

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE
OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AS FORMED THROUGH PERSONAL AND
OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE

by
Joseph G. Gerics
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experience of social-emotional learning both personal and professional for twelve urban middle school teachers in northeast Ohio. Urban middle school teachers have typically been under-represented in the research around social-emotional learning and this study looks to give voice to this under-represented group. Through the research, this study gained information regarding urban middle school teachers' personal and professional experiences with social and emotional learning and how this experience promotes or inhibits successful implementation of social-emotional learning within the classroom. The theories guiding this study are Emotional Intelligence which root the five core competencies of social emotional learning, Malsow's Hierarchy of Needs and Social-cognitive Theory. Social-cognitive theory was used as a foundation to describe self-efficacy as it relates to urban middle school teachers' experience with social-emotional learning both within themselves and within the classroom. Through semi-structured interviews, announced observations, and a focus group, data was gathered to ascertain the essence of teachers' lived experience both personal and occupational with social-emotional learning. Data was analyzed through phenomenological reduction, memoing and coding, and rich-thick description.

Keywords: experiences, interviews, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, self-management social-awareness, social-emotional learning

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Lesley for her unwavering love, support and understanding, to my children, may you know that through perseverance anything is possible, to my parents, you anchored me through this process, and to Dr. Battige for never giving up on me.

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I would like to thank Denine Goolsby and Dorothy Morelli for instilling a passion for social-emotional learning within me. Without your belief in me and your push to expand my horizons, this would not have been possible.

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List of Abbreviations

American Institutes of Research (AIR)

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

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Social-emotional learning is primarily based on the understanding that learning can best occur when there are supportive relationships in place that foster a challenging, meaningful, and engaging learning environment (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). According to Payton et al. (2008) social-emotional learning is defined as:

The process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills to: recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively. (p. 5)

In a national study of middle and high school students, less than a third of the students reported that they had a safe, caring and encouraging school climate while less than half stated that they possessed skills that dealt with conflict resolution, empathy, and decision making (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Espelage, Rose, Polanin, 2016; Martinez, 2016). The general agreement on the purpose of social-emotional learning otherwise known as SEL, is the attempt to enhance emotional intelligence and literacy through fundamental social and emotional skills and competencies (Espelage, Rose, Polanin, 2016; Hoffman, 2009). Social-emotional learning has emerged as a practice and tangible curriculum to address student deficiencies in regard to conflict resolution, empathy, and decision making. Social-emotional learning also encompasses the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills to: recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make

responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effective (Payton et al., 2008). This phenomenological study examines urban middle school teachers' perspective on social-emotional learning through the description of their lived experience with SEL as noted through their personal lives and within their teaching experience. The goal is for urban middle school teachers to highlight challenges of SEL implementation in order to formulate solutions to address those challenges.

Chapter one establishes the framework for this qualitative phenomenological study looking to understand urban middle school teachers' perception of social-emotional learning based on personal and occupational experience. A theoretical framework is established for the study aligning the study to the theories of emotional intelligence, human motivation theory, and social-cognitive theory. Within this chapter the problem and purpose statements are made known as well the significance of the study.

Background

Social and emotional learning, the process through which children develop fundamental skills essential for successful coping of emotions and behaviors and develop strategies for positive social interactions, has undergone extensive nomenclature change within the past four decades. Significance of SEL within the classroom however, did not garner traction until the early 1990's (Hoffman, 2009). The rise in significance can be attributed to a rise in various social and psychological issues and what responsibility the school has in addressing these needs within the student body (Hoffman, 2009; Cohen, 2006). The names which were used to identify what is now termed social-emotional learning include: interpersonal cognitive problem solving, social problem solving, social competence promotion, social development, and comprehensive social-competence and health education (Weissberg, 2016). The actual term social and emotional

learning was first coined in 1994 at Fetzer Institute by a group researchers and practitioners who were involved in youth development (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, and Weissberg, 2006). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed in 1994 to advocate that social-emotional learning be an integral part of every student's education (Weissberg, 2016). Today, CASEL operates with three main goals which include advancing the science of social-emotional learning, expanding effective practices of social and emotional learning, and improving state and federal policies in regard to social and emotional learning. The priority of CASEL is to initiate evidenced based and systemic implementation of social-emotional learning in 50% of schools within the United States by 2025 (Weissberg, 2016). The goal of systemic implementation of SEL includes state social-emotional learning standards that would read much like state academic standards and hold the same level of accountability for students mastering the concepts. Also included is the development of a competency assessment to measure social-emotional learning growth in students which would be aligned to the social-emotional learning standards.

Within the urban district where this study was conducted, social-emotional learning is a district wide initiative which includes mandated curriculum and programming at the elementary, middle, and high school level. The district curriculum for grades PK-5 is PATHS and the selected district curriculum for grades 6-8 is Second Step. The oversight of social-emotional learning within this urban school district is charged to a specific department called Humanware. Through this specific department, professional development in social-emotional learning, as well as oversight of programming is carried out.

The basis and credibility for Humanware within this school district stemmed from a foundational study conducted by Durlak et al. (2011). This meta-analysis reviewed 213 studies

and concluded that students who were involved and participated in a comprehensive social-emotional learning (SEL) program saw an increase of 11 percentile points on standardized tests as compared to their student peers who did not participate in a targeted SEL program. Antisocial and aggressive behaviors also were found to decrease in classrooms/schools that implemented social-emotional learning through curriculum or programming (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016; Bridgeland & Hariharan, 2016; Cohen, 2006; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Although empirical studies have been conducted on the benefits of social-emotional learning which include improved academic performance, reduced negative behaviors, reduced emotional stress, and improved attitudes and behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011), there still is resistance to implementation by teachers. This in part is due to feeling overstressed, having poor or inadequate training for SEL, and having little voice with the implementation process (Bierman, Domitrovich, Nix, Gest, Welsh, Greenberg, & Gill, 2008). The gap in literatures exists as it relates to urban middle school teachers' underrepresentation of voice with regard to perception of social-emotional learning.

The theories that are of significance to the study are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), social-learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and the theory of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In particular, the construct Hierarchy of Needs from the human motivation theory (1943) is one of the foundational pieces on which social-emotional learning is built. Social-emotional learning is a combination of the safety, love, and esteem categories within Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy. Social-emotional learning draws attention to a deficiency in the lower tier needs. A deficiency in any one of the categories will typically evoke a negative emotional or cognitive response (Boeree, 2006). From the social learning theory, the construct of self-efficacy will be integral within the study (Bandura, 1977; 1986). Since teacher's self-

efficacy is an important catalyst for student achievement (Bandura, 1998), it is important to capture how teachers perceive their own social-emotional learning competency. Emotional intelligence theory (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) serves as the catalyst and baseline for the present day five core competencies of SEL which include self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making (Payton et al., 2008).

Situation to Self

Philosophical assumptions are important to note because these assumptions mold and shape how I as the researcher view the problem and create research questions. Philosophical assumptions also direct how I explore information to those research questions (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I outline my philosophical assumptions to fully disclose my belief system and how I approached this research project.

My Personal Motivation

I have been an educator for 14 years with 9 of those years serving as a teacher both in a high school and middle school classroom setting. Many challenges present themselves within urban education (Durlak et al., 2011), but as I experienced, the most prominent challenge was students inability to constructively cope with emotions linked to events that in turn led to negative classroom behavior (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). In seeking answers for how to address this negative behavior within the classroom, I discovered the concept of social-emotional learning.

I currently serve as a district administrator in a large urban school district. Part of my job entails overseeing social-emotional learning implementation within two networks of schools. Particularly within the middle schools, I am concerned how positive relationship building skills and student emotional management is being modeled and taught due to the number of high

incident referrals that emerge. My hope is to identify challenges that impact the implementation of social-emotional learning within a middle school environment in an effort to not only help classroom effectiveness (behavioral management, academic performance), but also equip students with necessary skills for success both within and outside the classroom.

Ontology

According to Moustakas (1994), individuals view experiences differently therefore presenting a personal view of his/her reality, but one that could be different from someone else's perception of that experience. It would be my expectation that the participant's view of social-emotional learning would be different based on how he or she experienced it within a personal context (Yoder, 2014). With this frame of mind, I neutralized my own bias of social-emotional learning based on my personal experience and pursued the research from the mindset that there are multiple realities formulated by the study's participants own experience (Creswell, 2013).

Epistemology

As a qualitative researcher, epistemologically speaking, the interaction that I have with the participants shaped meaning of the research and the findings that stem from the interaction. According to Moustakas (1994), all knowledge must be connected and conformed to experience. This experience is based on sense of self as it relates to outside objects and occurrences in an effort to formulate and synthesize new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). It is from this viewpoint in which I conducted my research. With the exploration of urban middle school teachers' experience with social-emotional learning, this information yielded new knowledge to help pose solutions to the challenge of ineffective implementation.

Axiology

From an axiological lens, I truly find value in social-emotional learning. I serve as a

curriculum administrator within an urban school district. Within this role, I oversee the implementation and advancement of social-emotional learning with elementary, middle, and high-schools. I believe that social-emotional learning can change the culture of an academic environment as I have seen within my own district as evident through increased graduation rates, decreased suspension, and decreased violent infractions within our schools. Given my axiological viewpoint, speaking from a rhetorical lens, SEL is a viable alternative to punitive measures within a school setting. SEL fosters relationship between adult and student as well as student to student. These relationship dynamics intrinsically motivate students to self-regulate and self-manage behavior while punitive measures cause fractures and rifts in the aforementioned relationship dynamics. Punitive measures have been utilized as the “go-to” means of student management but I believe this has been mildly effective at best. Social-emotional learning allows for the student to equip him or herself with the tools that are needed to not only self-manage, but engage and foster meaningful relationships.

I consider myself a social-constructivist who firmly believes that meaning is gained from experience. Social constructivism is rooted in the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Personal experience and interaction with ideas, philosophy, and personal models shape perception (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). In this study, perception of social emotional learning is studied from the viewpoint of urban middle school teachers. Within my own position and experience, social-emotional learning implementation has been a challenge at the middle school level. Motivation for my current study stems from seeking to understand if perception of social-emotional learning as formed through personal and occupational experience can be a hindrance to implementation.

Problem Statement

Early adolescence (ages 10-14) is defined as composition of biological, cognitive, and emotional changes/experiences that yield a pronounced effect on personal development (Eccles, 1999). According to Rosser, Eccles, and Sameroff (2000), social-emotional learning is imperative for student functioning during these transitional years for the following reason:

How well adolescents organize their developing biological and psychological capacities in conjunction with the evolving social, cultural, and historical circumstances of their lives is one essential factor in determining whether they stay engaged and perform well in school, develop positive peer relationships, and positive about themselves and their future. (p. 3)

Based on a longitudinal study conducted by Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley (2015) for every one point increase in a child's social and emotional competence, that child is twice as likely to gain a college degree, 54% more likely to earn a high school diploma, and 46% more likely to have a full time job by age 25. For every one point decrease in a child's social and emotional competence, that child had a 64% higher chance of spending time in a juvenile detention center, 67% higher chance of being arrested by early adulthood, 52% higher chance of abusing drugs and alcohol, and 82% higher chance of being on a waiting list for public housing. While empirical evidence has surfaced validating the benefits of social-emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2011), teacher resistance to implementation of SEL is still a barrier and in part is due to feeling overstressed, having poor or inadequate training for SEL, and having little voice with the implementation process (Bierman et al., 2008). Successful implementation hinges on the teacher's ability to serve as a positive role model, communicate and demonstrate interpersonal

conflict resolution skills, and promote social-emotional learning in ways that connect with students (Jennings, 2007; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché, & Pentz, 2006).

Teachers' methodologies often imitate and replicate the manner of teaching that was demonstrated to them through professional mentoring as well as garnered through personal experiences (Olsen & Hora, 2013). While student success with subject mastery is dependent on teacher content mastery, a student's social and emotional understanding is dependent upon a teacher's own personal understanding and experience with social and emotional learning competencies (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Research indicates that teachers are expected to instruct, model, and coach students in the competencies of social and emotional learning without proper training both in higher education preparation programs as well as school and district based professional development (Education Week Research Center, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Lopes, Mestre, Guil, Kremenitzer & Salovey, 2012; Onchwari, 2010; Wajid, Garner, & Owen, 2013). The absence of proper training creates resistance and lack of professional buy-in from teachers with implementation of social and emotional learning due to low perceived self-efficacy with SEL as well as omission of teacher voice (Lopes et al., 2012). The problem is that there is a lack of information regarding urban middle school teachers' personal and professional experiences with social and emotional learning and this lack of information inhibits successful implementation of social-emotional learning within an urban middle school setting (Martinez, 2016).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived personal and professional experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning. In order to gain perspective on the challenges that face urban middle school

teachers with implementation of SEL programming and curriculum, the participants' private life experience outside of the classroom as well as professional experience will be studied.

Experience with SEL will be generally defined as personal and occupational interaction with the five core competencies of social and emotional learning including (a) social awareness, (b) self-awareness, (c) self-management, (d) relationship skills, and (c) responsible decision making (Durlak et.al, 2011). Personal experience will be defined as the manner in which the five core competencies of social-emotional learning were modeled, exhibited, mastered and acquired within the personal life of the teacher. Occupational experience will be defined as the approach and pedagogical process that the urban middle school teacher utilizes in the classroom with the five core competencies of social-emotional learning. The theories guiding this study are Emotional Intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), which root the five core competencies of social emotional learning, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), and social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). Social-cognitive theory will be used as a foundation to describe self-efficacy as it relates to urban middle school teachers experience with social-emotional learning both within themselves and within the classroom environment.

Significance of the Study

Empirically, this study addresses a present gap in literature through studying urban middle school teachers' personal and professional experience with social-emotional learning and how the lack of information surrounding this experience inhibits successful implementation of SEL (Kendziora & Yoder 2016; Martinez, 2016). This study gains urban middle school teachers' perspectives of the challenges implementing social-emotional learning. In doing such, the impact of understanding teachers experience with SEL (both personal and occupational)

provides insight on how to overcome challenges that exist within a middle school setting (Bierman et al., 2008).

Theoretically, this study provides an urban middle school teacher's lens as aligned with Emotional Intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) which provides the foundational competencies for social-emotional learning. This study provides further support to Bandura's theoretical constructs of self-efficacy (1977) and collective efficacy (1998) as aligned with implementation of social-emotional learning within an urban middle school classroom.

From a practical standpoint this study gives voice to an under-represented group within the research (urban middle school teachers) and also gives insight on urban middle school teachers' personal mastery of social-emotional learning competencies and how this emerges through classroom instruction and student interactions (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). In gaining insight from this study, challenges are looked at specifically in regards to social-emotional learning implementation within the classroom that is contingent on the urban middle school teacher's experience. Potential challenges to successful implementation include lack of self-efficacy, lack of resources (both tangible and intangible), and perception of social-emotional learning as an organizational top-down mandate (Bandura, 1977; Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, Weissberg, 2017; Hargreaves, 2004; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). In specifically highlighting the challenges faced at the urban middle school setting with social-emotional learning, school based and district administration can develop strategies and supports to address the aforementioned concerns. In a broad sense, these strategies and supports could lead to a higher allocation of funding for resources and intentional professional development to help strengthen teacher competency with social-emotional learning.

Research Questions

This study is guided through the structure of four research questions. The research questions probe into the participants' personal and professional experience with SEL so understanding can be derived from their responses. The following questions will provide structure and steer the study:

RQ1. *What are urban middle school teachers' personal experiences with their own mastery social-emotional learning competency skills?* Experience and self-efficacy as a theoretical construct are strongly correlated (Bandura, 1977). Experience could result from teaching and modeling, or having to overcome an obstacle or difficult circumstance (Bandura, 1994). Social-emotional learning competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills are inclusive of the upper levels within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). Successful implementation of SEL hinges on the teacher's ability to serve as a model and create an environment where social-emotional learning competencies can be experienced (Jennings 2007; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusche, & Pentz, 2006, Taylor et al., 2017). Much rests on a teacher's personal experience with social-emotional learning and therefore needs to be addressed within the study.

RQ2. *What are urban middle school teachers' experiences with the value of social emotional learning competencies as it relates to classroom instruction and routine?* Bandura (1997) defines collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p.447). A personal and group belief in value of programming/curriculum is essential to the success of that implementation (Bierman et al., 2008). The effectiveness of SEL within the classroom strongly hinges on what the teacher believes and experiences in regards to the benefits

and deep impact that social-emotional learning has on student behaviour and achievement (Bracket, 2012). The belief set that urban middle school teachers hold about social-emotional learning stems from experience as well as perceived benefit to the classroom community.

RQ3. What do urban middle school teachers perceive as challenges with the implementation of effective social-emotional learning as based on professional experience?

Although there are many cited reasons for curriculum/programming implementation road blocks such as continual change in leadership, heavy workload, and teacher anxiety about the specific curriculum/program due to lack of training, there is a lack of research around urban middle school teachers' experience with challenges as it relates to social-emotional learning implementation (Chung & McBride, 2015; Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003; Hargreaves, 2004; Zimmerman, 2006). This question specifically highlights and gives voice to what urban middle school teachers perceive as barriers since this group has been traditionally underrepresented within the research.

RQ4. How do urban middle school teachers address challenges with successful Implementation of SEL? Students in urban environments especially those with linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds continually encounter deficits within the educational system due to significant challenges that are faced in the classroom (Cramer & Bennett, 2015). Challenges that plague urban middle school environments include student behavioral issues, lack of tangible resources, and teacher burnout (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2015). In conjunction with the aforementioned challenge factors in urban middle school education, SEL is typically an unfamiliar curricula and program to educators. Due to this unfamiliarity teachers have expressed low comfort levels with

implementation (Bridgeland, Bruce & Harihan, 2013; Brown, Roderick, Lantieri, & Aber, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011).

Definitions

1. *Collective- Efficacy*- A group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments (Bandura, 1998).
2. *Relationship Skills*- The ability to form positive relationships, working in teams, and dealing effectively with conflict (Durlak et.al, 2011).
3. *Responsible Decision Making*- The ability to make ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior (Durlak et.al, 2011).
4. *Self-Awareness*- The ability to recognize one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and challenges (Durlak et.al, 2011).
5. *Self-Efficacy* - People's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance (Bandura, 1977).
6. *Self-Management*- The ability to manage emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals (Durlak et.al, 2011).
7. *Social-Awareness*- The ability to show understanding and empathy for others (Durlak et.al, 2011).
8. *Social-Emotional Learning* - The process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills to: recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effective (Payton et al., 2008).

Summary

A lack of urban middle school teachers' voice has presented challenges with implementation of social-emotional learning within the classroom (Kendziora & Yoder 2016; Martinez 2016). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the personal and professional lived experience of urban middle school teachers with social-emotional learning. Chapter one expounds upon the theoretical, practical, and empirical significance of this phenomenological study as well as the problem statement and purpose of the study. Aligning this study with the theory of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), and social-learning theory (Bandura, 1977), I look to give voice to an under-represent group (urban middle school teachers), with their perspective of social-emotional learning based on their personal and occupational experience. This study was conducted within an urban school district in northeast Ohio and utilized a semi-structured interview format, announced observations, and a focus group to gather data. Significant definitions are also established in Chapter one.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review will examine the effects that social-emotional learning (SEL) has on students including the benefits that SEL poses to academic achievement, social growth, and positive behavioral growth. This literature review also examines research that questions the benefit SEL has on student academic achievement, social growth, and behavioral growth. In examining literature that questions the benefit of SEL, a balanced perspective is produced to maintain a neutral standpoint. The examination of literature will look to gain clarity and understanding on the quality implementation of SEL programming as it relates to teacher self-efficacy. The theoretical framework, as well as theoretical constructs, will be reviewed to provide a foundational base for the rationale behind implementing SEL in a PK-8 school setting. Since this study seeks to understand the effective implementation of SEL through the lens of a teacher, prior studies that implemented or evaluated SEL programming will be reviewed.

Literature pertinent to this study was gathered using three methods which included online journal search, review of published and unpublished manuscripts, and investigation of relevant book sections. The term social-emotional learning in conjunction with the terms achievement, teacher perception, implementation, benefits, and teacher self-efficacy were entered into multiple online article search engines including Google Scholar, EBSCO, PsychINFO, ProQuest, and SAGE to uncover pertinent journal articles germane to my topic of research. Research gathered from multiple sources was then synthesized to procure the gap in the literature. This study addresses the gap in literature validated through the minimal number of empirical studies on the topic of social-emotional learning implementation within an urban middle school classroom environment.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of social-emotional learning stems from two major theories including Abraham Maslow's (1943) Human Motivation Theory and Peter Salovey and John Mayer's (1990) theory of Emotional Intelligence.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The premise of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) rests on the construct that there are levels of needs that must be satisfied, either partially or in full, before the next level of needs can be recognized and fulfilled. The critical construct as it relates to social-emotional learning is the category and level of needs. The lower tier levels of need which include physiological, safety, love, and esteem are known as deficiency needs. Physiological needs include basic nutrient needs such as vitamins and minerals as well as the balance between activity and inactivity (Boeree, 2006; Maslow, 1943). Safety and security needs include an individual's interest in finding a stable environment that includes protection and an overall framework for safe circumstances (Boeree, 2006; Maslow, 1943). Love focuses primarily on relationships and the need to be in social engagement with peers. This can manifest itself as the pursuit of friendship, courtship, and an overall sense of community (Boeree, 2006; Maslow, 1943). The esteem needs can be broken down into a lower level and higher level. The lower esteem level is a self-serving level in which the individual feels the need for respect of others while seeking status within the community. This level also seeks to satisfy certain wants such as attention, fame, appreciation amongst others (Boeree, 2006; Maslow, 1943). The higher level of this category is geared toward self- appreciation and self –respect. When the lower tier levels are met the individual does not recognize a difference in his or her behavior, but when unmet, the individual starts to exhibit signs of problematic behavior such as anxiety, anger, and depression (Maslow, 1943).

The top level/category is labeled self-actualization and is categorized as a growth need, which when engaged pushes the individual's intellectual growth (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has not gone without criticism. According to Wahba and Bridwell (1976), Maslow's theory is not built upon empirical evidence but rather suppositions of why people do what they do. Also it is likely that Maslow derived his theory from an ethnocentric view failing to take into account diverse cultural aspects. One example is that his viewpoint does not delineate a difference between the needs (social and cognitive) of those who have been raised in individualistic societies and those who have been raised in collective societies. The viewpoint expressed by Maslow is strictly from an individualistic realm as the culture within the United States is more directed toward self-improvement and achievement, hence self-actualization. Finally, according to Wahba and Bridwell (1976), if this theory does in fact hold true, it would be impossible for those who live in poverty to achieve self-actualization as the deficiency needs go continually unmet.

Social-emotional learning is a combination of the safety, love, and esteem categories within Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Social-emotional learning draws attention to a deficiency in the lower tier needs. A deficiency in any one of the categories will typically evoke a negative emotional or cognitive response (Boeree, 2006). Social-emotional learning as broken down by five competencies, helps individuals develop skills for adaptation when deficiencies present themselves. The Five Core Competencies of social-emotional learning are self-management, self-awareness, social-awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008). The core competencies are rooted in the theoretical acknowledgement that without attaining, at least, partial fulfillment of the aforementioned needs within the Hierarchy, student mastery of the core

competencies are rare (Payton et al., 2008). The core competencies and categories within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are mutually related. SEL competencies address and teach skills for when there is a deficiency. For example, self-awareness allows for that individual to recognize his or her emotions and to pinpoint what has triggered that emotion. Self-management teaches those skills that are necessary to manage the emotion and behavior associated with that emotion (Payton et.al, 2008). When these needs are met on a continual basis within the realm of the classroom, it provides the avenue for self-actualization to be engaged by the student.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as "the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 5). Emotional intelligence is a method in which an individual is made aware, comprehends, and chooses how he or she acts, thinks, and feels. Emotional intelligence helps an individual to establish priorities and determine how and what an individual learns. Some research indicates that emotional intelligence is responsible for 80% of successful endeavors in one's life (Jensen et al., 1998).

There are two scales which measure emotional intelligence and they include the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1996) as well as the Style in the Perception of Affect Scale (Bernet, 1996). The Bar-on Emotional Quotient Inventory is a measure that includes 133 items that tie into 15 categorical scales. These scales include the following: self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, independence, empathy, interpersonal relationships, social responsibility, problem solving, reality testing, flexibility, stress tolerance, impulse control, happiness and optimism (Bar-On, 1996). The Style in the Perception of Affect Scale is a

93-item assessment which evaluates the individual's ability to respond to emotions through three major avenues including body based, evaluation-based, and logic based (Bernet, 1996).

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983) lays the groundwork for the basic philosophical tenets of emotional intelligence although Gardner does not explicitly use the term emotional intelligence. However, the concept of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences provides grounding for emotional intelligence (Gardner, 1983). The actual concept of emotional intelligence stems from the work of Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Salovey and Mayer's (1990) theory of emotional intelligence provides a foundational base for social-emotional learning. Salovey and Mayer (1997) expanded and revised the constructs of emotional intelligence to emphasize the cognitive components of the theory. These constructs include: perception, appraisal and expression of emotion, emotional facilitation of thinking, understanding, analyzing, and employing emotional knowledge and reflective regulation of emotions (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1997).

