



## **Theoretical Background and Conceptual Framework: Summary of Research Supporting The Kimochis® Educator’s Tool Kit**

**The Kimochis® Educator’s Tool Kit** is a universal, school-based, social and emotional learning program designed to give children the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively. These skills have been identified by leading researchers in the field of social and emotional learning as necessary for school success, academic achievement, positive social relationships and the development of emotional competence. The Kimochis® curriculum incorporates innovative, fun and exciting lessons and activities that were developed to teach children how to manage challenging social situations with skill, character and confidence. This overview summarizes the research that supports the design and lesson components of the Kimochis® program.

### **Research Findings Related to the Overall Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning**

#### **Early Childhood Years:**

- Effective interventions that build social, emotional and behavioral skills at a young age can have a positive effect on how children are able to problem-solve and interact with their peers later in life (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2007).
- A convincing body of evidence has been accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve minimal social competence by about the age of 6 years, they have a high probability of being at risk for social-emotional difficulties as adults (Ladd, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1987).
- Strong evidence links social-emotional health in the early childhood years (birth to 6) to:
  - Subsequent school success and health in preteen/teen years
  - Long term health and wellbeing in adulthood
  - Promotion of resilience
  - Prevention of later mental health problems (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009)
- Research suggests that a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and citizenship are enhanced by frequent opportunities to strengthen social competence during early childhood (Hartup & Moore, 1990; Ladd & Profilet, 1996; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999).
- Research underscores the fact that promoting young children’s social-emotional competencies significantly enhances school readiness and success (Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Freedman, 2003).

#### **Elementary School:**

- Results from three large-scale reviews of research on the impact of social and emotional learning by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in 2008 found that SEL programs yielded positive benefits including:



- 23% improvement in social and emotional skills
- 9% improvement in attitudes about self, others and school
- 9% improvement in school and classroom behavior
- 10% decrease in emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression
- 11% increase in achievement test scores (Payton, et al. 2008)
- Extensive developmental research indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competence is associated with greater well-being and better school performance, whereas the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).
- Social and emotional learning has a positive effect on academic performance, including improved skills and grades in math, language arts, and social studies, and better problem-solving and planning skills, and subject mastery (Durlak & Weissberg, 2005; Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hawkins, 1999; Wilson et al., 2001; Zins & Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2004).
- “Mental health is a critical component of children’s learning and general health. Fostering social and emotional health in children as a part of healthy child development must therefore be a national priority.” (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000, p. 3).

## **Research Findings Related to the Development of the Kimochis® Curriculum**

The Kimochis® curriculum is based on sound theories of child development and social-emotional learning. Scientific, empirically-based research studies were referred to while developing the Kimochis® lessons to ensure that concepts and approaches that have proven to have beneficial effects on the development of social-emotional skills in children were included. A number of theoretical models and conceptual paradigms were studied, including, theories of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 2000), Social-Information Processing Model (Crick & Dodge, 1994), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Kendall, 2005).

In addition, research completed by leading experts in the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was reviewed. Maurice Elias, a renowned SEL researcher, and his colleagues define SEL as “the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively” (1997). The goals of an SEL program are to foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2003). These five core competencies provide children a foundation for better adjustment and academic achievement as shown by more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al., 2003). As children master these competencies, they can connect with their own beliefs and values, develop concern for others, make good decisions, and take responsibility for their choices and behaviors. Accordingly, Kimochis® lessons were developed around these five core competencies. The Kimochis® lessons and objectives for Early Childhood and Elementary Age students are outlined on pages 7 and 8.



## Research Findings Related to the Five Core Competencies and the Kimochis® Lessons

### Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and name your own emotions. Self-awareness also involves the ability to understand your values and needs, as well as your strengths and limitations. This awareness of self is crucial to early school success. When a child has an awareness of his/her own emotions, s/he can learn to regulate or modulate them, an essential factor that influences getting along with peers and coping in a school environment. Research by Marsh and colleagues (Marsh, Craven and Debus, 1998; Marsh, Ellis and Craven, 2002) has shown that four-year-olds have an understanding of their psychological selves and of their feelings and intentions. As self understanding develops, it guides moral development and also sets the stage for self control and self regulation. Young children who can identify emotions in themselves are more likely to have success when they transition into kindergarten (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1992). As a child's self-awareness develops, they can label their own emotions and identify the emotions of others. As Daniel Goleman states in his influential book, *Emotional Intelligence*, "Self-awareness, recognizing a feeling as it happens, is the keystone of emotional intelligence. The ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment is also crucial to psychological insight and self-understanding. People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives (Goleman, 1995, p. 43)."

