Supporting Children With Social and Emotional Challenges: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers’ Experiences Using Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Tina Pettway
Concordia University - Portland, tinapettway@bellsouth.net

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Tina Burns Pettway

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Barbara Weschke, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
Amanda Sailors, Ph.D., Content Specialist
Tony Goss, Ed.D., Content Reader
Supporting Children With Social and Emotional Challenges: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers’ Experiences Using Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Tina Pettway

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted by the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Higher Education

Barbara Weschke, PhD., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Amanda Sailors, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Tony Goss, Ed.D., Content Reader

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers in supporting students who encounter social and emotional learning (SEL) challenges in the classroom. This study examined if and how SEL competencies were implemented by teachers in supporting students experiencing SEL challenges in the classroom. SEL was the framework used during this research. A total of 10 teachers from an urban school located in a southern state were selected to represent the population for this study. Data were collected via face-to-face individual semistructured interviews with all participants. Participants were asked to share personal artifacts of successful SEL strategies used with students in the classroom. Although some participants had no knowledge of the terminology associated with SEL competencies, all participants used strategies that were closely related to SEL competencies. This study suggests that SEL skills must be taught to students at school and these skills should be incorporated into the everyday process of academic learning in a classroom. However, to successfully implement SEL competencies within a classroom, teachers must be trained in implementing these competencies.

Keywords: challenges, feelings, implementation, phenomenology, SEL competencies, social emotional learning (SEL), teacher support
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, who makes all things possible, and to my family and friends for their continuous unconditional support. To my fiancé, Santes, who encouraged me to pursue this doctoral journey and who has supported me through each trial and tribulation during this process. I want to thank my mother, who has always believed in me and provided support, and who has been a true confidant.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Educational institutions across the United States are under increasing pressure to deliver academic results, with a focus on enhancing student learning (Meador, 2018). However, educational critics claim that this increase in academic achievement is causing growing stress levels, anxiety, and mental health disorders among schoolchildren (Maynard, Solis, Miller, & Brendel, 2017). According to data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), five million schoolchildren in the United States experience one or more mental health disorders, with such disorders disrupting students’ learning and making classroom management difficult for teachers. Behaviors such as acting responsibly and displaying respectful behavior in the classroom may be a challenge for some students (Greenberg, 2018). Managing self-destructive behaviors and emotions, using conflict resolution strategies, and having the ability to make responsible decisions are some examples of issues that students struggle with when they lack development in social and emotional skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2018).

This present study explored the rising demands related to students’ social and emotional learning (SEL) challenges in the classroom, which educators are increasingly required to address. SEL is a process that helps children cultivate essential life skills, including awareness of one’s own emotions, fostering respect and care for others, establishing healthy relationships, making ethical and responsible decisions, and constructively handling adversity (Yoder, 2014b). According to CASEL (2018), there are five SEL skills—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—that can have positive effects on student behavior in the classroom. This study drew on the experiences of educators who were
engaged in working with students who displayed SEL challenges in the classroom. The identification of the five SEL competencies and how often, if at all, teacher participants were implementing them in the classroom to address social and emotional challenges among students is explored in this research.

The implementation of SEL in the classroom can occur in various ways; it can be introduced as a stand-alone program or incorporated with core academic subjects (Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2015). Nauert’s (2018) findings indicated that SEL programs in schools provide students with both immediate and long-term health, social, and emotional benefits. SEL benefits, such as students displaying positive attitudes toward themselves and others, lead to an increase in positive social behaviors and relationships with others. Ogg, Gohr, and LaRosa (2017) argued that children should receive scheduled opportunities to practice social and emotional skills in the classroom in the same manner that they practice their mathematics and reading skills. Cultivating a learning environment in which children’s voices are expected and respected is the responsibility of school professionals (Rusk et al., 2013). Social and emotional skills are influential contributors to student outcomes, such as academic achievement and work readiness (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

SEL development in students has become a large component of the educational process across the United States (Meador, 2018). The present study aimed to identify firsthand the challenges that teachers face in the classroom from students who experience SEL challenges. SEL developmental challenges affect both teachers and students and range from being underprepared to navigate intricate social situations to being unequipped to manage emotions and, possibly, lacking communication, collaboration, and compassion skills. Educational institutions worldwide are only now realizing that SEL is more fundamental than literacy and
This chapter will explore teacher participants’ experiences of working with students who present with SEL challenges in the classroom, together with if and how teachers implement SEL competencies, such as having an awareness of one’s own emotions, fostering respect and care for others, establishing healthy relationships, making ethical and responsible decisions, and handling adversity constructively when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges.

**Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework of the Problem**

**Background of the problem.** During a typical academic school year, children attend 32 hours of classes each week (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). During this time, the classroom teacher is responsible for submitting mental health referrals to the school counselor and related mental health support agencies for students who exhibit SEL challenges in the classroom. Teachers tend to refer students based on their subjective perceptions of their students’ mental health needs. As teachers usually have no specialized mental health training (Yates, 2017), their assessment of the behavioral challenges of their students is often unreliable. Teachers are sometimes not knowledgeable regarding the specific names or acronyms related to the development of social and emotional skills and are often unaware that disruptive student behavior stems from an SEL challenge (CASEL, 2018). Teachers must handle the SEL-related challenges faced by students with a calm, professional demeanor, and provide careful attention to the details of the challenge at the moment it occurs. SEL may come naturally for some people but, for others, social and emotional skills have to be specifically learned and must be practiced (Doyle, 2018).

**Context.** Educators have long taught academic concepts, but more recently, there is an increasing demand for them to provide a learning environment that also catches a student’s
individual social and emotional attention. Possibly, and in some cases necessarily, educators have to be deliberate about the way SEL skills are both taught and learned by children (Blyth et al., 2017). This phenomenological study provided an opportunity to obtain an insight into the lived experiences of teachers who work directly with students with SEL challenges in the classroom, along with identifying if and how teachers encourage students to use healthy SEL competency skills in the classroom. This research was limited to fourth- and fifth-grade teachers because previous data have indicated that these grades at this particular school research site have the highest number of behavioral referrals for students with social and emotional challenges (AdvancED, 2018).

**History.** Scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016) found that one in five students in a typical classroom shows signs of one or more social and emotional health disorders. Children experience many of the same emotions as adults; however, children often lack the reasoning skills to express themselves safely and effectively. Similar to adults, children sometimes feel angry, frustrated, embarrassed, or nervous. Unlike adults, however, children lack the language skills to verbalize how they are feeling. As a result, children often express their feelings through physical, and sometimes inappropriate, behavior. Tantrums and outbursts are among the unfavorable methods children use to express their anger and frustration to adults (Social-Emotional Learning for Prevention, 2017).

Anderson and Cardoza (2016) identified depression, anxiety, and substance abuse as the most common social and emotional challenges among school-aged children. These authors argued that, left unaddressed, such social and emotional challenges can lead to other issues, such as chronic absenteeism, low achievement, risk of repeating a grade, disruptive behavior and, ultimately, students being prompted to withdraw or drop out of school altogether. To avoid these
problems and ensure that students leave school with the skills they need, it is imperative to create a healthy school culture, which begins with positive teacher–student relationships. In addition, pre-school students must receive the support that they need to learn positive social and emotional development for school readiness in general in the classroom (Williford, Whittaker, Vitiello, & Downer, 2013). Social and emotional skills for students can be learned in a variety of ways throughout a school day (CASEL, 2018).

**Conceptual framework.** Throughout this study, I uncovered specific SEL skills that may be deemed beneficial for teachers supporting students with social and emotional challenges and identified the specific needs of teachers and strategies that teacher participants were implementing in their classrooms. CASEL (2018) stated that teachers who believed they were trained in ways to promote students’ SEL skills were confident in their ability to daily implement SEL to students. I chose SEL as the conceptual framework for this study. The decision to focus on this conceptual framework was driven by the emerging need for the development of SEL skills in students. According to CASEL (2018), there are five SEL skills—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—that can provide positive effects on student behavior in the classroom.

Self-awareness focuses on an individual’s ability to recognize and relate self-emotions, acknowledge goals, and identify values. Self-awareness also involves establishing self-esteem by understanding individual strengths and weaknesses. Self-management focuses on the ability to manage and control self-destructive behaviors in different situations. Self-management involves learning how to control self-impulses, wait for gratification, regulate stress, and persist despite personal or academic challenges. Social awareness involves developing the ability to empathize and respect others’ emotions and differences, particularly those whose culture or background is
different. Social awareness helps individuals learn empathy and compassion for others. Relationship skills involve the establishment and maintenance of healthy, social relationships with others. This competency focuses on teaching effective communication skills, active listening, and conflict resolution. Lastly, responsible decision-making is one’s ability to identify, analyze, and form a constructive decision on a matter. This competency focuses on understanding the consequences of self-action and how this action affects others (CASEL, 2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

Classroom teachers are responsible for accommodating the daily academic and SEL needs of 25 to 30 students (on average) from diverse backgrounds within a single classroom. Angry or inappropriate responses by teachers to children who have social and emotional outbursts in the classroom may worsen certain situations; however, when teachers learn to apply healthy social and emotional patterns in their responses to students’ negative social and emotional outbursts, they can potentially assist in managing SEL within a situational context (Panichelli, 2018). The problem explored in this study focused on teachers’ lived experiences of the SEL challenges of students in the classroom. This study aimed to identify if and how teachers implement SEL strategies that encourage students to acquire the competencies that enable them to use healthy social and emotional interactions in the classroom. The job of teaching children in a classroom can be stressful. By learning about the development of SEL competencies, teachers can better support students who present with social and emotional challenges in the classroom. When students can consistently manage their anger and other inappropriate social and emotional behaviors through the development of SEL, they can live a healthier life and achieve academically in school (Blyth, Olson, & Walker, 2017).
Stormont, Reinke, and Herman (2011) reported that stakeholders in students’ education found that teachers, in particular, should be made aware of the types of SEL challenges and the evidence-based programs that are available to support children experiencing such challenges. Providing teachers with explicit expectations regarding students’ SEL challenges can foster SEL awareness and identify specific SEL approaches that teachers can use to support their students (Hanover Research, 2013). Panichelli’s (2018) findings indicated that within an estimated three to five years of teaching, 50% of new teachers in the U.S. leave the teaching profession. This lack of teacher retention is blamed for high rates of job-related stress in teachers. The lack of SEL implementation training for teachers to support children with social and emotional challenges in the classroom has shown an increased awareness to educational policymakers and school leaders in the past 10 years (Bennett, 2017). According to a United States national teacher survey titled “The Missing Piece,” teachers want to implement SEL within their classrooms. Ninety-five percent of the teachers surveyed believed that social and emotional skills could be taught and that these skills should be incorporated into the academic curriculum. However, SEL is not the main focus for education stakeholders and policymakers in the United States (Brotto, 2018).

**Purpose of the Study**

I chose to use a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design and purposive sampling for this study. Qualitative research is a type of exploratory research that is used to obtain an understanding of substratum reasoning, human behavior, and personal opinions (Crossman, 2018). I chose this approach because of its suitability for addressing the study objective: To depict the experiences of individuals in real-world contextual situations with minimal intrusion by artificial research procedures. The purpose of this six-week study was to
explore teachers’ lived experiences in handling the SEL challenges of students in the classroom, along with identifying how, and if at all, teachers implement SEL competencies when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges in the classroom. SEL is the process of acquiring knowledge to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, manage self-emotions, establish and achieve goals, identify with the emotions of others, and understand how to make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018). Exploring teachers’ lived experiences of children with SEL challenges in the classroom has the potential to uncover different factors that may contribute to an explanation for the cause of the lack of SEL skills in students. SEL can contribute to a classroom in many ways, such as by promoting an increase in positive teacher–student relationships and student interactions and providing students with conflict resolution tactics (CASEL, 2018). SEL implementation within a classroom has the potential to create a learning environment that can assist students to be more socially responsible (Brotto, 2018).

I invited the teacher participants in this study to share their subjective experiences of the phenomenon of interest during an individual face-to-face interview. The phenomenological aspect of this research consisted of the points of view of individual teacher participants to identify effective ways to provide SEL to students. Research participants’ personal beliefs regarding students’ knowledge of how to activate SEL skills when needed were also identified during the interviews. Beliefs play an essential role in the methods that teachers use in the classroom, which include individual classroom management, instructional style, and additional support to assist students (Collie et al., 2015). Teacher perception and beliefs have the greatest potential in making a difference to the SEL of students (Poulou, 2016).

When an SEL curriculum is added to the academic curriculum, it does not just help students, it benefits teachers as well (Panichelli, 2018). Teachers need to understand the
importance of implementing SEL skills for students in the classroom. According to Jennings and Greenberg (as cited in Zakrzewski, 2013), a lack of SEL implementation in the classroom was one of the leading causes of teacher burnout. Tapp (2018) described teacher burnout as a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. Providing teachers with the opportunity to increase their confidence and competence in supporting students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom may be the first step toward mitigating this issue (Quesenberry & Doubet, 2016). Access to the knowledge and resources that can be implemented in the classroom will support teachers to help students progress, both academically and socially (Bennett, 2017). In addition, researchers have provided empirical evidence to show that training on how to implement social and emotional strategies has supported teachers to address those student behaviors that were distracting to other students (Hanover Research, 2013). Researchers at three universities—Loyola University, University of British Columbia, and the University of Illinois at Chicago—studied the effects of teaching SEL skills to students within the classroom. This study found that the SEL skills of the students improved after being exposed to programs aimed at healthy SEL skills (Nauert, 2018).

**Research Questions**

To answer each research question, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each research participant. This research addressed the following two questions:

**RQ1:** What are teachers’ experiences when working with students who present social and emotional challenges in their classrooms?

**RQ2:** How, if at all, do teachers implement SEL competencies when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges?
I designed the interview questions (see Appendix A) to (a) obtain background and demographic information regarding the research participants’ experiences of supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom; (b) obtain insight into individual teachers’ lived experiences of student SEL challenges, as well as identify the SEL competencies that participants have used to support students with SEL challenges in the classroom; (c) determine if and how teachers address specific SEL competencies with students; and (d) identify whether teacher participants have knowledge of SEL programs and whether they desire such professional development training.

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

**Rationale of the study.** I chose to use a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design and purposive sampling. Phenomenology is qualitative research that is undertaken to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon. Phenomenological research is conducted primarily through in-depth conversations and interviews. A phenomenological study commonly comprises small sample sizes, usually consisting of 10 or fewer participants (Creswell, 2013). Studying the experiences of multiple participants allowed me to make generalizations regarding what it was like to experience a certain phenomenon from the perspective of participants who have lived the experience. The interview questions (see Appendix A) were open-ended to allow the participants to fully describe the experience from their own viewpoint (Creswell, 2013).

This six-week phenomenological study provided a total of 10 fourth- and fifth-grade teachers with a one-time, individual, face-to-face interview to share their personal experiences of supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom, together with identifying if or how they implemented SEL skills. I asked participants in the welcome letter to bring to their
interview any artifacts (e.g., lesson plans or student work samples) that showed how they were using SEL in their classroom (see Appendix F). The artifacts were a form of triangulation for this research. Triangulation is a process of verification (checking for the truth) that increases validity by incorporating three different viewpoints and methods (Creswell, 2013). I used the data analysis process to derive information from the interviews to validate the SEL research framework, for example, to identify how SEL competencies influence how students learn, process thoughts, communicate with others, set goals, and organize things in their lives. I kept a journal throughout this research to write personal reflections of my thoughts and ideas of each step in this research. This study attempted to show that SEL is not simply one more thing for teachers to pay attention to with respect to their students, but rather, is an essential learning need in the classroom (Kang, 2018).

**Relevance of the study.** School districts across U.S. have discovered the urgent need for SEL implementation in classrooms. SEL is just as essential in classrooms as literacy and numeracy (Kang, 2018). When teachers do not know how to de-escalate a classroom situation that is related to the social and emotional challenges of students, increases in student behavioral problems and academic failure can occur (Romney, 2018). Zakrzewski (2013) stated that teachers need to recognize uncontrolled social and emotional behaviors among students in the classroom and demonstrate behavioral management options, rather than administer immediate student punishment. Additionally, identifying factors that may support and provide a remedy for addressing these SEL challenges is a crucial element of the day-to-day processes involved in teaching (Negron, 2016).

This study aspired to contribute to the field of education and to guide and assist teacher participants. The findings of this research may be used to help educators implement SEL skills
and methods to improve the learning experiences of children in the classroom. This research may also allow teachers to continually reflect on their social and emotional teaching methods and approaches in the classroom. The implementation of the five SEL skills in the conceptual framework may address many social and emotional challenges faced by children. At the conclusion of the study, it was anticipated that the participants would appreciate the need to provide SEL opportunities for children, understand how their behaviors influence children’s SEL, and recognize students’ social and emotional competency needs in the classroom. Social and emotional skills are an innovative way of learning healthy ways of dealing with individual stress, depression, and many other mental disorders (CASEL, 2018).

**Significance of the study.** The problem to be explored in this study focused on teachers’ lived experiences of working with students who present SEL challenges in the classroom and identifying how, and if at all, teacher participants implement SEL competencies when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges in the classroom. This phenomenological study was conducted to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research problem. The data for meeting this study objective were gathered through individual face-to-face interviews with the participants. Analysis of this comprehensive data set allowed me to test the validity of the study. I chose a qualitative approach because it provided an opportunity to obtain firsthand experience of the phenomenon of interest. The use of inductive reasoning allowed me to gather and analyze data to explain the study findings. This study has the potential to extend the existing knowledge regarding the participating teachers’ implementation of SEL in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms. Identifying social and emotional behavioral triggers and patterns that may influence students’ social and emotional interactions in the classroom will provide the basis
for teachers to understand how to implement social and emotional skills in their classrooms (CASEL, 2018).

I anticipated that the teacher participants would apply the information obtained from this research to their everyday classroom practices and, eventually, the findings would be implemented across the school where the participants taught. The data collected from this research may provide teachers and other educators at this research site with detailed examples of specific issues that children with social and emotional challenges face in the classroom. This research may also alert teachers to the need for ongoing professional development to implement social and emotional skills in the classroom. This study contributed to the awareness of the importance of equipping classroom teachers with the necessary skills to assist students with social and emotional issues within the classroom. A meta-analysis published in the MiddleWeb (2017) journal revealed an 11% increase in students’ overall academic performance when they were involved in school-wide social and emotional programs. The knowledge gained from this research may serve as a school district resource for education policymakers planning the structure and funding of professional development programs for teachers in the implementation of SEL within classrooms.

**Definition of Terms**

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

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning is a research-based program that provide SEL support in schools (CASEL, 2018).

**Experience.** A direct observation or something personally encountered or lived through (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2019).
Implementation. Putting into effect; fulfillment; a tool or strategy used in the performance of a task (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2019).

Phenomenological. The study of phenomena, i.e., the appearances of things or how an individual experience helps form a point of view (Creswell, 2013).

Social and emotional learning (SEL). Social and emotional is the development of learning how to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, manage self-emotions, establish and achieve goals, identify with the emotions of others, and understand how to make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. Interpretive frameworks are considered the basic elements of individuals’ beliefs that guide human actions. There are four philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology in research (Creswell, 2013). Ontology relates to how an individual grasps the idea of multiple human realities by exploring multiple forms of evidence from different individuals’ experiences. I assumed that the participating teachers would have various experiences regarding working with children with social and emotional challenges in the classroom. Epistemology in research relates to the theory and understanding of what is being studied (Creswell, 2013). The development of meaning from the subjective evidence provided in the research is epistemology. I assumed that all participants would provide valid information regarding their experiences of working with children who have social and emotional challenges in the classroom. Axiology relates to the values and significance of the research. I assumed that participants would have a better understanding of if and how SEL implementation was required in the classroom. The methodology in research is the process behind how the research is
conducted (Creswell, 2013). I assumed that the chosen qualitative approach for this research would yield saturated data.

**Delimitations.** Within qualitative research, delimitations aim to clarify the boundaries of the research combined with the narrowing of the research design (Creswell, 2013). Delimitations are boundaries set by myself as the researcher. The boundaries are created before any research exploration is conducted. Delimitations decrease the amount of time or effort spent on certain unnecessary and unrelated areas to the overall research (Creswell, 2013). The intended delimitations of the present study included probing questions to ensure that the participants provided a clear account of the problem the study aimed to explore. Another delimitation of this study was the sample size, which was limited to elementary teachers who worked in a school located in one southern state. Another delimitation of this study was the time of the school year in which the research occurred. The interview period for this research was during the winter months and between several national holidays, which are times when a large number of people suffer flu, pneumonia, and colds, potentially affecting the involvement of participants.

**Limitations.** In contrast to delimitations, limitations aim to identify potential shortcomings, conditions, or influences of the research. In qualitative research, limitations are influences that a researcher cannot control and will not affect the outcome of any findings (Creswell, 2013). This research was limited to fourth- and fifth-grade teachers because previous data have indicated that these grades hold the highest number of behavioral referrals for students with social and emotional challenges (AdvancED, 2018). I recognized that there would be limitations in the outcome because the total school population of the elementary school did not participate. The research period occurred when the school and surrounding community
experienced weather that might not be conducive for students to attend school, together with preset-calendar school holiday closings.

The most common limitations of this research design were from me acting as the data collection and analysis instrument. I gathered data from the teacher participants’ interviews. I relied on the experiences of the research participants, which limited the amount of data collected. In addition, reliability and validity could have been issues. I could not control certain influences that limited the availability of pertinent information. Potential limitations of the data in this research included preconceptions and personal bias of the participants related to the study topic. I anticipated that in this study the participants could articulate their thoughts and feelings about their experiences in assisting children with SEL challenges in the classroom. I had to rely on the experiences of research participants, which limited the amount of data that I was then able to analyze.

**Summary**

Schools across the United States are responsible for educating students, but what does this education consist of? Academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics are important and have played a vital role in shaping U.S.’s educational system for decades. However, the educational mandates of academic testing and accountability have caused issues associated with anxiety, high levels of stress, and other mental disorders among school children (Meador, 2018). Schools now face the challenge of addressing and implementing the teaching of SEL skills for students in the classroom (Maynard et al., 2017). SEL is a process that helps children cultivate essential life skills, including awareness of one’s own emotions, fostering respect and care for others, establishing healthy relationships, making ethical and responsible decisions, and handling adversity constructively (Yoder, 2014b). These skills are powerful
predictors of important youthful outcomes, such as academic achievement and work readiness (Durlak et al., 2011).

Children with SEL challenges require school experiences that teach positive behavioral skills and offer lasting impressions of skills that carry over and beyond school. Students have a better chance of being prepared to handle challenges when taught SEL skills alongside academic subjects (Nauert, 2018). The implementation of SEL in the classroom can occur in various ways; it can be introduced as a stand-alone program or incorporated into core academic subjects (Collie et al., 2015). School professionals are responsible for cultivating a learning environment in which children’s voices are expected and respected (Rusk et al., 2013). Educators have long taught academic concepts, but more recently, there is an increasing demand for them to provide a learning environment that also catches a student’s individual social and emotional attention. Possibly, and in some cases necessarily, educators must be deliberate about the way SEL skills are both taught and learned by children (Blyth et al., 2017).

