, 2003). Thus, student participation in the

PassageWorks program may act as a buffer to engagement in risky behaviors. MAS as defined in the Resiliency Scale includes optimism, self-efficacy and adaptability (Prince-Embury, 2006).

Explanation of finding I. According to early developmental theorists, a sense of mastery allows adolescents to understand their impact on their environment and take pride in the cause and effect relationships that follow (White, 1959). This sense of competence nurtures one's curiosity and contributes to the expansion of problem solving skills. Social learning theorists emphasized that sense of mastery is reinforced through one's social environment (Bandura, 1977, 1993). Accordingly, these experiences can be created for students to increase the likelihood that they will learn to have more positive expectations of their self-efficacy. The benefits of positive expectations have been supported by research. Strong evidence indicates that positive self-efficacy expectations predict better behavioral adaptation to stress (Cowen, Pryor-Brown, Hightower, & Lotyczewski, 1991 as cited by Prince-Embury, 2007), as well as lowered anxiety, higher school achievement and better classroom behavior control (Wyman, Coewn, Werk, & Kerley, 1993, as cited in Prince-Embury, 2007). Therefore, participation in the PassageWorks program may aid improvement in these domains.

On a large scale, the PassageWorks curriculum indeed embodies themes that directly address one's sense of mastery. The seven gateways to the soul discussed earlier, (see *Appendix A*) provide opportunities to learn and reinforce one's ability to impact one's social environment. Activities geared at deep connection with oneself, with others, with nature and/or with a higher power, help students enjoy the effects of their efforts to connect. Similarly, lessons focused around the need for initiation heighten students'

consciousness about transitions. This aspect of the curriculum provides opportunity to learn that one can set an intention for transition and growth, while also experiencing the later effects of the intention. On a smaller scale, these themes are reflected in lessons such as “Discovering What Makes Us Happy”, which invites students to think about their personal meaning of and conditions for being happy. Based on this preliminary research, lessons such as these appear to be successfully structuring experiences that allow students to have greater belief in their self-efficacy, which, in turn, facilitates their sense of mastery.

Implications of finding I. Extensive convergent evidence documents the benefits of social-emotional learning programs on students. Such findings include the facilitation of SEL programs on positive school attitudes, improved school behavior, higher academic performance (Zins et al., 2004), as well as improved cognitive and behavioral self-control, social competence, decreased school dropout, substance abuse, and delinquency (Wilson et al., 2001). Several evaluations of the SEL program, Strong Kids, indicate strong evidence for learning of social-emotional skills (Castro-Olivo, 2007; Gueldner, 2006) and decrease in internalizing symptoms (Marchant, Brown, Caldarella, & Young, 2010). Though an increased sense of mastery may be implicitly indicated in these findings, no other SEL program evaluation specifically evidences an improved sense of mastery among its participants. These preliminary results suggest that unique ingredients in the PassageWorks program warrant further study to tease out ways the program increases students’ sense of mastery.

Furthermore, the results were yielded from a predominantly Latino population implying that PassageWorks may be additionally well suited for developing a sense of

mastery in Latino youth. Given the increased vulnerability to poverty (Rumbaut, 2004), academic failure (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), and suicidal behavior among this population (CDC, 2000), increasing a sense of positive expectation and self-efficacy is particularly crucial. Despite the growing Latino population, only two other SEL program evaluations have been conducted among this group. These include the Migrant Education Program (MEP) and a culturally-adapted Strong Kids curriculum. The MEP evidenced effectiveness in improving academic outcomes, increasing a sense of school belonging, and raising self-esteem (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). However, this program requires more resources than PassageWorks, creating a potential barrier to utilizing this curriculum in impoverished schools. Similarly, the evaluation of a culturally adapted Strong Kids curriculum evidenced knowledge gains of social-emotional concepts (Castro-Olivo, 2007), but no other intervention effects were noted. Therefore, these preliminary results indicating the potential of PassageWorks to increase sense of mastery among a Latino population offer a promising option to integrate into culturally diverse classrooms.

Limitations of finding I. Though these results are promising, more support is needed to support the likelihood that the increased sense of mastery evidenced in this evaluation is due to participation in the PassageWorks program. The small sample size, lack of control group and lack of repeated measures weaken the findings. Additionally, the results were collected immediately following termination of the PassageWorks program. Follow up studies would be useful in determining if an increased sense of mastery is maintained over time. Specific qualitative research focused on clarifying

students' experiences of their own sense of mastery at varying periodic intervals of the PassageWorks curriculum would also extend understanding in this arena.

