All Theses And Dissertations   Theses and Dissertations

4-2020

Educator Perceptions Of Social-Emotional Learning Embedded In Academic Instruction To Improve Student Outcomes

Christopher T. Basta
University of New England

Follow this and additional works at: https://dune.une.edu/theses

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, and the Educational Leadership Commons

Preferred Citation

EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING EMBEDDED IN

ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

By

Christopher T. Basta

BA Sociology & Anthropology, Fairfield University, 1996
MAT, Sacred Heart University, 2006

A DISSERTAION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

April, 2020

Christopher T. Basta
April, 2020
Educational Leadership

EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING EMBEDDED IN

ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

ABSTRACT

Society, parenting, and public education have changed drastically over the past several decades. As a result, public schools recognize the need to address student social and emotional learning (SEL) in addition to their academic growth. Although there is abundant research into the benefits of SEL and various methods for delivering SEL instruction, there is a dearth of research studying teacher perceptions and understandings of SEL embedded in academic instruction. The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning (SEL) during academic instruction. This phenomenological study's research questions were (a) How do teachers' past experiences and training with embedding social-emotional learning in academic instruction inform their approach to teaching? and (b) How and to what extent do teachers perceive they are addressing their students' social-emotional needs during academic instruction?

Six teachers from a kindergarten to fourth grade public school participated in this study. Data was collected via an SEL survey, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Participants had a general understanding of SEL and focused their related work with students around the SEL competency of relationship skills. Each of the six participants relied on the

stand-alone SEL program, Second Step, as the sole way of addressing the five SEL competencies with their students. There was little to no evidence of participants purposefully having students apply these competencies within academic settings. The researcher noted that participants addressed student emotions and relationships across their school day, but did not embed social and emotional skill instruction, practice, or application within academic content instruction.

All school districts must critically examine how they have implemented SEL and provide ongoing, targeted professional development to staff related to the five SEL competencies and embedding SEL within academic instruction. There is a need for future research into how teachers' own social emotional development and SEL training impacts their ability to deliver meaningful, embedded SEL instruction to their student during academic instruction. Further investigation is also needed to determine to what extent a teacher's inclusion of SEL during academic instruction improves academic performance for students compared to classrooms where SEL is provided only via a stand-alone program.

KEYWORDS: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Trauma, K-4 Education, SEL
Competencies

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Christopher T. Basta

It was presented on
April 2, 2020
and approved by:

Suzan Nelson, EdD, Lead Advisor
University of New England

Corinna Crafton, EdD, Secondary Advisor
University of New England

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) noted that social and emotional learning (SEL) develops from prekindergarten through grade 12. However, educational reforms in the United States during the 1990s and 2000s focused on rigorous content standards in language arts and mathematics measured by high stakes comprehensive standardized testing at the expense of instructional activities aligned with SEL (CASEL, 2013). Public schools rode the tidal wave of reform and regulation by focusing teacher training and development as well as classroom time on research-based, best practices in academic instruction (Frey, Fisher, & Smith, 2019). Unintended consequences of this shift may include increased teacher burn-out, higher levels of stress and anxiety among students, and increased student dysregulation (Dacey, Criscitiello, & Devlin, 2017). Addressing the needs of the whole child, though often part of a school's vision statement, has become elusive. Significant research points to the positive impact on academic achievement and prosocial behavior when schools address self-regulation, attention, and cognitive skills, especially for subgroups of students who are marginalized or at-risk (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Additionally, a vast amount of research suggests that children who have experienced trauma are more likely to demonstrate maladaptive behaviors that limit academic growth and correlate to health concerns as adults (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015; Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, Koss, & Marks, 1998; Frey et al., 2019; Jensen, 2017). Students who demonstrate complex behaviors in class due to trauma and lagging SEL skills contribute to the achievement gap that persists in most schools in America (Dacey et al., 2017).

The Common Core State Standards and related high stakes testing, which were direct or indirect results of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, have exponentially expanded the focus on academic instruction, primarily in language arts and mathematics, in most public schools across the United States (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019; Kohler, Christensen, & Kilgo, 2012). Classroom interactions, lessons, and activities that did not have a direct correlation to improved test scores were reduced or eliminated (Baines & Slutsky, 2009). To exacerbate matters, changes in society, technology, and parenting have greatly reduced opportunities for children to naturally develop social skills through free play and discourse. Today, children spend more time on electronic devices than playing outside or having conversations with parents and peers (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019). As a result, children have limited opportunities to practice navigating interpersonal relationships and developing social skills (Dacey et al., 2017). In addition to increased screen time, demographical changes have occurred in many New England school districts. As the population of ABC Elementary School (a pseudonym for the site of the study) has shifted, the increased emphasis on academic rigor and high stakes testing along with major social changes have resulted in an increased prevalence of anxiety, frustration, and behavioral challenges among the student population, which impacts academic growth.

Increasingly, research suggests that intentional social-emotional skills instruction that is embedded within all aspects of a student's day and is part of a larger positive school climate framework decreases maladaptive behavior and improves academic performance (Bailey, Stickle, Brion-Meisels, & Jones, 2019; Frey et al., 2019). In recent years, a majority of states have developed SEL standards, recommendations, and position statements to provide guidance to schools as they support students' SEL growth and development (CASEL, 2013). The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015, which replaced NCLB, has removed some of the

emphasis on national accountability and opened the door for a more balanced approach to education that addresses the SEL needs of students (Dennis, 2016). Schools and districts in states targeting SEL will need to secure funding to develop school-wide comprehensive SEL plans, and to plan ongoing professional development for teachers focused on intentional social skills instruction (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018; Frey et al., 2019; Rennie Center, 2015).

CASEL (2013) and Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullotta (2015), identified five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Numerous studies, curricula, and programs have been developed to study and address these five SEL competencies in P-12 education. Research has shown that lagging social-emotional skills can impact future growth in all areas of development (CASEL, 2013; Frey et al., 2019). Incorporating SEL into all aspects of a student's school day can improve growth in all academic areas and can help reduce achievement gaps between subgroups of students (Goodwin, 2018).

ABC Elementary School is a small semi-rural town in southwestern Connecticut. The population of the town of ABC is about 10,000 with about 500 preschool to fourth grade students attending the school. In the early 2000s, a period of declining enrollment occurred in the district, which is just plateauing now. ABC Elementary School's student population has stabilized, but the demographics are shifting. A once primarily white, upper-middle class community is becoming more diverse. There are more students with special needs, language barriers, and behavioral concerns than ever before. The district and school administrative teams have started to work on long-range strategic plans to deliver the same high-quality education to a changing student population. These plans include ideas like innovations in space utilization, schedule design, student groupings, mastery-based learning, project-based learning, curriculum redesign,

and teaching strategies. Innovation to meet the needs of all students at ABC Elementary School will require funding and further research and study as well as collaboration between all stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

Although there is abundant research into the benefits of SEL and various methods for delivering SEL instruction, there is a dearth of research studying teacher perceptions and understandings of SEL embedded in academic instruction. Griggs, Mikami, and Rimm-Kaufman (2016) noted that future research should examine how teacher beliefs about and perceptions of student behavior might impact the choice and efficacy of strategies they use when working with students demonstrating challenging or noncompliant behavior.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher understandings and perceptions of social-emotional learning (SEL) during academic instruction and its impact on their students' social-emotional development. This study focused on kindergarten through fourth grade teachers in the ABC School District, which has suburban to rural characteristics. This study built on existing research by examining teacher knowledge of student social-emotional development and pedagogy and observing how that understanding influences academic instructional models in elementary classrooms. The study aimed to provide guidance to teachers, educational leaders, and other stakeholders about shifting instructional models to address the SEL needs of all students to reduce anxiety and behavioral concerns while continuing to improve student academic growth and performance.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers' past experiences and training with embedding social-emotional learning in academic instruction inform their approach to teaching?

2. How and to what extent do teachers perceive they are addressing their students' social-emotional needs during academic instruction?

Conceptual Framework

This study was centered on the researcher's personal interest in elementary education, current trends in social-emotional learning, and the theories of Vygotsky and Bandura. The researcher's interest in the topic of this study came from his many years as an elementary school educator and administrator. For close to 20 years, the researcher has worked with elementary school children and teachers. During this time, there have been many changes in society, technology, teaching pedagogy, and the culture of childhood (Rennie Center, 2015). As an administrator, the researcher's approach to working with educators has evolved to focus on encouraging teachers to develop relationships with students and to see each student as an individual with unique life experiences, strengths, needs, and areas for growth. The burgeoning emphasis on SEL in the field of education dovetails nicely with the researcher's work with educators.

Theories by both Vygotsky and Bandura support aspects of SEL being put into practice in schools today. Vygotsky's theory of social development (1962) suggested that children develop cognitive skills via co-construction and social interactions with peers and adults as well as with cultural signs like oral language, imaginative play, and writing. Children are prepared to develop

different cognitive skills at varying times based on their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1962) noted that adults should vary the level of support and modeling they provide students to increase independence as they acquire new skills. As they grow, children regulate themselves with adult support until they learn to self-regulate using internal self-talk (Vygotsky, 1962).

Bandura's social cognitive theory provides more insight into how children learn via social interactions (1977). Children learn new behaviors, including the five SEL competencies, by observing and interacting with others (Bandura, 1977). As children progress through their ZPD, they develop internal models for behavior as well as consequences for said behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Much of the research and current trends in SEL are supported by and outgrowths of the work of Vygotsky and Bandura (Frey et al., 2019).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Conducting research in a district where the researcher was formerly employed necessarily introduces the researcher into the research. In order to address this potential subjectivity, the qualitative style of rhetorical assumption was used to communicate the findings of the study. To ensure fidelity, experiences and opinions of the participants gleaned from the qualitative instrument used for interviews was presented using explicit language, scholarly interpretations, and personal narration. The study was also conducted under the assumption that the participants were honest when sharing their experiences and training with SEL during the interviews.

Like many qualitative studies, this study was limited by a few factors including data collection and analysis processes, subjectivity of the data, and the influences of the researcher's experiences on data interpretation. The researcher chose to limit the number of study participants to between six and eight educators at one elementary school for this study due to the

scope of the research involved and data collection procedures. The time that the teachers needed to dedicate to this study was taken into consideration based on their current schedules and work conditions. This was the primary delimitation because the researcher would have preferred to interview a wider range of teachers from each grade level K-4 at multiple sites. As a qualitative research study focusing on the lived experiences of a small group of participants, a limitation of the findings is that they may be transferable to other sites but not necessarily generalizable to all sites (Anderson, 2010).

Rationale and Significance

Elementary educators should be trained to address the social-emotional needs of students in addition to traditional academics (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). Professional development for teachers and preparation programs for teaching candidates are most effective at improving SEL implementation in the classroom when they are individualized, ongoing, and embedded within the classroom setting (Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014; Schluntz, 2018). Significant research suggests that student learning improves and academic achievement gaps between subgroups of students are reduced when elementary education is student-centered, data-informed, inquiry-based, inclusive of academic and social-emotional skill development, trauma-informed, engaging, collaborative, and supported by a comprehensive teacher evaluation system that focuses on individual teacher growth (Bailey et al., 2019; Felitti et al., 1998; Frey et al., 2019; *From a Nation*, 2019; Perry, 2007; Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016).

This study is significant for a variety of stakeholders including elementary educators, school and district administrators, curriculum directors and developers, public school board members, directors and facilitators of teacher preparation programs, and education policy makers. High stakes testing and rigorous content standards driven by national legislation and

reforms during the 1990s and 2000s have coalesced with major changes in society including the prominence of social media to exacerbate the need for elementary schools to incorporate social emotional learning into all aspects of a student's daily experience (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019). There is strong support for SEL in schools from various stakeholders nationwide (Frey et al., 2019). This research study was necessary in order to gain an understanding of how elementary educators' understanding of and training with SEL is translating into daily embedded SEL instruction.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap. Any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2019).

At-risk. Refers to students or subgroups of students who have an increased likelihood of dropping out of school or failing academically due to circumstances like poverty, discrimination, homelessness, serious health issues, domestic violence, learning disabilities, disciplinary problems, and grade retentions (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2019).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. The latest federal reauthorization of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which has replaced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

High stakes testing. Any test used to make important decisions about students, educators, schools, or districts, most commonly for the purpose of accountability and used to determine punishments, accolades, student advancement, or salary compensation for teachers and administrators (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2019).

Maladaptive behavior. Refers to any behaviors that reduce or prevent a person from adjusting to conflict, challenges, or changes in a situation or environment. Examples of maladaptive behavior include self-harm, task avoidance, tantrums, and harming others (Moran, 2016).

Mastery-based learning. Refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2019).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which is the central federal law in pre-collegiate education.

Project-based learning. Refers to any programmatic or instructional approach that utilizes multifaceted projects as a central organizing strategy for educating students (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2019).

Relationship skills. The ability to cultivate and sustain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups, and to communicate clearly for effective problem-solving; elements include communication, relationship-building, social engagement, and teamwork (CASEL, 2013).

Responsible decision-making. The ability to make healthy, informed choices about behavior and social interactions based on social norms, safety concerns, ethical standards, and potential consequences for self and others; elements include identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and ethical responsibility (CASEL, 2013).

Scaffolding instruction. Lev Vygotsky (1962) defined the development of cognition through the co-construction of learning and denoted the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as

an educational trajectory. Scaffolding teaching within a child's ZPD is essential to advance learning from the most assistance on a task to a level of independence.

Self-awareness. The ability to recognize one's own thoughts, emotions, and values and how they impact choices and behavior; elements include identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (CASEL, 2013).

Self-management. The ability to regulate one's own thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in novel and evolving situations; elements include effectively managing stress, self-discipline, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself (CASEL, 2013).

Social and emotional learning (SEL). Social and emotional learning "involves the processes of developing social and emotional competencies in children" (CASEL, 2013, p. 9).

Social awareness. The ability to perceive and empathize with the perspective of others, including those outside one's own social group, and to recognize social and ethical behavioral norms; elements include perspective taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respecting others (CASEL, 2013).

Social competencies. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning outlined five social and emotional developmental competencies; self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2013).

Social skills instruction. Social skills instruction was defined as explicit and direct instructional practices that describe, model, and role-play social and emotional learning behaviors with specific feedback (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

Vicarious reinforcement. Children and adults develop understandings about the consequences and outcomes of new behaviors by observing the results of said behaviors in others (Bandura, 1977).

Whole child. Head start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) both defined teaching the whole child as addressing the comprehensive needs of children focusing on cognitive, developmental, socio-emotional, medical, and family needs (Walker, 2014).

Conclusion

As the push for academic rigor has increased over the last few decades due to political movements, legislation, and high stakes testing; concurrently, opportunities for children to develop SEL skills have been reduced or even disappeared (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019). At the same time, the impact of childhood trauma on student behavior and development has been well documented (Bailey et al., 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Felitti et al., 1998; Perry, 2007; Plumb et al., 2016). This study aimed to make the case for instructional transformation at the elementary school level in order to meet the evolving social-emotional learning needs of children today. This was done by examining teacher understandings of child development and social-emotional learning and the instructional strategies teachers use in their work with students.

Chapter 1 of this study included an introduction, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the study's research questions, significance of the study, and key terms. Chapter 2 encompasses the study's conceptual framework and a review of the literature as it relates to the theoretical framework, kindergarten through fourth grade pedagogy, embedded social skills instruction, and the research questions. Chapter 3 illustrates the methodology used in this study and includes an overview of the study, the participants, the sampling strategy, the instruments,

the design, the data collection and analysis process, limitations, and ethical issues. Chapter 4

depicts the analysis of the data and results of the research conducted. Chapter 5 discusses results

of the study, conclusions, and recommendations of future studies.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For several decades, elementary school classrooms in the United States have experienced a major shift towards more academic rigor and fewer opportunities for social and emotional learning (SEL) and development (Kohler et al., 2012). The result is that the nation's youngest learners spend more instructional time on content related to rigorous national standards and high-stakes testing than they do on the critical SEL competencies, identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015), including self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making. In a world that is increasingly dominated by social media, the 24-hour news cycle, and instant digital communication, as well as the often-hostile interactions that spread virally via those mediums, the need for SEL in elementary school classrooms is evident (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning (SEL) and how they embed SEL within academic instruction to meet the social-emotional needs of their students. This study focused on kindergarten through fourth grade teachers in a small town in Connecticut with a population of about 10,000 residents, which has suburban to rural characteristics. The problem this study addressed was that, although there is abundant research into the benefits of SEL and various methods for delivering SEL instruction, there is a dearth of research about teacher perceptions and understandings of SEL embedded in academic instruction. This study built on previous research by examining teacher knowledge of student social-emotional development and pedagogy and observing how that understanding influences academic instructional models in elementary classrooms.

The researcher examined the research questions (a) How do teachers' past experiences and training with embedding social-emotional learning in academic instruction inform their approach to teaching? and (b) How and to what extent do teachers perceive they are addressing their students' social-emotional needs during academic instruction? As part of this study, a literature review was conducted in which the researcher examined peer reviewed journal articles, policy papers, books, dissertations, and government publications to establish a broad foundation for the study. Topics that developed out of the literature review include social and emotional learning, social competencies, teacher perceptions of SEL, trauma's impact on SEL, the Common Core State Standards, classroom quality, and intentional social skills instruction.

This review of the literature illustrated the need to focus on teacher perceptions and understandings about the development of social competencies along with academic skills in elementary education in Connecticut. The study is grounded in various social development theories. Social-emotional learning, classroom quality, and intentional social skills instruction are all necessary elements of comprehensive elementary school classrooms (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018; Frey et al., 2019). The intentional teaching of social skills is essential and attainable using social-emotional curricula and standards (Frey et al., 2019). Furthermore, the social qualities of a classroom can be measured in various ways including the impact of teacher-student interactions and peer engagement (Ansari & Pianta, 2018).