The Kimochis® lessons teach children to identify the nonverbal components (tone of voice, facial expressions, body language) of feelings. Children practice naming situations or experiences that often cause a specific feeling or feelings. Children learn to understand that feelings are messy and that we might have several feelings that occur at the same time! Lessons focus on building emotional literacy, the ability to identify, understand, and respond to emotions in oneself and others in a healthy manner (Joseph, 2003). When children know a wide range of emotion words (beyond *happy, mad, sad*), it is easier for them to understand their emotional experiences and to communicate with others about their feelings. Children are introduced to the concept of how to redo a social mistake, the first step of which requires an awareness of actually making a mistake. They practice how to *own up* and *come clean* as ways to make amends for mistakes. Children also learn that they need to be aware of how they are *coming across* to others in their nonverbal and verbal communication. Activities focus on heightening awareness of these concepts. Educators are encouraged to guide and prompt children to pay attention to their communication and emotions in social interactions throughout the school day.

### Self-Management

Self-management is the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors so that goals are achieved. It also involves persevering with difficult tasks and in complex social interactions. Self-management is a complicated, developmental process for young children (Kopp and Weyer, 1994). It requires children to remember and generalize what they have been taught by caregivers, to initiate changes in their behavior, and to constantly monitor their behavior in varying situations. These foundational self-management skills are emerging during the preschool years as the brain develops (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Development in self-management can be seen in the difference between the impulsivity of a toddler and the deliberate

behavior of a four year-old entering kindergarten in the fall. The relevancy of self-management skills to school success is obvious. When children can control impulses and cope with strong feelings in emotionally charged situations, they will be more successful in school (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). In fact, some studies that have shown that certain aspects of self-regulation predict children's reading and math achievement in the early primary grades (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1993; Howse, 2003). Additionally, the ability to effectively manage emotions contributes to less aggression and fewer problems with substance abuse (Brady, et al., 1998; Vitaro, 1998). Children with poor regulation skills are likely to have conflict-based relationships with their teachers and peers, which can lead to school problems and possible school dropout (Bandera, 2003). When educators are asked to identify areas of critical importance with regard to school success, they often name competence in cooperation and self-control as highly significant (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003). There is some evidence that emotion regulation is a better predictor of school readiness than IQ (Blair & Razza, 2007). Children can learn strategies to manage their emotions and cope with stressful situations. Research suggests that teaching children strategies such as thinking calming thoughts, deep breathing, doing a calming activity and reframing stressful situations by focusing on positive promotes effective management of feelings such as anger (Nelson and Finch, 2000) and impatience (Metcalf and Mischel, 1999; Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998).

The Kimochis® curriculum emphasizes the importance of teaching children to handle positive (happiness, pride) and negative (mad, frustrated, disappointed) emotions in ways that are productive and socially appropriate. The focus is on helping both educators and children understand that feelings fuel behavior (*Feeling-Behavior Link*). Lessons teach strategies such as taking *Cool Down* breaths, repeating positive self-talk strategies, and reframing upsetting situations in a more positive light. Children learn to regulate their tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, actions and word choice. Lessons help children to recognize how difficult it is to use emotion-management strategies when feelings are high. So, children are given opportunities to practice these strategies “out of the moment” when they can rely on logical reasoning and adult prompting to manage emotions (Metcalf and Mischel, 1999). Role-plays, puppet enactments and games give children practice in predictable social situations. Educators are provided ideas on how to prompt children to use their emotional regulation strategies when needed in social settings.