Positive Finding II

Findings yielded a strong positive correlation between participation in the PassageWorks program and increased spiritual wellness as measured by the Spirituality Assessment Scale (Howden, 1992). According to Howden, spiritual wellness includes four central features: unifying interconnectedness, purpose and meaning in life, innerness or inner resources, and transcendence (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006; McGee et al., 2003). Thus, student participation in the PassageWorks program may positively impact all of these domains simply by increasing one's sense of spirituality.

Explanation of finding II. Importantly, one of Rachel Kessler's (2000) central motivations in designing the PassageWorks curriculum was the belief that a spiritual void was afflicting our nation's youth. In many ways, her conviction that inviting spirituality into schools to combat adolescent vulnerabilities was ahead of her time. Since Kessler's initial design of the curriculum in 2000, research in adolescent spirituality has offered evidence supporting this idea. Adolescent spirituality has been found to be associated with lower levels of depression (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006; Cotton et al., 2005), less involvement in high-risk behaviors (Cotton et al., 2005), lower trait-anxiety (Davis et al., 2003), improved coping responses (Young et al., 2000) and better socio-emotional adjustment (Bert, 2011). Thus, as Kessler surmised, student participation in the PassageWorks program may positively impact all of these domains simply by increasing one's sense of spirituality.

For the purpose of this study, spirituality was understood as shifting attention from mundane concerns to the larger universe and one's place within it (Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005); and the process of cultivating the following categories: transcendence, connection with all living things and the universe, a sense of purpose, awe, gratefulness, compassion and/or a fostering of inner peace (Pargament & Saunders, 2007). This fits with the conceptual underpinnings of the PassageWorks curriculum, as each of the seven gateways of the soul (see *Appendix A*) targets an aspect of this definition. The high correlation between spiritual wellness and participation in the PassageWorks program offers preliminary evidence that Kessler's curriculum has succeeded in what it initially set out to do.

Implications of finding II. Though there is some growing interest on the impact of spirituality on adolescence, there has been no other documented research evaluating a school-based SEL program that integrates this component. Evidence mentioned above indicates that it would benefit our schools to focus more on finding ways to invite this space in to our nation's classrooms. This research implies that PassageWorks could be used as a vehicle to nurture student-centered spirituality. It is interesting to note that some have theorized that an increased sense of spirituality elicits the development of self-efficacy (Moberg, 1979 as cited by Guinn & Vincent, 2002) and "helps form the basis for sound decision making and critical thinking" (p. 380). Perhaps it is the exploration of existential issues and development of spiritual wellness that primarily contributed to the increased sense of mastery evidenced among the participants in this study.

Though the inclusion of spirituality in the PassageWorks is likely to benefit all participants, it may have particularly strong implications for the Latino population. Experts in the field of both psychology (Cervantes, 2010; Guinn & Vincent, 2002), and public health (Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002) have written about the salience of spirituality in Latino culture. Cervantes has written a compelling argument for the development of a psychotherapy approach for Latinos that integrates their conviction that spiritual and psychological health are intertwined. Similarly, Musgrave et al. (2002) offer suggestions for public health interventions geared towards Latina women that incorporate spirituality. Though too extensive to cite here, included in their article is research that supports the relationship of spirituality and health among Latina women. Finally, Guinn, and Vincent devised an intervention for Latina women acculturating in impoverished communities that aimed to increase spiritual wellness, which evidenced promising results. They assert that “the importance of the spiritual dimension for this population cannot be overstated as it is considered the core of wellness, representing the balance between inner and outer aspects of human experience” (Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Myers, Witmer, & Sweeney, 1993 as cited by Guinn & Vincent, 2002, p. 386). The inclusion of spirituality in school-based SEL programs may well be the key for successful outcomes among Latino students.

Limitations of finding II. Though there is strong support for the increase in spiritual wellness as a result of the PassageWorks program, there are several limitations to this study. As mentioned with Finding I, the small sample size, lack of control group and lack of repeated measures all weaken the findings. Follow up longitudinal studies would be beneficial to observe if the increased sense of spiritual wellness persists over

time. It would be useful to pursue further research on the impact of PassageWorks on spiritual wellness in a non-Latino population. This may help to separate out how much of the positive correlation in this study is due to this population responding to the spiritual aspects of the curriculum rather than the curriculum influencing the subjects of the study. An investigation in this area may also serve to clarify how helpful integrating spirituality into the classroom would be among non-Latino populations. Finally, this finding could have some variance among teachers. Spirituality is often a highly charged, emotionally-laden subject. Therefore, the instructor delivering the curriculum in this study may be more comfortable with the spiritual dimensions of the curriculum than someone else. Further research could examine correlation between instructors' level of spiritual wellness prior to conducting the PassageWorks curriculum and the degree of spiritual wellness cultivated in the students.