This chapter begins by elucidating literature related to social and emotional learning, social competencies, and classroom quality. This is followed by the conceptual framework used in this study, including the work of theorists about child development, learning, social interactions, and play that form the study's theoretical framework. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings of the literature review.

Understanding how teachers are addressing SEL needs in their classrooms will help educational leaders support teachers and provide professional development that will improve student SEL development and also academic success. Students who experience trauma through their development tend to have lagging social-emotional skills, which can impact their academic success (Anderson, et al., 2015; Frey et al., 2019). Some studies have shown a correlation between Free/Reduced Lunch status and trauma (Dacey et al., 2017). Therefore, students who are considered at-risk are likely to experience trauma that may impact their social-emotional development. This work adds to the body of research regarding SEL, presents findings that can inform the support of all students, regardless of their social-emotional skill development. Educators can use findings to increase equity between students with diverse cultural backgrounds and home situations.

Social and Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning has the potential to narrow the achievement gap between subgroups on students, address some aspects of childhood trauma and its impact on student learning, and improve academic performance for all students (Frey et al., 2019). As many states incorporate the development of social emotional learning skills into their K-12 content standards and curricular frameworks, many schools around the United States have already implemented stand-alone or comprehensive SEL programs (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018). Even though educators experience what Fullan and Quinn (2016) call *initiative fatigue* caused by too many new initiatives, most teachers embrace the shift toward social emotional learning (SEL) as something that is critical for their students (Tomlinson, 2018). SEL is not defined by any program or curriculum, but rather as a way for students to recognize and celebrate one another's similarities and differences and to respectfully interact with each other (Tomlinson, 2018).

Social and emotional learning has been delineated as the process of developing social and emotional competencies in children and adults through instruction (CASEL, 2013). Both CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) identified five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Development of these competencies is an integral part of all classroom instruction, together with academic growth. Critical aspects of child development include mental well-being and prosocial skill development (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2012). Lagging social-emotional skills can impact future growth in all areas of development (CASEL, 2013; Frey et al., 2019). This may result in alienation from peers and the school community, reduced academic achievement, and increased noncompliant or aggressive behavior (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Frey et al., 2019). Direct instruction of SEL skills can improve outcomes for students socially as well as academically (Frey et al., 2019).

SEL should be embedded within all content area instructional activities (Fisher & Frey, 2018). SEL instruction has an effect size of .62 on academic achievement when taught intentionally by certified educators (Fisher & Frey, 2018). Elementary school teachers should intentionally link SEL with numeracy, literacy, and other content areas (Boyles, 2018). The development of social-emotional skills via the five CASEL SEL competencies helps all students demonstrate growth and can reduce achievement gaps between subgroups of students (Goodwin, 2018). A meta-analysis of 213 studies of SEL programs involving over 270,000 K-12 students found that students exposed to intentional social skill instruction via universal SEL programs "showed significantly more positive outcomes with respect to enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behavior, and academic performance, and significantly lower levels of conduct problems and emotional distress" (Mahoney et al., 2018, p. 19). On average, student academic

achievement was 11-points higher than control group students without SEL programming (Mahoney et al., 2018). SEL, when embedded into daily instruction, has the most impact on students with the greatest number of risk factors including low socio-economic status, chronic stress, and trauma (Bailey et al., 2019).

Public school educators teach students from a multitude of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds with varied abilities and unique needs. Social-emotional learning involves the processes through which children and adults learn and apply knowledge and strategies to identify and regulate emotions, develop positive goals and relationships, show empathy for others, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2013). Just as with academics, students are at various developmental stages and abilities related to social-emotional skill development. Social-emotional learning is a critical aspect of developing classroom community as well as delivering quality instruction (CASEL, 2013). Healthy child development is contingent on positive social-emotional and mental health with a special emphasis on the power of inquiry and free-play (Gray, 2013).

For various reasons, many students are deficient in these areas, which can manifest at school as negative behavior, poor health, inferior academic performance, and alienation from peers (*From a Nation*, 2019). Students with lagging communication and social-emotional skills are at higher risk of being victimized or marginalized by social groups and society (Frey et al., 2019). An integrated approach to school wide SEL instruction increases equity by developing students' ability to communicate, self-regulate, socialize, self-advocate, and learn in school and in society (Kubista, 2015). CASEL described five social and emotional competencies critical to healthy social development (2013).

Social Competencies

CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) identified five SEL social competencies which are highly recognized. The five competencies are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are integrated and growth or strength in one competency benefits the others.

Self-awareness. Self-awareness includes emotional expression, self-perception, and self-efficacy. The foundational skills of self-awareness are comprised of being able to identify one's own emotions, limitations, and strengths, having an appropriate sense of self-confidence, and being able to advocate for oneself (CASEL, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015). Metacognition is an important aspect of self-awareness that helps students reflect on and understand their feelings, the choices they make, and areas for personal and academic growth. A lack of self-awareness often manifests itself as emotional or behavioral outbursts, which occur after a student has reached a unique threshold or limit. Self-awareness is typically developed early, helps children develop coping mechanisms, and promotes social awareness (CASEL, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015).

Social awareness. CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) noted social awareness includes the ability to take on the perspective of others and show empathy, an appreciation for diversity, and respect for others. Social awareness enables children to understand and strive to meet the norms for behavior and ethics of the community and school environment (CASEL, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015). Children who lack social awareness often unintentionally break established behavioral norms and appear to show a lack of regard for peers.

Self-management. A third competency delineated by CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015), and critical to social development is self-management, which incorporates impulse control, self-discipline, stress management, self-motivation, goal setting, and regulating emotions. Children with strong self-management skills are successfully able to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and thoughts as situations around them develop and change. Children who lack self-management skills frequently behave impulsively without regard for consequences or impact on others (CASEL, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015).

Relationship skills. Another social competency is the development of relationship skills through healthy relationship building with diverse peers and adults, communication that is clear, listening to and cooperating with others, and learning how to seek help and display conflict resolution strategies when needed (CASEL, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015). Relationship skills are cultivated within a trusting and emotionally supportive environment. High levels of teacher emotional support are vital for children of all ages, regardless of socio-demographic risk factors (Pianta et al, 2008).

Responsible decision-making. The final social competency introduced by CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) is responsible decision-making, which includes the ability to make positive choices about behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety, and social norms. This fifth SEL competency is the culmination of the previous four. Responsible decision-making requires children to identify problems, analyze situations, develop alternatives, evaluate impact on self and others, and make choices about personal behavior and social interactions (CASEL, 2013; Weissberg et al., 2015). When children are able to make decisions responsibly, they are fully available for academic, social, and emotional growth.

These five SEL competencies are not instinctual in human beings. Children need to develop them over time with the help of caring, reliable adults in appealing and safe relationships and environments (CASEL, 2013). Children require differentiated support and scaffolding to develop in these areas (Frey et al., 2019). Classrooms and schools with strong SEL instruction provide students with opportunities to develop these critical social-emotional competencies and become contributing members of their communities, have a sense of connectedness, and increase intrinsic motivation (Durlak et al., 2011).

Teacher Perceptions of SEL

Research suggested that teacher perceptions of, experiences with, and attitude towards SEL impacts how they implement SEL within their own classroom (Ee & Quek, 2013; Poulou, Bassett, Denham, 2018). Ee and Ouek (2013) conducted a qualitative study of teacher perceptions of SEL in which they interviewed 19 educators in Singapore. The researchers noted that choices teachers make when designing lessons and addressing student social, emotional, and behavioral needs in the classroom were influenced by their own status with the five social competencies identified by CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) as well as their own personal investment in SEL as a worthwhile strategy to improve student outcomes (Ee & Quek, 2013). Ee and Ouek (2013) found that 33% of their subjects saw themselves as an SEL facilitator and 17% saw themselves as social-emotional skill role models. These relatively low percentages suggested that many educators are not prepared to deliver SEL instruction and support. The study suggested that teaching candidates take a social-emotional skill self-assessment and receive SEL training in teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers are prepared to educate students for the 21st century (Ee & Quek, 2013). The study also noted that

future research should examine how teacher understandings of SEL impacts the ways they integrate SEL into academic content instruction.

Poulou et al. (2018) examined longitudinal data from a previous study of teacher social competencies. They studied previously collected data from 80 preschool teachers in the United States related to the teachers' emotional behavior in the classroom. Concurrently, Poulou et al. (2018) collected data for 92 teachers in Greece. Data was collected during both processes using the Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS) and the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Appendix D), both of which were developed by Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey (2011). The results of the study indicated that teachers' perceptions of SEL predict students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties in both countries (Poulou et al., 2018). The researchers suggested that future studies should include qualitative data from teacher interviews and classroom observations.

Teacher SEL beliefs scale. Brackett et al. (2011) developed the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (see Appendix D) for researchers to use while assessing teacher perceptions of and beliefs about SEL. "Because teachers are the primary deliverers of SEL programming, their attitudes about and support for SEL can affect the adoption, sustainability, and impact of such programs" (Brackett et al., 2011, p. 220). Brackett et al. (2011) created a survey that focused on three primary areas related to teacher perceptions about SEL that impact implementation: teacher comfort with teaching SEL, teacher commitment to develop social-emotional skills, and the culture of the school to support SEL. To evaluate and validate their tool, Brackett et al. (2011) first administered their tool to 88 fifth and sixth grade teachers from diverse areas of the State of New York who had recently been trained to deliver an SEL program developed in conjunction with Yale University called RULER. The tool was further validated after it was administered to

600 kindergarten to eighth grade teachers from diverse areas of New York State (Brackett et al., 2011). The study suggested that "As the disseminators of knowledge in the classroom, teachers and their beliefs about SEL may shape the learning environment and in turn, impact students' developmental outcomes" (Brackett et al., 2011, p. 232). The researchers suggested that researchers, program developers, and school administrators can use the instrument to gauge a faculty's readiness for a new SEL program as well as their perceptions of, comfort with, and commitment to SEL programming (Brackett et al., 2011). This survey was used as part of this study to gauge participants' perceptions of and commitment to SEL.

Trauma's Impact on SEL

A growing body of research indicates that poverty, childhood trauma, and chronic stress have far-reaching implications on the development, growth, and health of children and adults (Bailey et al., 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Felitti et al., 1998; Perry, 2007; Plumb et al., 2016). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about two-thirds of Americans are affected by trauma or adverse childhood experiences (CDC, 2016). Unpredictable, prolonged, severe trauma is an acute form of stress that has major consequences on the brain development, learning, and behavior of children (Plumb et al., 2016).

A study on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), conducted by Felitti et al. (1998), was a large-scale study of 17,000 adults in California that associated childhood trauma with health complications as an adult. The initial study developed into a series of longitudinal studies that took place from 2002 to 2016 as a collaboration between the CDC and Kaiser Permanente. The teams of researchers found that the more ACEs a person had, the higher the risk of chronic disease, mental illness, violence, being a victim of violence, and premature death (CDC, 2016). Childhood trauma, from abuse and neglect to violence and loss of a parent, impacts about 64% of

adults in America (CDC, 2016). Children with four or more ACEs are 32 times more likely than peers with fewer ACEs to have lagging social-emotional skills and demonstrate learning disabilities or maladaptive behavior in school (Plumb et al., 2016). Children of color as well as children of low socio-economic status are more likely to have experienced trauma than their peers (Bailey et al., 2019; *From a Nation*, 2019; Jensen, 2017). Plumb et al. (2016) noted that ACEs can impact brain development that manifests in children as trouble with focusing, learning, self-regulation, and decision-making; attachment difficulties, including being unable to trust others, empathize, regulate emotions, or manage stress; and difficulty regulating emotions that may present as appearing withdrawn, expressing a flat affect, or experiencing angry outbursts. ACEs also impact cognitive development of children that can present as language delays, intelligence quotient (IQ) deficits, learning disabilities, inability to concentrate or complete assignments, inability to learn from experience, or difficulty preparing for events (Plumb et al., 2016). Finally, Plumb et al. (2016) suggested that children with four or more ACEs "may have difficulty with social development, including difficulty forming and keeping friendships and propensity to engage in unhealthy relationships or isolate themselves socially" (p. 42). Significant research suggested that targeted, integrated SEL instruction is a key intervention schools can use to address the immense impact of childhood trauma (Bailey et al., 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Felitti et al., 1998; Frey et al., 2019; *From a Nation*, 2019; Perry, 2007; Plumb et al., 2016).

Common Core State Standards

Since their adoption in 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have had both strong advocates and passionate critics (Kohler et al., 2014). A major goal of the CCSS was to guide states and school districts as they ensure that students are college and career ready

(Shanahan, 2015). A few years before the CCSS were adopted, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 1989, 2002), an organization of educators, argued that standards had a negligible impact on effective teaching as well as on teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In 2015, the United States Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replacing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. ESSA addresses issues that confront educators including College and Career Readiness Standards for prekindergarten to twelfth grade and teacher and administrator evaluation systems (Civic Impulse, 2016). It also encouraged states to invest in attracting, retaining, and training effective teachers for low-income schools (Dennis, 2016). This legislation imposes national accountability for schools and provides access to funding for reducing achievement disparities between subgroups of students as well as improving teaching and student learning (Dennis, 2016). While ESSA does not address social emotional learning directly, it encourages states and districts to include nonacademic indicators of student learning in addition to assessment data such as school climate, safety, and student engagement (Ferguson, 2016). There is widespread endorsement by researchers, educators, and parents for the inclusion of SEL in P-12 education, for state and local governments being empowered by ESSA to effectuate this change (*From a Nation*, 2019).

Kindergarten through fourth grade standards in Connecticut. In 2010, Connecticut adopted the Common Core State Standards with some refinements and renamed them the Connecticut Core Standards. The standards focus on prekindergarten to 12th grade language arts and mathematics as well as literacy in social studies, science, and technical subjects in grades 6-12. Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) committees made up of various stakeholders collaborated to infuse the kindergarten through fifth grade literacy standards with

content integration and authentic learning experiences (CSDE, 2014). The kindergarten through

fifth grade literacy standards adhered to six guiding principles that focused on the development

of oral language and curriculum drawing on reading comprehension of nonfiction texts as well as

emphasizing writing clearly and concisely for various audiences (CSDE, 2014). There are eight

standards of mathematical practice that are interwoven throughout the K-12 math content

standards in a coherent and articulated sequence to develop a depth of understanding to attack

mathematical problems (CSDE, 2014). While both sets of Connecticut curriculum frameworks

are comprehensive and incorporate the Common Core State Standards, they do not include

instructional support strategies for teachers nor do they include valuable activities to help

students to meet these expectations, such as through social interactions and play (CSDE, 2014).

For the most part, the CSDE has relegated the responsibility of determining and implementing

best practices for instruction and professional development to local boards of education (CSDE,

2014). Researchers have been clear to point out that children who have strong social and

emotional skills perform better in school and reach academic benchmarks (Frey et al., 2019;

Jones & Bouffard, 2012). To this end, an increased number of states have published and

implemented social and emotional learning standards over the past few years, including the State

of Connecticut (CASEL, 2013). The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)

includes supporting the social, emotional, and health needs of students and families as one of its

major priorities.

      Jo Ann Freiberg is an educator focused on the wide arena of bullying, improving school

climate, restorative practices, and character education in Connecticut. Freiberg holds a PhD in

philosophy of education from Ohio State University, and her areas of academic teaching and

research include moral and character education, educational studies, professional ethics and

multicultural education. She currently serves as Co-Chair of the National School Climate Council and is on the Connecticut statewide task force on Sportsmanship. Among her many other roles, Freiberg is the CSDE expert consultant on bullying, school climate improvement, character education, The Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) Improving School Climate, and high school reform. Freiberg informed the researcher of her office's work to promote restorative practices and social-emotional learning in preschool to grade 12 classrooms in Connecticut (personal communication, July 10, 2018). Freiberg suggested that the CSDE would be placing a greater emphasis on SEL and would urge local boards of education and school districts to integrate SEL into daily instruction (personal communication, July 10, 2018). As evidence of this shift toward SEL, Freiberg noted that the State of Connecticut Board of Education had recently updated its position statement on SEL and created a resource for schools and educators called, The Components of Social, Emotional and Intellectual Habits (personal communication, July 10, 2018).

K-4 teacher development. As does most states, Connecticut has state regulations addressing teacher preparation and professional development that delineate the coursework, testing, and procedures educators must follow in order to become and remain a certified teacher. CSDE has guidelines for Obtaining and Maintaining Connecticut Educator Certification (2018) for the approval of educator preparation programs that include detailed standards and a review process. These guidelines were designed to ensure that teacher candidates are prepared well to receive their teaching certification (Obtaining and Maintaining, 2018). The state certification requirements are organized by grade level and content area as well as include a required minimum score on tests covering both subject matter knowledge and educational pedagogy (Obtaining and Maintaining, 2018). The state certification guidelines do not require any training

or professional development in social emotional learning. To receive a certificate, candidates must be assessed and prove mastery of these professional standards through their continued coursework and student teaching with a trained cooperating teacher (Obtaining and Maintaining, 2018). These standards include an emphasis on the knowledge of curriculum, teaching all students, family engagement, and professional responsibility (Obtaining and Maintaining, 2018).

After teachers receive their initial certification, professional development (PD) is required to maintain and renew state certification. Antoniou & Kyriakides (2013) outlined the following tenets of PD. PD is a critical part of the ongoing professional growth and development of educators. Professional development is most effective at improving student learning when it addresses both content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Teachers benefit most from consistent PD that is delivered over time. PD should be tailored to groups of teachers based on their interests, learning styles, and level of experience. Professional growth is imperative to the ever-evolving field of education. Educators need to constantly hone and develop their knowledge and pedagogical skills in order to adjust their practice to meet the diverse needs of their students. Educators need time to reflect upon and discuss PD so that it is internalized and so that groups of teachers can co-construct how the PD applies in their own classrooms (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). A research study conducted by Biza, Nardi, and Joel (2015) aimed to stimulate teacher reflection with the assumption that teacher knowledge is better developed in situation-specific contexts. This study suggested that new teacher preparation programs and professional development of veteran teachers focus on balancing effective classroom management with high quality instruction (Biza et al., 2015). In addition to classroom management and high-quality instruction, teacher evaluation plans must address key aspects of K-4 teacher development.