## **Social Awareness**

Social awareness is the ability to understand what others are feeling and to be able to take their perspective. This is often described as “theory of mind.” Researchers also talk about social awareness as the development of *empathy*, which is the response we have when we are able to recognize and understand another's emotions. Preschoolers who are more socially and emotionally perceptive have greater success in their relationships with peers and adults (Denham, 2003). Young children who are adept at understanding other's feelings tend to have more academic success at the primary level (Izard, 2002; Dowsett & Huston, 2005). Preschoolers progress through a period of development that helps them to understand that people's intentions, desires, feelings, thoughts and beliefs are motivators of behavior. As their ability to identify emotions in others increases, they are able to explain the causes of emotions and their consequences in developmentally more complex ways (Denham, 2006; Lagattuta & Thompson, 2006). Empathy plays an important role in relationship to academic and emotional success. Kaukiainen (1999) found that children who had good perspective-taking skills were less likely to be physically, verbally and



emotionally aggressive toward their peers. Other researchers have found that empathic children support their peers more frequently, are better liked and have higher academic achievement (Litvack-Miller, McDougall, & Romney, 1997; Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, & Ackerman, 2001).

The Kimochis® program helps children to be aware of others' emotions and intentions by teaching them simple observation and communication strategies. Young children learn the importance of getting the attention of a peer or an adult in way that feels good to all. Children learn to use people's names, gain eye contact before speaking and to use a gentle tap (*communication tap*) on the shoulder. These communication tools send the message that the communication intent is positive and that everyone is prepared for an interaction. Social awareness is learning how to pay attention to what others are doing and feeling. Most children have a desire to be kind and compassionate when they notice others are feeling left out or sad, but they may not know what words to say or actions to take. Kimochis® lesson teach children strategies on how to actively include others and be kind to partners even if that partner may not be their first choice. Through repeated practice in role plays outside of emotional moments, children can learn how to coordinate their own desires, needs, and interests with those of others.

## **Relationship Skills**

To be successful in school, children need to be able to form positive social relationships, work cooperatively in teams and deal effectively with conflict. Research suggests that children can develop positive peer relationships, acceptance and friendships when taught social skills through intentional instruction, practice opportunities, and guidance in teachable moments (Dunn & McGuire, 1992). Children who learn social-emotional skills early in life are more self-confident, trusting, empathic, intellectually inquisitive, competent in using language to communicate, and capable of relating well to others (Cohen, Onunaku, Clothier, & Poppe, 2005). When young children are provided practical social-emotional strategies and modeling by adults, they can develop the ability to initiate and join groups of peers, to cooperatively and spontaneously share with others, to communicate in ways that others understand, and to use strategies (i.e., turn-taking) to avoid conflict (Howes, 1987, 1988; Vandell, Nenide & Van Winkle, 2006). Children who enjoy positive relationships with peers experience higher levels of emotional well-being, and have self-beliefs that are stronger and more adaptive than children without positive peer relationships. They also tend to be engaged in and even excel at academic tasks more than those who have peer relationship problems (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Wentzel, 2005). Students who have established friendships with classmates are more likely to enjoy a relatively safe school environment and are less likely to be the targets of peer-directed violence and harassment than their counterparts without friends (Schwartz et al., 2000). When children can use effective social problem solving skills, they develop an ability to cope with stress (Dubow & Tisak, 1989; Elias & Clabby, 1988), handle interpersonal situations (Elias & Clabby, 1988), experience more positive social adjustment, improve academically, and show improvements in behavior (Dubow & Tisak, 1989; Gootman, 2001; Nelson et al, 1996).

The development of relationship skills is at the heart of the Kimochis® Way! When children have positive relationships they are happier, healthier and more productive. The combination of modeling (teacher, puppet, and peer), practice, coaching, and positive reinforcement is an established best practice to teach



social behaviors to children (Elliot and Gresham, 1993). The Kimochis® curriculum provides educators a number of activities and lessons that focus on building the interpersonal skills of children of all ages. Younger children will need intentional instruction and guidance in sharing and taking turns. By using the Kimochis® characters as puppets, young children can learn the communication scripts needed to solve commonly-occurring social problems in preschool (i.e., hitting, grabbing, yelling). Lessons for older children focus on implementing role plays that give children practice in using important skills such as joining groups, apologizing sincerely, forgiving in compassionate and caring ways and standing up for yourself and others. Ideas are provided for additional activities such as reading related children’s books, engaging in art activities, asking older children to journal as ways to extend the learning beyond the Kimochis® lessons. Letters and activity pages are available to send home to parents so they can understand the skills and common language practiced in the Kimochis® lessons and the social-emotional learning can be extended into the home setting.

### **Responsible Decision Making**

All educators and parents strive to teach children how to make responsible decisions. Children can learn to make ethical and constructive choices about their personal and social behavior. Focus in the classroom and school community needs to be placed on problem solving, reflection, perceptive thinking, self-direction, and motivation-skills that will contribute to life-long success (Adams and Hamm 1994). Research shows that students need effective problem-solving skills when making decisions about social situations (Denham & Almeida, 1987). Children also need to know how to make good choices about their own behavior in the classroom and at school. A number of research teams have found that individual differences in children’s cooperation capacities are directly associated with children’s academic achievement in the early primary grades (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber 1993; McClelland, Morrison, Holmes 2000). Children can practice making responsible social and behavioral decisions appropriate to their age level and can learn how to make choices that are respectful, realistic and responsible. They also need to think about how their actions will affect themselves and others, what their options actually are and what the outcome of their chosen path is likely to be.

The Kimochis® lessons provide structured opportunities for skill instruction and practice in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship skills. Intentional teaching combined with adult prompting, positive reinforcement, peer-to-peer monitoring and student monitoring promotes the use of the learned skills throughout the school day and in settings outside of the school community. This instruction, practice and generalization build the foundation for children to become skilled at social problem-solving and responsible decision making. As children master the skills in the Kimochis® lessons, they are on their way to knowing how to conduct themselves with personal, moral and emotional responsibility.

## Kimochis® Educator’s Tool Kit: Curriculum Lessons

<b>CASEL Core Competencies*</b> Children will be able to :	<b>Early Childhood Lesson objectives</b> Children will be able to:	<b>Elementary Age Lesson objectives</b> Children will be able to:
<p><b>Self-Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize &amp; name emotions</li> <li>• Understand reasons &amp; circumstances for feelings</li> <li>• Know needs &amp; values</li> <li>• Describe interests &amp; values</li> <li>• Accurately assess strengths &amp; challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify &amp; name feelings</li> <li>• Show an understanding of different facial expressions</li> <li>• Describe social situations that can create a feeling</li> <li>• Relate to Kimochis® characters’ personalities</li> <li>• Identify the difference between a taking voice/face/body &amp; a fighting voice/face/body</li> <li>• Identify the difference between helping and hurtful words</li> <li>• Show an understanding of how to act at silly and serious times</li> <li>• Identify how to make a safe choices when curious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify &amp; name feelings</li> <li>• Show an understanding of different facial expressions</li> <li>• Relate to Kimochis® characters’ personalities</li> <li>• Describe social situations that can create certain feelings</li> <li>• Identify the difference between a taking voice/face/body &amp; a fighting voice/face/body</li> <li>• Identify the difference between helping &amp; hurtful words</li> <li>• Identify when a redo is needed</li> <li>• Recognize social cues &amp; be sure that silliness is fun for everyone</li> <li>• Demonstrate an understanding of how you are <i>coming across</i></li> <li>• Demonstrate how to <i>own up &amp; come clean</i> when mistakes are made</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage stress &amp; control impulses</li> <li>• Verbalize &amp; cope appropriately with challenging emotions</li> <li>• Persevere in overcoming obstacles</li> <li>• Set &amp; monitor progress toward the achievement of personal &amp; academic goals</li> <li>• Modify performance based on feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a taking voice/face/body</li> <li>• Demonstrate how to use <i>Cool Down</i> strategies to express upset feelings in a positive way</li> <li>• Use self-soothing strategies to comfort self when sad</li> <li>• Use self-regulation tools to manage scared feelings</li> <li>• Demonstrate words &amp; actions to use when others hit, push, yell</li> <li>• Demonstrate how to use <i>Stop hands</i> to resolve conflicts</li> <li>• Demonstrate how to label hurtful words with “Ouch”</li> <li>• Demonstrate how to manage silliness in a safe &amp; friendly way</li> <li>• Redo cranky moments</li> <li>• Take back bossy talk</li> <li>• Demonstrate how to accept a compliment in a positive way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate talking tone of voice, face &amp; body (positive nonverbal communication)</li> <li>• Demonstrate <i>Cool Down</i> strategies to cope with upset feelings</li> <li>• Show how to use a talking hand &amp; <i>Stop hands</i> to resolve conflicts</li> <li>• Use positive self-talk scripts to move through upset feelings</li> <li>• Cope with statements that are <i>Big mean things that aren’t true</i></li> <li>• Show how to stay focused &amp; not get distracted by others</li> <li>• Use positive self-talk to try new things</li> <li>• Redo a hurtful social moment</li> <li>• Show how to express happy, excited, silly, &amp; curious feelings with safe &amp; wise choices</li> <li>• Show how to <i>give/receive a knowing look</i> to help peers redo hurtful moments</li> <li>• Identify ways to warn others when upset</li> <li>• Use self-regulation tools to manage expressions of pride without bragging</li> </ul>

<b>CASEL Core Competencies*</b> Children will be able to :	<b>Early Childhood Lesson objectives</b> Children will be able to:	<b>Elementary Age Lesson objectives</b> Children will be able to:
<p><b>Social Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand others' perspectives, feelings &amp; points of view</li> <li>Show empathy &amp; sensitivity to others' feelings</li> <li>Recognize &amp; appreciate individual &amp; group similarities &amp; differences</li> <li>Show respect to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate how to get a person's attention in an appropriate way</li> <li>Demonstrate how to use a talking hand to resolve conflicts</li> <li>Use words &amp; actions when peers cut in line, get in your way or invade your space</li> <li>Respect others' personal &amp; space boundaries</li> <li>Demonstrate caring actions toward peers who are feeling sad</li> <li>Offer encouragement to peers who are frustrated</li> <li>Demonstrate how to give compliments to peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate how to get a person's attention in an appropriate way</li> <li>Include others who are feeling left out</li> <li>Demonstrate how to accept &amp; work with a partner kindly &amp; respectfully</li> <li>Show an understanding about the concept of <i>first impressions</i></li> <li>Show a positive response when peers brag</li> <li>Demonstrate how to avoid taking peers' negative words personally</li> <li>Respect others' personal &amp; space boundaries</li> <li>Recognize &amp; offer support to peers</li> <li>Respect others' feelings of fear &amp; sadness</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationship Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish &amp; maintain healthy, rewarding relationships based on cooperation</li> <li>Show sensitivity to social-emotional cues</li> <li>Prevent, manage, &amp; resolve interpersonal conflicts</li> <li>Communicate clearly</li> <li>Engage others in social situations</li> <li>Seek &amp; provide help when needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate saying hello &amp; giving <i>Friendly Signals</i> to connect with others</li> <li>Demonstrate sharing &amp; turn-taking</li> <li>Demonstrate how to get included when left out</li> <li>Include peers who are left out</li> <li>Offer comfort to peers who are sad</li> <li>Use a communication tool to set limits when others are cranky or bossy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate how to use greetings &amp; <i>Friendly Signals</i> to connect with others</li> <li>Demonstrate positive ways to get included in play &amp; conversation</li> <li>Set boundaries when peers are too silly</li> <li>Apologize with sincerity &amp; truthfulness</li> <li>Forgive others who make hurtful mistakes</li> <li>Let others try again</li> <li>Listen to why your words &amp;/or actions can create upset feelings</li> <li>Use communication tools to set limits when others are upset</li> <li>Demonstrate how to act in kind &amp; caring ways when others are upset</li> <li>Identify when &amp; how to get adult help</li> <li>Connect with another's pride positively</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsible Decision-Making</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze &amp; identify problems</li> <li>Use social decision-making skills</li> <li>Respond constructively to interpersonal obstacles</li> <li>Conduct self with moral &amp; personal responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify strategies to stay safe when trying new things</li> <li>Demonstrate how to tell the truth</li> <li>Name how to solve problems through curiosity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stand up for what is right</li> <li>Stand up for self &amp; others</li> <li>Demonstrate how to <i>bounce back</i> when obstacles arise</li> <li>Assume the best in social interactions</li> <li>Demonstrate how to do the right thing when others do the wrong thing</li> <li>Demonstrate hope &amp; activate optimism that things will work out</li> </ul>

\* **Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning** has identified five core competencies that are learned through social and emotional interventions, all crucial to life, learning and work (CASEL, 2003)

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