A four-branch model of emotional intelligence was developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and directly linked the concepts of social-emotional learning to emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence directly affects the level of proper social interaction (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004). The higher an individual is in regards to emotional intelligence, the less likely that individual is to engage in unhealthy and unsafe behavior, and more likely to use critical thought and higher order thinking skills to solve impending problems (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Emotional intelligence is categorized through four branches which help to explain emotional intelligence through capacities and skills that collectively describe the major areas (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The four branches include perceiving emotion, using emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotion, and managing emotion. This model was later

popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995) with a slight change in categorical nomenclature. The idea and theory of emotional intelligence was popularized through Daniel Goleman's work. The further expansion of emotional intelligence categories included knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating one's self, recognizing emotion in others, and handling relationships (Goleman, 1995 p.43). The categories as explained by Goleman serve as a baseline for developing the five core competencies of social-emotional learning in present day form including self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Payton et al., 2008).

Emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning are conducive to one another because the end goal is not for the child to identify the emotion, but rather the reasoning behind the emotion (Goleman, 1995). It is not the revealing of the emotion but rather the processing cognitively, mentally, and even physically that said emotion which will provide a successful platform for that child (Goleman, 1995; Hoffman, 2009).

Social-learning Theory

Quality implementation of educational programming hinges on teacher perception of self-efficacy about implementation. Albert Bandura (1977, 1986) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance". (p. 391) Self-efficacy is also tied into the level of involvement within a group context. Individuals typically do not work in isolation and so, therefore, put emphasis and importance on the collective efficacy of the group (Bandura, 1998). Bandura (1998) described collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments". (p. 65)

In conjunction with the concepts of self-efficacy and collective efficacy stems teacher efficacy. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), teaching efficacy is described as a teachers “judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated”. (p. 783) Teacher efficacy describes how confident teachers are in their ability to influence student learning both within themselves and as a collective group (Klassen, Tze, Betts & Gordon, 2011). Teacher's self-efficacy is an important catalyst for student achievement, motivation, and overall success in the classroom (Bandura, 1998).

There are three factors which teachers primarily base their perception of teaching efficacy. The first factor is student engagement which references the teacher's sureness in his or her ability to instill motivation, comprehension, and inherent value of learning (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The second factor is classroom management which refers to a teacher's confidence that he or she has the ability to control and diffuse maladaptive behavior within the classroom as well as have students follow the classroom rules and norms (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The third factor refers to instructional strategies and the degree to which the teacher believes that he or she has the ability to use effectual methods to teach students (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

A perceived strong efficacy for teachers is rooted in the quantity and quality of training and professional development that is provided for that teacher (Collie et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Education Week Research Center (2015) of 709 educators with 562 of the participants being classified as K-12 teachers, 57% responded that they had not received proper

training for teaching social-emotional learning at their college or university. Also within this study two-thirds of the participants responded that they need or want more training in social-emotional learning to be more effective within the classroom.

Related Literature

This section addresses the argument for why social-emotional learning should be implemented within the classroom as grounded through emerging research. It is substantiated that social-emotional learning does have positive benefits both on achievement and behavior (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Durlak et.al, 2011; Reyes et al., 2012; Sklad et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014), but there remain challenges with implementation both from a logistic and personnel standpoint (Hoffman, 2009). This section also draws attention to the pundits of social-emotional learning and the claim that it is ineffective. Much of the research surrounding social-emotional learning has focused on student learning outcomes, but emerging research is focusing on how social-emotional learning benefits teachers in terms of building relationships with students, increased job satisfaction, and lower perceived stress and increase perceived teaching efficacy (Collie, Shapka, and Perry, 2012).

Social-Emotional Learning Defined

According to Durlak et. al (2011) SEL is composed of five core competencies that align with the process in which students as well as adults gain and apply the knowledge, beliefs, and skills that are needed to “understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (p.2). The five core competencies of social-emotional learning include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Durlak et al., 2011).

Self-awareness can be defined as “as accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence” (Dymnicki, Sambolt, Kidron, & College & Career Readiness & Success Center at American Institutes for Research, 2013, p.2). One of the major factors with an individual who is self-aware is that he/she possesses the ability to not only describe, identify, and understand that particular emotion, but also has the ability and reasoning to identify the cause of that emotion (Dymnicki et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The importance of ascertaining self-awareness is it enables successful emotional regulation and allows the individual to understand when it is needed to seek help from others in times of psychological distress (Ciarrochi, Wilson, Deane & Rickwood, 2003; Dymnicki et al., 2013). Self-awareness also allows for one to make correct self-judgments, become intrinsically motivated, and have a greater sense of self-satisfaction when goals are achieved (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011). Self-awareness ties directly with Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory from the aspect that an individual’s view of his or her capability correlates with how long-term goals and aspirations are shaped (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). These perceptions can change over time and therefore become an influential factor in how that individual behaviorally engages a task to be successful within an academic or work setting (Bandura et al., 2001; Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Self-management can be defined as “regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately” (Dymnicki et al., 2013, p.3). As with self-awareness, one of the core skills with self-management is the ability to regulate emotions with utilizing strategies that bring the emotional self into a state of balance

(Dymnicki et al., 2013; Gullone, Hughes King, & Tonge, 2010). Particularly in an education system of high-stakes testing, self-management is necessary to cope with the stress and anxiety associated with such tests. Students who are proficient with self-management have a more successful transition to college and throughout their academic career outperform their peers who are lacking with self-management skills (Bradley, McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasino, Daugherty, & Arguelles, 2010; Brown et al., 2004; Lane et al., 2012).

Social awareness is defined as “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognize and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences; and recognize and use family, school, and community resources” (Dymnicki et al., 2013, p. 3). The ability to appreciate, value and understand other’s perspectives in regards to social interaction allows for the development of healthy relationships and pro-social behavior (Decety, 2009; Durlak et al., 2011; Dymnicki et al., 2013; Durlak, 2016). Social awareness also allows for the individual to identify and understand where certain social supports can serve as interventions and resources for managing problems (Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Relationship skills include “establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed” (Dymnicki et al., 2013, p. 3). Possessing relationship skills allows for students and adults to ascertain skills needed to work better within a given group regardless of the diversity makeup of the group (Durlak et al., 2011; Loveless & Griffith, 2014).

Responsible decision making is defined as “the consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions” (Dymnicki et al., 2013, p. 4). Responsible decision making is not only in reference to

personal choices but also in reference to one positively contributing to their school and community.

The Need for Social-Emotional Learning

Policies and programs within schools are increasing the level of reliance experts, choice models, and programming to understand how emotion and student learning interrelate (Hoffman, 2009). Social-emotional learning is a movement within education that focuses on shifting educational practices in ways that support and sustain emotional climates that are deemed positive for both the classroom and building level (Bierman et al., 2010; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Guerra, Modecki, & Cunningham, 2014; Hoffman, 2009; Oberle, Dymnicki, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). Social-emotional learning looks to change the climate through building individual learner's emotional competency. The value and impact of SEL is not only raising awareness in educators about the need for emotion domains and competencies to make students successful in school, but also raising policy-makers awareness (Belfield et al., 2015; Elias et al., 2003; Hoffman, 2009).

One major argument for the need in teaching social and emotional learning is that possessing these skills will lead to a more productive social, academic, and life success. There is evidence that suggests the cognitive need for children to possess social emotional competence is just as powerful as for language and mathematic competencies (Bar On, Tranel, Denburg, & Bechara, 2003). When children's emotional intelligence is increased through social and emotional learning, they acquire a profound edge in their professional and personal futures (Cohen, 2006; Hoffman, 2009; Stern 2007). If students have a positive image about themselves and an overall positive image of others, this engagement of emotion will lead to an increase in positive school climate as well as academic success (Committee for Children, 2016). The need

for social and emotional learning does not only pertain to the students, but teachers as well.

According to Adina Lewkowicz (2007):

As teachers help to promote social and emotional learning, they will be able to lessen their students' frustrations, helping them to get their needs met in positive, healthy ways; they will also make classroom time more productive, prevent behavioral problems, build students of character, and increase academic prowess. (p. 3)

Teachers perceive that social and emotional learning has prescribed benefits to help in the arena of classroom management.

According to a national study (Durlak et al., 2011) of middle and high school students, less than 1/3rd of the students reported that they had a safe, caring and encouraging school climate while less than half stated that they possessed skills that dealt with conflict resolution, empathy, and decision making. Lack of social-emotional skills, as well as a negative school climate can adversely affect student academic achievement. Concern for student social-emotional competency and its link to academic growth is reflected in literature which indicates that approximately 25% of students in school struggle with adjustment and acclimation to the school environment (Weissberg, 2005). Also, between 15-22% of students will develop and maintain issues around social and emotional skills which are severe enough to require treatment (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001). In the wake of such research, proponents for SEL posit that social-emotional learning positively affects children's behavior, academic, and emotional outcomes when evidence-based prevention and intervention programs that target SEL skills are systemically implemented (Durlak, et al., 2011; Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik & Elias, 2003; Zins & Elias, 2006).

Social and Emotional Learning and Culture

Social and emotional learning looks to develop skills in individuals based on the framework that emotions are internal and idiosyncratic states that mandate ongoing oversight in order to be put to use in a positive and healthy manner (Cook, Silva, Hayden, Brodsky & Coddington, 2017; Hoffman, 2009). Identifying, naming, and communicating about these emotions are essential skills at the elementary and secondary levels (CASEL, 2007). However, past research on emotions pertaining to non-Western cultures demonstrates that expression, experience, and control of emotions is highly impacted and conditioned through cultural norms (Chao, 1995; Hoffman, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Vinden, 1999). Where implemented it must be understood that social emotional competence is can be manifested in manners that are directly related to the sociocultural characteristics of the children being engaged. The social and emotional development and progress of children is heavily reliant on the beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors of their families, friends, and the communities in which they reside and acquire knowledge (Garner, Mahatmya, Brown & Vesley, 2014). One example of this is in a comparison of interactions with adults for middle-income children as compared to children in poverty. Expectations for children of upper SES classification in regard to their interactions are usually aligned with home, school, and society as a whole whereas children of lower SES classification typically have no alignment between the three (Garner et al., 2014; Lareau, 2011). In viewing from this lens how social and emotional skills are attained, it is imperative that children's social emotional competence be considered through not only the sociocultural constructs of the mainstream culture but also through familial cultural constructs (Garner et al., 2014).

Social and emotional learning must be made applicable to more than those who are considered white, middle-class, and native English speakers (Hoffman, 2009). There is concern

that emphasizing certain aspects of expressing emotion such as talking about feelings shows a bias towards middle-class America. Being that the concepts of social and emotional learning are abstract in nature rather than concrete citing emotional awareness and the idea of how to be a friend as just a couple of examples, cultural norms would play a large role in the individuals approach to each (Hoffman, 2009). Denham and Weissberg (2004) heed that SEL curriculum and programming must adhere to cultural relevance and importance for the population in which it is serving. Student empowerment cannot be obtained if the connection to the information is outside the realm of his/her cultural grasp (Hoffman, 2009). It is recognized that differences in culture and diversity demand that some adaptations be made so that the programming and curriculum is not deemed problematic. In quoting Linda Lantieri, the senior program advisor for CASEL, Hoffman (2009) highlights this point:

SEL programs have evolved by and large through a Eurocentric lens at both the research and program development levels, but the five SEL competencies might be expressed differently in different cultural contexts. For example, some African-Americans may hesitate to use I-messages because of their cultural upbringing. . . .

The challenge today is for teachers to be aware of their own cultural leanings and how they fit—or don't fit—with their students' cultural beliefs and behaviors. (p. 541)

Teachable SEL domains and competencies as it relates to cultural norms must be addressed through the teacher so that such encodings and understandings can be explicitly drawn out. If cultural competence is ignored through SEL instruction, then the applicability of social and emotional learning for every child becomes problematic (Elias, Ferrito & Moceri, 2015; Hoffman, 2009; Zins et al., 2006).

Economic Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning

In a general correlation, social-emotional learning greatly contributes to essential 21st century skills which include creativity, cooperation, communication, and critical thinking. The acquisition of these skills allow for greater adaptation to an ever changing globalization approach and the ability to solve complex problems that may arise (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016). There are five essential skills which employers find to be valuable for the 21st century job market and those include professionalism, communication, team work and cooperation, critical thinking and problem solving, ethics and responsibility (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). The effective development of these 21st century skills as facilitated through social-emotional learning will produce students who are more marketable in today's job market (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016; Belfield et al., 2015; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

Social-emotional learning has been validated through benefit cost analysis which is a technique used to analyze investments and their economic profitability (Belfield et al., 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou & Robertson, 2011). Education has been utilizing benefit-cost analysis since the early 1960s to rate the investment return that both individuals and society invests into education through tax payer funded programming (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Reynolds et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, and Zander (2015), SEL was studied in order to evaluate the economic value that this curriculum/programming has using the benefit-cost analysis approach. The study looked at six programs/curriculum classified as SEL which included: 4Rs, Responsive Classroom, Second Step, Positive Action, Social and Emotional Training and Life Skills Training. These programs service the entire K-12 spectrum but in different capacities (such as at-risk, and disadvantaged) and targeting different age groups (Belfield et al., 2015). The central

question at the heart of the study is whether or not the benefits of these programs and ultimately SEL outweigh the cost of training, implementation as well as actual program cost.

The most significant empirical finding is that each of the six programs/curriculum for improving SEL within a school shows quantifiable benefits that exceeds the cost of implementation, materials and training, often by significant amounts (Belfield et al., 2015).

There is a conclusive return on investments for all of these educational programs aligned with social and emotional learning. According to Belfield et al. (2015),

And the aggregate result also shows considerable benefits relative to costs, with an average benefit-cost ratio of about 11 to 1 among the six interventions.

This means that, on average, for every dollar invested equally across the six SEL interventions, there is a return of eleven dollars, a substantial economic return. (p. 5)

A one-point increase in a standard deviation in SEL competency per 100 kindergartners would see an investment benefit of between \$800,000 and \$1.1 million dollars (Jones et al., 2015).

Social-Emotional Learning Effects on Student Achievement and Behavior

The expanding literature base for social-emotional learning is demonstrating positive correlations in academic achievement, as well as negative correlations with aggressive and antisocial behavior, deviant behavior such as drug and alcohol use, and overall mental health (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2004; Domitrovich, Bradshaw, Berg, Pas, Becker, Musci & Ialongo, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008). Links between SEL and positive educational gains are documented in multiple studies utilizing different intervention strategies as well as had different student population samples (Durlak et al., 2011; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). In a meta-analysis of 213 studies (Durlak et al., 2011), students who were

involved and participated in a comprehensive SEL program saw an increase of 11 percentile points on standardized tests as compared to their student peers who did not participate in a targeted SEL.

Antisocial and aggressive behaviors also were have found to decrease in classrooms/schools that implemented social-emotional learning through curriculum or programming (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). A meta-analysis conducted by Wilson and Lipsey (2007), showed that in 240 schools which had programs that targeted aggressive and disruptive behaviors (bullying, fighting, intimidation, and other unruly behaviors), a decrease in these negative behaviors was evident. This meta-analysis also indicated that intervention and prevention programs yielded better results when delivered through a school-wide model rather than a small targeted group.

Researchers at the University of Illinois and Loyola University analyzed evaluations of over 233,000 K-12 students nationwide and came to the conclusion that SEL improves student behavior and academic actions in multiple ways (Durlak et al., 2011). Students improved in many facets including better school attendance, better classroom behavior, and were more engaged in classroom learning. Students were also less likely to engage in maladaptive behavior such as bullying, drug abuse, and violent acts (Bailey, Zinser, Curley, Denton & Bassett, 2013; Cooke et al., 2017; Durlak, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Gullone, Hughes, King & Tonge, 2010; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Throughout the literature, an important theme to emerge is that to have maximum impact on student achievement, emotions, and behavior, social-emotional learning must be implemented either as a district or school wide level and not compartmentalized to specific classrooms (Jones, Barnes, Bailey & Dolittle, 2017; Reyes et al., 2012; Zins & Elias, 2006).

Social-Emotional Learning and College and Career Readiness

How a student perceives him/herself in relation to academic self-efficacy, motivation, social relationships, importance of school, possessed coping capabilities for psychological and emotional distress and academic stress could be used as an indicator of future academic outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Davis, Solberg, de Baca, & Gore, 2014; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia & Greenberg, 2013; Lopes et al., 2012). In a qualitative study that included a sample of 4,797 participants from a large urban school district, it was revealed that high school students categorized as functioning in the lowest 25% of their grade operated with lower social emotional skills capability than students categorized in the top 25% of academic performers by the end of the 8th grade (Davis et al., 2014). The results of this study concluded that the 5-core social emotional learning competencies effectively distinguished between students making positive and adequate progress in fulfilling the requirements for high school graduation and those students identified as having dropped out of school completely or failed more than 14% of their courses (Davis, et al., 2014).

Although the students who directly attend college after high school has increased to 68 percent, only 58% of these students receive a bachelor's degree within six years. Only 29.2 % of first time associate degree students receive their degree within three years (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, Roth, & Manning, 2012). In a qualitative study conducted by Martinez (2016), twenty teachers K-6 teachers were asked to identify how they perceived they were helping their students become college ready. These teachers stated that they were helping students prepare through being able to work in groups, becoming a problem solver, being independent, and being resourceful which the teachers later connected to being closely related to the SEL competencies.

Skills that are connected with the core competencies include being self-aware and pushing oneself to execute maximum effort within an academic setting. Students who are aware of their strengths are better able to function within a higher-education environment or understand the skills they need when entering the workforce (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak, 2016; Dymnicki et al., 2013; Oberle et al., 2016; Zins et al., 2006). In regards to self-management, students who grasp this competency are better able to handle transitions and de-escalate behavior within themselves as related to both rigorous coursework as well as job stress (Belfield et al., 2015; Dymnicki et al., 2013; State & Kern, 2017). Competency of social-awareness allows for the student to thrive in diverse environments through the formation of pro-social behavior. This allows for the formation of healthy relationships as well as minimizes stress when encountering others who are of different backgrounds (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak, 2016; Dymnicki et al., 2013; Oberle et al., 2016). Closely tied to social-awareness as a means of connecting with others in a meaningful way is the competency of relationship skills. First year college students as well as those who move directly into the workforce experience a new social environment. To be successful these young adults must build new social networks to include those who will make them feel supported. Building this network will reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness which establishes a more productive workforce member and through a higher education lens leads to college retention (Belfield et al., 2015; Dymnicki et al., 2013). As students transition from high school to higher education, there are also increased social, emotional, and mental health challenges that present themselves (Greenberg et al., 2001; Durlak et al., 2011; Dymnicki et al., 2013). However, the increase in abstract, counterfactual, and logical reasoning allows for the student to make planned out choices with a greater understanding of what consequences may be associated with each choice. Social-emotional learning positively increases how the student

processes outcomes and adjusts to making choices outside of a familial authority figure's presence within his/her life (Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Social-Emotional Learning as Ineffective

Social-emotional learning also has critics to the validity of SEL curriculum and programming and the effectiveness of such. Social-emotional learning is a vague and ambiguous term that is used as a comprehensive umbrella for multiple programs that are implemented in a school targeting students' emotional intelligence (Hoffman, 2009). Such programs captured under SEL include school based derived from public health, mental health and juvenile-justice viewpoints as well as programming rooted in moral and character development (Hoffman, 2009). One of the largest points of contention is the theoretical framework is which social-emotional learning is based. Emotional intelligence still is a questionable construct within the scientific community. Many programs that utilize emotional intelligence as its research base often do not delineate what components of EI are being used (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006; Hoffman, 2009). According to Cherniss et al. (2006) "there has been some confusion between the underlying core abilities of EI and the many social and emotional 'competencies' that are built on those core abilities". (p. 240) Although social-emotional learning programs are considered homogenous, the fact is that many programs under the SEL umbrella target different attributes of EI, but are not explicit in doing so (Hoffman, 2009). Hoffman stated (2009) "the literature on SEL paints for some; a diverse, positive picture of how focusing on social and emotional competencies can benefit students and schools, whereas for others, it is rife with confusion and lack of empirical and evaluative rigor". (p. 537)

Aside from the value of rooting curriculum and programming in emotional intelligence, other multi-faceted critiques have emerged challenging the effectiveness of SEL. One such

critique is that a broad scale, systematic evaluation has not been established and that there have been unsubstantiated claims made about the impact SEL has on student achievement (Hoffman, 2009; Waterhouse, 2006). One weakness of overall SEL implementation is the measurement of such and the evaluation of its impact as that has been absent in SEL literature. One of the reasons for the measurement challenge is that it has been hard to uniformly establish a good standard of implementation quality (Domitrovich, Bradshaw, Poduska, Hoagwood, Buckley, Olin, Ialongo; Lane, Menzies, Kalberg, & Oakes, 2012; Lane, Oakes, & Menzies, 2010; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). Sustainability of SEL programming and curriculum has also been factored into criticism because there have been so few longitudinal studies done with SEL programming (Hoffman, 2009). An overarching criticism is the degree to which focusing on children's' social and emotional skills will impact academic and behavioral performance (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002).

SEL can also be rendered ineffective through specific limitations as result of poor implementation mainly when done so with a programmatic approach as opposed to integrated strategies (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). SEL is also deemed ineffective when it is marginalized and not seen as a vital part to the educational mission of the district and school (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Social and Emotional Learning and Teachers

The prevalent amount of research surrounding SEL highlights the benefits that it has on students but lacks the in-depth discussion on the impact social-emotional learning has on classroom teachers (Collie et al., 2012; Domitrovich et al., 2016; State & Kern, 2017; Yoder, 2014). However, there is a growing base of literature that points to the benefits that social-emotional learning has on teacher performance (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, &

Salovey, 2010; Collie et al., 2012; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobsen, 2009). Teachers SEL beliefs are strongly tied to their dedication and commitment to the teaching profession. However, a lack of social-emotional learning practices evident in the classroom is linked to higher teacher burnout (Bracket et al., 2010; Collie et al., 2012; Elias et al., 2015; Ransford et al., 2009). Social-emotional learning plays a significant role in school climate primarily in student to teacher relationships as well as teacher to teacher relationships. Poor school climate is linked with higher teacher burnout and therefore a building culture that is based in SEL provides higher teacher satisfaction due to the notion that teachers are not separate entities from the environment in which they are placed (Collie et al., 2012; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Zins et al., 2004).

Critics of SEL question the validity of both programming and curriculum in relation to social-emotional learning. At the heart of the criticism lies the question of how effective SEL can be both for academic and non- academic purposes (Hoffman, 2009). However, what critics of SEL lack in much of their criticism is teacher voice as to the effectiveness of SEL within the classroom. A growing body of literature surrounding teacher voice and the perceived benefits of SEL demonstrate that teachers believe SEL improves outcomes of students in multiple areas including improved classroom competence, improved student behavior in the classroom, and improved academic performance within the classroom (Brown, Roderick, Lantieri, & Aber, 2004; Cherniss et al., 2006, Elias & Arnold, 2006; Hoffman, 2009). In a study conducted by Education Week Research Center (2015), a survey was sent nationally to educators in which 709 responded with 562 participants identifying as K-12 classroom teachers. The purpose of this survey was gather teacher and administrator perspective on the importance and perceived effectiveness of SEL within the classroom (Education Week Research Center, 2015). This

survey was a follow-up to a similar one given in 2012 in which a similar number of participants responded to questions regarding perspective of SEL.

According to the study results, teachers believed that the most important competency that students must possess and be taught those skills was self-management. Teachers believed that the most important competency skill that they themselves should possess is relationship skills (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Data trends from the 2012 study compared to 2015 suggest a greater importance and value placed on SEL through a teacher's perspective. This perspective is validated as 67% of teachers in 2015 believe that SEL is very important to student achievement as compared to 54% of teachers stating that SEL was important to student achievement with the previous study (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Also increasing in the 2015 study as compared to the similar study conducted in 2012 is the perception that SEL improves overall school climate 76% agree in 2015 as compared to 69% in 2012 (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Teachers also more strongly perceive that SEL reduces discipline issues in the classroom as 80% agree in 2015 as compared to 70% agreeing in 2012 (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Teacher perspective of the importance of SEL could also be impacted with data from the study which shows that teachers today feel that student behavior is worse than in 2012 and that there are more safety risks for students and staff within the school than in 2012 (Education Week Research Center, 2015).

Trending data would suggest that teacher perception of the effectiveness of SEL is increasing. With any program or curriculum implementation, unless there is buy-in from those who will be delivering the content, it will be rendered ineffective. Social-emotional learning application not only requires teacher buy-in to be successful, but the skills must also be modeled by the teacher. Successful implementation hinges on the teacher's ability to serve as a positive

role model, communicate and demonstrate interpersonal conflict resolution skills, and promote social-emotional learning in ways that connect with students (Jennings, 2007; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché, & Pentz, 2006).

According to Jones and Bouffard (2012), a child's social-emotional learning ascertainment is directly linked to a teachers' own social emotional understanding as well as their instructional skills. A teacher who is comfortable with the teaching and implementation of social-emotional learning also sees success in four key areas of the classroom including overall improvement in classroom management, classroom relationships (student to student and teacher to student), curriculum implementation and an overall positive classroom learning environment (Collie et al., 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Even more so with the instruction of social emotional learning, a teacher's values, beliefs, and implicit understanding of the world around them can contribute with great influence how SEL is taught within that particular classroom (Jennings & Frank, 2015). With much of the impact of social-emotional learning resting on the teacher (implementation and modeling) it is important to note that most institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs do not include social emotional learning but rather focus strictly on developing the cognitive components (Wajiid, Garner, & Owen, 2013). Teachers who exit teacher certification programs often times do not have formal training in social-emotional skills, competencies, or domains before they enter the classroom with the exception of what they may have gleaned through behavioral management classes (Onchwari, 2010; Wajiid et al, 2013). In a study conducted by Onchwari (2010), it was reported that 66% of teachers feel that they are either poorly, or moderately poor in their ability and preparation to effectively handle their students' emotions.

In a qualitative case-study conducted by Wajiid, Garner & Owens, (2013), it was discovered that curriculum programs which infuse a social-emotional learning component changed teacher candidates' views on the role that student emotional competency plays in classroom interaction and environment. The viewpoints of the teachers could be further broken down into three thematic elements which include the connection between SEL and academic increase, the importance of moving from teacher to student centered learning, and the teachers expressed desire for more professional learning opportunities around social-emotional learning. As the demand for teacher accountability increases to produce a whole child, it should be noted that teacher education preparation programs should also plan on producing teachers who are SEL competent (Wajiid et al., 2013).

Implementation

The five core competencies of social emotional learning align with, but should not be classified the same as other culture and climate frameworks including positive youth development, emotional intelligence, employability skills, 21st-century skills, and character education (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Social and emotional competencies are not engrained as personal characteristic traits but are inclusive of skills that can be taught, modeled, and ascertained from early childhood on. In regards to implementation of SEL within the classroom, there are four primary approaches that are taken: (1) explicit and direct instruction on SEL skills and competencies, (2) integration of academic content with SEL skills, (3) development of a learning environment with SEL competencies as a foundation, and (4) overall general teaching practices that enhance and support student growth and utilization of social and emotional skills (CASEL, 2013, 2015; Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, & Weissberg, 2015; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Yoder, 2014). Explicit and direct instruction of SEL skills and competencies include

teachers taking instructional time to teach social and emotional competencies as they would for other content instruction (Yoder, 2016). Integration of SEL skills within academic content would incorporate group work to solve problems. This allows for a reinforcing of individual and whole group responsibility within the lesson so students comprehend both positive and negative consequences of the way they involve themselves within the group activity (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Utilizing SEL competencies as a framework to shape building climate and culture can be done through multiple means. Some of these protocols include develop a discipline policy that moves away from punitive and supports inclusionary practices, allow for students to regulate and monitor their own behavior, ensure that every individual student has an connection to adult within the building that he or she can turn to for support, allow for student voice, and highlight and celebrate culture and diversity (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

The fidelity and sustainability of new programming and initiatives within an educational setting is heavily contingent on what teachers think of the aforementioned items since implementation mostly falls on them (Guerra et al., 2014; Martinez, 2016; Sklad et al., 2012). At the center of SEL programs is that the direct and content focused teaching of emotional intelligence is necessary and teacher belief that this is very much possible (Bernet, 1996; Bar-On, 1996; Cherniss et al., 2006; Hoffman, 2009; Stajkovic et al., 2009). Explicit focus on elementary and secondary social emotional skills must be a systematic focus at both the district and school base level (Hoffman, 2009). “Like reading or math, if social-emotional skills are not taught systematically, they will not be internalized” (Elias, 2006, p.7). Systematic implementation may differ in the form of curricula add-ons versus whole class lessons at various school sites however is systematically and uniformly implemented, the effect will remain the same (Durlak et.al, 2011, Hoffman, 2009; Jennings et al., 2013).

According to Durlak et.al (2011), the most effective way for SEL implementation was through the SAFE method. SAFE stands for the following: (1) sequenced activities that led in a coordinated and connected way to skills, (2) active forms of learning, (3) focused on developing one or more social skills, and (4) explicit about targeting specific skills. However, in looking past pure characteristics of programming and curriculum, fidelity of implementation is also instrumental in the effectiveness of SEL (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

In a meta-analysis of 75 studies conducted by Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, and Ben (2012) SEL was deemed ineffective if implementation was based on loose guidelines and overly broad principals. In regards with SEL implementation, it must be rooted in sound theoretical reasoning that is in nomenclature easily understood by the implementer, explicit in desired outcomes and goals, thorough and continual feedback, and consistency in leadership philosophy. Although many empirical studies have been conducted on the benefits of social-emotional learning which include improved academic performance, reduced negative behaviors, reduced emotional stress, and improved attitudes and behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011), there still is resistance to implementation by teachers. In fact, according to Sklad et al., (2012) the most important question facing SEL is not necessarily the effectiveness of the programming and curriculum, but whether or not teachers can deliver SEL in effective manner without compromising the potency through ineffective implementation. This in part is due to feeling overstressed and having poor or inadequate training for SEL (Bierman, Domitrovich, Nix, Gest, Welsh, Greenberg, & Gill, 2008). Curriculum companies such as Second Step, and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), formulated scripted lessons in conjunction with providing whole staff training by curriculum experts to relieve the pressures that teachers are feeling with implementation (Bierman et al., 2008; Bierman, Coie, & Dodge, 2010; Jennings & Greenberg,

2009). In a quantitative study of 44 classrooms conducted by Bierman et al. (2008), teachers who were privy to a well-laid out SEL curriculum as well as had a year of mentorship with implementing the curriculum perceived the SEL program to have a meaningful impact on their students. Teachers also viewed the SEL curriculum to be highly engaging due to their students' interactions with the curriculum. For an SEL curriculum to be implemented well, two foundational pieces must be in place. The foundational pieces include targeted training by content experts and a curriculum that is actively guided.

Sustainability of a program can be an indicator of how well that program has been implemented. There are key elements of implementation that must be present for a program to have sustainability (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). These elements include a school committee or school lead who oversees the implementation and is the point of contact for specific program problems. Another key element is participation from individuals who demonstrate ownership, high shared morale, and effective communication. Ongoing training should incorporate both staff and expert presentation, high inclusiveness of all students within the school, high visibility both within the school and within the community, and a bank of strategies to deliver the curriculum so that student engagement is not stifled through monotony (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

The implementation of SEL is as a strategy to help strengthen and support the social, emotional, and academic achievement of students. Educators both domestically and internationally have supported the implementation of it (Bridgeland et al., 2013). It should be noted though that educators voice that they will be able to implement SEL programming most effectively when they receive high quality professional learning experiences and support from their building and district administrators (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

Teacher Resistance to Implementation

Although there is mounting evidence to the benefits and value that social-emotional learning can have within the classroom, stringent accountability demands and increased emphasis on student outcomes as measured by standardized tests create a perceived challenge with implementation of SEL (Loveless & Griffith, 2014; Martinez, 2016). In order for increase in achievement as measured through state assessments, curriculum is thinned out to include only those subjects that are tested for student mastery. Accountability translates into prioritized focus on cognitive development rather than whole child. Teachers have voiced explicit tension in developing students SEL skills through taking time away from teaching core academics (as measured through state testing (Martinez, 2016). As articulated by a participant in a qualitative study, teacher concern over time constraints in regard to SEL is voiced:

Things become very one-sided, very academically oriented, and it is a reminder that this is a major part of teaching to the whole child. (SEL) gives that perspective. We feel pressure and tension with giving up academics. Like the reality of doing it (SEL)... it's more difficult than what we would want. (Martinez, 2016, p. 11)

Time constraints have been voiced as one of the primary challenges from the viewpoint of teachers with SEL implementation and instruction (Martinez, 2016). The time constraint challenge was further elaborated on as teachers expressed that SEL required more planning on their end but that this time was not given to them through master scheduling therefore leading to exclusion from daily implementation or perceived ineffective implementation (Martinez, 2016).

Change within systems can be difficult for multiple parties within the system itself. The nature of education is that some change is dictated while other change is embedded within the work itself (Hargreaves, 2004; Martinez, 2016). Teachers report that change in role, class, or

other organizational change (such as leadership) can be an emotional strain on them (Solomon, 2016). Feelings of anxiety, helplessness, loss and insecurity can make a teacher resistant to organizational change including implementation of programs/curriculum (Hargreaves, 2004). School leadership must understand that certain factors such as control, limited opportunities for feedback, and conformity expectation creates a climate of "us vs. them" within a system and is are lead predictors for resistance (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). In regard to SEL, teachers typically receive very little training in teaching SEL competencies and skills (Lopes, Mestre, Guil, Kremenitzer & Salovey, 2012). SEL competencies and skills receive little attention within higher education pre-service programs and therefore produce ill-equipped educators entering the workforce in regard to mastery of SEL (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Pre-service teacher training includes little attention to these issues beyond basic behavior management strategies, and little in-service support is available on these topics, particularly through effective approaches like coaching and mentoring

When there is change to scheduling, programs, and implementation thereof, teachers are more inclined to embrace such change when they are involved with designing as well as developing such change (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2015). To reduce the tendency for resistance in regard to program/curriculum implementation, administrators should utilize professional development, support and incentives as well as operate from a framework of praise and encouragement for teacher efforts (Zimmerman, 2006). School leaders are responsible for minimizing and removing barriers that hinder implementation. Such barriers could include teacher workload, teacher distraction from outside agents, and duties assigned. As teachers increase their capacity as well as become empowered through school leadership, resistance to implementation should decrease (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Zimmerman (2006) pointed out that administrators should employ incentives that encourage the efforts of teachers as they work toward achieving change. Principals should remove any barriers that might hinder implementation, including decreasing the workload so that teachers are not distracted from the primary focus of the change processes (Zimmerman, 2006). As teachers become empowered through school leadership as well as increase their implementation capacity, teachers are more likely to accept change because they have a sense of ownership (Zimmerman, 2006).

Summary

The state of the current literature is reflective of studies conducted on the effectiveness of SEL programs and curriculum, sustainability and implementation, cultural relevance of SEL, economic benefits and how SEL helps to improve student achievement and behavioral skills. Current literature reflects the benefits that SEL has on student behavior and academics as well as benefits to long term societal adjustment. Tying in three major theories and their theoretical constructs including human motivation theory (Maslow, 1943), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) social-emotional learning is validated as a grounded means to improve student academic and behavior performance. Current research however does not reflect urban middle school teachers' perception of social-emotional based on personal and professional experience and how this lack of teacher voice inhibits successful implementation. This study looks to directly address this gap in literature through a transcendental phenomenological study that looks into urban middle school teachers' professional and personal lived experience.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, (CASEL) “social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Corcoran & Slavin, 2016, p. 2). Successful SEL programs, according to Greenberg and Weissberg (2017), have a long-term positive impact on students’ lives. As a result of the success of SEL programs, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2017) stated “that critical next steps [in SEL research and program development] are teaching SEL to teachers for their own social-emotional development and providing training in SEL to pre-service teachers in the context of teacher training programs, to adequately prepare them for their work as educators” (p 192). Because there is a need for further research to accomplish the goals of Schonert-Reichl (2017) the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived personal and professional experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning. The remaining sections of this chapter provide a description and overview of the research design, procedures, methods, and information about the setting and participants.

Design

This study is organized in a qualitative tradition. According to Creswell (2016) a qualitative research approach facilitates the exploration of meaning a group ascribes to a particular phenomenon. This research design originated in the study of anthropology and is based on the ontological belief that an individual’s perception of reality is truth. Creswell (2012)

suggests that social constructivism, the idea that participants' historical and cultural settings impact their perception of reality, is an essential part of the qualitative approach. Creswell (2012) states that a qualitative design is appropriate when the researcher wants to answer "how and what" questions. It is my goal to capture the emic perspective of the participants regarding social emotional learning and give voice to their experiences through my presentation of the data generated by this study.

Within the qualitative approach, a transcendental phenomenological design is used. Phenomenology is an approach to research that seeks to understand the lived experiences of a group (Creswell, 2013). "The aim of [phenomenological research] is to determine what an experience means for the person who has had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Phenomenology, at the heart of the design, describes what participants have experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Unlike hermeneutical phenomenology, which is interpretive in nature, transcendental phenomenology is utilized when the researcher wants to develop a vivid description of the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). With this in mind, transcendental phenomenology is an appropriate design for this study to capture both the participants personal development of social emotional learning and their professional experience implementing the five core competencies of SEL which include, self-management, self-awareness, social-awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills.

Qualitative research promotes and compels a deeper understanding of the problem under study because it incorporates perceptions, attitudes, and emotions from the participants (Sallee & Flood, 2012). According to Sallee & Flood (2012), "Qualitative research with its use of thick description, offers research results that might be more easily understandable than the numbers

and statistics offered through quantitative data” (p. 141). With specifics to this study, a qualitative design has been selected because allows me to focus on the urban middle school teacher’s individualized experience with social emotional learning and explore aspects of their experience such as historical exposure, perception of effectiveness within his or her classroom, and perception of competency with modeling SEL. Strict numbers cannot expound upon challenges, successes, and overall understanding that the participants experience with SEL and therefore a qualitative approach is a better suited design over a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2013).

In keeping with the transcendental phenomenological tradition, to gather data that will accurately portray urban middle school teachers’ perception and experience with social-emotional learning, I utilized interviews, classroom observations, and a focus group. According to Moustakas (1994), epoche simply defined is the suspension of judgment and “requires the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt”. (p.26) In order for the researcher to suspend judgment he or she must employ bracketing. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), “bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (p. 80). I employed this technique through placing aside my personal and professional beliefs and experiences with SEL. In a more tangible sense, I did not infuse leading questions to the participants to garner answers that fit my SEL viewpoints and analyzed the data with a neutral mindset. Creswell (2013) addresses that bracketing does not mandate that the researcher forget all prior knowledge with past experiences, but rather not letting this knowledge become a distraction and focus while determining participants’ experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide my study:

RQ1: What are urban middle school teachers' personal experiences with their own mastery of social-emotional learning competency skills?

RQ2: What are urban middle school teachers' experiences with the value of social-emotional learning competencies as it relates to classroom instruction and routine?

RQ3: What do urban middle school teachers perceive as challenges with the implementation of effective social-emotional learning?

RQ4: How do urban middle school teachers address challenges with successful implementation of SEL?

Setting

This study was conducted in an urban school district in the northeast region of the United States which will be known as Jones school district. The district has nearly 42,000 students. The student population within Jones school district is as follows: 67% of the students are African American, 14.6% of the students are Caucasian, 14.4% of the students are Hispanic and 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander. The district has a free and reduced lunch rate of 100%. Schools within the district are set up as either PK-8 or high school. The school district does not have separate buildings for middle school. The teaching force in Jones school district is 68% Caucasian, 21% African American, 10% Hispanic, and 1% other. 99.6 % of district X teachers have a bachelor's degree and 70.6% of the teaching force have a master's degree or higher.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional learning or CASEL, primary focus is to promote evidence-based SEL as an educational priority in PK-high school classrooms nationwide. CASEL strives to do expand SEL through research, academic practice, and

lobbying state and federal legislators (CASEL, 2016). Jones school district is part of the Collaborating District's Initiative (CDI) which is facilitated by CASEL. The CDI is comprised of large urban districts' who have put explicit focus with the implementation of SEL programming and/or curriculum. There are currently 11 urban school districts that are included within the CDI. Jones school district was the second school district brought into the CDI and has been a part of this initiative since 2010. All districts within the CDI are assigned two consultants from CASEL who help advise and hold the expectation that the districts have a systemic, district-wide implementation of social and emotional learning. District implementation includes the use of a designated SEL curriculum within the classroom, ensuring that a variety of professional development sessions are offered both to individual schools and the central office, and the utilization of SEL programming. Monitoring of SEL within the district is the responsibility of the district rather than CASEL. The expectation from both CASEL and Jones school district is that classroom teachers are implementing social and emotional learning within their lessons and classroom routines. Accountability for SEL implementation is conducted through the monitoring of each school's Academic Achievement Plan or AAP in which the AAP must articulate and highlight how SEL is being carried out. Students must receive 40 minutes a week of explicit SEL instruction; however, each building has the autonomy to determine how that is carried out; Jones school district has been selected for the setting of this research because the participants have experienced social-emotional learning as the phenomenon and I as the researcher have built a rapport with the leadership of the district (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

Purposeful sampling, as defined by Johnson and Christiansen (2012), is "a nonrandom sampling technique in which a researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to

participate in a research study” (p. 231). For this study, participants were chosen utilizing purposeful criterion to ensure that they have experienced the phenomena, particularly within their professional life (Conklin, 2007). Additionally, according to Creswell (2013) the number of participants a researcher should have for a phenomenological study is 5-25. Therefore, this study included twelve urban middle school certificated teachers who have been teaching for two years or more within Jones school district. The criterion of two years within Jones school district ensures that the participants have had sufficient experience with the phenomenon to contribute meaningful insight to the study. Twelve participants were secured and yielded saturation for the study. Saturation is defined by Saunders et al, (2017) as “the basis of the data that have been collected or analyzed hitherto, further data collection and/or analysis are unnecessary” (p. 1), and sampling continued until saturation was reached (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I will know saturation had been reached when no new data, themes, and coding present themselves within the findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Purposeful sampling is useful in qualitative research because the researcher is able to select the participants and the setting that would be most conducive to formulating an understanding of the central phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, for my study I used criterion sampling to ensure that all my potential participants have experienced the same phenomena (Creswell, 2013) with that phenomena being social-emotional learning. Also, the participants were selected outside of the two networks of schools that I support to reduce perceived or actual influence over participant response (Turner, 2010).

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained for this study and the application for approval can be found in Appendix A. This transcendental phenomenological

study on the lived personal and professional experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning has also been approved through Jones school district's Director of Research and Evaluation. This approval includes access to participants, access to conduct classroom observations, access to hold semi-structured interviews and a focus group with the participants on district property, as long as I as the researcher conducts this study on personal time (such as the use of vacation time or personal days). Approval from Jones school district to conduct this study can be found in Appendix B. Official approval from IRB can be found in Appendix C.

Prior to garnering participants for the study, network superintendents and building principals were of the study during the monthly principal network meeting. I secured five minutes of time to share the purpose of the research and provide each principal information pertinent to the study in the form of the request to participate letter (See Appendix D). This informational session at the network principal meeting will occur the month prior to actually securing participants.

Recruitment for this study was two-fold. Building principals were asked to voluntarily forward the request to participate letter to his or her middle grade teachers. If the building principal chose to do this, I asked the principal to copy me on the email that was sent to the staff regarding participation in the study. Interested participant names were forwarded to me by the building principal or the interested participant emailed me directly.

Once the pool participants had been secured, I as the researcher vetted them. This vetting process included ensuring the participant was certificated and the participant has been in the district for at least two years to ensure that the participant has had professional exposure to SEL. Once the participants were vetted, an introductory letter was sent out to secure and finalize the

participant list (See Appendix E). Email communication was utilized to set up a mutually agreed upon time to discuss the study in person. I personally visited each participant and secured a signed Informed Consent (See Appendix F) as well as set up mutually agreed times for the interview process and two observations. The agreed upon dates and times for the interviews and observations were logged into Microsoft Outlook Calendar. Each building principal that had a participant involved in the study as well as the network superintendent received a hard copy of the interview and observation schedule.

The initial semi-structured interview took place prior to the first observation and lasted between 30-60 minutes in a setting that was free from distraction and was based on the participant's preference of location. The interview sites included the participant's classroom, or a meeting room within the school. The interview occurred two to three days prior to the first observation. The interview was recorded using a voice recording app on the phone and permission for this interview recording was obtained through the Informed Consent document. The pre-observation interview questions can be found in Appendix G. The purpose of the pre-observation interview was to elicit information from the participant about their historical experience with SEL from a personal lens. Also, the initial interview allowed the researcher to gather information from the participant regarding how he or she believed SEL impacts academics, culture, and climate.

After the initial interview, I conducted a classroom observation of the participant based on the mutually agreed time that was entered into Microsoft Outlook calendar. The building administrator received a hard copy of the interviews and observations and was also included on the Microsoft Outlook Calendar invite. The observation was held within a two-week time frame. Data was collected through video recording in which all students present in the classroom had to

have a video release form on file with the district. If the student did not have a video release form on file with the district, the principal was contacted to see if the student can be excused from class for the duration of the filming. During the filming no student had to be removed. Data was also collected using field notes from an adaptation of the the Roller & Lavrakas (2015) observation guide. The observation guide can be found in Appendix H. Written permission from the author to use this tool can be found in Appendix I.

The post observation interview occurred 1-2 days after second classroom observation in a setting that was free from distraction based on the participants' choice of location. Sites included the participant's classroom, and a meeting room within the school building. The questions for the post-observation interview can be found in Appendix G. Length of interview was between 30-60 minutes. Interviews were recorded using sound recording application on a phone. Participant permission to be recorded was secured through signing of the Informed Consent.

A focus group was held two weeks after post-observation interview. The focus group consisted of participants who were included in the observations and interviews. The focus group took place in room 224 of Jones school district's professional development center. This space was secured through reservation. A Microsoft Calendar Invite was sent to each participant of the date and time. The length of time for the focus group was 60 minutes. The session was recorded visually to ensure accurate data collection and permission to record participants is included in the Informed Consent. The questions for the focus group can be found on Appendix G. I as the researcher was the moderator for the focus group through.

The video tapes, field notes, and scripts from semi-structured interviews and the focus group were reviewed as many times as needed to gain clear perception of the data. Data from the

interviews and observations were transcribed to determine themes and patterns of data. Results and conclusions were shared with participants for member checking. These results were shared individually in a face to face meeting will occurred at the building in which the participant teaches. I corresponded via email on the district server to arrange a mutually acceptable time to disclose the study results. Thank you notes were sent to each participant as well as building principal for being part of the study. This was sent via school courier mail. The aforementioned procedural steps were the framework for how the study was carried out.

The Researcher's Role

I hold the role of “human instrument” within this phenomenological study as I both collected and analyzed the study data (Creswell, 2013). Although I am an administrator within the district where the study was carried out, I did not have influence over the chosen participants due to their school sites being outside of the networks I support. I do advocate for social-emotional learning within my network sites and hold a particular viewpoint that social-emotional learning can improve student achievement while decreasing negative student behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011). Through my chosen approach of transcendental phenomenology, I bracketed out my biases and assumptions about social emotional learning to allow a non-judgmental interpretation to occur (Creswell, 2013). Also known as the epoche process, I must be free of an established mind set, beliefs, and experiential knowledge of SEL as much as one can be who is embedded in the work (Moustakas, 1994). This was to ensure that I kept an open mind and also kept receptive when the participants shared about their experience.

One way in which I bracketed out my biases and assumptions about social-emotional learning is through performing the interviews and observations outside of my assigned networks of schools. I did not access data pertaining to these schools in regard to SEL measurements so as

to not shape how I viewed the school and solidify pre-conceived thoughts that I have about SEL implementation within that particular school. Also, I did not phrase or word my interview and focus group questions in a manner that would lead the participant to answer in a way that would fit my assumptions about SEL. Finally, I kept and maintained a reflexive journal throughout the duration of the study to help identify preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Data Collection

“Data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions (Creswell, 2012, p.110) The primary source of data within a phenomenological research study derives from interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Data collection began through the selection of the participants and utilized purposeful sampling to ensure that diversity and study qualifications were met (Creswell, 2013). My three methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews, focus group, and an announced observation.

Initial Interview

Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were used to elicit informative answers from the participants about their experiences (Creswell, 2013). The participants signed an informed consent prior to the interview and I reiterated to them the purpose of the study and what purpose the findings will serve (Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), the first challenge is to design questions that will be of personal and social significance to the participant and formulated in a clear and concise way. My passion, intense interest, and review of the literature for my research topic helped me to construct well designed open interview questions. These open-ended questions are aligned to the research questions and grounded in the empirical and theoretical literature.

Prior to the actual interviewing of participants, I vetted and piloted my interview questions for the purpose of refinement (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of piloting these questions was to evaluate if there were any bias present in the construction of the questions (Creswell, 2013). Another goal for piloting the questions was to gather feedback and advice on the relevance of the constructed questions (Creswell, 2013). My interview questions were expertly reviewed by Jones school district's CASEL consultants. I also vetted the questions with urban middle school teachers who are in my network of schools that I oversee. During the vetting process, I looked to gain clarification on if my constructed interview questions were concrete, concise, and had clear on meaning.

The setting of the interview was in a comfortable, neutral setting free from distraction (Creswell, 2013). I allowed the participant to choose the setting of the interview within reason. The interviews were recorded using a recording application on my phone. The phone was password protected with myself as the researcher only knowing the passcode. Another phone with a recording application was also used to ensure that the participant was accurately recorded. That phone was also password protected with me as the researcher only knowing the passcode.

Two interviews were conducted with each participant. One interview occurred prior to the observation and the other will occurred after the observation. The interviews lasted anywhere from 30-60 minutes. The following interview questions were designed to gather information that answered the research questions which framed this study. The initial interview questions gathered participant data that aligned in seeking the answer to RQ1 and RQ2. Given the fluid nature of qualitative research, additional probing questions were asked in order to explore the participant's responses on a deeper level. Examples of these probing questions are included after each question.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Thank you for joining me for this interview. If you wouldn't mind stating your name and the grade level you teach I would greatly appreciate it.
2. These next questions ask for you to talk about your personal experience with SEL. I appreciate your willingness to open up about your personal experience with social-emotional learning. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to recognize and manage your emotions?
 - a. If yes, Please tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, Please tell me more about what hindered this process.
3. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to set and achieve positive goals?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
4. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to demonstrate care and concern for other?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
5. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to establish and maintain positive relationships?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
6. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned make responsible decisions?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.

7. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to set handle interpersonal conflicts in a positive manner?
 - a. If yes, please tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
8. Now, let's talk a bit about the value of SEL in the classroom. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students recognize and manage their emotions?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
9. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students set and achieve positive goals?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
10. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students demonstrate care and concern for others?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
11. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students establish and maintain positive relationships?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
12. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students make responsible decisions?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.

- b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 13. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students to positively handle interpersonal situations?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 14. In closing, what else would you like me to know about your personal or professional experiences with SEL?

Post Observation Interview

A week after the last observation occurred, a post-observation interview was conducted. This interview was semi-structured as well. The goal of the interview was to gather the participant's reflection on how SEL was incorporated into the routine, dialogue, and lesson presentation as well as potential challenges of SEL implementation. The post observation interview questions sought to gather participant data to help formulate answers to RQ3 and RQ4. The questions for the post-observation interview were as follows:

1. Thank you for joining me again. If you would please re-introduce yourself and state what grade level you teach I would greatly appreciate it.
2. Thank you for the introduction. These next questions ask about your professional experience with SEL particularly around challenges you may have faced. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to recognize and manage their emotions?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?

- b. If no can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 3. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to set and achieve positive goals?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 4. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to demonstrate caring and concern for others?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 5. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to establish positive relationships?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Were they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?

6. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to make responsible decisions?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
7. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students positively handle interpersonal situations?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
8. In closing, what else that you'd like me to know about your professional experiences with implementing SEL in the classroom?

The initial and post-observation interview questions were designed to elicit necessary information from the participant without establishing an environment where the participant felt subjugated to the interviewer (Creswell, 2013). With this concept in mind, question one was asked to create a level of comfort between participant and interviewer and allow honest dialogue to ensue from the participant.

Questions two through seven of the initial interview and questions were designed to gain a fundamental understanding and collect data on the participants' personal experience with social-

emotional learning particularly around the five core competencies. According to Moustakas (1994), it is personal experience that heavily shapes and formulates knowledge. Teachers' personal experiences heavily influence classroom management, instructional practices, and educational paradigm beliefs (Dunleavy & Dede, 2014; Olsen, 2015; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Questions two through seven aimed to understand what the participant personally believed about SEL through extracting information about his/her personal experience with SEL.

Question eight through thirteen of the initial interview asked the participants to reflect on their professional experience with social-emotional learning as it related to the five core competencies. The questions still tapped into personal belief around social-emotional learning but allowed for expounding on how the participants have seen the effects or lack thereof within their own professional setting. Although there is mounting research as to the benefits of SEL both in terms of academic performance and behavior (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2009; Sklad et al., 2012; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013), a teacher's personal experience and beliefs about a curriculum, strategy, or practice still heavily dictates the level of implementation and to what fidelity it is utilized (Bandura et al., 2001; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2015). These questions focus explicitly on participants' professional experience and allowed for a dialogue to ensue about how they perceive the core competencies of SEL to have impacted students.

Observations

Observation is one of the key ways in which data can be collected placing emphasis on noting and collecting data within the field utilizing the researcher's five senses (Creswell, 2013). My role as the human instrument was a nonparticipant observer. According to Creswell (2013), within this capacity the researcher is an outside from the group being studied. He or she

observes and takes notes from a distant proximity. Data is recorded without direct involvement with the participants or activity. I was an outsider from the classroom and therefore had no direct involvement with classroom routine and instruction. This enabled me to take notes and record data specifically regarding teacher approach to implementation of SEL without having to be integrated into the environment (Creswell, 2013). Observations were in accordance with recommendations provided by Creswell (2013) to create a protocol that utilizes descriptive and reflective notes as a means of logging data.

It is important to note for standardizing purposes within the study that all teachers who work for Jones school district have received SEL training at the beginning of each school year through district professional development. This professional development is typically an hour in length and expounds on the meaning of the five core competencies of SEL as well as very basic strategies on modeling and implementation. An observation of the participants within the classroom was conducted. The observation was visually recorded as agreed to by the teachers' union in order to capture the professional experience of the participant to the fullest measure as it relates to social-emotional learning. Each observation took 43 minutes as this is the normal length of a class period. Included in Appendix H is the observation tool that was used. The observation grid that was employed is adapted from the work of Roller & Lavrakas (2015) and is designed to record observable events that align to the construct of interest. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015) the grid can be a vital tool in ensuring that the major components are encapsulated by the researcher. During the observation, I took field notes on how the participant demonstrated SEL (if at all) during classroom instruction, management, and student interaction within that particular 43-minute class period. Indicators of this experience were categorized under one of the five core competencies that it most closely relates to. Experience in conjunction

with SEL was indicated through vocabulary use, modeling of appropriate strategies for behavior coping that is linked to the five core competencies, and direct SEL instruction through curriculum.

Focus Group

A focus group was used in this study to better understand the participants experience with SEL as it relates to their personal life as well as professional life within an urban middle school classroom. This was a face-to-face focus group that took place at Jones school district's professional development center in a reserved conference room after all the participants had their post-interviews. The focus group was conducted to enhance the study through collecting data dependent upon participants' attitudes, reactions, and experiences (Gibbs, 1997). The questions are as follows

1. Thank you all for joining me here today. As a teacher I know how precious and valuable your time is. If you wouldn't mind, please state your name, what you teach, and how many years you have been teaching.
2. These next few questions are going you focus on your professional expertise in regards to SEL. What advice would you give to a future teacher of SEL who may not have strong personal SEL skills?
3. Do you believe SEL instruction in the classroom is beneficial for students?
 - a. Why or why not?
4. What challenges are new teachers of SEL likely to face when implementing this curriculum in the classroom?
5. What advice would you give new teachers of SEL about how to overcome these challenges?

6. In closing, is there anything else that you'd like me to know about your personal or professional experiences with SEL?

The questions of the focus group were constructed to help garner data that were utilized to answer RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. Question one was designed to bring in familiarity within the group and establish a comfort level that fostered an environment for open and honest dialogue (Creswell, 2013). Questions two, three, four, and five address the professional experience of the participants in relation to the foundational tenants of SEL. Addressing perceived challenges of implementation can create dialogue which fosters action to address those challenges in a productive manner (Yoder, 2014).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for my study included the organizing of data, memoing, and coding. The phenomena that is central to this study was determined through investigation of the participants' personal and professional experience with social-emotional learning. Themes and patterns of data emerged through a thorough reading and transcription of the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This repetitive process allowed me to deeply immerse myself within the data. Field notes from class observations were also utilized with the aforementioned methods to develop themes and codes that support data analysis.

Organizing the Data and Memoing

According to Creswell (2013), responses to interviews should be organized by the researcher utilizing pencil and paper method or technology. Responses to interview questions both within the individual interviews and focus group were transcribed and recorded by me as the researcher in order to analyze the data for themes and significant statements. Creswell (2013) also suggests that memoing, short phrases, key ideas and concepts should be utilized for succinct clarity. I employed this technique to take the central phenomena and align emerging

categories for validation as well as developing categories that need to be further developed (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenological Reduction and Coding

Qualitative data analysis is rooted in classifying, describing, and interpreting data so that codes and categories can be established (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Phenomenological Reduction was utilized that included epoche, the putting aside preconceived ideas and judgments to remain unbiased and horizontalization, ensuring every statement has equal value (Moustakas, 1994). The two semi-structured interviews required me to bracket myself out of the experience so that I could set aside my personal judgments based on my own experiences with SEL (Moustakas, 1994). Since both interviews were recorded and transcribed by me as the researcher, I listened to each statement so that the horizontalization of the data brought to the surface how my participants experienced the phenomenon. From the horizontalization, the significant statements were grouped into themes related to personal and professional experience with social-emotional learning competencies (Moustakas, 1994). The textural description of what happened and the structural description of how the experience happened was brought to the surface to gain understanding of the participants overall experience with social-emotional learning (Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh, & Marlow, 2011). From the themes, textural and structural description the essence of these shared experience emerged (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis was conducted through the coding program ATLAS.ti 8

Data analysis for the observations stemmed from my descriptive and reflective notes taken during the classroom observation. The logged data was evaluated for significant statements the participant made during the observed timeframe and then coded and categorized by themes. These overall themes came from the interview analysis, notes and data collected

during the classroom observation, and analysis of data elicited from the focus group. The observations, focus group, and semi-structured interviews allowed for a rich, thick description of the overall essence of the participants experience to emerge.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of a study must be established in order to consider the study's worth. This is done through establishing credibility and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility can be defined as confidence in the validity of the findings and transferability can be defined as the findings can be applied outside of the study in multiple contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It is also to be noted that establishing credibility is one of the most important elements in maintaining the trustworthiness of a study (Shenton, 2004). The extent to which results from a study can be applied in other situations and larger populations is known as transferability and it helps to establish trustworthiness through external validation (Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness is established through multiple means within this study including credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the researcher's level of confidence in how accurate and true the study's results are and is established through triangulation (Creswell, 2013). An observation, two semi-structured interviews, and the focus group allowed corroborating evidence to emerge involving the topic of study. Also to establish credibility within the study, member checks are used (Creswell, 2013). In asking the participants to lend their perspective and voice to my findings and interpretations, it is ensured that I maintain accuracy with the results. Member checking occurred throughout the study process but was heavily involved during the rough draft of formulating the study's results (Creswell, 2013). Peer review was incorporated through the

reliance on Jones school district CASEL consultants. The consultants held peer debriefing sessions on a manageable and agreed upon schedule by both the consultants and the researcher.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is a method utilized within research that employs a process to audit the study in order for it to be valid as well as ensuring that the study can be replicated (Koch, 2006). Dependability was increased through the use of external audits. The audit was performed by the district's CASEL consultants. These consultants are the district's coaches on social-emotional learning as assigned through contractual means between Jones school district and CASEL. Jones district consultants' former positions prior to coming to CASEL include a superintendent of a large urban school district and an SEL director for a large urban school district. I asked the CASEL consultants to evaluate and examine the process as well as the final product of the study for assessment of accuracy. I as the researcher also utilized detailed observational notes, an observational and interview template, as well as voice recorder to help ensure consistency with data collection.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the level in which the conclusions of qualitative research can be generalized and remain applicable to other situations or circumstances (Shenton, 2004). Transferability was established through the writing of rich, thick descriptions of the participants and setting of the study as well as through maximum variation of the sample. The description highlighted physicality, movement, and activity of the participants as well as other pertinent information (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I interconnected the details using specific quotes, adjectives, and action verbs (Creswell, 2013)

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were kept at the forefront for the duration of the study. Some important ethical concerns that surfaced and needed to be addressed within the study were anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). IRB approval was granted before the study could be carried out to ensure ethical treatment of the participants. Prior to the study, informed consent was obtained from each participant detailing the nature of the study as well as obtaining district approval. Data was kept secure on a password coded laptop to ensure the privacy and security of the participants' information. Pseudonyms were used for participant names and school locations. A final ethical consideration that was noted was the position I hold within the district. As a district administrator, I did not use my position as power or leverage to coerce the participants in answering in a certain manner that would line up with district idealism.

Summary

A transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to ascertain a deeper level of knowledge as it relates to urban middle school teachers' experience with social-emotional learning and the challenges of implementation. There were approximately 12 teachers from an urban school district in northeast Ohio who participated in the study and these participants were identified using purposeful sampling. Participants were provided informed consent to take part in this study. Data collection consisted of two semi-structured interviews, an observation, and a focus group. Phenomenological reduction was used to analyze the data yielded by the participants to gain understanding and identify the essence of their experiences. The participants' experiences were analyzed using transcription, memoing and coding.

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checks, external audits and a rich, thick description. Ethical consideration were a priority throughout the course of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived personal and professional experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning. Chapter Four presents a description of the twelve participants, provides responses to the guiding research questions, and a summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Participants

The twelve participants for this study are certificated urban middle school teachers who have been teaching in Jones school district for at least two years and who taught either a core subject, elective, or is an intervention specialist. The range of teaching experience (for the participants) within the district ranged from two years to 26 years. The gender make-up of the participants included three males and nine females. The racial make-up of the participants included three Black teachers, seven Caucasian teachers, and two Hispanic Teachers. In order to honor the anonymity of the participants and protect their identity, pseudonyms that are realistic and culturally appropriate were utilized in lieu of the participant's actual name.

Alyssa

Alyssa is a white female teacher in her late twenties and is a middle school intervention specialist. She has been teaching in Jones school district for 6 years. Alyssa is a very energetic person who expressed that she grew up a home that discouraged interaction with different races even though she was raised in an urban setting. She explained

I wasn't secluded from people who were of another race. We were surrounded by people

from all demographics. It was just downloaded to me that “those” people could not be trusted and were responsible for much of the crime in our city. I grew up almost fearing people who were not white. I don’t think I ever thought them to be inferior, just maybe dangerous. It was definitely frowned upon if as a child I was even playing with other kids who didn’t look like me.

Alyssa stated that it was her teachers who demonstrated that this type of racist thought was wrong. She said that actually growing up in a home where being prejudice was encouraged is what made her want to teach in an urban environment.

I love that SEL highlights social awareness and it’s straight talk about it. My colleagues look just like me (white, middle class, and female). I know that there are misconceptions out there and preconceived notions about what our kids can and cannot do based solely on how they look. I want to change that. I want to throw a cog in the system. I’m changing something that’s bigger than me and I will fight like hell to ensure that right is done for our kids.

Alyssa has a passion for social justice which she said also stems from how she views she was raised “incorrectly”. Alyssa believes that SEL is very important to teaching but how this looks across each and every classroom is different.

Dante

Dante is a black male in his early thirties who teaches math in Jones school district. He has been a teacher in the district for seven years. He expressed that he went into teaching because as a student he did not have teachers who “looked like him” and could not connect with him on a cultural level. Throughout Dante’s educational experience as a student he experienced what he considers educational racism. Dante describes this as white teachers having low

expectations of black students particularly black males. He considered himself smart but said he tried not to demonstrate his intelligence because of the over the top reactions he would get from his teachers.

Dante wants to change the experience for children of color in the education system in terms of having teachers who held high expectations as well as being a positive role model. Dante's demeanor during both the semi-structured interviews was serious and matter-of-fact, however, during the classroom observation his interactions with the students were very energetic and entertaining. Dante had mixed emotions about social-emotional learning but believed it could work as long as it was not marketed as a means to indoctrinate the students with white middle-class values like some character education programs. He believes that SEL delivered from a white middle class lens can create more harm for children of color because it can cause feelings of inferiority.

Eliot

Eliot is a white male teacher in his early thirties and is a middle school intervention specialist. He has taught 2 years in the Jones school district but has been an educator for a total of ten years. Eliot attributed much during the interview to how he was raised as a Jehovah's Witness. His understanding of right and wrong came from fear based tactics. As a result of his upbringing, Eliot said he never learned the inherent value of doing good, only the consequential elements of choosing wrong. He explains,

With my upbringing I was not allowed to experiment and choose "wrong". I was expected to be perfect. I was a reflection on my family and my faith. I still have trouble even today with doing the right thing because it's naturally good rather than because I'm

fearful of consequences. When we talk about relationship skills and responsible decision making I'm uncomfortable with it. I'm still learning if that makes sense.

Although he is not practicing that faith anymore, he stated that it molded much of his foundational values and core beliefs. In certain aspects, Eliot does not see his upbringing as faulty because it enabled him to have concrete self-management skills. During the interviews he was very pragmatic and straight forward. Eliot stated that he was still continually trying to fill in gaps with social-emotional learning because his upbringing was very different from the thematic elements of SEL.

Janet

Janet is a white female teacher in her early fifties who teaches middle school visual arts. She has been teaching in Jones school district for 24 years. Janet has a very meek and mild personality with a soft voice as exemplified through her soft tone throughout the interviews. She describes her childhood as being pretty normal and her parents as loving and nurturing. Janet said of her childhood

I loved my kid experience. We went to church every Sunday. We ate meals together without, you know, all of the distractions that families have now days. I feel bad for a lot of these kids because I know they're missing out on family experiences that I had.

Janet enjoys teaching but feels that the profession has changed. She does not perceive this change to be for the better as the focal point of education is now on test scores rather than application and child development. She feels that elective and special classes such as hers are pushed to the side and almost viewed as unnecessary. Janet vocalized that the elective classes sometimes do not get the respect that they should within the educational arena. She has a high

regard for SEL but does not want it to be just sent to elective classes for concrete implementation. If the district is expecting full implementation of SEL than she is of the opinion that core classes should be just as responsible for content delivery. Janet believes SEL is beneficial for her students but she also readily admits that she does not always understand the trauma that the children bring into the classroom. For her SEL does not always address how to engage students affected by complex trauma so she takes it upon herself to continually research how to engage and help her students through difficult situations.

Jessica

Jessica is a white female in her early twenties who serves as a gifted teacher for middle school in Jones school district. She has been a teacher in Jones school district for three years. Jessica described herself as a cluttered person and her classroom organization skills matched her housekeeping skills. She however did say during the interview while she laughed that she holds her students to a higher expectation of being organized and therefore it is a classic double standard scenario. Jessica admitted that she did have classroom management issues but it stemmed from her caring too much for her kids. She readily admitted that she struggles with the plight many of her students are in which can cause her to have a sympathetic lens to some maladaptive behaviors. During the classroom observation it was very apparent that there was a high degree of comfort for the students in the myriad of classroom interactions. This comfort sometimes led to students not taking Jessica seriously or conflict with other classmates.

Lisa

Lisa is a hispanic female in her late twenties who teaches science in Jones school district. She has been a teacher in Jones school district for 6 years. Lisa believes that education has

become very serious due to standardized testing and that fun has been taken out of the student's educational experience. She stated

You can look at the faces of the kids and see that they aren't having fun. I wasn't in school that long ago and I think it has changed so much. Part of relationship skills are interacting with others and we have taken that away from them. SEL has given me an avenue in because if my administrator ever questions why I'm doing things a certain way I can validate it through SEL.

Lisa's main goal for her classroom is for her students to have fun. Her philosophy is if they were in fact having fun, they would be more apt to learn the content. During the interviews, Lisa would often crack jokes and then follow up with "I'm sorry that's inappropriate.....right?"

During the classroom observation, Lisa engaged her classroom lesson in a manner where most of the students seemed to enjoy how she presented the content. She built in opportunities for her students to interact with each other and then explicitly draw out which interpersonal skills the students were building such as collaboration, compromise and conflict resolution. She would take a "joke break" during the lesson in which she would tell a corny joke and then pick back up with the content. One thing that stood out with Lisa's classroom is the amount of laughing that was free to take place.

Matthew

Matthew is a white male teacher in his mid-forties and is a middle school intervention specialist. He taught for 18 years total but this was his second year in Jones school district. His previous teaching experience was in an alternative school for children who had severe behavioral needs. Matthew is very philosophical in nature and would respond to questions highlighting and linking philosophical thought from Socrates, Aristotle, Aquinas and others with his perception of

SEL. He strongly believed that SEL was the result of personal experience and it is something that cannot be taught. Matthew believed that all learning including SEL is experiential which in his opinion is why many of his children struggle, particularly with SEL. He articulated that what is being taught and modeled in the classroom is the antithesis of their life experience. He acknowledge that his upbringing was vastly different from what his students upbringing is and this can create an unintentional disconnect. Most of the students that Matthew has come from single parent homes and are considered living below the poverty level. Matthew came from a two parent household in which he stated “we weren’t wealthy but we definitely were not poor. I definitely grew up, like, upper middle class.” He stated that disconnects between the students and himself come from his insufficient understanding on what it means to lack. Matthew came over from his alternative school placement to Jones School District even though it required a pay cut because he was burnt out. He explained

Teacher self-care is not a priority. In my former placement that was the case for sure.

Socrates if you don’t know said it perfectly when he said why are we putting everything into it for money and honor sacrificing wisdom and care of self? Of course I paraphrased but you get the idea. SEL teaches many things but self-awareness is huge. Kids need to know what their mental and physical being is telling them. I know I did!

Matthew still greatly enjoys teaching and attributes much of that to his placement change.

Natalie

Natalie is a black female in her early twenties who serves as a middle school intervention specialist in Jones school district. She has been a teacher in Jones school district for two years. Natalie believes that the classroom environment should be continually positive. Since she perceives herself to be a positive person it rests on her to create that type of environment. In her

current building Natalie expressed that it is hard to maintain the positive climate sometimes because she co-teaches and doesn't have the full autonomy to construct the classroom as she would like it.

I'm team SEL. However, when you work with another adult who does not have the same buy-in or view as you do it creates conflict. I think people have done good talking SEL as if it's happening consistently. I think my current situation shows what it's like to talk as opposed to do. I do SEL, he talk it. Kids notice that.

During the interviews Natalie would speak of her students in only positives even when she was talking about negative behavior manifestations. Her emphasis was on how the students are working to be able to better control their big emotions but it doesn't happen successfully all the time. Natalie compared it to baseball (as she loves baseball) and stated " People always looking for the homerun and often miss the singles. Singles mean progress and you're getting there. You're on base. We need to look at progress through that lens and I think we would find more wins than losses".

Patrice

Patrice is a black female in her early 50's who teaches middle school Reading/ELA in Jones school district. She has been a teacher in Jones school district for 16 years but has been a teacher for 26 years overall. Patrice holds very deep convictions about her Christian faith and believes that her career as a teacher is her calling from God and the students are her mission field. This belief was exemplified when she stated

People keep on asking me how do I keep doing it, when am I going to retire, things like that. I say the Lord is not through with me and I stay until He says Patrice you're done

now. The kids need me for sure they do. I'm a mama to them you know what I'm saying? I'm teaching them right from wrong. You go on and call it SEL because I call it the Lord's work.

Even after many years in the field Patrice said her students brought her joy. When she gets jaded about her profession she remembers the scripture verse Isaiah 40:31 which states "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." During the interviews her demeanor was happy throughout the process and she would interject how her Christian values aligned to what she believed SEL to be. During the classroom observation she engaged the students on a manner that was nurturing even when there were problematic behaviors that were manifested by students.

Regina

Regina is a hispanic female in her late thirties who teaches middle school Reading/ELA in Jones school district. She has been a teacher in the district for 15 years but she stated she has not stayed at one building for more than 3 consecutive years. She gets bored staying in one place too long and also stated with a chuckle that administrators and her do not always see eye to eye so she "keeps it moving". Regina was explicit in stating that we try and teach SEL skills to children but that adults are lacking with the same skills.

Regina was lighthearted throughout the interviews but was very emphatic when she would talk about the necessity of rules and how children need to have firm structure. She believed that her view of classroom management and SEL sometimes conflict as exemplified when she stated

SEL is not necessarily the fix to everything (although the district thinks it is). Don't get me wrong it's definitely important but, well I know this opinion is probably not popular but there needs to be somewhat of a healthy fear if that makes sense. I believe that SEL can work in most situations but sometimes the kids need to see me lose my cool to know I mean business. Maybe it's how I was raised but you know that's how I see it.

Regina really prides herself on her classroom management skills and that her students respected her even if they were not fond of her. She also stated her administrators compliment her classroom management. During her classroom observation her demeanor was very stern throughout the lesson. She later acknowledged that she believes if the teacher displays too many fluffy emotions it could be misconstrued as weakness by the students.

Sarah

Sarah is a white female in her early thirties who teaches middle school science for Jones school district. Sarah has been teaching for ten years in Jones school district. Sarah is a "tell it like it is" person who said that she is blunt and will probably swear during the interviews. During the interviews Sarah was very passionate in expressing her opinion which often times did include the use of profanity. Sarah felt like she was very relatable with the students because she came from very similar situations that her students come from.

I'm not going to sugarcoat it, I came from a f***ed up situation. My dad abused everyone and my mom let him. No food, getting the hell beat out of you...yeah it was bad. I was the caretaker for my sisters so I shielded them from a lot. I took a lot of shit that I don't want to talk about.....so I won't. I know these kids can be resilient and succeed. I had to and so can they.

Sarah stated with a laugh that she can be too honest at times (she says she earned that right) because many people don't like to hear truth and for her that's a problem. During the classroom observation Sarah's demeanor with the kids was calm but also matter of fact. The students respected her directives and complied. As the observer I could tell that it was a classroom that had fostered an environment of mutual respect between adult and student.

Tammy

Tammy is a white female teacher in her late forties who teaches middle school Reading/ELA for Jones school district. Tammy has been teaching for 18 years in Jones School District. Tammy was shy during the interview and described herself as a quiet person who does not like to talk in front of groups (adults). During the interviews she described trauma that she experienced within her own life and how this enhanced the connection she had with her students because she could relate to their experiences. Tammy would not delve into the trauma she experienced but rather just said it was significant. Tammy described herself as being a "bitch" in the classroom, but believed her students to still love her because she provided tight structure. She believed that rules and procedures especially teaching in an urban environment where absolutely necessary. Tammy believes in SEL but is not "head over heels" for it like some others in the district. To her self-management is the most important competency and that is the one she spends the most time teaching or demonstrating to her students. During the interviews Tammy had to be prodded to expound on some of her answers because they were brief in nature.

Results

The results from the data analysis of this transcendental phenomenological study are presented in the following sections. Data analysis was structured and grounded through the

research questions which were designed to understand the professional and personal experience of urban middle school teachers with social-emotional learning. The information included within the section, Theme Development, elaborates on the three primary themes that emerged from the data analysis with the five correlating sub-themes as it relates to the phenomenon. The information incorporated with the section research question response connects the data as derived from the participant interviews, classroom observations, and focus group to directly answer the information sought by the research questions. The data that is presented is a culmination of personal testimony from participants to capture their lived experience with the phenomenon.

Theme Development

As a result of the data analysis three themes emerged with five sub-themes. The three main themes include: (a) personal acquisition of SEL concepts (b) professional understanding of SEL and (c) classroom application of SEL. The themes were formulated after a thorough an in-depth review of transcripts from both the focus group and individual interviews. Also used for theme development were the observation notes that were collected and analyzed from classroom observations. As I read through the transcripts repeatedly, I coded each statement in regards to how it related and described the phenomenon under study. All statements that were relevant were pulled out and recorded in a separate document for further review and analysis. The coding of each statement and determining relevancy to the study required me to continually engage with rigorous inclusion of phenomenological reduction such as bracketing out internal biases, personal thoughts and emotions. In utilizing these separating mechanisms, I engaged in reflexive activity to separate myself from the lived experience being conveyed by the participants.

The procedural steps for a phenomenological study data analysis were used as established by Moustakas (1994, p. 122). These steps included (1) documenting all pertinent and relevant statements, (2) detailing and listing every non-repetitive/overlapping statement, (3) categorizing statements into units of meaning, (4) amalgamate the meaning units into themes. The themes that emerged from the data collection including interviews, observations, and a focus group are as follows: (a) personal acquisition of SEL (b) classroom application of SEL (c) professional understanding of SEL. These themes served as a framework for understanding the personal and professional experiences of urban middle school teachers implementing SEL in their classrooms. The themes and correlating sub-themes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes of SEL Experience

Theme	Sub-theme
Personal Acquisition of SEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEL Learned Through Modeling - Impact of Personal Trauma - SEL and Culture
Professional Understanding of SEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges of SEL implementation - SEL Learned Through Professional Development
Classroom Application of SEL	

Table 2 establishes the repeated words or phrases found throughout participant interviews, observations, and focus group that helped construct the themes.

Table 2

Significant Words and Phrases Repeated by Participants from Data

Theme	Thematic Cluster	Repeated Word or Phrase
<i>Theme I:</i> Personal Acquisition of SEL	SEL learned through modeling	I was never taught SEL Religious upbringing Family values My parents taught me My teacher showed me I was never shown I learned on my own
	Impact of personal trauma	Physically abused Sexually abused Triggers Drugs and alcohol I took care of me/us Impacted me I can relate to these kids Not supposed to be that way
	SEL and culture	Little interaction with different people Can't relate White people White teachers White values Racist
<i>Theme II:</i> Professional understanding of SEL	Challenges of SEL implementation	Not prepared No college classes Frustrated Confused Anxious Did not do SEL Learned SEL myself Expectation Lack of training How do I do this Need SEL classes in college District Training Principal Competing priorities

	SEL is cut out Not enough time Principal expectations
SEL learned through professional development	Explicit SEL instruction Importance of SEL Academics over SEL High quality professional development Teacher buy-in Relevant Differentiated Administrators need to attend Ongoing development SEL and academic integration
<i>Theme III:</i> Classroom Application of SEL	Improved student behavior Self-care Improved academic performance Routine and structure Self-management techniques Teaches emotional control Less angry No difference Internal skills

Personal acquisition of SEL. The first prominent theme that emerged from the data was how each participant historically experienced SEL in their own lives. Each participant articulated personal stories (family upbringing, religious beliefs, and influential individuals in their life) which helped to shape their understanding of the five core competencies within SEL. Although each participant acknowledged they had never heard of the term social-emotional learning prior to their teaching experience in Jones School District, the depth of knowledge about SEL would not be as great without their personal experience. During the focus group Matt explains,

All of us are sitting here and I think we all just said in one way or another that we had no

idea what this was growing up. I mean, you know, not what it was but what this was called. However not one of us has denied the importance of these SEL competencies when we look back at our personal lives even though we couldn't name it! Learning is experiential...I see you rolling your eyes over there Eliot but it's true. This proves it. We didn't know what it was called but we are all sitting here talking about how importance our youth was in shaping our understanding of SEL (Matt, focus group, May, 2018).

As participants shared their unique stories, their personal experiences and upbringing reflected heavily on their current perception of SEL. All the participants acknowledged (either through the semi-structured interviews or focus group) that the five core competencies were in some way or another present in their youth but not all competencies may have been taught or demonstrated correctly or appropriately.

Through the exploration of the theme, Personal Acquisition of SEL, three sub themes emerged. These included SEL learned through modeling, impact of personal trauma, and SEL and culture. These three sub-themes provide insight and depth into how the participants experienced the phenomenon on a personal level.

SEL learned through modeling. The participants all had diverse personal experiences with SEL that aided in comprehending the competencies. During the focus group nine of the participants stated that modeling of what we now label as SEL was typically done through religious upbringing, parent interaction, or through a teacher where a strong connection was made. Eliot and Patrice were two participants who linked their religious upbringing as having significant impact on how they experienced and comprehended the concepts of SEL. Eliot was raised as a Jehovah's Witness but is no longer practicing. He really emphasized that all five of

the core competencies of SEL were impacted though his religious experience. Some experiences he expressed were to the detriment of gaining mastery of the competencies and some to the benefit. One particular explicit acknowledgment of this is when Eliot stated the following,

There is no moral ambiguity in my former religion, right is right and wrong is wrong. I believe that this helped me tremendously with my responsible decision making skills because I had to constantly reflect on my actions. Now granted, it was fear of punishment that helped me garner skills for mastery with this competency but it definitely helped. I think where my religious upbringing didn't serve me well is in the area of social awareness. Talk about things like empathy, respect for others, and other stuff with this, it just didn't happen. The law was the law and you respected that, not necessarily people. I'm actually still working on this because I had to learn this myself because what was shown to me was not right (Eliot, interview, April, 2018).

Patrice was very open about her Christian faith and tied everything she talked about in regards to SEL with her religious upbringing experience. According to Patrice,

You call it SEL but I call it Jesus. My pastor taught me and still does all this stuff. Self-awareness is salvation. You need to know yourself and where you weak come to Jesus. Social-awareness is just love your neighbor, come on now. Self-management is don't give in to temptation that the devil be setting up for you. Relationship skills...just follow the Master and He will show you how to have good ones. You call this SEL I get that. I just call it following the Word. Jesus modeled it and I follow (Patrice, interview, May, 2018).

Modeling of SEL through parents or caretakers was had significant experiential impact on the participants. All participants stated that their parent or caretaker had significant influence

on their knowledge of relationship skills and self-management, particularly when SEL was modeled rather than just verbalized. One participant, Matthew, who firmly believed that personal experience could never be replaced with teaching expressed

Everything I believe and know has come from my experience particularly my home experience. My parents were amazing and I always remembered thinking, that's how I want my life to go. I mean, now I can go back and tell them they had great SEL skills right? No but seriously, they exemplified everything we're sitting here talking about.

That's how I learned this. That's how I grew in it (Matthew, interview, May, 2018).

If there was proper modeling in the home of what is now commonly referred to as SEL skills, it seemed to resonate with the participants and move them towards the desire to emulate those same skills. Natalie also expressed how her parents helped shape a positive view of SEL,

SEL was definitely learned though my home experience. My parents really were significant in how I came to embrace SEL. Unfortunately I don't see much of that with our kids here. By that I mean parents demonstrating SEL. I can say this is important because it really is, but if it's not in the home experience, these kids don't buy it (Natalie, interview, April, 2018).

Participants expressed that modeling of SEL competencies by parents, caretakers, religious figures, and teachers crafted their perception of SEL. There was a desire to emulate those skills. Modeling was not just a physical expression of the core competencies, but could also incorporate a modeling of ideology. This was especially true when it came to interactions and ideology about diversity.

The impact of personal trauma. In seven of the twelve participants, significant childhood trauma was experienced. This trauma included childhood poverty, physical abuse,

sexual abuse, witness to violent acts, and caretakers who abused drugs and alcohol. The trauma that these participants endured in their childhood shaped their worldview and perception on how one should operate in society. Dante spoke during his initial interview about his early life and how it relates to his experience with SEL. He touched on some of the trauma including being exposed to drugs, and growing up in poverty, but was reluctant to elaborate. In speaking about his childhood experience as it relates to SEL, Dante stated

You know how things supposed to be even when you're in dysfunction. You asking me about these competencies and I couldn't name them back then but I knew that's how it was suppose to go down. Now I didn't live like that early on. I formed my relationships by what was in it for me, I managed through intimidation, and the only social awareness I could bring up was who was tryin to kill me and be aware of that. See, we suppose to be teaching these kids these skills and I look at them, I see me. We got to make it real for their life situation. Lots of times what we trying to teach these SEL skills but they opposite of what they learning at home and in the streets. No offense but make it real, not caucasian. (Dante, interview, April, 2018).

The personal trauma that was experienced allowed for many of the participants to form an understanding of not necessarily how to engage and interact in the world around them, but rather how not to do it. This was exemplified through a statement Tammy made in which she said,

I didn't know what SEL was but I knew I did not want to be like them. I knew I would be different in how I respond to things and people. I vowed to myself to never hurt people like I was hurt. See, now we call that self-management. (Tammy, interview, April, 2018).

The data also revealed that many of the teachers who experienced significant childhood trauma were not comfortable or secure with the competency of self-awareness. One possible reason is the reflection process needed to be high-functioning in self-awareness requires the identification of emotions, accurate self-perception, strengths, and weaknesses (Schonert-Reichel, 2017). The identification of emotions can lead to linking those emotions with unpleasant events and cause a re-triggering of unpleasant feelings (Malta, Levitt, Martin, & Cloitre, 2009). Alyssa unashamedly stated that she was uncomfortable with teaching this competency because she herself does not feel she has the mental or emotional capacity to tackle the students' emotions when they do deep introspection. Alyssa explained,

I see so much value in mastering self-awareness, I really do. We have programs that help us do that with the kids such as PATHS and Second Step. When I'm teaching Second Step it adds a barrier for me so that I don't have to go there with my feelings. I don't feel like I'm good with self-awareness by choice so it's one of those do as I say not as I do type things. Honestly Joe, I'm self-aware enough to know that there are some things I don't want to re-open because if I do I won't be solid for the kids. But yeah..... self-awareness is valuable and the kids do need those skills.....maybe someone who is whole can be more effective than me at teaching that. (Alyssa, interview, May, 2018).

For some of the participants, SEL did not garner traction until later on in life. While those participants believed that the SEL skill set would have been beneficial in childhood, their adult experiences with SEL still impacted their perception of value and belief of the competencies. This is exemplified through Sarah's statement,

SEL was in no way shape or form communicated, modeled, shown, or whatever when I was a kid. In fact if you would have asked 20 year old Sarah what she thought of this shit

I would say who f***ing cares. But see I know now as an adult that these skills are so essential. I know I swear a lot but I can function as a normal adult. Not many in my screwed up family can say that. I'm holding down this job like a f***ing boss and I attribute that to self-management that dare I say I learned when I started dating my now husband. It's weird because my childhood screwed me up and adulthood straightened me out. That shit is backwards isn't it? Actually you know what, now that I'm on this track and thinking, I can thank all my adult experiences for shaping me SELly....I just made up a word for you. So, f*** you dad I turned out great (Sarah, interview, April, 2018).

Participants who experienced trauma within their early life highlighted how SEL helped to mitigate toxic effects from those traumatic experiences both behaviorally and cognitively. It also brought about a more empathetic mindset within those specific participants in how they engage their students who have been affected by complex trauma. Modeling characteristics from the competencies of self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills were prioritized within the classroom because of the recognized benefits these characteristics play in helping students to understand constructive ways to manage their emotions and actions.

SEL and culture. This sub-theme tied in strongly with the competency, social-awareness. Of the twelve participants only Lisa and Regina stated that they had exposure to diversity within their upbringing. Dante was the most vocal in what he considers a lack of teachers owning how incompetent they are in this area,

You can't fault people for not knowing what they don't know but you chose to teach here you know what I mean? Like you white and you know this school has little black boys and girls but now you wanna talk about how they don't respect you? You can't relate to them and they know it! Shit, stick me in a classroom full of white kids and I can't relate.

I'll own that. I know that. I'm not saying everyone like that but you preaching how socially woke you are but I'm gonna be honest I don't see that competency here (Dante, interview, April, 2018).

The data demonstrated that a lack of diverse interactions throughout childhood impacted the participants' self-efficacy toward modeling/teaching social-awareness in the classroom. One frequent phrase, "can't relate", appeared in conjunction with how participants viewed themselves with students in the classroom or situations the students were going through. Jessica explained

Growing up I had little exposure to ummmm well to black people. I would definitely say that my family put bad stigmas on them, umm which wasn't right you know. It's interesting because now all my kids are black that I teach. I'm being really honest, I still have to check myself sometimes from letting all the crap my parents said influence my interactions. Sometimes I do feel uncomfortable because I can't relate on some things. My parents weren't bad though, just ignorant I guess (Jessica, interview, May, 2018).

Tammy also had very little interaction with diverse peoples, but she took it upon herself to become self-educated about different cultures. She admitted that lack of diversity exposure may have been a hindrance at first with her teaching, but she explained

Yes I'm white and middle class. There were some disconnects in beginning but I figured it out because I wanted to, I was motivated to. I recognized that within myself and I'm not going to say I mastered cultural competency but I gave it a heck of a shot and that's all one can really do. I think my kids understand me and I understand them most days (Tammy, interview, May, 2018).

Some participants voiced a cultural disconnect with their teacher from their

experience as a student. Dante emotionally recalled one such experience,

I was a pretty smart kid, not gonna lie. Ms. Jenkins, man, she would have never guessed that about me cuz no one from the hood is suppose to know shit. I never let on I was smart. Hell no I didn't. She would say things to me like "Dante you gonna wind up in jail" or "Dante you gonna have eight kids turn out like you" It was ignorant bull shit. She really would just look down her ummmmm, well hell, her pointy white nose down at me in disgust. If someone had beef in class with someone she would just be like, "You boys know you just going settle this after school anyways so just save it for then".

I'm telling you man real, ignorant, bullshit right there (Dante, Interview, April, 2018).

Many participants stated that teachers they had during their student years were inept in social awareness. However, this verbal acknowledgement of witnessing ineptitude did not always translate to a change in practice within their own classroom. For example, one participant recalled her experience as a student in a particular class where minority students were being culturally appropriated. However, within her observation she would use statements such as "you're Muslim and you don't know this?" or "I don't see color, you're all my kids". Another participant classified one of his teachers as "horrible" because she was unable to resolve conflicts between herself and him. Yet during this participant's classroom observation he would say phrases such as "I'm still mad about last week for what you did so you're on a tight leash". Participants did not see the similar flaw in their own teaching practice.

While a positive, personal experience with SEL has the ability to enhance the classroom, a negative experience with SEL also can have a resounding impact that amplifies classroom engagement. Instances where a participant experienced a toxic event or interaction often led to a vocal commitment by the participant to not engage students or adults in the same manner.

Professional understanding of SEL. After participants gave voice to their personal experience with social-emotional learning, they moved into their experience with SEL from a professional standpoint. This seemed to be a natural transition from personal experience to professional experience as participants drew upon their individual understanding of SEL from historical occurrences and turned those occurrences into a professional working knowledge. Eliot highlighted this

I think it's safe to assume that this SEL thing is not common knowledge, yet it is all at the same time. What I mean is that growing up I learned things a certain way and that impacts how I operate on a professional level. SEL is not what I called it. It was taught to me that these are just values we live by. Now in the professional world and mine is teaching, I can give context to my personal life while giving a name to what I'm trying to model and instruct in my teaching. I have come to have understanding of this because of my teaching if that makes sense (Eliot, interview, April, 2018).

The depth of professional understanding with SEL primarily rested on the participants' willingness and interest to deepen SEL knowledge. Dante expressed reading books on equity because he viewed equity and SEL as "homies" and wanted to have real world application for SEL in his classroom that matched his values. Natalie used the word "peer pressure" to describe her reasoning for taking time to read more about SEL. She did not want to seem underdeveloped to her colleagues when it came to SEL knowledge.

Challenges of SEL implementation. There were two major challenges with SEL implementation that were voiced by all twelve participants. The first of these highlighted challenges was no formal training for SEL prior to teaching. During the focus group and also during the individual interviews it was emphasized that there is not much preparation given to

teachers prior to the classroom to help them ground their understanding of what SEL is. Regina stated,

Maybe that's why I don't have such a buy-in to this as my other colleagues. I feel that if it's worth doing then it would have been embedded in my core work. Now that was some time ago but still I would have heard something about it. Well anyways, maybe it's up and coming but for me I'm stuck in my ways, but its good stuff it is. I'm just stubborn (Regina, interview, May, 2018).

None of the participants in this study had any formal education or training with SEL prior to being hired by the district. Formal education with respect to this study refers to teacher preparation courses in higher education. Lisa explains feeling lost in her first year of teaching in the district

I didn't student teach in Jones. There is already a weight and uneasiness during the first year of teaching. When I was hired my very first exposure to SEL was during one of our mandatory professional development days and I was like what the hell is this? I was trained for science education not social-emotional stuff. I about panicked! I did a lot of my own research in it. Luckily I had colleagues who helped fill in the gaps for me with SEL and we had good in district training on it. I can't imagine if I would have not had support in understanding what it is. My question I guess would be why isn't this in teacher preparation courses? That was a curveball I did not see coming and it knocked me off my feet (Lisa, interview, May, 2018).

Matthew described that although he had been in the teaching field for eighteen years, Jones school district was different in terms of the SEL expectations. He explained

I'm going to be honest. My first year in district I just didn't do it. I got along great in

my teaching past without it so I just didn't see a need. Now, after being reflective I guess it just really came down to me not being comfortable with what SEL is and how I would make it fit in my classroom. Unfamiliarity really can stop progress. Good thing Jones provides opportunities for SEL training because I imagine if left to our own ways we would avoid it simply because we don't know it (Matthew, interview, May, 2018).

Even though Jones district offers in-house training regarding SEL, four of the participants during the focus group expressed that the provided training came from a lens that foundational SEL knowledge was already present. New teachers or teachers new to the district thought that administrators would see it as a red flag if they acknowledged that they did not have any understanding as to what SEL is. Natalie highlighted this point

No one else will say it but I will. We operate with a culture of fear around here. Either you know it or you don't. If you don't know it, don't admit it because it will come back to bite you. Bet that there is not one person in this room who knew what SEL was but if they was asked they said yes. That's a problem, or challenge, or whatever you want to call it. If I don't know it, I'm too fearful to ask. What's implementation lookin like if that's how we operate? I did not know SEL, so therefore I did not do. Once I gained some understanding then I started to figure out how to implement it (Natalie, focus group, May, 2018).

The number one reason cited by all twelve participants for why SEL is not done effectively is the lack of time. During my observations of the participants I only saw four explicit SEL lessons. In three of the observations I heard the participant tell the students that he/she "ran out of time" with the promise of engaging in SEL activities tomorrow. Five of the participants made no mention of SEL but mentioned to me that they do SEL during certain days

and the observation did not occur on that day. Given the obligations of the teacher to core classes (reading/ELA, math, science, social studies) SEL explicit instruction is often the first to be removed off the teaching load. Eliot explains

It's a constant struggle for what I can accomplish in class. When things like SEL bump up against tested subjects there's no way it's gonna win. I'm not evaluated on how functional my kids are with these competencies. I'm evaluated on how they produce on the test. It's sad man, it really is. So yeah, SEL is the first on the chopping block (Eliot, interview, May, 2018).

Aligned with the lack of time for teaching SEL is the administrative prerogative on how teacher instructional time is spent. Seven out of twelve participants indicated that they have new administrators who have come from outside the district and are unfamiliar with SEL. Building leadership is one of the most important factor for how initiatives will be implemented within a building (Reform Support Network, 2015). Out of the twelve participants, nine stated that they would not go against their principal's wishes in how their instructional time should be spent, even if they believed material such as SEL should get more attention. Alyssa explains

I really value SEL and have personally seen the impacts that it can make. We have a new administrator who is not from Jones. I think he is good but he came here with a job and that was to get this school turned around (academically). When he comes in for formal and informal observations he is not looking for SEL. I know because I got dinged on my eval for SEL. Yeah I could fight that, counter it, whatever because SEL is suppose to be occurring but at the end of the day he is still my supervisor with the power to make my day to day hell. I'm going to comply with what he wants (Alyssa, interview, April, 2018).

Principal expectations of how time should be spent in the classroom can strongly support or discourage SEL implementation. Another example of this is demonstrated in Jessica explanation of SEL time restraints coupled with administrative expectations

For one thing there is never enough time in the day to do what needs to be done. If the principal or leadership team in general does not buy in to SEL then its sunk. Luckily this year I have a principal who believes in SEL. I didn't the two previous years. I would be in meetings with him when downtown would come to do their thing and he would say we were doing SEL but we weren't. In fact, when I brought up SEL in a staff meeting he stated that while that's important, it's not the rigor he's looking for. Basically class time could only be spent on academics and if you wanted to do SEL it had to be on with individual students on your own time. Yeah...who has time for that (Jessica, interview, April, 2018).

The mere perception of a building administrator that SEL should not be on the same pedestal as academics impacted how teachers conducted day to day SEL instruction. Administrator's perception of instructional time trumped how the teacher wished to spend their instructional time with the integration of SEL.

SEL learned through professional development. All twelve participants agreed that Jones district needed to continue with professional development that builds and increases teacher capacity with social-emotional learning. Even Regina (who stated she does not really do SEL) believed that professional development was necessary. In response to institutions of higher learning not offering courses in SEL, the burden to educate teachers falls on the district. This is

where most of the incoming professional educators have first exposure to SEL. Alyssa described the need for relevant professional development

There needs to be differentiated pd for SEL. It use to be this is what SEL is. We Still need that SEL 101 type pd for newbies in the district including admin. However, for most of us we are past the “what it is” stage. The professional development should evolve to fit the need. Like now I want to know more about integration. We need to stay ahead of the “I don’t know how” excuse. For those coming into Jones as new hires that is a valid excuse because I didn’t know. But, once you’re here there are many supports to get you the SEL know how, mainly through pd. Also, I know this will be on record but I don’t care. Administration needs to have their own separate pd on the value of SEL. They aren’t sitting in there with us during the sessions and I think it should be a uniform message and we progress as a whole group not just as a compartmentalized group (Alyssa, interview, May, 2018).

All twelve of the participants also believed that it was the district’s job to support and develop teachers with SEL. If SEL is what is expected in Jones District, then it should not be on the teacher to find their own way. However, nine of the twelve participants did say that the teacher should be vocal to their administration in letting them know that they need more support/training with SEL. Janet explained,

I’m more of the ummm senior member of our teaching faculty. I am known to be the mouthpiece for our staff on certain things. I have in the past spoke to our principal about more SEL training or refreshers. I think this is important to keep in the forefront of our thinking. If we are linking this to overcoming challenges not being stagnant is vital. If SEL or anything for that matter becomes stale the want and desire to do it wanes.

Have to keep it relevant, interesting, and framed as essential (Janet, interview, May, 2018).

The quality of professional development impacts how SEL is applied within the classroom.

Classroom application of SEL. Tangible application for SEL, particularly in the classroom, was the final theme that emerged from the data. SEL was viewed as a sort of enigma in terms of what it should look like or be to participants who were unfamiliar with it. Lisa stated during her interview

I was really thinking to myself what is this suppose to look like. What are my outcomes? We didn't have an actual curriculum for middle school until about five years ago. I Remember my first year asking around about SEL and what I should do and my colleagues said basically just do whatever, soooo yeah it was no help. I guess I interpreted what it should be on my own based on the competencies. The kids I think enjoyed it but who knows maybe I just told myself that *laughs* (Lisa, interview, May, 2018).

SEL was really left to the teacher for interpretation on how it should be applied in the classroom. Participants were vocal that in the beginning stages, there was not much direction at the middle school level for implementation. Tammy explained this sentiment,

I think when we first heard of SEL in the district it was viewed as an elementary thing. The elementary teachers received an SEL curriculum and I felt that they were the ones to get the training. I mean not that we weren't included, but it was like for us, here is SEL go do it. I would ask my colleagues what they were doing and it almost became a joke, like, just go make it up, so I did. The district is much more inclusive of us middle school teachers now, although sometimes I still just make it up, unless of course that's not what

we're suppose to do *laughs* (Tammy, interview, May, 2018).

Other participants echoed these sentiment of not having a full idea of what it would look like in the classroom until Jones district started to demonstrate SEL and academic integration. Jessica explained

I think the district knew we were struggling with what this looked like in the classroom.

When they started to put an emphasis on integration it gave us more clarity on what it could look like aside from the SEL curriculum. At least for me that helped because it framed it for me. I at least had a direction for how to proceed. The district finally helped with something (Jessica, interview, May, 2018).

During the focus group all participants with the exception of one acknowledged through verbal means that the district has improved the effort to demonstrate concrete examples of how SEL fits within the classroom.

When the participants spoke to their experiences with SEL in the classroom, most spoke to the ending impact that SEL had on behaviors and academics rather than processes and procedures of SEL. It should be noted that 11 of the 12 teachers believed that SEL impacted both behavior and/or academics positively. The focus group and participant interviews underscored that SEL was overwhelmingly viewed as a support for behavior modification rather than a support to improve academics. Participants also voiced that SEL just in itself cannot make positive changes in students. If there is explicit SEL instruction by the teacher but the concepts are not modeled in real life, the impact is believed to be minimal. Lisa voiced this clearly

If I suck as a person and try to teach SEL it doesn't work. Would you buy a great car from a scumbag salesman? I wouldn't. I want the nice car and nice person to sell it to

me. I do SEL because it's right for kids but it's not the only thing that's right for kids. I as the teacher have to be right, and if I'm not, well then SEL won't work (Lisa, interview, April, 2018).

Patrice also expressed the same sentiment,

You know Joe, I love these kids. I do. But don't you think for a quick minute that I don't get upset with them cause I do. If we talking self-management and they see Ms. Patrice lose her cool, I know they thinking she fake. They gonna do what I do. I really believe that. So what I do is use it as a teaching moment. They see me pop off, when I get off 100 I ask them, what should Ms. Patrice should have done? They tell you, by God, they tell you. That's how they learn though. Hear, see, apply. Jesus didn't just tell people, He showed them. Got to follow that lead now (Patrice, interview, May, 2018).

During an observation of Sarah she stated to the kids that she was not doing well today emotionally and she asked how many of her students were not doing well in their feelings today. Eight students raised their hand and a calmness came over the room. Sarah stated they would get to science but if everyone was not in a good place, including herself, then nothing meaningful would take place because the focus was elsewhere. She asked that everyone just take five minutes and write in their journals which all the students complied with. After five minutes Sarah moved on with the lesson. Following the lesson I asked Sarah about this routine

Yeah I do that. I check in. I SEL the hell out of the kids because if I don't I can promise you their head is not with me or fucking science. I'm also helping them to identify their feelings, building capacity for empathy, managing stress, all that SEL stuff. They don't know I'm doing SEL voodoo on them but it works. Bottom line is if they're not alright, it's coming out so I'm going to do as much as I can in the front end, be SEL, and curb

any potential shit (Sarah, interview, May, 2018).

During the focus group the four participants who were in the district prior to the introduction of SEL were unanimous in identifying SEL as one of the top reasons that their classrooms run smoother. According to the participants, SEL has the capability to teach tangible expectations for kids (and adults), how emotions arise and positive ways to handle emotions, how to be respectful to others, how to handle issues with other children rather than just fighting, and also increases self-confidence so attention seeking behavior is down. Lisa stated,

I know I'm an awesome teacher *laughs* but I can't take all the credit. SEL has given tools, if I choose to use, to help with behavior issues. It really takes the pressure off me because we are teaching the kids how to identify emotions and manage them. We're teaching them how to be better friends and how to handle people conflicts. Those people conflicts use to spill over into class and affect everything. Not saying it's perfect but, well, in my opinion it's working. You get out what you put in, so not going to say names, but if it's not working for some people (teachers) I wonder how hard they're trying (Lisa, focus group, May, 2018).

It should be noted that none of the reasons given as to how the participant views SEL in the classroom had quantifiable evidence to validate the teachers' perception of impact. Also it should be noted that the successes in the classroom that were drawn out from the group centered on what they saw as behavioral wins rather than academic wins. Matthew exemplified the common thought of the group when he said

If you ask any teacher what their number one issue is in the classroom I bet they'll say something with behavior management. They might be afraid to acknowledge that because of evaluations but we all know it's true. There is no silver bullet with behavioral

issues but what we do have are tools like SEL to help build capacity in kids to deal with the root of behavior stuff. I might be generalizing it a little but does everyone remember what it was like before SEL came here? I do, well not here but in my previous district which is just like here (Matthew, focus group, May, 2018).

Application of SEL in the classroom as it's associated to academics relied more so on teacher ingenuity than concrete training provided by the district. This still led to siloed thinking of how to incorporate SEL into classroom academics. Jessica explained,

I still think the water is muddy with SEL as an academic pillar. So for me, I have to be very intentional of where I put SEL in or do it as a standalone thing. Does that make sense? I never received training in making it work in with academic subjects. I know in theory they are compatible but I need more I guess in how to do that. It's good for kids and maybe it's on me to figure out how to stick it in Math, and ELA, and other areas you know? (Jessica, interview, May, 2018).

Sarah also expressed how she applied SEL within academics during the focus group,

Everyone does it differently. Some are amazing like me, and some are just plain shitty at it. No one in this room of course *laughs* It takes purpose to do it and if you're not bought in than you aren't going to look at ways to embed in the content which in my case is science. It's just my fuc....sorry I know people in here don't appreciate my potty mouth sometimes, so it's just my humble opinion that we say we're doing it for academic things but really it's done for behavior management. I like it in my content so I look for ways to embed it. Different strokes for different folks (Sarah, focus group, May, 2018).

The application of SEL in the classroom rested on perception of participants as to where they believed it could have the most impact, or, what felt most comfortable to them. In this particular case, application of SEL was utilized as behavioral support rather than academic.

Regina was the lone participant of the study who did not find SEL to impact classroom environment or academics. She characterized SEL as a new fad for urban education. Her belief is classroom success hinges on the adult standing in front of the students. Her reasoning behind lack of belief in SEL is that she has not seen much change in how her classroom operates with the implementation of SEL as opposed to when it was present. Regina also cited that SEL, if done well, should bring about academic success. Jones school district is improving but is not making the great strides that she believed should be made. Regina's classroom operates with rigid standards by her own verbal accord and any student who deviates from those standards is dealt with swiftly. This was very evident during the observation as there were three students were removed from class within a 40 minute time span. Regina's take on SEL was revealed during her interview

SEL is not bad, it's not just what everyone is saying it is. I've been doing this for over 15 years and I didn't make it this far by being soft and whimsical with the kids. I love them and because I love them I'm trying to instill in them ethics that they will need but are lacking so they can be successful. I'm going to say something to you, I don't think of myself as a person who does SEL and you know what, my kids perform well. They do. Everyone else keep doing SEL and I'll do what I think is best because at the end of it, I hold the responsibility for how my students learn (Regina, Interview, April, 2018).

Essentially SEL was deemed to have positive impact on classroom processes, structures, and routines as validated through the teachers' professional experience with SEL. The positive

impact came through how SEL constructively helps students understand emotions as well as equips them with the tools necessary to problem solve and resolve conflict more effectively and also build relationships of substance with their peers and with adults.

Research Question Response

Four research questions were formulated to help ground and guide this study. The themes and sub-themes that developed during the data analysis provided the responses to these research questions. The responses to the research questions also convey the essence of the participants' personal and professional experience with SEL by way of the textural and structural elucidation of the phenomenon.

Research Question One

Research Question One investigated, "What are urban middle school teachers' personal experiences with their own mastery of social-emotional learning competency skills?" I designed this question to gain understanding on what experience the participants had throughout their life with social-emotional learning (even if it was not identified as such) on a personal level that helped in framing the meaning of SEL to them. All participants spoke about their childhood as having tremendous influence in how they came to understand SEL. Participants viewed their individual experience with SEL through a historical lens of occurrences throughout their personal life. The participants strongly connected their personal experience with SEL to their childhood and young adult life experiences. Personal adult experience with SEL was categorized as professional experience. Dante, Sarah, and Tammy highlighted abusive upbringing as well as poverty as playing a role in understanding self-awareness. Eliot, Natalie, Patrice, and Matthew attributed their strong religious upbringing in helping to shape their view of self-management. Alyssa and Jessica credited their lack of familial appreciation of diversity as having impact on

their concept of social awareness. All participants viewed what they experienced in their personal lives as having impact on their interpretation of relationship skills. Tammy stated that the best thing she could take from her early life of dysfunction was how not to treat people.

Not one participant vocalized that he or she had mastered social-emotional learning. SEL was viewed as more of a journey than something that could be mastered as spoken by Sarah during the focus group

You know SEL is different than academic concepts. You can't really test that shit, crap, oh whatever you all know I swear so shit. Like how do you say I've reached the top with self-management.....yeah f***ing right. No one is zen enough to do that. We are always going to be just in a constant state of improving. I guess what's good about this is kids see it modeled correctly and then also incorrectly. We're human so I don't think there's such a thing as mastery of this.

While perceived mastery of SEL was never equated to have occurred through personal experience, the value of those life experiences in helping to place value and meaning with the competencies for the participants was evident.

Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked, "What are urban middle school teachers' experiences with the value of social-emotional learning competencies as it relates to classroom instruction and routine?" The purpose of this research question was to gain insight on urban middle-school teachers' perceived impact that SEL has in the classroom. This question draws out whether the teacher believes that there is value in social-emotional learning in relation to student outcomes and student behavior. 11 out of 12 participants believed that SEL had a positive impact on classroom instruction and routine. One participant who dissented from the majority summarized

her lack of belief in the change power of SEL by concluding that if SEL was indeed having positive impact then it should be reflected directly in academic gains which she believed were not happening. During the focus group when others were expounding upon their highlights of SEL benefits Regina quipped in

Not to be the downer here but umm anyone care to share what our district grade still is?

It's an F. Since we are in year, well what year are we in again with SEL? Anyways

Doesn't matter we've been doing it long enough and we're still the lowest grade. I'm not trying to be nasty but evidence is evidence or should I say data is data *laughs*. Ok sorry everyone, carry on, carry on (Regina, focus group, May, 2018).

The majority of participants had the belief as formed through their professional experience that SEL had value in decreasing unwanted and maladaptive student behavior. Eight of the twelve participants stated that they write less referrals specifically related to behavior (although it was never quantified) than their colleagues who they know do not engage with social-emotional learning in the classroom. Some of these behaviors that the participants explicitly named were verbal aggression towards other students and or teacher, physical aggression towards other students and or students, leaving the classroom, and lying. As Janet stated

So many times my kids come in angry and never say why. Many of their actions related to that anger would get them wrote up. When SEL came into the district, oh about eleven years ago, kids started to be able to identify emotions and put a name to it. Like I always say, if you can name it you can tame it. Now we can talk about the emotion and reason for it and stay ahead of any negative actions that would most likely wind up getting referred. Now don't get me wrong, I still write up kids but it's not like I did before this

whole SEL thing made its way here (Janet, interview, April, 2018).

The belief among nine of participants is that if behavior in the classroom is manageable with a decrease in unwanted conduct, then the academic gains will follow.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three asks “What do urban middle school teachers perceive as challenges with the implementation of effective social-emotional learning?” The purpose of this research question was to draw out specific challenges of implementation as it relates to SEL according to the experiences of urban middle school teachers. The two major challenges that were emphasized both during the interview and focus group were no training in SEL prior to entering the classroom and lack of time to effectively implement SEL. Participants used words such as anxious, fearful, confused and frustrated to describe how they felt trying to meet the expectation of SEL instruction with no foundational knowledge. During the discussion within the focus group around SEL challenges Jessica explained

I don't think anyone quite understands the fear and even dread new teachers have with content they know nothing about. I guess I can only speak for myself but I was so avoidant of it because I didn't know shit about it. I guess lucky maybe for me was I had a principal who had the expectation that SEL get done and that forced me to dive into it. I'm sure even now if you don't have an administrator like that and you're having those bad feelings, it just won't get done.

The challenge of not being trained or having course work with SEL in teacher prep courses also conveys that SEL is not important. Elliot explained the earlier version of his teacher self-thought that SEL was good but if it was really important he should have learned about it prior to hitting

the classroom. The fact that it's not included within college courses conveys that social-emotional learning is more fringe work rather than essential.

The most prevalent challenge highlighted by all twelve participants is time constraints. Janet delineated between effective SEL implementation and compliance. Janet explained

You said the word effective and well there's a difference. If done well SEL takes time because there should be time for reflection, and role play, and opportunities to model, I mean right? We are teaching skills here and sometimes those skills are complicated.

Anyone can teach SEL just for compliance sake. Unfortunately I think more often than not we do it for compliance because there so much to get done and we can just fly through it and check it off the box and say it's done. Sorry sometimes I get worked up over this more than I should (Janet, interview, May, 2018).

When time is of the essence typically it is SEL that is put to the side as Matt brought up. Since it is not a tested subject it can most easily be removed without administrative repercussions. The ability to keep SEL in the forefront or give it equal footing with academic subjects was expressed to be hard to continually do.

Time restraints as well as little to no formal SEL training were the highlighted challenges that the participants faced with implementation of SEL. The challenges for implementation of SEL are adult centered and are not necessarily contingent on the students. In fact, ten of the twelve participants stated that their students really enjoyed explicit SEL instruction even if the students had little to no familiarity with it. Patrice expressed this sentiment in explaining that inept adults hamper children's learning. She firmly believed that most of the issues and challenges particularly around SEL implementation were adult contingent and not student based. Patrice adhered to the philosophy that you grant time for things that you find to be of value. This

sentiment was expressed when she stated “If we don’t find the time for SEL, we have done our children a great disservice. I can’t go home at night and knowingly not provide what my kids need. I find time, I make time” (Patrice, focus group, May, 2018).

Research Question Four

Research question four asks “ How do urban middle school teachers address challenges with successful implementation of SEL?” This question was designed to gather data pertaining to teacher oriented action steps for solving implementation issues in regards to social-emotional learning. For this study I did not want to get building administration or central office perspective on addressing the challenges because they are not tasked with the actual implementation of day to day SEL in the classroom. Also their perspective would be of more of an organizational approach rather than a specific classroom teacher approach.

As was indicated earlier, none of the participants had exposure to SEL prior to being hired into Jones school district. Two of the participants stated that initially when presented with the challenge of SEL implementation they simple avoided the challenge by not doing it. Tammy highlighted this in saying

When SEL first came to the district, my thought was this is not going to stay, much like everything else. So was SEL a challenge.....well I would say not for me because I just didn’t engage in it. I’ll admit, I was jaded and this was just another thing for me to do so I didn’t. Does that make sense? Well I do it now, obviously, but you want to know why? I didn’t like how I felt knowing that I was suppose to be doing SEL, I knew the kids needed SEL, and I wasn’t doing it. I guess I had an ethical challenge. Anyways, the end of the story is I do it and it’s not a chore for me (Tammy, interview, May, 2018).

While only one participant stated that SEL is not a challenge because she simply is not currently doing it, the other eleven participants stated that they have to get creative with SEL in the classroom. The challenge of SEL seemed to be contingent on teacher perception of SEL. For example, eight of the participants stated that low implementation for them came when SEL was viewed as another thing to do, an add on, and a district mandate. However, seven of those eight participants also stated that once they saw the value of SEL they tried to integrate SEL with academics. They would teach the core academic content lessons and tie social-emotional learning competencies for seamless integration. Trying to implement SEL through integration rather than as a stand-alone component brought implementation at a deeper level. Sarah described the process of integration

As a teacher you have to get fucking creative. I have A B and C to get done with only X amount of minutes and SEL is Z on the list. I look for ways I can just work these competencies right into my lesson. So like I'm talking about scientific method and Responsible Decision Making just fits so nicely in with that. I draw out SEL right from academic (Sarah, interview, May, 2018).

Along the same lines Dante discussed SEL and academic content integration

I teach Math right, so I was trying to figure out how to work in SEL. One way I do it is through identifying emotion. Like, how's this problem got you feeling, show me. Identify your strengths man and don't let this problem tell you no different. It's all that self-awareness stuff. The kids don't even know we doing SEL but we are. Sometimes you just got to work it like that (Dante, interview, May, 2018).

During three of the observations, the teacher would directly highlight which competency and characteristic of that competency was being exemplified through the content. However eight of

the participants did not specifically draw out the SEL competency but would make the connection directly through the academic content.

Summary

Chapter Four began with a profile for each participant including background professional and personal information. The chapter also detailed the results of the study under two sections including theme development and research question response. Emergent themes and sub-themes were discussed in detail and incorporated into the research question responses. Narrative data from participant interviews, observations, and focus group depicted the lived personal and professional experience of the participants with social-emotional learning.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived personal and professional experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning. Chapter five summarizes the findings of the study and discusses those findings with applicable theory and relevant research as described within the literature review. Implications of the research including theoretical, methodological, and practical are examined as well as the study's delimitations and limitations. Finally, a recommendation for future research is considered concluding with a chapter summary.

Summary of Findings

The investigation of this study examined the participants' personal and professional experience with SEL using a qualitative approach. The methodology was transcendental phenomenology as defined by Moustakas (1994). Chapter Four houses the detailed findings from this study; however, within this section there is a concise summary of the emergent themes as a result of the data analysis. Also within this section are the answers to the research questions that this study proposed to answer.

Themes

There were three themes that surfaced after the data was analyzed. These themes included: (a) personal acquisition of SEL, (b) professional understanding of SEL, and (c) classroom application of SEL. Represented within each theme is a compelling part of the participants' lived experience with the phenomenon. This described experience became an important component in understanding the essence of the phenomenon.

Personal acquisition of SEL was the first theme to emerge from the data. Three sub-themes related to this theme also surfaced which included: (a) SEL learned through modeling, (b) impact of personal trauma, and (c) SEL and culture. Participants placed heavy emphasis on their childhood experiences as having shaped their understanding of SEL. Religious upbringing, parent/caretaker modeling of SEL competencies (or lack thereof), educational experience, diversity interaction, and complex trauma were significant factors for how each participant framed the core competencies on a personal level. All participants expressed that they did not understand a formal definition of social-emotional learning prior to entering the classroom but the skill set represented by the competencies were conveyed through informal channels during childhood. Some participants recognized that how the competencies were modeled for them was actually counter to what was deemed morally right by the participant particularly with the competencies of social awareness and self-management. In these instances those participants express discomfort or apathy in teaching or modeling the competency of self-awareness due to triggering of unwanted emotions or a low self-efficacious view of himself/herself within that competency.

Professional understanding of SEL was the next theme to surface through the data. This theme had three sub-themes which included: (a) no formal training for SEL prior to teaching, (b) time constraints for effective SEL, and (c) SEL learned through professional development. The theme referred to how the participants' came to understand SEL within the context of their teaching profession. For all of the participants the first engagement with SEL came through the professional learning sessions offered within Jones school district. Since all the participants had no formal training or understanding of SEL prior to Jones school district or any educational setting, it led to anxiety, frustration, and confusion primarily with new teachers. Lifted within

this theme were the two most voiced challenges with SEL implementation which included lack of training prior to the classroom and lack of time for implementation. Due to these challenges SEL is often times the first to be removed from the daily schedule or not engaged with at all. While all but one of the participants felt that SEL was important to the classroom from a professional lens, the depth in which SEL was implemented factored on administrative view on SEL, academic priorities, and personal view of SEL.

Classroom application of SEL spoke to the perceived impact that SEL within the classroom. Participants noted that SEL impacted both academics and behavior within their experience. However, most participants believed that SEL had a more profound impact with improving student behavior than on academic performance. Specifically highlighted under the context of improved behavior was less verbal and physical aggression, increase in respectful interactions between peers as well interactions between student and adult, and increased student capacity to regulate emotions. Participants cited that the explicit SEL teaching and modeling of social-engagement, emotional identification and management as well as problem solving strategies was the primary reason for decreased classroom disturbances that are behaviorally motivated. Although academic gains were not concretely expounded on by the participants, it was verbalized that decreased problems with classroom management led to academic gains. SEL established expectations and a framework for how a classroom should operate and although SEL in itself cannot bring about the desired level of change, it can be a catalyst.

Research Questions

Answers to each research question asked in this study were solidified through data analysis. The first research question asked, *What are urban middle school teachers' personal experiences with their own mastery of social-emotional learning competency skills?* Participants

really delineated a time frame in which they considered personal and professional development of SEL. Most participants categorized their childhood as the time in which they learned the core competencies through direct or indirect means. Those means typically were parent or caretaker modeling, religious teachings and upbringing, trauma, cultural interpretation, non-familial modeling (such as a teacher), or through personal introspection. Those participants who came from an abusive or dysfunctional childhood upbringing viewed themselves as almost lagging with SEL knowledge. They believed that the actual erudition of SEL came from incorrect modeling of the competencies and the commitment on their end to not interact with others in the same toxic manner. All participants agreed that the word mastery does not correctly represent their personal reflection of SEL knowledge acquisition. Participants believed that there is not a pinnacle to ascertaining SEL skills or knowledge but rather it is a continual learning endeavor.

The second research question posed, *What are urban middle school teachers' experiences with the value of social-emotional learning competencies as it relates to classroom instruction and routine?* All but one participant saw SEL as having positive impact on classroom instruction and routine. The one participant who did not agree stated that she did not necessarily see direct impact or benefits of SEL implementation. Participants viewed the most noticeable impact within the classroom to be centered on behavioral improvements. Specifically cited examples included decreased occurrences of physical and verbal aggression as manifested within a peer to peer interaction or student to adult interaction. Also participants attributed students having the skills and ability to articulate their emotional state as a reason for a decrease in maladaptive behavior manifestations. Participants mostly agreed that classroom instruction has improved due to the decrease in classroom management issues but they have not identified a direct correlation with SEL implementation and academic improvement. Participants were

reluctant to link their own classroom academic performance as hinging directly on the implementation of SEL.

Research question three asked *What do urban middle school teachers perceive as challenges with the implementation of effective social-emotional learning?* Participants cited two major challenges with effective SEL implementation which included time constraints as well as no formal training in SEL education. Participants unanimously agreed that lack of time was the largest obstacle for SEL instruction. Due to administrative preference, on-going yearly testing schedules, core academic subject instruction, and impromptu changes in daily schedule, explicit instruction of SEL is often cut from the classroom routine. Coupled with lack of time is the situation in which teachers have no prior experience with SEL instruction prior to entering the classroom in Jones school district. Only a handful of universities nationwide incorporate SEL coursework into their teacher preparation programs. Participants cited feeling anxious, stressed, confused, and frustrated when given the task and expectation of teaching SEL. They communicated that initially when SEL was taken districtwide in Jones, they mitigated these uncomfortable feelings through not engaging in SEL or to conducting SEL with a compliance driven mindset rather than an actual belief system.

The final research question is *How do urban middle school teachers address challenges with successful implementation of SEL?* Participants cited personal creativity for how they address the lack of formal training as well as time constraints. Participants also stated that Jones district has created engaging professional learning sessions around SEL. In speaking to the specifics of creative implementation for SEL, it was cited by participants that the integrate SEL into academic core lessons whenever they can. Although they may not explicitly be teaching SEL, they are explicitly highlighting core competencies within the academic lessons.

Discussion

In order to comprehend the larger context of the findings of this research, it is imperative to understand the results of this examination with regards to the empirical and theoretical literature that was discussed in Chapter Two. The results from the data analysis both corroborate and extend theoretical and empirical literature discussed as it relates to how SEL is experienced by urban middle school teachers.

Theoretical Literature

Deficiency or mastery of the five core competencies as looked at through the lens of the participants and their experience connects directly with Human Motivation Theory and Emotional Intelligence. Social Learning Theory provides meaning as to the level of efficacy that the participants have with SEL, and establishes grounding for their efficacious perspective. Through the data, participants substantiated the existing theoretical framework.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) posits that an individual has a level of needs that must be satisfied either in part or in full. If these needs are not met, that individual cannot recognize or fulfill the next tier of needs. Collectively these levels or tiers of needs are called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The five core competencies draws attention to a deficiency within the lower tier needs including safety, love and belonging, and esteem (Maslow, 1943).

The participants spoke mainly to how SEL allows for instruction and modeling of necessary skills to help rectify maladaptive behavior. Participants had an understanding that an unmet need, or deficient experience with a need, particularly in the lower tiers, brought about a negative emotional reaction to a situation (Boeree, 2006 & Maslow, 1943). The understanding of this came either from personal experience of unmet needs, or observational conclusions from their teaching experience in working with students. Not one participant believed that he or she

could fully meet the needs of the students they serviced, and the best he or she could do was partially meet any one of the tiered needs. SEL was recognized as being a conduit in helping to meet the needs within the classroom.

Participants cited specific examples of how the five core competencies provide for a tangible framework for not only teaching students skills, but also in creating an environment where the tiered level of needs could at least be partially met. Safety needs primarily associates with the competencies of self-management, self-awareness, and responsible decision making. Participants acknowledged that many students carried evidence of significant trauma and unless that child felt safe in the classroom, learning was not going to occur. Students needed to build capacity in identifying emotions, how to articulate those emotions, and where those emotions stem from. Participants believed that the environment in which they taught was a safe zone, but that students' emotions and lack of knowledge in how to deal with those emotions are what led to the perception of being unsafe. Participants also referred to the word or idea of community. A sense of connection, friendship, and strong relationships fit into the tiered need of love and belonging. Skills necessary for this need to be at least partially met are taught or modeled through the competencies of social awareness and relationship skills. Participants wanted to build inclusive classroom communities for their students but identified that a lack of respect, empathy, and perspective taking created barriers to do this. Opportunities need to be afforded to students in order to acquire these skills such as intentional times for relationship building, assignments which required cooperating working, and scenarios where students could practice how to productively resolve conflict. The esteem tier within the Hierarchy of Needs primarily rests upon the competency of self-awareness. Participants identified that many students do not know their strengths or do not vocalize it. It was also stated that if a student does identify a

strength, it's a delinquent or maladaptive attribute which can lead to an internalization of negative self-imagery.

Through participants' experiences with SEL, it is evident that the Human Motivation Theory lends credence to how the five core competencies can meet and sustain, at least in part, the tiered level of needs. SEL also provides a means to teach skills and adaptations that can be utilized for when a deficiency is sensed as it relates to the levels of need.

Emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence as defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) is “the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 5). This theory is the foundational base for SEL was expanded by Daniel Goleman (1995) to include what we know call the five core competencies of SEL. Fifty-seven percent of employers look for SEL skills as priority when hiring a candidate (Kendal, 2018).

Participants expressed that in order for their students to become successful as adults, the skills that need to be attained are for the most part, not content based. When identifying what students need to be well adjusted and contributing adults, participants all gave responses affiliated with managing emotions (self-management) and being able to work cooperatively with others (relationship skills). It was stated numerous times through multiple participants that these aforementioned skills were deemed absolutely necessary for success yet one of the biggest frustrations was of not having time to teach these skills. Though the participants did not have quantifiable data, students who they perceived as having lower emotional intelligence than their peers were more likely to engage in unsafe behavior in the classroom. Students with also lower emotional intelligence as determined by the participants were also more likely to have higher

frequency of conflict with their peers. Students need instruction and modeling for how to process emotions and increase emotional intelligence.

Social-learning theory. Social learning theory which evolved into the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) held the concept of self-efficacy as the foundational piece to the learning process . Using the formal definition as given by Bandura (1986), self-efficacy refers to “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance”. (p. 391) Social-emotional learning is not a topic that is covered in teacher preparation courses in most colleges and universities. Therefore, many teacher candidates who enter the field have little to no exposure to SEL oriented content and concepts. Participants highlighted their thoughts when initially introduced to SEL through descriptive terms such as “unfamiliar”, “uncomfortable”, “new”, and “apprehensive”.

Participants did not have a high self-efficacious view of themselves regarding mastery of SEL content and concepts and therefore did not implement or superficially implemented SEL in the beginning stages of their career within Jones District. It was only through professional learning provided through Jones district or personal research about SEL where efficacy increased. Also, the lack of perceived efficacy from the participants lens didn’t just stem from lack of professional exposure to SEL. Personal experiences such as trauma, family connectedness, religious upbringing, and outside family relationships also impacted self-perceived mastery of SEL skills, concepts, and content.

Empirical Literature

Social-emotional learning as a whole is not new to the body of literature. However, most of the studies focused purely on quantitative data and results to determine the effectiveness of SEL within the classroom (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Dymnicki et al., 2016;

Committee for Children, 2016; Weissberg, 2016). This study addresses the gap in literature as it is qualitative in approach with a specific focus on urban middle school teachers and their lived personal and professional experience with SEL. The findings from this study affirm and extend the current literature regarding teachers' experience with social-emotional learning.

SEL, academic achievement and behavior. The growing literature base shows that there is a connection between high functioning SEL implementation and academic gains (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2004; Domitrovich et al., 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Reyes et al., 2012; Zins et al., 2004). Although participants could not quantify their perception of how SEL has impacted academic achievement within their own classrooms, all but one believed that SEL improved academic performance. Reasons highlighted for academic improvement stem from increased attendance, better able to manage stress in academic testing situations, and better able to work cooperatively in peer learning situations.

Students who are academically functioning in the lowest 25% of their class also operate with lower SEL functioning as compared to the top 25% of their class (Davis et al., 2014). Participants corroborated this study in identifying that from their professional experiences, lower academic performing students are also those students who have a difficult time exemplifying skills in relation to the five core competencies. Particularly lacking are the skills related to self-awareness and self-management which includes identifying emotions, strengths, and weaknesses, managing emotions, stress management as well as having an accurate self-perception of oneself. Participants explained that in trying to prepare their students for college in career, they are seeing large deficits within the aforementioned skills. Over half of participants explicitly stated that these deficiencies are barriers in college and career readiness. They believe that if students

cannot identify and subsequently manage uncomfortable emotions, it will affect interpersonal skills, problem solving capabilities, and the ability to form productive relationships. This adheres to previous research findings that identify skills related to self-awareness and self-management as pivotal in preparing students for college and the workforce (Belfield et al., 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak, 2016; Dymnicki et al., 2013; Oberle., 2016; State & Kern, 2017; Zins et al., 2006).

Previous research has also demonstrated that aggressive behavior has decreased in classrooms as a result of social-emotional learning implementation (Cook et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak 2016; Wang et al., 2009; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Participants highlighted a decrease in aggressive and maladaptive behavior in students as the hallmark of SEL implementation. Their perception is that if the student(s) could self-regulate and manage uncomfortable emotions, it would improve academic content delivery due to a decrease in classroom disruptions. Also according to participants within this study, the behaviors and actions that they perceived to decrease within their classroom due to SEL include physically hitting while angry, verbal degradation, intentional bullying, and overall unruly behaviors.

Teachers and SEL. A strong part of a child's development and understanding of SEL concepts is strongly tied to their teachers' comprehension and comfort with SEL (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers' values and beliefs also influence how SEL is translated within the classroom (Jennings & Frank, 2015). Participants understanding of SEL came from various life experiences including familial, religious, educational, and community experiences. Those life experiences weighed in how they valued SEL primarily if their experience was negative. Participants who experienced significant adversity could

empathize with their student circumstances on a higher level, and therefore placed a higher value on their students garnering SEL skills.

Teachers view time constraints, lack of foundational knowledge of SEL prior to entering the classroom, and lack of administrative buy-in as the primary challenges with SEL implementation (Campbell et al., 2015; Loveless & Griffith, 2014; Martinez 2016). The research was corroborated through all participants who expressed that SEL was inhibited through lack of time, no prior experience with SEL prior to working in Jones district, and administrators who stressed academic content instruction over SEL instruction.

Implications

The findings of this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications that justify further consideration. In regards to theory, participants believed students to have low efficacy and functioning with SEL skills, but this was also true of themselves as they reflected on their own life experience. Empirically, there is an expansive literature base on the impact of SEL on students. However, the literature is deficient in regards to how urban middle school teachers perceive SEL including challenges and successes of SEL. From a practical standpoint, participants corroborated previous research of challenges with implementation that include time constraints, lack of administrative support for SEL, and low quality professional development offerings.

Theoretical Implications

Participants identified that many of their students lacked the ability to understand their own emotions as well as identify and understand emotions in others. Due to this deficiency, students' ability to manage their emotions is low functioning. Emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, 1997) surmises the higher an individual's functionality in emotional intelligence,

the less likely that individual is to engage in unsafe and aggressive behavior. That individual is also more likely to use higher order thinking skills as well as critical thought to problem solve (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Most participants articulated that they perceived challenging and aggressive behavior to decrease in the classroom as a result of implementation SEL but it was not universally agreed upon. A minority of participants attributed a decrease in aforementioned behaviors to strong teaching practices in general rather than an SEL component. This draws into question if a teacher's perception of efficacy and managing the classroom from a perceived area of strength is the contributing factor to a perceived decrease in manifested behavioral issues. If a teacher does not have a strong belief (which was articulated often times as "being uncomfortable") that he or she is capable of teaching or modeling SEL, than classroom management is ran through punitive means.

Achievement, adult and student motivation, and overall success in the classroom is contingent on a teacher's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1998). Given that quality training and professional development builds capacity in teachers, investment in SEL should have priority if results are expected (Collie et al., 2012). None of the participants received any formal training in SEL prior to the classroom and therefore felt disadvantaged in fulfilling expectations to teach and model the competencies. Their lack of self-efficacy led to a self-reported disinterest or valueless implementation when there was little to no support in the form of professional learning.

Empirical Implications

Much of present day literature focuses on SEL impacts on students but lacks teacher perspective, particularly urban middle school teachers. Similar to the literature base, participants identified lack of time, and pre-existing formal knowledge of SEL, as well as compliance with administrative mandates as challenges for SEL implementation. However, where the

participants' experience started to deviate from existing research is how their personal story impacts SEL implementation. Most participants connected professional implementation of SEL with a personal experiential account. This included familial expectations, values, and norms as well as childhood traumatic experiences. Whether the participant conveyed a negative or positive personal experience, he or she directly tied that personal experience with how he or she carried out SEL instruction and modeling within the classroom. Particularly with the participants who experienced trauma, SEL was held in high value. However the following was true of participants who experienced complex trauma in that they saw themselves as damaged and not the best conduits for SEL. This was due to their perception of low efficacy in the competency of relationship skills, self-awareness, and self-management. For example, one participant expressed that if she could not manage her emotions, who was she to try and teach children much less model emotional management.

As SEL becomes more of a prominent focus within schools as a means of positively impacting students, development of programs for teacher self-care need to be addressed. Some participants expressed that undealt with personal trauma affected SEL implementation due to a personal triggering when trying to explicitly teach or convey a skill/concept. Even if a teacher has not experienced complex trauma, the stress of day to day operations within a classroom environment can become highly stressful. Highly stressed adults engaging with highly stressed children can create an environment where conflict supersedes instruction (Campbell et al., 2015). Districts should look to invest in adult care including professional learning sessions around mindfulness, stress management, as well as providing opportunity for educators to seek professional services for mental health well-being. Most participants discussed that they felt underappreciated and

not valued due to lack of investment on the districts end on their mental and physical well-being. As one participant articulated, “The expectation is for us to conduct SEL for the children, but no one is talking about SEL for the adults.”

Practical implications

Urban middle school teachers gave voice to placing high value on SEL, but yet still struggling to implement within the classroom. As previously disclosed, implementation challenges lie with time constraints as pitting academics against SEL, lack of professional knowledge or preparation with content related to SEL, and administrative priorities on other functions within the classroom other than SEL (Hargreaves, 2004; Loveless & Griffith, 2014; Martinez, 2016). Much of the challenge with SEL implementation is contingent on how the administrator views SEL. Participants expressed that if the building administrator places priority on SEL, implementation is less exigent. According to the participants’ experience, administrators who value SEL inherently rather than compliantly will build time in the schedule for explicit SEL instruction, balance prioritization of SEL with academics and seek integration rather than compartmentalizing, and encourage SEL practices within the classroom.

In response to participants’ experience with lack of foundational SEL knowledge prior to entering the classroom, institutions of higher learning need to start establishing courses in which teacher candidates are exposed to the fundamentals of SEL. As SEL becomes more of a focus in K-12 education as exemplified through adoption of state SEL standards and increasingly more districts embracing SEL (Aspen Institute, 2018), higher education is seemingly lagging behind. Participants emphasized that the more familiar they became with SEL content, the less inhibited they felt with instructing and modeling social-emotional learning. If college and university

teacher preparation programs do not seek to restructure with the inclusion of SEL, the weight of exposure, training, and preparation for teachers will rest on individual districts.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study included the participants work experience in Jones school district. Each participant must have worked in Jones school district for two years. In conjunction with length of time in the district, each participant had to be a certificated middle school teacher who taught in a traditional classroom. No delimitations were placed based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or age. While the participants had to be employed within Jones school district, there were no restrictions placed on geographical location of schools they represented. The delimitations that were selected were done so to make certain they experienced the phenomenon.

This study as presented has limitations due to the inherent characteristics of the qualitative phenomenological approach. One such limitation was myself as a human instrument for research. Adhering to the practice of Epoche as established by Moustakas (1994), there were still prejudgments that I brought into the research connected to the phenomenon.

Another limitation included the transferability of the study. All participants were from the same region of the country working within the same school district. The results of this study cannot be transferred to other urban middle school teachers aside from Jones school district with certainty as it would be impossible to know their experiences with the phenomenon.

One final limitation was the time of year in which the data was collected. Data was collected in April and May which is during the end of the school year. Most participants expressed that they were stressed due to the end of the year and students were shut-down because state testing had passed. In looking at challenges with implementation, participant answers may

have not been authentic to true belief about the phenomenon if data had been collected at another point within the school year.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study did address a gap in research, it is confined in transferability to a more expansive population of urban middle school teachers. Should this study be replicated, findings could then be solidified as being transferable. To maintain the integrity of the study, a replication should hold true to the delimitations of the study to ensure a true experience of the phenomenon by future participants. It would be recommended that future replications of the study be enacted outside of urban areas within the Midwest. This would allow for a determination to see if the data from the research is unique to a particular geographic region.

This study was conducted in a district that has a strong teachers union. It is recommended that if the district in which the study is to occur has a teachers union, then permission for classroom observation be secured from the teachers union prior to the start of data collection. This is to ensure that the classroom teacher being observed for data collection purposes does not feel intimidated or wary during the process as the data is not intended for evaluative purposes. Permission from the teachers union also provides a safeguard from potential issues that could arise with the use of observation for data collection and the district's collective bargaining agreement.

While this study looked at the phenomenon of urban middle school teachers personal and professional experience with SEL, a future study should address how school based administrators connect with SEL. All of the expressed challenges to SEL implementation are directly or indirectly tied into administrative functioning within the building. Since this would

provide another lens from which to explore the phenomenon, a more comprehensive approach to addressing challenges and barriers could be undertaken.

Evaluative driven professions, such as education, can often times lead to a sense of paranoia in which employees operate on a fear of retribution premise. The stigma of an administrator operating in the role of researcher within the district he or she serves can have impact on how the participants respond to data collection procedures. It would behoove researchers who seek to replicate this study in a district in which he or she is employed, to gauge the climate of the district in an effort to gather authentic data. Participants who operate from a fear of reprisal stance will provide placating answers to questions that guide the study. Strong consideration should be given to conducting the study outside of the district in which the researcher does not hold a position of authority.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of urban middle school teachers with social-emotional learning from a personal and professional lens. Through the participants narrative, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon was developed to allow others insight into the phenomenon. If the implications from the research are taken into account and bring systemic change, the contributions will minimize challenges faced with SEL implementation.

The results of this study have brought to the surface challenges that urban middle school teachers face with the implementation of social-emotional learning. Teacher value of social-emotional learning is dependent upon personal experiences, administrator belief, formal teacher preparation, and competing interests within the classroom. It is possible for teachers to find value in SEL but not fully engage in it due to perceived administrative expectations. There is a

perpetual vying for instructional time and many teachers pit academics against SEL and operate under the premise that both cannot be accomplished. Investment should be made in quality professional learning opportunities that provide teachers with tangible and concrete ways that SEL and academics can be successfully integrated as to not have a toxic competition and educator guilt over non-completion.

Efforts also need to be increased at the high education level to incorporate SEL classed into teacher preparation coursework. Undertaking content within the classroom is both uncomfortable and stressful for new teachers, and therefore lends itself to a dismissal of SEL content simply for the lack of foundational knowledge. As not only school districts, but state education departments develop and adopt SEL standards, putting prepared and SEL competent educators becomes imperative.

The findings of this study endorse that SEL is beneficial for reduction in student maladaptive behavior manifestation and increased academic performance based on teacher perception. Given this data, systematic changes with prioritization should be made that put emphasis on academic content instead of SEL skills. Without the ability to identify and manage emotions, productively resolve conflict with peers, problem solve, and work cooperatively with others, deeming student success based solely on content mastery is a disservice both to the child as well as their future employability. Participants repeatedly echoed that SEL is the link in which students are able to find success both within and outside of the classroom.

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APPENDIX A

APPLICATION FOR THE USE OF HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

IRB APPLICATION #: (To be assigned by the IRB)

I. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Complete each section of this form, using the gray form fields (use the tab key).
2. If you have questions, hover over the blue (?), or refer to the [IRB Application Instructions](#) for additional clarification.
3. Review the [IRB Application Checklist](#).
4. Email the completed application, with the following supporting documents (as separate word documents) to irb@liberty.edu:
 - a. Consent Forms, Permission Letters, Recruitment Materials
 - b. Surveys, Questionnaires, Interview Questions, Focus Group Questions
5. If you plan to use a specific Liberty University department or population for your study, you will need to obtain permission from the appropriate department chair/dean. Submit documentation of permission (email or letter) to the IRB along with this application and check the indicated box below verifying that you have done so.
6. **Submit one signed copy of the signature page (available on the [IRB website](#)) to any of the following:**
 - a. Email: As a scanned document to irb@liberty.edu
 - b. Fax: 434-522-0506
 - c. Mail: IRB 1971 University Blvd. Lynchburg, VA 24515
 - d. In Person: Green Hall, Suite 1887
7. Once received, applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis.
8. Preliminary review may take up to 3 weeks.
9. Most applications will require 3 sets of revisions.
10. The entire process may take between 1 and 2 months.
11. *We cannot accept applications in formats other than Microsoft Word. Please do not send us One Drive files, Pdfs, Google Docs, or Html applications.*

Note: Applications and supporting documents with the following problems will be returned immediately for revisions:

1. Grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors
2. Lack of professionalism
3. Lack of consistency or clarity
4. Incomplete applications

Failure to minimize these errors **will** cause delays in your processing time

II. BASIC PROTOCOL INFORMATION

1. STUDY/THESIS/DISSERTATION TITLE (?)

Title: A Qualitative Study on Urban Middle School Teachers' Perspective of Social and Emotional Learning as Formed Through Personal and Occupational Experience

2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR & PROTOCOL INFORMATION (?)

Principal Investigator (*person conducting the research*): Joseph Gerics

Professional Title (*Student, Professor, etc.*): Student

School/Department (*School of Education, LUCOM, etc.*): School of Education

Phone: 4402287200

LU Email: jgerics@liberty.edu

Check all that apply:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online Graduate Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Residential Undergraduate Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Residential Graduate Student | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Undergraduate Student |

This research is for:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Class Project | <input type="checkbox"/> Master's Thesis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarly Project (DNP Program) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Doctoral Dissertation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

If applicable, indicate whether you have defended and passed your dissertation proposal:

- ☐ N/A
- ☐ No (*Provide your defense date*):
- ☒ Yes ([Proceed to Associated Personnel Information](#))

3. ASSOCIATED PERSONNEL INFORMATION (?)

Co-Researcher(s):

School/Department:

Phone:

LU/Other Email:

Faculty Chair/Mentor(s): Dr. Sandra Battige

School/Department: School of Education

Phone: 904-993-8212

LU/Other Email: slbattige@liberty.edu

Non-Key Personnel (*Reader, Assistant, etc.*): Dr. Dawn Hayden

School/Department: Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Phone: 216-210-4466

LU/Other Email:

dawn.hayden@clevelandmetroschools.org

Consultant(s) (*required for Ed.D Candidates*): Dr. James Zabloski

School/Department: Rawlings School of Divinity

Phone: 434-592-6575

LU/Other Email: jlzabloski@liberty.edu

4. USE OF LIBERTY UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS (?)

Do you intend to use LU students, staff, or faculty as participants *OR* LU students, staff, or faculty data in your study?

- ☒ No ([Proceed to Funding Source](#))

☐ Yes (*Complete the section below*)

of Participants/Data Sets:

Department:

Class(es)/Year(s):

Department Chair:

Obtaining permission to utilize LU participants (*check the appropriate box below*):

SINGLE DEPARTMENT/GROUP: If you are including faculty, students, or staff from a single department or group, you must obtain permission from the appropriate Dean, Department Chair, or Coach and submit a signed letter or date/time stamped email to the IRB indicating approval to use students from that department or group. **You may submit your application without having obtained this permission;** however, the IRB will not approve your study until proof of permission has been received.

☐ I have obtained permission from the appropriate Dean/Department Chair/Coach, and attached the necessary documentation to this application.

☐ I have sought permission and will submit documentation to the IRB once it has been provided to me by the appropriate Dean/Department Chair/Coach.

MULTIPLE DEPARTMENTS/GROUPS: If you are including faculty, students, or staff from multiple departments or groups (i.e., all sophomores or LU Online), **the IRB will need to seek administrative approval on your behalf.**

☐ I am requesting that the IRB seek administrative approval on my behalf.

5. FUNDING SOURCE (?)

Is your research funded?

☒ No ([Proceed to Study Dates](#))

☐ Yes (*Complete the section below*)

Grant Name/Funding Source/Number:

Funding Period (Month & Year):

6. STUDY DATES (?)

When will you perform your study? (*Approximate dates for collection/analysis*):

Start (*Month/Year*): September 2017 **Finish** (*Month/Year*): March 2018

7. COMPLETION OF REQUIRED CITI RESEARCH ETHICS TRAINING (?)

List Course Name(s) (*Social and Behavioral Researchers, etc.*):

Cultural Competence in Research (ID: 15166) Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127) Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503) Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504) Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505) Liberty University (ID: 15111) Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)

Date(s) of Completion: 5/23/2016

III. OTHER STUDY MATERIALS AND CONSIDERATIONS

8. STUDY MATERIALS LIST (?)

Please indicate whether your proposed study will include any of the following:

Recording/photography of participants (*voice, video, or images*)?

☒ Yes ☐ No

Participant compensation (<i>gift cards, meals, extra credit, etc.</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Advertising for participants (<i>flyers, TV/Radio advertisements</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
More than minimal psychological stress?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Confidential material (<i>questionnaires, surveys, interviews, test scores, etc.</i>)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Extra costs to the participants (<i>tests, hospitalization, etc.</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
The inclusion of pregnant women (<i>for medical studies</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
More than minimal risk?*	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Alcohol consumption?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Waiver of the informed consent document?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Protected Health Information (<i>from health practitioners/institutions</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
VO ₂ Max Exercise?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Pilot study procedures (<i>which will be published/included in data analysis</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Please indicate whether your proposed study will include the use of blood:

Use of blood?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Total amount of blood:	
Blood draws over time period (<i>days</i>):	

Please indicate whether your proposed study will include any of the following materials:

The use of rDNA or biohazardous material?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
The use of human tissue or cell lines?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Fluids that could mask the presence of blood (<i>including urine/feces</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Use of radiation or radioisotopes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

***Note: Minimal risk** is defined as “the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in everyday life or during the performance of routine physical or physiological examinations or tests. [45 CFR 46.102(i)]. If you are unsure if your study qualifies as minimal risk, contact the IRB.

9. INVESTIGATIONAL METHODS (?)

Please indicate whether your proposed study will include any of the following:

The use of an Investigational New Drug (IND) or an Approved Drug for an Unapproved Use?

☒ No

☐ Yes (*Provide the drug name, IND number, and company*):

The use of an Investigational Medical Device or an Approved Medical Device for an Unapproved Use?

☒ No

☐ Yes (*Provide the device name, IDE number, and company*):

IV. PURPOSE

10. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH (?)

Write an original, brief, non-technical description of the purpose of your research. Include in your description your research hypothesis/question, a narrative that explains the major constructs of your study, and how the data will advance your research hypothesis or question. This section should be easy to read for someone not familiar with your academic discipline: The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived personal and professional experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning. In order to gain perspective on the challenges that face urban middle school teachers with implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) programming and curriculum, the participants' private life experience outside of the classroom as well as professional experience will be studied. At this stage in the research, experience with SEL will be generally defined as personal and occupational interaction with the five core competencies of social and emotional learning including (a) social awareness, (b) self-awareness, (c) self-management, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. Personal experience will be defined as the manner in which the five core competencies of social-emotional learning were modeled, exhibited, mastered and acquired within the personal life of the teacher. Occupational experience will be defined as the approach and pedagogical process that the urban middle school teacher utilizes in the classroom with the five core competencies of social-emotional learning.

The theories guiding this study are Emotional Intelligence, which root the five core competencies of social emotional learning, human motivation theory, and social-cognitive theory. Social-cognitive theory will be used as a foundation to describe self-efficacy as it relates to urban middle school teachers experience with social-emotional learning both within themselves and within the classroom environment.

The following will be research questions central to the study:

- RQ1: What are urban middle school teachers' personal experience with their own mastery of social-emotional learning competency skills?
- RQ2: What are urban middle school teachers' experience with the value of social-emotional learning competencies as it relates to classroom instruction and routine?
- RQ3: What do urban middle school teachers perceive as challenges with the implementation of effective social-emotional learning?
- RQ4: How do urban middle school teachers address challenges with successful implementation?

In answering the following research questions, the data collected will gain urban middle school teachers' perspectives of the challenges implementing social-emotional learning. In doing such, the impact of understanding the teachers experience with SEL (both personal and occupational) will provide insight on how to overcome challenges that exist within a middle school setting.

V. PARTICIPANT INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

11. STUDY POPULATION (?)

Provide the inclusion criteria for the participant population (*gender, age range, ethnic background, health status, occupation, employer, etc.*): This study will include a minimum of twelve urban middle school certificated teachers who have been teaching for at least two years in Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Provide a rationale for selecting the above population: The time qualification in district is to ensure the participant has had at least one years' worth exposure to SEL within a professional context.

Are you related to any of your participants?

☒ No

☐ Yes (*Explain*):

Indicate who will be excluded from your study population (e.g., persons under 18 years of age):

Teachers who have less than one year experience with Cleveland Metropolitan School District and who are not certificated. Minors (17 and younger) will also be excluded from the study population.

If applicable, provide rationale for involving any special populations (e.g., children, ethnic groups, mentally disabled, low socio-economic status, prisoners):

Provide the maximum number of participants you plan to enroll for each participant population and justify the sample size (*You will not be approved to enroll a number greater than the number listed. If at a later time it becomes apparent that you need to increase your sample size, submit a [Change in Protocol Form](#) and wait for approval to proceed*): The maximum number of participants will be 12-25 as this is the recommended number for saturation within a phenomenological study. 2

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION ONLY IF YOU ARE CONDUCTING A PROTOCOL WITH NIH, FEDERAL, OR STATE FUNDING:

Researchers sometimes believe their particular project is not appropriate for certain types of participants. These may include, for example, women, minorities, and children. If you believe your project should not include one or more of these groups, please provide your justification for their exclusion. Your justification will be reviewed according to the applicable NIH, federal, or state guidelines:

12. TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS (?)	
Who will be the <u>focus</u> of your study? (<i>Check all that apply</i>)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Normal Participants (Age 18-65)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women
<input type="checkbox"/> Minors (Under Age 18)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fetuses
<input type="checkbox"/> Over Age 65	<input type="checkbox"/> Cognitively Disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> University Students	<input type="checkbox"/> Physically Disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> Active-Duty Military Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Participants Incapable of Giving Consent
<input type="checkbox"/> Discharged/Retired Military Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners or Institutional Individuals
<input type="checkbox"/> Inpatients	<input type="checkbox"/> Specific Ethnic/Racial Group(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Outpatients	<input type="checkbox"/> Other potentially elevated risk populations
<input type="checkbox"/> Patient Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> Participant(s) related to the researcher
<p>Note: Only check the boxes if the participants will be the <u>focus</u> (for example, <i>ONLY</i> military or <i>ONLY</i> students). If they just happen to be a part of the broad group you are studying, you only need to check "Normal Participants." Some studies may require that you check multiple boxes (e.g., Korean males, aged 65+).</p>	

VI. RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

13. CONTACTING PARTICIPANTS (?)

Describe in detail how you will contact participants regarding this study (include the method(s) used—email, phone call, social media, snowball sampling, etc.): Specifically to my study I will use criterion sampling to ensure that all my participants have experienced the same phenomena with that phenomena being social-emotional learning. Prior to garnering participants for the study, network superintendents and building principals will be apprised of the study during the monthly principal network meeting. I will secure five minutes of time to share the purpose of the research and hand out to each principal information pertinent to the study in the form of the request to participate letter. This informational session at the network principal meeting will occur the month prior to actually securing participants.

Recruitment for this study will be two-fold. Building principals will be asked to voluntarily forward out the request to participate letter to his or her middle grade teachers. If the building principal chooses to do this, I will ask the principal to copy me on the email that is sent to the staff regarding participation in the study. Interested participant names will be forwarded to me by the building principal or the interested participant can email me directly. If this aforementioned recruitment method does not yield a large enough sample size, participant selection will be done from looking at teacher placement in Workday, which is the district employee information data base, and gathering the names of those who are currently placed as a certificated teacher in a middle school classroom. As a district administrator I have access to this system and have received clearance to use this for research purposes by the Director of Evaluation and Research of Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Once a pool of possible participants has been secured, I as the researcher will vet them. This vetting process will include ensuring the participant is certificated and the participant has been in the district for at least two years to ensure that the participant has had professional exposure to SEL. If I have too many qualified participants respond, I will narrow it down through gathering a good stratification of grade level representation and years of participant teaching experience. Once the participants have been vetted, an introductory letter will be sent out to secure and finalize the participant list. Email communication will be utilized to set up a mutually agreed upon time to discuss the study in person. I will personally visit each participant and secure a signed Informed Consent as well as set up mutually agreed times for the interview process and two observations. The agreed upon dates and times for the interviews and observations will be logged into Microsoft Outlook Calendar. Each building principal that has a participant involved in the study as well as the network superintendent will receive a hard copy of the interview and observation schedule.

14. SUBMISSION OF RECRUITMENT MATERIALS (?)

Submit a copy of all recruitment letters, scripts, emails, flyers, advertisements, or social media posts you plan to use to recruit participants for your study as separate Word documents with your application. [Recruitment templates](#) are available on the IRB website.

Check the appropriate box:

- ☒ All of the necessary recruitment materials will be submitted with my application.
- ☐ My study strictly uses **archival** data, so recruitment materials are not required.

15. LOCATION OF RECRUITMENT (?)

Describe the location, setting, and timing of recruitment: Recruitment will start in January/February of 2018 and remain open until the number of needed participants is filled. There is no physical setting for recruitment as it will all be done electronically.

16. SCREENING PROCEDURES (?)

Describe any screening procedures you will use when recruiting your participants (*i.e., screening survey, database query, verbal confirmation, etc.*): Verbal confirmation will be utilized to ensure that participants are within required criteria as well as utilizing the program Workday to ensure years of service and certificate status. a

17. RELATIONSHIPS (?)

Does the researcher have a position of grading or professional authority over the participants (*e.g., is the researcher the participants' teacher or principal?*)

☐ No ([Proceed to Procedures](#))

☒ Yes (*Explain what safeguards are in place to reduce the likelihood of compromising the integrity of the research, e.g., addressing the conflicts in the consent process and/or emphasizing the pre-existing relationship will not be impacted by participation in the research.*): I am an SEL director for two networks of schools within District X. I will be recruiting participants from outside of my network so that the integrity of the study will not be compromised

VII. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

18. PROCEDURES (?)

Write an original, non-technical, step by step, description of what your participants will be asked to do during your study and data collection process. If you have multiple participant groups, (*ex: parents, teachers, and students*) or control groups and experimental groups, please specify which group you are asking to complete which task(s). **You do not need to list signing/reading consent as a step:**

Step/Task/Procedure	Time (Approx.)	Participant Group(s) (All, Group A, Group B, Control Group, Experimental Group, etc.)
1. Participants will take part in an individual initial semi-structured interview	60-90 Minutes	All
2 Participants will take part in an announced observations	43 minutes	All
3. Participants will take part in an individual post semi-structured interview	60-90 minutes	All
5. Participants will take part in a focus group session	60-90 minutes	All
6.		
7.		

8.

19. SUBMISSION OF DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS/MATERIALS (?)

Submit a copy of all instruments, surveys, interviews questions, outlines, observation checklists, prompts, etc. that you plan to use to collect data for your study as separate Word documents with your application. Pdfs are **ONLY** acceptable for proprietary instruments.

Check the appropriate box:

- ☒ All of the necessary data collection instruments will be submitted with my application.
☐ My study strictly uses **archival** data, so data collection instruments are not required.

20. STUDY LOCATION (?)

Please describe the location(s)/site(s) in which the study will be conducted. Be specific (*include city, state, school/district, clinic, etc.*): Study will be conducted in Cleveland, Ohio with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The specific school sites will be primarily based on teacher response as long as those schools are outside of the networks that I service. Interviews and classroom observations will occur at CMSD site locations.

Note: For School of Education research, investigators must submit documentation of permission from each research site (district level is acceptable) to the IRB prior to receiving approval. You may seek permission prior to submitting your IRB application, however, **do not** begin recruiting participants. If you find that you need a conditional approval letter from the IRB in order to obtain permission, one can be provided to you once all revisions have been received and are accepted. Contact the IRB with any questions regarding this process.

VIII. DATA ANALYSIS**21. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS/DATA SETS (?)**

Estimate the number of participants to be enrolled or data sets to be collected: 12

22. ANALYSIS METHODS (?)

Describe how the data will be analyzed and what will be done with the data and the resulting analysis, including any plans for future publication or presentation: Data analysis for my study will include the organizing of data, memoing, and coding. The phenomena that is central to this study will be determined through investigation of the participants' personal and professional experience with social-emotional learning. Themes and patterns of data will emerge through a thorough reading and transcription of the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This repetitive process will allow me to deeply immerse myself within the data. Field notes from classroom observations will also be utilized with the aforementioned methods to develop themes and codes that support data analysis. The program ATLAS.ti.8 and Microsoft Excel will be used to code and categorize participant responses. The data will be used to present research findings for my dissertation defense. will be analyzed through the means of recording and transcription. The program ATLAS.ti 7 will be used to code and categorize participant responses. The data will be used to present research findings for my dissertation defense.

IX. PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT**23. PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT REQUIREMENTS (?)**

Does your study require parental/guardian consent? *(If your participants are under 18, parental/guardian consent is required in most cases.)*

☒ No ([Proceed to Child Assent](#))

☐ Yes *(Answer the following question)*

Does your study entail greater than minimal risk without the potential for benefits to the participant?

☒ No

☐ Yes *(Consent of both parents is required)*

X. ASSENT FROM CHILDREN**24. CHILD ASSENT (?)**

Is assent required for your study? *(Assent is required unless the child is not capable due to age, psychological state, or sedation OR the research holds out the prospect of a direct benefit that is only available within the context of the research.)*

☒ No ([Proceed to Consent Procedures](#))

☐ Yes

Note: *If the parental consent process (full or part) is waived (See XIII below) assent may be also. See the IRB's [informed consent](#) page for more information.*

XI. PROCESS OF OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT**25. CONSENT PROCEDURES (?)**

Describe in detail *how and when* you will provide consent information *(If applicable, include how you will obtain consent from participants and/or parents/guardians and/or child assent.):* Participants who have volunteered for the study will be given Informed Consent forms to be filled out. The Informed Consent will be given no later than two days after volunteering for the study and will be sent out electronically through email.

XII. USE OF DECEPTION**26. DECEPTION (?)**

Are there any aspects of the study kept secret from the participants *(e.g., the full purpose of the study)?*

☒ No

☐ Yes *(describe the deception involved and the debriefing procedures):*

Is deception used in the study procedures?

☒ No

☐ Yes *(describe the deception involved and the debriefing procedures):*

Note: *Submit a post-experiment debriefing statement and consent form offering participants the option of having their data destroyed. A debriefing template is available on our [website](#).*

XIII. WAIVER OR MODIFICATION FOR REQUIRED ELEMENTS IN THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS**27. WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT ELEMENTS (?)**

☒ N/A

Does the research pose no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., no more risk than that of everyday activities)?

☐ No, the study is greater than minimal risk.

☐ Yes, the study is minimal risk.

Will the waiver have no adverse effects on participant rights and welfare?

☐ No, the waiver will have adverse effects on participant rights and welfare.

☐ Yes, the waiver will not adversely affect participant rights and welfare.

Would the research be impracticable without the waiver?

☐ No, there are other ways of performing the research without the waiver.

☐ Yes, not having a waiver would make the study unrealistic. (Explain):

Will participant debriefing occur (i.e., will the true purpose and/or deceptive procedures used in the study be reported to participants at a later date)?

☐ No, participants will not be debriefed.

☐ Yes, participants will be debriefed.

Note: A waiver or modification of some or all of the required elements of informed consent is sometimes used in research involving deception, archival data, or specific minimal risk procedures.

XIV. WAIVER OF SIGNED INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

28. WAIVER OF SIGNED CONSENT (?)

☒ N/A

Would a signed consent form be the only record linking the participant to the research?

☐ No, there are other records/study questions linking the participants to the study.

☐ Yes, only the signed form would link the participant to the study.

Does a breach of confidentiality constitute the principal risk to participants?

☐ No, there are other risks involved greater than a breach of confidentiality.

☐ Yes, the main risk is a breach of confidentiality.

Does the research pose no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., no more risk than that of everyday activities)?

☐ No, the study is greater than minimal risk.

☐ Yes, the study is minimal risk.

Does the research include any activities that would require signed consent in a non-research context (e.g., liability waivers)?

☐ No, there are not any study related activities that would normally require signed consent

☐ Yes, there are study related activities that would normally require signed consent

Will you provide the participants with a written statement about the research (i.e., an information sheet that contains all of the elements of an informed consent form but without the signature lines)?

☐ No, participants will not receive written information about the research.

☐ Yes, participants will receive written information about the research.

Note: A waiver of signed consent is sometimes used in anonymous surveys or research involving secondary data. This does not eliminate the need for a consent document, but it eliminates the need to obtain participant signatures.

XV. CHECKLIST OF INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT

29. STATEMENT (?)

Submit a copy of all informed consent/assent documents as separate Word documents with your application. [Informed consent/assent templates](#) are available on our website. Additional information regarding [consent](#) is also available on our website.

Check the appropriate box:

- ☒ All of the necessary consent/assent documents will be submitted with my application.
☐ My study strictly uses **archival** data, so consent documents are not required.

XVI. PARTICIPANT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

30. PRIVACY (?)

Describe what steps you will take to protect the privacy of your participants (*e.g., If you plan to interview participants, will you conduct your interviews in a setting where others cannot easily overhear?*): Interviews with participants will be conducted in a setting where there is minimal public interference including reserved rooms at the public library, participants classroom, and participants home. Also within the study itself pseudonyms will be used in lieu of participants actual names and data will be stored on password protected laptop.

Note: Privacy refers to persons and their interest in controlling access to their information.

31. CONFIDENTIALITY (?)

How will you keep your data secure (*i.e., password-locked computer, locked desk, locked filing cabinet, etc.*)?: Data will be stored on password-locked computer as well as locked filing cabinet.

Who will have access to the data (*i.e., the researcher and faculty mentor/chair, only the researcher, etc.*)?: The researcher will be the only person who has access to the data.

Will you destroy the data once the three-year retention period required by federal regulations expires?

- ☒ No
☐ Yes (*Explain how the data will be destroyed*):

Note: All research-related data must be stored for a minimum of three years after the end date of the study, as required by federal regulations.

32. ARCHIVAL DATA (?)

Is all or part of the data archival (*i.e., previously collected for another purpose*)?

- ☒ No ([Proceed to Non-Archival Data](#))
☐ Yes (*Answer the questions below*)

Is the archival data publicly accessible?

- ☐ No (*Explain how you will obtain access to this data*):
☐ Yes (*Indicate where the data is accessible from, i.e., a website, etc.*):

Will you receive the raw data stripped of identifying information (e.g., names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, social security numbers, medical records, birth dates, etc.)?:

- ☐ No (Describe what data will remain identifiable and why this information will not be removed):
- ☐ Yes (Describe who will link and/or strip the data—this person should have regular access to the data and should be a neutral party not involved in the study):

Can the names or identities of the participants be deduced from the raw data?

- ☐ No (Place your initials in the box: I will not attempt to deduce the identity of the participants in this study):
- ☐ Yes (Describe):

Please provide the list of data fields you intend to use for your analysis and/or provide the original instruments used in the study:

Note: If the archival data is not publicly available, submit proof of permission to access the data (i.e., school district letter or email). If you will receive data stripped of identifiers, this should be stated in the proof of permission.

33. NON-ARCHIVAL DATA (?)

If you are using non-archival data, will the data be anonymous (i.e., data does not contain identifying information and cannot be linked to identifying information by use of pseudonyms, codes, or other means—for studies involving audio/video recording or photography, select “No”)?

- ☐ N/A: I will not use non-archival data (data was previously collected, [skip to Media](#))
- ☒ No ([Complete the “No” section below](#))
- ☐ Yes ([Complete the “Yes” section below](#))

****COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU ANSWERED “NO” TO QUESTION 31****

Can participant names or identities be deduced from the raw data?

- ☐ No
- ☒ Yes (Describe): Although names and titles will be identifiable from the raw data, only the researcher will know this information and it will remain confidential and kept from the public.

Will a person be able to identify a subject based on other information in the raw data (i.e., title, position, sex, etc.)?

- ☐ No
- ☒ Yes (Describe): From the voice recording the sex of the participant will be able to be identified.

Describe the process you will use to collect the data and to ensure the confidentiality of the participants (i.e., you may know who participated, but participant identities will not be disclosed or pseudonyms will be used): Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of participants' actual names. The list of pseudonyms will be stored separately from the other research data.

Do you plan to maintain a list or codebook linking pseudonyms or codes to participant identities?

☐ No

☒ Yes (Please list where this list/codebook will be stored, whether it will be separate from your study data, and who will have access): The data will be stored on a password protected computer and the researcher will be the only individual who has access to this data.

****COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO QUESTION 31****

Describe the process you will use to collect the data to ensure that it is anonymous:

Place your initials in the box: I will not attempt to deduce the identity of the participants in this study:

Note: If you plan to use participant data (i.e., photos, recordings, videos, drawings) for presentations beyond data analysis for the research study (e.g., classroom presentations, library archive, or conference presentations) you will need to provide a materials release form to the participant.

34. MEDIA USE (?)

Will your participants be audio recorded?

☐ No ☒ Yes

Will your participants be video recorded?

☒ No ☐ Yes

Will your participants be photographed?

☒ No ☐ Yes

****COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO ANY MEDIA USE****

Include information regarding how participant data will be withdrawn if he or she chooses to leave the study*:

Will your participants be audio recorded, video recorded, or photographed without their knowledge?**

☒ No

☐ Yes (Describe the deception and debriefing procedures):

***Note on Withdrawal:** Add the heading "How to Withdraw from the Study" on the consent document and include a description of the procedures a participant must perform to be withdrawn.

****Note on Deception:** Attach a post-experiment debriefing statement and a post-deception consent

form, offering the participants the option of having their recording/photograph destroyed and removed from the study.

XVII. PARTICIPANT COMPENSATION

35. COMPENSATION (?)

Will participants be compensated (e.g., gift cards, raffle entry, reimbursement)?

☒ No ([Proceed to Risks](#))

☐ Yes (*Describe*):

Will compensation be pro-rated if the participant does not complete all aspects of the study?

☐ No

☐ Yes (*Describe*):

Note: Research compensation exceeding \$600 per participant within a one-year period is considered income and will need to be filed on the participant's income tax returns. If your study is grant funded, Liberty University's Business Office policies might affect how you compensate participants. Contact the IRB for information on who to contact for guidance on this matter.

XVIII. PARTICIPANT RISKS AND BENEFITS

36. RISKS (?)

Describe the risks to participants and any steps that will be taken to minimize those risks. (Risks can be physical, psychological, economic, social, or legal. If the only potential risk is a breach in confidentiality if the data is lost or stolen, state that here): The only risk is a breach in confidentiality.

Will alternative procedures or treatments that might be advantageous to the participants be made available?

☒ No

☐ Yes (*Describe*):

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION ONLY IF YOUR STUDY IS CONSIDERED GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK:

Describe provisions for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of adverse effects to the participants (e.g., proximity of the research location to medical facilities, or your ability to provide counseling referrals in the event of emotional distress):

37. BENEFITS (?)

Describe the possible direct benefits to the participants. *(If participants are not expected to receive direct benefits, please state "No direct benefits." Completing a survey or participating in an interview will not typically result in direct benefits to the participant.):* None

Describe any possible benefits to society: Benefits include increased knowledge on the challenges of social-emotional learning within an urban middle school setting and how these challenges can be overcome through a teacher lens.

Evaluate the risk-benefit ratio. *(Explain why you believe this study is worth doing, even with any identified risks.):*



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Alex Johnson, Ph.D.

MATTHEW LINICK, PH.D.

Office of Portfolio Planning, Growth, and Management

Joseph Gerics,

Thank you for your interest in working with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD). Permission has been granted to move ahead with the proposed research project: "QUALITATIVE STUDY ON URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AS FORMED THROUGH PERSONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE" pending IRB approval from your supporting academic institution.

The project has been approved with the following provisions:

1. Principal approval at the school(s) needs to be granted before any data collection can be conducted.
2. Data collection in terms of in-depth interviews, surveys, etc. must be coordinated with the Principal and not compromise class time in any significant manner.
3. Consent and assent forms signed by participant must be collected before in-depth interviews, surveys, etc. can be conducted.
4. Results must be made available to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District within 45 days of the completion of the study.
5. The identities of all participants must be held confidential.
6. IRB Approval to conduct research has been attained before data collection begins.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Matthew Linick at (216) 838-0181 or by email at matthew.linick@clevelandmetroschools.org.

Sincerely,

Matthew Linick, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Research and Evaluation
Cleveland Metropolitan School District

APPENDIX B**APPENDIX C****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 13, 2018

Joseph Gerics

IRB Approval 3150.031318: A Qualitative Study on Urban Middle School Teachers' Perspective of Social and Emotional Learning as Formed Through Personal and Occupational Experience

Dear Joseph Gerics,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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APPENDIX D

Date: July 10, 2017

Greetings, teachers/administrators,

As a graduate student in the education department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a degree. The purpose of my research is to investigate urban middle school teachers' personal and professional experience with social-emotional learning in order to identify challenges with implementation of SEL. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

You were selected to participate in the current research study because are a middle school teacher in the district. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in two semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a classroom observation. The interviews and focus group will last between 30 and 60 minutes, with no interview time exceeding 60 minutes. The questions for the interviews and focus group will focus on your perceptions and experiences with SEL as a teacher in a middle school classroom and also in your personal life. The classroom observation will in no way be tied or impact teacher evaluation criteria for the district. The questions for this interview will focus on your perceptions and experiences with SEL as a teacher in a middle school classroom and also in your personal life. . Participants will also be asked to review transcripts of the audio recording of the interview, following the interview, to check for accuracy.

In order to participate, please read through the attached consent/assent form, ask any questions you may have, sign it, and return the form back to the primary investigator. It should take only a few minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your participation will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in doing so now, please indicate a date and time wherein I can arrange to interview you: _____.

You can contact me at any time with questions regarding this research at: jgerics@liberty.edu. Participants will not be compensated for participation in this research study. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Joe Gerics

APPENDIX E

Dear participant,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study which looks to gain insight on challenges that face urban middle school teachers with the implementation of social-emotional learning. As stipulated in the request to participate as well as consent form this study will include an observation that will have no impact on your evaluation with the district. Please indicate potential dates and times for these observations that would be compatible with your schedule. I look forward to learning from you.

Day of Week:

Time frame:

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

A Qualitative Study on Urban Middle School Teachers' Perspective of Social and Emotional Learning as Formed Through Personal and Occupational Experience

Joseph Gerics
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of social-emotional learning and how this is implemented at the middle school level based on your experience as the teacher. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been in the field of education as a teacher for five years or more. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Joseph Gerics, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of urban middle school teachers as it relates to social-emotional learning both from the participants private life outside of the classroom and also the participants occupational experience as a practitioner in order to gain perspective on the challenges that face urban middle school teachers with implementation of SEL programming and curriculum.

Procedures: If you agree to participate I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Partake in an initial and post semi-structured interview. This interview will take between 60-90 minutes and will be recorded for transcription purposes.
2. Allow researcher to observe the class to gather SEL data.
3. Participate in a focus group that will last for 60-90 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation: The risks involved in this study minimal. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the study will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Cleveland Metropolitan School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Joseph Gerics. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 440-228-7200 or joseph.gerics@clevelandmetroschools.org. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Sandra Battige, at sbattige@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

APPENDIX G

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Initial interview questions

1. Thank you for joining me for this interview. If you wouldn't mind stating your name and the grade level you teach I would greatly appreciate it.
2. These next questions ask for you to talk about your personal experience with SEL. I appreciate your willingness to open up about your personal experience with social-emotional learning. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to recognize and manage your emotions?
 - a. If yes, Please tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, Please tell me more about what hindered this process.
3. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to set and achieve positive goals?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
4. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to demonstrate care and concern for other?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
5. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to establish and maintain positive relationships?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
6. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned make responsible decisions?
 - a. If yes, tell me about your learning process.

- b. If no, tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 7. Within your lifetime, do you believe you have learned to set handle interpersonal conflicts in a positive manner?
 - a. If yes, please tell me about your learning process.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 8. Now, let's talk a bit about the value of SEL in the classroom. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students recognize and manage their emotions?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 9. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students set and achieve positive goals?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process
- 10. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students demonstrate care and concern for others?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 11. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students establish and maintain positive relationships?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 12. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students make responsible decisions?

- a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 13. Within your classroom, do you believe that SEL has helped your students to positively handle interpersonal situations?
 - a. If yes, please expound on this by providing a few examples.
 - b. If no, please tell me more about what hindered this process.
- 14. In closing, what else would you like me to know about your personal or professional experiences with SEL?

Post Observation Interview

- 1. Thank you for joining me again. If you would please re-introduce yourself and state what grade level you teach I would greatly appreciate it.
- 2. Thank you for the introduction. These next questions ask about your professional experience with SEL particularly around challenges you may have faced. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to recognize and manage their emotions?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 3. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to set and achieve positive goals?

- a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 4. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to demonstrate caring and concern for others?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 5. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to establish positive relationships?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Were they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 6. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students to make responsible decisions?

- a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 7. Within your classroom, have you experienced any challenges to teaching students positively handle interpersonal situations?
 - a. If yes, can you please expound on this by providing a few examples? What strategies have you implemented to overcome these challenges? Where they effective? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, can you please tell me why you believe you have not encountered challenges in this area?
- 8. In closing, what else that you'd like me to know about your professional experiences with implementing SEL in the classroom?

Focus Group Questions

- 1. Thank you all for joining me here today. As a teacher I know how precious and valuable your time is. If you wouldn't mind, please state your name, what you teach, and how many years you have been teaching.
- 2. These next few questions are going you focus on your professional expertise in regards to SEL. What advice would you give to a future teacher of SEL who may not have strong personal SEL skills?
- 3. Do you believe SEL instruction in the classroom is beneficial for students?
 - a. Why or why not?

4. What challenges are new teachers of SEL likely to face when implementing this curriculum in the classroom?
5. What advice would you give new teachers of SEL about how to overcome these challenges?
6. In closing, is there anything else that you'd like me to know about your personal or professional experiences with SEL?

APPENDIX H

Site Location:		Date:	Start Time:	Stop Time:	
Area of Observation	Self-Management	Self-Awareness	Social-Awareness	Responsible-Decision Making	Relationship Skills
Behavior (Student, Teacher)					
Conversation (what, by whom, where)					
Context (What else is going on in class, what type of event triggered interaction)					
Response (Student, Teacher)					
Other Observable Events					

APPENDIX I

From: Margaret R. Roller <rmr@rollerresearch.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 3, 2017 6:24 PM
To: Gerics, Joseph
Subject: Re: Permission

Hello Joseph,

Thank you for contacting me and asking permission to use our observation grid in your dissertation work. We are pleased to give you permission to use the grid, we only ask that you properly cite the book in your discussion of the grid.

Margaret R. Roller • rmr@rollerresearch.com
804.693.3208 • 888.227.8999
Website: www.rollerresearch.com
Blog: www.researchdesignreview.com
Book: [*Applied Qualitative Research Design*](#) (Guilford Press)

On Tue, Oct 3, 2017 at 2:36 PM, Gerics, Joseph <Joseph.Gerics@clevelandmetroschools.org> wrote:

Good Afternoon Ms. Roller,

I am writing to secure permission from you to use the observation grid that can be found in *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach* for data collection that will be included in my dissertation. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Joseph Gerics