Non-significant Findings

No significant correlations were found between participation in the PassageWorks program and variables related to participants' quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and the resiliency domains of sense of relatedness and emotional reactivity. A discussion of each of these variables is included below.

Quality of life. The quality of life domain investigated the impacted of PassageWorks on overall life satisfaction, school satisfaction and self-satisfaction as measured by the Multi-Dimensional Student Life Satisfaction (MLSS) Questionnaire (Huebner, 2001). This is surprising given the evidence that documents that impact of SEL programs on improving students' sense of well-being (Elias et al., 2003). One potential barrier to gaining an accurate measure of participants' quality of life as impacted by

PassageWorks is the sheer extent to which the moods and attitudes of adolescents can fluctuate. Situations regarding friendships, intimate relationships, and schoolwork can have a strong impact on their feelings in any given moment. Furthermore, the stress from these circumstances is likely to increase rather than decrease as the semester progresses. Often students return to school from summer vacation relaxed and rested. As schoolwork increases and tensions in relationships mount, students tend to become more stressed. It is possible that these situations contributed to non-significant findings in the quality of life domain, despite participating in the PassageWorks program.

In hindsight, aspects of the MLSS were also problematic as a measure. For instance, one domain that is included in calculating overall life satisfaction is Living Environment. These questions require students to rate their degree of happiness with their actual homes and neighborhoods. In a low-income population, one is likely to see increased dissatisfaction with living environment. Furthermore, the PassageWorks curriculum cannot possibly target changes in this area. Therefore, this aspect of the measure may have prevented an accurate change in overall quality of life as related to PassageWorks. Still, the lack of change in the domain of self-satisfaction is cause for concern. Self-satisfaction is comprised of seven questions that are all aimed towards measuring the extent to which students feel positively about themselves. It is recommended that current developers of the PassageWorks curriculum identify particular lessons where increased attention to self-satisfaction and self-concept might be addressed.

Interpersonal relationships. A primary focus of social-emotional learning programs has been to improve relationships, as good relationships have been linked to

higher reports of subjective well-being (Pianta, 1999; Wong et al., 2002). The PassageWorks curriculum strives to provide students with tools to build stronger relationships with peers, teachers and family members. Results indicated that there were no significant changes between the quality of participants' relationships prior to and following participating in the PassageWorks curriculum. Both the total relationship index and the teacher relationship index in the Clinical Assessment for Interpersonal Relationships (CAIR, Bracken, 2006) were examined to understand the specific impact of PassageWorks on the curriculum.

There are several potential explanations regarding the lack of evidence that PassageWorks improves the quality of interpersonal relationships. One possibility is that almost half of the participants were unable to submit data related to either their father or mother due to absence from their lives. In this case, the T Score corresponding to the raw score rating of the present parent was obtained and calculated for the missing parent. Although this is the procedure indicated in the CAIR manual, the reliability for this revision is not listed. These absences may have impacted the total relationship indices. Another consideration is that the sample yielded an overall mean classification of Normal prior to participating in the PassageWorks program. This could indicate that less improvement was needed in the quality of participants' interpersonal relationships. Additionally, participants were asked to consider all of their life relationships when completing the measures. Though this still indicates no change in relationships from outside of the PassageWorks classroom, it may not be reflective of improved relationships within the classroom. Perhaps in future studies, students could be asked to consider only their relationships with peers in their PassageWorks classroom and their

specific relationship to the PassageWorks teacher. This would provide a better measure of how relationships may be deepened with other participants in the program. Finally, it is valuable to consider the real possibility that the PassageWorks curriculum needs to incorporate greater emphasis on explicitly considering interpersonal relationships, both inside and outside of the classroom. This may be further supported by the lack of significant findings in the resiliency domain, sense of relatedness. It is recommended that current developers of the PassageWorks curriculum identify particular lessons where increased attention to relationship skills might be given.

Sense of relatedness and emotional reactivity. Despite positive findings in the resilience domain of sense of mastery, data resulted in no correlations between the PassageWorks program and the resilience domains of Sense of Relatedness and Emotional Reactivity. It is important to note that the mean classifications for the sample in both domains prior to participation in the PassageWorks program were in the Average range, while sense of mastery was below average. This may suggest that the improvement in one's sense of mastery was needed, whereas participants' sense of relatedness and emotional reactivity were already satisfactory.

