A CASE STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' SELF-DETERMINATION IN

IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING PEDAGOGY

by

Ingrid Brouwer

An Applied Research Report Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Denise R. Nixon, PhD., Committee Chair

Sarah Kerins, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this single common case study will be to answer the question, "How does intrinsic motivation and self-determination in the ability to make choices and manage one's behavior guide the implementation of social-emotional teaching practices into the early childhood classroom?" for the participants at Mount Uinta (pseudonym). The theory guiding this study will be Deci and Ryan's Self-determination Theory (SDT), as it will validate the three basic psychological needs to strengthen learners' autonomy, competence, and a sense of positive relatedness in social-emotional learning and teaching. Reaching the goal of implementing intrinsic motivation and professional development (PD) for early childhood teachers can complement the teaching of SEL skills. The method for the selected research will be qualitative, using exploration and understanding of a group of teachers and the social problem of teacher intrinsic motivation and self-determination. Detailed information will be collected using a variety of data collection methods for this single common case study, by conducting interviews with the staff, holding focus groups, and collecting teacher reflection surveys on their level of preparedness to incorporate SEL into early childhood classrooms. The analysis will be conducted via two-cycle coding methods, including emotion coding and pattern matching to form an understanding of teacher self-determination.

Keywords: early childhood teachers, intrinsic motivation, social-emotional learning, self-determination theory, autonomy, relatedness, competence

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to my four marvelous children Rachel, Justin, John, and Shelby, and their spouses and children. Thank you for cheering me on through all the years of studying. I hope I am an example to you in pursuing continued education. I greatly love you and am proud of your educational, family, and career pursuits.

I dedicate this manuscript to my wonderful parents Frans and Ans Brouwer who have always believed in me pursuing my dreams. I owe you both so much.

A great thanks to all my siblings and their families for always asking me how I'm doing through the daunting days of homework, I love you all.

Thank you to my Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ who I have often called upon to give me strength and perseverance to continue this journey. I have always felt the strength and energy needed to keep moving along.

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I owe a lot to previous teachers in my multiple courses over the years. Those who cheered me on and told me to keep pursuing more education as they knew that there were so many wonderful professors who would be willing to keep guiding me to pursue my dreams. Thank you all.

Thanks to those friends who have always kept cheering me on, although asking, "When are you ever going to be done with school?" It helped me not give up and keep pursuing this grand finale in my education journey.

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List of Abbreviations

Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS)

Conscious Discipline (CD)

Child Development Associate (CDA)

Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Collaborating States Initiative (CSI)

Disabilities and Mental Health Manager (DMHM)

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Early Head Start (EHS)

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Head Start Association (NHSA)

Ontario Child Health Study (OCHS)

Professional Development (PD)

Self-determination Theory (SDT)

Social Emotional Competency (SEC)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

School Development Program (SDP)

Utah State Board of Education (USBE)

Utah Head Start Association (UHSA)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how teachers can acquire intrinsic motivation and self-determination to build their social-emotional competence before instructing their preschool students in social-emotional learning. This chapter includes background information on the purpose of professional development in how to develop, promote, and implement SEL for teachers, the relationships of the researcher to the study and participants, the problem and purpose statements, and the significance of the study and research questions. Included in the background section are historical, social, and theoretical contexts of the phenomenon of self-determination. Definitions of terms and a summary complete the chapter.

Background

Early childhood education relies on the inner potential of the child. Approaches such as social and emotional learning (SEL) may play an important part in the development and well-being of a child, including healthy relationships and positive mental health (Blewitt et al., 2021). Intrinsically motivated teachers, as well as meeting their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), can guide their students to persist on difficult tasks, cope with challenges, stay in school longer, and perform better academically (Marshik et al., 2017). A comprehension of adult human motivation and how it is fostered through meeting basic psychological needs could foster guidance of a child as an individual being, capable of self-control, independence, and autonomy (Huf & Kluge, 2021).

School success is most often correlated with academic achievement, enquiring social-emotional competencies of self-management, self-awareness, problem-solving, and relationship skills go hand in hand with cognitive skills to create success in school and life (Denham et al.,

2012; Low et al., 2016). Incorporating SEL includes setting clear expectations, teaching social skills, discussing and explanation of emotions, scaffolding, and modeling activities (CASEL, 1994; Ferreira et al., 2020; Zinsser et al., 2016), yet not all educators are consistent or intrinsically motivated in their implementation of these practices (Snyder et al., 2018). Formal guidelines and practices for implementing SEL into early childhood curricula are needed (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jagers et al., 2019). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are necessary elements for a person's well-being. People require intrinsic motivation and the feeling associated with finding satisfaction from accomplishing an activity (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Historical Context

Plato (*375 BC*) wrote about education in *The Republic* in Ancient Greece indicating a need for a holistic curriculum of physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral judgment. With this curriculum, he believed a citizen of good character would be produced and lead a prosperous life. The meaning of the word *character* comes from the Greek word *engrave*. Confucius (600BC) explains how habits, acting in certain ways that affect our behavior, bring meaning and purpose to character (Effrem et al., 2019)—the colonial American times created schooling for children with moral character instruction found in Judeo-Christian religion. Thomas Jefferson urged schools "to raise men to high moral required of a democracy" which was needed for freedom and independence (Effrem et al., 2019, p. 5). Teachers were given the role of encouraging and strengthening basic ethical standards educational equity and meaningful instruction had been in the making for over 100 years as a campaign by educationalists such as John Dewey to create elementary and secondary schools as the means to form a "New America liberated of prejudices of family, church, and tradition" (Effrem et al., 2019, p. 4).

In the early 20th century, Dewey, and other progressive educators such as Edward Thorndike of Columbia University Teachers College were joining psychology with education. Psychology could influence aspects of learning that would assist students to socialize, collaborate, and problem solve in groups and would help students be molded for workforce training Post-World War II gave way to states making decisions as to what children should be taught in school, moving away from parental input on "What is most worth knowing?" (Effrem et al., 2019, p. 4). The long-held public-school view of colonial America, of teaching religion-based morality, gave way to SEL. Not only were core subjects taught, but learning the rules of life, and forming habits of self-discipline and consideration of others. In other words, teaching character education in being a good citizen was seen as a gap to be filled in the lives of American children. The new secular public school environment focused on teaching habits that were impartial to religion but taught fairness, honesty, and trustworthiness. Moral character instruction was left to parents (Effrem et al., 2019).

In the late 1960s the Comer School Development Program (SDP), instituted by James Comer at Yale School of Medicine, was designed to generate a school environment where children felt comfortable, special, and safe (Coulter, 1993). Here positive relationships were formed with teachers and parents and in return a positive outlook toward school developed, improving academic learning. SDP used psychological and developmental applications to create effective pedagogy for in-service training sessions. In the years between 1987 and 1992, the K12 New Haven Social Development Program was established due to the success of SDP as well as the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (Elias et al., 1996). Individuals from the community combined their knowledge and expertise and created a framework for the incorporation of emotional skills in schools.

The term social and emotional learning (SEL) was incorporated in the early 1990s, indicating all children and adults gain and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand, express, and manage emotions and conduct considerate decisions (Denham et al., 2012). Young children who receive emotional knowledge become socializers of emotional competence, becoming students who can self-regulate, show empathy for others in social situations and build supportive relationships. After moving away from moral and character education and religion-free schools, SEL now includes the teaching of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making traits (CASEL, 1994).

Social Context

Satisfaction of the fundamental psychological human needs can be understood through the development that occurs through social context support of high-quality motivation, healthy development, and well-being. The interpretation of the effects of social contexts is relevant to both motivation and behavior in experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The brain can produce the ability to create meaning from interpersonal relationships to cope with stress and respond to life events. "We must understand that human connections create neural connections that shape how we see life, handle stress, and respond to life events" (Bailey, 2015, p. 64). The evidence-based CASEL 5 (1994) framework addresses five wide-ranging areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL (1994) formed the Collaborating States Initiative (CSI), launched in 2016, to work with states and school districts to ensure students from preschool through high school are thoroughly prepared academically, socially, and emotionally to be successful in school, work, and life. With the increased attention to social and emotional learning (SEL), a growth from eight to over 40 states are participating in the CSI and continue to develop guidelines for professional learning to

support student SEL. By creating The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL, 1994) Framework for Systemic SEL, the organization seeks continued systemic improvement to help organize, implement, and improve SEL for students as well as teaching staff through state education agencies (CASEL, 1994).

Preschool students' readiness to enter elementary school involves a wide range of skills attitudes, and behaviors that can affect a student's success in school. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are all components of social-emotional learning (SEL). When a teacher can insert personal meaning into the cognitive process, the learning becomes constructive. Piaget's constructivist learning theory from 1968 guides the constructive learning process through "teachers who are the organizers, guides, and promoters in the learning process" helping students to stretch their thinking and find and solve problems through collaborative learning (Zhang & Lin, 2018, p. 649).

Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 2017) also known as social or emotional intelligence are different from intellect, yet these skills impact a student's education and further academic success. Often ignored in measuring intellect, SEL is critical in early childhood education where children are learning to identify and label feelings. Dewey (1931-1988) noted that education does not exist if "ideas and knowledge are not translated into emotion, interest, and volition" (p. 189). Students focus on a teacher's directions through "two brains" (Park et al., 2020) a so-called "cognitive brain" that focuses on the *what* of instruction and another called the "emotional brain" that focuses on the *how* (p. 570).

Theoretical Context

People can hold a belief about their competencies indicating how they behave and the choices they make. Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are necessary elements for a person's well-being. People need intrinsic motivation and the feeling associated with finding satisfaction from doing an activity (Gagné & Deci, 2005). The beliefs that people hold about their capabilities and the outcomes of their efforts are described by Bandura as self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy directly relates to his social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The social learning theory describes how humans actively process and think about the relationship between their behavior and its consequences. There must be active processing to determine if there is a want to imitate the observed behavior, called the mediational process (McLeod, 2016). People can hold the belief about their competencies which will indicate how they behave and the choices they make. As teachers develop more skills, their self-efficacy beliefs might change. Encounters that have been mastered by overcoming obstacles or succeeding in challenging tasks are powerful (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy can be enabled as knowledge is built through verbal persuasion and encouragement. The more an individual learns through modeling the behavior of others, the more one develops self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

The foundation of positive relationships is possessing social-emotional competence (Poulou, 2017). When a teacher can insert personal meaning into the cognitive process, the learning becomes constructive. Zhang and Lin appreciate how Piaget's constructivist learning theory guides the constructive learning process as teachers organize, guide, and promote learning hereby helping students to stretch their thinking and find and solve problems through collaborative learning (2018). There is evidence that higher quality early childhood experiences matter for children's development and life-long success (Hatfield et al., 2016). Teachers are

constantly engaged in SEL (Zinsser et al., 2014) but how their own social and emotional competence and well-being influence student's SEL is often not cultivated (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). It is particularly important in early childhood as "teachers have the potential to be excellent socializers, given their position as powerful role models" (Zinsser et al., 2014, p. 474). Teachers can build their efficacy beliefs through intrinsic motivation, engagement (Wright et al., 2021), and influence. Teachers as models, play a powerful role in the child's development, as children notice the emotions of their teachers (Denham et al., 2012).

The main socialization model in a child's life used to be the parent, but as more children spend large amounts of time in preschool, modeling, and teaching emotion regulation and socialization has fallen on teachers (Zinsser et al., 2014). Preschool teachers who receive professional development can improve the social-emotional skills of the children (Jensen et al., 2017). Teachers' positive understanding of emotions can help create a positive classroom atmosphere using positive expressions and guiding emotional self-regulation (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2014). Encounters that have been mastered by overcoming obstacles or succeeding in challenging tasks are powerful (Bandura, 1994). Sometimes inadequacy may occur, but even slow progress will prove obstacles can be overcome. Learning about how much professional development time is spent on social-emotional competence (SEC) and personal well-being (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) will indicate whether teachers receive adequate learning opportunities. Lastly, their opinions matter to help improve professional development on SEL where needed (Guerrant, 2016; Zinsser et al., 2014). A better understanding of emotional regulation and teachers' emotional competence could lead to positive progress in teacher training (Denham et al., 2012). Teachers who understand their emotional competence are better equipped to handle education-specific stresses.

Problem Statement

The problem is that early childhood educators do not have adequate intrinsic motivation and self-determination (Klaeijsen et al., 2018) in the ability to make choices and manage their behavior to implement SEL skills effectively (McClelland et al., 2017). There seems to be a lack of professional development in SEL, yet social and emotional skills form the foundation of positive relationships. Early childhood teachers' self-determined forms of intrinsic motivation and the ability to develop, promote, and implement (Klaeijsen et al., 2018) specific teaching behaviors while the basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017) are satisfied, need more investigation. Teachers' own emotions, the learning environment, as well as attending to the student's social-emotional needs affect academic achievement (Denham et al., 2012). High-quality early childhood educators play a significant role in strengthening a child's social, emotional, and cognitive functioning and school readiness (García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016; Hemmeter et al., 2021; Marshik et al., 2017). Reaching an understanding of how teachers promote emotional competence, the value of SEL instruction, and the teacher's role as socializers of emotional practice (Denham et al., 2012), could guide future professional development training. This could "help teachers better meet students' SEL needs" (Zinsser et al., 2014, p. 487).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) realizes that the implementation of SEL is not a linear process. A schoolwide SEL implementation approach is recommended to build a strong foundation, strengthen adult SEL, and promote SEL for students (CASEL, 1994). Consideration of strategies in the implementation of SEL pedagogy may promote long-term change in preschool classrooms. Even with this knowledge, there is surprisingly little research on early childhood teachers' social-emotional competence, and how to

manage their feelings and display emotions to influence students' SEL competence (Denham et al., 2012; Poulou, 2017).

Purpose Statement

This single common case study aims to develop an in-depth analysis of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination in the ability to make choices and manage one's behavior guide the implementation of social and emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators at Mount Uinta (pseudonym). At this stage in the research, social-emotional learning will be generally defined as "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as components of social-emotional learning" (CASEL, 1994; Denham et al., 2012; Low et al., 2016). The theory guiding this study is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), validating the three basic psychological needs of the individual: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-determined forms of intrinsic motivation and the ability to develop, promote, and implement (Klaeijsen et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017) specific teaching behaviors and the management of one's behavior could guide implementation of SEL in the early childhood classroom and increase overall well-being.

Having the ability to understand early childhood teachers' own social and emotional competence concerning teaching effectiveness could benefit the teaching staff at Mount Uinta with the implementation of the SEL curricula. Social-emotional learning pedagogy will provide teachers with the tools needed to manage their feelings and displays of emotions. They will be able to be aware of their teaching practices, and overall well-being, and able to pay attention to their students' emotional needs (Denham et al., 2012). The Utah State Board of Education (USBE), indicates SEL pedagogy to convey "communication, executive functioning, and problem-solving skills" (USBE, 2019), and as the process

through which all 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, create, and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 1994).

Little is known about teachers' perceptions of integrating SEL and the role they play in delivering SEL into the early childhood learning environment (Blewitt et al., 2021). Moen et al. (2019) emphasized the need to support teachers in their efforts to increase the emotional climate in the classroom.

Significance of the Study

Understanding teachers' perceptions of their own social and emotional competencies may explain teacher-student relationships and how their own emotions relate to their teaching practices. Teachers' competence and the ability to model, coach, and scaffold children's emotional and social experiences, could provide understanding in their roles of purposefully incorporating SEL into their preschool classrooms (Wright et al., 2021; Zinsser et al., 2014). Strengthening professional development, coaching, and training in SEL could be beneficial for teachers. Before developing such training programs, gaining an understanding of teachers' own beliefs about emotions, views on attachment relationships, and experiences in effective emotional support are needed (Zinsser et al., 2014).

Theoretical Significance

Humans thrive when the basic three psychological needs of satisfaction in autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. Ryan and Deci (2020) state, "behavior is regulated by the internal rewards of self-esteem for success and by avoidance of anxiety, shame, or guilt for failure" (p. 2). This may be viewed through internally controlled regulation in which a teacher's

self-esteem is contingent on outcomes. Moving from amotivation (non-self-determined) to participation in professional development, the teacher may find learning to match their interest and become driven to learn, thus moving to intrinsic (self-determined) motivation.

Not only can motivation enhance teacher learning and integration of values into their personal lives (Deci & Ryan, 1985), but their attitude toward completing a task also becomes important (Ryan & Deci, 2020) and complements alignment in the workplace and overall well-being. Studying preschool teachers' intrinsic motivation and self-determination to grow and change when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled, can show how teachers can feel more committed, passionate, and satisfied in their teaching practices. This study can provide insight into creating professional development training that promotes the emotional competence of early childhood teachers. Those teachers will form an understanding of how to develop, promote, and implement teaching behaviors that influence the social-emotional learning environment.

Empirical Significance

Implementation of effective social and emotional learning pedagogy, including training or professional development for early childhood teachers in building up their own SEL skills through practice and modeling of such skills (McClelland et al., 2017) is necessary to successfully implement SEL. SDT concepts support, that within the human core, there are innate satisfactions that predict wellness and drive (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-actualization (the internal drive to reach one's potential) and doing something meaningful in life as part of eudemonic well-being and happiness in hedonic well-being are both needed for purposeful growth in a person (Jones et al., 2019). Those teachers who have self-determination and intrinsic motivation will take an active role in understanding and studying SEL and increase their competence. Studies

have been conducted to promote the development of positive student-teacher relationships. Research has mainly focused on students' social and emotional competencies. SEL competencies are not a focus within teacher preparation state standards, and few states recommend student teachers' SEL proficiency before teaching commences. Understanding teachers' perceptions of their own social and emotional competencies may explain teacher-student relationships and how their own emotions relate to their teaching practices.

Practical Significance

The results of the study could increase preschool teachers' intrinsic motivation in the ability to make choices and manage their behaviors (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Belief in oneself and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017) can increase teaching effectiveness. Teachers and administrators could benefit from this research study by understanding the effects of self-determination and intrinsic motivation in SEL pedagogy implementation. Teaching SEL is approached in an emotional and instructionally supportive manner by teachers which influences children daily. The positive changes that may occur when teachers have gained social-emotional competency skills through professional development to confidently implement SEL in their classroom can prove beneficial. Biological, social, and cultural conditions could stimulate psychological growth, engagement, and wellness through SDT. This study could be an important contributor to the importance in the realization of how motivation and satisfaction are underliers of effective self-regulation and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It may explain how emotionally competent teachers and positive classrooms coincide with one another (Poulou, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Research Questions

This single common case study aims to develop an in-depth analysis of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social-emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators. The theoretical framework that will guide this study is, how teachers can stay determined to learn necessary skills and have the self-confidence to accomplish and succeed in learning those skills. This may influence how a teacher approaches incorporating SEL into their teaching practices (Low et al., 2016; Zinsser et al., 2014). To observe the benefits of SEL programming, it is necessary to understand teachers' social-emotional competence and fulfillment of their basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017), through the application of self-determination theory. Incorporating a public health lens with tiered layers of SEL intervention may support teachers' social-emotional well-being (Blewitt et al., 2021). Teachers who received PD through means, such as workshops, practice-based coaching, modeling, guides for implementation, and incorporated instructional practices enhanced their social-emotional capability (Snyder et al., 2018).

Central Research Question

How do intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social and emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom?

Sub Question One

How do early childhood teachers use intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being?

Sub Question Two

How can professional development participation contribute to early childhood teachers' social and emotional competence?