Comprehensive teacher evaluation plans that connect with individualized teacher professional development are a critical part of educator growth (Schluntz, 2018). A 2019 report by the Consortium for School Networking entitled, *Driving K-12 Innovation: 2019 Hurdles*, noted that professional development that is not related to the individual needs and strengths of teachers has little to no impact on student achievement. The report and other research (Schluntz, 2018) recommend personalized, job-embedded, ongoing professional development to engage teachers as lifelong learners. A challenge in developing teacher evaluation plans is the ambiguous nature of concepts such as teacher effectiveness and teacher quality (Harris et al., 2014). Building administrators typically conduct teacher evaluations, therefore, individual definitions of these terms may vary school to school (Harris et al., 2014). Plans must include a detailed rubric for teachers of various levels of tenure in addition to a framework and guidelines to assess the impact of teacher professional development on student achievement (Harris et al., 2014). Teacher evaluation and professional development are most effective when they take place over time, giving teachers the opportunity to internalize learning and enact it within their classroom (Harris et al., 2014). Sustained growth in teacher practice is important to make significant permanent shifts in instructional practice (Patterson & Crumpler, 2009). This research further investigated the issue of motivation for teachers to change because of lack of student engagement, apathy, and classroom discipline problems. This literature review indicates a lack of teacher training and PD that systematically addresses embedding SEL in academic instruction.

Classroom Quality

Brown, Jones, LaRusso, and Aber (2010) posited that classroom quality, as measured by both peer and teacher-student interactions and relationships, is a strong indicator of academic and social-emotional development. Griggs, Mikami, and Rimm-Kaufman (2016) studied classroom

quality and its impact on student behavior at three elementary schools in the southeastern United States. This mixed methods study included 322 students and 32 teachers in kindergarten through fourth grade. Using a combination of teacher rating scales, surveys, and classroom observations, Griggs et al. (2016) hypothesized that classrooms with strong classroom quality, in the form of high levels of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support, would demonstrate a mitigating effect on problematic student behavior from the beginning of the year to the end. High levels of emotional support and classroom organization resulted in a 44% and 29% reduction in problematic behavior respectively. These findings suggested that classroom quality, specifically levels of emotional support and classroom organization, are important predictors of student social-emotional growth and behavior.

A cluster randomized controlled trial design was used by Brown et al. (2010) to examine the relationship between teacher social-emotional function and classroom quality, and its impact on student academic and social-emotional growth when an SEL intervention is used in elementary classrooms. The SEL intervention program that was studied was a universal, school-wide preventive intervention called the 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) program. The aspects of classroom quality that were studied mirrored those in the Griggs et al. (2016) study: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Brown et al. (2010) looked to see if teacher social-emotional functioning (perceived emotional abilities, professional burnout) impacted the quality of classroom activities and interactions, and whether these factors influenced the efficacy of the 4Rs program on classroom quality. The study involved gathering data from 82 third grade teachers in 18 elementary schools in a large urban center in the eastern United States. Data was collected through classroom observations and teacher questionnaires. The team found that while teacher burnout had little effect on classroom

quality, teacher perceptions about their own emotional abilities had an effect size of .52. The team also noted that treatment classrooms, those that used the 4Rs program, demonstrated higher average emotional support (.49) and higher average instructional support (.54). Their findings suggested SEL intervention programs have moderately higher impact on classroom quality, and therefore student academic and social-emotional development, when teacher social-emotional functioning is high. Brown et al. (2010) noted that similar studies should be conducted in suburban and rural settings with more affluent student populations to determine if the same effect sizes can be replicated.

A study conducted by Carr, Mokrova, Vernon-Feagans, and Burchinal (2019) focused on the cumulative impact of classroom quality over multiple years. The mixed method study followed a sample of 1,015 Pre-Kindergarten students through the end of their kindergarten year. The random sampling was taken from 240 Pre-Kindergarten classrooms in six states. These students were then followed as they matriculated to 800 different kindergarten classrooms. Carr et al. (2019) used direct academic assessments and classroom observations to assess classroom quality and student academic growth in language, literacy, and numeracy. This study found that high levels of classroom quality in Pre-K predicted strong academic achievement and growth in language, literacy, and numeracy in kindergarten. The study further noted that the predictive effect of strong Pre-K classroom quality on academic growth in kindergarten was magnified when followed by high classroom quality in kindergarten. In other words, high levels of classroom quality in successive grade levels was related to increased academic gains by students. Carr et al. (2019) suggested that future studies into classroom quality might focus on strategies that improve teacher-student interactions related to instructional support in order to increase positive student academic outcomes.

Similarly, Ansari and Pianta (2018) researched the connection between high levels of classroom quality and childcare with academic performance over time. Ansari and Pianta (2018) conducted a mixed methods longitudinal study by examining preexisting data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD SECCYD), a longitudinal investigation of children from birth through the end of high school from 1991 to 2007. This study focused on 1,307 students who were cared for outside the home before elementary school. Existing data for the sample included assessment of the quality of childcare they received prior to school using the Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE), assessment of classroom quality during elementary school using the Classroom Observation System (COS), and assessment of academic achievement in language, literacy, and mathematics using the Woodcock-Johnson Educational Battery. Ansari and Pianta (2018) conducted statistical analyses to determine if high-level childcare quality before elementary school and elementary classroom quality impacted academic performance through grade nine. The study concluded that high levels of childcare quality predict academic performance in the early years of elementary school. This predictive effect is multiplied by strong classroom quality in elementary school. The study suggested that the impact of classroom quality on academic performance diminishes after elementary school. Ansari and Pianta (2018) noted that there were many variables that may have impacted their results beyond classroom quality, which should be included in future similar studies.

Classroom discourse. Conversation or discourse in a classroom between students and between students and teachers develops social-emotional skills and is a critical aspect of classroom quality (Ankner, 2016; Ansari & Pianta, 2018). Vygotsky (1962) held that language was the primary tool for cognitive development among children. Classroom discourse is simply

the language used by teachers and students to communicate in a classroom setting. Classroom discourse can come in the form of cumulative talk, disputational talk, and exploratory talk (Pennell, 2018). Cumulative talk occurs when students share their ideas, thoughts, and learning about a topic with each other (Pennell, 2018). Disputational talk is more complex than cumulative talk as students attempt to defend their position on a topic to peers (Pennell, 2018). Exploratory talk happens when "learners co-construct an agreed set of 'ground rules' for discussion, work toward a common learning goal, and then use learned discourse strategies to make claims, critically evaluate ideas, and negotiate meaning" (Pennell, 2018, p. 390).

The quality of classroom discourse or interactions has been categorized into three groups: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Pianta et al., 2008; Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, & Curby, 2017). Classrooms that use a variety of discourse formats foster social and emotional skill growth and development by focusing on language development, student engagement, and student-to-student and student-to-adult interactions (Kiemer, Gröschner, Kunter, & Seidel, 2016). Adequate language development is critical for students to actively participate in classroom activities and instruction as well as social interactions with peers (Kiemer et al., 2016). Kiemer et al. suggested that in order to maximize the benefits of classroom discourse, teachers must intentionally include it in their planning across the school day (2016). "Emotionally supportive interactions have been linked to school engagement, prosocial skills, and reading and math achievement" (Abry et al., 2017, p. 195). According to Kiemer et al. (2016), a classroom rich in different types of discourse will benefit all students, but especially students who have language or social delays or are English Learners (EL).

Classroom observations. Observations have long been used as a tool in classrooms around the world to understand and improve teaching and learning (Bell, Dobbelaer, Klette, &

Visscher, 2018). The quality of classroom interactions, instructional pedagogy for academic and social-emotional development, and classroom management is typically measured by classroom observations (Bell et al., 2018). Objective, direct observation of teacher performance is a critical part of efficacious teacher evaluation systems that impact student learning and growth (Jones & Bergin, 2019). For many years, classroom observations relied on two primary methods of data collection, scripting or behavior tallies (Bell et al., 2018). Bell et al. (2018) noted that supervisors would typically sit in on a teacher's lesson and write down, or script, every word uttered by the teacher and the students. They suggested that the other common form of observational data collection required a supervisor to tally behaviors of a teacher and her students during a lesson. These behaviors might include the distribution of boys versus girls volunteering or the number of times a teacher asks open-ended questions (Bell et al., 2018). Evaluation of meaningful discourse, teacher reflection, and student-focused interventions was very limited based on the data collected with these two observational methods (Jones & Bergin, 2019).

In 2001, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required states and localities to develop comprehensive teacher evaluation plans that included formalized teacher observation instruments. Later, NCLB was replaced in 2015 by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which relaxed some of the requirements of NCLB (Ferguson, 2016). However, most states still require localities to include state-specific or commercially developed observation tools as part of their teacher evaluation programs (Jones & Bergin, 2019). In Connecticut, a state-specific model developed under NCLB and still an option under ESSA, is called SEED, the System for Educator Evaluation and Development (*2017 SEED Handbook*, 2017). Disadvantages of state-specific observation instruments include variability between scorers due to inadequate or inconsistent

training and limited interstate correlations between instruments for research purposes (Bell et al., 2018).

While many states still promote the use of their own homegrown observation and evaluation tools, highly reliable and effective observation tools have been developed commercially. Commercial observation instruments have been designed as subject-specific tools or generic tools that can be used across a student's day (Bell et al., 2018). Some subject-specific observation tools include the Mathematical Quality of Instruction (MQI), the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation (PLATO), the Quality of Science Teaching (QST), and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA+) in science education. While there is significant research suggesting the importance of measuring teacher quality within specific content areas (Bell et al., 2018), these types of tools would be a burden on elementary school administrators and teachers who are typically generalists, teaching all content areas. Of much more practical use at the elementary level are commercially produced generic observation tools such as the Framework for Teaching developed by Charlotte Danielson, the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model created by the Marzano Center, the International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching (ICALT) created by researchers at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by Pianta, La Paro, and Hamre (Bell et al., 2018). Requiring significant training, formidable reliability testing, and regular recertification, observations and evaluations of teachers using these tools tend to be less variable between scorers and more appropriate for research at the elementary level compared with state-specific instruments (Bell et al., 2018). Due to its focus on social interactions, the researcher used the CLASS instrument to observe participants as part of this study.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). CLASS, developed by Pianta et al. (2008), was originally created to evaluate teachers and support staff in preschool and Pre-Kindergarten settings. Eventually, the CLASS was broadened for use preschool to grade 12 using modified tools and rubrics. Pianta et al. (2008) used development theory and research as the basis for their observation tool noting that "interactions between students and adults are the primary mechanism of student development and learning" (p. 1). The CLASS has three domains or sections that examine student and adult interactions: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Each of the three domains have dimensions that focus on interactions in the classroom setting. Emotional support includes the dimensions of positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives (Pianta et al., 2008). Classroom organization examines behavior management, productivity, and instructional learning formats. Finally, the domain of instructional support focuses on the dimensions of concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling (Pianta et al., 2008).

Pianta et al. suggested that an actively certified CLASS observer can use the instrument for program planning and evaluation, accountability efforts, research, and professional development and supervision (2008). They further noted that the instrument may be used in its totality for a broad assessment of classroom interactions or as individual domains of investigation. The data supporting the reliability and validity of the CLASS comes from numerous research studies involving hundreds of classrooms and thousands of students across the United States conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning; Pianta, Aber, and Rimm-Kaufman; and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Pianta et al., 2008). The CLASS has been used as a comprehensive or discrete measure in an abundant number of research studies to collect observational data (Pianta et al., 2008). Because

of its focus on classroom interactions and emotional support for students, the CLASS is frequently used in studies related to SEL in the classroom (Pianta et al., 2008).

Intentional Social Skills Instruction

Student social and emotional learning is best addressed by an amalgamation of "embedding SEL in strategic plans, budgets, and hiring practices; making time for explicit SEL instruction using vetted curriculum; developing SEL standards; integrating the work into curriculum and instruction in math, English, and other subjects; and investing in a dedicated SEL team that rolls out the effort in a way that's right for each school" (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018, p. 31). Discrete social-emotional curriculum has a low-effect size on improved student social development as opposed to an embedded approach to SEL (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Daily academic instruction that integrates student social-emotional needs is an optimal way to help children develop their social competencies (Frey et al., 2019). SEL typically incorporated into daily classroom schedules is not meaningful and there are many barriers to school based SEL programs including isolation from content area instruction, time limitations, inconsistent implementation, and inadequacies in teacher SEL training and professional development (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). When SEL is included as part of a school's official curriculum, is integrated into all aspects of a student's day, and is part of a school-wide framework, the development of prosocial and self-regulatory skills improves learning in all content areas (Frey et al., 2019). Dacey et al. (2017) and Frey et al. (2019) suggested that a combination of discrete and embedded SEL instruction is widely accepted by researchers and educators as an integral part of student growth and success in all aspects of education from preschool to grade 12. A report from the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019), *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope,* noted that schools should "Explicitly teach

social, emotional, and cognitive skills by using evidence-based instructional materials, practices, programs, and resources [and] embed those skills in academic instruction and school-wide practices" (p. 44).

Second Step

Low, Smolkowski, and Cook (2016) conducted a study focused on *Second Step,* a nationally recognized K-5 social-emotional skills curriculum. The mixed methods study aimed to determine which aspects of SEL curriculum implementation had the greatest impact on obtaining desired student outcomes including generalization of social-emotional skills outside of program lessons. The full Second Step program consists of 15 to 25 lessons, depending on grade level, lessons within four units, which may include role-playing, direct instruction using engaging posters, group discussion and activities, and demonstration videos. The lessons directly teach students skills that are intended to strengthen their ability to learn, have empathy, manage emotions, and solve problems. The program was updated in 2012 to also address aspects of self-regulation, specifically attention, working memory, and inhibitory control.

Low et al. (2016) utilized a randomized controlled trial of 61 schools, 321 teachers, and over 7,300 students in Arizona and Washington. Participating kindergarten to second grade teachers were trained using materials developed by the Committee for Children, publisher of Second Step. During year one of implementation, participating teachers self-reported weekly on various aspects of implementation including competency, fidelity, and frequency (Low et al., 2016). In the fall and spring of year one, these teachers also assessed student social-emotional skills using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Second Step Edition (DESSA-SSE). Finally, student behavior was observed in the fall, winter, and spring of year one by graduate students trained to use the Behavioral Observation of Students in Schools developed by Shapiro

and Kratochwill. The team analyzed these data points to establish three implementation classes for teachers and to then determine if student membership in these classes predicted gains in measures of student behavior. The three teacher classes were labeled as high-quality, low-engagement, and low-adherence (Low et al., 2016).

Low et al. (2016) found that about half of the participating teachers were in the high-quality class with slightly above average frequency, above average fidelity to the program and integration activities, and strong engagement with students. About 24% of teachers were in the low-engagement group and the remaining teachers were in the low-adherence group. The low-adherence group tended to stray from the program and lessons, but kept students engaged (Low et al., 2016). The low-engagement group made few attempts to engage students, rarely extended learning beyond the lesson content, and was below average in frequency of instruction. Of the three implementation classes, students with teachers in the high-quality class showed the most engagement with and generalization of the skills addressed by the Second Step program including reduced behavioral concerns and improved social-emotional skills (Low et al., 2016). The low-adherence class demonstrated similar improvement in conduct and social skill development. Finally, the low-engagement class exhibited the least improvement in student conduct and social-emotional development (Low et al., 2016). Low et al. (2016) concluded that student engagement with instruction is equally if not more important than SEL program design and teacher competency with said program. The researchers suggested that future studies into the implementation and impact of SEL programs should take place in settings where the program has been used for several years as implementation fidelity can vary significantly in year one of a program.

Responsive Classroom

Abry et al. (2017) conducted a randomized efficacy trial to examine the impact of four components of the *Responsive Classroom* (RC) program, a commercially published comprehensive approach to SEL. Through the lens of SEL, RC empowers teachers to deliver engaging academic instruction, build positive classroom relationships, effectively manage classroom routines and behavior, and create a developmentally appropriate learning environment (Abry et al., 2017). The goal of the study was to determine which core SEL components of RC increased the quality of teacher-student classroom interactions and if those same SEL components improved or reduced the teachers' approach to classroom interactions.

The four components the researchers studied from RC were Morning Meeting, Rule Creation, Interactive Modeling, and Academic Choice. Morning Meeting is a classroom gathering every day where students and teacher greet each other, participate in an enjoyable activity, have a chance to share their thoughts, and create and read an interactive message (Abry et al., 2017). Occurring less often, but with regularity, Rule Creation is a collaborative effort to develop, refine, and reinforce community expectations (Abry et al., 2017). Students learn and practice those rules and routines through Interactive Modeling, where teachers model behavioral expectations (Abry et al., 2017). Academic Choice is a time when teachers provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate autonomy with respect to academic work (Abry et al., 2017).

The study by Abry et al. (2017) involved 143 teachers from grades three, four, and five in 24 elementary schools within one school district in a Mid-Atlantic state. Participating teachers were trained in RC the spring before they received the cohort of students who were matriculating out of second grade in the spring of 2008. Baseline data was collected before teachers were

trained in RC using multiple surveys and observation tools. Tools to measure teacher fidelity to the RC approach included the Classroom Practices Observation Measure created by Abry, Brewer, Nathanson, Sawyer, and Rimm-Kaufman (2010); the Classroom Practices Teacher Survey developed by Nathanson, Sawyer, and Rimm-Kaufman (2007a); and the Classroom Practices Frequency Survey created by Nathanson, Sawyer, and Rimm-Kaufman, (2007b). Each of these tools were created by the study research team avoiding the use of RC language, but with the intent of measuring adherence to and quality of the delivery of RC components (Abry et al., 2017). Teacher-student classroom interactions were measured using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by Pianta et al. (2008). Graduate students and researchers were trained, tested, and rated reliable conducting observations with all three tools. After participants were trained in RC and baseline data were gathered using the multiple measures, teachers implemented RC with the cohort of students beginning in grade three in the fall of 2008. Observations using both tools noted above were conducted five times for 60 minutes each over the course of the school year and follow-up surveys were completed by participants electronically in the spring of 2009. The same process was used when the cohort of students entered grade four and later grade five (Abry et al., 2017).

Abry et al. (2017) found that of the four SEL components of RC studied, Morning Meeting and Academic Choice had the greatest impact on the quality of teacher-student classroom interactions. Teachers who implemented Morning Meeting with fidelity had improved emotional interactions with students. Teachers who implemented Academic Choice according to their training demonstrated higher levels of emotional and instructional support. All teachers in the study, regardless of their initial level of interaction quality, demonstrated growth related to teacher-student interactions when Morning Meeting and Academic Choice were implemented

with fidelity (Abry et al., 2017). The study also showed that teachers with lower baseline levels of teacher-student interaction quality benefitted the most from implementing Morning Meeting and Academic Choice (Abry et al., 2017). The researchers noted that since they only assessed four out of ten RC components, it is possible all of the components are synergistic and augment each other. Abry et al. (2017) suggested that future studies should investigate how teacher characteristics and perceptions affect the efficacy of SEL programs.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study comes from an interpretivist perspective. Interpretivism assumes that reality and truth are socially constructed (Butin, 2010). Interpretivist theories developed by Vygotsky (1962) and Bandura (1977) are the basis for the study's theoretical framework. Vygotsky's theory of social development (1962) posits that social interactions are the basis for cognitive development in children. Just as humans have developed tools to interact with the environment, Vygotsky suggested that humans also develop psychological, abstract tools like speech, writing, and numerical representations, which he called cultural sign systems, to organize their thinking, permanently record information, and quantify objects. According to Vygotsky (1962), the cognitive development of children until age two is dominated by intrinsic, natural growth and discovery. However, he suggested that cognitive development beyond age two is mainly controlled by cultural sign systems (Vygotsky, 1962). Children learn to use these cultural tools, such as language, through interactions with and imitation of adults, first to communicate with others and then for inner, self-talk (Vygotsky, 1962).

Vygotsky (1962) suggested that children are ready for various cognitive skills to develop at different times based on their zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is the difference

between what children can do with adult support and what they can do independently (Vygotsky, 1962). Children move through the stages of ZPD and develop cognitively through co-construction and social interactions (Vygotsky, 1962). Teachers and parents must give children tasks and experiences that they are able to accomplish independently as well as those that require some adult assistance to stimulate growth through stages of ZPD without overwhelming them (Vygotsky, 1962). The depth and frequency of adult assistance should vary so that the child maintains a degree of independence (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky (1962) placed importance on art and play for child development. Experiences with art and drawing at the student's ZPD would naturally translate into the development of writing skills (Vygotsky, 1962). Imaginative play naturally helps students move their conceptual understanding from the concrete level to more abstract thought (Vygotsky, 1962). Additionally, Vygotsky (1962) and his student, Luria (1960), noted that self-regulation is developed in children through social interactions and self-talk. Children regulate themselves based on the commands of adults, until they internalize self-regulation using their own commands with self-talk (Vygotsky, 1962).

Vygotsky's social development theory dovetails nicely with the social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura (1977). Bandura (1977) indicated that cognitive operations and social experiences are intricately connected and influence behavior and development. Bandura's theory suggested that as individuals are exposed to models, verbal discussions, and discipline through social encounters they mentally represent their environment and process these experiences on a variety of cognitive levels. Children develop new learning quickly via observation. After observing others, children can reproduce long sequences of new behaviors. By observing others, children learn potential consequences of the new behavior. Bandura

referred to this cognitive process as vicarious reinforcement; children and adults develop ideas about the outcomes of new behaviors simply by observing them in others (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura suggested that behavior models come in the form of live models, visual models, verbal models, and symbolic models. His theory of observational learning includes four components: attentional processes, retention processes, motor reproduction processes, and reinforcement and motivational processes. In order to learn from a model, a child needs to pay attention to that model either because it is interesting to them or offers something of value. Since children often practice a new behavior that was modeled later after it was observed, Bandura (1977) suggested they make cognitive connections that help them retain the modeled behavior. As children retain new behaviors, they slowly develop the physical, motoric abilities to carry out that behavior as modeled. Finally, children perform new behavior in relation to the direct reinforcement they receive from adults, the vicarious reinforcements, and the self-reinforcements they make of their own accomplishments including self-praise. The social learning theory of Bandura noted that children develop high or low expectations of their own behavior as well as the ability to self-regulate based on the models available to them. When children are presented with models of positive, prosocial behavior they are more likely to internalize and replicate acts of sharing, helping, cooperation, and altruism (Bandura, 1977).

Taken together, the theories of Vygotsky and Bandura emphasize the critical nature of interactions with peers and adults in the cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social development of children. It is through this lens or theoretical framework that this study will explore SEL in K-4 classrooms.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 began with an exposition on the conceptual framework of this research study. This was followed by a review of the literature associated with elementary education. The studies included as part of this literature review frame the status of social-emotional learning (SEL) in K-4 classrooms. Strong state standards and quality teacher professional development are identified in the research as critical components to reduce academic achievement gaps that exist between different socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural groups as well as improve overall student performance and growth. The research suggests that positive social interactions and discourse are critical to student development. The power and importance of social-emotional skill development is well documented in the reviewed studies.

Daily academic instruction carefully planned with embedded social-emotional learning is the ideal way to help children continually develop their social competencies. Research into the impact of trauma on brain, physical, academic, social, and emotional development in children also indicates that SEL intervention is critical for at-risk children. A weak area in the body of research on SEL is an examination of the connection between teacher understandings and training in SEL and how SEL instruction is integrated in the classroom to improve academic achievement in suburban and rural settings. This literature review demonstrated a need for qualitative research studies that examine teacher perceptions and experiences with SEL compared to how SEL is effectuated in their classrooms within non-urban settings. Chapter 3 will present the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Academic achievement and prosocial behavior are positively impacted when schools address self-regulation, attention, and cognitive skills, especially for subgroups of students who are marginalized or at-risk (Frey et al., 2019). Students who demonstrate complex behaviors in class due to trauma and lagging social-emotional skills often struggle to make academic progress. This chapter will describe the purpose of this study, the research design, the research site and participants, the sampling method, the data collection and analysis process, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher understandings of social-emotional learning (SEL) during academic instruction and their perceptions of its impact on their students' social-emotional development. Although there are many methods of embedding social and emotional learning within academic instruction, teacher understandings of and perceptions about enacting SEL skill development needed investigation to better address student SEL needs.

Research Design

In order to research teacher understandings and instruction of social-emotional skills during academic instruction rather than as a stand-alone program, a qualitative phenomenological strategy was used for this study. Phenomenological studies use anecdotal information in the form of personal experiences and interpretations of events by research participants as sources of information from which to draw conclusions (Groenewald, 2004).

Since this study aimed to analyze information about teacher understandings of SEL instruction during academic instruction, a phenomenological strategy was most applicable. A phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to investigate teacher perceptions of, training

related to, and experiences with social-emotional learning in tandem with academic lessons via first person interviews and surveys. Participants were asked to give first-hand, honest accounts of their training with and understanding and instruction of social-emotional learning within content area instruction, because personal experience is ideal for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). The IPA research focused on the experiences of the participants related to these broad questions:

1. How do teachers' past experiences and training with embedding social-emotional learning in academic instruction inform their approach to teaching?

2. How and to what extent do teachers perceive they are addressing their students' social-emotional needs during academic instruction?

The researcher used responses gleaned from interviews (see Appendix C) with participants included in a small sample of teachers in combination with a survey (see Appendix D) and classroom observations (see Appendix E) focused on social-emotional instruction and teacher sensitivity to student SEL needs. This triangulation of data helped the researcher to determine teacher perceptions of SEL and how and to what extent teachers are incorporating SEL into their academic instruction to support their students' social and emotional needs.

Site Information and Population

This study was conducted in a relatively small Pre-K-8th grade school district in New England with suburban to rural characteristics, which educates about 900 students. The district has one Pre-K-4th grade elementary school and one 5th-8th grade middle school. The town shares a 9th-12th grade high school with a neighboring town; this school has a student population of an additional 900 students with about half coming from each town. The Pre-K-8 district has no commercial tax revenue and relies heavily on residential property tax revenue as its main source

of educational funding. The annual budget in the 2017-2018 school year for the two schools was about $20,000,000. Due to its size, the district's per pupil expenditures far exceeded the state average at about $23,000. A very low percentage of students in this school district are from families that are identified as low income or do not speak English as a first language. However, projections from the district's annual report suggest these numbers are on the rise as the demographics of the town are shifting. Many children who are raised in poverty face social and emotional instability and associated risk factors that can often lead to poor school performance and behavioral challenges (Jensen, 2017). This study took place at the district's Pre-K-4th grade elementary school.

According to information provided by the State Department of Education (2019), ABC Elementary School educates about 500 students. The student population is 83.1% Caucasian, 9.4% Hispanic, 3.5% Multi-Racial and Non-Hispanic, 2.3% Asian, and 1.0% African American. About 270 of these students are male and about 230 are female. There are about 45 certified educators working in ABC Elementary School. Three percent of the student population is classified by the State as low-income, while 0.7% are designated as English Language Learners (ELL).

Sampling Method

As a phenomenological study, the participants in the study need to have some experience with the subject of the study, namely social-emotional learning. Therefore, the researcher used a purposive non-probability sampling strategy. To conduct purposive sampling, sometimes called judgment sampling, the researcher selected participants based on his own determination of which potential participants were most fitting and appropriate to the study (Creswell, 2015; Glesne, 2016). From the group of teachers who responded to the invitation to participate, the researcher

selected six teachers with a range of experiences, training, and background with social-emotional skill development as well as a range of years as an educator who were most appropriate for the study.

Inclusion criteria

The researcher solicited volunteers to participate in the study from ABC Elementary School in the researcher's district. This group of teachers included teachers ranging in age from 23 to 64. There were 24 kindergarten to grade four regular education teachers working in the school. Twenty-one of these teachers are female and three are male. All of these teachers were invited to participate in this study through a short informational session and invitation letters (see Appendix A). The information session was held at the elementary building and lasted about 20-minutes. Invitation letters and consent forms were distributed at the meeting. Interested participants completed the consent form and emailed it to the researcher to use for sampling. To participate in this study, individuals had to be working as full-time certified classroom teachers in grade levels kindergarten through fourth grade. Volunteers had to also have some experience or training with SEL. The final criterion was that the participants must have been teaching at ABC Elementary School for at least two-years.

Exclusion criteria

The researcher used some exclusion criteria when determining how to invite participants into the study. Pre-school and Pre-K teachers were not included in this study because, while they do focus on social and emotional learning, the academic rigor is not comparable to kindergarten through fourth grade. Specialized teachers, for example, fine and practical arts teachers, were not included in the study because the research focuses on classroom instruction within the context of vertical academic standards.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Following a qualitative design, the researcher used his comprehensive literature review, support from colleagues, and information from experts in the field of elementary education and qualitative research to plan his study (Creswell, 2015; Glesne, 2016) in conjunction with the work of Vygotsky and Bandura as well as the researcher's expertise as a veteran educator and administrator to develop eight interview questions (see Appendix C) that encouraged participants to delve deeply into their perceptions of and experiences with embedding SEL into academic lessons. The researcher made a detailed description of the study using multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2015). The researcher also used a field notebook to keep track of all data, analysis techniques, and all versions of survey and observation documentation (Glesne, 2016). In addition to handwritten notes in a field notebook, semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded using Dragon Speech Recognition software for later audio transcription. Dragon Speech Recognition software creates and transcribes an audio file into digital text. Additionally, participants completed the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (see Appendix D) (Brackett et al., 2011) to help the researcher assess their perceptions of and beliefs about SEL. The survey focuses on three primary areas related to perceptions about SEL that impact implementation: teacher comfort with teaching SEL, teacher commitment to develop students' social-emotional skills, and the culture of the school to support SEL. Finally, the researcher conducted one 60-minute classroom observation of each teacher using CLASS to assess SEL instruction and support during classroom instruction.

Both CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) outlined five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Yoder (2014) identified 10 teaching practices that support these five SEL

competencies, which are: (a) student-centered discipline; (b) teacher language; (c) responsibility and choice; (d) warmth and support; (e) cooperative learning; (f) classroom discussions; (g) self-reflection and self-assessment; (h) balanced instruction; (i) academic press and expectations; and (j) competence building via modeling, practicing, feedback, and coaching. The researcher was trained and certified as a reliable CLASS observer in November of 2015 and as a trainer of CLASS observers in 2018. The CLASS tool was an ideal observation instrument to choose for this study because it focuses on teaching practices (Yoder, 2014) that support the five SEL competencies (CASEL, 2013), required in-depth training and certification, and its validity is based on extensive use by researchers and school administrators across the country since 2008 (Pianta et al., 2008). The researcher observed and scored the participants using CLASS in order to develop data that was compared to themes that developed from the participant interviews and surveys.

Data Analysis

The researcher read the interview transcripts, survey, and observation scoring sheets (see Appendix E) several times while taking notes and looking for phrases and key ideas, always keeping the research questions in mind. Initial analysis of the interviews, surveys, and observations was made line-by-line with tentative codes. Domain or taxonomic coding was used to first examine the data for the ways in which teachers approached social-emotional during academic learning (Glesne, 2016). Whenever there were unclear or confusing sections in the data, the researcher referred back to the digitally recorded material for clarification. The researcher noted specific patterns, elements, and themes that emerged as he coded the data. Coded data was then be organized into a spreadsheet based on the themes and patterns that were identified. The coding of the data offered a layer of analysis of classroom instruction into two

broad domains--social-emotional and academic. Each broad domain was then broken down into subthemes that emerged based on how teachers were observed incorporating social-emotional learning into academic instructional time. The researcher worked with this data and considered the research questions in order to develop a narrative and interpretation of the data.

Limitations of the Research Design

A limitation of this study is the small sample size taken from one school in a small New England school district. When conducting a phenomenological study, a researcher is examining the lived-experiences of the participants in order make generalizations (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, while the study was site dependent, the themes that emerged may be transferable to teachers at other schools in other locations with similar experiences.

The researcher served as an administrator with a focus on behavior, discipline, school climate, and social-emotional learning in the district where the study was conducted. Having worked in this capacity for several years, he has supervised and collaborated with the potential teacher participants and has background knowledge about their capacities with social-emotional learning. Therefore, there was potential for the researcher to approach the study with personal biases. To combat this, the researcher consistently reflected on his potential biases in an attempt to remain neutral and objective during the study by recording his thoughts and reflections in a research journal. Additionally, the researcher no longer worked in the same state as the study site at the time of the study, so there was no possibility of his research being tied to any teacher's professional evaluation. As part of this process, the researcher objectively kept a research journal, took interview and observation notes, and reviewed the digital transcription of both the observations and interviews. Fortunately, the training the researcher has received as an administrator and during the CLASS certification program have given him ample practice

remaining neutral when working with and observing teachers.

Dependability, credibility, and member checking. Data validation is critical for a qualitative study. Part of the validation process used by the researcher included having a panel of experts review and approve the interview protocol questions. This committee, made up of six researchers and educators with expertise in elementary education, qualitative research, and social-emotional learning, suggested a few minor revisions, which were implemented, and then the protocol was piloted to ensure validity. Member checking was used to check the interview transcripts for accuracy. The researcher used member checking as a tool to verify the expression of participant's ideas, experiences, and beliefs during the interviews (Glesne, 2016). The CLASS observation data was peer reviewed by another CLASS certified observer for validity.

Ethical Issues

Participation in this study was completely voluntary and participants, who had signed consent forms, had the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher approached the participants being studied with sensitivity and respect in various ways including but not limited to (a) disclosing the purpose and processes of the study to participants, (b) informing and reminding the participants of their rights in writing and verbally throughout the course of the study, (c) not using deceptive or misleading practices, (d) adhering to strict confidentiality standards, (e) following ethical interview and observation practices, (f) explaining the role of the researcher, and (g) demonstrating respect for the research sites (Creswell, 2015). The researcher used a purposive, non-probability sampling strategy to select participants from the selected district. The removal of randomness from the sample population being studied introduced an element of bias (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Lastly, privacy and confidentiality for the participants and school were ethical considerations. During the study, the researcher

assigned pseudonyms to the participants and their school to ensure confidentiality. Any identifiable descriptors of the school were removed from the data and research. All digital data was stored on a password protected laptop computer. Paper data including transcripts, research notes, and consent forms were stored in a locked briefcase during transport or a locked filing cabinet while in the researcher's office. Finally, all research materials will be securely stored for a four-year period and all records will be destroyed at the end of this period.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning during academic instruction and its impact on student social-emotional development. This study was conducted in a small Pre-K-8 school district in New England, which has suburban to rural characteristics and shifting demographics. The researcher used a purposeful, non-probability sampling procedure to involve participants in the study. Participants were interviewed using a piloted protocol and they completed the Teacher SEL Rating Scale (Appendix D) (Brackett et al., 2011). Classroom observations were managed with a certified research tool, CLASS. This chapter explained how data were collected and analyzed and procedures that were used to ensure reliability and validity, as well as ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed summary of the researcher's findings and themes that emerged during the study. In Chapter 5, these themes and findings will be interpreted, and the outcomes as they apply to existing practice and future research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher understandings of social-emotional learning (SEL) during academic instruction and its impact on their students' social-emotional development. In order to research teacher understandings and instruction of social-emotional skills during academic instruction, a phenomenological strategy was used for this study. This chapter reviews the data collection process, participant demographics, and patterns and themes that developed during this research study.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers' past experiences and training with embedding social-emotional learning in academic instruction inform their approach to teaching?

2. How and to what extent do teachers perceive they are addressing their students' social-emotional needs during academic instruction?

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to thoroughly address the study's research questions, the researcher collected data from multiple sources. Participants completed a survey, participated in an interview, and were observed teaching as part of this study. The researcher then triangulated this data to identify findings related to participant understandings of social-emotional learning.

Survey

The six study participants completed a survey as part of this research study. The tool employed was the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (see Appendix D), which assesses perceptions of and beliefs about SEL (Brackett et al., 2011). The instrument focuses on three primary areas related to perceptions about SEL that impact implementation: teacher comfort with teaching SEL, teacher commitment to develop social-emotional skills, and the culture of the school to

support SEL. Participants completed the 12-question survey prior to meeting with the researcher

and handed it to him at the beginning of their interview (see Table 1).

Table 1
Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett et al., 2011) Data of Six Teachers (Scale of 1-5)

Participant	T1-K	T2-1	T3-3	T4-4	T5-2	T6-K	Mean
My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	5	5	5	5	5	4	4.83
The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional skills.	4	5	5	5	4	4	4.5
All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	4	3	3	4	3	3	3.33
Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs comes naturally to me.	5	5	4	5	4	4	4.5
My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.	4	5	4	5	4	4	4.33
I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	5	5	4	5	4	4	4.5
Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	5	5	5	5	4	4	4.67
I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	5	5	4	5	4	4	4.5
My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.	1	1	1	1	1	2	1.17
I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.	5	4	4	4	3	3	3.83
I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills.	5	4	4	4	3	3	3.83

Responses on the survey were assigned ratings as follows: Strongly Agree - 5, Agree - 4, Neither

Agree nor Disagree - 3, Disagree - 2, Strongly Disagree - 1. As noted in this study's literature

review, Brackett et al. (2011) suggested that "As the disseminators of knowledge in the

classroom, teachers and their beliefs about SEL may shape the learning environment and in turn,

impact students' developmental outcomes" (p. 232). Therefore, survey responses of either fours

or fives indicate a school's staff supports SEL and is committed to implementation. Based on the

individual responses as well as the aggregated responses to the survey, participants are very

comfortable teaching SEL, the school culture strongly supports SEL, and teachers are moderately

committed to developing their skills to teach SEL. Participants T5-2 and T6-K demonstrated the

least interest in developing their ability to teach SEL by participating in future trainings.

Qualitative Instrument

   After each of the six study participants handed in their completed surveys, the researcher

conducted a 60-minute face-to-face semi-structured interview with each participant. As the

study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the researcher developed the

framework for each interview, but was prepared to follow the lead of each participant. The

interview instrument used for this study was a protocol consisting of eight open-ended questions

(see Appendix C) and informed consent (see Appendix B) was obtained. IPA calls for semi-

structured interviews which allow the researcher to follow-up and probe beyond the

predetermined interview questions to collect more information so the researcher can interpret

how the participants are making sense of their lived-experiences. The interviews take on a

conversational feel as the interviewer digs deeper into experiences shared by the participant to

gain a more complete understanding of the phenomena from the participant's perspective.

Following IPA protocol, in order to collect interview data with precision, the interviews were

recorded and transcribed (Larkin et al., 2011). As noted above, each participant gave written, informed consent to participate and for each interview to be recorded. An acknowledgment that the study is intended to help educators and students was made explicit. In addition, participants were told if they felt uncomfortable and wanted to end the interview, they could do so at any time. Finally, in addition to the recording, participants were also told that notes and jottings may be taken as additional forms of data.

Data coding and analysis process. In order to thoroughly analyze each interview during this study following IPA guidelines, the researcher also observed the participants during their interviews, made analytic memos, and considered contextual factors to help him understand how each participant was making sense of their experiences with SEL (Larkin et al., 2011). The analysis of each interview was inductive where the data coalesced from specific details into general themes. Glesne (2016) suggested conducting a close reading of interview transcripts and/or listening to interview recordings several times to develop further understandings. In order to reduce fatigue and increase the researcher's perceptions, subsequent reviews of each transcript were spaced out between 24- and 48-hours. During this process, the researcher made analytic memos to record his observations from each transcript. The left-hand margin of each transcript was used to take notes about what the participant said and how it was said.   Additionally, Larkin et al. (2011) reported that each line of the transcript be coded an initial theme in the right-hand margin. These initial codes assist the researcher in analyzing large amounts of data (Glesne, 2016). Transcripts from each of the six interviews were examined to elucidate connections across and between the themes. This process was followed for each of the six participant interview transcripts. The analysis was iterative. Data was reviewed across participants and themes to find connections among emerging themes which were grouped with a descriptive label

(Glesne, 2016). It was necessary to have two rounds of coding to refine the data into smaller categories (Larkin et al., 2011). This process resulted in a list of themes and subthemes that were reviewed for developing the narrative of how the researcher made sense of how the participants were making sense of their experiences (Larkin et al., 2011).

As mentioned above, transcript data from each of the six interviews was coded as part of the analysis process. Codes help a researcher sort and organize vast amounts of data into more manageable chunks for analysis (Glesne, 2016). The researcher coded the data from the six interviews in two rounds. The first round was in vivo and the second round was pattern coding. In vivo coding, also referred to as verbatim or literal coding, is often used in qualitative research because it places emphasis on the actual words used by the participants rather than researcher-generated codes, and relies on participants to give meaning to the data themselves (Saldana, 2009). Pattern coding is typically completed after an initial round of coding as it groups large amounts of data into smaller groupings or related chunks for analysis into themes (Saldana, 2009). As the researcher coded, he also considered his analytic memos, notes taken down during each interview, as well as any reflections. In vivo coding was used during the first round in order to group the data into categories, while the second round of coding was used to reduce the data into smaller, manageable chunks (Larkin et al., 2011). Pattern coding was employed during this second round as it enabled large amounts of data to be refined into more practical groupings leading to a pattern code and, finally, a theme (Glesne, 2016). Rather than using computer software for the coding process, transcripts were marked up and analyzed by the researcher with paper and pencil.

Themes of the Study

Interviews – Background information. During the interview process, participants

shared pertinent demographic and background information (see Table 2). Pseudonyms were

assigned to each participant with the following convention: T for teacher, number for interview

order, and K-4 representing the grade taught. Therefore, T1-K is the pseudonym assigned to the

first teacher interviewed and she teaches kindergarten and so forth to T6-K.

Table 2
Background of Six Teachers

Participant	Years teaching	Teaching grade level	Professional development for SEL	Formal SEL training	College degree program
T1-K	19	K	yes	no	Early education/psychology
T2-1	21	1	yes	no	Early childhood
T3-3	7	3	yes	no	Early childhood/marketing
T4-4	23	4	yes	no	Elementary education
T5-2	15	2	yes	no	Education/theater
T6-K	16	K	yes	no	Sociology/early childhood

Teacher one (T1-K) shared that she has been teaching elementary school children for 19 years,

all of them at ABC Elementary School. She graduated college with a Bachelor of Science in

Psychology and later earned a Master of Arts degree in Early Education. T1-K did her student

teaching at ABC Elementary School in kindergarten in 1999 and was hired as a kindergarten

teacher in 2000. Other than in 2014 and 2015 when she was a second-grade teacher, T1-K has

taught kindergarten during her tenure at ABC Elementary School. T1-K has attended several

workshops offered by local educational resource centers focused on social emotional learning in

addition to both trainings offered by the State of Connecticut and multiple professional

development programs presented by ABC Elementary School. She has never participated in any

formal coursework related to SEL.

T2-1 started her career working with children for 14 years at a preschool in northern Connecticut. With a Bachelor of Arts in Child Development and a Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education, she transitioned to teaching grade one at ABC Elementary School 21 years ago. T2-1 has participated in a few professional development sessions offered by ABC Elementary School focused on social emotional learning but has not taken any courses on the subject.

T3-3 worked in the finance industry for five years after college, having earned Bachelor of Arts in Marketing. After being laid off during an economic downturn, T3-3 went back to school to earn a Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education. T3-3 was hired in 2012 as a preschool teacher at ABC Elementary School. Two years later, T3-3 moved to third grade and is still teaching that grade level today. T3-3 has participated in school-sponsored professional development related to social emotional learning but no formal courses or other trainings on the topic.

Teacher four (T4-4) has been an elementary school teacher for 23 years. He has taught first grade through fourth grade and has also served as a literacy specialist. He has been a fourth-grade teacher for the past several years. Most of his career has been spent educating the children of ABC Elementary School. His major in college was Elementary Education (grades K through 6), and he later earned a Master of Arts in Education. T4-4 has not taken any courses in social emotional learning but has participated in trainings offered by the State of Connecticut as well as numerous professional development sessions provided by ABC Elementary School.

T5-2 has been a teacher for fifteen years, all of them in grade two at ABC Elementary School. After earning a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Performing Arts, she worked at a residential education facility in New York for boys between 12 and 19 years old with serious

and persistent psychopathology. She later earned a Master of Arts in Elementary Education and started teaching grade three at ABC Elementary School. Like T4-4, T5-2 has not taken any courses in social emotional learning but has participated in several district-sponsored professional development sessions on the subject.

Teacher six (T6-K) worked at a community nursery school prior to entering the field of public education. In 2000, she began her public-school career as a paraprofessional in a special education classroom in a community adjacent to the town of ABC. Having previously earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, in 2002 T6-K went back to school and earned a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education. In 2004, T6-K was hired as a kindergarten teacher at ABC Elementary School. T6-K has not attended any organized courses on social emotional learning but did participate in one professional development session on the topic at ABC Elementary school.

Interviews – Themes. As stated earlier, codes were used by the researcher to analyze the interview data from the six participants. These codes allowed the researcher to manipulate large amounts of data and organize the information so it could be analyzed (Glesne, 2016). Codes for this study were developed during two rounds of analysis. As noted above, the first coding round was in vivo and the second round was pattern coding. In addition to following these two methods, analytic memos, notes taken during the interviews, as well as researcher reflections complemented the coding.

However, analysis did not start with coding. Analysis actually began during each interview as the researcher jotted notes about participant interest and enthusiasm when explaining the impact of SEL. Also, as the interviews were transcribed and listened to several times, analysis occurred naturally prior to formal coding rounds when the researcher noticed

certain words and phrases like "emotion" or "self-regulation" and potential themes began to present themselves. This unstructured technique was used throughout the analysis process when coding as well as listening to the interviews. The notes, memos, and researcher reflections began to take on a structure for the researcher as ideas for themes emerged, receded, and reappeared. However, the two formal rounds of coding were far more structured and resulted in more reliable analysis and themes, a description of which follows.

Instead of using computer software to analyze the data, all coding was done by the researcher with paper and pencil. The first round of coding followed in vivo methodology. In vivo coding is regularly used in qualitative studies and especially in phenomenological studies where researchers are attempting to understand how participants make sense of their own experiences (Larkin et al., 2011). Since this is an IPA study as noted above, in vivo coding was used to access each participant's voice and perspective during their interviews. After reviewing the six transcripts and applying in vivo coding, a total of 312 codes emerged.

The codes developed by using in vivo methods during round one helped to organize the data into categories. The second round of coding refined the data into even smaller chunks (Glesne, 2016). During the second round of analysis, the process of pattern coding was applied to the codes from round one to refine the initial 312 codes into categories, patterns, and finally, five broad themes. For example, the in vivo codes of "relate to others", "make and keep friends", and "socialization with peers" were assigned the pattern code: relationships.

Coding during round two of this process was also completed by hand. Each of the 312 in vivo codes were written on a separate small piece of paper. The individual papers were color coded by participant. Having different colors for each participant's responses allowed the researcher to visualize where participants were related to the codes individually and as a group.

Line numbers from each transcript were written on the colored paper with each in vivo code to allow for easy retrieval. As the researcher spread the colored papers out to sort the codes, he was easily able to visualize the data and begin determining patterns. Interview questions and in vivo codes were reviewed together to make meaning of the data, look for emerging patterns, and determine pattern codes. A few patterns were easier to define than others. For example, "make amends", "resolve disputes", and "problem-solve with peers" led to the pattern code of repairing relationships. In the end, a series of moving the colored papers, listening to the interviews several times, rereading journal notes as well as analytic memos, and two rounds of coding led to five major themes. Those five themes were relationships, risk-taking, repairing harm, Second Step, and student voice. The themes are presented in Table 3 below indicating how many times each theme was referenced by each participant.

Table 3
Interview Data of Six Teachers

Participant	Relationships	Repairing harm	Risk-taking	Second Step	Student voice	Total themes
T1-K	15	7	9	4	4	39
T2-1	10	3	5	6	2	26
T3-3	5	4	4	8	1	22
T4-4	17	10	8	3	6	44
T5-2	12	5	6	2	3	28
T6-K	6	2	3	7	1	19

Relationships. Out of the five major themes that emerged after interview data was coded, relationships was the most prevalent referenced 65 times across all six interviews. As noted in this study's literature review, children who have experienced trauma have challenges developing and maintaining relationships and school staffs using targeted SEL instruction can help mitigate this challenge (Bailey et al., 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Felitti et al., 1998; Frey et al., 2019; *From a Nation*, 2019; Perry, 2007; Plumb et al., 2016). T2-1 reflected

on how important connections and relationships with students are to the learning process, "A teacher in my school has a sign on her door that says 'You can't teach a child until you reach the child,' and I absolutely agree with that statement." T4-4 suggested that building a strong classroom community is key to powerful learning, "Every interaction with a student is a chance to improve the relationship and foster trust which leads to rich learning experiences." According to T1-K, some of her students have not had many successful relationships in their home life and need to build connections at school, "Each year I have students who have trouble connecting with peers and adults, so building trusting relationships in my classroom is critical for them to develop a love of learning and a sense of confidence for taking academic and social risks." T5-2 revealed that relationship building starts on the first day of school each year, "SEL is about the relationships and community that I have established with my students from the very first day of school; it is a work in progress." T6-K also shared that making connections with students is critical, "You have to have a hook, a way to connect with students so they know you care and trust you." All six participants agreed that without strong relationships, connections, and community in a classroom, learning opportunities would be limited. T3-3 noted, "When you have a strong classroom community built on trusting individual relationships you can take the kids so much further into a topic or inquiry; they trust you and follow you."

Risk-taking. Building strong learning communities and relationships helps each participant develop a safe learning environment. The theme of risk-taking was identified 35 times during the six semi-structured interviews. T4-4 shared that training he received from the State of Connecticut in Restorative Practices has had a great impact on his ability to develop a safe learning space for his students, "Using discussion circles has become part of our everyday routine; we circle-up two to three times each day developing predictability and student comfort

to share freely and honestly about not only their thinking but also their feelings." T1-K echoed T4-4's thoughts, "My students get in the habit of talking about their feelings after a few weeks of classroom circles, this helps them bravely volunteer their ideas during academic times." T6-K recalled, "By incorporating SEL into my teaching all day long, my students feel supported and safe to take risks in their own learning." When reflecting on the benefits including SEL in her daily teaching creates for students T2-1 shared, "I have also noticed that my students who were not risk takers when they entered my classroom feeling more comfortable about taking risks as the year progresses and becoming more successful in their academic endeavors." Similarly, T3-3 noted, "SEL instruction helps my students feel confident, comfortable, and safe to share their feelings and ideas and to take risks in our learning community." Each participant referenced SEL having a positive impact on student risk-taking. T5-2 followed suit with more detail:

> By setting goals, students create distinct motivational pathways. Much of my readings discuss explicit messages. Telling students how the brain changes helps them to understand learning, which often includes struggle or challenges. When students perceive struggle as normal, they don't fear making mistakes, will take more risks, be open to failure, and focus more on progress. There is so much SEL embedded in all this work. I work hard to establish a learning environment of respect and encouragement at the beginning of the year. I strive to create a community in which my students are comfortable to take risks and are motivated to always do their very best.

Repairing harm. Over the past two years, the entire staff at ABC Elementary School has been trained to use Restorative Practices in their daily work with students and each other. In an interview conducted as part of the literature review for this study, Freiberg, a Connecticut State Department of Education consultant, suggested besides developing relationships, a major

component of Restorative Practices is repairing harm when actions and choices of a group or individual have harmed others (Frieberg, personal communication, July 10, 2018). Not surprisingly, repairing harm done to others is a theme that appeared 31 times in the interview data. T3-3 reflected, "In Restorative Practices we were taught how to repair relationships between students and even teachers when harm has been done so that all parties can move forward with the learning process together." This sentiment was also evident when T6-K shared, "Teaching students strategies for conflict resolution and problem solving when harm has been done to our community of learners is a key component of my classroom management." T2-1 noted, "Even though it takes up precious instructional time, allowing students the opportunity to talk about their problems is a huge part of repairing harm done to any classroom relationships, which helps the class work together on academics later." T1-K report, "If there was a problem at recess, we talk about it during our circle time so that the students can move on with their day and feel that any harm caused has been repaired." T5-2 agreed, "The class is now entrenched in a routine of calling for a class-wide or small group circle to talk about an issue between students before it gets too big; this helps resolve problems and keeps kids focused during learning." Finally, T4-4 shared, "Take the time to build relationships and repair harm when a problem has occurred and your classroom community of learners will gel together almost like a family; I cannot stress enough the impact of not letting problems fester."

Second Step. The fourth most frequently occurring theme from the interviews for this study was Second Step. Second Step is a stand-alone K-5 social skills program that is used at ABC Elementary School to explicitly teach SEL skills in each classroom. Second Step emerged as a theme in the interviews 30 times. This study's literature review noted that classrooms with high quality implementation of Second Step demonstrate reduced behavioral concerns and

improved social emotional skills (Low et al., 2016). T6-K shared, "We use Second Step to develop common understandings and language around student feelings and behaviors throughout the school." T3-3 noted, "By the middle of the year, you can see and hear my students using Second Step strategies as they negotiate social situations with each other; it is very rewarding." When discussing a student who has a challenging home situation T1-K reflected, "The predictable structures and routines provided by our weekly Second Step lessons and follow-up activities, has helped him to develop better coping skills and opened him up to more of his academic potential." T5-2 noted, "Though I am not a big fan, the Second Step program is important for us to use as a school since most teachers have not had formal training in SEL; without Second Step we would be relying on teachers to address SEL without any vertical or horizontal alignment between and among grade levels." T4-4 echoed T5-2's opinion, "Second Step also supports the work with SEL in our building; it is very important we use a consistent approach for students to have similar experiences and knowledge." Lastly, T2-1 shared, "Along with Restorative Practices, we teach Second Step to provide direct instruction in SEL with units on skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, friendship skills, and problem solving."

Student voice. The six participants of the study's semi-structured interviews also focused on the theme of student voice. This theme was discussed 17 times over the course of the interviews. T1-K related, "Even kindergarten students are more engaged in their learning when they have a say or choice in the process; I try to build student voice and choice into every lesson." T4-4 reported about how he uses goals to focus on student voice:

> Goal setting has been an important part of my students' experience. Rather than focusing on what students can't do, we use checklists, rubrics, and learning progressions to support students in identifying what they can do. Once students can see their strengths, they are

more willing to determine an area of growth. Students ownership and voice is a big part

of this process to develop short-term and year-long goals.

T3-3 believed that incorporating student voice and choice was a critical part of encouraging

student growth, "If students feel they are heard and have a say in the direction their project goes,

they are more likely to take risks and invest their time and energy to the project." T2-1 agreed,

"In order for a child to strive to be the best that they can be, they need to be a part of an

environment in which they feel safe and in which they feel heard." T6-K noted, "Students need

to feel that they are connected to their learning and have some say in what goes on in their daily

activities in order to be successful." Lastly, T5-2 expressed similar thoughts, "I believe, student

motivation, engagement, and buy-in to learning activities is directly related to how involved they

are in the design process; I try to be thoughtful about how I add an element of student voice and

choice to each project or activity I develop for my class." During the literature review for this

study, the researcher noted that Vygotsky (1962) held that language was the primary tool for

cognitive development among children. Ensuring students have a voice in their classroom is a

purposeful way to improve their cognitive development.

Teacher Perceptions

The responses participants shared with the researcher during the semi-structured

interviews based on the questions from the study's qualitative instrument (see Appendix C) were

considered to establish participant perceptions about embedding SEL into daily instruction. As

noted above, coding the interview data indicated five major themes related to participant

perceptions of SEL. One measure of a participant's familiarity with the five major themes of the

interview data could be the frequency with which each participant discussed the themes.

Following this method, the researcher could conclude that T4-4 and T1-K are the most

knowledgeable about the themes having referred to them 44 and 39 times respectively over the course of their interviews with significantly detailed, rich descriptions. Out of the five major themes, T4-4 and T1-K shared information about relationships significantly more than the other four themes. T5-2 and T2-1 each mentioned the five major themes 28 and 26 times respectively. Lastly, T3-3 and T6-K discussed the five themes 22 and 19 times respectively. All of the participants focused their responses mainly on the theme of relationships except T3-3, who discussed Second Step more than relationships. Over the course of the six semi-structured interviews, the mean of the theme references was 29.67 and the median was 27. The range of references to the five major themes between the participants was 25. Though the mean and median for this data set is fairly consistent and indicates some congruence between the participants related to their perceptions of or ability to discuss embedding SEL within instruction, the range of 25 suggests a wide disparity between T4-4 and T6-K.

Observations

After each participant had completed the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett et al., 2011) and participated in a 60-minute interview using the study's protocol (see Appendix C), classroom observations were conducted by the researcher using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by Robert Pianta, Karen La Paro, and Bridget Hamre (2008) (see Figure 1). During each observation, the researcher sat close to the instruction so that he could hear discourse between students and between the teacher and the students. In 2016, the researcher was trained and certified reliable as a CLASS Observer and, later in 2017, as a CLASS Observation Trainer.

Figure 1. Pianta et al. (2008). K-3 CLASS Domains, Dimensions, Indicators, and Behavioral Markers.

These trainings consisted of two 3-day in-person comprehensive programs and annual reliability recertification testing online. Three broad domains make up the CLASS observation tool called Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

Since the domain of Emotional Support deals with social emotional learning and development, it was the domain used by the researcher during the observations. As shown above in Figure 1, CLASS divides the domain of Emotional Support into the dimensions of Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, and Regard for Student Perspectives. Each dimension is described in detail below. Observers are trained to use the CLASS tool to look for evidence that supports the indicators of each dimension, which are typically shown by related behavioral markers as presented in the CLASS manual. Each dimension is assigned a score from one to seven based on the breadth and depth of evidence available during the observation. Classrooms with significant amounts of high-quality evidence for a dimension would score in the

high range with a six or seven, while a classroom lacking evidence would score in the low range

with a one or two. The only dimension that is an exception to this rule is Negative Climate.

Since the presence of evidence of Negative Climate is not desirable, earning a one or a two is

preferred, while earning scores of a six or a seven would be a major concern. A CLASS scoring

sheet was used for each observation (see Appendix E). Observation scores for each participant

within each of these four dimensions are displayed below in Table 4.

Table 4
CLASS Observation Data of Six Teachers

Participant	Grade Level	Content Area	Positive climate score	Negative climate score	Teacher sensitivity score	Regard for student perspectives score
T1-K	K	Math	7	1	7	7
T2-1	1	Reading	5	1	6	5
T3-3	3	Science	5	2	5	5
T4-4	4	Writing	7	1	7	7
T5-2	2	Math	4	1	4	5
T6-K	K	Writing	3	2	4	4

Observations – Positive Climate. According to the CLASS observation manual, within

the domain of Emotional Support the dimension of Positive Climate focuses on the relationships

between students and teachers and among students in addition to the level of warmth, respect,

and enjoyment demonstrated by both verbal and non-verbal interactions in the classroom (Pianta

et al., 2008). The tool requires observers to record and score the breadth and depth of evidence

related to four indicators within Positive Climate: Relationships, Positive Affect, Positive

Communication, and Respect. Observers look for behavioral markers to support a high score in

Positive Climate including cooperation, eye contact, respectful language, physical proximity,

matched affect, verbal and physical affection, smiles, social conversation, and warm tone of

voice.

T1-K and T4-4 each scored at the top of the high range with a seven in this dimension as there was strong evidence of Positive Climate during their observations. Students and teachers appeared very comfortable with each other. There was a quiet hum of positive, respectful conversations and the warmth between the individuals was palpable. In these two classrooms, teachers and students also smiled regularly and had frequent strong eye contact with each other. As T1-K and a student volunteer thought aloud about the calendar work they were doing during circle time, the class cheered exuberantly when T1-K used a magic trick to change the ones counters into a ten. T1-K and her students clearly enjoyed being with each other. T4-4 used specific, positive language to reinforce the thinking students were doing when he said, "I love how you pushed through that text, but paused as you were thinking about that difficult word."

T2-1, T3-3, T5-2, and T6-K all scored in the middle range of the Positive Climate dimension, indicating a moderate amount of evidence was present during their observations, with T2-1 and T3-3 scoring a five, T5-2 scoring a four, and T6-K scoring a three. The researcher noted some evidence of Positive Climate indicators during each of these six observations. As T2-1 worked with a small group of students she used their names, smiled, and had a friendly tone of voice. At one point, T2-1 said, "Eyes on me my friends. I have some words here. What can you tell me about the word all?" While the students were engaged, their affect was less than enthusiastic. T3-3 and her students each smiled occasionally and had matching neutral affects during the science period that was observed. As a student described the motion of a hoverboard as part of her presentation, T3-3 giggled and made a self-deprecating remark about falling off a hoverboard; a few students joined in her laughter. Both T2-1 and T3-3 demonstrated enough evidence of Positive Climate behavioral markers to score at the top of the middle range.

T5-2 scored squarely in the mid-range for Positive Climate with a four. There was adequate evidence of Positive Climate indicators during the observation. These included some encouraging, friendly teacher comments like, "I am really excited to see how you do with this game today" and "Keep trying, you can do it!" Evidence that prevented a higher score in this dimension included students arguing during partner work and two other students using a negative affect with each other during the group share portion of the activity.

T6-K scored the lowest out of all of the participants in this dimension with a three. This score put T6-K at the top of the low range for Positive Climate. T6-K rarely smiled and her tone of voice was not warm or friendly. Students appeared uninterested and disconnected from the teacher and each other. When one student was excited to share an anecdote from his weekend that was vaguely connected to the mini-lesson about writing informational pieces, the teacher did not give the student the opportunity to share his story or suggest that he share it later. T6-K responded to this student by saying, "That's not what we are doing right now." Some students used disrespectful language with each other and were reluctant to cooperate with the teacher.

Observations – Negative Climate. The next dimension in the Emotional Support domain within the CLASS instrument is Negative Climate. This dimension does not simply represent the absence of Positive Climate elements, but instead the presence of indicators and behavioral markers that lead to negativity in the classroom. Indicators of Negative Climate include Negative Affect, Punitive Control, Sarcasm/Disrespect, and Severe Negativity. As noted above, this is the only dimension where the most desirable score is a one. If an observation resulted in a score of seven for Negative Climate, school administrators would likely consider removing the teacher from the room to ensure student safety. Behavioral markers are typically observed when a score higher than a one is achieved in Negative Climate include teasing,

humiliation, bullying, threats, yelling, anger, harsh tone, irritability, aggression, physical control, sarcasm, victimization and physical punishment.

T1-K, T2-1, T4-4, and T5-2 all demonstrated no evidence of Negative Climate during their observations, thus earning the preferred score of a one for this dimension. Both T3-3 and T6-K occasionally made sarcastic comments to or about students. T3-3 stated, "I think I just need to come over and your eyes know to look at the speaker. Do you need me standing next to you during all of the presentations?" While the student may not have understood the sarcasm, the comment increased the level of negativity in the classroom. Similarly, during a writing period, after a student said, "My brain doesn't want to write anymore," T6-K replied, "You're just going to have to tell your brain to put more words down on the paper." This minimal amount of mild sarcasm resulted in a score of two in this dimension for both T3-3 and T6-K. This low score is still within the ideal range for this dimension.

Observations – Teacher Sensitivity. The CLASS observation tool suggests that high levels of teacher sensitivity support student learning and academic inquiry because teachers regularly offer students comfort, encouragement, and reassurance, which result in a willingness to take risks. The dimension of Teacher Sensitivity measures a teacher's responsiveness to and awareness of student academic and emotional needs. The four indicators of Teacher Sensitivity that CLASS observers look for are Awareness, Responsiveness, Addresses Problems, and Student Comfort. Classrooms with significant evidence in this dimension include behavioral markers like: students seek support and guidance, acknowledges emotions, anticipates problems, helps effectively and in a timely manner, plans appropriately, notices lack of understanding, helps to resolve problems, students freely participate, and students take risks.

T1-K, T2-1, and T4-4 all scored within the high range for Teacher Sensitivity. In each classroom students were excited to share their ideas and take academic risks. T1-K was very tuned into the students in her class. When one student had trouble telling the class what day came next on the calendar, T1-K prompted him by singing the beginning of a days of the week song that is well-known to the class. After another student's older sister brought her lunchbox down because their mother had placed them in the wrong backpacks, T1-K pleasantly encouraged the student to check the contents of the lunchbox to be sure it was actually hers as she could sense the child was anxious about the situation. T2-1 has routines in place to support students when they need academic help during lessons. When T2-1 was working with a small group of students at a table, students who came up to her with questions were given support or asked to wait for a moment as the teacher finished with the group at her table. T4-4 checked in with a group designing a website about Tsunamis that they have been researching saying, "I see an image, but where is the text? How can you support yourself as a learner, so you are ready to do the work?" T4-4 was acknowledging that the students needed support and encouraging them to be self-sufficient.

T3-3, T5-2, and T6-K landed solidly in the mid-range for Teacher Sensitivity. During each observation, moderate evidence was noted to support a score in the mid-range. While T3-3 recognized that a student was reluctant to give her science presentation, her handling of the situation was less than sensitive when she said, "You have to do it some time, so now is a good time. You have to use a presenter voice." When T5-2 was leading a community-building circle discussion, she showed sensitivity by allowing a student to say every color was his favorite rather than forcing him to choose just one. However, during partner work, T5-2 did not notice that two students were arguing about how they were sorting their coins until they spilled their

coins all over the floor. T6-K was aware of and planned for student needs by allowing one

student who has difficulty working near others to work at a desk instead of a group table.

However, when the same student asked T6-K for help generating ideas for his nonfiction piece,

T6-K simply told him, "Sit back down and think about what you want to write about and I will

check in with you later." T3-3, T5-2, and T6-K each demonstrated some evidence supporting a

score in the mid-range for Teacher Sensitivity.

        Observations – Regard for Student Perspectives. The final CLASS dimension being

examined during the observations included in this study was Regard for Student Perspectives,

which measures the degree to which classroom interactions and activities focus on student

interests, points of view, and motivations and foster student autonomy and responsibility.

Evidence in Regard for Student Perspectives comes from four indicators: Flexibility and Student

Focus, Support for Autonomy and Leadership, Student Expression, and Restriction of

Movement. In order to score in the high range in this dimension, CLASS observers look for the

following behavioral markers: encourages student discourse, elicits ideas and perspectives,

shows flexibility, incorporates student ideas, is not rigid, incorporates student ideas, follows

students' lead, allows choice, gives students responsibility, and allows movement.

        T1-K and T4-4 demonstrated significant evidence in this dimension, both scoring a

seven. There was no restriction of student movement and each classroom activity included

elements of student choice and leadership during the observations. T1-K had students lead the

class in their calendar activity during circle time. Later, students selected cozy spots in the room

to work in partnerships. At one point, T1-K reminded students about their responsibilities as

autonomous partnerships, "Remember, you have to take turns as you play your selected place

value game, and you are not finished until your partner is finished as well." During the

observation of T4-4, most students were working independently or in pairs around the room with laptop computers while T4-4 worked with a small group on writing summaries. During this small group work, students were actively in charge of their own learning as demonstrated by one student saying to another, "Do you have any evidence to share from the reading?" After reviewing a nonfiction article, T4-4 modeled how to write a summary and then said, "Now it is your turn, friends, to develop a summary of the article using your own notes and thoughts about the text. I will be back to check on your progress in a few minutes." T1-K and T4-4 provided both support and independence for their students earning the highest score in this dimension.

T2-1, T3-3, T5-2, and T6-K all earned a four or five, placing them in mid-range for this dimension. T2-1 sent students off to read in partnerships around the room as she worked with a small group. By reviewing partner work expectations prior to sending the students off, T2-1 gave students autonomy and responsibility. However, the partnerships and the reading materials were assigned by T2-1, removing an element of student choice. During the science presentations in T3-3's room, students who were presenting were clearly sharing leadership roles and there was an element of autonomy to the content of their presentations. However, students who were observing the presentations had assigned seats on the rug and were told by T3-3, "Sit crisscross applesauce," restricting their movement. T5-2 allowed students flexibility and autonomy as they practiced sorting coins into groups they designed, but as students spoke excitedly to each other about new combinations, T5-2 reminded them, "Be sure to use your inside voices." As students were writing in T6-K's room, they each generated a unique list of things they could do as writers to help their readers like include proper capitalization, punctuation, spacing, and spelling. However, T6-K limited student choice of writing implements to pencils only and reminded them to work at their assigned table seats only, restricting their choices and movement. Each teacher,

T2-1, T3-3, T5-2, and T6-K, demonstrated a combination of evidence that supported a score in the mid-range for Regard for Student Perspectives.

Triangulation of Data

Three data points were used by the researcher as part of his study to gain a more comprehensive perspective of the research questions. Survey responses from the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (see Appendix D), which assesses perceptions of and beliefs about SEL (Brackett et al., 2011), gave the researcher a glimpse into the readiness of each participant and the school to incorporate SEL practices. Participant interviews provided the researcher with an understanding of participant perceptions of and experiences with embedding social emotional learning within academic instruction. Lastly, CLASS observations provided the researcher with information about the participants' understanding and implementation of social emotional learning. Table 5 displays relevant information from each data point of the study in order to provide a fuller picture of each participant in relation to embedding social and emotional learning within academic instruction.

Table 5
Data Triangulation of Six Teachers

Participant	Grade level	Total 'strongly agree' survey responses	Interview code totals	Positive climate score	Negative climate score	Teacher sensitivity score	Regard for student perspectives score
T1-K	K	8	39	7	1	7	7
T2-1	1	7	26	5	1	6	5
T3-3	3	4	22	5	2	5	5
T4-4	4	8	44	7	1	7	7
T5-2	2	2	28	4	1	4	5
T6-K	K	1	19	3	2	4	4

The triangulated data for T1-K and T4-4 indicates a high level of understanding and readiness for embedding SEL into their daily academic instruction. Both participants

demonstrated their readiness for SEL with the highest number of 'strongly agree' survey responses out of the participants with eight each. A strong understanding of embedding SEL into academic activities was indicated by the number of times T1-K and T4-4 referenced the five major themes, 39 and 44 respectively. Lastly, T1-K and T4-4 were the only participants to score in the optimal range in all four of the CLASS dimensions observed during this study, showing a high level of implementation of their SEL understandings.

The data for T2-1, T3-3, and T5-2 does not triangulate into a similar pattern. These participants each scored in the mid- to high-range on some dimensions of CLASS, indicating a moderate implementation of SEL in their classrooms. They also were either close to the mean of 29.67 for interview code totals (26, 22, 28 respectively) or were close to the mean of five for total 'strongly agree' survey responses (7, 4, 2 respectively). This data could indicate that the participants are somewhat ready for SEL implementation and have a moderate amount of SEL understandings but could improve their ability to embed SEL instruction within academic instruction.

Lastly, the triangulated data for T6-K coalesces into a different story related to embedding SEL during academic instruction. T6-K demonstrated the lowest readiness for implementing SEL in her classroom with only one 'strongly agree' survey response. She also referenced the five major interview code themes the fewest times (19), indicating a lower level understanding of embedding SEL into academic instruction. Finally, T6-K scored solidly in the mid-range for all of the CLASS dimensions being observed as part of this study, indicating limited implementation of SEL during instruction, which could be related to a variety of factors including her investment in SEL, her prior training with SEL, or her own social and emotional development.

Conclusion

In Chapter 4, the researcher reviewed the data collection and analysis process, participant demographics, and patterns and themes that developed during this research study. Also included in this chapter was a review of survey responses from the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (see Appendix D), a summary of CLASS observation scores, and triangulation of the data collected as part of the study. Survey responses indicated that most of the participants are ready to implement SEL in their classrooms. The themes that were most prevalent during the six semi-structured interviews were: relationships, repairing harm, risk-taking, Second Step, and student voice. CLASS observation scores indicated moderate to high performance by the participants in the four dimensions of the Emotional Support domain included in this study. In Chapter 5, these themes and patterns will be interpreted, and recommendations for future studies will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher understandings of social-emotional learning (SEL) during academic instruction. This chapter presents a summary of the study as well as recommendations for future research. The chapter is divided into the following sections: interpretation of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

SEL in public schools is a common talking point for many educators and educational leaders across the country. Much of the research and current trends in SEL are supported by and outgrowths of Vygotsky's theory of social development (1962) as well as Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977). Additionally, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) identified five critical SEL competencies including self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Insights and perspectives into the implementation of SEL during academic instruction were gained by the researcher through this qualitative research study.

Interpretation of the Findings

As shown in Chapter 4, data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations indicated that, while a few of the participants have sought out external professional development (PD) related to SEL, most have only participated in SEL PD provided by their district. Additionally, none of the participants noted participating in any formal coursework related to SEL. Having worked previously as an administrator in the district where the study site is located, the researcher was familiar with professional development offerings provided by the district to staff in recent history related to SEL. District SEL PD provided to the participants of the study in recent years has focused on discrete instruction of the five SEL competencies using

the Second Step curriculum as well as building and repairing relationships using Restorative Practices. The content of the district PD related to SEL was echoed in the themes that developed from the study data. When responding to the study's interview questions about SEL, most participants focused on student emotions and relationships. In their responses and actions, participants demonstrated that their understanding of SEL was rooted in their familiarity with aspects of Restorative Practices and the Second Step program. This is a positive outcome related to teacher perceptions and value of SEL. However, participant interview and survey responses as well as observations did not indicate that the five SEL competencies were being embedded in academic instruction with significant frequency.

Positive social and emotional functioning has been associated with increased neurotransmitters in the brain which has been correlated with cognitive flexibility, improved learning, and increased student academic achievement (Anderson et al., 2015; Felitti, et al., 1998; Frey et al., 2019; Jensen, 2017). The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) noted the theoretical and research-based foundations of SEL and its implications for mental health and long-term academic success. Research also suggests that intentional social-emotional skills instruction embedded within academic instruction decreases maladaptive behavior and improves academic performance (Bailey et al., 2019; Frey et al., 2019). After sharing the findings from this study with administrators from ABC Elementary School it is the hope of the researcher that ABC Elementary School leaders will implement further training for teachers to broaden their understanding of SEL and their ability to embed the five SEL competencies within academic instruction throughout the day.

Implications for Practice

This section will highlight the implications of this study based on participant responses to survey and interview questions and the results of their observations using the CLASS observation tool. The study research questions will be used to organize this section.

Research Question 1. How do teachers' past experiences and training with embedding social-emotional learning in academic instruction inform their approach to teaching? This study showed that the participants have a general understanding of SEL and focus their related work with students around the SEL competency of relationship skills with the theme of relationships being most prevalent in the interview data with 65 references. Three of the other major themes, repairing harm, risk-taking, and student voice, are each minor elements of the other SEL competencies as identified by CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015), specifically self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Based on these results, each participant's understanding of the five SEL competencies and how to embed them within academic instruction appeared to be limited. Currently, each of the six participants rely on the stand-alone SEL program, Second Step, as the sole way of addressing the five SEL competencies with their students. There was little to no evidence of participants purposefully having students apply these competencies within academic settings. Only during the observations of T1 and T5, did the researcher note intentional social skill application embedded within academic instruction. T1 and T5 each had their students practice the SEL competency self-management as part of their planned learning activity. T1 designed a math game in which pairs of students worked together to make five groups of ten using colored cubes. The students had to take turns making each group of ten and they had to wait until each partner was finished before returning to the classroom rug. T1 planned for the students to practice impulse control

and self-regulation, both of which are part of the SEL competency self-management. Similarly, T5 had her students set a goal of how many ways they planned to sort a given amount of coins within ten minutes. T5 intentionally had students practice goal setting, which is also part of the SEL competency of self-management. With the exception of T6, all of the study participants demonstrated a readiness to implement SEL within their classrooms and recognized the need for further training in this area as well as the significant positive outcomes that social and emotional skill instruction can provide for the students with whom they work. The researcher hypothesizes that each participant's lack of experience and training with embedding SEL within academic instruction limited how SEL informed their instruction techniques and plans during academic instruction.

Research Question 2. How and to what extent do teachers perceive they are addressing their students' social-emotional needs during academic instruction? The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) both recommend a four-pronged approach to developing students' five SEL competencies using evidence-based SEL instructional models. The first instructional model recommended by both organizations is discrete, direct instruction in social and emotional skills using a program that has a vertically aligned scope and sequence of lessons. Such lessons should address effective communication, responsible decision-making, conflict resolution, naming emotions, managing stress and anxiety, promoting empathy and compassion, personal goal setting, and being assertive (CASEL, 2013; *From a Nation*, 2019). Second Step, the SEL stand-alone program used in all classrooms at ABC Elementary School, is an example of this type of SEL program. The second approach to SEL suggested by both organizations focuses on routines and practices across the school day and in

all school settings. These routines and practices should be structured, predictable occasions for students to have positive social interactions, develop trusting relationships, and feel like productive members of the school community who have a voice (CASEL, 2013; *From a Nation*, 2019). The third approach to SEL instruction in schools recommended by the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) and CASEL (2013) suggested that SEL should be embedded within academic instruction. Lastly, school leadership should promote and develop policies and structures that support SEL at the building level (CASEL, 2013; *From a Nation*, 2019). In an interview conducted as part of the literature review for this study, Freiberg, a Connecticut State Department of Education consultant, noted that the State of Connecticut Board of Education had recently created a resource for schools and educators called, The Components of Social, Emotional and Intellectual Habits, that includes and supports these four approaches to SEL instruction in Connecticut public schools (personal communication, July 10, 2018).

Triangulation of data collected as part of this research study indicated that three of these four approaches are in place to some degree within all of the classrooms of the study participants at ABC Elementary School. All the participants of this study demonstrated that they understand and implement the first recommended approach to SEL instruction by regularly including direct instruction of SEL skills using the Second Step program. The participants all reported teaching Second Step lessons and follow-up activities weekly. Each participant also includes various opportunities for students to engage in social discourse and build trusting relationships throughout the school day to varying degrees as part of their teaching pedagogy. Finally, leadership at ABC Elementary School has invested time, talent, and funds to promote SEL at the building level with school-wide initiatives related to Restorative Practices training for staff,

scheduled time for student discourse daily in the form of Restorative Practice Circles, school climate surveys and action steps, student leadership opportunities, SEL and behavior trainings for staff, an alternate setting for students to build relationships after they have finished their lunch, and a dedicated room for students to reflect on their emotions if they need a break or to take space. Embedding SEL within academic instruction, the focus of this study, is the approach recommended by the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) and CASEL (2013) that was least evident in each of the participant classrooms. However, based on their current understandings of and trainings with SEL and approaches to SEL instruction, the participants expressed repeatedly during their interviews that they each address SEL within academic instruction consistently. The researcher noted that, for the most part, participants addressed student emotions and relationships across their school day, but did not embed social and emotional skill instruction, practice, or application within academic content instruction. This disconnect suggests that teachers at ABC Elementary School need further training in the five SEL competencies and how to embed them within academic instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

As noted earlier in Chapter 3, a limitation of this study is that it took place in a small elementary school setting with suburban to rural characteristics. Additionally, due to the impact on teachers' schedules and work conditions, the researcher chose to limit the sample size to six educators. Therefore, this study was limited with respect to size and location, and the findings may be transferrable but not necessarily generalizable to other sites. The study would need to be replicated in settings with different demographics and larger sample sizes to verify the findings. Also, the study site promulgates the use of Second Step for direct instruction of SEL and Restorative Practices as a schoolwide SEL framework. Future studies could investigate the

correlation between the combination of these two approaches to SEL in elementary school settings. A final limitation of this study was that, in order to be included in this study, teachers had to have been teaching at ABC Elementary School for a minimum of two-years. Future studies could examine how novice teachers embed the SEL five competencies within academic instruction and whether or not teacher preparation programs support this practice.

It was clear from this study that each participant's ability to or interest in implementing SEL in their classrooms during academic instruction was limited by their preparation and training. The literature review for this study indicated that there is ample research into the effect SEL has on students, but there is a need for research into how teachers' own social emotional development and SEL training impacts their ability to deliver meaningful, embedded SEL instruction to their student during academic instruction (Bailey et al., 2019; CASEL, 2013; Frey et al., 2019; *From a Nation*, 2019). Further investigation is also needed to determine to what extent a teacher's inclusion of SEL during academic instruction, the missing fourth recommended approach to SEL instruction, improves academic performance for students compared to classrooms where only three of the SEL approaches are prevalent.

Conclusion

Social and emotional learning (SEL) and skill development are critical components of student academic and interpersonal success at school. As noted earlier, CASEL (2013) and Weissberg et al. (2015) identified five critical SEL competencies including self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Abundant research suggests academic achievement and prosocial behavior are improved when schools address these five competencies, as well as attention and cognitive skills, especially for subgroups of students who are marginalized (Dacey et al., 2017; Frey et al., 2019; Pianta, La

Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Additionally, significant research indicates that students who have

experienced trauma are more likely to demonstrate dysregulated behaviors that limit academic

growth (Anderson et al., 2015; Felitti, et al., 1998; Frey et al., 2019; Jensen, 2017). Students

who are dysregulated at school due to trauma and a lack of SEL skills contribute to the

achievement gap that persists in many American public schools (Dacey et al., 2017). The

teachers in this study recognized the value of SEL and most believed that they address SEL

within academic instruction currently. While the researcher noted that study participants have a

basic understanding of SEL, more training is encouraged so that teachers can embed instruction

in the five SEL competencies within academic instruction with regularity.

The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic

Development (2019), the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL,

2013), and significant other research posit that SEL instruction improves academic outcomes in

addition to student behavior. The Connecticut State Department of Education has joined national

groups and many other states in supporting SEL instruction in public schools using the

aforementioned multi-level approach. This four-pronged approach includes: stand-alone direct

instruction of SEL skills, classroom activities and structures that encourage social emotional

growth and development, building-level SEL initiatives supported by administrators, and SEL

instruction and application of these skills embedded within academic content. This study

demonstrates that while some public schools, like ABC Elementary School, recognize the value

of SEL and have provided basic training and programming related to SEL, more effort and

attention is needed to ensure the five SEL competencies are addressed using the four

recommended approaches by teachers and schools to garner improved student outcomes. All

school districts must critically examine how they have implemented SEL, and provide ongoing,

targeted professional development to staff related to the five SEL competencies and embedding

SEL within academic instruction.

References

Abry, T., Brewer, A., Nathanson, L., Sawyer, B., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2010). Classroom

practices observation measure. Unpublished instrument. University of Virginia. Retrieved

from https://www.academia.edu/2801083/Classroom_Practices_Observation_Measure

Abry, T., Rimm-Kaufman, S., & Curby, T. W. (2017). Are all program elements created equal?

relations between specific social and emotional learning components and teacher-student

classroom interaction quality. *Prevention Science*, *18*(2), 193-203. doi:10.1007/s11121-

016-0743-3

Anderson, C. (2010). Presenting and evaluating qualitative research. *American Journal of*

Pharmaceutical Education, 74(8), 141. Retrieved from

http://www.ajpe.org/doi/full/10.5688/aj7408141

Anderson, E. M., Blitz, L. V., & Saastamoinen, M. (2015). Exploring a school-university model

for professional development with classroom staff: Teaching trauma-informed

approaches. *School Community Journal, 25*(2), 113-134. Retrieved from

http://www.adi.org/journal/2015fw/AndersonEtAlFall2015.pdf

Ankner, S. (2016). Teacher talk and student learning (Order No. 10142762). ProQuest

Dissertations & Theses A&I. (1823257867). Retrieved from https://search-proquest-

com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/1823257867

Ansari, A., & Pianta, R. C. (2018). Variation in the long-term benefits of childcare: The role of

classroom quality in elementary school. *Developmental Psychology, 54*(10), 1854–1867.

doi:10.1037/dev0000513.supp (Supplemental)

Antoniou, P., & Kyriakides, L. (2013). A Dynamic Integrated Approach to teacher professional

development: Impact and sustainability of the effects on improving teacher behaviour and

student outcomes. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 29*, 1-12.

doi:10.1016/j.tate.2012.08.001

Ashdown, D. M., & Bernard, M. E. (2012). Can explicit instruction in social and emotional

learning skills benefit the social-emotional development, well-being, and academic

achievement of young children? *Early Childhood Education Journal, 39*(6), 397-405.

doi: 10.1007/s10643-011-0481-x

Bailey, R., Stickle, L., Brion-Meisels, G., & Jones, S. M. (2019, February). Re-imagining social-

emotional learning: Findings from a strategy-based approach: To bring the benefits of

SEL to more students, programs need to be flexible enough to adapt to local needs. *Phi*

Delta Kappan, *100*(5), 53. Retrieved from https://link-gale-

com.une.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A588989914/ITOF?u=bidd97564&sid=ITOF&xid=a294

06e6

Baines, L., & Slutsky, R. (2009). Developing the Sixth Sense: Play. *Educational Horizons, 87*(2),

97-101. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/42923751

Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall.

Bell, C. A., Dobbelaer, M. J., Klette, K., & Visscher, A. (2018). Qualities of classroom

observation systems. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International*

Journal of Research, Policy, and Practice. doi:10.1080/09243453.2018.1539014.

Biza, I., Nardi, E., & Joel, G. (2015). Balancing classroom management with mathematical

learning: Using practice-based task design in mathematics teacher education.

Mathematics Teacher Education and Development, 17(2), 182-198. Retrieved from

https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/56097/1/MTED_2015_Biza_Nardi_Joel_Repository.pdf

Boyles, N. (2018, October). Learning Character from Characters. *Educational Leadership: The Promise of Social-Emotional Learning*, *76*(2), 70-74. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct18/vol76/num02/Learning-Character-from-Characters.aspx

Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., Rivers, S. E., Elbertson, N. A., & Salovey, P. (2011). Assessing Teachers' Beliefs About Social and Emotional Learning. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 30*(3), 219-236. doi:10.1177/0734282911424879

Brown, J. L., Jones, S. M., LaRusso, M. D., & Aber, J. L. (2010). Improving classroom quality: Teacher influences and experimental impacts of the 4rs program. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*(1), 153–167. doi:10.1037/a0018160

Butin, D. W. (2010). *The education dissertation: A guide for practitioner scholars.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Carr, R. C., Mokrova, I. L., Vernon-Feagans, L., & Burchinal, M. R. (2019). Cumulative classroom quality during pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and children's language, literacy, and mathematics skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 47*, 218-228. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.12.010

Carstarphen, M. J., & Graff, E. (2018). Seeding SEL Across Schools: Strategies for Leaders: Two district superintendents explain why--and how--they've prioritized social-emotional learning in their school systems. *Educational Leadership*, *76*(2), 30–34. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.une.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=1327 92650&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/ace

Civic Impulse. (2016). S. 1177 — 114th Congress: Every Student Succeeds Act. Retrieved from

     https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/s1177

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2013). *The 2013: CASEL*

     guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs (Preschool and Elementary School

     Edition). Retrieved from https://une.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-

     com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/1093910299?accountid=12756

Creswell, J.W. (2015*). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*

     and qualitative research (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Dacey, J., Criscitiello, G., & Devlin, M. (2017*).* Integrating sel into your curriculum: practical

     lesson plans for grades 3-5. Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Danielson, C. (2011). A Vision of Excellence. Retrieved July 25, 2019, from

     https://danielsongroup.org/framework

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). Teacher education and the American future. *Journal of Teacher*

     Education, *61*(1-2), 35+. Retrieved from https://link-gale-

     com.une.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A216896337/BIC?u=bidd97564&sid=BIC&xid=86d6c4

     1c

Dennis, D. V. (2016). Learning from the Past: What ESSA Has the Chance to Get Right. *The*

     Reading Teacher, 70(4), 395-400. doi:10.1002/trtr.1538

Driving K–12 Innovation: 2019 Hurdles (Rep.). (2019). Retrieved February 14, 2019, from

     Consortium for School Networking website: https://cosn.org

Durlak, J., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., Weissberg, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of

     enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based

universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405-432. Retrieved from

http://www.jstor.org/stable/29782838

Ee, J & L. C., Quek. (2013). Teachers' perceptions of students' social emotional learning and

their infusion of SEL. *Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education*. Retrieved from

https://link-gale-

com.une.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A589049611/AONE?u=bidd97564&sid=AONE&xid=5f

a90be5

Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M.

P., Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to

many of the leading causes of death in adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine,*

14(4), 245-258. doi:10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8

Ferguson, M. (2016). ESSA opens school door to social-emotional learning. *The Phi Delta*

Kappan, 97(8), 74-75. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489334

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2018, October). What students want to talk about: socially oriented

questions help students gain life skills. *Educational Leadership: The Promise of Social-*

Emotional Learning, *76*(2), 80-81. Retrieved from

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct18/vol76/num02/What-

Students-Want-to-Talk-About.aspx

Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Smith, D. (2019*). All learning is social and emotional: Helping students*

develop essential skills for the classroom and beyond. Alexandria, VA, USA: ASCD.

From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope (Rep.). (2019, January 15). Retrieved

http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation

Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence: the right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Gifford-Smith, M. (2000). Teacher social competence scale, fast track project technical report. Durham, NC: Duke University. Retrieved from http://fasttrackproject.org/techrept/s/sct/

Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (5th ed.).* New York, NY: Pearson.

Glossary of Educational Reform. (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2018, from https://www.edglossary.org/

Goodwin, B. (2018, October). SEL: Getting the "other stuff" right: Nonacademic factors have a major effect on learning. *Educational Leadership: The Promise of Social-Emotional Learning, 76*(2), 78-79. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct18/vol76/num02/SEL@-Getting-the-%C2%A3Other-Stuff%C2%A3-Right.aspx

Gray, Peter. (2013). *Free to Learn Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life.* Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books.

Griggs, M. S., Mikami, A. Y., & Rimm-Kaufman, K. S. E. (2016). Classroom quality and student behavior trajectories in elementary school. *Psychology in the Schools, 53*(7), 690–704. https://doi-org.une.idm.oclc.org/1

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1). Article 4. Retrieved 13 July 2019 http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf

Harris, D., Ingle, W., & Rutledge, S. (2014). How teacher evaluation methods matter for accountability: A comparative analysis of teacher effectiveness ratings by principals and

teacher value-added measures. *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(1), 73-112.

Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/24546670

Jensen, E. (2017). *Poor students, richer teaching: Mindsets that raise student achievement.*

Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Jones, E., & Bergin, C. (2019). Evaluating teacher effectiveness using classroom observations: A

Rasch analysis of the rater effects of principals. *Educational Assessment*, 1-28.

doi:10.1080/10627197.2018.1564272

Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: From

programs to strategies and commentaries. *Social Policy Report, 26*(4), 1-33.

doi:10.1002/j.2379-3988.2012.tb00073.x

Kiemer, K., Gröschner, A., Kunter, M., & Seidel, T. (2016). Instructional and motivational

classroom discourse and their relationship with teacher autonomy and competence

support—findings from teacher professional development. *European Journal of*

Psychology of Education, 33(2), 377-402. doi:10.1007/s10212-016-0324-7

Kohler, M., Christensen, L., & Kilgo, J. (2012). Among the periodicals: Developmentally

appropriate practice. *Childhood Education, 88*(6), 407-412. doi:10.1080

/00094056.2012.741494

Koth, C. W., Bradshaw, C. P., & Leaf, P. J. (2009). Teacher observation of classroom adaptation-

checklist: Development and factor structure. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling*

and Development, 42, 15–30. doi: 10.1177/0748175609333560

Kubista, J. R. (2015). Social emotional learning to develop positive culture and climate (Order

No. 10168071). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (1826873671). Retrieved from

https://search-proquest-com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/1826873671

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2001). *Practical research: Planning and design (7th ed.).* Upper

    Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Low, S., Smolkowski, K., & Cook, C. (2016). What constitutes high-quality implementation of

    SEL programs? A latent class analysis of second step implementation. *Prevention*

    Science, 17(8), 981-991. doi: 10.1007/s11121-016-0670-3

Luria, A.R. (1960). "Verbal regulation of behavior." In M.A.B. Brader (Ed), *The central nervous*

    system and behavior. New York: Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation.

Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional

    learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan, 100*(4), 18-23.

    doi:10.1177/0031721718815668

Marion, R., & Gonzales, L. D. (2014). *Leadership in education: organizational theory for the*

    practitioner (2nd ed.). Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press.

Marzano, R. (2014). The leader in solutions for teacher and leader evaluation and growth.

    Retrieved July 25, 2019, from https://www.marzanocenter.com/

Moran, K. M. (2016). Why do adolescents use maladaptive emotion regulation strategies? the

    role of perceived effectiveness, distress tolerance, and impulsivity (Order No. 10110084).

    ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (1796881191). Retrieved from https://search-

    proquest-com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/1796881191

Nathanson, L., Rivers, S. E., Flynn, L. M., & Brackett, M. A. (2016). Creating emotionally

    intelligent schools with RULER. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 305–310. doi:

    10.1177/1754073916650495

Nathanson, L., Sawyer, B., & Rimm-Kaufman, S.E. (2007a). Classroom practices teacher survey. Unpublished instrument. University of Virginia. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/2801175/Classroom_Practices_Teacher_Survey

Nathanson, L., Sawyer, B., & Rimm-Kaufman, S.E. (2007b). Classroom practices frequency survey. Unpublished instrument. University of Virginia. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/2801246/Classroom_Practices_Frequency_Scale

Obtaining and Maintaining Connecticut Educator Certification [PDF]. (2018). Hartford: Connecticut State Department of Education. Retrieved from https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/guides/obtaining1109aw.pdf

Osborne, J., Enduran, S., & Simon, S. (2004). Enhancing the quality of argumentation in school science. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 41*(10), 994-1020. doi: 10.1002/tea.20035

Patterson, T., & Crumpler, T. (2009). Slow transformation: Teacher research and shifting teacher practices. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 36*(3), 95-111. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479191

Pennell, C. E. (2018). Exploring classroom discourse in the Common Core era: A multiple case study. Literacy Research and Instruction, 57(4), 306-329. doi:10.1080/19388071.2018.1474982

Perry, B. (2007). Stress, trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders in children: An introduction. The Child Trauma Academy. Retrieved from https://childtrauma.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/PTSD_ Caregivers.pdf

Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom assessment scoring system (CLASS) manual.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub.

Plumb, J. L., Bush, K. A., & Kersevich, S. E. (2016). Trauma-sensitive schools: An evidence-based approach. School Social Work Journal, 40(2), 37-60. Retrieved from https://search-proquest-com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/1789702716

Poulou, M., Bassett, H., & Denham, S., (2018) Teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning: Students' emotional and behavioral difficulties in U.S. and Greek preschool classrooms, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 32*:3, 363-377, doi: 10.1080/02568543.2018.1464980

Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., & Dong, N. (2018). The Incredible Years teacher classroom management program: Outcomes from a group randomized trial. Prevention Science, 19(8), 1043-1054. doi:10.1007/s11121-018-0932-3

Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy. (2015). *Social and emotional learning: Opportunities for Massachusetts, lessons for the nation.* Boston, MA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Schluntz, M. (2018). Developing collective teacher efficacy through job-embedded professional development in elementary teachers (Order No. 10829679). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (2102560171). Retrieved from https://search-proquest-com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/2102560171

Schonfeld, D. J., Adams, R. E., Fredstrom, B. K., Weissberg, R. P., Gilman, R., Voyce, C., … Speese-Linehan, D. (2015). Cluster-randomized trial demonstrating impact on academic achievement of elementary social-emotional learning. *School Psychology Quarterly, 30*(3), 406–420. doi: 10.1037/spq0000099

Shanahan, T. (2015). Common Core State Standards. *The Elementary School Journal, 115*(4), 464-479. doi:10.1086/681130

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2012). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

The Connecticut State Department of Education. (2014). *Connecticut Core Standards English Language Arts, K-5 Standards Progression.* Retrieved from https://ctcorestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/CCS-ELA_K-5_Standards_Progression.pdf

The Connecticut State Department of Education. (2014). *Connecticut Core Standards Mathematics, K-5 Standards Progression.* Retrieved from https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Student-Assessment/Smarter-Balanced-Presentations/mathematics_overview.pdf?la=en

Tomlinson, C. (2018, October). Dignity in the classroom. Educational Leadership: The Promise of Social-Emotional Learning, 76(2), 86-88. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational leadership/oct18/vol76/num02/abstract.aspx

2017 SEED Handbook [PDF]. (2017, October). Hartford: Connecticut State Department of Education. Retrieved from https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/SEED/2017_SEED_Handbook.pdf?la=en

Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Walker, C. (2014). *Early head start participants, program, families, and staff in 2013*. Center for Law and Social Policy. 1015 15th Street NW Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED568165.pdf

Weissberg, R.P., Durlak, J.A., Domitrovich, C.E., & Gullotta, T.P. (2015). Social and emotional

    learning: Past, present, and future. In J.A. Durlak, C.E. Domitrovich, R.P. Weissberg, &

    T.P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*

    (pp. 3-19). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Woodcock, R. W., McGrew, K. S., & Mather, N. (2007). *Woodcock Johnson III Tests of*

    Achievement. Rolling Meadows, IL: Riverside.

Yoder, N. (2014, January). *Teaching the Whole Child* [PDF]. Washington, D.C.: American

    Institutes for Research. Retrieved from

    https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf

Appendix A

Invitational Letter

Dear Educator:

As a doctoral candidate at the University of New England, I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that delves into the phenomenon of social and emotional learning. I believe this study will add to the body of knowledge regarding the integration of social and emotional learning into elementary classrooms.

I would like to invite you to participate in a face-to-face interview (no more than 60 minutes), a 12-question survey, and one non-evaluative classroom observation (no more than 60 minutes). The sample for this study will consist of participants who are elementary K-4 classroom teachers in New England.

As part of this invitation, you will receive a consent form that outlines the procedures, directions, and ethical requirements for the study. Your contribution is very valuable. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time. All records and documents with your name will be kept confidential and you will not be identified in any publication of this dissertation. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Interviews will be digitally recorded by Dragon Speak dictation and audio to text dictation for transcription purposes only. Solely the researcher will have access to the recordings, completed surveys, and observation notes. The recordings, surveys, and notes will be held in a secure area with password protection. At the conclusion of the study, the recordings, surveys, and notes will be destroyed.

There will be no direct benefits to your participation in the study. However, your participation will involve reflecting on your experiences, which may provide other teachers, principals, and other administrators and stakeholders' information useful for becoming better informed about the integration of social and emotional learning into elementary classrooms.

Please read the attached Informed Consent Form and if you are willing to participate, email a signed copy of the form to me at cbasta@une.edu. I will then contact you to arrange for an interview. If you have questions, please contact me through e-mail at cbasta@une.edu. Please accept my sincere appreciation for your support and participation.

Sincerely,

Christopher T. Basta, *M.A.T., Doctoral Candidate*

Appendix B

Consent for Participation in Research

Consent for Participation in Research

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Social-Emotional Learning Embedded in Academic Instruction to Address Student Social-Emotional Needs

Principal Investigator: Christopher T. Basta, Graduate Student, University of New England
Email: cbasta@une.edu   Phone: (203)803-8423

Introduction:

• Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
• You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Purpose of the study:

This study seeks to collect information on how elementary school teachers embed social-emotional learning within academic instruction to meet the needs of their students.

Who will be selected for the study?

To be selected you must meet the following requirements:

• Current K-4 elementary school teacher who has taught at the study site for at least two years
• Have some experience teaching social-emotional skills

What will I be asked to do?

• Review and sign this consent form and then return to the researcher at cbasta@une.edu.
• Participate in one in-person interview and one non-evaluative classroom observation (approximately 60 minutes each) and complete a 12-question survey.

- Review the typed transcript of the interview (30 to 60 minutes), and comment or make changes to transcripts via telephone, video call, email, or through an in-person interview.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- Although it is not expected that the participant receives any direct benefit from participation, the participant may acquire an understanding of the positive effect of embedding social-emotional learning within academic content instruction.
- Your participation may also help other educators, administrators, community stakeholders, and graduate students increase their understanding of how embedded social-emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs.

What will it cost me?

- There are no associated costs. In-person interviews will be conducted at a location that is local and convenient for the participant or by phone/video conference.

How will my privacy be protected and data be kept confidential?

- Pseudonyms will be assigned to both you and your school.
- Paper documents including the consent forms and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only the investigator has access to. Documents will be maintained by the investigator for five years after the study is completed; after which they will be destroyed.
- Electronic documents will be stored on the password protected personal laptop of the investigator.
- Audio recordings of the interviews will remain with the principal investigator and erased after completion of the study.
- Transcripts will be sent to participants for review and information may be shared with the faculty advisor or University of New England Institutional Review Board (IRB).

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future interactions with your school.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any interview question for any reason.

- You may withdraw from the study at any time.
- The principal investigator may terminate your participation in the study at any time for any reason, with or without notice to you.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Christopher T. Basta. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact him at cbasta@une.edu or via phone at (203)803-8423.
- The faculty advisor, Suzan Nelson, Ph.D. may be contacted at snelson@une.edu or via phone at (207) 221-4860.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You may keep a signed copy of this form for your records.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research participant. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

_____   _____
Participant's signature or   Date
Legally authorized representative

_____
Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

October 16, 2019
Researcher's signature   Date

Christopher T. Basta
Printed name

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Date: _____   Interviewer: _____
Participant Code: _____

Script to be read before each interview:
Thank you for taking time to meet with me today to talk about your experiences as an elementary school teacher. The purpose of this interview is to understand your experiences addressing student social and emotional learning. I am not evaluating you or your school district.

Everything we talk about today is confidential. I will be developing a report to document what you share with me, but no names or schools will be identified. Our interview should take no more than 1 hour. I would like to digitally record the interview with Dragon Speak dictation, and audio to text format, but your name and your school district's name will not be included on the transcripts, and the recordings will be kept in a secure location in my office. Please let me know if there's any point at which you would like me to turn off the recording device.

Additionally, when I come for the classroom observation following this interview, I will be showing you a copy of this interview for your review. You can read your responses and make any additions or deletions at this point. Do you have any questions? You did receive a copy of this document 48 hours prior to this interview in the event you decided not to participate.

Interview Questions
1. Please take some time to share your personal thoughts on social and emotional learning.
2. Reflect on and discuss any formal or informal training you have had related to embedding social-emotional learning into academic lessons.
3. How often do you embed SEL in your academic instruction?
4. In what ways do you include social-emotional learning in your academic instruction? Can you give me some specific examples?
5. Can you talk about challenges you have encountered incorporating social and emotional learning into your instructional practice?
6. Can you talk about any benefits to students you have observed by including social and emotional learning in your daily teaching?
7. Based on personal experiences, if you were to give advice to another teacher who is going to work on social and emotional learning with their students, what would you say?
8. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

Appendix D
Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale

Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett et al., 2011)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Scale for Teachers

> Please read the following definition:
>
> ***Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*** *refers to the development of skills related to recognizing and managing emotions, developing care and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively.*
>
> With this definition in mind, please read the following statements and think about how true each is for YOU. Rate the extent to which you **agree** or **disagree** with each statement.
>
> YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS SURVEY ARE CONFIDENTIAL
> *Completely fill in the bubble that corresponds with your response.*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	O	O	O	O	O
2. The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional skills	O	O	O	O	O
3. All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	O	O	O	O	O
4. I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	O	O	O	O	O
5. Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs comes naturally to me.	O	O	O	O	O
6. My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.	O	O	O	O	O
7. I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	O	O	O	O	O
8. Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	O	O	O	O	O
9. I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	O	O	O	O	O
10. My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.	O	O	O	O	O
11. I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.	O	O	O	O	O
12. I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills.	O	O	O	O	O

Appendix E
CLASS Scoring Sheet

CLASS Scoring Sheet

((CLASS®

OBSERVATION SHEET

Teacher: _____   Observer: _____

Start time: _____   End time: _____

Number of adults: _____   Number of children: _____

CONTENT (circle all; check majority):			FORMAT (circle all; check majority):		
Lit/Lang Arts	Math	Science	Routine	Whole group	Individual time
Social Studies	Art	Other: _____	Meals/snacks	Small group	Free choice/centers

Circle appropriate score.

Dimension	Notes	Score
Positive Climate (PC) • Relationships • Positive Affect • Positive Communication • Respect	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Negative Climate (NC) • Negative Affect • Punitive Control • Sarcasm/Disrespect • Severe Negativity	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Teacher Sensitivity (TS) • Awareness • Responsiveness • Addresses Problems • Student Comfort	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Regard for Student Perspectives (RSP) • Flexibility and Student Focus • Support for Autonomy and Leadership • Student Expression • Restriction of Movement	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Behavior Management (BM) • Clear Behavior Expectations • Proactive • Redirection of Misbehavior • Student Behavior	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Productivity (PD) • Maximizing Learning Time • Routines • Transitions • Preparation	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Instructional Learning Formats (ILF) • Effective Facilitation • Variety of Modalities and Materials • Student Interest • Clarity of Learning Objectives	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Concept Development (CD) • Analysis and Reasoning • Creating • Integration • Connections to the Real World	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Quality of Feedback (QF) • Scaffolding • Feedback Loops • Prompting Thought Processes • Providing Information • Encouragement and Affirmation	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Language Modeling (LM) • Frequent Conversation • Open-Ended Questions • Repetition and Extension • Self- and Parallel Talk • Advanced Language	Notes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7