Overall Limitations of the Study

Overall issues in areas of research design and measurement may have impacted the study. As mentioned earlier, a major limitation is the small sample size and lack of control group. Additionally, the measures were administered only once prior to and once following participation in the PassageWorks program. Had a more extensive repeated measures design been employed, it would have corrected for some of the limitations of not having a control group. Furthermore, there were no follow-up measures administered

to assess longitudinal changes. Therefore, it is impossible to know if changes in spiritual wellness and sense of mastery were retained over a particular time period. Conversely, other domains may have evidenced change, as there is the possibility that participants would integrate, synthesize, and apply the learned skills over the period of months following their participation.

Additional threats to external validity may limit the generalizability of the study. The participants in the study all attend one school in Nebraska. Their particular needs may not reflect the needs of other Latino high school students in the country. Furthermore, the participants were not randomly recruited. Rather, all of the students had already signed up to participate as an elective in the PassageWorks program. This may reflect a greater willingness and/or pre-disposition to engage in an SEL curriculum. Perhaps students required to take the PassageWorks course would not garner the same results. Additionally, a single instructor facilitated all PassageWorks lessons. While this assured consistency of the curriculum, it is difficult to know the role this particular instructor had on the results. For instance, one PassageWorks instructor may highlight interpersonal relatedness more in the curriculum, while another may privilege developing a sense of agency.

Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the limitations in this study, preliminary data suggests that further study of the PassageWorks program is worthwhile. Additional investigation should employ a true experimental design to better clarify that intervention effects are due to participation in the program and not other confounding variables. This design should include a larger sample size to increase statistical power, the use of a control group, and a repeated

measures design to assess longitudinal changes in participants. Additionally, facilitators of the curriculum should be varied to ensure the curriculum itself is responsible for the changes in participants and not the personality of a particular instructor. It could also prove useful to compare outcomes of different facilitators. To improve generalizability, further investigations should be conducted in different geographic locations and school environments. Though it is important to continue to evaluate the measures effectiveness in a Latino population, other populations (minority and otherwise) should be included. Also valuable would be administering measures to family members and teachers in which they rate their observations of participants in these domains. This allows for more than the subjective perspective of the participant as evidenced in the self-report. Additionally, it could be useful to collect grades or standardized test scores of future participants and note if any academic improvements are made during and following participation in the program. Process evaluation research may also be helpful as PassageWorks is implemented in different schools throughout the country. This could investigate a multitude of questions such as: How long has the curriculum been implemented in the school? Does it take some years for PassageWorks to make a positive influence? How do other teachers view the curriculum? Does it make a difference if PassageWorks is implemented at an earlier grade level and repeated throughout a student's 12-year education? What is the relationship between teacher training and curriculum efficacy? Finally, it may be helpful to include a qualitative component in future research studies. This could expand awareness of both participant and teacher understanding of what may or may not be effective aspects of the curriculum.

Conclusion

Evidence indicates that school-based preventative social-emotional learning programs have a powerful impact on improving the lives of adolescents. Despite extensive research on the effectiveness of these programs, few examine their applicability among the frequently at-risk Latino population. Identifying social-emotional programs that hold potential to decrease vulnerabilities typically inherent among this group is critical. The purpose of this study was to assess the efficacy of PassageWorks, a social-emotional and spiritual learning program, among a predominantly Latino population. Specifically, this study sought to examine the impact of PassageWorks on resilience, interpersonal relationships, quality of life, and spiritual wellness. A total of twenty-six students from two different PassageWorks classroom participated. Students completed packets of measures prior to and following participation in the PassageWorks program. The results indicated that participants in the PassageWorks program had a statistically significant increase in both their sense of mastery and spiritual wellness.

The PassageWorks curriculum is conceptually well grounded in knowledge from social-emotional learning, positive psychology and brain-based research on emotion. The program's unique integration of spiritual learning provides a valuable contribution to the social-emotional learning literature and may have important implications for use among Latino populations. These promising preliminary results indicate further investigation of PassageWorks would be worthwhile. Future studies should include improvements to the research design, increased generalizability, and consideration of a qualitative component.

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Appendix A: Seven Gateways to the Soul of Education



Laura Weaver <lweaver@passageworks.org>

11/15/12 ☆ ↩

to me ▾

Randi--see below:
is this what you mean?