Definitions

1. *Autonomy* – The sense of being ruled by self while in sync with the external environment (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

2. *Competence* – Being capable and confident, amidst challenges to achieve through related mentors and professional development opportunities (Jones et al., 2019).

3. *Intrinsic Motivation* – Engaging in spontaneous behavior that is driven by internal rewards satisfying to the individual. An opportunity to curiously explore, learn, and actualize one's potential without receiving external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

4. *Professional Development* - Early childhood professional development predominantly provides knowledge and skills to teaching staff to enhance their teaching skills and increase their knowledge (Jensen et al., 2017).

5. *Relatedness* – The influence of relationships on well-being (Jones et al., 2019).

6. *Scaffolding* – Scaffolding in an instructional context would be the process of giving support to learners at the appropriate time and at the appropriate level that allows for understanding of concepts and materials (Clark, 2018).

7. *SDT – Self-Determination Theory*. The ability to make choices and manage one's internal motivation, thereby enhancing belief in oneself and enhancing the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

8. *SEC – Social Emotional Competence*. Teachers' characteristics (e.g., mindfulness, emotion regulation, coping, etc.), form the basis of their attitudes toward students and are the foundation of positive relationships (Jennings et al., 2020; Poulou, 2017).

9. *SEL – Social and Emotional Learning*. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are all components of social-emotional learning (CASEL, 1994; Denham et al., 2012; Low et al., 2016). Skills and knowledge students need to "communicate effectively, interact with peers, resolve conflicts, and manage their emotional responses to stressful situations" (Utah State Board of Education, 2019, p. 4).

10. *Self-Actualization* – The internal drive to reach one's potential and do something meaningful in life as part of eudemonic well-being and happiness in hedonic well-being are both needed for purposeful growth in a person (Jones et al., 2019).

11. *Self*-Efficacy – Encounters that have been mastered by overcoming obstacles or succeeding in challenging tasks (Bandura, 1994) and can be seen as individuals' basic psychological needs are satisfied by the environment (Klaeijsen et al., 2018).

Summary

This single common case study aims to develop an in-depth analysis of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social-emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators at Mount Uinta. The problem is that early childhood educators do not have adequate self-determination (Klaeijsen et al., 2018) and lack the training to implement SEL skills effectively (McClelland et al., 2017). The role of ECE teachers in first understanding their own social and emotional skills before teaching them to young children needs to be further explored. The intention would be for teachers to stay intrinsically motivated to learn the skills necessary and have the self-confidence to accomplish and succeed in learning those skills. Preservice or professional learning in SEL could strengthen early educators' social-emotional competency. Research on how early childhood educators' intrinsic motivation in understanding their own

emotions, so they can then guide SEL in the classroom, is needed. Understanding the social and

emotional competence of their regulation skills involved in teaching SEL may enhance early

childhood education. This will be investigated using Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination

theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This single common case study aims to develop an in-depth analysis of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social-emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators at Mount Uinta (pseudonym). Understanding the social and emotional competence of the teachers' regulation skills involved in teaching SEL may enhance early childhood education. Most studies on teacher perceptions have been on primary and secondary teachers' perceptions, no studies were completed on preschool teachers (Poulou, 2017). Self-regulatory, family autonomy support, and relationship factors are predictors of young children's academic achievement. Social and emotional learning (SEL) has come to the forefront at the beginning of this century as necessary skills, just as important as academic skills (Jensen et al., 2017), to be incorporated into the educational curricula (CASEL, 1994; Ferreira et al., 2020). SEL indicates multiple areas of ability, such as understanding self and others' emotions, creating, and keeping positive relationships, emotion management (CASEL, 1994; Ferreira et al., 2020), showing social awareness and empathy, and responsible decision-making. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners are advised to implement SEL for pre-K-12 students (Jagers et al., 2019). Current literature investigating preschoolers who have not been taught social-emotional learning skills indicates these children may have a difficult time with academic achievement in further schooling (Whitted, 2011). Improved classroom behavior, as well as executive functioning, pre-academic achievement, and school readiness in classroom curricula, helps children improve their performance on standardized tests (Denham et al., 2012; Penney et al., 2019; Poulou., 2017; Zinsser et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to understand how early childhood teachers can strengthen their self-determination by enhancing the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Displaying confidence in the ability to make choices and manage their behaviors, would enhance their beliefs in themselves, and gain adequate knowledge and understanding of the subject. This will be investigated using Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on the study of human motivation and personality, observing people's ingrained motivational tendencies for being curious about one's environment (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Being interested in learning and growing in knowledge allows for the validation of this process (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When it comes to education, external controls, supervision, and evaluations often go along with reward and punishment. Students feel controlled instead of finding self-fulfillment in learning (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

To understand the impact on teacher's perceptions of the *outcome of* teaching SEL pedagogy in their ECE classrooms, the *process of* attainment must also be evaluated. When teachers guide learning and development, they create the inclination to be curious, interested, and in gaining intelligibility (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Having self-determination increases teachers' personal development by moving the *process* to achieve the desired *outcome* of self-efficacy, likely increasing the teachers' level of confidence in his/her competence in SEL. The intention would be to stay determined to learn the skills necessary and have the self-confidence and determination to accomplish and succeed in learning those skills.

Academic engagement and better learning outcomes can be supported in the form of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Niemiec & Ryan,

2009). These basic psychological needs explain human behavior and personality and the types of motivation that bring satisfaction. Helping people to act on making a choice or decision enhances the quality of motivation, commitment, persistence, and achievement to activities that can occur without external influence that are interesting and pleasurable (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Having the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence met suggests a relationship to self-efficacy and self-confidence in the ability to perform future-specific teaching strategies when choosing teaching as a career (Burgueño et al., 2021). Satisfaction of basic human needs suggests greater alignment with growth and positive social functioning. This study could advance professional development for early childhood education teachers by examining how teachers can acquire the intrinsic motivation to build their social-emotional competence before instructing their students in social-emotional learning.

Related Literature

Signs of early social and emotional struggles as well as exposure to family or socioeconomic stress factors indicate a need for early childhood educators' familiarity with SEL practices. Through the encouragement of high-level thinking skills of synthesizing, analyzing, reasoning, comprehending, application, and evaluation, students create their knowledge. "The process of learning is an active construction rather than the mere passive acceptance of information outside based on their knowledge and experience" (Zhang & Lin, 2018, p. 649). Building on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory by modeling the expected outcome, instructors could present credibility, trust, and respect as an example of one who practices self-efficacy (Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2018). Supporting students' basic psychological needs aids in student intrinsic motivation and achievement, creating positive student autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Marshik et al., 2017). Connection of concepts is

formed, and meaning is created out of what is learned by taking new information and applying these concepts to experiences. Social constructivism dictates those students cooperate in discussion and communicate with one another (Zhang & Lin, 2018); teachers use open-ended questions allowing students time to process, to interact with peers, creating opportunities for exploration in learning. Those teachers who deem their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence fortified, will be more intrinsically motivated to stimulate their students' own basic psychological needs (Marshik et al., 2017). Competence and motivation are essential for development and achievement (Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2018) as people have a natural tendency toward personal growth, challenge, and capability, influenced by the setting or social interaction (Jones et al., 2020).

Self-Determination Theory

SDT determines that motivational behaviors that were self-determined through emotions lead to modifying behaviors, while non-self-determined motivations lead to unstable behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Whether a basic need is physiological or psychological, if satisfied, contributes to health and well-being. If not satisfied, contributes to ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). One level of self-determination could be controlled through intrinsic forces, giving pleasure in the choice to undertake personal needs or goals. Somewhere in the middle of the self-determination levels, there may be guilt or shame feelings that emerge from non-self-determined motivation when external regulation presents a reward or helps to avoid punishment.

When it comes to intrinsic motivation, people complete an activity because they find it interesting, and enjoyable or are learning and gain spontaneous satisfaction from doing the activity (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Another natural developmental tendency is internalization. Here uninteresting behaviors (e.g., following rules) are absorbed, reshaped, and merged into personal

performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-regulation is an important feature of internalization. The ability to adjust to spontaneous behaviors creates the most autonomously fully functioning self-regulated individual (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016). People require intrinsic motivation in the classroom to incorporate new knowledge and applications learned through socialization. The social environment helps to extend the natural process and supports both intrinsic motivation and internalization. Within SDT, this support is fulfilled through the basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy with autonomy being the innermost important aspect (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Extrinsic motivation on the other hand requires some tangible or verbal reward for doing the activity, the activity itself isn't the reward but the consequence of working for the reward or avoiding a punishment after the behavior is over (Chen et al., 2015). When people thrive, they are active and engaged, resulting in intrinsically motivating behaviors that help them grow and learn (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on how social and cultural factors promote or compromise a sense of determination that may help teachers work on self-actualization and social-emotional regulation. SDT affirms that autonomy, relatedness, and competence, are the most important psychological needs that affect human thoughts, feelings, and behavior, either alone or side by side (Pavey et al., 2011).

Autonomy

This is the first one of the basic psychological needs regarding the use of your mental ability to use volition to make self-proclaimed approval on conscious decisions. The external environment and an individual's actions determine how autonomous one becomes (Barrable, 2020). Being able to experience choices regarding one's actions creates autonomy; not to be confused with independence. Autonomy stands for having a sense of self while in sync, and the

need to be engaged with tasks, autonomously (Sergis et al., 2018) with the external environment (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016) that pertains to them. Having a desire to feel in control when seeking activities, can give someone a feeling of choice over one's behaviors, beliefs, and values (Marshik et al., 2017). Students may feel more intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000) when enough support for the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs is fulfilled in an educational setting (Fedesco et al., 2019).

Relatedness

The second basic psychological need focuses on the influence of relationships on well-being. A person wants to feel connected to the people around him or her (Pavey et al., 2011). People have a desire to feel connected to and supported by significant others (Marshik et al., 2017). Having teamwork among educators is one of the most important components in implementing an autonomy-supportive workplace and educator well-being (Jones et al., 2019). As people also take part in solidarity activities, relatedness may be less relevant for intrinsic motivation. Most teachers seem more motivated to persist when they have a feeling of closeness, and a sense of belonging (Fedesco et al., 2019) Support and influence by the organizations they work in (Klaeijsen et al., 2018) also create a sense of belonging. In the classroom, relatedness is evidenced when both instructors and students are intellectually and emotionally connected (Fedesco et al., 2019) and involved in tasks that allow for teamwork and communication with other students (Sergis et al., 2018). Relatedness is specifically important for stimulating prosocial behavior because of the increased feeling of connectedness to others (Pavey et al., 2011). Secure attachment is a stronger predictor through the psychological need of relatedness, versus that of autonomy or competence. Secure attachments may help create the development of prosocial

behaviors. Need satisfaction nurtures the tendency toward growth, positive social development, and coherent psychological functioning (Pavey et al., 2011).

Competence

The third basic psychological need relates to the educator's role. Being capable and confident amidst challenges is made achievable through related mentors and professional development opportunities (Jones et al., 2019). The students' needs are related to feeling capable of successfully becoming involved in the learning process (Sergis et al., 2018). Being able to interact productively within their surroundings will deliver desired outcomes (Marshik et al., 2017). For learning to occur, the basic needs of both competence and autonomy are necessary for the continuity of intrinsic motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Social and Emotional Curriculum plus Support

There is evidence that higher quality early childhood experiences matter more for children's development and life-long success. Evidence also suggests that more effective teacher-child interactions (Ferreira et al., 2020; Poulou, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2014) promote children's language, literacy, and social-emotional outcomes across the pre-K years. While many of the difficulties that occur in preschool classrooms might be developmentally appropriate, there is evidence that social, emotional, or behavioral challenges that are severe and persistent in the early years are linked to emotional and behavioral disorders in older children and adolescents. Intrinsic motivation tends to be higher in classrooms where autonomy-supportive strategies promote competence, engagement, and self-esteem in students (Marshik et al., 2017). The more profound student performance, including grades and persistence, could be due to intrinsically motivated and self-determined behavior (Fedesco et al., 2019). Dialogue and interaction play a crucial role in high-quality early childhood education, so

social-emotional curricula must be integrated into early childhood education (García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016; Hemmeter et al., 2021; Marshik et al., 2017).

Early childhood education is associated with counteracting the negative effects of low-quality home environments. High-quality interventions promote and support cognitive-linguistic skills to prevent educational inequalities among children from different social backgrounds (García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016). Those children who struggle to regulate their emotions need assistance in evidence-based practices in the social-emotional areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 1994). The regulation of the body, forming meaning of emotion, the ability to focus and sustain attention, organizing memories, and the ability to have interpersonal communication are all components of a stable regulated individual (Bailey, 2015). Quality ECE programs can help young children and their families receive necessary treatments early on in life, creating better transitions to school indicating more positive behaviors, self-regulation, and social skills that will benefit them throughout life (Penney et al., 2019). A better understanding of how to train and incorporate professional development (PD) in SEL that would lead to high-quality implementation is needed (Jagers et al., 2019). Having a clearer understanding of the relationship between using autonomy-supportive strategies in the classroom influences teachers' own needs for relatedness in their work environment and influences their teaching effectiveness in their classroom (Marshik et al., 2017). SEL contributes to better learning outcomes, equity, and optimal well-being for those who come from diverse socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and circumstances (Jagers et al., 2019; Moen et al., 2019). Students perceived academic self-efficacy has a beneficial influence on motivation, effort, perseverance, and success

(Bandura, 1994; Marshik et al., 2017). For children to learn effectively, social awareness and emotional connectedness are key (Ferreira et al., 2020).

Parent-Child Interactions

Parents are of great influence on a child's ability to learn. They are the child's first and foremost teacher and the first to identify mental health concerns in their child. Parenting behaviors that include verbal interactions, positive parenting behaviors, and positive parent-child interactions are all part of a child's social-emotional and behavioral development and school readiness (Joo et al., 2019; Penney et al., 2019). Students' perception of relatedness to teachers, peers, and parents provided a high prognosis of engagement and academic motivation (Fedesco et al., 2019). These early relationships with parents and caregivers create the capacity for interpersonal communication and the ability to focus and sustain attention. "Optimal brain development encourages the development of self-regulation and executive skills, fostering academic success" (Bailey, 2015, p.64). Parents who have developed secure attachments with their children will aid in the process of the child developing more positive teacher-child relationships (Breeman et al., 2015; Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Preschool has a positive and long-term impact on children's attainment, progress, and social-behavioral development; and this positive influence on children's outcomes continues throughout primary school, especially, if preschool is of high quality. The role of the parents is unique as children acquire language and develop communicative skills through adult-child interactions (García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016).

Parents who are supportive of autonomy and relatedness find a manifestation of values and integration of behavior regulations (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Starting during the toddler stage, the need for autonomy is central, toddlers want choices and claim independence. Parents can

provide autonomy support through balancing exploration, engaging in perspective taking, play, offering choices, attentively listening, and natural interactions within the environment for their child (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016) which can benefit both the child and the adult. Early childhood programs have seen the need for enhancement services to their existing programs to involve parents in the learning of their children. This is accomplished through workshops, parent meetings, parent classes, parent-teacher conferences, and specific skill-based curricula that help with children's language, literacy, math, and cultural or home language skills (Joo et al., 2019).

Teacher-Child Interactions

Children's social-emotional characteristics may affect their relationships with teachers and peers. Those children who start school with more positive social-emotional development form more adaptive classroom social relationships (C. Wang et al., 2016). The relationship a child has with their teachers is remarkable and can be seen from an attachment perspective and as a basis for acclimating to the social school environment (Ferreira et al., 2020; Moen et al., 2019). The student-teacher relationships demonstrate that "young children at risk tend to experience greater improvement in the quality of the student-teacher relationship in emotionally supportive classrooms" (Moen et al., 2019, p. 339).

Affect and attitudes impact preschoolers (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Connections are noted between student motivation and many positive learning effects, finding highly motivated students' persistence in acquiring knowledge through intrinsic motivation (C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). To promote the development of positive student-teacher relationships, teaching is approached in an emotional and instructionally supportive manner which influences all children daily (Poulou, 2017). Feedback and scaffolding are used in the early childhood curriculum as mentioned by Clark (2018), to help children reach their zone of proximal development (ZPD)

termed by Vygotsky in the 1920s. ZPD refers to the difference between what the child can do without help and what the child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from the teacher (Clark, 2018). Autonomy and self-determination development for children is important and can be valued even within a structure of time, space, routines, safety, hygiene, and eating (Barrable, 2020). Motivation, interaction, and even following rules can be presented in an autonomy-supportive manner (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016).

The CASEL 5 framework leads the way for all people to learn and apply the knowledge, skills, and outlook to develop healthy well-being (CASEL, 1994). Secure attachments can be formed between children and their teachers. Teachers are seen as a secure base in the classroom, part of a larger social context to influence beliefs (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016), interact to help the child feel safe, where a child-centered approach is apparent (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021) and can function well and develop social skills that will benefit the child, not only in the first school setting but also in those years that follow (Ferreira et al., 2020). If a child cannot rely on their teacher and form a close bond, they might have a harder time developing other socialization development. Teachers can be emotional socializers, (Poulou, 2017) to create connections and teach social-emotional competencies (Breeman et al., 2015; Meija & Hoglund, 2015; Zinsser et al., 2016) and encourage autonomy through actively supporting children's self-initiating abilities (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016).

Piaget displayed the child as an active creator of his learning and development. A child learns through the interaction of the child and his environment (Huf & Kluge, 2021). Each child is unique; learning and developing at their own pace. Their needs and learning interests come from intrinsic motivation and their learning potential (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016). Students who are challenged and able to make decisions about their learning can be met at their psychological

need level of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). The teachers'

intrinsic motivation also influences the educational performance of their students as well as

students' motivation, interest, and persistence (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). When emotional

competence is developed in young children, appropriate social behaviors will in turn advise

academic success. Explicit instruction through emotional scaffolding, designed to develop social

and emotional learning skills, leads to success where teachers help their students understand the

effect their conversations have on others. Teachers can devote their learning to social

development and mental health to enhance relationships and scaffold feelings. Scaffolding in an

instructional context would be the process of giving support to learners at the appropriate time

and at the appropriate level that allows for understanding of concepts and materials (Clark,

2018). Whereas instructional scaffolding is used in understanding concepts, a practice called

emotional scaffolding (Park et al., 2020), using similar techniques, focuses on young children's

emotional reactions to concepts and other pedagogical content that influences students'

emotional responses. Being supportive of autonomy needs to be looked at in three distinct ways.

Teachers should follow a child-oriented approach, paying attention to the signals of their

students, discern them accurately, and direct their responses. They are striving for a reciprocal

and collaborative relationship with the child and viewing the child as a developing individual

whose experiences are as important as one's own (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016).

Children demonstrate higher inhibitory control (Ferreira et al., 2020) and phonological

skills through high emotional support from teachers. Emotional support is demonstrated through

emotional warmth, positive emotional connections, and positive expressions of children's

questions and encouragement. There is enjoyment, respect, and autonomy during learning in

high-quality emotional classrooms (Moen et al., 2019). Here teachers experience psychological

rewards including self-efficacy (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020) as they follow the child's pace,

make suggestions, and provide opportunities for making choices (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016).

The time when autonomy starts to develop in children becomes apparent during the early

learning years. Teachers need to support their students through this stage of self-regulation. This

includes executive function, engagement in conversation, understanding of rules, behavioral

experiences, and regard for child-initiated interests and exploration (Barrable, 2020). Classrooms

with clear extrinsic motivation behavior expectations, experienced through prompts and

modeling, assist students in value learning. When feeling a sense of belonging and

connectedness with their teacher, competence is gained (Hatfield et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci,

2000). Enhanced student learning and adaptation can be facilitated when students' basic

psychological needs are supported in the classroom where the motivation to learn and be

engaged is integrated (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

     Children's social-emotional development at school is affected not only by the

relationships children have with their teachers and their peers (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021), but also

by the connections between these relationships (C. Wang et al., 2016). Determining the motives

of individuals for helping each other might be achieved via the fostering of individuals' feelings

of connectedness toward others (Pavey et al., 2011). Teachers demonstrate connectedness

(Ferreira et al., 2020) by presenting emotional warmth and positive expressions to children's

questions and encouragement. It is important to have nurturing and responsive relationships and

positive early learning experiences. High-quality early care and education are central to

promoting social-emotional skills and preventing social, emotional, and behavioral challenges

(Hemmeter et al., 2021). "The student-teacher relationship provides children with a base for

adapting to the social environment of school" (Moen et al., 2019, p. 332). The use of the three

main types of autonomy support: cognitive, procedural, and organizational can bring an understanding of why some teachers are more autonomy-supportive than others. Cognitive autonomy support allows students to think for themselves, explore ideas, and become competent learners. Procedural autonomy support boosts student power of form and presentation, and organizational autonomy support encourages student control of the learning environment (Marshik et al., 2017).

In contrast to positive teacher-child relationships, negative relationships produce undesirable outcomes that are associated with peer dislike, loneliness, depression, disruptive behavior, and adjustment to the classroom which inhibit friendship and positive self-image. Understanding the social-emotional implications that aggravate behavior, anxiety, loneliness, and antisocial and aggressive behavior makes positive teacher-child interactions necessary (Breeman et al., 2015; Sutherland et al., 2018).

To promote student learning, collaborative teacher efficacy is fundamental in creating a sense of belonging or connectedness and is associated with students' social and emotional well-being (Blewitt et al., 2021), academic self-efficacy and motivation, school satisfaction, and academic achievement (Jagers et el., 2019; Raes et al., 2020). Human development is an integration of social and emotional learning where skills and knowledge are applied to create healthy identities, emotions are managed and individual goals are enriched (CASEL, 1994). SEL strengthens equity through feeling and showing empathy, building trusting relationships, and empowering all students to share in a set of principles and practices (CASEL, 1994) where belonging and connectedness are fundamental (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jagers et al., 2019). One of the most important elements associated with a student's social and emotional well-being is a sense of belonging. Self-efficacy and motivation are key to academic achievement and

developmental outcomes for students (Jagers et al., 2019). Students who are provided with an autonomy-supportive argument on the importance of learning, may notice students' self-initiation and maintained volition for academics and feelings of efficacy (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Child Behavior

Research indicates that quality early childhood education (ECE) correlates with overall better academic, behavioral, and developmental outcomes. Due to many expulsions in the ECE setting, it is important to know how to address behavior by implementing positive behavior strategies (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021; Ritblatt, 2016; Whitted, 2011). Barriers to early identification could occur because children's behavior might have to do with development. A decrease in externalizing behavior could be facilitated through close teacher-child relationships (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Social connectedness may reduce aggression whereas social exclusion may increase aggression and reduce prosocial behaviors (Pavey et al., 2011). People have an innate need for belonging. If this need is unsatisfied, violence, aggression, and reduction in cooperative and prosocial behavior occur (Pavey et al., 2011; Sutherland et al, 2018).

The frequency and intensity of behavior need to be investigated as well as why the behavior is happening. During preschool, it is important to identify the behavior and give it attention, so it does not get reinforced. Autonomy-supportive behavior structure is about implementing rules, elevating appropriate behavior, and following through with consequences in a way that respects the child's feelings, ideas, and conscious decisions (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016). Autonomy-supportive teachers observed increased intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, and self-esteem in their students over time (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Teachers dealing with children with challenging behavior and who are unable to reinforce clear

expectations get worn out and often leave their teaching career (Buettner et al., 2016). Peer behavior needs to be controlled, so children don't impact one another. Training designed specifically for good behavior management can help staff in the classroom. Teachers need to be skilled in classroom behavior management, not fear accountability, and shift their perceived disruptiveness off the child to eliminate or prevent behavior challenges (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021).

Although there are different social skills curricula available for teachers, structure with clear expectations (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016) and purposeful activities can be incorporated into the daily teaching schedule to learn social-emotional skills (Ferreira et al., 2020). Setting limits is important in educational environments, helping to facilitate student's cooperative functioning within the classroom. Students who are given autonomy-supportive limits enhance student intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, psychological well-being, and academic performance. Minimizing the noticeable critical demands or enforcement in the classroom can support students' autonomy. Allowing students to have a voice and choices may deliver positive outcomes in the classroom (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Additional training materials and methods need to be made accessible to increase teachers' and school administrators' knowledge and skills in SEL implementation (Whitted, 2011). Exploration provided can guide children to gain self-regulatory skills in their early childhood classrooms so they are prepared to enter Kindergarten with skills that will help them be successful in their future school years. Children's social functional skills and problem behaviors can affect the entire classroom when it comes to learning academic skills. Self-regulation helps children to interact better with others so learning can take place in the classroom. Girls seem to learn self-regulation skills faster and in turn show an improvement in academic success. Parent autonomy support is linked to successful child development and self-regulatory skills as do teacher-child relationships (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021).

Self-determination theory's (SDT) basic psychological need of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) where a person feels connected to the people around them can create an essential need for motivated commitment to prosocial behavior (Pavey et al., 2011). Shifting the level of authority when it comes to addressing challenging behavior away from the teacher and helping teachers to have a mindset shift on children's challenging behaviors are needed (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Emotional climate in the ECE classroom affects the range of emotions and experiences which in turn affects classroom emotional behavior. A positive emotional climate enhances students' social and emotional experiences, whereas a negative emotional climate brings on behavior and social-emotional difficulties (Poulou, 2017; Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Teachers who are inadequate in regulating their own as well as their students' emotions tend to have more negative emotions in class leading to disorderly behavior (Poulou, 2017). In contrast, teachers who create an atmosphere of relatedness will find students who feel the teacher truly likes, respects, and appreciates him or her (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Having the ability to effectively manage one's own emotions involves social and emotional competence (SEC). Having higher SEC brings higher perception and access to internal responses (e.g., anger, irritation, etc.) and can encourage young children to respond in appropriate ways instead of reacting in frustrating situations (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020). When observing teachers in their ability to implement SEL pedagogy, occupational self-efficacy (Klaeijsen et al., 2018) is observed through persistence and perseverance in the face of difficulties in early childhood academic environments (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Self-efficacy is defined as the confidence to complete a task, as Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) explains. Self-efficacy can be enabled as knowledge is built through self-determination

(Deci & Ryan, 1985), verbal persuasion, and encouragement. The more an individual learns through modeling the behavior of others, the more one develops self-efficacy, to implement SEL pedagogy in the ECE classroom (Usher & Pajares, 2008). The role of the teacher is to offer an environment challenging enough for exploration (Huf & Kluge, 2021).

Self-efficacy, which is closely related to behavior, is affected by school as well as individual teacher characteristics (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). The need for competence affects behavioral actions. Prediction of self-efficacy can be seen as individuals' basic psychological needs of both autonomy and competence are satisfied. When satisfied by those two basic needs, intrinsic motivation is present for learning to occur (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Early childhood teachers lack essential SEL training through professional development. Even if SEL is included in the early childhood curricula, there is a need to be supported with effective and structured application (Jennings et al., 2020). Teacher self-efficacy is linked to good quality education. Contentment and emotions influence desirable student outcomes (Jagers et al., 2019) where developmentally appropriate and child-centered practice occur (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Self-efficacy specifies an individual's judgment on how well he or she can accomplish tasks required in anticipated situations (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Challenging behaviors may cause high levels of stress and cause teachers to feel overwhelmed, which affects self-efficacy (Poulou, 2017; Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). When a teacher can manage and express their own emotions, the foundation of providing a secure and safe classroom where students can learn social skills is created (Poulou, 2017). Behavior management instruction embedded in the ECE curriculum and taught through professional development could help prevent teacher stress, turnover, and burnout. Adequate knowledge and skills to handle difficult behaviors with students to provide for the needs and

safety of all students can be obtained through explicit SEL PD instruction (Buettner et al., 2016; Penney et al., 2019; Poulou, 2017).

Psychological needs satisfaction allows for growth, integrity, and health (Deci & Ryan, 2000) of teaching staff, forming resilience and fulfillment in their work environment (Stan & Virga, 2021). When teachers' autonomy is suppressed through high job demands or overextended workloads, they become more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion (Fernet et al., 2013). Teachers who are equipped with occupational self-efficacy and autonomous motivation (Klaeijsen et al., 2018), trusting relationships, and self-care strategies are likely to have resilience and remain committed to teaching. Possessing emotional intelligence (EI) is evidenced to be the foundation of positive relationships and effective school environments. Teachers with high emotional intelligence detect their students' needs quickly, which leads to low levels of behavior in their students (Poulou, 2017).

Mental Health in the Workplace

Positive mental health, education, professional development, and experiences of early educators are critical factors in improving outcomes for children in quality ECE programs. Even though teaching is a rewarding occupation, it can be emotionally challenging (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020). The emergence of social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties surfaces and can increase indicating a need for mental health services (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2017).

Job strain or burnout occurs when significant resources are lost or jeopardized (Fernet et al., 2013). Out of a study of 26 occupational types, teachers experience the most stress. Teaching has become a high-stress profession due to the interaction of students with behavior and unpredictability to what the job entails, leading to burnout and unfulfillment of basic

psychological needs (Stan & Virga, 2021). Employees become vulnerable to burnout when the work environment hinders the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (Gagné & Deci, 2005) through challenging circumstances or the absence of significant resources (Fernet et al., 2013). Psychological basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness take an active part in and are linked to the motivational and vigorous practices involved in job-related characteristics to elements of burnout (Fernet et al., 2013). The Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS) (Chen et al., 2015; Schultz et al., 2015) may give a good indication when evaluating self-determination theory, relating the basic psychological needs met to job satisfaction. (Ryan & Deci, 2020) When unhealthy relationships emerge between job and teacher, burnout occurs. Three main elements are related to burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Being emotionally overexerted and exhausted at work is referred to as *emotional exhaustion*. Job resources, comprising of job control and friendships, have an indirect effect on exhaustion. Negative, pessimistic, or overly disengaged responses to other people at work are known as *depersonalization*. Employees' motivation ceases when job resources are absent. Lack of resources holds teachers back from goal achievement and personal development, lending themselves to detachment from their job through depersonalization and perceiving their work negatively (Fernet et al., 2013). Having feelings of loss of competence and productivity is seen as *reduced personal accomplishment*. Emotional exhaustion is assessed as the primary feature of burnout. Deprivation of any of the three basic needs could lead to burnout. Burnout comprises reduced emotional energy, as well as interpersonal and personal indifference to the job (Fernet et al., 2013). Using mindfulness meditation techniques can show positive effects on well-being, reduce stress, and teacher burnout, (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2017), and reduce preschool teacher

depression (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Job satisfaction is affected by high-quality relationships, which help alleviate stress and buffer against emotional exhaustion (Jones et al., 2020).

All people have inborn psychological resources that energize, direct, and sustain human behaviors (Gagné & Deci, 2005). These resources supposedly are directly related to psychological and physical well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on *autonomy*, the need for the ability to have a choice and the will to make decisions, *relatedness*, the degree to which one feels connected with others, and *competence*, and self-confidence in accomplishing challenges. A person will experience greater well-being, better performance, positive workplace outcomes (Fernet et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2019), and lower turnover of employees when these three basic psychological needs are met. The quality of social relationships influences people's health and well-being and helps one thrive by engaging with others (Pavey et al., 2011).

Well-being is often defined as more than the absence of illness, pain, or stress, and healthy well-being is more than feeling happy. It includes having positive relationships and a feeling of achievement of worthwhile tasks (Jones et al., 2020) with available physical, psychological, social, and organizational job resources to help accomplish the tasks (Fernet et al., 2013). SDT identifies extrinsic motivation styles*; external, introjected*, *identified*, and *integrated* regulation as the four main forms with different degrees of self-determined motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). External rewards can reduce autonomous motivation, however financial well-being has been shown to affect overall psychological health. SDT credits the importance of pay and working climate to influence intrinsic motivation and well-being (Jones et al., 2019). Not all stress can be eliminated, but knowing how to manage emotions and stress in healthier ways can improve the teaching experience (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020).

External regulation is the least autonomous type of extrinsic motivation. Here, behaviors are depicted to gain a reward or avoid punishment (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). *Identified* regulation, is also seen when a person validates a behavior/task and experiences feelings of desire and choice that are seen as important, allowing movement toward greater autonomy to take place (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). On this, controlled or *introjected* regulation is felt when a person is pressured into a task and internalized out of guilt or ego. When the ego is involved, an internal force is at play, trying to avoid shame or feelings of worthiness (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). *Integrated* regulation is the most autonomous type of extrinsic motivation where recognized regulations are combined with other characteristics of the self (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). External motivation is directed by rewards or external dominance (C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). For workplace well-being to be supported and improved, autonomous motivation is necessary (Jones et al., 2019; C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019).

Depression and job stress are associated with lower-quality educational outcomes for students and may increase classroom behavior. Female teachers are especially vulnerable and have a higher risk for poor physical and mental health (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Emotional exhaustion is exhibited when job demands are high, and employees' mental and physical energy is depleted. Overloading of job responsibilities directly affects emotional exhaustion (Fernet et al., 2013). Having access to and assistance from a supervisor can eliminate work-related tensions and enhance commitment to an organization. Supervisors who collaborate on ideas and provide encouragement are more likely to have committed teachers. Perception of the fulfillment of the basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence are essential for the continuity of intrinsic motivation (C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019) and contributes to and strengthens

organizational commitment over and above other organizational and social resources of the job (Stan & Virga, 2021).

Out of the three psychological needs, relatedness seems to be most ignored. The need for relatedness is more varied and contains multiple aspects in educational settings (Fedesco et al., 2019) yet linked as the greatest predictor of autonomous motivation, compared to autonomy and competence needs (C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). A workplace that allows employees space for decision-making and offers more support would reduce emotional exhaustion and depersonalization while permitting a feeling of personal achievement. Employees' psychological resources are cultivated by workplaces that offer supportive job characteristics (Fernet et al., 2013) within an organization with options given about how to perform or attend to their work (Fedesco et al., 2019).

Adequate training for teachers and ECE providers is necessary for SEL and child mental health, especially as mental health problems are rising rapidly in younger children. Teachers need to understand how to recognize social-emotional issues or trauma and when to seek guidance as teachers have the essential role in promoting SEL and mental health at school (Ferreira et al., 2020). Individualized support and implementation of SEL are sometimes provided by mental health consultants in the classroom. These consultants also work with teaching staff and parents to provide and teach specialized emotional and behavioral strategies. Even with these additional supports, teachers are incongruent in implementing SEL or understanding mental health (Zinsser et al., 2016). Education-based public health programs connected with schools can further strengthen children's social-emotional skills, thereby reducing behavior and internalizing problems (Blewitt et al., 2021).

Teacher Intrinsic Motivation

The choice of becoming an early childhood educator has not been deeply researched internationally (Weiss et al., 2018). Using Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (2000) intrinsic and extrinsic motivations may define the different career choice motives and personal characteristics of ECE educators (Weiss et al., 2018). When choosing ECE teaching as a career, the role of motivator might have been one of the key elements of interest. Being interested in pedagogical work with young children, establishing relationships, and supporting growth and development could be fulfilling an intrinsic motive. Satisfying basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness could lead to accomplishing a desired behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000) relevant to one's intrinsic motivation (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Gaining self-efficacy in the belief of gaining the necessary skills and abilities to successfully perform the teaching tasks that lay ahead after pre-service, motivates choosing an ECE teaching career.

Wanting to give young children stability, fulfilling students' needs, and supporting growth and development will be important aspects of making teaching a profession (Weiss et al., 2018). SDT suggests that need satisfaction can strengthen the understanding of how feelings of basic psychological need satisfaction can affect motivation and behavior. The importance of secure attachments aids in the development of prosocial behaviors and a need for *relatedness* may lead to further participation. (Pavey et al., 2011). There may be an association between greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Raes et al., 2020) related to forms of self-efficacy (Burgueño et al., 2021) and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs (Klaeijsen et al., 2018).

Intrinsic motivation is a very convincing type of motivation as it relates to personal satisfaction from performing a specific activity (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Those teachers who enjoy their work are more credible in applying innovative thinking, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation to contribute to activities and improvement ideas (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). When a

developmentally appropriate academic curriculum is provided for teaching ages 3-6, the intrinsic

motivation to study and learn this curriculum indicates higher self-determination in career choice

(Weiss et al., 2018). Being engaged in the learning process can involve three dimensions:

behavioral, *affective*, and *cognitive* engagement. *Behavioral* includes focus, attention,

participation, effort, or involvement. *Affective* focuses on interest, boredom, frustration, or

enjoyment, and *cognitive* deals with learning outcomes, metacognition, and self-regulated

learning (Raes et al., 2020). Personal resourcefulness is linked to resiliency and the ability to

control and impact one's circumstances. Fulfillment of the basic psychological needs helps

satisfy motivation and gives energy to job fulfillment (Stan & Virga, 2021). Affective

engagement seen through self-determination theory brings to focus how the social setting of a

learning environment can influence the motivation for a teacher's learning encounters. Intrinsic

motivation is best supported when the psychological need for relatedness to peers and teachers

increases (Raes et al., 2020).

Due to the growing need for early childhood educators, there may be an extrinsic

motivation for job security, self-directed work scheduling, or the compatibility of family and

profession, and recommendations from family, friends, or career advisors (Weiss et al., 2018)

that supplies some self-determination related decision making to becoming an EC educator.

Higher job satisfaction and well-being are positively related to intrinsic motivation (Klaeijsen et

al., 2018). This integrated regulation permits a level of self-determination to influence a decision

to enter the teaching profession (Weiss et al., 2018). The development of pre-service teacher

education needs to help improve the perceived competencies of teachers and to reduce the risk of

abandonment of the career (Burgueño et al., 2021). More research related to EC educators'

decisions to become teachers is still needed as previous studies are mainly related to primary and secondary teaching (Weiss et al., 2018).

Teaching Staff Professional Development

For the creation of high-quality education, teacher professional development and innovative practices, need to be part of a learning community where intrinsic motivation of staff is evidenced (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Are teachers adequately prepared to provide SEL support when training for pre-service teachers primarily focuses on content knowledge and pedagogical skill (Stipp, 2019), while experts call for increased training in SEL (Sandilos et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2016). "Preschoolers' ability to remain emotionally regulated and positively engaged relates to teacher evaluation of children's school success through Kindergarten" (Denham et al., 2012, p. 138). Teachers need to be well-educated and trained to ensure quality teaching. When ongoing support from supervisors and peers is evident, new teachers are more likely to remain on the job (Stan & Virga, 2021). Proper training affects the quality of services provided to the students in the classroom and teacher qualification level in ECE is correlated with children's positive social and cognitive development (Weiss et al., 2018).

There may be an association between greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Raes et al., 2020) related to forms of self-efficacy (Burgueño et al., 2021) and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs (Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Autonomy satisfaction can be created by providing educators with more choices and decision-making power, notwithstanding their qualifications (Jones et al., 2020). Early childhood professional development predominantly provides knowledge and skills to teaching staff to enhance their teaching skills and increase knowledge (Jensen et al., 2017). Academic coursework and classroom management through training sessions, ongoing mentoring, and coaching help improve child outcomes and the effectiveness of

early childhood services. Besides child outcomes, teacher professional development can simultaneously alleviate teachers' self-reported burnout and support student SEL (Joo et al., 2019; Sandilos et al., 2020; Stipp, 2019). Educational content presented in PD should be interesting and motivating to improve the competencies of the teaching staff. Integrating a value into their personal beliefs can guide a person towards completing a task. Personal beliefs regarding teaching, learning, and being come through integrated motivation (Jones et al., 2019). Teacher motivation determines the understanding of the continued commitment of staff to teaching and continued teaching as a career. Non-self-determined motivation would be deficient (Burgueño et al., 2021).

Professional development can be supplied in multiple forms such as workshops, collaborative group work, or through technological interventions (Jensen et al., 2017). Workshops or collaborative group work between teachers can include technological restructuring to improve the availability of content on SEL interventions during pre-service or in-service time to increase the knowledge and skills of preschool teachers (Jensen et al., 2017). Self-efficacy beliefs are most likely to change as teachers' skills develop, although some letdown may creep in as teachers master self-efficacy through compelling experiences (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Emotionally supportive teachers tend to create efficacious classroom environments" … yet very little about the socialization practices of preschool teachers is known (Zinsser et al., 2016). To reduce discipline inconsistency, incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) can give way to more developmentally appropriate techniques to handle behavior. Creating opportunities for staff as well as students to receive SEL support will create a reform in cultural beliefs, biases, and competence of SEL pedagogy (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Besides the aspects of learning about SEL, there is a perceived gap between conceptual models of fidelity. Access to more

comprehensive and integrative models of SEL programs may benefit the classroom and could be associated with positive outcomes (Low et al., 2016).

Coaching needs to be a large part of professional development; accomplished through various methods (e.g., virtual, in-person, group) to allow for more personalized PD intervention (Snyder et al., 2018). Training focused on basic psychological needs and satisfaction contributes to stronger employee participation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Purposeful activities can be incorporated to learn social-emotional skills (Ferreira et al., 2020) and for fulfilling teachers' needs for relatedness and autonomy thereby developing stronger dedication among teachers (Stan & Virga, 2021). To create a successful learning environment, teachers, parents, medical and mental health providers, and school administrators (Ferreira et al., 2020) should collaborate and assist each other in training in evidence-based practices for children struggling with handling emotions and behaviors (Penney et al., 2019). The influence of teacher experiences and social settings plays a large role in motivation and behavior. The intrinsic motivation for teachers to improve academically would satisfy their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and occupational self-efficacy (Burgueño et al., 2021; Klaeijsen et al., 2018) but would be hindered when the social setting is not conducive to learning. Intrinsic motivation and occupational self-efficacy assist in innovative practices (Klaeijsen et al., 2018).

SEL is necessary to incorporate into the curricula. However, how to train on SEL in the best possible way and to engage in data-driven performance still needs investigating (Ferreira et al., 2020), With training in social and emotional development being the forerunner for later social and academic accomplishments, it is interesting that US prekindergarten and elementary teachers are not receiving adequate training (Buettner et al., 2016). Training in SEL seldom is conducted in learning institutions. However, after having received training in SEL, teachers are

better able to instruct students with home-related stress, the impact of trauma (Jagers et al., 2019), academics and behavior, and students from low socio-economic status (SES). Teachers recognize the need and request additional training in SEL and behavior management (Buettner et al., 2016). As the pressure in education is on incorporating SEL learning standards into teaching, teachers are left to determine how to incorporate SEL best but receive only a small amount of training during professional development (Zinsser et al., 2016). The success of professional development and pre-service is influenced by the teacher's instructional style. It is in the social setting where motivation and willingness to learn can be formed (Burgueño et al., 2021) and where student engagement is evident. This is associated with positive learning outcomes and high retention measures (Raes et al., 2020). The success of children's outcomes will benefit from effective training. When connectedness between teacher and student is evident and changes are noted in the child's social-emotional development, then PD is successful (Jensen et al., 2017).

Pre-service teachers indicated that their university preparation did not provide the necessary education to understand social and emotional development. Positive social and cognitive development of students is linked to the qualification level of early childhood educators (Weiss et al., 2018). Teacher certification requirements indicated some core components of SEL are taught but most of the 49 states, other than Utah and the District of Columbia, did not instruct any of the five core students' SEL elements. SEL elements should be taught to all teachers and not only be prominent in special education (Penney et al., 2019; Snyder et al., 2018). Most teaching staff have not acquired education, professional development, mastery, and/or guidance in identifying and supporting children who present behavioral problems. Fulfilling the psychological need for competence suggests teachers need to have feelings of self-esteem. Leaders can provide professional development opportunities to ensure

teachers can deal with daily challenges successfully (Jones et al., 2020). Even creators of curricula are inadequately trained to incorporate SEL and mental health into the curricula (Ferreira et al., 2020). Graduates with "emerging skills" in SEL are not likely to handle children with challenging behaviors.

Competent teachers are those who can regulate their own emotions first. Then they can create relationships with students (Poulou, 2017) and feel a sense of accomplishment (Jones et al., 2020). Dedicating more time to building rapport with students may help increase their relatedness with students (Fedesco et al., 2019). Having positive student-instructor relationships creates competence in students. It may be indicative of a supportive learning environment (Fedesco et al., 2019) that inspires motivation in teachers to want to be great teachers (Burgueño et al., 2021). Positive relationships can be formed between coworkers, by providing organizational time to collaborate. Job satisfaction through relatedness with coworkers can create a sense of belonging and decrease job turnover (Jones et al., 2020). When the instructor is seen as a master in the PD subject matter, a connection between course and instructor is formed, increasing a sense of belonging, and may lead to more self-determined motivation in the organization (Fedesco et al., 2019). Being committed to an organization helps teachers focus on attaining school goals, investing more effort into their jobs, and retaining employment longer (Stan & Virga, 2021). Teachers' perspectives, motivation, and willingness to learn about SEL and mental health are also necessary elements for successful implementation (Ferreira et al., 2020). Even though teachers receive professional development or specialized training on teaching methods, is that training effective (Buettner et al., 2016)? Do those teachers feel prepared (Ferreira et al., 2020) and confident enough to implement the received training in their classrooms? Positive professional development should cover those areas needed to enhance the

early childhood profession, prevent teacher burnout (Buettner et al., 2016; Poulou, 2017), and

enhance connections (Fedesco et al., 2019) by fulfilling the need for relatedness and autonomy

(Stan & Virga, 2021). Here teachers should feel motivated, their learning experience influenced,

and provided with a positive outlook on their teaching career (Burgueño et al., 2021). Self-

determined motivation could teach self-efficacy and the desire to choose teaching as a profession

(Burgueño et al., 2021).

Summary

For teachers to feel competent in teaching SEL, they first need to be able to regulate their

own emotions and understand how their emotions affect their teaching practice (Poulou, 2017).

Satisfactory training and education are deficient for early childhood educators and mental health

providers in serving young children (Jagers et al., 2019). Teachers need the confidence,

knowledge, and cognizance of the implementation of modifications, interventions, and calming

techniques to build up their students' SEL knowledge and skills. Teachers with high efficacy

beliefs can manage classroom behavior and provide more emotional care (Penney et al., 2019;

Stipp, 2019). Focusing on Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, connections between

people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact help children develop tools to

communicate their needs in social functions, leading to higher thinking skills. Keeping in line

with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017), self-determined motivation of satisfaction helps teachers choose

teaching as a career (Burgueño et al., 2021). An autonomy-supportive workplace where the three

basic psychological needs are met increases job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2019). Teachers' well-

being, management of emotions, and feelings, and display of empathy for others (CASEL, 1994;

Ferreira et al., 2020) and their interpersonal skills affect their teaching abilities and how to

handle behaviors and support the social-emotional learning of their students (Penney et al., 2019;

Poulou, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2016). Reducing teacher stress by managing challenging behaviors, can be supported through specialized training and professional development. ECE teachers need to be provided with better professional development in SEL strategies. They can implement these strategies in their own lives first to then help their students become better-adjusted individuals. Teachers need managers who embrace an autonomy-supportive style toward their employees. When there are opportunities for choice, meaningful information, acknowledgment of perspectives, and encouragement, employees' basic psychological needs are satisfied. Using transformational leadership behavior is also linked to autonomous motivation. Here employees are encouraged to think critically, are provided with constructive feedback, and are persuaded to put effort into their job. Employees' awareness of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can limit burnout, as they relate to positive job characteristics and satisfaction in the workplace (Fernet et al., 2013).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This single common case study aimed to develop an in-depth analysis of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social-emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators at Mount Uinta (pseudonym). This qualitative single case study sought a causal explanation by answering three research questions: How do intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social-emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom? How do early childhood teachers use intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being? How can professional development participation contribute to early childhood teachers' social-emotional competence? The research design, setting, procedures, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations outlined the steps taken to conduct this study. Individual interviews, focus groups, and teacher self-assessment data provided analysis in answering these questions ethically.

Research Design

The chosen topic for this research was a common single case study to be conducted through interviews, a focus group, and a teachers' self-reflection survey on the ability to enhance teacher competence and well-being. Examining the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017) guided the recognition of teachers' own SEC before teaching others. The method for the selected research was qualitative, using exploration and understanding of a group of teachers and the social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) of teacher intrinsic motivation and self-determination. The common single case study method expressed occurrences and conditions of an everyday situation that generated intention using qualitative research exploratory in nature. The reason for the chosen qualitative

approach versus a quantitative approach lay in the necessity to answer *how* and *why* questions, which were suited for this case study research in seeking answers associated with a more exploratory line of inquiry (Yin, 2018). It could be particularly useful to provide an in-depth focus on the need for early educators' own perceived social-emotional competency before implementing and strengthening SEL skills in the classroom. A quantitative study would not have suited a comparison of teachers who display social-emotional competency versus those teachers who did not display social-emotional competency and could not be adequately measured. Seeking to discern between self-determination or self-efficacy in social-emotional competence (SEC) would only give a limited contribution to the education field, as both were needed in an approach to develop personal development. Including intrinsic motivation as part of self-determination theory would better reveal the effect of academic self-efficacy and the relatedness in persisting to achieve the desired result of teacher SEC (Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2018).

The empirical inquiry design of a case study investigated teachers' self-determination by exploring, describing, and explaining this real-life context phenomenon (Joyner et al., 2018; Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007). For case study research to be appropriate, the research questions needed to seek an explanation around some contemporary real-life circumstances. Interviewing and surveying teaching staff in the preschool classroom applied meaning to the data to be collected in answering the research questions and investigating first-hand the impact of teachers' social-emotional competence in implementing SEL pedagogy. Witnessing face-to-face interactions of student-teacher and student-student provided real-life pertinent information regarding SEL pedagogy. The second component that benefited from the use of a case study was the in-depth description of some specific real-world social phenomenon (Yin, 2018) or a real-life

case that was in progress where more information could be collected now (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Conducting interviews taught about real-world social phenomena from the perspective of teachers (Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2018). Potential insight into teachers' professional development and self-reflection of teachers determined if preparation and self-determination in the desire to learn about SEL were necessary components before implementing SEL pedagogy in the early childhood classroom.

The question that persisted was "How do intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social-emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom?" Implementation of effective social-emotional learning pedagogy included training and professional development for early childhood teachers in building up their own SEC skills through practice and modeling of such skills (McClelland et al., 2017). A common case study depicted the teachers' emic perspective on self-determination and how the basic psychological needs were internalized and integrated into their personal value system (Ryan & Deci, 2017). From here self-determination was to be constructed and examined about the association (Ryan & Deci, 2017) with received professional development. Increasing their own SEC (McClelland et al., 2017; Poulou, 2017) played an important role in teacher well-being and persistence to teach ECE students. The researcher's thick description of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 2007) regarding the real-life case in addressing the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Zainal, 2007) communicated the approach (Yin, 2018) that self-determination, intrinsic motivation, and professional development brought an understanding and implementation of SEL into early childhood teaching practices (Jensen et al., 2017; Klaeijsen et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social and emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom?

Sub Question One

How do early childhood teachers use intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being?

Sub Question Two

How can professional development participation contribute to early childhood teachers' social and emotional competence?

Setting and Participants

This research study sought to explore and examine an in-depth analysis of early childhood teachers' self-determined forms of intrinsic motivation in enhancing social-emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom. The selected site for this common case study was in the state of Utah with its rich diversity in population, multiple universities, many school districts, early childhood centers, and Head Start locations recognized by the Utah Head Start Association (UHSA) (UHSA, 2021).

Setting

This setting provided a diverse demographic population concerning socio-economic status, gender, age, and ethnicity consisting of seven population groups of non-Hispanic and Hispanic groups according to the Utah County Government 2021 statistics. Here real-life diversity continued to increase, as continued demographic transformation occurred through global interconnections with migration of people to be employed in the increasing technology market. People moved to Utah due to popular outdoor recreational, economic, and educational opportunities. The case study commenced in Utah County where there are multiple Head Start locations with the main office for Mount Uinta located in the county seat of the state, Utah

County.

This geographical area with a population of 622,213 residents, based on the Utah County Government statistics of 2021, was chosen to assist me in exploring this second-largest county with a population density of 234.1 people per square mile, according to the Utah County Government statistics in 2021, where multiple sources of real-life phenomena could be investigated. The actual data collection was collected from everyday lives integrated into real-world events with my needs in mind (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) although this couldn't be controlled when dealing with human subjects. To overcome generalizing conclusions, triangulation from many different sources provided complementary and relevant documentation for the study and provided construct validity of the case study. Case studies liked to use a wide variety of sources, which provided more available insights and gave better overall quality to the study (Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007).

The Mount Uinta organization was governed by an Executive Director, a Policy Council, and their Board of Directors which consisted of elected mayors and County Commissioners of Utah, Summit, and Juab Counties in 2021. The parent Policy Council Chairperson defended the rights of parents involved in the education of their children and regulated the administration of Mount Uinta. The part of Head Start Region VIII, according to the National Head Start Association (NHSA), had an office in the southern area of Utah which encompassed five school districts and operated under a grant to serve 651 low-income children and families. The main office was located centrally with centers reaching a circumference of approximately 37 miles, totaling 13 locations, 30 classrooms, and an Early Head Start (EHS) location, which served 12 home-center-based families. Locations had center managers who ensured high-quality education for all children, ages three to five, and for EHS birth to age three, by supporting teaching staff

and classroom interaction. Each classroom consisted of three teaching staff, a lead and assistant teacher, and a classroom aide, who instructed up to 17 students. Each center's location had a facility designed with safety in mind for the welfare of the children served. All locations had a fenced playground with equipment and room for outdoor activities where children could play and learn. Classrooms were equipped with child-sized furniture that stimulated growth and learning opportunities. Staff used the *Creative Curriculum Solutions* (Teaching Strategies, 2021) program as the main curricula, as well as other enhancement curricula to guide learning, including the social-emotional program *Conscious Discipline* (Bailey, 2015).

Participants

The target population was drawn through purposed sampling from the staff and administrators at Mount Uinta Head Start locations. The target population was between 10 to 12 early childhood teachers and center managers, who had been employed or were new to the agency with the appropriate qualifications of ECE teacher.

Staff had studied early childhood education, completed a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a child development associate (CDA) credential or equivalent, and earned enough ECE credits to qualify as an ECE teacher or teacher assistant. This targeted staff population determined the sample size was of mixed and diverse race, male, and female, with different levels of ECE knowledge and experience. Staff may have lacked confidence or experience in working with students of low socio-economic status (SES) and may not have understood the emotional impact of experiencing poverty.

The pool of applicants were all over the age of 18. Recruitment consisted of a pool of 120 early childhood staff at Mount Uinta. Gaining insight from administrators at locations benefited the focus group discussion on SEL perception and implementation. This single

common case study was set to explore the phenomenon of teaching staff as the point of interest to the researcher (Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007).

Researcher Positionality

The motivation to pursue this research was based on my experience working at Mount Uinta and a few childcare settings. While observing children between the ages of one and five, I had come to observe children's temperament to be different depending on their home environment and born instinct. I started searching for different tools that would help my teaching team and found the book *Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Young Children* (McCloud, 2007) but no SEL was implemented in the lesson plans we wrote. Different childcare facilities provided curricula written especially for the company but again, nothing was available where teaching staff could include social-emotional aspects into the lessons.

By taking a college course, I came to learn about the intriguing SEL program called Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2015), this program explained the need to teach children to become good citizens, and this could be done by regulating the adult first and then teaching these concepts to the students. As I started working at Head Start, I learned more about Conscious Discipline (CD) as the agency had just started implementation of this enhancement curriculum. Children served by the Head Start agency came from low socio-economic status (SES) with a need for SEL. Even after seven years of working with this agency, there was still much need for the implementation of SEL. Persistence and self-determination were sought to get all teachers and staff on board. Teaching staff who came into the program were taught by the disabilities and mental health team on Conscious Discipline (CD), and more PD training on CD was always at the forefront for all staff. Professional development for the integration of SEL into early

childhood teaching practices was lacking. Implementing SEL within the basic curricula was still a struggle as there seemed to be more of a push for math and literacy over social and emotional learning.

Interpretive Framework

The philosophical worldview proposed in the study was constructivist. The method for the selected research was qualitative with "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.4). The question of "How can I know the participants' experiences and gain knowledge of their experiences" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) guided the action of inquiries. Seeking an understanding of early childhood teachers' insight into teachers' self-determination, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy beliefs in teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) was the goal. What meanings were to be derived from the participants' views on social-emotional learning? The assumption was, that views would be complex when it came to understanding and learning about one's social-emotional competence. Teachers would gain social-emotional competence for overall teaching effectiveness (Wright et al., 2021) as part of the goal of incorporating self-determination. Gaining an understanding of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors brought awareness that emotions shape thoughts and decisions. Learning to describe emotional experiences gave me an understanding of my own and others' emotions. Labeling emotions and being able to describe specific emotions enabled the ability to identify those emotions in others. When feeling emotions ourselves, we are better able to recognize and manage emotional experiences (Brown, 2021).

Philosophical Assumptions

To gain answers to the teacher's perceived level of preparedness to teach SEL in their classrooms as well as to acquire knowledge from real-life experiences before and after receiving

professional development in SEL was intriguing. A focus group discussed the social interactions in the ECE classrooms and discussed further strengthening of SEC on implementation and strengthening of teaching practices. An interpretive paradigm "in trying to understand teachers' experiences of participation in the decision-making process in the school allowed for the interpretation of the participant's perceptions of their realities" (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 36). To remain ethical, I needed to guide my questions in a way that was fair to all research participants and ensured their rights were supported by treating all the same without showing preference and/or differentiation towards any participants.

Ontological Assumption

The desire to conduct this qualitative case study was to explore an ontological approach to early childhood teachers' self-regulation skills. Exploring how teachers came to understand their own emotions first before teaching SEL to their students and discovering how integrating self-determination to accomplish this needed investigating. Assessing teachers' feelings and thoughts through interviews and self-reflection was elaborated through answering questions on conceptualizations. Studying teachers' language in focus groups provided a discovery of interpretations through socially constructive talk. Creating an interaction between researcher and teacher formulated meaning through language used on the specific topic of emotion, and then analyzed by the researcher (Höijer, 2008). Having language access strengthens connections and shapes what we are feeling. Interpretation of emotional experiences relies deeply on language (Brown, 2021).

Epistemological Assumption

An epistemological approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) assisted childcare providers, ECE educators, administrators, community agencies, and parents in how to work with young

children. The assumption (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) in convincing staff that SEL should be at the forefront before academics was still hard for educators to grasp. A gap remained evident as teaching staff struggled to recognize and understand their own emotions. As a researcher who also worked with early childhood staff in a non-supervisory role, but more a support in the classroom, I have evidenced the struggles firsthand. Right from the beginning of the school year, there were staff that struggled to put personal lives aside before stepping into the classroom. Their focus was on personal emotional struggles instead of building relationships with new students and this was noticeable. Many staff members struggled with mental health-related issues that caused high stress and provided many with feelings that it was easier to quit the job instead of searching out help to handle everyday stresses. Incorporating professional development in the summer helped provide an understanding to teachers of how their emotional well-being was important. This resulted in teaching staff finally starting to ask for more SEL training for themselves as they realized SEL dictated a large part of daily experiences with students.

Axiological Assumption

Focusing on SEL first in oneself, resulted in regulated students in the classroom. There was an axiological consideration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to inquire what early childhood educators have learned about SEL in college, their child development associate (CDA) courses, preservice and professional development. The researcher's intrinsic valuable goal was to seek an understanding of what needed to be taught to early childhood teaching staff to be better prepared to understand their own emotions to gain SE competence. Being a part of an organization assisting teaching staff with their mental health and instructing professional development in social-emotional competence, an interpretivism research philosophy was relevant to the study.

Seeking an in-depth investigation, the researcher was part of seeking what attributed to ECE staff becoming SE competent without bias toward the outcomes.

Researcher's Role

In qualitative study, the researcher was the primary data collection agent examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. Having a generic analytic plan to link the data gave an important view and gave guidance in analyzing data creating a case description and analyzing and interpreting plausible rival explanations (Yin, 2018). The qualitative, interpretive approach was most beneficial to "identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal backgrounds, such as gender, history, culture, and socio-economic status (SES) that shaped the interpretations formed during the study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183).

My role was that of disabilities and mental health manager (DMHM) at Mount Uinta. The chosen design had been developed due to curiosity about how early childhood teachers are adequately prepared to meet the many challenges faced daily by students in their classrooms. As one of five disabilities and mental health team employees, I visited the classrooms to assist teaching staff with children who displayed behavior, developmental challenges, language concerns, and/or mental health concerns. It had come to my attention that many teachers were ill-prepared to handle the challenges they were daily faced with. Teachers' social-emotional competence was lacking which in turn affected the teaching of social-emotional strategies to their students.

My role did not include a supervisory role over the teaching staff, which eliminated bias or assumptions that could have influenced theoretical interest. Relationships established with most teaching staff presented researcher bias but did not hinder data collection and analysis. As the DMHM, I often visited classrooms to observe children, which allowed me to visit the

classrooms whose teachers were participating in the study during work hours. Even though I did not have a supervisory role over any teachers, I was able to build relationships with teaching staff. My role involved assisting them with the children and providing strategies for implementation when behaviors occurred. I provided and collected paperwork for referrals to school districts for language, cognitive, or other developmental services, and consulted and referred for mental health services as needed. The sample of teaching staff was selected from staff interested in participating in this study. The study was explained and described in detail to the executive director and the board and policy council of Head Start and permission was gained to conduct the study.

Procedures

Case studies had a history of being viewed as an exploratory method, but this does not need to be the case, as case study research does not depend on the ethnographic or participant-observer forms of inquiry but can be investigated and explained how or why an approach or intervention worked or not worked (Yin, 2018). Case study research was viewed as a methodology; a particular design in qualitative research in forming conclusions about the overall explanations that were learned from studying the case (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Permissions

No data was collected from participants until all necessary approvals from Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and site permission had been obtained. The highest level of approval was collected from all agencies where data was to be collected. The researcher gained permission from the executive director of Mount Uinta by contacting and completing a research request form and documenting the research proposal, the planned process for the research, recruitment strategies, and method of participation protection. Additional documents

were supplemented to inform the Board of Directors with a clear understanding of the intention of the research. Until the researcher gained approval from both locations, the research did not start.

Recruitment Plan

To conduct research ethically (Yin, 2018), participants were informed through email and posted flyers handed to the organization, about focus groups and voluntary involvement in these groups, regardless of research participation. The administration was also invited to participate in these focus groups to gain more insight into organizational practice regarding professional development for SEL pedagogy. In addition to focus groups, direct observation of classrooms took place with the permission of the director and teaching staff. Interviews were scheduled with participants who consented to the study and were held at a convenient time for both staff and researcher. Each interview followed the Interview Protocol (Appendix A) Each participant was informed that the interview would be recorded and transcribed. Focus groups (Yin, 2018) were held following the Focus Groups Protocol (Appendix B) to discuss amongst teaching staff their experiences with professional development and perception of SEL and to gain insight into the impact of teachers' social-emotional competence in implementing SEL pedagogy. Classroom teacher observations were scheduled and conducted to observe and gain insight into the implementation of SEL pedagogy. The interpretation of the evidence collected depended on the researcher's style. There were no case study formulas but the researcher's empirical thinking and studying of the output of the coding determined if there were meaningful patterns in response to the initial "how" and "why" questions that started the thinking process (Yin, 2018). When searching for patterns, the data that emerged could be placed in different categories, displays, frequency of events, or themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

A variety of data collection procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and reported teachers' self-refection described their experience during this study indicating the case study research methodology, finding answers to the research questions, and data analysis. Collecting qualitative data helped me to better understand the lived experiences of early childhood educators' self-efficacy in the implementation of SEL pedagogy in the classroom. The six sources listed for case study research were: "documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts" (Yin, 2018, p. 111). The careful analysis of the data collected assisted in the exploration of the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges (Barrett & Twycross, 2018) ECE teachers faced with the implementation of SEL for their students. As I completed this case study, the goal was to describe the lived experiences as they occurred and not create my interpretation (Zainal, 2007). To only use one source of data collection was not recommended for case study research. A good principle to follow was to "maintain a chain of evidence" which increased construct validity (Yin, 2018).

Data collection for this research was provided through focus groups (Gill & Baillie, 2018), semi-structured interviews (Guerrant, 2016), and teacher self-reflection surveys (Yin, 2018). When reporting this research case study, all evidence needed to be reported fairly. Being unbiased in questioning in searching for evidence, with the main goal to expand and discover theories instead of analyzing (Yin, 2018). The focus group highlighted the perceived perspectives and level of preparedness of the teaching staff and discussed ways to increase their self-determination in learning social-emotional competencies to strengthen their teaching practices.

I collected data myself by examining responses from the focus groups and interviewing participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) including the use of data such as audiovisual instruments and teacher surveys (Yin, 2018). One of the evaluative approaches was to conduct and document teachers' self-refection about their SEC and implementation in the local setting (Yin, 2018). All these forms allowed participants to share their ideas freely.

Interviews and early childhood teachers' self-reflection gave insight into teachers' perceived perspectives on SEL and the implementation of SEL in their teaching practices (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Focus groups gained insight into the organization as well as the teaching staff's views on professional development in gaining social-emotional competence by incorporating SEL and creating formal guidelines and practices (Blewitt et al., 2021). Gaining insight from teachers' real-life experiences after PD on their own emotional competence and socialization techniques through classroom observations created a promising way of improving the teaching quality and practices for the implementation of SEL pedagogy (Jensen et al., 2017).

This data was gathered inductively through pattern coding (Saldaña, 2021) as a second cycle method to group categories, and themes from the bottom up through the organization of the data created more abstract components of information. The researcher then deductively determined if more evidence was needed to support each category of information gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The development of a codebook (Roberts et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2021) was used to guide analysis and allowed for replication of qualitative methods and easy implementation of reliability testing. A clear description of the coding and reliability testing was able to support the researcher in demonstrating that a codebook allowed for intent and systemic analysis of the raw data and applying it to qualitative research.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The interview was the primary data collection tool used for this qualitative common case study. The interview, being the most common and fundamental instrument used in social and human research (Yin, 2018), was necessary to describe the lived experiences of the participants. I learned in-depth about the perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of the participants (Gill & Baillie, 2018) when it came to the implementation of SEL in their classrooms. Interview-based research could be complicated due to the large amount of data needed to be interpreted and coded to align with the research questions (McGuigan, 2011). Questions and responses were to be appropriately formed and examined for the research context. The interview was a guided conversation that was not structured, but more fluid than fixed (Yin, 2018), created about the specific topic by the interviewer, and the interviewee answered those questions. Depending on the conditions for interview collection, there were different methods used as the researcher held an interview. An electronic interview was an alternative method to the traditional in-person interview with the opportunity to record the interview (Yin, 2018). Using the electronic method was to be a safer (in this time of COVID-19), yet effective way to examine the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and experiences of the interviewee. An electronic interview was conducted via telephone conversations, video conferencing, or chat on social networks (Parvaresh-Masoud & Varaei, 2018) or at asynchronous times via email, when necessary. The electronic interview was a benefit for long-distance, difficult access or time constraints when interviewing was impacted.

The interview for this research was completed in person and recorded, but the electronic interview would have been used as a backup plan for those times when an in-person interview was not feasible. The challenge of the electronic interview was the ethical considerations, due to

the risk of disclosure of information, keeping participant privacy and confidentiality. Experts in the field reviewed the following questions. The interview protocol is in Appendix A.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your background and experience teaching early childhood education. SQ2

2. What type of formal social-emotional learning instructional training, if any, have you received? SQ2

3. Describe any professional development training you received to raise awareness of your personal social and emotional competence and positive well-being. SQ2

4. How would professional development in SEL methods improve instruction of SEL to your students? SQ1

5. How has your self-determination teaching in ECE provided you with insight into intentional teaching practices in SEL? CRQ

6. How would you describe your level of interest in learning and growing in the knowledge of SEL? CRQ

7. How does your overall well-being affect your teaching abilities? SQ1

8. Describe successful practices you use in teaching SEL to your ECE students. SQ1

9. What support would you need to help feel more competent in implementing SEL into your ECE classroom? SQ2

10. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences teaching SEL that we haven't discussed? CRQ

To start the conversation flowing and concerning sub-question two and empirical literature, questions one and two explored the competency of the teacher in receiving education

in general in any form on SEL. Human behavior is regulated by motivation, moving along with a self-determination continuity of different levels (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and regulated through external impact or influences (Burgueño et al., 2021). Addressing questions two, three, six, seven, and nine all related to sub-question two and the problem statement and indicated if the teacher was comfortable with talking about social-emotional learning and addressing needed improvement of instruction in the subject. The hope was that by observing their motivated students, teachers became more interested in teaching (C. K. J. Wang et al., 2019). Questions six, seven, and eight helped teachers to better understand the positive impact they have as socializers of emotional competence (Denham et al., 2012). Teachers and pre-service teachers felt encouraged and had confidence, as indicated, in empirical literature. The beliefs that people held about their capabilities were addressed in the purpose statement and by addressing questions ten and eleven about the outcomes of their efforts extended information to define future research.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

After having recorded the interviews and analyzing this data set of interviews, I employed Saldaña's (2021) coding manual for qualitative researchers. I set aside my prejudgments, took an open stance, put my personal opinions aside, and related to social-emotional learning and teachers' feelings on competence and willingness to learn about SEL. Doing this helped me not be biased towards my study. Coding was one way of analyzing qualitative data, with interview data being most beneficial from this research-generated interpretation. Codes were created from the interview questions' answers through symbolically assigned words or phrases that represented the subjects of SEL instruction, teacher well-being, and professional development. By using coding themes, concepts emerged, and data were linked together, shaping each other into building a theory (Saldaña, 2021). A two-cycle coding

approach was used for both interviews and focus groups and then transcribed verbatim. Themes were formed to identify the related research questions as the transcription was read and reread to analyze the data. Viewing the ontological, epistemological, and methodological points of view of the research questions, the researcher determined what type of theme and/or emotion realization was going to be generated. Cycle one coding was used to process codes with values codes (Saldaña, 2021). It indicated certain words with a specific ending processed, and that aligned with the purpose of the study of human behavior. Values codes were used to gain insight into human experiences that were brought into perspective by the teaching staff and generated from all sources of data. When themes arose in the data collection, it was important to place the data into categories. These categories were part of the process of understanding and analyzing evidence in the data (Saldaña, 2021). The second cycle of coding was for pattern coding where groups of themes were formed to help in developing explanations from the collected data (Saldaña, 2021).

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

The focus group was the second data to be collected to gain insight into the early childhood teacher's perceptions of SEL instruction and implementation in the classroom and on professional development. Insight was gained into the organization and the teaching staff's views of professional development on SEL pedagogy in the program, their perspectives on the implementation of SEL in the classroom, and understanding of their social-emotional competence were the focus of the conversation. A follow-up focus group was considered after the research had been completed to wrap up the research and to target any unanswered concerns if necessary. Focus groups consisting of approximately six to twelve participants were planned to be completed face-to-face but could also be performed online, using appropriate technology

creating the ability to gather views of many participants at one time (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

Recruitment for the focus groups consisted of no more than twelve participants to allow for a good sample size and an opportunity for participants to express themselves. Depending on the number of willing participants, two focus groups could have been held at Head Start to allow for diverse group participation to include administrative staff as well. The time set aside for the focus groups was scheduled during a time convenient for all participants. A focus group interview protocol was used to ensure qualitative data-gathering implementation, informed consent, appropriate access, and secure data storage (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Focus group questions were similar to individual interview questions and consisted of the following guiding questions to gain insight into the perceived efficacy of early childhood educators when it came to the implementation of SEL pedagogy. Focus group protocol is located in Appendix B. Introduction of one another, clarity about the process, and ground rules for discussion were set at the beginning of the discussion time.

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your attitude, position, or stance regarding the implementation of SEL in your classroom? CRQ

2. What are the benefits of integrating social-emotional learning instruction (understanding self and others' emotions, creating, and keeping positive relationships, emotion management, showing social awareness and empathy, and responsible decision-making) into the ECE classroom? CRQ

3. How has professional development affected, motivated, or inspired your work on your social-emotional competence? SQ2

4. Tell me about the classes you choose on SEL when given the opportunity, during

professional development. How is this learning brought back into the classroom afterward? SQ2

5. Would the use of intrinsic motivation increase your overall well-being? SQ1

6. Would your well-being affect your social-emotional competence? SQ1

The central research question and theoretical framework guided question one in understanding the teacher's perception of the implementation of SEL in general and the impact it could present in helping their students learn social-emotional skills. Question two coincided with question one yet was also relevant to the significance of the study regarding teachers' relationships, competence, and ability to teach social development and strengthen relationships. Empirical literature and the theoretical framework guided questions three and four in understanding how professional development affected teachers' intrinsic motivation in bringing the instruction of SEL into the ECE classroom. Having good training in behavior management was shown to prevent negative behavior and improve social-emotional well-being in the classroom (Penney et al., 2019; Ritblatt, 2016; Zinsser et al., 2016). The relationship skills between parent/caregiver and teacher provided awareness that social-emotional and self-regulatory skills were necessary components in the preschool classroom. Workshops that provided theoretical knowledge and practical applications for autonomy support were beneficial in early childhood educators' awareness of promoting student motivation and functioning as well as satisfying educators' basic needs for self-determination (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016). The purpose statement and sub-question one helped guide focus group questions five and six in finding satisfaction in self-determined forms of intrinsic motivation in the implementation of SEL.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

As the questions were asked, the focus group conversation was recorded, so the researcher could go back, code, and review what had been discussed. The data recorded was written out and then cleaned to make the conversation coherent. The complexity of human emotions that were brought into the discussion needed analyzing and coding to allow for the analysis of the feelings and moods of the participants. The researcher had to find the correct wording to describe emotional experiences that occurred during the focus group, especially as the discussion dealt with social-emotional learning. Emotion codes were used to label recollected emotions or experiences by the participants. Emotions provided a deep awareness of world views and life's circumstances. The results of the data were interpreted and measured to find a deeper understanding of the participants' journey toward SEL by using Saldaña's coding manual for qualitative researchers (Saldaña, 2021) and the labeling of emotions (Brown, 2021). The same process of two-cycle coding was implemented as in the interview data. Transcribing the recordings verbatim assisted in analyzing the data, before coding, reading, and rereading the data. Saldaña (2021) explained that while reading and rereading, your subconscious mind can develop insight into the data.

Teacher Self-Reflection Data Collection Approach

Using a case study approach reaps many benefits, one was that case study data collection had an opportunity to gain evidence from many different sources. Those case studies that enlisted multiple sources of evidence were rated more highly in terms of quality. Triangulation of data was strengthened when multiple sources of data were presented and provided different findings (Yin, 2018). Self-reflection was a critical phase of self-determined learning. Self-reflection by teachers offered opportunities and reflection of time, effort expended, strategies, and learning involved that influenced the performance of learning a particular skill by the learner

(Dickfos et al., 2014). Case study observation was a favorable approach to seeking an understanding of complex topics and allowed the researcher to observe what people do compare to what they say they do (Morgan et al., 2017). When teachers were willing, they could be recorded teaching SEL skills (self-modeling) in their classrooms and then watching their own recorded teaching (Dickfos et al., 2014), allowing teachers to reflect, gain insight into the understanding of SEL pedagogy, teacher self-awareness, and implementation of professional development. A self-reflection question list was used to gather data on teacher insight concerning SEC. Reflection of the following questions were noted and are in the self-reflection protocol in Appendix C:

1. What did I learn from participation in the study that I didn't know before?

2. What links can I make between my experiences and other ideas from professional development or focus groups?

3. How can I use the knowledge I have gained from this experience in the future?

4. What learning occurred for you in this experience?

5. How can you apply this learning?

6. What would you like to learn more about, related to this subject?

7. What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or issues?

8. What information can you share with your colleagues?

9. What are the most difficult or satisfying aspects of your work? Why?

10. How would I rate my intrinsic motivation to learn more?

11. Have my beliefs changed since participating in this study?

Self-Reflection Data Analysis Plan

A teacher self-reflection survey for data collection was a noteworthy tactic for gaining

insight into participants' perceptions. Using this technique revealed the perception of the

teachers' professional development, processes, and insight toward (Furlong, 2010) their

implementation of SEL pedagogy. Through self-reflection, I collected invaluable data to

complement the individual and focus group interviews. In addition, I gained an insight into the

relationship of teachers with their students through reflected interactions occurring in the

classroom that added new understanding. Being part of collaboration sessions with coworkers

and supervisors also added valuable insight. The findings coincide with the given interview and

focus group answers that were provided to form relations to social processes in everyday

observations (Yin, 2018). After gathering all surveys, values coding was applied to analyze

teacher's assertions, and the types of messages shared. Values coding reflects a teacher's values,

attitudes, and beliefs through real-life experiences and documented actions (Saldaña, 2021).

Data Synthesis

An in-depth exploration into the complex phenomenon of teacher perception on

integrating social and emotional learning pedagogy and the role they played in delivering SEL

into the classroom within its real-world context (Yin, 2018) gave an understanding of the case

study as the connection of concepts was formed and meaning created out of what was learned

(Zhang & Lin, 2018). The researcher's interpretation of the data was generated by a code,

giving meaning for use in later pattern detection (Saldaña, 2021). Codes were entered into the

analytical framework until no new codes emerged. This assumed representation of the data was

then transferred into NVivo or another software program where systematic coding was

identified and added as nodes allowing for sorting, clustering, and comparison of codes between

and within subgroups (Roberts et al., 2019). Coding was just one way of investigating qualitative data as it depended on the researcher's preference (Saldaña, 2021).

There were no specific formulas or tools that produced the analyzed data when it came to case study research. Starting with data analysis versus identifying data that answered the research questions was not addressed by Yin (2018). The researcher was required to study the analytical rationale of outputs of the coding, and any meaningful patterns, insights, or concepts herself to draw a tentative solution based on evidence. Evidence then helped the researcher to answer the main research question. Moving backward and forward through research questions, data, interpretations of data, and being able to state some findings and conclusions concluded the kind of analysis sought after.

Yin (2018) supplied four different strategies to help guide the analysis of the study. The strategy inclined to be used was to rely on theoretical propositions. Self-determination theory guided this case study and also helped to organize the entire analysis by guiding and explaining relevant correlated data (Yin, 2018). Yin provided five analytical techniques to be considered to build an analytical and sound case study. Pattern matching helped identify the focus on the organizational process and outcomes in answering the *how* and *why* research questions of the study. Adding to pattern matching built an explanation of the case. The goal of explanation building was to explain "how" or "why" some outcomes had occurred in a narrative form. Single-subject case studies use time-series analysis to measure a single relevant action over time, giving strength to case studies. The objective was to investigate applicable "how" and "why" questions associated with the research questions and not only time trends. Using a program logic model was effective in noting organizational change and explaining the cause-and-effect between professional development intervention and later SEL instruction success in

the ECE classrooms. Cross-case synthesis was not applied to this single case study as it only applied to multiple-case studies (Yin, 2018).

The use of one or multiple strategies was considered during data collection and analysis. Ensuring that data analysis was of high quality and deserving of this case study and that all evidence was analyzed and showed as much evidence as was available. Investigation of all plausible rival interpretations was addressed and noted in the findings. The analysis demonstrated the most convincing position of the case study with a focus on the most important issue of SEL competence being addressed without excessive deviation. Care was taken to demonstrate a naturalness of knowing the subject matter at hand (Yin, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Research needed to be well described to convey the outcomes of the project. Roberts et al., (2019) established that "Research aims to determine the relationship between knowledge and practice through the demonstration of rigor, validity and reliability" (p. 2). These attributes helped to determine the trustworthiness of the research project. Trustworthiness was gained by a thorough explanation of research methods that allowed for mirroring the completed research and determining the findings. "Case study evaluations could limit themselves to descriptive or even exploratory objectives" explains Yin (2018, p. 322). Detailed and mechanical descriptions of procedures and methods were explained to allow readers to determine how the conclusions of the research were established.

Credibility

When it came to critiquing methodologies in research, qualitative research regarded credibility and trustworthiness as the most common criteria to evaluate (Cope, 2014). Qualitative research is based on describing, interpreting, and understanding meanings and one could argue

the research methods should influence the theory or findings to be tested for accuracy and how

compatible the findings are with reality (Nyirenda et al., 2020). Yet a qualitative research finding

was likely to lack credibility unless the researcher accurately constituted the phenomena through

description, explanation, and theory. Often completed through the process of memoing, where

the researcher keeps notes of key thoughts, suspicions, and forms of data collection hereby

creating an audit trail with rational explanations of inquiry (Cutcliffe & McKenna., 1999).

Triangulation, namely theory/perspective triangulation (Yin, 2018) was likely to strengthen the

validity and saturation, rapport building, repetitive questioning, as well as coding repetitively

(Nyirenda et al., 2020) all aimed to enhance credibility and was to be part of the research. How

those outcomes came about is shown through examination of causal relationships (Yin, 2018).

Transferability

The findings of this research were applied to other environments through the thick, rich

description of the study context and presupposition. To meet these criteria, the result needed to

have been meaningful to individuals not involved in the study (Cope, 2014) and relevant to their

circumstances. This case study allowed the researcher to investigate data at the micro level, and

present real-life applications to provide a better understanding of participants' behaviors (Zainal,

2007). When a case study is unusual and of interest to the general population, and the underlying

issues are of practical importance, a case study can be exemplary. Having the goal of

completeness, the debate in the literature was felt where the researcher gave clear attention to the

phenomenon being studied. This complete case demonstrated that complete attention was given

to the critical pieces of evidence (Yin, 2018).

Dependability

The researcher remained dedicated to the constancy of the data during the research period during similar conditions and created decision trials at each stage of the research process (Cope, 2014), ensuring that the research could be replicated (Nyirenda et al., 2020) and neutrality in the interpretation of findings would be free of bias. Generalizing case studies was appropriate as the findings generalized a theory instead of populations. Case studies were designed to replicate each other, to build on a theory, and to determine the applicability of the findings in their situations and to others (Gall et al., 2007). The researcher's approach to findings was consistent and accurate among all sources. A rich thick description of the findings was disclosed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Confirmability

The data represented the responses of participants at Mount Uinta and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints by describing how conclusions and evaluations were concluded directly from the data. Case study research is unique, and the findings can apply to other cases or settings. Finding applicability was the goal of this case study because of the process and types of evidence gained. There was a degree of neutrality in the findings of the phenomenon studied. Theories are better developed, and educational interventions are implemented through studying perspectives of phenomena in case studies (Gall et al., 2007). The researcher used detail in each step of data analysis by providing an audit trail, followed by data triangulation to ensure that the findings were precise and showed the participants' responses. The researcher practiced reflexivity by maintaining open dialogue and discussion with coworkers and peers in her team and reflected internally on the research process.

Ethical Considerations

With the use of technology and the Internet, ethical considerations and implications of the research study were acknowledged. After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided clearing to begin collecting data, ethical site approval consent of Mount Uinta was obtained. To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, all files were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office with a computer password, and fingerprint-protected electronic files. Confidentiality was maintained using the pseudonyms of all participants and codes for locations. Obtaining informed consent from every participant ensured that participation in this research was voluntary. All individuals who participated in this research had the opportunity to withdraw from the research of their own free will, at any time, without providing any reason. Participants' possible physical, social, psychological, or legal harm was kept to an absolute minimum, by providing participants with details on the research study before agreeing to participate. All relevant information regarding the study showed an indication of what the study was about, the risks and benefits of taking part, how long the study was to take, with contact information and approval number to conduct this research. A possible focus group to debrief after the completed study was provided to target any unanswered concerns, or questions, or provide mental health resources.

Online research has become more convenient and successful for those who might decline participation in face-to-face research (Burles & Bally, 2018). Data was collected and stored on a password-protected computer to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Files were saved for three years after the research was completed and any potential issues that arose were dealt with immediately through personal communication with the participant. Unless research was followed up on or added to, files were destroyed after three years.

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive detailed summary of the research that was conducted at Mount Uinta to develop an in-depth analysis of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhanced social-emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators. A common single case study design using interviews, a focus group, and a teachers' self-reflection survey using pseudonyms for the site and participants ensured ethical practices and confidentiality. Data collected were placed in group categories and themes, underwent a two-cycle coding approach, and then analyzed. Multiple procedures were used to ensure the validity of the study, including peer checking, external audits, and data triangulation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this common single case study was to understand how self-determination and intrinsic motivation enhance social and emotional teaching practices for early childhood educators and motivate overall well-being. According to Yin (2018), the choice to use case studies depends on the questions that seek to explain some contemporary circumstance (e.g., 'how' or 'why' some social phenomenon works) (p. 4). The staff at Mount Uinta is a group of individuals in this single common case study. This chapter begins with a brief description of the 11 participants in this study and continues with the results of the study. The results are displayed through themes and subthemes organized by the central research question and two research sub-questions. Outlier findings and a summary of the themes and major findings conclude the chapter.

Participants

Twelve participants consented to be part of this study. Each of them obtained a teaching degree in early learning education or a similar field. All educators had similar teaching experiences with children and voluntarily agreed to participate in this study as they were interested in the topic of SEL. The participants in this sample were teachers (*n = 7)*, center managers (*n = 3)*, and a classroom quality mentor and monitor (*n = 1)* employed by Mount Uinta in Utah. Each participant taught at Mount Uinta during the past school year while the study was held. The following participants participated in this common case study (Table 1).

Table 1

Early Childhood Teacher Participants

Teacher	Years	Highest Degree	Content Area	Grade
Cynthia	31	Double Bachelor	Early childhood development Early childhood	Preschool
Elizabeth	20	Bachelor	Early childhood	Preschool
Hannah	10	Bachelor	Family Life	Preschool
Julie	40	Double Bachelor	Early childhood education & Elementary education	Preschool
Laura	10	Bachelor	Behavioral Science	Preschool
Manaia	20	Associate	Child Development	Preschool
Nancy	20	Associate	Child development	Preschool
Rachel	17	Bachelor	Family and Human Development	Preschool
Sara	6	Bachelor	Liberal Studies, Early childhood	Preschool
Shelby	3	Bachelor	Family Life	Preschool
Susan	26	Bachelor	Education: ECE Endorsement	Preschool
Viola	1	Bachelor	Geography & International Development	Preschool

After receiving a signed informed consent form (Appendix D) from each participant, I set up times to meet with each participant. I met with participants individually at the center location where they taught for the personal interview. Secondly, all but one participant joined via Zoom to participate in a focus group during a morning that was set aside as a professional development day. The researcher had received prior permission to hold the focus group during that time. One participant was not available, so study participants decreased from 12 to 11. The completion of the research ended with the self-reflection survey completed by each of the 11 participants. These were completed online or by handing in a paper copy at the convenience of the participant.

Cynthia

Cynthia has been in the early childhood field for 31 years. She was a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 45 - 55 years old. Cynthia has double bachelor's degrees in early childhood development and early childhood administration. Having taught many children ranging in ages from infant up to preschool age, as well as held administrative roles, gives her lots of knowledge in the early childhood field.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was an early educator for 20 years. with lots of different experiences. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 45 – 55 years old. After starting as a volunteer at a Head Start in Oregon, she became an assistant teacher, earned an associate degree, and then quickly moved up to head teacher. Elizabeth earned a three-year bachelor's degree in early childhood education out of the country and worked there as a director, an educational leader, and a teacher. Since moving back to the United States, she has been a teacher at Head Start.

Hannah

Hannah has been an educator for 10 years in many different capacities, from teaching students from kindergarten to 6th grade with autism spectrum disorder in a charter school to working with special needs youth needing intense care. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 25 - 35 years old. She has earned a bachelor's degree in family life.

Julie

Julie has been a dedicated ECE teacher for 40 years. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 45 - 60 years old. She has double bachelor's degrees in elementary education and early childhood education. She has lots of experience teaching early childhood and held various administrative roles both in the United States as well as abroad. Her latest role in education is in coaching and mentoring early childhood educators.

Laura

Laura has been in early childhood for at least 10 years. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 45 – 55 years old. She has a bachelor's degree in behavioral science. After working in various school districts as a substitute SPED teacher, Laura became a teacher at Head Start and has also taken on the role of center manager.

Manaia

Manaia has been teaching early childhood for at least 20 years. She is a female of Samoan descent and in the age range of 50 – 65 years old. She decided to obtain an associate degree in child development after being a bus aide as she liked working with kids.

Nancy

Nancy has been teaching in early childhood for over 20 years. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 50 – 65 years old. She has an associate degree in child development and loves teaching at Head Start to help the kids learn how to teach conflict resolution, skills she had used for many years in her home daycare before coming to Head Start.

Rachel

Rachel has been an early childhood teacher for 17 years and has been interested in working with children since attending high school. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 40 – 50 years old. She has a bachelor's in family and human development and loves the Head Start program that incorporates so many wonderful tools for families.

Sara

Sara has been an early childhood educator for about six years. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 25 - 35 years old. She earned a bachelor's degree in liberal studies with a minor in early childhood and landed her first preschool teaching job in California,

teaching at that preschool for about four years. After moving to Utah, she came to teach at Head Start and has also taken on the role of center manager.

Shelby

Shelby has been teaching early childhood for a little over 3 years with experience in moderate special education in elementary school from kindergarten up to fifth grade. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 20 - 30 years old. She has a bachelor's degree in family life and enjoys working in kids' camps with youth ages three to twelve.

Susan

Susan has been a dedicated early childhood educator for 26 years. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 40 – 55 years old. Susan has a bachelor's degree in education with an endorsement in early childhood and has worked for the same organization after first starting as an assistant teacher and then moving up to head teacher.

Viola

Viola was on the verge of completing her bachelor and this was her first year teaching in a preschool setting but had experience in early intervention settings. She is a white, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 20- 30 years old. Her bachelor's degree is in geography and international studies. Sadly, Viola only participated in the interview and then dropped out of the study.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Before exploration of teachers' own social and emotional needs, there needed to be an understanding of the benefits of integrating SEL in the classroom. Listening to the teaching staff give their stance on the need for SEL, it was evidenced how teaching staff can be self-determined to learn about SEL and when not. The following initial codes were gained through

two-cycle coding and shortened to match the theme and subthemes and are listed in Table 2 and

followed by the grouping of initial codes in Table 3.

Table 2

Initial Codes

Initial code	*n* of participants contributing (*N*=11)	*n* of transcript excerpts assigned	Sample quote
Implementation training	7	13	"I feel it's always good to reiterate skills and to have repetition in a lot of the concepts because I feel in one training you can't ingrain everything" (Hannah)
Behavior training	7	9	"Guide them in the direction that might help them" (Cynthia)
Collaboration/Focus Groups	5	6	"My beliefs are reinforced that I need to research more on my own as others are not interested in learning anything else" (Elizabeth)
Recognition/Support	11	20	"More training needed and somebody more experienced showing an example" (Shelby)
Stress	5	5	"The attitude in how I came to work, I was stressed, and I think it showed" (Susan)
Struggles/Behavior	8	4	"Especially with the new generation coming up, it is harder than it used to be." (Manaia).
Intentional SEL teaching practices	8	9	"It's been beneficial as I am seeing a difference in the children that I'm working with" (Hannah)
Benefits of integration	10	7	"Yes, I want to do more. You never stop learning" (Elizabeth)
Why do teachers incorporate SEL?	5	6	"I'm so much more patient" (Rachel)
SEL needs to be bigger priority	3	4	"Reinforced the idea that educators need to be taught more about SEL techniques in school and at PD" (Sara)

Beliefs in things that need doing	11	10	"But you keep encouraging them" (Manaia)
Value of SEL for staff	7	5	"First you have to learn it yourself" (Elizabeth)
Self-care	11	15	"Finding ways to take care of myself and to stay positive" (Julie)
Well-being training	6	8	"I need to do some things to take care of me too" (Nancy)
Teacher self-awareness	10	13	"I think kind of adopting that you know that social emotional in yourself, like sticking through hard things, or take deep breaths when you need to or walking away or taking a mental health day" (Sara).
Personal stuff	5	5	"When I am not in a good mental state then I don't have the motivation to do my job" (Laura)
Find motivation	11	15	"My goal is to make them functioning, kind humans" (Sara)
Intrinsic motivation	10	11	"I have a big desire to learn more about it." (Shelby)
Outlier: Training for others	4	3	"Some of the parents might like some help, as they may not know how to deal with their child" (Manaia)

Table 3

Grouping of Initial Codes to Form Themes

Themes Initial codes grouped to form a theme	*n* of participants contributing (*N*=11)	*n* of transcript excerpts assigned

Theme 1: Benefits of Integrating SEL Instruction in the ECE Classroom
    staff's intrinsic understanding of SEL
        Code: Benefits of integration
        Code: Why teachers Incorporate
        Code: Intentional teaching practices
        Code: Needs to be bigger priority
    when staff is self-determined in implementing SEL
        Code: Value of SEL for staff
        Code: Belief in things that need doing
	11	41

Theme 2: Teachers' Need for Self-Care	11	57
staff's well-being relies on connection with others		
Code: Teacher self-awareness		
Code: Self-care		
the need to have intrinsic motivation to implement SE for oneself		
Code: Intrinsic motivation		
Code: Personal stuff		
Code: Find motivation		
Code: Well-being training		
Theme 3: Teachers Want More Training	11	57
become competent in SEL		
Code: Behavior training		
Code: Implementation training		
motivated to learn		
Code: Recognition/Support		
Code: Collaboration/Focus groups		
what stops me?		
Code: Stress		
Code: Struggles/behavior		

Benefits of Integrating SEL Instruction in the ECE Classroom

As the focus group began, and the question was posed on the staff's attitude toward SEL integration, there was an overall agreement with Elizabeth's statement of "It is a must, we must do it. No if, ands, or buts about it, we must do it. We have to prepare them for life". This agreement for the need for implementation of SEL appeared in the interviews, discussion in the focus group, and self-reflections of all staff. It became clear that social-emotional instruction is beneficial in assisting children in learning life skills. "Children need to learn to be in a school setting and how to get along with others. This can be very demanding, and they need to be prepared to know how to handle these things, how to self-regulate, and how to interact with others, all vital skills, just as important as academics", stated Julie. Children need to learn turn-taking and sharing, follow directions, and so forth, but it starts with feeling safe, trusting the

teacher, and creating a connection with her and others, "and we are learning alongside them", as Julie reflects on the things said by others during the focus group session.

When Staff is Self-Determined to Implement

Experienced teacher Susan self-reflects, "I have more social-emotional learning to do. I was reminded of how important social-emotional learning is and that I am in charge of my own learning". It is more important than ever before, especially when handling increased challenging behavior, that has become more common. Teaching social-emotional learning at this young age is needed. It needs to start at an early age, so the child can understand it is okay to feel and express their feelings. Most of the teaching staff have grown up not learning or talking about emotions. Some emotions were seen as bad, so showing kids by example that it is normal, and adults have emotions too, is something that kids can learn at a young age. This is also the time to fix those challenging behaviors rather than later. "It essentially is like a foundation, and it is easier for them to learn it now because this is the time when they learn so many things", states Shelby during the focus group discussion. Teachers feel more motivated to continue teaching SEL when they see the benefits of children feeling safe, growing, and learning.

When social and emotional teaching is used and taught, a difference is observed in the classroom. Children who have learned self-regulation skills are better able to build relationships with others. Every child has different experiences in life, but those who learn to take a breath, talk about their feelings, and learn to vocalize their wants and needs, are better able to interact with others and then teach each other how to use these skills in the same way. Hannah questioned the others in the group, "How is the emotional stuff we teach actually making an impact on my students?" Then proceeded to answer her question by stating, "When they start growing their adult teacher relationship with me, that is one of the ways that I can tell SEL has

become effective. They will give me little hearts, or say 'I love you, teacher', and then the negative issue in the classroom starts decreasing". Susan jumps in with, "I can tell for me when it is effective when they start telling each other the words or tell me that I need to breathe". Nancy also chimed in with, "When the more aggressive child will come and say I want to take that person and talk with them with the time machine".

SEL is crucial for success in classrooms, as students are not ready for academics until they can self-regulate. Teachers noticed a decrease in unruly behaviors when children were able to communicate their wants and needs with each other. "Our job is important, and we should never give up on the kids", Manaia puts in her self-reflection. When it comes to teaching the ones who are more difficult to teach due to challenging behavior, Nancy starts the conversation in the focus group, "I think elementary schools appreciate the fact that we are doing so much socialization because there are times when I can't focus and teach numbers and letters because his social skills are off the wall". "If we can get them to know how to regulate their emotions then their future looks brighter because they know how to deal with it, we need to keep encouraging them", agrees Manaia.

Teachers' Need for Self-Care

Nancy spoke during the focus group about how there used to be one child with challenging behavior in a classroom, whereas now it is common to have six or seven. Susan agreed to this, "It is more common or more normal now. It was so much easier before because children would just follow and listen. Challenging behavior has been increasing over the past 10 years". Hannah chimed in with, "I don't know what it is, but I had an increase in behaviors in the classroom that I hadn't seen before. It was kind of overwhelming to deal with, to be honest". "This job isn't easy, but knowing that social-emotional in yourself, sticking through hard things,

taking deep breaths when you need to or walking away, and even taking a mental health day"
were all great examples passed on by Sara.

When dealing with too many things, sometimes at home or work, there may be a need for
social-emotional help from outside sources. Manaia stated, "I have used EAP (employee
assistance program) when I needed social-emotional help, and just talking to other staff and see
what they think helps me. It helps a lot when we're sharing our load with others". Also being
able to understand that "sometimes it can affect you at work, we see kids have hard days, but we
have hard days too". It is good for kids to see that adults have emotions too, especially if a child
hit you and it actually hurts us", stated Shelby in her interview.

Staff's Well-Being Relies on Connection with Others

Teachers are feeling a bit lonely in their classrooms away from staff at other center
locations. Hannah has friends who are teaching different grades in a school district. She likes
how they get together to lesson plan so you can gain insight from each other. She shared how she
would like the concept of sharing ideas with other teachers in the organization, where a group
can get together once a month and share and learn from more experienced teachers as they
bounce ideas off one another. One of the ideas mentioned during the focus group was to create a
team support group that could even meet via Zoom with one another, so those outlier centers
don't feel so alone. So many staff struggle with challenging behaviors or other concerns, and it
can be hard to deal with things on your own. Many liked this idea. Susan stated, "It is good to
just know that you are not alone", and Manaia chimed in with, "When you can think of everyone
achieving together instead of just one for the win then teamwork makes the dream work".

The Need to Have Intrinsic Motivation to Implement SEL for Oneself

As we come to understand that a child need to feel safe before they can learn, center manager Sara stated, "I think there is a safe place for grownups too. Everyone is kind of learning together", this made for a perfect topic of discussion, "A classroom needs to meet all the aspects of safety for students as well as for teachers. Teachers are on the same journey, learning alongside the students and all need to be willing to regulate together, as this isn't always an easy place to be when it's not going well", reiterates Sara. All teaching staff agreed it is important to learn alongside the children. When children see that teachers are with them in social-emotional learning, they come to see their teachers in a new way and start creating a bond. There may be professional development taught on self-care and self-regulation and the importance thereof, but after a full day in the classroom, teachers are too exhausted to implement certain techniques, expresses Hannah. Nancy also reflected this in her interview, "I find it easy to sit and listen in a training and I can get all excited and pumped up about it, but implementing it is completely different".

Teachers Want More Training

It became clear that many teachers have not received much or any education in social-emotional learning as this wasn't a focus, either at college or in previous jobs. Sara, Shelby, and Laura mentioned similarly in their interviews, that it is hard to implement a social-emotional curriculum that is new to you. Having been placed in a classroom without much training and understanding of the Conscious Discipline curriculum that is used for social-emotional learning in the classroom. Shelby mentions in her interview and self-reflection, "It then becomes impossible to teach these social and emotional skills to the students as you, yourself don't grasp the concepts". A few new teachers had received a little social-emotional learning during college,

mainly when their field of study was family life, but not to the extent that they knew how to teach it diligently to their students. Even for those more seasoned teachers, it was agreed that ensuring that social and emotional pedagogy is being taught every day, is difficult. It helps when those with more experience in the implementation of Conscious Discipline come into the classroom and model for teachers, even the use of videos makes a difference. Julie mentioned in her interview, "It makes a huge difference, as then you can practice those things you've seen, so they will become second nature. We do need to give people a chance to practice it". Laura also mentioned this in her interview, "It reminds me of the kids, we teach them the words to use by modeling it. But if we as teachers don't have those words to use then it makes it harder in those moments, because we do shut down when we have very difficult kids". It then becomes easy to skip those important social-emotional elements in the day, even though it is so beneficial for the students.

To Become Competent in SEL

Teaching staff came to understand and discussed during the focus group that social-emotional learning is, "Things I haven't learned about or taught earlier in my teaching career. I mean, it wasn't even thought of yet, so I think it brings a lot of awareness for the staff as well in handling their own social-emotional well-being and building skills." Cynthia asserts "As teachers, we need to fill our own socially emotional bucket and I wish we could do a lot more with training on social emotional because we work with children that are coming from some pretty tough home lives and if we as teachers can better ourselves, we can help these children". Having professional development and being taught to stop and take a breath when needed, can be beneficial. Teaching staff know to go back to those basic self-regulation skills when ready to pull their hair out. Rachel jumps into the conversation with, "Sometimes I stop and say, Ms.

Rachel needs to take a deep breath, can you help me?" Hannah likes having connections with adults and other teachers as "It makes a huge difference on social emotional development, and it helps to strengthen us and help us be more willing to dive deep".

Motivated to Learn

"I love working with children and I want to continue to do that, it has been my life's work. I want to help them, so yes, I am motivated to learn so that I can implement it in the classroom. Let's go, keep trying, I won't give up", states Nancy in her interview. The suggestion for training during the summer was presented, and many chimed in during the focus group and self-reflection that they would like to attend training on social-emotional learning over the summer break and would be eager to join. As there is always so much going on during the school year, the mind wanders to all the other things that still need to be done during professional development training, so training in the summer would be great.

What Stops Me

The teaching staff at Head Start grasp that teaching basic social-emotional skills to a three- to five-year-old is necessary. They also realized that they need more dialogue on enhancing their own belief in SEL and how to incorporate it into their own life first and to boost their intrinsic motivation to want to learn. "On days that I may be feeling stressed, overwhelmed, or overworked I just don't have quite the energy to teach as I do on other days when I'm a lot more emotionally stable", states Hannah. Many of the self-reflections mentioned that this profession is draining so there arises a feeling of failure, low intrinsic motivation to seek new learning, and mind blocks that stop staff from teaching SEL effectively.

Building Own Social-Emotional Skills

Alongside the need to teach social-emotional skills to students, there is an awareness that creating connections with students is an important aspect of their teaching. "When you validate a child's emotions, you point out how they are feeling and it is like suddenly, a little light bulb comes on … they understand me, they're not getting mad at me for feeling this way, they are helping me. You make that connection with a child and get them to a place where they can communicate with you and they feel safe", states Laura during the focus group. When teachers create relationships with students, they gain a better understanding of their feelings and can build on their own SE competence as well as help the children learn self-regulation skills.

Some teaching staff have more experience in SEL implementation, as this comes with years of teaching experience in an early childhood classroom setting than newer teachers. New teaching staff exhibit more hesitation in implementation and a greater degree of difficulty understanding the social-emotional cues of a three- to five-year-old and express this during their interviews. When asked what learning was gleaned through this study in the self-reflection, one teacher noted, "Most educators have not had formal training in social-emotional learning". This can make it difficult to teach social-emotional concepts to a young child. Elizabeth reminds me in her self-reflection, "When children feel safe, secure, and supported they grow in confidence to explore and learn".

Awareness of My Feelings and Needs

Teachers came to understand the need to become more aware of their feelings before they could teach SEL to the students, as then they could understand more of what the kids are feeling or the things they are going through. Teachers also need time to talk to other teachers to bounce ideas off one another, just like in the focus group, to just say, "I'm struggling, how about you?", especially when they are in a center where they are the only class and where there aren't many

other adults to share the frustrations that are felt. "You think you have your struggles with your kids, and you are thinking, I've got to be the only one", expressed Hannah during the group discussion.

Knowing that their overall well-being affects their teaching abilities brought a wave of thoughts up in the focus group on things such as: "The need to get enough sleep so I'm not cranky and don't want to be there", stated Manaia, and "When I am physically fit, I come in here with a better attitude", said Rachel. Stress can cause that feeling of being overwhelmed and doesn't give you the energy to teach, affirmed both Hannah and Susan "No motivation to do my job", voiced Laura.

Outlier Data and Findings

As teachers discussed the benefit of integrating social-emotional learning in the classroom, the focus shifted to home life for the children and helping the parents. Societies' view on children's aggression towards teachers has shifted, we need professional development in how to educate children where they are at and on what is happening in classrooms. It might take some time for this trend to catch up, but there is a need for educators to speak up and ask for training in how to help these children, families, and staff. Families may struggle, have a lot going on in their lives, may not know how to deal with their child, and could use some help. Manaia states during her interview, "I've seen kids at home when we go do our home visits, it is chaotic, but then when they are here, they are different, so different. And with the new generation coming up, they are a lot harder now than they were back then".

Training to Help Families

Manaia was the first to mention that training for parents was needed. Her thoughts drifted to this during our interview, "We can teach all we want at school, it is different here than when

they go home. We cannot control that. Some of the parents might like some help and they may not know how to deal with their child". Mentioned as well by Laura during her interview how important it is for teachers to have filled their emotional buckets as the staff is working with children who come from a tough home life. Laura felt, that "It should be a bigger priority to teach parents on social and emotional and know how to handle their child because we can teach all we want at school, but this needs to be transferred to home where it matters because then it's going to stick. That, in my book, is number one, how can I help?" When staff is emotionally stable, they can discuss ways to help at the home front for those parents who are struggling and are trying to understand their child.

Training on Current Trends

It seems to be a common occurrence these days that children can come home from school and tell their parents they have punched and kicked their teacher repeatedly. In earlier years, parents would have spoken to their children and explained that that is not acceptable behavior, but there seems to be a shift in society. Sara pointed out in her interview that as educators they need to be taught about the behaviors that are currently being displayed by children and where society is at. "The classes need to reflect on what's going on in the classroom versus what they think is happening". It is hard to teach social-emotional skills when parents are in limbo on spanking or whatever the trend is currently. Teachers want training to help these children, their families, themselves, and their staff.

Research Question Responses

As a common single case study, this study was concerned with the subjective experiences of the 11 participants as related to the intrinsic motivation that provided self-determination to gain more SEL knowledge. Yin (2018) describes, "Case studies also are relevant the more that

your questions require an extensive and 'in-depth" description of some social phenomenon" (p. 4). To help describe the factors that influence early childhood educators' self-determination and intrinsic motivation, the following questions were created for this study and the relation shown in Table 4 to the themes.

Table 4

Emergent Themes and Research Questions

Research question	Themes that address the question
CRQ. How do intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social and emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom?	Theme 1: Benefits of Integrating SEL Instruction in the ECE Classroom
SQ1. How do early childhood teachers use intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being?	Theme 2: Teachers' Need for Self-Care
SQ2. How can professional development contribute to early childhood teachers' social and emotional competence?	Theme 3: Teachers Want More Training

Central Research Question

How do intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social and emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom?

When you are doing something for the pure love of doing something it will affect your ability to learn and grow in an area so much more than if you're doing it, you know, because you're wanting something from it", states Laura. The participants' perspective is that working with underserved populations can be both rewarding and challenging as there are many needs for the children who enter the classroom. There is personal motivation to get competent in implementing social-emotional learning because you can see how beneficial it can be, especially

for these kids with big feelings and big behaviors.

Sub Question One

How do early childhood teachers use intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being?

"The way you think about things changes the way we feel about things, the way we feel about things changes how we behave", recites Elizabeth. Teaching staff express that there are struggles and that not everything may go the way we expect it would as the day goes on. Sometimes there is frustration about how they handled a situation, but they want to do things better and feel that they are making a difference in a child's life. They are still human and make mistakes, and when working through tough situations, it may invoke guilt but could provide that motivator to want to learn and help these children. This is why most staff keep showing up while others don't. Laura stated," I guess, I don't have the intrinsic motivation". Others are in this industry because they are caring passionate people that want to help children and have that innate drive to do better next time.

Sub Question Two

How can professional development contribute to early childhood teachers' social and emotional competence?

Having professional development training on many subjects is good, but learning about social and emotional needs to be a bigger priority and "more often throughout the year", states Cynthia. There is so much social-emotional material out there, and as it is not taught much in college, there is a need to research more sources. "You can't teach something you do not know", states Elizabeth. So, more training on social-emotional learning is needed to bring it into the classroom. Elizabeth feels, "There has to be more out there, and I want to find out what I can do to help the children". This intrinsic motivation to want to learn more needs continual

encouragement. Elizabeth is not the only one who wants to learn more and not "feel like we are stuck", as she says. Having that self-determination to seek learning, even if professional development is not provided or only sparsely in this subject, these teachers want to become more competent in social-emotional learning.

Summary

This chapter presented the results from the participants' interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection surveys. The 11 participants were all educators and the data gathered from conversations and surveys describe the factors that influenced teachers' intrinsic motivation and self-determination in social and emotional learning. While examining how the integration of SEL instruction in the ECE classroom enhances learning, the following theme emerged indicating many benefits to SEL instruction. It became evident that the staff's intrinsic understanding of SEL and the staff's self-determination to implement SEL will benefit both the staff and the students.

When examining teacher's well-being, the theme of self-care emerged. Creating connections and time to connect, exchange information, and collaborate with others were all beneficial in the motivation to keep teaching. The realization came that social and emotional learning benefits oneself. This also led to motivation to learn alongside the children. The theme that was noted throughout the study was a need for more training in SEL. Teachers cannot teach something they do not know anything about. There must be more training throughout the year on social-emotional concepts and how to first work on oneself as then teachers could integrate this into the classroom with the students. If there isn't the intrinsic motivation of the staff to want to learn, it becomes harder to implement SEL into the classroom. How to gain that self-determination to want to learn when there is so much more to be done than just teach, makes it

hard for staff to not become overly stressed and burned out. Having conversations with one another and providing that emotional boost to continue and welcome input, helped staff to realize they are not alone in this endeavor in becoming competent in social and emotional learning and its implementation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this single common case study was to explore why intrinsic motivation and self-determination in the ability to make choices and manage one's behavior can guide the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) into the early childhood classroom for the participants at Mount Uinta (pseudonym). The research question and two sub-questions were designed to explore how early childhood teachers can acquire the intrinsic motivation and self-determination to build their social-emotional competence before instructing their preschool students in social-emotional learning. This chapter describes the lessons gained from the research and consists of research needed on professional development in how to develop, promote, and implement SEL for teachers. Chapter Five consists of five discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

During this study in exploration of how teachers can acquire intrinsic motivation and self-determination to build their social-emotional competence, four major themes were identified that answer the central and two research sub-questions. These themes highlight the findings from this study, and the sections of discussion that follow show the relationship of these findings to previous research as well as new research of this study. In addition, this discussion will add to the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Interpretation of Findings

This section includes a summary of the themes explored in the previous chapter and a discussion of important findings from the study. The interpretations include the necessity of social and emotional learning, self-determination, and the intrinsic motivation to become socially and emotionally competent as an early childhood teacher.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Through a two-cycle coding approach, themes in the data were developed. These themes were organized around the central research question and two research sub-questions. The first theme focused on the benefits of integrating SEL, the staff's intrinsic understanding of SEL, and the staff's self-determination to implement SEL. All were identified within the central research question of how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social and emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom.

Research sub-question one answered how early childhood teachers use intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being with the overall theme focusing on teacher's need for self-care. Two subcategories emerged, one mentioned that staff's well-being relied on connection with others, and subcategory two mentioned the need for intrinsic motivation to implement SE for oneself.

Research sub-question two related to professional development, bringing it back to answering how professional development can contribute to early childhood teachers' social-emotional competence. Theme three related to the need for more training for teachers in this subject area. With subtheme one indicating more competence gained in SEL for teachers. Following this, two additional subthemes emerged with one being the motivation to learn while the other addressed the issue of what is stopping the individual from having intrinsic motivation to want to learn more.

Awareness. An overall agreement exists in the opinion that young people need to learn, become good citizens in society, and reach for goals in life. This can be accomplished by teaching the skills described by CASEL on *self-awareness*, *self-management*, *responsible decision-making*, *social awareness*, and *relationship skills*. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) relate several important findings on intrinsic motivation. Certain "aspects of learning tasks that are perceived as autonomy, supportive and conducive to students' intrinsic motivation … students tend to learn better and … how teachers introduce learning tasks impacts students' satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence … allowing intrinsic motivation to flourish … thus providing an important basis for learning" (pg. 136). CASEL has been involved in research over the past decade regarding SEL and its effects on children, as well as adults. As SEL is encircled in everyday interactions at the school level, in families, caregivers, and communities, the question was posed by the research team as to why adult SEL wasn't prioritized sooner (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Frey et al., 2022). This aspect was noted by Julie, "I wish I would have had all this understanding and this training (Conscious Discipline) years ago. It would have benefited a lot of classes, and I would have trained my own staff on it".

As emotional regulation starts with self, teachers need to become aware of appraising their emotional state as well as that of another person. The capability to understand that some emotions cross with others and the experience this emotion raises provides the teacher the opportunity to reflect on the emotion being experienced. This brings one to *self-awareness* on the fundamental need to know how to self-regulate one's own emotions and to then be able to successfully teach these same concepts to their students. Frey et al., (2022) state, "While we experience emotions internally, their expression impacts others" (p. 71). Being self-aware is

required for emotional regulation as this skill makes personal and professional relationships work.

Integrating SEL into the early childhood classroom is crucial to children's mental health outcomes. A recent study using the Ontario Child Health Study (OCHS) data from 1983 to 2014, noted a general increase in hyperactivity in male children between the ages of 4 and 11 years old. It is estimated that between 10% and 25% of young children deal with mental health issues that affect their daily social and other settings they interact in. By introducing social-emotional learning (SEL) to young children between the ages of 0 and 5 years, mental health concerns may be reduced with a focus on building healthy relationships between the child and significant adults in their lives by forming trusting relationships (Penney et al., 2019). Teachers who are competent and intrinsically motivated to help young children self-regulate will not only teach *what* a child is feeling but will go deeper and help them understand *how to deal with* those feelings. All teaching staff agreed that hands-on learning is best. Teacher Elizabeth is seeing success in her classroom. She uses Google Slides and has one whole page devoted to social and emotional. The page displays videos, stories, and songs. She lets the students choose what they want to learn and has noticed a difference in her classroom interactions. One child will come in singing kindness, kindness and asks to start the day with this happy song. The children learn about the rules as those are repeated multiple times a day and even a mantra or motto is included that is recited before playing together. As Elizabeth states, "I think the class is a lot kinder and the behaviors are better. It all stems from relationships with the kids".

Teachers' competence and the ability to model, coach, and scaffold children's emotional and social experiences are providing the purposeful incorporation of SEL into their preschool classrooms. This relates to the problem of the need for professional development in SEL.

Professional development, coaching, and training in SEL will strengthen competence and can be beneficial for teachers. Professional development can intrinsically motivate teachers to gain an understanding of how to manage their feelings and display of emotions, thereby gaining an understanding of their student's emotional needs.

      Validation. CASEL's research shows "that when teachers tend to their own SEL, it decreases stress levels and increases job satisfaction. Adults' personal experience of SEL becomes a powerful catalyst, promoting students and staff well-being, and deepening SEL as an integral part of all district work" (Frey et al., 2022, p. 7). We must start with the self before we can teach students SEL as we all have stresses. "I think we are all humans so we all are dealing with social and emotional issues all day, every day so the more we're aware of it, the more that we can support others and offer support to those that don't have skills", states Julie. Social-emotional learning is a lifelong endeavor and needs to continue so we can know oneself before we teach children. As adults, we must recognize that "our feelings matter," says Cynthia, and this should be communicated with the students. Children like their feelings to be validated and that should not be ignored by teachers. This can be a great learning tool for students. Teacher Shelby shared, "Children need to gain an understanding that teachers have feelings just like them and that they can have hard days too and share this with them. When a child ends up hitting one of us, and it actually hurts us, and they see that. I think it is good for them to see that adults have emotions too". Giving acknowledgment to feelings teaches empathy and forms relationships between teacher and student.

      Teachers recognize that for them to not just survive, but thrive, they need to take care of themselves. Rachel understands this need of taking care of herself, including staying physically fit helps her come to the classroom with a better attitude. She then feels "more positive and ready

to handle what the kids throw at me. I know the most important thing I can do is show up and be there for them and love them, no matter what".

Learning. Learning about social-emotional regulation gave a few staff members more insight into the need to understand and desire to learn more. Sara came to the realization, "I guess, looking back on it now, it is interesting that it (SEL), isn't taught. I never really considered that before". Professional development shows an improvement in the quality of early childhood teaching, and increasing teacher qualification positively boosts child outcomes. Holding professional development helps teachers work on transferring theoretical knowledge into practice (Jensen et al., 2017), Nancy thought back to her college days and realized that not much about SEL was taught until she came into the early childhood classroom and learned about conflict resolution when mentored by a teacher." I am so glad people have become aware and are making others aware of how crucial it is for success. I mean we see some of these same skills in adults, or lack of skills, such as not being able to contain their anger or lashing out. It (social and emotional regulation) is an important skill we need to teach and teach early, so I'm glad for paying attention to that in our program", adds Julie.

Intrinsic motivation. Self-determination is a mindset to aid in improving the lives of people and building resilience in the face of adversity. Engaging in self-determination as a motivational tool helps in applying a strengths-based approach to the students as well as cultivation of own strengths and assistance in recognizing these strengths in others. "I want it to become part of me instead of something that I'm supposed to be doing. That is going to influence my interaction with all my children", states Nancy. Teachers' personal development becomes "autonomous when they can willingly devote time and energy to their studies" (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009, p. 135) and achieve the desired *outcome* of self-efficacy.

Julie finds, "I have to be in a good space myself before I can reach out and help others and so it's finding ways to take care of myself and to stay positive. You need to make sure you're getting exercise because how can we help others if we are not in the right space". SDT recognizes that a teacher needs both autonomy and competence for intrinsic motivation to be maintained (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study may be an important contributor to the importance in the realization of how motivation and satisfaction are underliers of effective self-regulation and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It may explain how competent emotional teachers and positive classrooms coincide with one another (Poulou, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners advise to implementation of SEL for pre-K-12 students as SEL contributes to the short-term and long-term ability to self-regulate which may provide the ability to productively engage with the civil and natural world (Durlak et al., 2011; Jagers et al., 2019).

Implications for Policy

This study provides insight into the importance of early childhood education staff's need for professional development in gaining SEL competence. Jagers et al., (2019) indicate that "Social and emotional learning points to the process through which children and adults attain and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, states, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (p.162). Over the past 25 years, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers have been advocating for the approval of guidelines and practices on implementing SEL into early childhood curricula (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jagers et al., 2019). The implication for local preschool agencies is to include professional development

opportunities on social-emotional competence proficiency for all preschool teaching staff. Teachers who understand their emotional competence are better equipped to handle education-specific stresses. Teachers can build their efficacy beliefs through intrinsic motivation, engagement (Wright et al., 2021), and influence that may lead to high-quality implementation with an effort to contribute to more stable learning outcomes for those from diverse backgrounds (Jagers et al., 2019). Reaching an understanding of how teachers promote emotional competence, the value of SEL instruction, and the teacher's role as socializers of emotional practice (Denham et al., 2012), could guide future professional development training.

Parent involvement in the classroom or working with their child at home on social-emotional skills needs to be looked at. This depends on the parents' ability to self-regulate, their knowledge of their own social emotions, and their beliefs about this (Zinsser et al., 2014). This is why it is so important to teach parents about emotions and how understanding social-emotional development influences the ability to understand their child. Teaching staff feel there is a need for parents to learn about social-emotional learning and strategies for helping their children. When a parent can engage in positive social-emotional interactions with their children, they may be more supportive when their children display negative emotions and can help them regulate. This may lead to the willingness to invest time into their child's education and see the value that teaching social-emotional self-regulation brings and that it is part of their responsibilities as parents.

Implications for Practice

Building professional development, specifically in social-emotional learning, needs to be implemented at every professional development. Staff needs to be reminded and taught often to build social-emotional competence and implementation of self-care. The foundation of positive

relationships is possessing social-emotional competence and skills. Even though teachers are responsible for teaching social and emotional skills, there is very little research on teachers' perceptions and how they are functioning socially and emotionally (Poulou, 2017). Staff become quickly overwhelmed as the teaching year starts, in how to self-regulate when handling children with difficult behaviors. Having the professional development plan for the year where social-emotional learning and teacher well-being will be addressed brings a constant awareness to staff that they are all in this together and can lean on one another for support and prevent teacher burnout. They are then equipped with the knowledge and confidence to teach social-emotional learning to their students and are reminded of the importance of their well-being.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study extends current research on the need for social and emotional education for students and influences continued studies on teacher competence in social and emotional pedagogy and teachers' mental well-being before teaching early childhood students' social-emotional skills.

Preschool teachers who receive professional development can improve the social-emotional skills of the children (Jensen et al., 2017). Gaining an understanding of how much professional development time is spent on social emotional and personal well-being (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) will indicate whether teachers receive adequate learning opportunities to become competent socially and emotionally. Research has mainly focused on students' social and emotional competencies. SEL competencies are not a focus within teacher preparation state standards, and few states recommend student teachers be SEL proficient before teaching commences.

In addition, having competent early childhood teaching staff who understand, and practice social-emotional skills may also prevent early childhood teacher burnout as teachers may feel better able to handle behavioral challenges that may occur in the classroom. Displaying confidence in the ability to make choices and manage their behaviors, would enhance teachers' beliefs in themselves, and gain adequate knowledge and understanding of the subject. This part may be challenging as human autonomy undergoes choice. "Decision-making is the process of selecting among options that are available to a person", states Ryan and Deci (2017, p. 581). Choosing to do that which is autonomously motivating can be an experience either through the initiation of their goals or agreement in the pursuit of learning and practicing social and emotional skills.

Teacher competency

Teachers' perceptions of their own social and emotional competencies may explain teacher-student relationships and how their own emotions relate to their teaching practices. Having self-determination increases teachers' personal development by moving the *process* to achieve the desired *outcome* of self-efficacy, likely increasing the teachers' level of confidence and fulfillment in his/her competence in SEL. When teachers guide learning and development, they stimulate students' self-regulation to be curious, interested, and motivated to gain knowledge (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). After the teaching staff completed participation in this research study, a choice was put before them, either to continue the same path they had been going or change due to a desire to learn more about SEL. Distinguishing the offered choice in autonomy with a focus on intrinsic motivational change and decision-making or deciding to follow what was offered at work through professional development. Both would provide learning opportunities in SEL, but those teachers with intrinsic motivation and self-determination started

looking for learning on their own instead of waiting for professional development opportunities to come. The excitement in those who displayed confidence in the search for new information in SEL created a change in their overall well-being and newly gained excitement to teach students in the coming school year. This coincides with previous research on intrinsic motivation and self-determination, where being interested in learning and growing in knowledge allows for validation of the process (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Parent involvement

Conducting this study indicated a request from teaching staff to involve parents in the learning of social and emotional pedagogy. Teachers seek parental assistance in teaching social and emotional skills to their children. These skills can't only be taught at school, they need to also be taught and instilled in the home. Gaining a better understanding of social and emotional development may assist more parents' willingness to attend positive parenting classes on SEL. Armed with more SE knowledge, parents may accept intervention services from school districts or agencies for their child who may need more specialized social-emotional interventions from skilled specialists instead of denying or ignoring the need for intervention. "SEL makes a difference. We know this from the research, which demonstrates that an education that promotes SEL has a positive impact on a wide range of outcomes, including academic performance, healthy relationships, mental wellness, and more" (Bridgeland et al., 2013; CASEL, 1994).

Limitations and Delimitations

Delimitations of this study include the choice of the site and the age requirement of the participants. In the state of Utah, there were a few options in choosing a Head Start location, but the researcher had a limited amount of time to travel to other sites and to gain permission to conduct the research. The nearest other Head Start agency is a migrant Head Start location where

mainly the Spanish language is used. This created further delimitation as the researcher is not fluent in Spanish. The age limitation coincided with the minimum age limit to be teacher-qualified at Head Start. This study was limited to the educators at Mount Uinta Head Start who volunteered to participate. All the study participants were White females. One of the 11 participants identified as a White Polynesian female. All participants were required to have teaching experience and be teacher-qualified according to Head Start standards. There was a further limitation, in that there were no male teachers employed at this time.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on social and emotional competence not only for early childhood educators but elementary and secondary teaching staff would be informative in understanding educators' emotional competence before instructing their students. Teachers need to understand their own social and emotional functioning and how this affects their teaching practices and the teacher-student relationships in classrooms. More research is needed on how teachers' emotional functioning regulates themselves, so they can stay socially and emotionally competent in their behavior and the effect on teacher-student relationships and the teaching of SE to their students. It is discouraging to witness so much teacher burnout. This may be diminished if teachers feel competent in their social-emotional regulation skills. When teachers can take care of their well-being by using self-determination practices in searching for their fulfillment in autonomy, competence, and relatedness concerning psychological wellness and full functioning as human beings.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to understand why intrinsic motivation and self-determination in the ability to make choices and manage one's behavior of

teaching staff enhances the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the early childhood classroom and motivates overall well-being. Eleven early childhood educators from Head Start participated in the study. Individual interviews with teaching staff consisted of seven teachers ($n = 7$), three center managers ($n = 3$), and one classroom quality mentor and monitor ($n = 1$); documents from each staff included a personal interview, participation in a focus group, and self-reflection survey, all were collected and analyzed. A two-cycle coding approach consisting of values coding, process coding, and pattern coding was utilized. The themes identified in the data were organized through the central research question exploring how intrinsic motivation and self-determination enhance social and emotional teaching practices in the early childhood classroom. Two sub-questions explored early childhood teachers' use of intrinsic motivation to increase overall well-being and how professional development participation contributes to early childhood teachers' social and emotional competence. Through the analysis of the themes in the study, four significant findings surfaced. These findings were awareness, validation, learning, and intrinsic motivation. With professional development and self-determination, early childhood educators can gain competence in quality teaching of social and emotional skills and build resilience in the face of adversity by cultivating strengths in self and others.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Facilitator
- Welcome and thank you for volunteering to participate
- Introduce myself
- Hand out the consent form
- Give a brief overview of the project and goals for the interviewer.
- Provide information about the process, times, breaks, bathrooms, etc.
- The researcher will take notes and record what is discussed, but individual names or identifying information will not be attached to the comments.
- Provide basic guidelines for the interview
    o If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to leave or to pass on the questions. Being here is voluntary.
    o Everyone's ideas will be respected. Do not comment on or make judgments about what someone else says, and do not offer advice.
    o There are no right or wrong answers.
    o Do you have any questions?

Participants
- Early childhood educators and administrative staff
- Ask participants to review, ask any questions, and then sign the consent form. Offer a copy of the consent form (unsigned) to each person. Some will want a copy; others will not offer it anyway.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your background and experience teaching early childhood education.

   SQ2

2. What type of formal social emotional learning instructional training, if any, have you

   received? SQ2

3. Describe any professional development training you received to raise awareness of your

   personal social and emotional competence and positive well-being. SQ2

4. How would professional development in SEL methods improve instruction of SEL to

   your students? SQ1

5. How has your self-determination teaching in ECE provided you with insight into intentional teaching practices in SEL? CRQ

6. How would you describe your level of interest in learning and growing in knowledge of SEL? CRQ

7. How does your overall well-being affect your teaching abilities? SQ1

8. Describe successful practices you use in teaching SEL to your ECE students. SQ1

9. What support would you need to help feel more competent in implementing SEL into your ECE classroom? SQ2

10. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences teaching SEL that we haven't discussed? CRQ

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Phase 1: Before the focus group
- Fill out an assessment project plan to identify the purpose and outcomes for the group. In this case, it will be to gather perceptions of early childhood educators' beliefs about SEL and its implementation in their classrooms.
- Describe the experience with professional development on SEL, their concerns, and additional training that would help improve teaching SEL.
- SEL is necessary to incorporate in the curricula but how to train on SEL in the best possible way and to engage data-driven performance still needs investigating (Ferreria, 2020, p. 55)
- With training in social-emotional development being the forerunner for later social and academic accomplishments, it is interesting that US prekindergarten and elementary teachers are not receiving adequate training (Buettner et al., 2016, p. 55).
- As pressure is on to incorporate SEL learning standards into teaching, teachers are left to determine how to incorporate SEL as they receive a small amount of training during professional development (Zinsser et al., 2016, p. 55).

Determine how many focus groups I want to run
- One focus group of six to twelve participants.
- Perhaps another to gain more information or to provide closure on the research

Facilitator
- Welcome and thank everyone for volunteering to participate
- Introduce myself, the co-facilitator, and the note-taker.
- Hand out the consent form
- Give a brief overview of the project and goals for the focus group.
- Provide information about the process, times, breaks, outside smoke areas, bathrooms, etc.
- Distribute name tags for focus groups (first names only).
- Project staff will be taking notes about what is discussed, but individual names or identifying information will not be attached to comments
- Provide basic guidelines for the focus group
    - If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to leave or to pass on the questions. There is no consequence for leaving. Being here is voluntary.
    - The meeting is not a counseling session or support group.
    - Someone will be available after the meeting if you need support, and we will provide information about local victim service resources.
    - Keep personal stories "in the room"; do not share the identity of the attendees or what anybody else said outside of the meeting.
    - Everyone's ideas will be respected. Do not comment on or make judgments about what someone else says, and do not offer advice.
    - One person talks at a time.

- It's okay to take a break if needed or to help yourself with food or drink.
- Everyone has the right to talk. The facilitator may ask someone who is talking a lot to step back and give others a chance to talk and may ask a person who isn't talking if he or she has anything to share.
- Everybody has the right to pass on a question.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Does anybody have any questions?

Participants
- Early childhood educators and administrative staff
- Ask participants to review, ask any questions, and then sign the consent form. Offer a copy of the consent form (unsigned) to each person. Some will want a copy; others will not offer it anyway.

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your attitude, position, or stance regarding the implementation of SEL in your classroom? CRQ

2. What are the benefits of integrating social-emotional learning instruction (understanding self and others' emotions, creating, and keeping positive relationships, emotion management, showing social awareness and empathy, and responsible decision-making) into the ECE classroom? CRQ

3. How has professional development affected, motivated, or inspired your work on your social-emotional competence? SQ2

4. Tell me about the classes you choose on SEL when given the opportunity, during professional development. How is this learning brought back into the classroom afterward? SQ2

5. Would the use of intrinsic motivation increase your overall well-being? SQ1

6. Would your well-being affect your social-emotional competence? SQ1

APPENDIX C

CLASSROOM TEACHER SELF-REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Focus on:
- Analyzing and understanding your thoughts and behavior

- Become aware of yourself

- Be honest with yourself

- Keep track of patterns in your thoughts and actions with a self-reflection journal

- Determine your core values and beliefs

Self-reflection questions

1. What did I learn from participation in the study that I didn't know before?

2. What links can I make between my experiences and other ideas from professional development or focus groups?

3. How can I use the knowledge I have gained from this experience in the future?

4. What learning occurred for you in this experience?

5. How can you apply this learning?

6. What would you like to learn more about, related to this subject?

7. What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or issues?

8. What information can you share with your colleagues?

9. What are the most difficult or satisfying aspects of your work? Why?

10. How would I rate my intrinsic motivation to learn more?

11. Have my beliefs changed since participating in this study?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT
A Case Study of Early Childhood Educators' Self-determination in Implementing Social and
Emotional Learning Pedagogy
Ingrid Brouwer
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of components influencing teacher's implementation of
social-emotional learning. You were selected as a possible participant because of your early
childhood education background. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions before
agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Ingrid Brouwer, School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this case study is to better understand early childhood teachers' self-
determination to make choices and manage their own lives, herby enhancing belief in oneself
and enhancing the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness
(also known as motivation, development, and wellness) that could guide implementation of
social-emotional learning into the early childhood classroom.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a one-time, 20–30-minute interview regarding SEL training, and
   incorporation of intrinsic motivation to enhance the basic psychological needs of
   autonomy, relatedness, and competence to improve instruction of SEL This interview
   will also be audio recorded and transcribed.
2. Participate in a one-time, 45-60-minute focus group discussion to gain insight into the
   early childhood teachers' perceptions of SEL instruction, professional development,
   and teachers' overall well-being to guide SEL implementation in the classroom. This
   focus group discussion panel will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
3. Participate in a teacher self-reflection survey, lasting approximately 15-20 minutes,
   containing 11 follow-up questions regarding the study. This will allow the researcher
   to understand the teacher's understanding of gained experiences, willingness to seek
   additional PD, and understanding of their intrinsic motivation to keep learning.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks in this study are no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, however, the personal benefit of
participation in this study is a better understanding of your social-emotional competence in

teaching SEL. As well as to gain a deeper awareness of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence that may influence personal well-being.

Compensation:

A $20 gift card to your favorite store.

Confidentiality:

The records for this study, including the audio recordings, will be kept private. The data will be safely stored in my (Ingrid Brouwer) personal computer. The data will not be accessible to a third party, other than a transcriber. The data will be deleted at the end of three years as there will be no other use for the data in the future. In any sort of report that I might publish, I will not include any sort of information that will make it possible to identify a subject of this study. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. However, if you are selected to participate in a focus group, I cannot guarantee privacy or confidentiality, as other participants are involved.

How to withdraw from the study:

Should you at any time wish to withdraw from the study you may contact me, Ingrid Brouwer, and request to be withdrawn from the study. Upon withdrawal from the study, any data that may have been gathered (audio recording/interview records) will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Ingrid Brouwer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓. Dr. Denise Nixon, the chair for this study, may also be contacted at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓. 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, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 23515, or email at irb@liberty.edu
You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers.
Yes ___   No ____

Signature: *Date:* _____

Signature of investigator: *Date:* _____

IRB Code Numbers: IRB-FY22-23-507   IRB Expiration Date:

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 30, 2023

Ingrid Brouwer

Denise Nixon

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-507 A case study of early childhood educators' self-determination in implementing social emotional learning pedagogy

Dear Ingrid Brouwer, Denise Nixon,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations

in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR

46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests

(cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or

observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the

following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity

of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to

the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required

by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be

found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study

on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the

consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information

electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available

without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any

modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification

of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email

us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office