The objective of this study was, therefore, to learn about teachers’ lived experiences of dealing with students with SEL challenges in the classroom, together with identifying if and how teachers were currently using any of the five SEL competencies in their classes to assist students with SEL challenges. This included how they might be determining whether an approach was appropriate for specific social and emotional behaviors and students. Additionally, this study sought to identify the social and emotional programs or strategies that teacher participants currently implemented in the classroom to assist children with social and emotional challenges. It was anticipated that the findings and conclusions drawn from this research would have a significant influence on SEL implementation by the teacher participants in their classrooms.
The next chapter, which comprises a review of the literature, explores the various characteristics of SEL challenges within the classroom. The literature review identified several common factors; for example, SEL skills were required in classrooms and the role played by teachers in implementing these skills was vital. The in-depth exploration of the various approaches to implementing SEL competencies by teachers to support student learning was the focus of the literature review for this study. Identifying the specific aspects of teachers’ lived experiences in supporting students who presented SEL challenges in the classroom directly correlated with the study phenomenon.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review focuses on extant studies examining various aspects of SEL challenges within a classroom. SEL is defined as the process of acquiring knowledge to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, manage self-emotions, establish and achieve goals, identify with the emotions of others, and understanding how to make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018). SEL models and the strategies that researchers have found effective in the educational setting are also examined in this literature review. The objective of this study was to explore the role of SEL in the classroom through the investigation of the experiences of teachers in regards to handling students’ SEL challenges in the classroom. This study also aimed to explore if and how teachers implement each of the SEL competencies in their class to assist students with SEL challenges, including how they might be determining if an approach is appropriate for specific social and emotional behaviors and students. Given the importance of SEL in this research, and as a part of this review, literature pertaining to the effects of external and internal factors that create SEL challenges and hinder student learning was reviewed.

Many resilient children face extremely challenging circumstances with grace, yet others develop toxic stress responses that derail their ability to learn in the classroom (Cantor, 2013). However, teachers welcome students and their challenges in schools across the U.S. with grace and humility. Teachers who possess the ability to identify students SEL needs, along with understanding how to implement the identified SEL skills, have a better chance to influence students in activating social and emotional skills in the classroom (Meador, 2018). SEL knowledge of teachers is recognized as being essential for students’ effective social and emotional development, which, in turn promotes students’ academic progress (Yoder, 2014a).
Therefore, it is essential to identify the most effective strategies that teachers can adopt to avoid adverse outcomes that jeopardize children’s mental health as well as their academic progress, and thus limit their future prospects (Negron, 2016).

**Conceptual Framework**

Children start developing emotional behaviors in the context of the first meaningful relationships they build with their parents and caregivers. These relationships shape their emotional responses later in life (National Institutes of Health, 2018). As children enter school, they become more independent and start building new relationships with their teachers and peers. If their initial experiences are negative, they may start exhibiting inappropriate SEL behaviors in the classroom, which may adversely affect their self-esteem as well as their academic progress (Doward, 2014). Sociocultural theory suggests that adults in a society should foster children’s cognitive development intentionally and systematically by engaging children in challenging and meaningful activities (McLeod, 2017). McLeod (2012) explained that Vygotsky’s (1978) cognitive development theory stated that cultural interpretations and appropriate responses to everyday interactions could be formed successfully by children through informal and formal conversations with adults.

The conceptual framework for this study was the five developmental SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision making. Self-awareness is the competency skill that focuses on an individual’s ability to recognize and relate with self-emotions and behaviors. Self-management is the competency skill that focuses on the ability to manage and control self-behaviors in different situations. Social awareness is the competency skill that involves developing the ability to empathize and respect others’ emotions and differences. Relationship skills involve the establishment and maintenance
of healthy and social relationships with others. Responsible decision-making is one’s ability to identify, analyze, and form a constructive decision on a matter (CASEL, 2018).

Teaching is a challenging job that requires teachers to participate in honest self-reflection of their daily teaching practices in order to effectively provide students with meaningful learning (Lewis, 2017). SEL skill development has the potential to prepare students with the self-actualization and interpersonal skills to become productive citizens within the world (CASEL, 2018). However, one important factor that must be considered in teaching SEL to students is how social and emotional competency is being taught to students. This research explored if and how SEL competencies are taught by teachers in the classroom. Participants in this research were provided a detail list of SEL competencies and their meanings.

The conceptual framework of this research is supported by a meta-analysis conducted by CASEL (2017), which has demonstrated that social and emotional programs are needed within U.S. classrooms, as they can help children with SEL challenges to develop a healthier approach to relationships. SEL skills involve several interrelated areas that positively influence an individual’s social interactions with others (Greenberg, 2018). When correctly implemented, SEL initiatives also help students to improve their ability to modify their attitudes and behaviors, in order to deal with daily tasks and challenges within the classroom in a more productive way (Kang, 2018). The CASEL (2017) research has also indicated that SEL initiatives have made significant progress in addressing children’s mental health, social skills, and academic achievement in schools across the United States. Children who have a strong SEL foundation are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and become a productive citizen in the world (Learning and Health, 2017).
Review of Research Literature

When conducting this literature review, I used reliable and valid sources of information regarding teachers’ supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The search commenced by querying electronic databases, such as ERIC, Google, and ProQuest. During this literature review, relevant keywords were used, such as social and emotional, student-teacher interaction. In finding sources for this qualitative research, much consideration was given to the relevance and credibility of the information provided. All literature sources identified through the strategy as mentioned above were evaluated against the following criteria: (a) relevance to the research problem; (b) relevance to the research questions; (c) clarity of information; and (d) whether the information was used in other studies. Most of the literature sources included in this review have been published within the last seven years, thus meeting the first criterion. However, some earlier studies were also included as a means of providing a context for the more recent work.

Teachers’ lived experiences of implementing SEL. This study focused on understanding teachers’ lived experiences of social and emotional challenges of children in the classroom. Poulou (2016) conducted a study in central Greece to examine how teachers perceive the increase in SEL challenges of students in the classroom. The study examined the relationship that perceived regarding their emotional intelligence compared to students’ emotional intelligence. This study consisted of 98 elementary teachers with 617 students that ranged from six-to-11 years of age. This study used the structural equation model for this research, which is a combination of statistical methods that correlate sets of relationships between one or more independent variables and one or more dependent variables to be examined. The teacher participants were expected to complete rating scales, questionnaires, and self-assessments that
assisted me in determining the relationship of SEL behavior of teachers to students. The results indicated that teachers’ lived experiences of student SEL challenges were closely related to student relationships. The research findings also indicated that the SEL levels of the teachers were high based on individual age and experiences of life. The high teacher level may be attributed to the years of learning how to identify and display self-emotions with others. The teachers’ perspectives of students were significant to this research because it provided validation that students’ SEL challenges are contributed to the lack of students’ individual social skills.

A research study, conducted by Fedele (2015), found that teachers who possess strong SEL characteristics and experiences are more likely to have a classroom culture that promotes SEL skills on a consistent basis. Researchers of the study analyzed 126 fourth-and-fifth-grade teachers on the responsive classroom approach using a randomized controlled trial. The responsive classroom approach is a set of intended class practices designed to create an atmosphere that is safe, joyful, and engaging. The responsive approach also helps students to feel encouraged to develop their academic, SEL skills that are conducive to individual strengths and needs within the classroom setting. This approach provides the opportunity for students to be more receptive to SEL strategies being taught by the classroom teacher (Responsive Classroom, 2018). The purpose of the study was to discover whether teachers would be able to implement the responsive classroom approach well and with high fidelity. Before the trial was conducted, teachers were observed in their classrooms, given a self-efficacy survey, and asked to provide the research committee with information on teacher experience. The characteristics of the teachers were observed to attempt to identify behaviors that supported the research theory. Fedele (2015) study found that factors such as teacher personal demographics and background did not have any effect on whether the teacher could display and implement SEL strategies to students in the
classroom (Fedele, 2015). This research indicates that professional development training for teachers should be focused on the development of SEL skills to assist implementation in the classroom because it allows teachers to increase their ability to implement beneficial teaching practices in the classroom (Fedele, 2015).

Research conducted by Zakrzewski (2014) found that SEL did not just change student behavior, but it also altered teachers’ perspectives and behaviors towards students. Four teachers from one school district, but in different schools and grade levels, participated in Zakrzewski (2014) research regarding the ways in which SEL transformed classrooms. Surveys and focus groups with other teachers in the school district were also undertaken. The first teacher in this research was an elementary educator who expressed that since she started educating her students on SEL skills she noticed that her class ran more smoothly; in addition, she became kinder, more patient, calmer, and less controlling with her students. The elementary teacher also indicated that her view of different social and emotional outbursts by her students had helped her to develop a more open approach, prompting her to look for the reason behind the outburst. When this teacher discussed how this affected her perspective of teaching overall, she observed that the job of a teacher was a difficult position to have, but being a teacher was the most meaningful work in the world.

The second teacher interviewed for the purpose of Zakrzewski (2014) research was a music teacher. This teacher indicated that implementing SEL in her classes provided opportunities for her students to learn more about music and ways to activate SEL skills when required. She expressed that before introducing SEL skills to her students, most of the class time was used up with handling various excessive social and emotional issues. The music teacher expressed that since she had been implementing SEL skills she felt a sense of renewal rather than
burnout. The third teacher involved in this research was a middle school teacher. This teacher started modeling SEL skills to her students and improved her own SEL skills by collaborating with her students about her own social and emotional deficiencies. This middle school teacher created a class culture that modeled mutual respect for individual differences, including the teacher.

The fourth teacher interviewed for the purpose of Zakrzewski (2014) research was also a middle school teacher. This teacher expressed that implementing SEL with her students had been a career-changing experience, by helping her to not quit the teaching profession due to the significant decrease it had prompted in her feelings of burnout. This school district provided professional development training for their teachers to implement SEL in the classroom, also taking steps to provide teachers with training on self-care. The superintendent of this school district spearheaded this initiative by modeling personal well-being as a leader and articulated that understanding and promoting this initiative throughout the district would create better relationships with people and improve the educating of students. The initiative would provide a foundation for positive student–teacher interactions, a safer learning environment, and enhance the academic learning ability of students. The superintendent also indicated that the school district had a high attrition rate of 50% of teachers, with this initiative helping to address this high attrition rate. This finding was discovered via surveys and focus groups with teachers, which showed that a combination of reasons was behind this high rate, although a lack of self-care and knowledge of how to handle students with SEL challenges in the classroom were indicated as being the most significant factors. Well-being was a crucial element for cultivating the individual SEL of teachers.
The next research project that focuses on the SEL experiences of teachers, conducted by Glennie, Rosen, Snyder, Woods-Murphy, and Bassett (2017). All teacher participants had experience in collecting data about students’ SEL. A focus group with teachers was employed in this study to capture the teachers’ experiences and perspectives of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. Teacher participants in this study were also invited to share with the group their individual strategies for developing any SEL success. The research started with teachers completing a survey soliciting information about the characteristics of their schools. A total of 28 teachers participated in the research focus group. Most of the teachers were experienced teachers, except for two who had fewer than 11 years of teaching experience. Over half of the teachers in the study worked in suburban schools, a quarter in urban schools, and a quarter in rural schools. Over half of the teacher participants worked at the secondary level, and less than 20% were in schools with enrollments of 1,500 or more of students.

During the focus group the teacher participants expressed the types of SEL practices they used, such as cooperative learning and coaching, to assist students academically and socially in the classroom. Some teachers suggested implementing school-wide character education programs geared towards creating opportunities for students to practice and learn about SEL. One high school teacher explained how her school implemented a SEL program at her school. The school program focused on building positive relationships with students through student-voice teams. Student-voice teams allow students to speak out on issues that impact their school that would enable students to be active participants in decisions made for the school. The school created a bi-weekly platform on different topics for students to speak on issues taking place in the school and classrooms. Two teacher participants suggested that teachers should permit students to re-do assignments, quizzes, or tests more often because it could help students to
develop persistence in their learning. A few more teachers suggested that providing flexibility in the school schedule could assist students to develop relationships because students could meet in small groups with teachers or counselors, and students could connect with each other. A small number of teacher participants believed that providing students with opportunities to participate in service projects would help them to develop a sense of working together, and the program *Girls on the Run* was mentioned as being a program that could be implemented. *Girls on the Run* is an inspiring program for girls that promotes good health, confidence building skills through an experience-based curriculum creatively integrates running (*Girls on the Run*, 2018).

The teachers unanimously agreed that developing stronger relationships with their students would help create stronger social and emotional student–teacher relationships. The teacher participants also mentioned some challenges in implementing SEL skills with students in the classroom. School testing policies sometimes interfere with SEL, because a certain amount of academic information has to be taught by a given test date, leaving only a limited amount of time for SEL. The lack of resources and professional development training in assisting students with SEL challenges in the classroom is another challenge for teachers. These research findings indicated that, beyond the bounds of direct instruction, teachers can influence the SEL development of their students in various ways. For example, when students perceive a caring, enthusiastic, supportive, and attentive teacher, their sense of belonging in school is ensured. Also, when teachers challenge students to think more critically by striving to understand concepts and clarify their reasoning, combined with education regarding SEL skills, students’ growth mindsets increase.

**Teacher SEL readiness for the classroom.** A study by Blad (2016) in which the readiness of teachers to respond to students’ challenges was examined suggested that to be
effective in using comprehensive SEL strategies with students, teachers must learn how to relate to students. The ability to identify with challenges that students face is an essential aspect of instruction, and this can be an issue if there is a significant disparity between teachers and their students in sociodemographic status or other characteristics. Similarly, if teachers and students are of a different race, this can hamper healthy relationship development. Considering these findings of Blad’s (2016) research was based on data from a school district having a majority of African American students, with Hispanic as the next largest group, followed by Caucasians and other ethnicities, where over half of the population of students received free or reduced-price lunches. The data for this research were generated through a climate survey given to students; however, the data collected was limited, so the school administration decided to conduct focus groups to create questions that provided the researcher with more information.

In 2014, this school district was classified as “high risk” within a pre-established, early warning system. This classification refers to a school district serving a large population of students who are considered unlikely to meet the academic requirements for passing the grade, and who may; as a result drop out of school (Blad, 2016). The early warning system was put in place to alert school districts of excessive absences, multiple office referrals, and lack of academic progress because these students would require assistance to reverse this adverse trend (Blad, 2016). With the goal of assisting the struggling students, the school district in focus of this investigation partnered with the American Institute for Research (AIR) staff in the development and implementation of comprehensive, SEL practices for all schools (Blad, 2016).

Blad’s (2016) research revealed that to ensure students do not exhibit behavioral problems and succeed academically; they must develop SEL skills, such as being able to make responsible decisions, becoming more aware of other people emotions, and responding to self-
emotions. When the school level disaggregated the data, the findings indicated that, for the elementary and middle school students, role-playing exercises, games, and class discussions were the most effective SEL strategies. In contrast, high school students outwardly formed healthier relationships with others after participating in self-behavioral activities, such as writing journals to record and complete long- and short-term goals, and attending mandatory in-school advisory sessions. To gain a better understanding of students’ reactions to questions regarding their SEL skills, in addition to reviewing district-level data, the researcher created interview questions to ask students to receive data related on the topic, the interviews were conducted by teachers in their classrooms. Analyses of the interview responses revealed the need for strategies and methods aimed at bringing about change in the classroom to better support children with SEL challenges.

Blad used the whole-school, whole-community, whole-child (WSCC) model to highlight the need to improve instruction and capture students’ interest in the content, thus motivating them to become active participants in their learning and health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). The WSCC model postulates that every young person in every school in every community must be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, as only by creating the interconnectedness between education and health can the whole child be served (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). This model has since become the framework for school systems across the U.S. (Learning and Health, 2017).

In a study conducted by Yoder (2014a), A Tool for Teachers was adopted to examine teachers’ social and emotional instructional competencies. This investigation aimed to prompt the participating educators to reflect on their current teaching practices and the effect that they have on the students’ SEL. The development of this tool began with operationalizing teachers’
social and emotional competencies (SEC). To achieve this initial objective, the staff at (AIR) conducted an extensive literature review of teachers’ SEC. In addition, the AIR staff interviewed experts in the SEL field to obtain their input on the definition and operationalization of teacher SEC that should be included in the self-assessment tool (Yoder, 2014a).

Additionally, the critical incident technique (CIT) was used to identify elements of teachers’ SEC that allowed them to complete their work more effectively. The CIT comprises a sequence of steps performed to examine the correlations in the positive and negative behaviors of humans. The CIT staff documented results, and then used the results to categorize and examine to identify the key factors that contribute to teachers’ performance (Nugent, 2013). The evaluation tool focused on five SEC teachers should possess namely self-awareness, management, monitoring, social skills, and effective decision-making skills (American Institute for Research [AIR], 2015). Analyses of teachers’ responses revealed that they must strengthen their own SEL skills to model and encourage positive student interactions (Yoder, 2014a).

To assist students’ SEL development, teachers must be aware of the importance and possess the requisite skills (CASEL, 2018). Wood (2015) suggested that, when teachers are not trained in responding to in-class students’ SEL challenges in supportive ways, they typically rely upon their own childhood experiences. In college, prospective teachers learn various instructional strategies, whereas limited focus is given to children’s SEL challenges and the best way to address them in the classroom (Wood, 2015). With the aim of elucidating prospective teachers’ readiness for supporting SEL in their students, Wood (2015) conducted a study in which 24 prospective teachers in a university child development laboratory (CDL) took part in this research. As a part of this research, the prospective teachers participated in a written self-assessment about hypothetical emotional situations. All participants were encouraged to be
honest and to suggest the best way to handle social and emotional issues that the children exhibited in these scenarios. Throughout a semester, Wood (2015) examined the interactions of the prospective teachers with the children in the CDL classrooms. Based on the data gathered through these observations, Wood (2015) rated the participants’ readiness to respond to the children’s social and emotional reactions. The researcher found that prospective teachers who proposed more efficient strategies for regulating their own emotions as part of the self-assessment task approached the children in CDL classrooms with more acceptance and understanding during stressful situations. In addition, they were supportive toward children exhibiting disruptive classroom behavior and emotional outbursts.

When teachers provide students with learning structures, there can be opportunities within the classroom for students to make meaningful choices about learning, so that positive social and emotional interactions can be promoted (Yoder, 2014b). In a study on student development of SEL in the educational setting, Yoder (2014b) suggested that any strategy implemented in the classroom must incorporate the following elements: Student-centered discipline, whereby teachers use classroom management strategies to address discipline issues in their classroom, and the adoption of language that is respectful to students, while ensuring discipline. These two social and emotional elements ensure that teachers use appropriate directives to assist students to learn how to use positive social and emotional self-behavior more frequently and assures students that someone cares about their well-being (Yoder, 2014b).

The next element is focused on allowing students to make responsible decisions regarding their work in the classroom. This element reinforces the teachers’ support for students while encouraging them to be more independent and accountable for their academically oriented social and emotional behaviors. The fourth element ensures that empathy and support
demonstrated in the classroom, as the social support that students receive from their teacher and peers is influential for their well-being and healthy self-esteem. The fifth element should comprise the promotion of cooperative learning, whereby teachers should assign explicit tasks that require students to work together toward a collective goal. The sixth element, relates to holding regular classroom discussions, as through exchanging ideas, students and teachers develop productive relationships (Yoder, 2014b).

The next element focuses on teachers assisting students to be self-reflective and to able undertake self-assessment regarding the social and emotional challenges that affect their individual learning. Student opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment occur when teachers ask students to think about their work proactively, as part of instructional tasks. Students participate and academically achieve through balanced instruction, which is delivered when teachers incorporate both active and direct instruction, while promoting individual as well as collaborative learning. SEL elements that require students how to set realistic academic expectation can be achieved by teachers assigning students meaningful and challenging work, and rewarding success while also helping those who may be struggling. Finally, building students’ competence occurs when teachers help children develop SEL competencies, systematically, through the typical instructional cycle (Yoder, 2014b).

The author posited that, by incorporating these elements into classroom instruction, teachers would equip students with SEL competencies required to master academic content (Yoder, 2014b). Bridging the gap between SEL implementation and what teachers are already doing in the classroom is a critical component that must be addressed in American schools. Integrating professional development training, support, and resources for teachers reinforces the importance of student SEL in the classroom. Durlak et al. (2011) stated that educational
leadership agencies, such as state departments of education, school district boards, and individual
classroom. Yoder (2014b) suggested that SEL is linked to teacher evaluation systems and professional
development learning opportunities for teachers.

A report by Davis (2018) demonstrated that professional development for teachers with a
focus on learning how to teach student SEL skills in the classroom is beneficial. This report is
about a high school in Dallas for which the school district provided summer professional
development training for teachers that included explicit training on how to handle specific social
and emotional outburst of students. The training was focused around assisting the whole child
through the use of an initiative program called Mood Meter (Kubitz, 2016). The Mood Meter is a
process that allows students to use the reflecting technique during a social and emotional crisis to
help them identify with the emotion. The student may have a specific notebook or place in the
class to go and write their thoughts on paper by naming the emotion that is troubling them.

The Mood Meter approach is a process that encourages self-awareness, social-awareness,
and self-management for students. The Mood Meter approach only focuses on three of the five
CASEL (2018) competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,
relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The school district agreed to start with only
three of the CASEL (2018) five SEL competencies and to add-on the last two competencies the
next school year. The school district executive director of student engagement and counseling
expressed that the school district was in the early phases of SEL implementation. The director
also stated that the school board felt very optimistic that the school district was now on the right
path to implementing what was needed to address the SEL challenges of their students and the professional development training needed for their teachers. The school district motto for the district-wide SEL implementation is: students learn better when they feel better. The motto statement intent is to bring awareness about the relationship between students feeling good and doing well at school (Davis, 2018).

A report published by CASEL (2015) in collaboration with AIR further supports the need for additional teacher professional development to assist children in dealing with SEL challenges. This 2015 study focused on the implementations of SEL at three urban state school districts and was motivated by the overwhelming request from teachers within these districts for additional professional training to meet the needs of students better in their classrooms that require SEL support. The teachers requested additional training, as they felt that the low graduation rates in their schools were partly the result of the social and emotional challenges many of the students faced, for which teachers were ill prepared to manage. As they were blamed for the poor academic performance of their students, these teachers decided to document their experiences of social and emotional issues that students exhibited in the classroom, and used these self-reflection journals as evidence to support their claim that productive instruction can only be achieved if student behavior in class is addressed first. The administration responded to this initiative positively and conducted an additional survey regarding the SEL situations that the teachers regularly faced and the ways they responded in each case. The survey findings confirmed the need for an in-depth investigation of the situation. Conclusive results from the survey indicated that the teacher survey was directly aligned with the need for SEL implementation and the predictions of teachers regarding the academic achievements and behavior of students.
Within this study, the AIR staff was charged with collecting data on SEL usage for 3 years. The data were collected between February and May of each year via surveys administered to school-based staff who worked in the areas of instruction or student support, and teacher interviews were conducted to obtain additional information. The SEL implementation at the school was measured and scored in 3-month increments, thus allowing SEL effectiveness to be measured while identifying any changes that needed to be made. The goals of this extensive investigation were to evaluate the following: (a) the implementation of activities described in the collaborating district’s initiative, which indicated a plan of action to implement the SEL uniformly throughout each district systematically; (b) clarity of roles and responsibilities for each school district in implementing the SEL; (c) individual school buy-in and adaptation to culture; and (d) individual school anticipated student outcomes, including academic performance, attendance, and suspensions, as well as social and emotional competence. The three districts were approved implementation of the SEL until 2020 (CASEL, 2015).

Ashdown and Bernard (2012) indicated that only 40% of children starting school for the first time possess the social and emotional skills necessary to be successful in kindergarten. This finding further supports the need for professional development that would allow teachers to better support children with social and emotional challenges during all phases of education. In the educational context, when teachers interact with students, they demonstrate the meaning and related attachment to objects, events, and experiences. McLeod (2012) described Vygotsky (1978) zone of proximal development, as the tasks that a child can do with the help and guidance of others, but cannot perform independently. As cited in Cherry (2018), Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development is defined by the ability a child cannot demonstrate without help. Available evidence indicates that to apply the concept of the zone of proximal development in
their classrooms, teachers need to understand the social and emotional barriers that may affect student learning fully. Teachers must use teaching practices that develop persistence, engagement within learning, and resilience.

Cherry (2018) also suggested that to promote SEL, content should never be taught independently from SEL skills, as they are instrumental for academic progress. Thus, new topics should be introduced in small increments, gradually building upon the skills the child has already mastered. Cherry (2018) also suggested that while students’ independence should be encouraged, teachers should always be ready to assist those who are struggling—a strategy known as scaffolding. Cherry (2018) further noted that, when the zone of proximal development is adopted in the classroom, teachers must ensure that students’ abilities and skills are improving continually by gradually extending the boundaries and increasing task difficulty. Moreover, as empirical evidence suggests that encountering new content in various contexts and formats aids learning, interactions with peers should be encouraged, as this assists in making associations between ideas. According to Cherry (2018), these everyday experiences systematically and positively affect students’ SEL.

**SEL within schools.** In 2014, the principal of Washoe County School District middle school, in Washoe, Nevada decided to retain social and emotional school-wide practices even after budget cuts. The ratio of students to teachers at this middle school was 38 to 1, which was the result of school district budget cuts. The principal of this middle school decided that the faculty and staff had developed such a successful SEL program for their school that it could not just be eliminated. The SEL implementation improved student academic and social and emotional abilities. Having a school-wide SEL implementation program provided the teachers with the skills to address issues related to the different demographics of the students attending
the school. The school climate surveys indicated that student respect and adult caring had risen from 43% to 53% and 75% to 80%, respectively, between 2013 and 2016. The student survey also indicated that students became more aware of their self-behaviors (Abamu, 2018).

The principal of this middle school also commented that there was an assumption that adults who work with students have SEL skills themselves. Developing teacher self-awareness and training in the implementation of social and emotional skills is a main priority for the Washoe County School District middle school principal. Providing ongoing professional development may provide teachers with a more consistent and open view of the real-world issues that their students are faced with every day. This awareness would demonstrate to teachers the importance of how the implementation of social and emotional skills would improve student’s mental health as well as their academic success. The principal did acknowledge that implementing SEL school-wide had its difficulties, but overall it had proven to provide ongoing success for the school (Abamu, 2018).

A case study conducted in Washington State K–12 public schools identified the need for social and emotional assistance for students in their school system. The Washington school district research team in 2011 conducted a meta-analysis of 213 schools totaling 270,034 students on their social and emotional universal school-based intervention programs. The research analysis indicated that social and emotional interventions conducted with students by regular teachers showed significant improvement in the academic and social behaviors of students. The researchers found that social and emotional interventions combined with academics can be successfully implemented across all levels of learning (elementary, middle, and high school) through social and emotional programs (Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup, 2016). Many teachers may instinctively know that social and emotional
skills are essential for the academic success of students (Anderson, & Cardoza, 2016). However, the primary focus of most schools is on ensuring that the students have mastered the academic content, thus neglecting their social and emotional development, even though these skills are equally important to academic and life success (California Department of Education, 2018). Social and emotional skills are important to the academic and life prospects of children (CASEL, 2018).

Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s EASEL Lab and the Wallace Foundation conducted research on the effectiveness of SEL programs within schools (Gilbert, 2018). The results of this research indicated that effective SEL school programs must consist of four elements. These are known by the acronym SAFE: (a) sequenced which provides students with coordinated learning opportunities; (b) active, which creates new learning opportunities; (c) focused, which emphasizes the individual child’s social needs; and (d) explicit, to target the specific social and emotional needs of the child. The four SAFE elements are centered on CASEL program goals for creating supportive learning environments that target prosocial relationships and developmental social and emotional skills. The research results alluded to obstacles observed and made assumptions on why issues may have been encountered (Gilbert, 2018).

This research provided implementation recommendations for conducting successful SEL programs within a school. The first recommendation suggested that the SEL programs at a school should allow enough time for implementation. Next, schools should not create a SEL program that stands alone; that is, the program should be implemented across the curriculum. SEL programs were recommended also to provide real-life situations so that students could identify with aspects from their everyday lives. The provision of professional development for
school staff on effective SEL implementation in the classroom was also suggested. Finally, collecting data to guide future decisions and address students’ social and emotional needs was proposed (Gilbert, 2018).

SEL programs are evidenced-based and play a critical role in social and emotional assistance for children. The Harvard researchers analyzed 25 SEL programs and discovered they had a significant influence on shaping the social and emotional processes in children who actively participated in the SEL programs. The one component that was found in all 25 SEL programs to have made a difference to program success was the social and emotional instructional methods used by teachers. The analyzed results from the 25 programs indicated that once the school was able to train teachers properly on how to implement social and emotional skills to students, there was more student behavioral success. The Harvard research results also indicated that there is still a need for further ongoing professional development for teachers assisting children in SEL programs because the behaviors of students are forever changing (Gilbert, 2018).

Another SEL that supports students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom is the MindUP program (MindUP, 2018). MindUP is a program that has been designed by educators for educators, along with social and emotional expert scientists and researchers. MindUP is a subsidiary of CASEL, which offers unique ways of assisting children with social and emotional challenges. The MindUP program is a research-based curriculum designed with 15 different lessons to address social and emotional student challenges for pre-k to the eighth grade. This comprehensive program offers strategies for teachers to guide all learners to focus and reach academic success. Each lesson can be readily adapted into any school schedule (The Hawn Foundation, 2018).
The Hawn Foundation (2018) MindUP program implementation within schools across U.S. statistics report indicated that implementation was a success for 2017. With proper implementation of the MindUP program, it has been reported that in many of the program’s participating schools there was a 90% increase in students’ pro-social behavior, 75% improvement in student planning and organizational skills, and 82% optimistic behavior of students (Hawn Foundation, 2018). The MindUP program allows teachers the ability to: (a) respond to students’ social and emotional outbursts more calmly and thoughtful manner; (b) assist students to achieve and maintain focus; and (c) create a class climate that provides students with hope and support their social and emotional challenges.

Camera (2018) stated that the American people now understand the importance of providing non-academic skills such as social and emotional skills to children in school. In a school in Cleveland, Ohio, a principal launched a school-wide social and emotional implementation program in 2014 and witnessed an increase in students’ academic and social and emotional abilities. The school-wide social and emotional initiative created ways for students to communicate their feelings to teachers and administrators, along with time incorporated within the school day for teachers to reinforce conflict resolution and anxiety management strategies for students. The principal of this school solicited the commitment of the faculty, staff, and community in collaborating to educate students at the school, using the whole-child concept (Camera, 2018). Teaching with the whole-child approach provides accountability to ensure that all children within a school in every community are provided with a learning environment that is safe, supportive, and offers a challenging academic curriculum (Assessment and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2014).
This Ohio school in January 2018 partnered with other school districts in Tennessee, Connecticut, and New Jersey in a collaboration awareness campaign titled “The Kids Are Not All Right.” The campaign goal was to increase the awareness of American policymakers, educators, parents, and all stakeholders of schools that social and emotional assistance is needed for students. Once the Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development co-chair learned about the school districts’ campaign, she applauded their outstanding accomplishment and initiative related to students’ SEL. In return, she started a program to assist other schools to participate. This acknowledgment was the start of the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development program that provided schools with the knowledge on how to integrate curriculum content with social and emotional skills for students by providing training sessions for the faculty and staff at interested schools (Camera, 2018).

Durlak et al. (2011) posited that school programs are more effective within a framework of support and implementation that extends across and beyond the classroom. The authors highlighted that the capacity to handle the social and emotional needs of children in the classroom is one of the most challenging tasks for a teacher. Yet, this is not recognized in teacher-preparation programs that mostly focus on classroom instruction strategies, while failing to prepare prospective teachers for the social and emotional challenges of their future students (Durlak et al., 2011). According to Jackson (2017), this issue is further exacerbated by the reluctance of many principals to give SEL the required priority. Sparks (2013) highlighted the importance of school principals’ support for SEL initiatives, noting that children’s academic success was dependent on the overall culture of the school, which is primarily set by the school principal and includes student safety and the relationships that exist among teachers and students.
In addition to offering teachers training that would better equip them to respond to students’ social and emotional issues in the classroom; it is necessary to remove any organizational barriers to successful SEL implementation.

Shriver and Bridgeland (2015) highlighted the research of Levin and Belfield on how social and emotional challenges of young people may affect the economic returns of social and emotional programs. The economic returns were examined to determine whether investing in social and emotional programs would benefit society in a generational life span. This 6-year research was conducted on prominent social and emotional interventions that covered a range of combinational social and emotional behaviors. The research found that without the correlation of social and emotional programs with academic curriculum in classrooms, there was an anticipated chance of increased unemployment, prison population, mental illness, and unstable families in future generations (Brotto, 2018). The benefits of SEL programs would reduce the levels of depression and anxiety in students, and thus student attendance, grades, and overall performance would improve. This research indicated that to maintain SEL in the classroom, teachers’ professional training on how to implement social and emotional interventions must be the first step in addressing the issue.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

For many years, the primary focus of American schools has been to ensure that students receive quality education; however, this focus has changed in the past 10 years due to the many acts of violence carried out by students with social and emotional challenges in American schools (Anderson & Cardoza, 2016). Based on a collaborative campaign entitled, “The Kids Are Not All Right” (Camera, 2018), it is evident that students struggle with SEL skills in school and so the campaign’s purpose is to raise awareness of the hidden, underlying problem. There is
now awareness of the need for SEL skills to be taught to students in schools. The phenomenological approach adopted by this research may capture the understanding of teachers’ experiences of using SEL competencies with students that exhibit SEL challenges in the classroom.

Understanding the critical nature of SEL within schools is fundamental to understanding the problem that was addressed in this research. The review of the literature in this chapter presented qualitative approaches to studying teachers’ lived experiences of SEL challenges of students in the classroom, in addition to specific SEL skills that can be approached through different SEL programs. The inclusion of social and emotional programs in schools may never be fully functional until colleges and universities provide adequate social and emotional teacher-preparation training in their core teaching licensing programs (Blad, 2017). There are numerous publications focused on the social and emotional challenges of students in the classroom (Cantor, 2013). However, the main factor to address social and emotional challenges in the classroom should be the provision of professional development for teachers on how to teach social and emotional skills to students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom (Brotto, 2018).

This review of the literature provided an opportunity to explore the various methodologies and designs that were used in research on social and emotional challenges of students, teacher experiences of implementing social and emotional skills within the classroom, and the importance of professional development and training of teachers to implement social and emotional skills with students in the classroom. The studies described in this review were more qualitative than quantitative because the current research is primarily exploratory, with a focus on gaining an understanding of the problem. The literature review in this research also mainly focused on the use of common qualitative research data methods, such as interviews, focus
groups, and participation/observations. The literature review identified a methodology used by Camera (2018) and Blad (2016), which influenced me in selecting interviewing as the methodology approach for this study. Both these studies used the collaboration of school stakeholders to form groups and assign the groups with the task of identifying and learning the perceptions of individuals who were vested in the school, such as teachers, administrators, students, staff members, and community volunteers. The use of teacher participants’ interviews allows the perspectives and opinions of all research participants to be acknowledged, as opposed to participants responding to a survey on paper. The success of the program studied by Camera (2018) and Blad (2016) was a direct influence to implementing an interview in this research framework.

Additionally, the use of open-ended questioning in the research may provide a clearer understanding of the research participants’ experiences of the phenomenon compared to a survey. The purpose of the open-ended questioning is to allow participants the opportunity to share information that may include perspectives, attitudes and understanding of the research questions. Open-ended questioning also may eliminate response error because participants are more likely not to forget the question because it can be repeated. This type of questioning also may prompt participants to answer with sentences, stories, and give a deeper insight to the research questions (Yin, 2016).

Abamu’s study (2018) investigated the Washoe County District middle school and used various combinations of faculty, staff, students and parents’ surveys to collect data on the implementation of social and emotional programs within the school. The analysis of the survey data was quantitative, which does not support the phenomenological framework of this study. An open-ended questioning approach for this research was considered appropriate, based on the
questions being asked by the research study. Furthermore, the survey findings by Abamu (2018) indicated that there is a need for social and emotional programs to be implemented in schools only. Nonetheless, the Abamu (2018) literature reviewed did not focus on the identification of those components that contribute to the implementation of social and emotional skills with students (Gilbert, 2018), and which may help to address the research questions. The purpose of this research is to identify the gap in the literature.

Abamu’s (2018) study explored how teachers perceived the social and emotional challenges of students, and conducted a review of the literature on teachers’ experiences and knowledge of social and emotional programs. Research cited by Blad (2016) indicated that different factors affect the way teachers perceive the students’ social and emotional challenges. Blad (2016) concluded that the implementation of social and emotional programs was required to address teachers’ lack of knowledge and confidence in their ability to identify with the issues or challenges that a student experience socially and emotionally. Another factor cited by Blad (2016) is that the level of advance schooling a teacher has is a significant factor when considering the effectiveness of implementing a social and emotional program in schools. The research findings cited in Blad (2016) demonstrated a direct correlation to the need of addressing the problem, question of this research, and provided the researcher with innovated ideas in seeking solutions to the research problem.

Overall, there have been different types of research on the role of teacher experiences and how these experiences influence the inequitable implementation of social and emotional competencies in classrooms. Research conducted in this area (Blad, 2016; CASEL, 2018; Fedele, 2015; Woods, 2015; Yoder, 2014a) has indicated that professional development of teachers to implement CASEL’s five social and emotional competencies with students could impact the SEL
crisis in U.S. classrooms. Some studies, such as Davis (2018), Cherry (2018), and Shriver and Bridgeland (2015), were limited in their conclusions because of various factors, such as limited data collected. Hence, the findings were not identified as anticipated and, furthermore, unexpected variables affected the research, as a whole. This study intends to identify the gap in the literature that further studies need to address to determine if and how SEL competencies are being implemented in the classroom by teachers, and identifying specific SEL behavior that may change students social and emotional behaviors in the classroom.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Supporting SEL of students may create an opportunity for school professionals to reflect on their responses to students’ social and emotional challenges. Educators must fully understand how their actions and reactions affect the relationship with the child if they are to support students with social and emotional issues more effectively. The research presented in this chapter has revealed that the promotion of healthy and productive relationships between teachers and students is vital for students’ academic achievement (Assessment and Curriculum Development, [ASCD], 2015). Psychologists recommend that social and emotional skills be developed within a culture that supports different ways of feeling, relating, and doing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). School professionals are responsible for cultivating a nurturing learning environment in which children’s voices are expected and respected. The Harvard Graduate School of Education’s EASEL Lab and the Wallace Foundation conducted research on social and emotional methods that considered strengths, based on the techniques used to identify and mediate human activity, as well as the versatility of findings yielded (Gilbert, 2018).

Also, in this literature review, the implementation of different approaches to SEL has been discussed. Fedele’s (2015) and Yoder’s (2014a) research findings revealed the need for
more extensive teacher training. More teacher training will allow teachers to better support students in managing their social reactions, emotions, and feelings, as well as developing friendships and solving school-related problems. These essential life skills promote students’ well-being and positive mental health while ensuring greater academic success (McLeod, 2017). Sparks (2013) noted that, when students can delay expressing immediate, personal emotions of gratification for something specific, they are more likely to display positive behavior and individual academic and social success. Children experience the same emotions as do adults; however, they lack the maturity required to safely and effectively manage these emotions and express their feelings and views constructively. Similar to adults, children become angry, frustrated, embarrassed, nervous, and so on; however, they may not have the language skills to clearly how they are feeling. Consequently, they often convey their feelings nonverbally, and may even engage in inappropriate behavior or physical confrontations. Tantrums and outbursts are among the unfavorable methods that children use for expressing their anger and frustration to adults (Social-Emotional Learning for Prevention, 2017).

All studies included in this review support Wood’s (2015) assertion that teachers need additional training, as they do not learn how to respond to children’s social and emotional challenges while in college. According to the study of 600 American schools, conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality staff, newly qualified teachers enter classrooms inadequately prepared to meet all student needs, including those related to social and emotional development (Merrow, 2017). Consequently, they need much more training and support in this particular area. Providing SEL interventions for teachers will ensure that students can cope with difficulties they encounter in school and beyond, thus helping guard them against mental health problems as they mature. An ample body of evidence indicates that children who have developed
SEL skills find it easier to control their emotions and behaviors, and have a positive outlook about themselves and the world around them. By being involved in the implementation of social and emotional healthy lifestyle, they also learn to solve problems in more productive ways and form better interpersonal relationships (Learning and Health, 2017).

The collaborative study conducted by CASEL and AIR researchers in 2015 revealed that SEL initiatives implemented in U.S. schools have many weaknesses/challenges, some of which stem from lack of continuity in leadership, as well as frequent teacher changes. Many schools also lack the required funds to implement SEL programs and measure their effectiveness fully. Nonetheless, the participating schools did report benefits in adopting SEL, as in most cases these programs have resulted in improvements in student behavior and grades. These positive outcomes were attributed to students becoming more challenged by academic tasks, whereas the teachers responded more effectively to SEL challenges within the classroom. Because of these positive trends, student-peer social and emotional interactions also improved, generating a more positive school climate that is conducive to learning. The study findings also indicated a positive change in school safety; however, the difference compared to the previous year was not statistically significant (CASEL, 2015).

The CASEL (2015) findings further revealed that, while these positive outcomes were encouraging to achieve systemic academic school improvements, a minimum of 5–7 years’ study is required to notice significant student progress, especially if the impact is measured at the student on grade level. Available evidence related to SEL implementation in various schools across the United States indicates that such systemic change is feasible and can lead to the desired student outcomes. Observations from all three school districts where this collaborative study was conducted revealed a noticeable change in teachers’ attitudes toward SEL.
implementation, from negative to positive, as well as more productive relationships with children who exhibited social and emotional challenges (CASEL, 2015).

The evidence provided by CASEL (2015) indicated that a comprehensive set of SEL practices for students in elementary, middle, and high schools is needed if the desired results are to be achieved. These practices should include the following: (a) reworking discipline policies, requiring teachers to solve nonviolent problems either in the classroom or by taking the students involved to the hallway for a brief discussion; (b) boosting student-staff relationships by making the presence of school administrators and other staff more prominent and encouraging meaningful interactions; and (c) gradually adopting SEL instruction in classrooms by providing training for teachers to effectively motivate students with SEL challenges.

To further assess the effectiveness of SEL initiatives adopted by schools, as a part of the CASEL (2015) collaborative study, surveys were administered to students, whereby they were required to rate difficulty in performing various tasks, such as empathizing with a peer, using a 5-point Likert scale. Focus groups were another source of data for the CASEL (2015) collaborative study, as these groups motivate discussions and generate further insights into the effectiveness of SEL initiatives. Within a general research study, it is rare to have access to all the members of a particular group (McLeod, 2017). Although direct questioning and interviewing can allow researchers to pursue the research topic in greater depth, focus groups promote open and honest communication, often yielding important additional findings. In this particular case, more than 150 SEL concerns and student competency issues emerged, which were classified into five categories, namely self-knowledge, controlling self-behavior, becoming socially aware, building relationships with others, and developing decision-making abilities (McLeod, 2017).
As a result of taking part in the CASEL (2015) research, schools were able to identify students with higher SEL scores and establish a direct link between academic performance and behavioral outcomes. This information could, however, also be regarded as a disadvantage and potentially biased, as students with strong academic and behavioral abilities were eliminated because they did not fit the parameters of the study (CASEL, 2015). Surveys can also be beneficial in gathering pertinent data; however, if the questions are not sufficiently specific, they provide limited results. In this study, measuring students’ ability to achieve high-stakes’ testing for accountability failed to adequately address how to focus on supporting students with social and emotional challenges. The surveyed school reached a graduation record of 75% in 2015, which motivated the administrators to set the goal of 90% for 2020, with a focus on providing SEL opportunities throughout the school.

**Critique of Previous Research**

When reflecting on the literature review, clear advantages and disadvantages of extant research emerged. The Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development created a program for the faculty and staff for schools who were interested in learning how to integrate curriculum content with SEL skills for students. The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development created a SEL program based on the personal interest of the institute vice president. Lastly, the (AIR) staff collaborated with two research studies in this literature review. The collaboration was conducted by Yoder (2014a), which provided an extensive literature review of teachers’ knowledge of SEL competencies. The study researcher believes that the information the third-party groups provided to each study allowed for a diversity of point of view and perspectives of each situation.
Also, some of the literature reviews used third-party groups that had no direct connection to the research subject being reviewed. The disconnection to the research may be considered a contributing factor because there would be limited bias but could also be considered a non-contributing factor because of the disconnection the information being received could have been nonfactual information. Some of the third-party groups in the literature review are the following: Harvard Graduate School of Education’s EASEL Lab and the Wallace Foundation, researched the effectiveness of SEL programs within schools and the research findings alluded to obstacles observed and assumptions on why issues may have happened (Gilbert, 2018).

Woods, 2015 and Yoder, 2014b confirm extant studies in which teachers could share their views regarding the best strategies for responding to students’ social and emotional challenges and their preparedness to adopt effective measures in the classroom that require teachers’ additional training in supporting children with social and emotional issues. However, such training initiatives must be tailored to the needs of both teachers and students because what works in one situation or for one condition might be ineffective or even dangerous in another. McLeod, 2017 and Durlak et al., 2011 stated when designing SEL programs, available resources must be considered and potential conflicts with other measures must be identified; however, Blad (2016) contradicted that research, because if teachers are not trained to implement SEL programs in the classroom effectively, there will not be any progression in students social and emotional behaviors. In the educational context, when teachers interact with students, they demonstrate the meaning and related attachment to objects, events, and experiences (Weissberg, 2016).

None of the authors whose studies are included in this review provided a concrete plan of action to address SEL challenges of students. For example, Camera (2018) stated that the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development started a
program to provide school knowledge on how to integrate a social and emotional curriculum but did not offer any specific suggestions. Also, the Washoe County School District middle school principal did not provide specific details regarding what SEL implementation that was used in her school. The principal just stated the school would keep the social and emotional school-wide practice even though the school was having to cut the budget.

In one of the review studies conducted by CASEL (2015) with the assistance of AIR, staff revealed that teachers must provide better assistance to children with SEL challenges if they are to succeed academically. They have unique situational tactics regarding reworking discipline policies by (a) requiring teachers to solve nonviolent problems in the classroom or by conducting a quick consultation in the hallway; (b) boosting student-staff relationships by making the administrators’ presence more visible, thus promoting positive communication and interactions; and (c) gradually adopting direct instruction of SEL skills in classrooms by providing training for teachers that demonstrates how to effectively support students with SEL challenges. Additionally, this study highlighted the benefits of adopting several methodological approaches, as district data were combined with surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gain as much relevant information as possible. The CASEL (2015) research study also benefitted from the involvement of AIR staff. This partnership yielded many advantages, such as ongoing tracking of data, which periodically warranted adjustments in the implementation, while facilitating comprehensive analyses of the SEL implementation and effectiveness.

Summary

Schools have an essential role in promoting children’s SEL development because most children aged five to 18 attend school and form significant relationships in this environment. Social and emotional disorders among children have become more prevalent and many teachers
are not adequately prepared to deal with such behaviors in their classrooms (Greenspan, 2018). Disorderly behavior is indicative of poor SEL skills and makes it very challenging for teachers to focus on the curriculum. Empirical evidence also indicates that peers reject those students with SEL challenges, making it even more challenging to learn, as emotional and practical support of fellow classmates is an essential resource for children and young adults (Wood, 2015). Students may struggle with some of the same challenges that many adults have, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Others may face much larger issues, including homelessness, poverty, and exposure to violence and systemic oppression (Social-Emotional Learning for Prevention, 2017).

The total number of hours a child spends in a classroom every year is 923; therefore, what a child learns in school is essential to his or her development (Nauert, 2018). By placing emphasis on SEL in schools, students may be equipped with the necessary skills to resolve social interaction problems in more productive ways. This will not only prevent antisocial behavior, but will also improve academic outcomes (Anderson & Cardoza, 2016). There are many SEL programs available to assist teachers in working with children with social and emotional challenges in the classroom. CASEL offer several SEL programs for educators to implement within a school or classroom. Ideally, as SEL competencies skills become commonplace in school environments, more students will use SEL strategies to guide their behavior, exhibit increased caring and concern for others, make positive decisions, and take responsibility for their actions (Sparks, 2013).

The next chapter focuses on the qualitative methodology for the study. This methodology chapter provides a rationale for the methodology, a description of how the qualitative methods are applicable to the study, and the data collection methods that was used in this research. The
research methodology chapter assisted me in discovering and to ensure the efficiency of the chosen research method. The qualitative method is focused on descriptions about people’s lived experiences of a given situation (Creswell, 2013). The methodology chapter is exploratory in nature and is mainly focused on gaining insights and understanding regarding SEL implementation in the classroom.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used to explore the purpose and design of this research. I chose to use a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design and purposive sampling. Qualitative research is a type of exploratory research that is used to obtain an understanding of foundational reasoning, human behavior, and personal opinions (Crossman, 2018). I chose this approach because of its suitability to address the study objective: to depict the lived experiences of individuals in real-world contextual situations with minimal intrusion of artificial research procedures. This research aimed to identify if and how teachers implement SEL competencies in their class with students who experience SEL challenges.

Classroom teachers provide the daily academic and SEL needs of 25–30 students, on average, from diverse backgrounds in a classroom (Panichelli, 2018). One in five students in a typical American classroom shows signs of one or more social and emotional health disorders (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Acting responsibly and displaying respectful behavior in the classroom can be a challenge for some students. These challenges may hinder students’ ability to form healthy social and emotional relationships in school and life, and make the handling of these situations difficult for teachers (Greenberg, 2018). Similar to adults, children sometimes feel angry, frustrated, embarrassed, or nervous. Unlike adults, children often lack the language skills to verbalize precisely how they are feeling. As a result, children often express their feelings through physical, and sometimes inappropriate, behavior (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Having the knowledge and understanding of how to use SEL skills is a growing issue for students and may require greater reinforcement from teachers as
to how to activate SEL skills when required (Greenberg, 2018). SEL is defined as the process of acquiring knowledge to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, develop self-awareness, establish and achieve goals, identify with the emotions of others, and understand how to make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018). Learning social and emotional skills may help students focus academically, increasing the likelihood they will succeed in school and their subsequent lives and careers (Greenberg, 2018).

SEL competencies provided the conceptual framework for this research. A conceptual framework includes key concepts, factors, and variables regarding the research topic in question and their presumed relationships (Sage Publications, 2018). SEL consists of five developmental competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2018). This study explored the lived experiences of teachers using SEL competencies with students who exhibited SEL challenges in the classroom. This phenomenological study also aimed to explore if and how teachers implemented each of the SEL competencies in their class to assist students with SEL challenges, including how they determined if an approach was appropriate for specific social and emotional behaviors and students. I obtained data by conducting individual face-to-face interviews with the teacher participants involved in the study.

This chapter begins with an overview of the questions that I addressed in the research. The subsequent sections of the chapter describe the purpose of the research and how I conducted the study, the research populations, sampling method instrumentation, data collection, and analysis procedures. Finally, the chapter describes the credibility and dependability of the research, the limitations of the data, and the findings and ethical issues of the study.
Research Questions

The following two research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What are teachers’ experiences when working with students who present social and emotional challenges in their classrooms?

**RQ2.** How, if at all, do teachers implement SEL competencies when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges?

I designed the interview questions (see Appendix A) to: (a) obtain background and demographic information regarding the research participant’s teaching experiences of supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom; (b) obtain individual teacher lived experiences of student SEL challenges and identify the SEL competencies that participants use to support students with SEL challenges in the classroom; (c) determine if and how teachers address specific SEL competencies with students; and (d) identify whether teacher participants have knowledge of SEL programs and if they desire professional development training on such programs.

In qualitative studies, researchers present research questions in commonplace and broad ways to best learn from the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenology aspect of this study consisted of the lived experiences of individual teacher participants that related to educating students with SEL challenges in the classroom. Smith (2018) has defined personal experiences as individual thoughts, ideas, and images of particular concepts. Cunningham (2017) defined personal perceptions as how individuals process information about others. This research aimed to identify if and how teachers established and implemented SEL competencies that encouraged students to use healthy SEL competency skills in the classroom. The SEL skills of students can be fostered via student-centered instructional activities that
include an integral part of the curriculum and should be scheduled throughout each school day (Bailey, Jacob, & Jones, 2014).

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

This six-week study explored teachers’ lived experiences of handling the SEL challenges of students in their classrooms. It also identified if and how teachers implement any of the five SEL competencies in their classes to assist students with these challenges. Identifying the experiences of teachers in supporting children with SEL challenges has the potential to uncover different factors that might contribute to the issues faced by teachers in the classroom. SEL can contribute to a classroom in many ways, including promoting an increase in positive teacher-student relationships and student-peer interactions and providing conflict resolution tactics for students and teachers. To meet this research purpose, a qualitative research methodology with a phenomenological design was adopted, as this ensured that the views of the participants in identifying and providing meaning to the research questions were obtained and analyzed. During this research, I maintained a journal and audio-recorded the interview responses of the research participants.

I used the conceptual framework of SEL competencies to identify and provide meaning to the research questions by having a clear strategy in place to analyze and delve further into the responses of the participants following their interviews. Participants were asked specific interview questions about the SEL competencies they had used or observed in their classes to answer the research questions. I provided each teacher participant with a list of the five SEL competencies, along with their meaning and examples, during the interview (see Appendix D). This information assisted the participant to become more knowledgeable about the SEL competencies and acted as a reference tool. This information was informed by the secondary
research sources used for this study. If a teacher participant showed no knowledge of SEL in any situation closely related to SEL behaviors, I introduced and briefly discussed the different SEL competencies. If, during the discussion, the participant could relate to a situation with the competencies, I recorded this in my journal as the participant’s response.

I informed the teacher participants of the different SEL competencies, together with examples of related behaviors, during the interview. Although the teacher participants may not have referred to SEL competencies by name, they may still have used these skills with their students. SEL is not a stand-alone program or teaching method. All SEL competencies can be blended with core academic subjects and taught in many ways. I encouraged the teacher participants to share their subjective experiences of the phenomenon of interest in this study during a face-to-face interview. I used the data-analysis process to derive information to validate the research framework. The study explored if and how participants implemented SEL competencies and if specific SEL skills promoted positive behavior from students who experienced SEL challenges in the classroom. I listened actively to hear if and how the teacher participants encouraged students to use SEL competency skills in the classroom.

The first SEL competency example that teachers may use to influence students in the classroom is the skill of self-awareness, which focuses on an individual’s ability to recognize and relate to self-emotions and behaviors (CASEL, 2018). For example, a teacher might allow students to create rules that promote respectful behavior and provide guidelines for unacceptable language and conduct in the classroom. Developing rules allows students to think about why certain words and actions may be hurtful to others. One idea is for teachers to allow students to create a class list of words that are unacceptable and to hold each other accountable using some form of hand signals to help make students aware they are violating a class rule (Hough, 2014).
The next SEL competency example that teachers may use to influence students in the classroom is the skill of self-managing one’s emotions. Self-management focuses on the ability to manage and control self-behaviors in different situations (CASEL, 2018). This competency involves a teacher providing explicit instructions by establishing clear, obtainable goals for students. Some examples include permitting students to measure self-behavior daily and recording this behavior on a pre-determined form or chart, concluding with a comparison recorded behavior with a goal set for the day. Goals provide students with the clarification and understanding of what is expected of them in a set time. These goals can be posted within the class or written as a personal reminder for students at their desk, for example (Shafer, 2018).

The third SEL competency example is the skill of social awareness, which involves developing the ability to empathize and respect others’ emotions and differences. Teachers may provide discussions that are similar or related to the following example: a teacher provides a news article or some other type of literature to students to read that describes how stereotypes form and how they affect others. The teacher may use a reflective approach to activate the SEL competency for students by providing time for students to express their feelings about stereotypes, as well as the opinions and perceptions of other’s feelings, either on paper or as a class discussion (Hough, 2014).

The next SEL competency example is the skill of building relationships. Relationship skills involve the establishment and maintenance of healthy and social relationships with others (CASEL, 2018). Students tend to have a great deal of empathy for their best friends and relatives—that is, people they know and are familiar with. However, it may be difficult for students to value people outside of these groups. Difficulties in relationship building for students might appear when a new student enrolls in class, for example, or when another student
primarily speaks a foreign language or dresses differently to others. Teachers can cultivate students’ SEL ability by creating opportunities for role-play, reading and discussing books about relationships, and allowing opportunities for students to interview a peer they do not know in class. These are all supportive approaches to increasing the SEL skills of students (Hough, 2014).

The final competency that a teacher might use to influence students is the skill of making responsible decisions. Responsible decision-making is the ability to identify, analyze and form a constructive decision on a matter (CASEL, 2018). Assisting students to develop responsible decision-making skills depends on how much practice and teacher feedback a student is given. For example, discussing the meaning of decision-making skills with students is always a great start. The discussion can be conducted through the use, for example, of a book illustrating the principles and processes of decision-making and concluding with students sharing their thoughts about how to make decisions. When a student can recognize and identify a problem, they can analyze the situation from a variety of approaches. Evaluating and reflecting on responsible decision-making entails exploring potential options and considering the consequences of a decision, including the ethical and moral obligations regarding the decision. This process increases students’ awareness and ability to handle situations and helps develop an understanding of how to analyze all the consequences of different outcomes to make the best choice (Hatter, 2017).

I used a data-analysis process to gather information to validate the research framework. The results provide evidence that supports the view that the development of SEL competencies is a critical component of the educational experience. The results also show that educators must address any inadequacies in the SEL skills of students to ensure that all students achieve their
full potential. Students can achieve academic, social, and emotional success if teachers strive to develop their SEL skills, in addition to focusing on academic subjects (California Department of Education, 2018). Through this phenomenological research, I gained an in-depth understanding of teachers’ lived experiences supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom using the principles of SEL competencies. This research identified if and how teacher participants implemented SEL competencies and if and how they addressed the specific SEL behavior of students in the classroom via individual face-to-face interviews with participants on this research topic.

Education researchers and practitioners have shown considerable interest in SEL development as evidence has shown that students who lack these skills do not perform as well as their peers (Nauert, 2018). Often, SEL deficits are harder to pinpoint in children than physical development deficits (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Empirical evidence has suggested that students with well-developed SEL competence are more likely to succeed at school and in other settings. These students are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue higher education, thus enhancing their career opportunities, mental health, and prospects of becoming prosperous and productive citizens (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). The CASEL (2018) study noted that SEL developmental skills represent the ability to pay attention, make transitions from one activity to another, and cooperate with others. These attributes are essential to a child’s school readiness. SEL skills can be incorporated into the curriculum and taught in the classroom through explicit demonstrations and by providing opportunities for all students to apply learned SEL skills in diverse situations (Weissberg, 2016).
Research Population and Sampling Method

The target population for this 6-week study included a total of 10 fourth- and-fifth-grade teachers from one public school district in a southern state. This Title I school is located in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Students were predominately African American. The socio-demographic and racial composition of the student population was representative of the surrounding community: 80% of the approximately 1,350 students were African American, 12% identified as White, 6% as Hispanic, and the remaining 2% comprised other ethnic groups. The school had approximately 245 students enrolled in the fourth grade and 230 students in the fifth grade (AdvanceED, 2018). The school had two teachers per subject—reading and language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

I used purposeful sampling to recruit 10 teachers of different academic subjects from the fourth and fifth grades. I included female and male teachers in this research. In total, 20 teachers at the school taught fourth and fifth grades. I chose this school site and grade levels because 40% of all discipline referrals at this school pertain to social and emotional challenges that the students exhibit in the classroom, as indicated in the school district’s school Continuous Improvement Plan report (AdvanceED, 2018). To reverse this trend, school district administrators allocated one additional counselor to this site and hired the school’s first in-school social worker during the 2017−18 academic school year. School district administrators also partnered with staff from a local mental health agency to provide services for students who had been referred by teachers, counselors, and administrators.

As noted above, I identified fourth- and fifth-grade teachers to participate in the study through purposeful sampling. Creswell (2013) notes that this type of sampling might result in nonrepresentative subsets of larger populations. For this reason, I used purposive sampling to
recruit research participants who possessed the knowledge or experience of the phenomenon under investigation. In Creswell’s (2013) words, “purposeful sampling yields an intentional sample of a group of people who can best provide information about the research problem being examined” (p. 148).

**Instrumentation**

As part of this 6-week study, I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with each teacher participant. I created interview questions (see Appendix A) for this study and asked these questions of each research participant to collect individual experiences. I used an open-ended interview approach to allow participants to contribute as much detail as they desired. Interviewers can use open-ended questions to ask probing, follow-up questions to ensure that participants express their experiences and viewpoints in full (Yin, 2016). I used this interview approach to ensure the same information was collected from each interviewee. Face-to-face interviews also allowed participants to share information with me in their own words. As a result, interviewees may feel more comfortable in open-ended interviews because they can express information from their perspective, rather than being asked to fit their answers into pre-defined response options (Crossman, 2018).

Before each interview, I informed the participants of the study objectives and the nature of their contribution to the research process. I audio-recorded all conversations and transcribed them for thematic analysis after each interview. As is best practice for this type of research, I ensured the reliability of interview questions through the quality of questioning. In return, I ensured the validity of responses through the consistency and relevance of interview questions (Crossman, 2018). I reviewed and field tested the interview questions and procedures with other teachers not participating in this research. A field test is a smaller, preliminary version of a given
study undertaken over a shorter period and with a smaller number of participants than the main study. I used this method to identify any shortcomings in the study design with nonparticipants that had expert knowledge about the population and research topic to determine whether the questions asked would provide adequate data concerning the study objective and questions (Yin, 2016).

The interviews consisted of 11 open-ended questions that I designed to elicit thorough responses from the participants. This number is the minimum number of questions required to gather detailed responses without overwhelming participants (see Appendix A). I designed the interview questions to (a) obtain background and demographic information regarding the research participant’s teaching experiences of supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom; (b) obtain individual teacher lived experiences of student SEL challenges, and to identify the SEL competencies that participants used to support students with SEL challenges in the classroom; (c) determine if and how teachers address specific SEL competencies with students; and (d) identify whether teacher participants have knowledge of SEL programs and whether they desire professional development training on such programs. I asked each participant the same questions in the same format. I asked the participants to be honest and straightforward in their responses. I used the responses of the participants to compare, contrast, and analyze variations in the experiences of participants. The following section of this chapter describes the data collection process I used during this research.

**Data Collection**

The data collection for this phenomenological research involved one-time teacher participant individual face-to-face interviews. This research approach assisted me in uncovering an in-depth picture of the studied phenomenon. As noted, I recruited 10 participants through
purposive sampling. The subset of teacher participants was a representative sample of a larger
group. The targeted enrollment for this research was 10 teachers. However, I distributed
recruitment letters to 20 teachers. In qualitative research, the sample size should consist of
enough participants to obtain data to describe the phenomenon of interest and address the
research questions. One of the main objectives of qualitative researchers is to gather enough data
to develop or saturate the research fully (Creswell, 2013).

I obtained the data required to meet the study objective through interviews. An interview
protocol was used to guide the interview process of the study (see Appendix C). I also used
written and audio-recorded journals as data sources (Crossman, 2018). I assigned each
participant a pseudonym to ensure their privacy. A pseudonym is a fictitious name given to a
person to ensure the confidentiality of the identity of that person (Merriam-Webster online
dictionary, 2019). I kept a journal to detail the SEL competencies that participating teachers
implement with students in their class and participants’ interview responses. I also used this
journal to help identify patterns in the data. I am the only person with access to the notes from
this research and any storage or reporting of the interview results was performed in a way that
did not disclose the identity of the participants. The research school site involved will not be
published or reported, thus protecting the name of the school and not disclosing it in the
publication of the results. Through this process, I was able to identify new ideas, an interpretive
path not taken, or possible connections between an early (discarded) idea and a newer
developing theme that might explain previously noted inconsistencies (Suter, 2012).

Before commencing the data collection, I requested clearance and permission from the
Concordia University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the board of the school district, and the
principal of the school to participate in this study. After receiving permission, I sent out
recruitment letters to all fourth- and fifth-grade teachers at the school stating the objective and purpose of the research, as well as the procedures and expectations of participants. This was considered in Week 1 of the study (see Appendix B). After receiving commitment responses from 10 participants, I sent out a welcome letter to all participating teachers, along with detailed information regarding the schedule of individual interviews, which was considered in Week 2 of the study. This letter also informed participants of their rights and basic requirements of participating in the study. In addition, the letter stated that confidentiality would be ensured throughout the process of participation in the study. The letter informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without risk of any negative repercussions. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. A participant’s decision about whether to participate would not affect their relationship with the school or school district in which the participant was employed. If any participant chose to withdraw at any time, I requested that the participant notify me of this decision in writing. In addition, I asked participants to sign a research consent form at the beginning of the research process. By signing this consent form, participants permitted me to use all data obtained prior to any withdrawal from the study.

I conducted a 1-hour interview with each participant at the research site during Week 3. I audio-recorded all interviews to assist with accurate transcription. During Week 4, I listened to the recordings of interviews and transcribed them verbatim. I coded, analyzed, and member checked each interview. Member checking involves verifying the truth of the transcriptions both during and at the end of each interview. The credibility of the research involves showing that research findings are accurate and honest (Statistics Solutions, 2018). These data collection methods were deemed adequate to meet the objectives of the study. This method yielded useful
information from a diverse group of teachers I chose through purposeful sampling (Crossman, 2017).

In the final week of the study, I sent out letters thanking each participant for their role in the study and provided a general summary of findings. The entire data collection process took a total of one hour for each participant. There were no risks to participating in the study other than providing individual experiences. I recorded and transcribed all interviews. Once I checked the transcript for accuracy and transcription was completed, recordings were deleted. Any data provided were coded so that people who were not the researcher could not link any of the information back to the research participants. Any name or identifying information given by participants was securely kept by electronic encryption on a password-protected computer locked inside a secure cabinet. Recordings were deleted as soon as possible. All other study documents would be kept secure for 3 years and then destroyed.

Data Analysis Procedures

During this qualitative research, I focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers lived experiences of working with students’ with SEL challenges and exploring if and how teacher participants’ implemented SEL competencies with students in the classroom. I achieved this objective by gathering and analyzing a comprehensive set of data pertaining to the subjective experiences of the study participants (Crossman, 2017). The data collection process was via audio-recording of each participant’s face-to-face interview and researcher notes. I used a confirmability process to analyze the data. Through this process, I ensured that bias did not skew the research findings by checking and rechecking the data collected throughout the study (Statistics Solutions, 2018). The bracketing method was used to ensure that my focus remained on the study; the responses of each participant were viewed as having equal value and all
relevant statements were gradually reduced into a statement that captured the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I gathered data for this research through a one-time individual face-to-face interview with each participant. I assigned each participant a pseudonym to ensure the privacy of the participants. I asked participants in the welcome letter to bring to their interview any artifacts (e.g., lesson plans or student work samples) that showed how they were using SEL in their classroom (see Appendix F). Artifacts were used to triangulate this research. Triangulation is a process of verification (or truth-checking) that increases validity by incorporating three different viewpoints or methods (Creswell, 2013).

I began the data analysis for this phenomenological study by creating a detailed description of the data gathered about the teacher participants’ experiences of supporting children with SEL challenges in classrooms, along with if and how SEL competencies were being implemented with children in the classroom. I then identified similarities in participant responses and documented findings from the interviews. During this process, I discovered whether there were any gaps in the data. Discovering gaps is an indication that the researcher understands the topic in question and has identified the potential for further meaningful study and independent research on this topic (Creswell, 2013).

During the next phase of data analysis, I listened to the audio-recordings from the interviews and transcribed them verbatim to identify common or repeated words and expressions. This process of thematic analysis should reveal patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis that assisted me in generating themes from the interview data. Thematic analysis has six phases: familiarization, generating codes, creating themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing a final report (Statistics Solutions, 2018). The analysis process involves organizing data, looking for distinct concepts and
categories in the data, and then reorganizing the data into common themes using codes (Creswell, 2013). I used thematic analysis to analyze all data gathered in this research.

Familiarization is the process of the researcher becoming well-acquainted with the data through reading and re-reading interview transcripts (Statistics Solutions, 2018). After familiarization with the data, I began the analysis process with open coding. This process involved aggregating the data and assigning a study-related meaning. The process of classifying the distinct identity of different patterns, unique themes, current trends, and relationships among research data is called open coding. Coding involves subjecting all sources used in the investigation to a data-aggregating and meaning-making process (Creswell, 2013). The next step in the analysis process pertained to axial coding, whereby I identified one open coding category on which to focus. This category is referred to as the core phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I expected that this process would end with a reasonable conclusion, with the transfer of final concepts and categories into a data table. I used the NVIVO computer analysis software program to create categories (NVIVO, 2018). This software program provided me with the capabilities to categorize and classify the data.

The next step in this process was to create themes from the codes that I had created. This process provided me with clusters of codes that I used to form additional clusters of codes with similar meanings or relationships with one another. After creating themes, I reviewed them to ensure the themes depicted an accurate aspect of the data’s meaning, including all important details of the data. Naming themes involved creating labels to describe the relationship or the meaning of the themes. The final report was the last step in this process, which was written to present the findings and interpretation of the research data (Statistics Solutions, 2018).
In addition, I identified potential SEL strategies for teachers to adopt when working with students with SEL challenges. Qualitative research is a subjective form of research that depends on the controlled observations of the researcher. I used the data analysis process to make general discoveries about the phenomenon to be researched. Any name or identifying information given by participants was kept securely by electronic encryption on a password-protected computer locked inside a secure cabinet. No additional persons would have access to the safe during or after the conclusion of the research. The recordings were deleted as soon as possible; all other study documents would be kept secure for 3 years and then destroyed.

**Limitations of the Research Design**

Phenomenological research focuses on the participants’ lived experiences. I could not control certain factors that limited the availability of pertinent information. In contrast, delimitations are choices made by the researcher—that is, the boundaries of the study (Crossman, 2018). Phenomenological research can provide valid data. However, the data may have certain limitations. Potential limitations of the data in this research included preconceptions and personal bias of the participants related to the study topic. I anticipated that in this study the participants could articulate their thoughts and feelings about their experiences in assisting children with SEL challenges in the classroom. I had to rely on the experiences of research participants, which limited the amount of data that I was then able to analyze.

Finally, I gathered much of the data for this research from interviews. Therefore, self-reported data may pose a limitation in the study. Teachers may respond to interview questions based on how they feel about the topic, or they may be fearful of sharing information they feel may threaten their job security, thus sharing limited information. Self-reported data can also present many forms of bias—that is, individual understanding or a lack of knowledge of a
particular thing or subject may influence data collection (Aguinis & Edwards, 2013). Also, I had
to ask the right questions to ensure that participants provided a clear account of the problem
being explored. I asked teacher participants to share any artifacts supporting their lived
experiences of working in the classroom with students with social and emotional challenges (see
Appendix F). I asked teacher participants how they implemented these artifacts with students and
whether they had proven to be effective. The teachers providing artifacts commented that the
teacher-made artifacts assisted with supporting student SEL challenges in the classroom but not
for major SEL challenges, such as students exhibiting extreme tantrums.

Validation

Credibility. The objective of a phenomenological study is for the researcher to reach an
in-depth understanding of the research topic—a deep structure of knowledge that comes from
visiting personally with participants, spending time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed
meanings (Creswell, 2013). The conceptual framework of this study was SEL, whereby teachers
identified and developed skills that children need to learn to manage their social and emotional
behaviors in the classroom. I anticipated that the teacher participants would describe if or how
they used specific SEL competencies to address the needs of their students during the open-
ended questioning interviews. I also expected that the data collection instruments used would
provide reliable findings. I used confirmability within the research to ensure an audit trail of each
step of the data analysis process and to validate participant responses accurately. In addition, I
obtained corroborating evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources to validate the
trustworthiness of the data (Statistics Solutions, 2018). I also used consistent procedures
throughout the research. As I collected data continually, I explored the evidence collected to
interpret the findings and to produce a study summary.
**Dependability.** After interpreting and condensing the findings of the research, I provided the teacher participants with the opportunity to comment on the data collected. Member checking involves verifying the truth of transcriptions, both during and at the end of each interview. I shared a brief summary of the data I collected at the end of each interview to ensure the lived experiences shared by the participant were interpreted correctly. Participants did not review the full transcripts. Input from participants helped me refine their understanding of the studied phenomenon. Research credibility involves showing that research findings are accurate and honest (Statistics Solutions, 2018). I also solicited participant feedback on how I had conducted the study. Research participants were allowed at the end of each interview to ask questions about the research methods, the interpretations and conclusions that the researcher derived from the data collected during the individual interview, and any other questions regarding the research they may have had. Thus, participant feedback played a critical role in the outcome of the study as it provided information on “how well the ongoing data analysis represents the experience” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206). Teacher participants did not review the completed study transcripts, but each participant was sent an emailed thank you note after I completed the data analysis process. The thank you note expressed my appreciation for each participant’s contribution to the study and a general summary of the findings (see Appendix I).

**Expected Findings**

I expected the participants would be able to describe in detail the experiences of working with students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom. The descriptions were expected to assist the research participants in understanding which of the five SEL competencies (or all five) were required to increase student SEL in the classroom. In return, the teachers may be able to use these identifiers to generate ideas and create an outline of how to improve SEL
implementation. This study provided teacher participants with an awareness and identification of specific social and emotional competencies that assist in supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom. This study may also provide solutions to specific issues that may not have been identified in regard to working with children with social and emotional challenges in classrooms.

The teacher participants were expected to reflect on the meaning of, and how to recognize and understand: one’s emotions, feel empathy, make decisions, and build and maintain relationships to better support students with SEL challenges in the classroom. I expected that teachers participating in the study would recognize the importance of implementing SEL competencies to support students with SEL challenges in the classroom. This phenomenological study was expected to provide concrete examples of SEL methods and strategies that fourth- and fifth-grade teachers could use to support students with SEL challenges. The research was intended to be dependable, meaning that the research was credible and replicable (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

**Ethical Issues**

There is always scope for ethical issues to arise during a phenomenological study. For this reason, phenomenological researchers must meet pertinent ethical guidelines. In this study, I provided a letter of consent to the participants informing them of their rights and the basic requirements of participation in the study. This letter also explained that participation in the study was voluntary and that it would not expose them to any risks beyond those encountered in everyday life. According to Adams and Lawrence (2018), “ethical guidelines of all studies should be designed to increase knowledge in regard to behaviors, situations, or theories. My role
as the researcher is to be responsible to use only the measures or procedures that will produce meaningful results” (p. 95).

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The main ethical issues that arose in the study pertained to the researcher’s conflict of interest. As an educator with over 20 years’ experience working with children with different behavioral challenges, I have ample knowledge of the social and emotional challenges that children experience. I have worked for 13 years as a trained therapeutic foster parent and have firsthand experience of social and emotional issues that educators encounter in the classroom. In this research, I used the bracketing method (Creswell, 2013) to remain cognizant of my role as a research instrument and to avoid projecting any preconceived personal opinions onto the research process. I had no connections with the participants of this research, despite professional connections to some other individuals in their school district. I reviewed confidentiality related to the study with participants. I explained to each participant the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. There were no foreseeable risks from participation in the research.

**Ethical issues in the study.** Each participant received a letter of invitation that stated the purpose of the study and delineated a protocol aligned with the study purpose. This letter informed participants of their rights and basic study requirements. In addition, the letter explicitly stated that the researcher would ensure confidentiality throughout the research process. The letter informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without the risk of any negative repercussions. The choice by participants of whether to participate would not affect their relationship with the school or school district in which the participant was employed. If any participant chose to withdraw at any time, it was requested that a written notice be given to the researcher. In addition, by signing the ‘acknowledgment of permission’ indicated
on the research consent form, participants granted permission to the researcher to use all data obtained before any withdrawal of the study. I obtained permission to conduct this study from the Concordia University IRB. I requested permission from the principal of the school in question to conduct research within the school, as well as permission from the superintendent of the school district in question.

I provided the participants with a detailed description of all study procedures, including those procedures for maintaining confidentiality. All interviews were recorded and transcribed electronically. Once the transcriptions were used to check the accuracy of the data collected, the recordings were deleted. All data provided were coded to ensure confidentiality and so that no-one apart from the researcher could link information back to the research participants. Any name or identifying information given by participants were kept securely in electronic encryption on a password-protected computer locked inside a secure cabinet. The recordings were deleted as soon as possible; all other study documents will be kept secure for three years and then destroyed with a paper shredder.

**Summary**

This chapter provides information about the research procedure used in the present study, together with justification for my choice of a phenomenological method to explore the experiences of teachers in supporting children with SEL challenges. The study was conducted in one urban elementary school in a southern state. This school site was chosen based on the high number of discipline referrals related to SEL challenges that students exhibited in the classroom, as indicated in the school district individual school Continuous Improvement Plan report. The study sample was composed of 10 fourth- and-fifth-grade teachers who taught different academic subjects. I collected data for this study through open-ended interview questions. Face-to-face
participant interviews, researcher journal notes, teacher-made artifacts, and audio-recordings were used as data collection methods. The justification for each data collection method has been discussed in this chapter. The final component of this chapter considered the appropriate criteria and trustworthiness of the research. The next chapter focuses on data analysis and the development of results.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom. It investigated if, and how, teacher participants implemented SEL competencies in their class when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges. Acting responsibly and displaying respectful behavior in the classroom can be a challenge for some students. This may hinder their ability to form healthy social and emotional relationships in school and life, and it challenges their teachers. According to Greenberg (2018), having an understanding of how to activate SEL skills when needed is a growing issue for students, one that requires greater reinforcement from their teachers. As stated previously in the literature review, CASEL (2018) defines SEL as the process of acquiring knowledge to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, develop self-awareness, establish and achieve goals, identify with the emotions of others, and understand how to make responsible decisions.

SEL competencies are the conceptual framework for this research. A conceptual framework represents the key concepts, factors, variables, and the relationship between the factors of what is being studied to explain a phenomenon (Crossman, 2018). This study focused on specific educational themes gathered from SEL competencies. SEL includes five developmental competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2018). The reviewed literature revealed that these competencies are essential to developing individual social and emotional skills (Anderson & Cardoza, 2016).
My role as the researcher was to explore teachers’ lived experiences regarding the handling of SEL challenges with students in the classroom and to explore if and how teachers implemented SEL competencies to students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom. I collected data from teachers in an elementary school located in a southern state. During the data collection and analysis stages, I had a professional connection to another school in the researched district. I had no other connection or personal relationship with the research participants or school site. I obtained the data for this research from face-to-face interviews with 10 certified teachers of fourth- and fifth-grade students working within the same research school site. I recruited and communicated with the teachers participating in the study outside of school hours.

I used a phenomenological study design to gather a comprehensive set of data about the subjective experiences of the study participants. The 10 participants’ lived experiences of working with students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom provided the basis for data analyses. I developed open-ended interview questions for this study. Open-ended interview questions allow for research participants to express themselves and give information from their perspective, rather than being asked to fit their answers into pre-defined response options (Crossman, 2018). During the data analysis process, various themes became evident, and participants were found to have similar opinions in response to the interview questions. The data collected during this research do not represent all participants in every sample, as not every participant commented on every theme; however, I included each of the 10 participants’ perspectives in various sections of the results. I used pre-existing a priori codes for the SEL competencies framework to code the data.
The study undertook a thematic analysis of the 10 teacher-interview transcriptions; it followed six phases: familiarization, generating codes, creating themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing a final report. The detailed statements provided by the 10 participants offered ample data to answer the research questions posed. From the results of the data analysis, I used the a priori SEL themes for this research: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Within each theme, subthemes supporting the final theme were developed, for example, self-management as identifying, self-management as goals, social awareness as awareness, relationship skills stayed the same, and responsible decision-making as problem-solving. I began the thematic analysis process by categorizing participants’ interview responses and connecting similar meanings.

Figure 1 shows a detailed breakdown of the total responses from participants for each theme in this study. A total of 133 responses were collected from the teacher participants in this research (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Results of collective interview responses (n = 133).](image-url)
Description of the Sample

The participants of the study were 10 fourth- and fifth-grade teachers from one public school district in a southern state. The research site was a Title I school located in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood with predominately African American students. After receiving approval from the school district, I met with the principal of the research site. In the meeting, I provided an in-depth description of the study, the IRB approval letter, participant consent form, and school district letter giving permission to conduct research (see Appendices E, F, and G). The principal agreed that I could conduct my research within the school. The principal also agreed that any of the school’s fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and any additional certified teachers could participate in the research. The principal allowed teachers to use their classrooms as a private interview space outside of school hours.

I used purposeful sampling to recruit 10 teachers of different academic subjects from the fourth and fifth grades. According to Creswell (2013), “purposeful sampling yields an intentional sample of a group of people who can best provide information about the research problem being examined” (p. 148), and this type of sampling can result in non-representative subsets of larger populations. For this reason, researchers should use purposeful sampling when research participants require knowledge or experience about the phenomenon under investigation. The purposeful sampling technique used in this research produced a representative sample of teachers with similar characteristics, such as being teachers of the fourth or fifth-grade; holding a state-certified teaching certificate; and possessing prior experience in teaching students with social and emotional challenges in the classroom. Characteristics such as gender and ethnicity were not considered to have any effect on the sampling procedures or data collection.
After meeting with the principal, I sent a recruitment letter for this study by email to the 20 fourth- and fifth-grade teachers who worked at the research site (see Appendix B). I obtained the teachers’ email addresses from the school’s website. I also asked the principal if there were any other teachers I could interview who had direct contact with fourth- and fifth-grade students at the school. The principal suggested that I approach the school’s two reading and mathematics interventionist teachers as possible interviewees if I did not obtain enough responses from the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. The principal explained that the interventionist teachers were certified specialists in either reading or mathematics for each grade level. Interventionist teachers work with students in a small class setting away from the regular classroom. Not all students are required to take classes with an interventionist teacher; this resource is only for students identified in district quarterly and annual academic assessments as having specific areas of academic weakness. Content in these classes is based on the academic needs of the students. The principal explained that each interventionist teacher works with approximately 35 to 40 fourth- and fifth-grade students on each day of the school week.

After contacting all the research participants, I conducted purposeful sampling, which produced an estimate of 14 eligible teachers to interview. Ten teachers were used for this research, four of the eligible teachers deciding not to participate. I initially contacted these 10 teachers via an email requesting volunteers for a one-hour interview with me. There were no issues in obtaining participants for this research. I chose this school site and these grade levels for this research because 40% of all discipline referrals at this school pertained to the social and emotional challenges students exhibit in the classroom, as indicated in the school district’s Continuous Improvement Plan report (AdvanceED, 2018). Additionally, during the interview process, I discovered some unexpected attributes of the participants that might explain individual
differences in perspectives of SEL in the classroom. For example, two of the 10 teachers had background experience in English Language Learning teaching. Three of the 10 teachers had taught reading or mathematics at some point in their years of teaching fourth or fifth-grade. All 10 participants had five or more years of teaching experience. Their length of time teaching in the research site school district ranged from three to 20 years. A total of 10 out of a possible 14 educators comprised the study sample. The length of the interviews for this research varied according to the participant’s willingness to provide detailed information; they ranged from 35 to 50 minutes.

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

Typically, classroom teachers are responsible for addressing the daily academic and SEL needs of between 25 and 30 students, on average, from diverse backgrounds (Panichelli, 2018). This research included the experiences of teachers within a conceptual framework of SEL competencies to gain an in-depth understanding of the SEL challenges a student may experience in the classroom. When information is individualized and based on perspectives, it is imperative to use a qualitative method that allows research participants the opportunity to discuss and explain their viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). Numerical data cannot measure perspectives and experiences; however, themes or trends can subsequently be identified from qualitative data. The phenomenology of shared experience can present research findings that are both similar and different. Individual data collection through face-to-face interviews can depict the lived experiences of individuals in real-world contexts with minimal intrusion of artificial research procedures, thus increasing the validity of the results (Yin, 2016). Therefore, I chose a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design for this research to identify and provide meaning to
the research questions, along with a clear strategy to analyze and delve further into participants’ responses following their interviews.

The data collection instruments for this research consisted of 10 individual face-to-face interviews, artifacts collected from participants, and my journal notes. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The purpose of the face-to-face interviews was to allow participants to share information with me in their own words. As a result, interviewees may have felt more comfortable in open-ended interviews, because they could express information from their perspective. I audio-recorded all interviews and provided each teacher participant with a pseudonym. I chose to use the word “participant” plus a letter from the alphabet, starting with the letter A for the first teacher participant. I explained to each teacher participant that the pseudonym was a fictitious name to ensure privacy (see Appendix C). Participants agreed to be audio-recorded through a signed consent form (see Appendix E). I conducted the interviews in March 2019.

I asked teacher participants to share any artifacts that supported their lived experience of working in the classroom with students with social and emotional challenges. I also asked teacher participants how they implemented such artifacts with students and whether it had proven to be an effective tool. Three teachers shared the same artifact used as part of a team document (see Appendix F). These teachers explained that they used the artifact as documentation of student behavior attached to the discipline referral form submitted to school administrators. Two additional teachers shared a teacher-made artifact used by their grade-level team. The teachers commented that they used the artifact to assist students in reflecting on their behavior by asking them to write individual journal thoughts (see Appendix G). The teacher participants also commented that they used this teacher-made artifact to assist students in
recognizing their impulsive behaviors. The remaining teacher participants did not share any teacher-made artifacts or lesson plans to support their lived experiences or suggested how they implemented SEL competencies with students in the classroom.

**Field test interviews.** Prior to meeting with the principal of the research site and receiving responses from potential teacher participants, I field-tested the interview questions and procedures with five teachers in a southern state who had extensive experience working with students demonstrating social and emotional challenges in the classroom. The field test participants were not a part of this study or the study school district or site. During the field test, I identified any necessary changes to my original interview questions. I identified the need to combine and create new interview questions to provide clarity to participants. In addition, I felt that participants might find it easier to give clear responses if I provided them with a written copy of the interview questions for reference during the interview. For this reason, I printed additional copies of the interview questions to distribute if the participants wanted to see the questions in print.

**Bracketing.** I used a confirmability process in analyzing the data for this research to reduce bias and avoid skewing the research findings (Statistics Solutions, 2018). I used the bracketing method to ensure that my focus remained on the study. I viewed the responses of each participant as having equal value and gradually compressed all relevant statements into a single statement that captured the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I remained as objective as possible by bracketing my thoughts and presuppositions through a process of crosschecking my journal notes with software-program translations of the statements. I kept a journal to write personal reflections of my thoughts and ideas about each step in this research. I paraphrased participants’ responses in my journal, which also helped me to analyze the data. The journal
notes assisted me in identifying patterns in the data and in writing the research findings. The journal notes also allowed me to check for the occurrence of key words to secure the commonalities of participant conclusions. I used member checking to ensure all messages were received as intended by participants. This included paraphrasing participants’ responses in my journal; at the end of each interview question, they could verify that their intended response was accurately recorded.

**Validation.** I conducted member checking as a form of validation to ensure the accuracy of the information. Member checking involves verifying the truth of transcriptions both during and at the end of each interview. The credibility of the research involves showing that the research findings are accurate and honest (Statistics Solutions, 2018). The artifacts provided by the teacher participants resulted in triangulation for this research. The collected artifacts were teacher-made checklists of desired behaviors and reminders that served different purposes for individual students (see Appendix F). The purpose of the checklists was to make students aware of their behavior and to encourage students to make better choices regarding their behavior in class. Triangulation involves corroborating evidence using different data sources (Creswell, 2013). While collecting the data for this research, I looked for evidence of corroboration and used this insight to interpret and write-up the findings.

**Data collection.** I initiated data collection by gathering a comprehensive set of data derived from the lived experiences of the study participants from interview responses, from my journal notes, and from the artifacts shared by the participants. This study focused on specific educational themes gathered from the five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2018). I journaleed detailed descriptions of the data gathered on the lived experiences of the teacher
participants in supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom. Simultaneously, I journaled if and how these teachers were implementing SEL competencies with children in the classroom.

**Data analysis procedures.** After data collection, I started the analysis process, which involved organizing data, looking for distinct concepts and categories related to the SEL framework criteria, and reorganizing the data into common themes using codes (Creswell, 2013). I transcribed and scanned data using NVIVO (2018) to obtain the initial themes. I then began the lengthy process of synthesizing and organizing the data, to determine patterns and relationships, and analyzing the additional information provided by the participants that contributed to answering the overall research questions. I listened to audio recordings from the interviews and transcribed them verbatim using the NVIVO software program to identify common or repeated words and expressions. I repeatedly analyzed and compared my journal notes to the interview transcriptions for clarity and accuracy of the data.

I analyzed the teacher-made artifacts provided by teacher participants as evidence demonstrating how they were implementing SEL in their classroom (see Appendices F and G). I used artifacts as a means of triangulation in this research. Triangulation is checking for research validity by using multiple sources of data, or multiple approaches to analyzing data, to enhance credibility (Creswell, 2013). I applied this thematic analysis to all 10 interview transcriptions from the teacher participants to reveal patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis that assisted me in generating themes from interview data. The data went through the six phases of thematic analysis: familiarization, generating codes, creating themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing a final report (Statistics Solutions, 2018).
Phase one: Familiarization of data. I became acquainted with the data through reading and rereading the interview transcripts (Statistics Solutions, 2018), a process that allowed me to start analyzing the responses of teacher participants. After familiarization, I bracketed the interviews. The bracketing method ensured that my focus remained on the study, that the responses of each participant were viewed as having equal value, and that all relevant statements were gradually reduced into a statement that captured the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I employed a priori coding, which involved using predetermined categories to code responses for the SEL framework used in this study. I then used the NVIVO (2018) software program to scan the transcriptions for the actual occurrence of words to create an accurate derivation for generating emergent codes to apply to the second phase of analysis.

Phase two: Applying a priori codes. The next step in this process was to apply a priori codes of the pre-existing SEL framework to analyze the documents. The key words included self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This process provided me with clusters of codes, which I used to form additional clusters of codes with similar meanings or relationships with one another. Six key words emerged during this process. These words guided the interpretation of categories in phase three. After reviewing the statements, I extracted key words based on context, recurring statements, and relationship to the research questions. Coding involves subjecting all sources used in the investigation to a data-aggregating and meaning-making process (Creswell, 2013). I used NVIVO computer analysis software to create categories. This software program provided me with the capabilities to categorize and classify the data. I recorded the frequency of repetitive, meaningful words numerically, both manually and through software analysis. The teacher
participants provided explicit statements about the key words I extracted. I interpreted meanings of key words based on the statements surrounding them.

**Phase three: Creation of initial pattern codes (open coding).** I began the analysis process with open coding. This process involved aggregating the data and assigning it a study-related meaning. The process of classifying the distinct identities of different patterns, unique themes, current trends, and relationships among research data is called open coding (Creswell, 2013). I linked the initial pattern codes to the key words from phase two, that is, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. After creating the themes, I reviewed them to ensure that they portrayed an accurate depiction of the data’s meaning, including all important details of the data. Naming themes involved creating labels to describe their meaning or relationship to the SEL framework for this study. I created new categories by examining sentences and words that were clustered and had a similar meaning. The process of analyzing textual content is known as open coding; open codes in research serve as a basis for the creation of subthemes in the final themes in the concluding phase (Creswell, 2013). Fifteen open codes originated in the 133 participants’ statements shown in Table 1. Open codes in the table are coded in numerical order, with a capital C representing the word ‘code.’ The total number of times a code occurred in the participants’ responses is indicated in the right column in Table 1. Clustering lists of coded themes to form a similar meaning from each sentence of every transcript allowed me to form patterns from the data. The discovery of organizing and sorting creates an essential meaning conveyed by the participants (Creswell, 2013).
Table 1

Open Coding Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Number of times code occurred in teacher statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1: More social and emotional learning</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2: Misconceptions of expectations</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3: Relationships</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4: Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5: Communication</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6: Academic Achievement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7: Ongoing Implementation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8: Educational stakeholders support</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9: Teacher training</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C10: Increase opportunities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C11: Emotions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C12: Meaningful learning</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C13: Educational Policy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C14: Student Accountability</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C15: Changing the norm</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase four: Identifying themes and codes relations. In this phase, I combined similar category codes to form broader themes. The initial 15 open codes were narrowed down by the commonality of the five key overarching areas in phase four by corroborating broad themes into more focused meanings to generate the final themes (see Table 2). Key themes were pre-existing based on the SEL competencies framework for this research. I analyzed the teacher-made artifacts for commonalities and correlations to the key themes. I reviewed all of the transcripts
and identified commonalities in words and phrases from participants’ responses to the research and interview questions. There were 133 statements evaluated by being divided into categories and charted according to their occurrence (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Pursuing Themes Within Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Identifying</td>
<td>C1: More social and emotional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C2: Misconceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C11: Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Goals</td>
<td>C6: Academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C10: Increase Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C12: Meaningful learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C14: Student accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Awareness</td>
<td>C15: Changing the norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C4: Lack of Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C7: Ongoing Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C8: Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Relationship Skills</td>
<td>C3: Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C5: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C9: Teacher Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Problem Solving</td>
<td>C13: Educational Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Phase five: Reviewing patterned codes.* In this phase, I took the five themes that were identified in phase four and created names that depicted their meaning and provided understandings that support the SEL framework. The first theme of ‘identifying’ was narrowed down to ‘self-awareness’; the second theme of ‘goals’ became ‘self-management’; the third theme of ‘awareness’ concentrated on ‘social-awareness’; the fourth theme of ‘relationship skill’
remained the same; and the fifth theme of ‘problem-solving’ was focused down to ‘responsible
decision-making’.

*Phase six: Detecting final themes (axial coding).* The last step in the thematic analysis
was to name the final key themes and the topics addressed in participants’ responses. Keywords
guided the open codes to create the final themes and topics that originated from participants’
interview transcripts (see Table 3).
Table 3

*Final Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final themes</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Teachers’ self-perspectives of students’ social and emotional challenges in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers assist students in identifying with their emotions in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers build student confidence and encourage positive social and emotional behaviors in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers assist students in recognizing their individual strengths and teach them how to create individual goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Teachers experience situations in handling students who exhibit impulsive social and emotional challenges in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching students stress management, self-discipline and self-motivation skills in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assisting students with organizational skills and how to set individual behavioral goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>Teachers show empathy for students with SEL challenges in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers encourage students to show respect for others in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers provide students with the opportunity to express individual perspectives on topics that interest students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers encourage an appreciation for student diversity in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Skills</td>
<td>Teachers encourage and model effective communication with others for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers provide opportunities that encouraged teamwork and social engagement for students in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Decision-Making</td>
<td>Teachers demonstrate how to solve problems for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers model how to reflect on their actions for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers show students how to be ethically responsible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of the Findings

This study has the potential to extend the existing knowledge regarding the participating teachers’ lived experiences and the implementation of SEL in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms. Through this research, I intended to enhance the scholarly and practical understanding of the experiences of teachers supporting students in the classroom with SEL competency skills. Most importantly, I intended to identify strategies that teachers could implement to enhance SEL competencies among their students, resulting in greater student engagement (Weissberg, 2016). The detailed statements provided by the 10 research participants offered ample data to answer the research questions posed. The teacher participants explained in their interviews their lived experiences and personal opinions of working with children with SEL challenges in the classroom. The teacher participants also expressed the importance of classroom management and why teachers must understand and have the opportunity to receive professional development training to gain knowledge regarding supporting children with SEL challenges. Many participants commented that changing students’ SEL norms does not happen overnight or through one-time activities or events in the classroom. All teacher participants commented that in their lived experiences of teaching providing set standards and expectations of SEL must be modeled by teachers and students should be guided to practice SEL skills. If students are expected to demonstrate SEL thinking and actions in school on a day-to-day basis, then SEL developmental skills must start with teacher implementation of these skills (Hough, 2014).

Presentation of the Data and Results

I began the data analysis for this research by transcribing the interview audio files to written documents using the NVIVO transcription software program. The software program recognized five similarities, which emerged as major themes. Repetition and use of
interchangeable concepts can make finding definitive answers from qualitative studies challenging (Yin, 2016). The analysis process involved organizing data, identifying distinct concepts and categories in the data, and then reorganizing and coding the data into common themes (Creswell, 2013). The themes listed below emerged from the analysis of the participants’ responses to the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Each interview transcript went through all six phases of the coding process, as suggested by Creswell (2013). Tables 4–8 summarize all information presented during the interviews, in no specific order and categorized into the five themes based on responses: the implementation of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

**Theme 1: Self-awareness.** Self-awareness can be defined as the competency skill that focuses on an individual’s ability to recognize and relate to one’s emotions and behaviors (CASEL, 2018). The theme of self-awareness skills emerged from responses to questions 1, 2, 3, and 9 of the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The teacher participants in this theme repeatedly addressed four topics. Table 4 provides the self-awareness topics the participants responded to and the total number of times the topic occurred in all interviews. This competency involves the teacher providing students with strategies to identify with their emotions, recognize individual strengths, and build self-esteem. For example, a teacher might allow students to create rules that promote respectful behavior and guidelines for unacceptable language and conduct within the classroom. Developing rules allows students to think about why certain words and actions might be hurtful to others. The process of developing rules may start with students creating a class list of words deemed unacceptable. Students then hold each other accountable by using some form of hand signal to help make students aware when they are violating a class rule (Hough, 2014).
Table 4  

*Implementation of Self-Awareness Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Awareness topics</th>
<th>Total number of participants’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ self-perspectives of students’ social and emotional challenges in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers assist students in identifying with their emotions in the classroom.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers build student confidence and encourage positive social and emotional behaviors in the classroom.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers assist students in recognizing their individual strengths and teach them how to create individual goals.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teachers’ lived experiences of students’ social and emotional challenges in the classroom.* As shown in Table 4, four topics appeared many times when participants discussed their lived experiences of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. As the table shows, 10 out of 10 participants had such lived experiences. Teachers in this study explained that the ways students interact with each other and how they respond to certain situations that arise in the classroom indicate that they are not able to grasp the meaning of triggers for negative responses and actions. Participants in this study felt that their students lacked social skills and did not have the capabilities or knowledge necessary to control their emotions (participants A through J).

*Teachers assist students in identifying with their emotions in the classroom.* The second-highest number of comments referred to assisting students in identifying their SEL challenges. As shown in Table 4, only six of the 10 participants commented on assisting
students. They shared how they had had no formal training in handling students with SEL challenges so applied techniques they had either read online or came up with themselves. These techniques had proven effective, so the teacher participants continued using them (participants A, B, D, E, G, and I). Four of the participants commented that they did not feel comfortable or lacked the professional training to assist students. They relied on other resources within the school to address students’ SEL challenges, such as advice from administrators, school counselors, and mental health partners (participants C, F, J, and H).

Teacher participants explained how they involved students in writing assignments that provided opportunities for the students to express their opinions and perspectives on things that were happening in their lives (participants A and B). Two of the teacher participants believed that teaching students to journal could be used in the future to assist students with identifying and expressing their emotions when something upsets them (participants D and E). One of the teacher participants commented in her interview about how she implemented yoga techniques with her students. She expressed that yoga had provided her with a sense of relaxation and focus for her life and that she took a couple of minutes at the start of the teaching day to do breathing exercises with her students. Teacher participant H also provided a statement that she used in her class to assist students to identify with their emotions when something happened to upset them: “Is the issue at hand worth getting you in trouble? Just breathe and think about it.” Participant H commented that students sometimes needed reminders to help guide their thinking when negative situations arose. Teaching students to deal with stressful situations is a daily challenge. Finding a technique that helps students calm down and reflect on their actions is central to helping them understand their emotions.
Build student confidence and encourage positive social and emotional behaviors in the classroom. The next common topic among the research participants was assisting students in building their confidence and encouraging them to have positive social and emotional behaviors in the classroom. As shown in Table 4, five of the 10 teachers commented on this topic in their interviews, expressing how many of their students had low self-esteem and lacked the motivation to try. While there were a number of different contributing factors to this, the most common involved the students’ home environments. These participants expressed that they encouraged students to have the confidence to attempt academic tasks on a daily basis. The teacher participants also commented that they had noticed a lot of students having a hard time gaining or understanding social cues that affect and control their behavior, such as understanding personal boundaries, respecting others’ belongings, and being respectful (participants A, B, C, F, and G).

Teacher participant A mentioned in her interview how she had handled the SEL challenges of her students by relating them to her personal experience as a member of a large family:

I understand how people have different personalities and ways, so I use my personal family experience with my students to help them understand how to be able to adapt to different situations and different personalities of others. I have an open discussion in my class about individual personalities and how our classroom is a community made up of different people who are family.

The notion of open discussion allows students to identify with their own emotions and think about how they would want to be treated by someone else; in turn, this teaches them how to treat others. The participants who did not comment on this concept felt that the situations affecting
their students were beyond the scope of a regular classroom setting. Some had attempted to assist their students but were unsuccessful, so they did not try again (participants D, E, H, I, and J).

*Teachers assist students in recognizing their individual strengths and teach them how to create individual goals.* The last topic in this section addresses how participants assisted students in recognizing their individual strengths and creating individual goals. As shown in Table 4, four of the 10 participants made reference to involving students in activities related to individual reflection and goal setting. Teacher participants commented about providing an opportunity at the beginning of the school year to set individual goals (participants A, B, D, and G). Teacher participant A provided detailed information on how she encouraged and supported her students from the first day of school by telling them what her goal was for them for the school year. She identified how she created a class goal and how she would create individual goals for them within the first month. She then challenged them to set academic and nonacademic goals for themselves and to write these down on the inside cover of their class notebook to serve as a constant reminder of what they had set for themselves. The teacher participant commented that she had discovered throughout her 10 years of teaching that most students were not aware of their strengths or how to set individual goals realistically. So, each semester, the teacher participant asked students to complete a reflective writing assignment to journal the upkeep of the individual goals they had set for themselves. Teacher participants B and G commented that students were surprised at their accomplishments; but there were also students who were disappointed because they had not done anything towards their goal. School is not just about academics; it prepares the whole child for real-world experiences for the future. Teacher participants A, B, D, and G felt this activity helped students learn how to identify and manage their emotions.
Theme 2: Self-management. Self-management can be defined as the competency skill that focuses on the ability to manage and control one’s behaviors in different situations (CASEL, 2018). The self-management skills theme emerged from responses to questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Teacher participants in the research repeatedly discussed four topics regarding self-management. The total number of times the topics occurred in all interviews is listed (see Table 5). An example of self-management is permitting students to measure their self-behavior daily and to record their behavior on a chart (see Appendices G & H). This allows them to compare the recorded behavior with the goal set for that day. Goals provide students with the clarification and understanding of what is expected of them in a set amount of time. These goals can be posted within the class or written by students at their desk as a personal reminder (Shafer, 2018). This competency also involves the teacher providing students with opportunities to appreciate diversity in the classroom.

Table 5
Implementation of Self-Management Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Management topics</th>
<th>Total number of participants’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers experience situations in handling students who exhibit impulsive social and emotional challenges in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching students stress management, self-discipline and self-motivation skills in the classroom.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students with organizational skills and how to set individual behavioral goals.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers encourage an appreciation for student diversity in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers’ experience handling students who exhibit impulsive social behavior and emotional challenges in the classroom. As shown in Table 5, four topics appeared when participants discussed their lived experiences of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. Ten out of the 10 teacher participants had experience handling students who exhibited impulsive SEL challenges in the classroom. All the teacher participants commented in their interview that students’ impulsive behaviors appeared to arise out of nowhere but were really reactions to stimuli. Often the stimulus was emotional: anger, boredom, confusion anxiety, and many other individual student factors. All the teacher participants provided details of their experiences with students struggling with serious anger management issues. They concluded that when students were not able to express their feelings, they responded with negative, violent behavior and profanity.

Several of the teacher participants commented on how they had supported students with SEL challenges in the classroom by speaking calmly to them, so as not to make the situation worse by their reaction. This was a direct approach to controlling a student’s impulsive behavior (participants A, B, E, and I). During the teacher participants’ interviews, all the teachers repeatedly expressed that they tried to provide a friendly classroom environment. They also stated that the more they knew about the particular student’s background, the better they could respond effectively when that student exhibited negative or impulsive social and emotional behavior in the classroom. All 10 teacher participants commented on the importance of teacher-student relationships in reducing the time taken to get a student’s behavior back in control. Teacher participant E mentioned that she felt she could relate to students’ SEL challenges because she was young, in some cases the age of a student’s older sibling:
I understand how students relate and associate situations based on their environment and their level of knowledge and way of thinking. The teacher participant shared that she has a sibling around the same age as her students and sometimes asked her sibling to explain or share insight into how situations were perceived at their age. A lot of students think that being angry is cool and acceptable by others. This is why I have an open discussion in my class about feelings and appropriate ways of expressing self to others.

*Teaching students stress management, self-discipline and self-motivation skills in the classroom.* The next highest number of comments had to do with supporting students by providing them with the opportunity to learn stress management, self-discipline, and self-motivation skills in the classroom. As shown in Table 5, nine out of the 10 teachers agreed that students need to be taught techniques for recognizing and managing individual stress levels. These nine teachers also commented in their interview that they provided an area in their classroom where students could go for time out. This area had cozy chairs, stress balls, and Rubik’s cubes for students to use. These proved to be effective because students sometimes needed a place for time out (participants A, B, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J). Two of the teacher participants commented on how they had started implementing a class chant for students to recite throughout the class period, for example, “I have the power to make all my days a success” and “I love learning.” The use of these chants was an attempt to keep students focused and motivated to learn (participants G and I).

One of the 10 teacher participants commented that students should be taught about stress management, self-discipline, and self-motivation in a setting other than the classroom, such as with a counselor or mental-health partner. This teacher participant (participant C) commented that there was so much emphasis on academic achievement that there was no time to focus on
social and emotional skills with students. Teacher participant C also commented that “Resilience takes a lot of practice and time for students, and time is something that we do not have.” All the participants commented that they had had experience teaching students with various medical diagnoses, such as mood disorders, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in their classroom. The teacher participants all commented on their experiences of supporting students who are not always medicated, or who have not been diagnosed, or are in the process of being diagnosed. All the participants commented that they felt limited to the support they could provide students when students were not getting the medical assistance needed.

Assisting students with organizational skills and how to set individual behavioral goals.
The last common topic among the research participants was about providing students with opportunities to learn to be organized and to set individual behavioral goals. As shown in Table 5, only four out of the 10 teacher participants commented in detail about this topic. They all stated that they required their students to keep a class notebook, and they provided their students with a checklist for projects and assignments (participants A, B, E, and G). This school site offered a school-wide student planner for all students, but the teacher participants commented that the use of the planner was up to the individual teacher.

Theme 3: Social awareness. This competency involves developing the ability to empathize and respect others’ emotions and differences (CASEL, 2018). The theme of social awareness emerged from responses to questions 4, 5, and 10 of the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Four topics were repeatedly discussed by the teacher participants in the research for this topic (see Table 6). This competency involves the teacher providing students with opportunities to appreciate diversity in the classroom. Teachers facilitated discussions that were similar or related to the following example: a teacher provides students with a news article or
some other type of literature that describes how stereotypes form and how they affect others. The
teachers used a reflective approach to activate the SEL competency; they provided time for
students to express their feelings about the stereotypes and their perspectives on others’ feelings
(either on paper or as a class discussion; Hough, 2014).

Table 6

*Implementation of Social Awareness Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social awareness topics</th>
<th>Total number of participants’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers show empathy for students with SEL challenges in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers encourage students to show respect for others in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers provide students with the opportunity to express individual perspectives on topics that interest students.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers encourage an appreciation for student diversity in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teachers’ display empathy for students with SEL challenges in the classroom.* As
shown in Table 6, four topics appeared when participants discussed their lived experiences of
working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. Ten out of 10 teacher participants
commented that they had lived experiences on each of the topics in this section and had
encouraged students on them. The teacher participants commented in their interviews that being
a teacher required them to be an empathetic person. They also shared experiences of students
being unable to understand how to do certain things or not being given opportunities based on
their environment or individual situations. Participant G commented that showing empathy was a
powerful tool in teaching students how to build and maintain self-esteem and in helping students
to manage their behavior and learn new academic and nonacademic strategies. All the teacher participants said that when students knew they cared about them, the student-teacher relationship became better and issues could sometimes be resolved faster, even during difficult times.

*Teachers encourage students to show respect for others in the classroom.* As shown in Table 6, all teacher participants in the research commented on this topic. The ability to collaborate with peers is an essential element within the classroom; it was encouraged and supported by all 10 teacher participants in the research. The 10 teacher participants all commented on how they developed classroom rules and norms with their students at the beginning of the school year and how they had to reinforce the rules throughout the rest of the year. Teacher participant B said that he could relate to the SEL challenges of students displaying empathy based on his personal life:

> I was raised by my mother, who worked all the time to provide for me and my two siblings. I remember as a child not just depending on going to school for learning but for eating and playing with my friends. We were not allowed to go outside and play because our mom was at work. I also remember feeling like my teachers were raising me because my mother was always at work. I knew she loved me, but I was not able to ask her questions about homework or talk about what went on at school or what was bothering me.

Participant C commented that her principal had led the charge to have a non-negotiable policy that supports safe and respectful behavior throughout the school. Participant C also commented on a tragic incident that occurred during the previous school year. The incident involved students being bullied, and it occurred due to a lack of awareness of students experiencing social and emotional challenges.
Teachers provide students with the opportunity to express individual perspectives on topics that interest them. As shown in Table 6, all teacher participants in the research commented on this topic. Their comments were very enlightening and interesting because all 10 had different perspectives on how students respond to given situations. Participant A commented on how students are provided with opportunities to express their thoughts and emotions through journal writing in the classroom. Participant B commented on how students are provided with such opportunities through class team debates and explained that implementing the debate concept in the classroom had been very challenging in the beginning but improved over time. Participant B felt that the students needed an outlet and voice on issues that affected them daily. Participant C’s approach to providing students with opportunities to express individual perspectives in the classroom involved technology. Students were required to post and respond weekly to a class blog that discussed issues related to society. Participant C commented in the interview that teachers needed to use methods related to what interests students, and today’s students love technology.

Teachers encourage an appreciation for student diversity in the classroom. As shown in Table 6, 10 out of 10 teacher participants commented on their lived experiences regarding this topic. During their interviews, the teacher participants stated that they always encouraged and showed appreciation for student diversity in the classroom. All the participants noted the slogans displayed around the school, stating “at ABC School [pseudonym], we believe that RESPECT is seeing worth and value in everyone.” The teacher participants explained that this slogan was created about five years ago and seemed to work for the school, so they have kept it ever since. Participant C commented on the Hispanic Night celebration held at the school each year. With the enrollment of Hispanic students increasing over the past 10 years, the faculty and staff
decided to include Hispanic Night as part of their annual celebrations. A school-wide Hispanic heritage month was held each October, with cross-curriculum awareness similar to the observance of Black History month and American Education Week. The Hispanic Night was a collaborative partnership between the school and the community to foster awareness of Hispanic culture. Participants C and E stated that they felt it was important to celebrate and learn about their students’ and colleagues’ cultures. Some learning activities they used in their classes included getting students to write out questions they had about the culture being observed and then allowing students the opportunity to respond to those questions within a class discussion. Participant C used technology in all aspects of learning in their classroom. This teacher participant asked students to post artifacts of celebration for the different school observances on the class webpage and dedicated a post to educating students about various facts on different cultures.

**Theme 4: Relationship skills.** This competency can be defined as the involvement, establishment, and maintenance of healthy social relationships with others (CASEL, 2018). The theme of relationship skills emerged from responses to questions 2, 5, and 8 on the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Table 7 shows the total number of times the topic was repeatedly addressed by the teacher participants. This competency involves the teacher providing students with strategies to communicate effectively with others and encouraging students to collaborate as a team in the classroom. Students tend to have a great deal of empathy for their best friends and relatives; however, it may be difficult for them to value people outside of those types of connections. Difficulty in relationship building may arise when a new student enrolls in a class, for example, or if a student primarily speaks a foreign language or dresses differently. Teachers can cultivate students’ SEL abilities to expand their circles of knowledge and acceptance of
others by creating opportunities for role-playing, reading and discussing books about relationships, or by allowing students to interview a peer in the class they don’t know. These examples are all supportive approaches to increasing students’ SEL skills in developing and maintaining healthy relationships (Hough, 2014).

Table 7

**Implementation of Relationship Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship skills topics</th>
<th>Total number of participants’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers encourage and model effective communication with others for students.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers provide opportunities that encouraged teamwork and social engagement for students in the classroom.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers encourage and model effective communication with others for students.**

Table 7 shows that two topics appeared many times when participants discussed their lived experiences of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom: 10 out of 10 participants encouraged effective communication with others and modeled it for their students. Teachers in this study explained that the way students interacted with each other—along with how they responded to certain situations that arose in the classroom—indicated that they were not able to grasp the meaning of negative responses and actions or understand their triggers. The teacher participants felt that before discussing effective communication with students, it was important that they model the kinds of healthy relationships and communication they wanted in the classroom. Teacher participants C and G commented that their being teachers did not mean they always got things right, that they needed support and encouragement in handling the social and emotional challenges encountered. All the teacher participants stated that mutual respect was
the foundation of communication with others, and they provided numerous examples of how to encourage and model effective communication. These included (a) learning and pronouncing students’ names correctly, (b) being aware of voice tone and facial expressions when speaking to students, and (c) making both positive and negative communications with students clear but respectful.

*Teachers provide opportunities that encourage teamwork and social engagement for students in the classroom.* As shown in Table 7, 10 out of 10 teacher participants commented on their lived experiences regarding this topic. The teacher participants in this study reinforced the importance of teacher-student relationships, but they also provided lived experiences of the significance of student-peer relationships to learning in the classroom and dealing with everyday issues. Participant C detailed how the use of technology offered direct support and opportunities for students to be socially engaged. Participant C used technology integration in all aspects of learning for their class. This included requiring students to use Google Docs for collaboration on group assignments and to follow assigned team roles and procedures. When the assignment was presented in class, each student had to present a part of it orally. Participant A commented that student discourse opportunities were sometimes challenging, due to negative behaviors of students in the class, and that they were not a priority for teachers. Participant E provided lived experiences of how encouraging teamwork and social engagement in the classroom also assisted students in identifying individual strengths and weaknesses. This had provided an opportunity for class discussions about the meaning of teamwork and individual abilities. Some teacher participants had encouraged teamwork and social interactions in their class more than others; however, all the teacher participants agreed that they needed to increase student discourse in their classroom.
Theme 5: Responsible decision-making. This theme focused on an individual’s ability to identify, analyze, and form a constructive decision on a certain matter (CASEL, 2018). The responsible decision-making skills theme emerged from response to questions 6 and 7 of the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Three topics were repeatedly addressed by the teacher participants in this theme and the number of times the topic occurred in all interviews (see Table 8). This competency involves the teacher providing students with strategies to make responsible decisions. When a student can recognize and identify a problem, he or she can analyze the situation from a variety of approaches. Evaluating and reflecting on responsible decision-making entails exploring the potential options and considering the consequences of a decision, including the ethical and moral obligations behind it. Discussing the meaning of decision-making skills with students is a great way to start learning this competency. Discussion can be conducted through the use of a book that illustrates the principles and processes of decision-making, and it can be concluded with students sharing their thoughts about decision-making. This process can increase students’ awareness and their ability to handle situations. It can also assist them in developing an understanding of how to analyze possible consequences of different outcomes in order to make the best choice (Hatter, 2017).
Table 8

Implementations of Responsible Decision-Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible decision-making topics</th>
<th>Total number of participants’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers demonstrate for students how to solve problems.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers modeling for students how to reflect on their actions.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching students how to be ethically responsible.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Teachers demonstrate for students how to solve problems.** Table 5 shows that three topics appeared many times when participants discussed their lived experiences of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. As the table shows, 10 out of 10 participants demonstrated to their students how to solve problems. Participant E noted that the hardest part of teaching students to solve problems was getting them to admit and accept that they had made a mistake. All the teacher participants commented that they had either discussed or provided scenarios of how to solve problems for students. Some examples of student problems included not being able to handle various situations related to peer pressure, not understanding how to ask for or seek academic help, and difficulty learning how to use self-control in their behavior.

Participants A and D discussed training they had received in years past that focused on teaching character-building. These two teacher participants referenced using materials and strategies from the character-building training to assist their current students with learning how to problem-solve. Some of these strategies included listening attentively to the student, asking the student clarifying questions about the issue, and asking the student how the situation might have happened differently.
Teachers are modeling for students how to reflect on their actions. Participants A and D commented that using the character-building materials with their current students also led to students reflecting on their actions. When an individual can learn from their mistakes, the experience is more likely to be valued and remembered. As Table 5 shows, eight out of 10 participant teachers provided modeling for students on how to reflect on their actions. Participants E and G stated that they did not provide modeling for students. Participant E commented that her lived experience of teaching students with social and emotional challenges had shown her that they have a high level of resistance to change and authority, and they resist feeling that they might be wrong. Participant G explained that teaching students how to ask for help was challenging. Even if they had developed a student-teacher relationship, teachers could still find it difficult to teach a student how to reflect on their actions. In the lived experience of working with fifth-grade students with social and emotional challenges, participant G learned that students built resistance to authority and developed a high level of pride from their home and community environment.

Teaching students how to be ethically responsible. Table 5 shows that seven out of 10 participants stated that they taught students how to be ethically responsible. All the participants noted that they had recently completed mandatory Pro Ethica training, which was provided by the school district. The Pro Ethica training consisted of a series of interactive modules with real-life scenarios related to teachers’ relationships with students, the school, and the community (Educational Testing Services, 2019). Three of the research participants commented that going through the training initially made them feel like they were not adequately teaching students how to be ethically responsible, so they did not want to comment on this question. The seven participants who commented on teaching students to be ethically responsible stated that the Pro
Ethica training provided a refresher of policies and procedures that must be followed in education. The seven participants commented that they tried to teach students how to follow policies and rules, but they admitted the training made them aware that some current, everyday school practices violated educational policies and procedures.

**Summary**

This phenomenological study investigated if and how teachers encourage students to use SEL competency skills in the classroom. Ten teacher participants were involved and provided me with their lived experiences of working with students with social and emotional challenges. I conducted face-to-face interviews with each of the 10 research participants. I then undertook thematic analysis of the 10 teacher interview transcriptions, following six phases: familiarization, generating codes, creating themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing a final report. The results of the study showed that SEL is needed in classrooms and that all education stakeholders require a deeper awareness to implement its strategies effectively. Throughout this research, it was evident that, within the educational process, students learn social and emotional skills in addition to academic content. This research provided evidence of the need in public education to better fuse academic learning with SEL and connect it with current social realities. Teaching students to determine what is important helps instill in them values and morals for a successful and productive future (Greenberg, 2018).

Chapter 5 contains summaries of the SEL experiences of the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. An overview of how the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers implemented SEL competencies is presented in a discussion of the results as they pertain to the literature review. Chapter 5 also includes the implications of the findings for theory and policy, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and further research.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers supporting the SEL challenges of students in the classroom. In addition to, identifying if and how teachers implement SEL competencies in their class when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges. Comprehensive literature on the topic supported the background of this study and its research methods (CASEL, 2018). The exploration of the lived experiences of the teacher participants in this study regarding children with SEL challenges in the classroom revealed different factors that contribute to students’ lack of SEL skills. SEL is a process that helps children cultivate essential life skills, including being aware of their own emotions, fostering respect and care for others, establishing healthy relationships, making ethical and responsible decisions, and handling adversity constructively (Yoder, 2014b). According to CASEL (2018), there are five SEL skills—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—that can positively affect student behavior in the classroom. The SEL development of students has become a large component of the educational process across the U.S. (Meador, 2018).

This study sought to identify the firsthand challenges teachers face in the classroom when working with students with SEL challenges. Challenges in SEL development involve both teachers and students and can include being underprepared to navigate intricate social situations; being unequipped to manage emotions; and even lacking the skills of communication, collaboration and compassion. The lived experiences of the teacher participants provided detailed data on supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. This study also provided if and how teacher participants implemented SEL competencies with students experiencing social and emotional challenges in the classroom. I interviewed 10 teachers for this
research. This study was limited to one urban school district in the southern portion of the United States. The specific study population was fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. The 10 participants agreed to a one hour interview in March 2019 and provided artifacts to support their experiences.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the key data derived from this study, which focused on specific educational themes gathered from SEL competencies. This chapter presents a summary of the results; discussion of findings relative to the literature reviewed; limitations of the study; discussion of the recommendations for implementation, theory, and policy change; recommendations for further research; and significant conclusions. This study aimed to identify if and how SEL competencies are implemented in the classroom by teachers with students with SEL challenges. During this study, the exploration of the lived experiences of teacher participants in regard to children with SEL challenges in the classroom revealed different factors and causes that contributed to students’ lack of SEL skills. The study also provided empirical evidence of the specific training teachers needed to implement SEL skills for students with SEL challenges in the classroom.

Summary of the Results

This phenomenological study provided an opportunity to obtain lived experiences from teachers who worked directly with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The study also explored if and how teacher participants implemented SEL competencies in their classroom. All 10 participants in the study revealed that they had experienced difficulties with students with SEL challenges in their classrooms. During the initial stages of this study, I expected participants to acknowledge the significant role educators play in supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. However, all participants commented that they could relate to some of the SEL challenges that the students faced based on personal experiences, both inside and outside the
classroom. Five of the 10 teacher participants had some knowledge of SEL competencies but did not use the correct SEL terminology. All teacher participants had attempted to implement some form of strategy or skills to teach students how to support their SEL challenges. All teacher participants also expressed their concerns over the increase in the number of students with SEL challenges in the classroom and over insufficient teacher training.

Throughout this study, participants’ responses strongly suggested that students’ home environments played a critical role in the SEL challenges they faced. All the teacher participants commented that they believed students want SEL support from teachers; however, this study exposed different aspects of students’ behavior in the classroom that were not easily noticed or identified as an SEL challenge. All teacher participants commented that their participation in the study made them more reflective about the level of support they provided to students with SEL challenges in their classroom. During data analysis, I identified repeated discussed responses from the teacher participants; these responses were coded and separated into themes.

This study provided evidence that SEL skills can be taught with academic content within the classroom. In providing data related to fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, this study added to the research conducted on related topics regarding identifying the lived experiences of teachers in supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. This study did not cover all aspects relating to supporting students’ SEL challenges, but it provided evidence to support the need for teachers to use SEL skills in classrooms. This study provided teachers’ lived experiences of working with students with multiple SEL challenges in the classroom.

**Discussion of the Results**

The exploration of the teacher participants’ lived experiences of students’ SEL challenges in the classroom revealed that teachers are using subjective perceptions and ideas to support
students with such challenges. The teacher research participants in this study had a subjective perspective, i.e., they had individual personal beliefs or feelings regarding the topic (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). I believe that the teacher participants in this study provided valuable information regarding their experiences of supporting children with SEL challenges. There were pros and cons of each teacher participant’s approach to implementing SEL skills in the classroom; however, I recognized their efforts in implementing these skills and commended them for their efforts. Mindset is the attitude that an individual has about a task at the most primary level (Frey, Fisher, & Smith, 2019). All teacher participants expressed a passion for teaching and their students’ learning and they all said they had a positive mindset and outlook for supporting students with SEL challenges.

Six of the 10 teacher participants in this study did not know the specific terms related to SEL competencies. All 10 admitted to trying ideas and strategies they felt might work with students with SEL challenges without using any proven educational theory. Because of implementing such non-evidence-based practices, teacher participants commented that they were unsure whether they were supporting or exacerbating the difficulties of students experiencing SEL challenges in the classroom. The teacher participants’ personal beliefs were identified in every aspect of this study. Beliefs play an essential role in the methods that teachers implement in the classroom; they include individual classroom management, instructional style, and additional support to assist students (Collie et al., 2015). Teachers’ perspectives and beliefs have the greatest potential for making a difference to the SEL of students (Poulou, 2016).

Exploring the lived experiences of teachers supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom provided answers to this study’s stated research questions. The results provide evidence that SEL is not simply one more issue requiring the attention of teachers; rather, it is an
essential learning need in the classroom that should be provided by teachers (Kang, 2018). The teacher participants in this study provided evidence to support how SEL skills taught in the classroom can enable students to work with others, manage stress, and make good decisions alongside their academic topics. Teacher participants in this study expressed how they have witnessed students who are learning how to manage themselves and relate to others develop positive social behavior and perform better academically when taught SEL skills in the classroom (Nauert, 2018). The teacher participants in this study commented that SEL skills have always existed in the educational field of teaching, that they have gained increased awareness from teachers in the past 10 years, and that they been given a formal name, social emotional learning (SEL).

All the teacher participants in this study commented that fourth and fifth-grade students are challenged with many forms of peer pressure, societal expectations, and non-traditional home situations. Teachers participating in the study also commented that to work effectively with students with SEL challenges in the classroom, they have learned strategies such as creating lessons that are relevant to students’ life experiences, providing time for students to collaborate with peers in the classroom, teaching students how to develop relationships, and creating and maintaining consistent rules in the classroom. Teacher participants commented that students had been observed exhibiting the use of SEL skills when provided opportunities to collaborate in creating classroom rules and when rules were consistent in the classroom.

Throughout the process of this study, teacher participants were able to understand some of the causes of students’ SEL challenges by learning about SEL competencies, and they were given the opportunity to acknowledge the indicators of, and relationships between student behavior and SEL competencies. All the teacher participants commented that they appreciated
the opportunity to participate in this study and gain a greater awareness of SEL skills. This study exposed different aspects of students’ behavior that are not easily noticed or identified as SEL challenges. The teacher participants in this study commented that they had experienced students being isolated, skipping school, dropping out of school, and becoming involved with criminal activities.

According to Anderson and Cardoza (2016), when schools fail to provide SEL training for teachers, there is an increase in the number and severity of SEL challenges faced by students, potentially leading to more serious issues. SEL challenges, if unaddressed, may cause a student to become socially isolated, prompting her or him to be truant or drop out of school, and potentially become involved in criminal activities. The teacher participants in this study commented that students who require academic assistance beyond the classroom, such as attending intervention for dyslexia, speech therapy, and individualized instruction, occasionally experience SEL challenges when rejected socially by peers.

Research conducted by CASEL (2018) found that students with SEL challenges may demonstrate internalized and externalized SEL behaviors. The CASEL (2018) research results provided evidence that explained the reasoning for students’ internalized or externalized behavior in the classroom, as discussed by teacher participants in this study. All of the teacher participants commented that they had supported students in the classroom who demonstrated internalized SEL behaviors. Such behaviors include not being interested in class activities, choosing to remain quiet throughout the day, demonstrating an unrealistic view of reality, and expressing an ongoing mentality or feeling of victimization. In contrast, the teacher participants also observed students who externalized their SEL challenges; these students exhibited chronic
discipline problems in the classroom, had a lack of empathy or compassion for others, had frequent temper tantrums, and did poorly academically (CASEL, 2018).

During this study, another aspect of student behaviors that may not be easily noticed or identified as an SEL challenge was exposed. Teacher participants commented that students from non-traditional families often have very different family dynamics compared to their classroom peers. For example, a student may be living with a grandparent while one or both parents serve a jail sentence. The student may go home to an empty house in the evening because he or she lives in a single-parent household and the parent works two jobs to support the family. Students may have two homes: one with the father and the other with the mother. These different family dynamics contribute to the SEL challenges that students face daily. Providing teachers with explicit expectations regarding students’ SEL challenges could foster SEL awareness and identify specific SEL approaches that teachers can use to support their students (Hanover Research, 2013). During this study, all the teacher participants commented that they had observed one or more of the above-mentioned family dynamics of students, indicating that some of the SEL challenges of students may frequently start from their home environment.

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

This phenomenological study sought to contribute to education literature by exploring if and how teachers implement SEL competencies in their classroom, and uncovering the factors related to students’ SEL challenges in the classroom through teachers’ lived experiences. The key themes of this study were based on the SEL competencies framework for this research, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The available literature I reviewed was interesting, important and contributed to the development of my conceptual framework. The current study expands on
previous research results regarding SEL and related topics by providing explicit information on supporting SEL challenges of fourth- and fifth-grade students specifically. This study further builds on existing research on SEL and related topics by creating an awareness of the professional development training needed to support teachers’ implementation of SEL skills in the classroom, and increasing awareness for all educational stakeholders of the SEL challenges for students in the classroom.

Understanding students’ SEL challenges is a crucial element of the day-to-day processes involved in teaching (Negron, 2016). According to Greenberg (2018), schools are faced with an increasing number of SEL challenges, and school districts across the U.S. have discovered the urgent need for SEL implementation in classrooms. Arguably, SEL is just as essential in classrooms as literacy and arithmetic in a classroom (Kang, 2018). Ogg, Gohr, and LaRosa (2017) contend that children should receive scheduled opportunities to practice social and emotional skills in the classroom in the same way they practice math and reading skills. A meta-analysis published in the MiddleWeb (2017) journal revealed an 11% increase in students’ overall academic performance when involved in school-wide social and emotional programs. Thus, there was an identified need to expand the literature in this area of education. This study contributes to the existing body of research by confirming the importance of teaching SEL skills in the classroom.

The MiddleWeb (2017) study examined the perceived relationship between teachers’ emotional intelligence and students’ emotional intelligence, using 98 elementary teachers and 617 students ranging from 6 to 11 years of age as the study participants. The teacher participants were expected to complete rating scales, questionnaires, and self-assessments that assisted the researcher in determining the relationship of SEL behavior of teachers toward students. The
study found that teachers’ perspectives of student SEL challenges were closely related to student relationships. Poulou’s (2016) findings also indicated that the SEL levels of the teachers were high based on individual age and life experiences; this may be attributed to their years of learning how to identify and display self-emotions with others.

**Teachers’ lived experiences of implementing SEL.** The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ SEL implementation in the classroom. Along with investigating if and how teachers encourage students to use healthy SEL competency skills in the classroom. I did not consider the demographic background of teachers as a factor in supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The teacher participants in this study were not observed in their classrooms, and were not given a self-efficacy survey; rather, they were individually interviewed face-to-face and asked to respond to questions regarding their lived experiences on supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The teacher participants’ lived experiences of students in this study identified that teachers believed SEL challenges contribute to students’ lack of individual social skills. According to Morin (2019), children’s bodies change significantly between the ages of 9 and 11, which can leave a child feeling uncertain about themselves. Most fourth- and fifth-graders are typically in this age range (9–11 years). They are increasingly interested in spending time with friends, and characteristically desire to be accepted by their peers. Children of this age begin to develop the ability to understand different points of view, and form opinions on many things. All of the teacher participants remarked that their students struggle with self-esteem and act immaturity. The research results alluded to obstacles observed and made assumptions on why issues may have been encountered.

Similar research is Poulou’s (2016) study, which identified teacher perspectives of students as being aligned to the hypothesis that students’ SEL challenges contribute to their lack
of individual social skills. The students in Poulou’s (2016) study were also between 9 and 11 years of age. The main difference between the studies is that Poulou (2016) focused on just one SEL challenge, relationship skills, whereas I focus on all five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The research results from both studies indicate that professional development training for teachers should focus on the development of SEL skills to assist implementation in the classroom, because it allows teachers to increase their ability to implement beneficial teaching practices to address students’ challenges in this area.

All the participants in this study noticed that their SEL skills as a teacher improved from modeling SEL skills to their students in the classroom. Seven teacher participants noted that they had not previously thought about how modeling SEL skills for their students would significantly (and positively) influence these skills. Zakrzewski’s (2014) research, which explored teachers’ SEL perspectives and behaviors toward students, found that teacher participants had similar reactions as this study participants regarding modeling SEL skills to students. Before conducting this research, I expected teacher participants would be able to describe their lived experiences of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom in detail; however, learning how modeling has influenced lives beyond those of the students was surprising. Eight of the 10 teacher participants also commented that developing their own SEL skills assisted them in generating ideas and creating outlines of how to improve SEL implementation in their classroom. A similar study to my own was that by Fedele (2015), who found that the prior and personal experiences of teachers assisted some of them to show empathy and understanding regarding the different SEL challenges of students in their classrooms. Fedele’s (2015) study also focused on fourth- and fifth-grade teachers.
This study provided teacher participants with an awareness and identification of the specific SEL competencies that assist in supporting children with SEL challenges in the classroom. I found that beyond the bounds of direct instruction, teachers could influence the SEL development of their students in various ways. For example, when students perceive a caring, enthusiastic, supportive, and attentive teacher, their sense of belonging in school is assured. Additionally, when teachers challenge students to think more critically by striving to understand concepts and clarify their reasoning using SEL skills, students are more likely to possess growth mindsets. This study’s teacher participants unanimously agreed that developing stronger relationships with their students helped to create a stronger social and emotional student–teacher relationship. In a study conducted by Yoder (2014a), *A Tool for Teachers* was adopted to examine teachers’ social and emotional instructional competencies. This investigation aimed to prompt the participating educators to reflect on their current teaching practices and the effect that these had on the SEL of the students. The development of teachers’ social and emotional competencies was used as a tool for the present study. In addition to a critical incident technique approach, this was used to identify elements of teachers’ social and emotional competencies that allowed them to complete their work more effectively. The results of Yoder’s (2014a) study indicated that teachers’ responses and self-regulated impulses regarding student SEL challenges must be strengthened individually; furthermore, teachers should act as role models to effectively encourage and teach positive self-management skills.

**Teachers’ SEL readiness for the classroom.** This study directly correlates with the literature I found related to my study topic, such as Wood’s (2015) study, because the teacher participants in my research that had fewer than five years’ experience commented that they had not received any SEL preparation or training in college. The seasoned teachers with five or more
years’ experience expressed that the only training they could remember from college that was closely related was an educational psychology class. All the teacher participants in this study felt that awareness of the implementation of SEL skills for students should be a prerequisite in college-level teacher programs. Wood’s (2015) study suggested that when teachers are not trained in responding to in-class students’ SEL challenges in supportive ways, they typically rely on their own childhood experiences. In college, prospective teachers learn various instructional strategies to limit the focus given to children’s SEL challenges and the best way to address them in the classroom (Wood, 2015).

This study is also closely related to Yoder’s (2014a) study, as it sought to undertake an exploration of if and how teachers use SEL skills with students in the classroom. The teacher participants in both these research studies commented that they felt participating in the research helped them become more reflective in their teaching practices and develop a greater awareness of the importance of SEL learning for students in the classroom. The main difference between the two studies is that Yoder (2014a) interviewed experts in the SEL field, while I interviewed teachers who had lived experiences of supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. This study did not develop operationalizing the teachers’ social and emotional competencies tool; instead, I created interview questions to elicit thorough responses from participants regarding this study topic.

The interview questions encouraged teachers to discuss the characteristics of the school, and to show and discuss artifacts used to implement SEL skills with students. The teacher responses to these questions provided data to assist in understanding the culture and climate that the teacher participants work in each day. All the teacher participants commented that they had observed that the overall culture of the school and the faculty and staff makes certain that every
student and their family feels welcome equally. Research completed by Glennie, Rosen, Snyder, Woods-Murphy, and Bassett (2017) started with teachers completing a survey soliciting information about the characteristics of their schools. This study undertaken by Glennie et al. (2017) involved the creation of a focus group to capture the teachers’ experiences and perspectives of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom, whereas this study examined teachers’ lived experiences by conducting individual face-to-face interviews with the teacher participants. Both studies asked teacher participants to share strategies for developing any SEL student success.

I asked the teacher participants in this study to share strategies they used for developing SEL student success, as well as any artifacts that assisted them in SEL implementation with students in the classroom. Three of the 10 teacher participants shared artifacts they had created to assist in working with students with SEL challenges (see Appendix F). All the teacher participants had already attended some form of SEL awareness professional development at the school, but they all felt more training was required to effectively implement SEL skills to students. During each teacher participant’s interview, I shared a copy of the SEL competencies, which listed some of the characteristics for each. Wood (2015) rated the research participants’ readiness to respond to the children’s social and emotional reactions. I learned that teachers who proposed more efficient strategies for regulating their own emotions as part of the self-assessment task approached children in classroom with more acceptance and understanding during stressful situations. In addition, they were supportive toward children exhibiting disruptive classroom behavior and emotional outbursts.

I also used a field test for this study with other teachers not participating in the research. A field test is a smaller, preliminary version of a given study. The field test was conducted over a
shorter period and with a smaller number of participants than the actual study. The purpose of the field study was to identify any shortcomings in the study design with non-participants who had expert knowledge about the population and research topic to establish whether the interview questions would elicit adequate data from the research participants concerning the study objective and questions (Yin, 2016).

**SEL within schools.** Many teachers instinctively know that SEL skills are essential for students’ academic success (Anderson & Cardoza, 2016). However, the primary focus of most schools is to ensure have mastered the academic content, and thus their social and emotional development is neglected, even though these skills are equally important to academic and life success (California Department of Education, 2018). The research findings from this study provide evidence that SEL skills can be combined with academic content in the classroom. Teacher participants stated that they believed students need to be taught SEL skills in the classroom, and all provided examples of how they offer students opportunities to practice SEL skills in class. In one instance, teachers related implementing SEL skills in the classroom by providing a positive class culture that ensures students’ opinions are valued through class discussions on respecting others and handling stressful situations. Teacher participants also observed that teaching students how to activate SEL skills facilitated self-awareness for the teachers, as the ways they behave, speak, express thoughts, and make academic decisions all influence how students interact and behave in the classroom. All of the teachers in this study commented on needing to be deliberate in the way they teach and support students in the classroom.

The results of this study directly correlate with the literature I found related to my study topic, such as research conducted in Washington State K–12 (2011) public schools, which found
that SEL skills can be combined with academic content in the classroom. Notably, research from the Washington State K–12 public schools study focused on an entire school district by creating a district research team, while my study only focused on one elementary school and 10 teachers from that school, as there was only one researcher. The researchers in the Washington State K–12 public schools study found that when combined with academic study, social and emotional interventions can be successfully implemented across all levels of learning (elementary, middle, and high school) through social and emotional skills programs (Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup, 2016).

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The teacher participants in this study commented that in their experience of implementing SEL skills with students, they found correlations to real-life situations helped students understand the SEL skill being taught. This finding directly supports the literature, including research conducted by The Wallace Foundation that also recommended that SEL programs provided real-life scenarios so students could identify with aspects from their everyday lives (Gilbert, 2018). The teacher participants in this study commented on the need to connect and incorporate real-world learning experiences in the classroom, so students understand what they are learning is useful beyond school. All the teacher participants in this study stated their belief that the purpose of education is to prepare students for life and not just for fourth and fifth-grade.

The teacher participants in this study supported the inclusion of SEL skill learning across the curriculum. Collecting additional data to guide future decisions and address students’ SEL needs were identified as necessary. The teacher participants in this study commented that they had experienced students who needed more individualized SEL support in developing impulse
control. These students’ lack of SEL skills may be due to home experiences, such as exposure to various type of trauma and a lack of basic essential needs. Students with this type of exposure tend to act out through aggressive and argumentative behavior toward others. All the teacher participants in this study reinforced the importance of having a student–teacher relationship so they could notice and address individual students’ SEL challenges.

Similarly, the Wallace Foundation study suggested that schools should not create a stand-alone SEL program; that is, the program should be implemented across the curriculum. Many reasons SEL challenges may occur with students were assumed by the teacher participants in this study. One of the concerns of the teachers was not having enough time to include SEL skills effectively in their classroom. Most teacher participants commented that SEL implementation training should be required for teachers, so they fully understand how to incorporate SEL skills within the curriculum. The provision of professional development for school staff on effective SEL implementation in the classroom was also suggested by the Wallace Foundation, whose first recommendation was that SEL programs in schools should be allocated enough time for implementation. Notably, while my research SEL framework included five competencies, the Wallace Foundation indicated that the effectiveness of a school’s SEL program was only dependent on four elements.

Limitations

The aim of stating limitations is to identify potential shortcomings, conditions, or influences of this study. In qualitative research, limitations are any influences the researcher cannot control and will not affect the outcome of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research can provide valid data. However, the data may have some
limitations. Potential limitations of the data in this research include preconceptions and personal bias of participants related to the topic of this study (Crossman, 2018).

I recognized that there would be limitations in the outcome because the total elementary school population did not participate. This study was limited to fourth- and fifth-grade teachers because data indicated these grades as having the most behavioral referrals for students with SEL challenges (AdvancED, 2018). The study had the limitation of the amount of data received from participants. I anticipated that study participants would be able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about their experiences supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. I had to rely on the lived experiences of research participants, as is the case in this study, this can limit the amount of data that I can analyze. This study’s time frame was anticipated to be when the school and surrounding community experience weather not conducive to students attending school, as well as previously designated school holiday closings. The most common limitations of this study stem from me acting as a data-collection and analysis instrument. The reliability and validity of the data were limitations that I could not control, those influences that limit the availability of pertinent information. Nevertheless, the conclusions of my research may be conveyed toward practice because they promote awareness of SEL in the classroom.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

**Implications of the results for practice.** The results of this study have many implications for improving educational practice. SEL provides students with reasonable, supportive, and welcoming learning environments. The results of this study showed that SEL is needed in the classroom, and deeper awareness for all stakeholders of education is needed to effectively implement SEL strategies for students with SEL challenges. According to Brotto (2018), in a U.S. national teacher survey called “The Missing Piece,” teachers wanted to
implement SEL within their classrooms. Ninety-five percent of the teachers surveyed believed that SEL skills taught in the classroom can be combined with the academic curriculum. However, SEL is still not a main focus for education stakeholders and policy makers in the U.S. (Brotto, 2018). Teachers who understand the importance of implementing SEL skills in the classroom are more likely to effectively manage and facilitate meaningful learning to students (Greenberg, 2018).

Implementation of SEL in the classroom can occur in various ways; it can be introduced as a stand-alone program or incorporated with core academic subjects (Collie et al., 2015). This study can be used as evidence to support this theory based on the teacher participants’ lived experiences of supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. Teacher participants in this study commented on how they incorporate SEL skills in conjunction with academic skills in teaching students who experience SEL challenges daily in the classroom. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), there are five million school children in the United States experiencing one or more mental health disorders. These disorders often disrupt students’ learning and make classroom management difficult for teachers (Greenberg, 2018). Throughout this study, participants’ commented explicitly on how learning is interrupted for students with SEL challenges. Teacher participants commented that SEL skills implemented in the class do not have to be used solely to manage students’ negative behavior but can be used in assisting students’ with setting academic goals, in diversity within the classroom, and in team building skills.

Implications of the results for policy. The school district of this study research site implemented a policy to hire full-time social workers in the schools in which over 50% of discipline referrals related to social and emotional behaviors. The teacher participants in this
study commented that they appreciated the school district’s efforts in this regard, but have not yet witnessed any improvement in students’ overall social and emotional behaviors as a result of the social worker’s presence. The teacher participants also noted that the social worker had not provided teachers with any SEL skills training to assist students in the classroom. Further, they stated that the policy notice from the school district indicated that the social worker would provide assistance to only 20 students school-wide and these students would be referred by the school counselor and principal.

According to Meador (2018), federal educational policy makers have recently taken an interest in developing nonacademic skills, such as SEL skills in classrooms. SEL implementation has become a priority across the nation (CASEL, 2018). Many individual states have acknowledged the urgent need for SEL implementation which has led to schools with a wide range of demographics and socioeconomic compositions participating in SEL programs (Nauert, 2018). Durlak et al. (2011) stated that educational leadership agencies, such as state departments of education, school district boards, and individual school administrators each have a responsibility in creating and maintaining systematic supports and professional development training of SEL skills needed by teachers. The goal is for policymakers and educational leaders to understand the importance of SEL within the classroom. Governing agencies have the opportunity to change policies, and other education stakeholders are given the opportunity to contribute to making SEL an important part of the tools and resources students use in the classroom. This study provided awareness to one southern state school out of over 1,500 schools that make up that state’s school system. I believe that the SEL awareness that was provided to the selected school will assist in future SEL implementation throughout that school district and hopefully throughout the state.
Implications of the results for theory. During my research, teacher participants commented that changing students’ SEL norms does not happen overnight and does not happen through one-time activities or events in the classroom. The teachers expressed that set standards and expectations of SEL must be modeled by teachers and that students should be provided practice with SEL skills. If students are expected to demonstrate the influenced SEL thinking and actions in school from day to day, then SEL development skills need to start with teacher implementation of the skills (Hough, 2014). SEL affects the lives of many students, parents, teachers and communities in meaningful ways that could possibly improve relationships and society as a whole (Weissber, 2016).

SEL is a framework that includes many skills affecting academic and life success. The collaborative study conducted by CASEL and AIR researchers in 2015 revealed that SEL initiatives implemented in U.S. schools have many weaknesses/challenges, some of which stem from lack of continuity in leadership, as well as frequent teacher changes (CASEL, 2015). An article called, “4 Principles of Classroom Management and Social Emotional Learning,” demonstrated the importance of teachers understanding and gaining knowledge regarding supporting SEL challenges in children in order to enhance learning outcomes and student wellbeing (Bennett, 2018). This research provides evidence for Bennett’s (2018) contentions, because all of the 10 teacher participants in this study commented that they need more training to better understand SEL skills and learn how to implement them in their classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

The majority of students with emotional problems sit undetected in general education classrooms (CASEL, 2018). According to data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), there are five million schoolchildren in the United States experiencing one or
more mental health disorders; these disorders often disrupt students’ learning and make classroom management difficult for teachers. Stormont, Reinke, and Herman (2011) reported that stakeholders in students’ education found that teachers, in particular, should be made aware of the types of SEL challenges and the evidence-based programs that are available to support children with SEL challenges. When an SEL curriculum is added to the academic curriculum, it does not just help students, it benefits teachers as well (Panichelli, 2018).

Educators have to be deliberate about the way SEL skills are taught and how they are learned by children (Blyth et al., 2017). Just telling students about SEL skills is not enough in supporting their SEL development (CASEL, 2018). This research indicated that to promote SEL in the classroom, teachers first need professional development training on how to implement SEL skills to students (Yoder, 2014b). It is crucial that schools examine and restructure the SEL skills implementation process to better support students with SEL challenges in the classroom (Frey et al., 2019). This study provided teacher participants with an awareness of SEL issues and enabled them to identify specific SEL competencies that assist in supporting children who experience SEL challenges in the classroom. I therefore recommend that further research be conducted to identify ongoing support for teachers in providing SEL skills support for students in the classroom.

This research has expanded the SEL knowledge for the teachers participating in this research, and it has identified specific areas that may warrant future research regarding SEL training for teachers supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The purpose of any research study is to provide an in-depth understanding of a topic, as a source of knowledge and understanding (Creswell, 2013). This study has provided reliable evidence of teachers’ limited experiences supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. In addition to
exploring if and how teachers implement SEL competencies when working with students who experience social and emotional challenges in the classroom. The demand for further research on related SEL topics has increased since the start of this research (AdvanceED, 2019). The dynamics of if and how SEL skills are perceived and taught by teachers may change from day to day and are with consideration of the societal issues of the world in which we live (CASEL, 2018).

Conclusion

This study sought to identify the firsthand challenges teachers face in the classroom when working with students who experience SEL challenges. Challenges in SEL development involve both teachers and students. They can include being underprepared to navigate intricate social situations, being; unequipped to manage emotions, and even lacking the skills of communication, collaboration and compassion. This study focused on SEL’s five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision-making. The conceptual framework for this study was SEL. SEL is a process that helps children in cultivating essential life skills—including an awareness of their own emotions—fostering respect and care for others, establishing healthy relationships, making ethical and responsible decisions, and handling adversity constructively (Yoder, 2014b). The SEL development of students has become a large component of the educational process across the U.S. (Meador, 2018).

After reviewing data from the research school site indicating that the fourth-and-fifth-grade classes had the highest behavioral referrals with related SEL challenges in the entire school, it was clear to me that there was an urgent need for SEL skills to be taught to students in the classroom. The absence of SEL skills taught in school is significant and warrants further exploration; this study’s findings indicate that teachers want to support students when they
experience SEL challenges in the classroom, but need additional SEL training to do so effectively. In this study, I explored teachers’ lived experiences of working with students who present SEL challenges in the classroom, along with if and how teachers use SEL competencies. The lived experiences of the participants provided detailed data indicating that more SEL skills need to be taught in classrooms on behalf of all educational stakeholders.

The phenomenological approach adopted by this study intended to capture the understanding of teachers’ experiences of using SEL competencies with students who exhibit SEL challenges in the classroom. Through examining the lived experiences of teachers in relation to working with students who experience SEL challenges in the classroom the teacher participants of this study commented that they are more reflective on their own SEL skills. All of the participants expressed that implementing SEL in the classroom with students has changed them personally which is a surprising outcome of this study. Teacher participants’ responses in this study provide detail experiences of how implementing SEL skills assist to be more reflective of their own actions. This study has provided the teacher participants a lens through which they view and understand the SEL challenges of students better and are able to respond to these student challenges with compassion and more effectively rather than using consequences of punishment. Cultivating social and emotional skills for teachers is essential, when the teaching profession has a high attrition rate of 50% in the first five years of a teachers’ career (Zakrzewski, 2014). The study clearly demonstrates that integrating SEL into the classroom is good for both students and teachers in the classroom.

The teacher participants in this study had lived experiences of modeling and teaching students some form of SEL skills in the classroom. This research is conclusive that SEL skills taught to students will not be effective unless teachers are able to implement daily and
throughout all curriculum areas. The teacher participants in this study expressed how they are expected to support the SEL challenges of students without any professional development training. This research provide evidence that building teachers SEL knowledge through professional development is needed. According to CASEL (2018) students will encounter a variety of challenges in life, but preparing and teaching them how to handle challenges creates a resilient person for life.

The lived experiences of the teacher participants in the study revealed unique SEL experiences in the classroom. This study identified issues related to SEL in the classroom and expanded on the need for further research. This study identified that teachers are engaged in implementing SEL skills in the classroom without even knowing about SEL competencies. As the researcher of this study, I believe that all learning experiences in life encompass some form of social and emotional challenge. As an educator for over 25 years, I have personal experiences of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom and understand the need to provide more support to teachers and students regarding SEL implementation in the classroom. This area of research is critically important given the current state of SEL challenges faced by students in the classroom at this research school site. The aim of this study was to explore the lived experience of the teacher participants at the school research site to uncover the factors contributing to a lack of SEL skills in students. The study also sought to identify the five SEL competencies and how often, if at all, teacher participants implemented them in the classroom to address the social and emotional challenges among students. This study has provided evidence of specific SEL challenges that teachers encounter when working with students who present social and emotional challenges in the classroom. I hope my research findings will assist in furthering the field of education in the area of SEL implementation in classrooms.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

The teacher participants’ interviews were comprised of the following questions/prompts:

1. As a teacher, how do you define social and emotional learning for your students?

2. What social and emotional challenges have you encountered with students in your classroom that hinder their ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with others?

3. What academic challenges have you encountered with students in your classroom that hinder students’ ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with others?

4. Please explain how students' social and emotional issues contribute to their lack of academic success.

5. How does your own professional experience and teaching grade level contribute to your ability to foster empathy among students, especially those who experience social and emotional development issues and behaviors?

6. How do you identify and encourage an appreciation of students' diversity as it influences students’ social and emotional learning development in your class?

7. To what extent and how do you provide opportunities for your students to establish and achieve individual academic and social and emotional goals?

8. How importantly would you value the creation of a classroom plan to address issues regarding students ethical, safety and social well-being in your classroom? Please explain what you would do, or actually do in your classroom to achieve these goals.

9. What social and emotional learning program or strategy do you currently use in your class to assist students with social and emotional challenges? Describe your approach and
how do you determine if the approach is appropriate for the specific social and emotional behaviors of students?

10. Regarding the above-mentioned issues and challenges, as a teacher, what are you needs to help you work with students with SEL challenges in the classroom?

11. What kind of professional development training have you received regarding implementing social and emotional strategies for students and would you be willing to attend future training?
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

March 18, 2019

Greetings,

My name is Tina Pettway, and I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University, Portland, Oregon, and currently work as an Instructional Coach [redacted]. I am conducting a research study on teachers’ experiences of working with children with social and emotional learning (SEL) challenges in the classroom. This study aims to explore if and how teachers’ use SEL skills in the classroom. In addition to, what specific SEL skills have been explored by the teacher that has successfully improved the development of student behavior, who had previously exhibit social and emotional challenges in the classroom?

I am emailing to ask if you would be willing to participate in my research in your work environment. I am in need of 10 participants for this research study. Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without risk of any negative repercussions. Confidentiality will be protected throughout the research process by participant names not being connected with any researcher journal notes. The requirements from you for this study would be for you to agree to participate in a one-hour individual face-to-face audio-recorded interview with me. If you would like to participate in this research, or need additional information, please contact me [email redacted].

Thank you for your time,

Tina Pettway
Doctoral Candidate
Concordia University–Portland, Oregon
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Part 1
Hello, my name is Tina Pettway. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study.

Before we get started, I would like to take a few minutes to go over the study purpose and guidelines. (Researcher read aloud, then ask if there are any questions or concern) Provide participants a few minutes to read the consent form (participant read and sign the consent form).

Part 2
After participant has signed consent form.

I will now assign you ____ as your pseudonym. (The researcher has chosen to use the word participant plus an alphabet, starting with the letter A) The researcher explained that pseudonym is a fictitious name that will ensure privacy.

Part 3
The researcher will say, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all comments without any reference to individuals. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.
Appendix D: Participants Handout

Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Self-Awareness
- Identify Emotions
- Accurate Self-Perception
- Recognizing Strengths
- Self-Confidence
- Self-Efficacy

Self-Management
- Identifying Emotions
- Stress Management
- Self-Discipline
- Self-Motivation
- Goal-Setting
- Organizational Skills

Social Awareness
- Perspective-Taking
- Empathy
- Appreciating Diversity
- Respect for Others

Relationship Skills
- Communication
- Social Engagement
- Relationship-Building
- Teamwork

Responsible Decision-Making
- Identifying Problems
- Analyzing Situations
- Solving Problems
- Evaluating
- Reflecting

Retrieved from https://info.apertureed.com/sel-implementation
Appendix E: Basic Consent Form

**Research Study Title:** Supporting Children with Social-Emotional Challenges: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers’ Experiences Using Social Emotional Learning Competencies

**Principal Investigator:** Tina Pettway

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland, Oregon

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Barbara Weschke

**Purpose and what you will be doing:**

This study will explore if and how participants use Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies, and what specific skills promote the positive behavior of students who experience challenges in the classroom. The researcher understands that although teacher participants may not refer to the SEL competencies by name, they may still use these skills with their students. A benefit of this study is to engage teachers and discuss different SEL competencies.

Approximately 10 volunteers are needed for this study. No one will be paid to participate in the study. Enrollment will begin in early March 2019 and end in late March 2019. To be a part of the study, participants should hold a current Alabama teacher certificate and work within the observation site. Participants are asked to talk with the researcher in an interview on their experiences and perceptions of working with students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The total process should take less than 2 hours for each participant, spread out over 10 weeks in a way that is convenient to the participants.

The researcher of this research, Tina Pettway, will take written notes during the interview and audio-record all interviews. Only the researcher will have the notes for this research, and any storage or reporting of the interview results will be done in a way that does not disclose the identity of the participants. The school involved will not be published or reported so that even the name of the schools will be protected and not disclosed in the publication of the results. The interview that participants will be involved in this study and the initial analysis of the results are expected to be completed by June 2019.

**Risks:**

There are no risks in participating in this study other than discussing examples or opinions that participants want to keep private. The researcher will protect all information by using a code for each participant that cannot be linked to any personal information or identity. Any name or identifying information given will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a safe deposit box. When the researcher looks or analyzes the data, none of the data will have names, just codes. A recording will be made of the interview to ensure accurate and valid data analysis. However, only the researcher, Tina Pettway, will have access to the recording. The recording will be transcribed, and to ensure privacy protections, the recording will be deleted as soon as the transcription is completed and checked for accuracy.

Participants will be asked to speak in general terms rather than giving specific details. No participant will be identified in any publication or report. All participants’ information will be kept private at all times. The recording will be deleted as soon as possible, and the transcript and all other study documents will be kept securely and privately manner until it will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of this study.

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Benefits:

This study would provide teacher participants with an awareness and the identification of specific social-emotional competencies that assist in supporting children social-emotional learning challenges in the classroom. This study can provide solutions to specific issues that may not have been identified in regards to working with children with social-emotional challenges in classrooms.

Confidentiality:

All efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality in this study. The study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the study if they choose. There is no reward, and there is no penalty for participating or not participating. The use of general statements or pseudonyms will be used when describing situations within the interview session to help protect the privacy of participants. All interviews will be recorded. The researcher, Tina Pettway, will conduct the transcription as soon as possible, substituting any identifying information with pseudonyms. When discussing or publishing the research results, identifying information such as the individuals participating or the actual name of the school will be kept private by presenting the results in a general way without naming the individual or school.

Right to Withdraw:

All participants are free to skip any questions they do not wish to answer in the interview. This study is not required, and there is no penalty for not participating. If participants want to withdraw, participants must inform the researcher in a written form (such as by email) before June 2019, so that any information you wish to withdraw can be removed from the analysis of the results of this study.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions, you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tina Pettway at [email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).
Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Tina Pettway

Investigator Name

Investigator Signature

Investigator: Tina Pettway; email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr. Barbara Weschke;
Concordia University –
Portland 2811 NE
Holman Street Portland,
Oregon 97221

Date

1/14/19
Appendix F: Teacher-Made Artifact

Think and Reflect Time Out Sheet

Student Name: __________________________ Date: ______________________

Part 1: My behavior:

Describe the behavior you displayed. (What did you do?)

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Why was this behavior not being respectful, responsible, or ready? (What rule/procedure did you break?)

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Part 2: My goals:

How should you handle this situation or change your behavior in the future?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Parent signature required? Yes _____ No _____
Appendix G: Teacher-Made Artifact

Student Behavior Journal Activity 1, 2, 3

Write about the following:

1. What class rule did you break?
2. How does this action make you feel?
3. How can you change the action next time?
Appendix H: Research Site Approval Letter

[Name of School District Redacted]

The following research proposal was reviewed by the committee and approved for partnership:

Study Title: Supporting Children with Social-Emotional Challenges: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers’ Experiences Using Social Emotional Learning Competencies

Principal Investigator: Tina Pettway

Organization: Concordia University

Faculty Advisor, if applicable: Dr. Barbara Weschke

Type of Research Collaboration: Collection of New Data

IRB Approval? Yes

Research Abstract:

The researcher will interview 10 teachers about addressing the social-emotional learning needs of students.

Committee Recommendation: The committee approves this research proposal.

Superintendent’s Approval: Signature redacted
Appendix I: Teacher Participants Thank You Email

June 1, 2019

Greetings,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to you for giving me the opportunity to interview you and obtain your lived experiences of working with children with social and emotional learning (SEL) challenges in the classroom. I have certainly learned a lot from each teacher participant’s unique experiences.

This research has expanded SEL knowledge for all teachers participating in this research, and it has identified specific areas that may warrant future research regarding training for teachers supporting students with SEL challenges in the classroom. The results of the study indicated that SEL is needed in classrooms and that all education stakeholders require a more profound awareness to implement its strategies effectively. Through your expressions of lived experiences, it is conclusive that, within the educational process, students learn social and emotional skills in addition to academic content. This research provided evidence of the need in public education to better fuse academic learning with SEL and connect it with current social realities.

Once again, thank you for your time and sharing some of your lived teaching experiences.

Tina Pettway
Doctoral Candidate
Concordia University–Portland, Oregon
Appendix J: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

*What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

*What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
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I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–
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2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the
production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has
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11-30-2019

Date