To Whom it may concern,
Randi Hirschberg has full permission of the PassageWorks Institute to use the Seven Gateways and Teaching Presence images in her dissertation. Feel free to contact me with any further questions.

best,
Laura Weaver

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From Kessler, R. (n.d.). The Seven Gateways to the Soul of Education. *The PassageWorks Institute*. Retrieved January 10, 2008 from <http://www.passageworks.org>

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Appendix B: Teaching Presence Map



Teaching Presence

Laura Weaver <lweaver@passageworks.org>

11/15/12 ☆ ↶

to me ▾

Randi--see below:
is this what you mean?

To Whom it may concern,
Randi Hirschberg has full permission of the PassageWorks Institute to use the Seven Gateways and Teaching Presence images in her dissertation. Feel free to contact me with any further questions.

best,
Laura Weaver

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Appendix C: Parental Consent

Date: _____

Dear parent/legal guardian,

Lexington High School, has adopted a curriculum called PassageWorks. The main intention of PassageWorks is to support students by building self-awareness, community connections, social skills, and emotional resilience (being able to have, handle, express, and move through feelings and deal with challenges and setbacks). The curriculum is a year-long course presented in 50-minute sessions once a week in a regularly scheduled class.

Lexington High School has volunteered to be part of a research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. This study is being conducted by Randi Hirschberg, M.S., doctoral student in clinical psychology at Antioch University New England and supervised by Roger Peterson, Ph.D., ABPP, Professor and Distinguished Senior Scholar of the Clinical Psychology program at Antioch University New England. Your child was selected as a possible volunteer because they are already receiving this curriculum as part of their general education. It is anticipated that students will foster resilience, interpersonal relationships and an increased sense of well-being through participation in the program.

Other than participating in the PassageWorks program as usual, this research will ask participants to fill out brief surveys at the beginning and end of the school year to measure the effectiveness of the program. These surveys are easy to complete and will ask students questions about their feelings about themselves, their relationships and their abilities. Students will complete them in a quiet classroom under supervision by their teacher. They will take no longer than 45 minutes. There is no grade attached to this research. Participation in the program is voluntary. **All participation will remain confidential.** Names will not be disclosed at any time. Additionally, any participant may choose to stop filling out the surveys at any time. The decision to participate in the study will not impact the student's (or their family's) relationship with the school, district, or teacher. Students that choose to not participate in the study will engage in a supervised study session for that period where they may read or work on homework.

The questionnaires that students will complete are if minimal psychological risk. Responding to questions about feelings could be mildly unpleasant to students. However, the PassageWorks instructor administering these measures is trained to monitor these situations and handle them appropriately.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Randi Hirschberg at rhirschberg@antioch.edu. Please sign the line below and indicate whether or not you will agree to participate in the study and return to the school as soon as possible. Thanks in advance.

I have read and understood the information provided to me about the PassageWorks program evaluation research.

I give permission for my child to participate in the study. _____

Sincerely,

Randi Hirschberg, M.S.
Antioch University New England
40 Avon Street
Keene, New Hampshire
03431

Appendix D: Student Assent

Title of study: Evaluation of the Impact of the PassageWorks Program on Participants

Principal investigator: Randi Hirschberg, M.S., Doctoral Candidate of Clinical Psychology

Institute: Antioch University New England

Introduction:

I am Randi Hirschberg from Antioch University New England. I am interested in evaluating how PassageWorks impacts you throughout the school year.

Background information:

The PassageWorks program is a social-emotional program working to support students in transitions from high school. The curriculum must be facilitated by an educator trained at the PassageWorks Institute.

Purpose of this research study

The purpose of this study is to understand how the PassageWorks program impacts adolescents.

Procedures

One group of participants in this study will enrol in a PassageWorks class as usual that meets once a week for fifty minutes. Another group will take their normal classes. All participants will complete a collection of measures at the beginning and end of the school year.

Possible risks or benefits

There is no risk involved in this study except your time. The school is still working to determine if you can receive extra credit for your time. The results of the study may help to improve the PassageWorks program and understand how adolescents characterize their well-being.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate without any loss of benefit which you are otherwise entitled to. You may also withdraw any time from the study without any adverse effect. You may also refuse to answer some or all the questions if you don't feel comfortable with those questions.

Confidentiality

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except myself, the principal investigator, will have access to it. Your name and identity will also not be

disclosed at any time. The data may be seen by Ethical review committee and may be published in journal and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity.

Available Sources of Information

If you have any further questions you may contact Randi Hirschberg at rhirschberg@antioch.edu. If you leave a phone number I will promptly return the call. Additionally, feel free to ask me any questions during my site visit.

1. AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant's Name (Printed or Typed):

Date:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Principal Investigator's Signature:

Date: