Exploring Veteran Teachers’ Implementation of Social Emotional Learning Interventions

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING VETERAN TEACHERS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTERVENTIONS

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Northern Illinois University, 2023
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Helping students cultivate their social and emotional well-being is critical to preparing them for their futures. In recent years, school districts have adopted social and emotional learning (SEL) standards and began implementing prepackaged curriculum to help teachers address students’ needs. This study explores the perspectives of six veteran teachers implementing an SEL curriculum in a Midwestern elementary school. After a six-member focus group interview, one participant from third, fourth, and fifth grade were chosen to be interviewed and observed to find their individual perspectives of the process. Data were analyzed within the CASEL framework and the Responsive Classroom practices to identify how they incorporated the SEL practices into their classroom environment as well as the changes they made to their classroom practices and the associated challenges. Findings of how they incorporated the practices included committing to starting each day with SEL activities and utilizing positive language to build relationships and strengthen positive student behaviors. Findings also showed that participants made changes to their classroom practices by being more mindful of using the strategies throughout the day, teaching communication and relationship skills helped students become positive members of their school community, and making personal connections with
students to understand their individual needs. Additionally, findings showed how the participants overcame the challenges of time and insufficient training. Furthermore, based on the findings, recommendations for the field of education and further research were described. Recommendations in the field of education include dedicating specific time to SEL, strengthening competence in each practice, seeking SEL classes as part of their continuing education credits, partnering with administration to facilitate additional training, and using social media to find activities and share content they have used in their classroom. Additionally, SEL program creators should consider identifying the practices as most critical to facilitate the implementation process and creating a separate practice to facilitate real-world issues. Recommendations for future research include replicating the study in other grade levels or in a culturally diverse setting. Additionally, research could be done using other SEL programs.
EXPLORING VETERAN TEACHERS’ IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTERVENTIONS

BY

TIMOTHY PRITCHARD
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Doctoral Director:
Eui-kyung Shin
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DEDICATION

To My Former and Future Students
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Schools are places in which students learn not only academics but also how to navigate the social and emotional aspects of life and interact with their peers and teachers (Gardner et al., 2014). Educators have always helped their students in these areas; however, over the past two decades, the need to implement specific social emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools has become a priority due to the increased pressure on students (Osher et al., 2016). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a heightened level of anxiety and stress on students that will have a lasting effect for years to come (Mariani, Bayani, & Kneidel, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary for schools to prepare students for these and future challenges.

In 2005, Illinois was the first state to develop and adopt K-12 SEL standards. Continuing their efforts to promote SEL in schools, Illinois redesigned their principal preparation programs to meet evolving school needs in 2010 (Long, 2019). These actions helped lay a solid foundation for the changes to the most recent reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. This federal law mandates that schools assess ongoing student progress in non-subject areas, which includes SEL (CASEL, 2018; Grant et al., 2017).

Teaching SEL can be traced back as far as 1900; however, widespread attention increased in the 1990s to address social concerns such as bullying and school shootings (Osher et al., 2016). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), a leader in SEL advocacy, defines SEL as
the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Research shows that a child’s social and emotional education is a major factor in the learning process (Blair, 2002). SEL education gives students tools to deal with problems when they arise. Durlak et al.’s (2011) study of 213 school-based programs, including over 270,000 students, indicated a positive impact on social and emotional skills in schools that utilized SEL interventions in comparison to control groups. Payton et al. (2008) reviewed 317 studies involving 324,303 elementary and middle-school students. This analysis showed SEL programs improved students’ social skills, attitudes about one-self, connection to school, positive social behavior, and increased academic performance.

Selecting an SEL program for implementation is an important decision for local school districts because the programs vary in theoretical foundation, design, support, and activities. (O’Conner et al., 2017). Grant et al.’s (2017) research identified that local school districts can implement SEL programs in a variety of ways: through explicit instruction, positive learning environments created through general instruction, incorporation of SEL strategies into the current curriculum, or school-wide initiatives that promote a positive school atmosphere. To best implement SEL, Jones et al. (2017) recommended a greater focus of the outcomes at the classroom level. The teachers’ social-emotional competency in teaching SEL skills has the biggest impact on students. Additionally, the programs should change as students progress through their academic careers to meet their changing needs.

Effectively implementing SEL competencies beginning at the elementary level can have long-term positive effects on a child’s socialization, behavior, and academic performance.
However, as districts begin to implement an SEL program, it is important to understand the challenges teachers face as they work to help students learn the competencies through new SEL curriculum. “When leaders think about supporting SEL, they must integrate shared approaches, data, and staffing while working to integrate SEL into their school as an organization” (Chu & DeArmond, 2021, pp. 3). Finn and Hess (2019) support this approach and advocate for a slow and well-thought-out approach as opposed to quickly implemented programs that may be poorly executed.

Social emotional programs implemented by district administration need to take into consideration the many influences of a student’s life (Zwaans et al., 2008), including student engagement, school climate, and safety (CASEL, 2018). Grant et al. (2017) noted that implementing an SEL program can help teachers monitor and improve those aspects of the learning process. However, implementing any new curriculum is a task that involves coordination on the part of the administration as well as the classroom teachers.

Since teachers work directly with the students, they need to transition from old methods to new ones as they develop student-teacher relationships and classroom management strategies to foster a positive classroom climate (Jennings et al., 2014). While school districts often update their academic curriculum by adopting new programs for teachers to implement, learning how to teach SEL is different because it is based on personal connections teachers make with their students. Therefore, I focused on veteran teachers, as defined in Chapter 2, because they have well-established teaching methods, while teachers new to the profession do not, and may have difficulty with the transition (Hargreaves, 2005; Lortie, 1975; Snyder, 2017).
Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is a combination of CASEL’s (2020) SEL framework and the Responsive Classroom practices. This section begins with an explanation of the CASEL framework and then describes the Responsive Classroom practices. Finally, it positions the two theories in the context of a prosocial classroom model to gain insight into veteran upper elementary teachers’ perceptions of implementing an SEL program.

CASEL Framework

CASEL was created in 1994 by a group of volunteer educators and researchers whose goal was to promote SEL programs in education through research, practice, and policy (CASEL, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). The competencies outlined by CASEL are the most widely used framework for SEL, which is why it was chosen for this research study (Durlak et al., 2017). CASEL (2012) created its framework using age-appropriate concepts that develop as the students’ needs change from pre-K through high school. The CASEL framework shown in Figure 1 identifies the five competencies through which the standards were developed. The skills are supported in the classroom and throughout the school as well as at home and in the community (CASEL, 2019b).

Each of the five CASEL competencies contributes to the learning process. CASEL (2012) grouped the competencies to help students deal with introspective aspects as well as develop relationships with others. The first two competencies, self-awareness and self-management, relate to an internal understanding of self. The next two competencies, social awareness and relationship skills, involve a social component and how a person relates to others.
The last competency is the final piece that helps students make responsible decisions. Making good choices for themselves and others is important for safety, social norms, and understanding the consequences of their actions. The framework can be used by educators to guide instruction on health, drug abuse, violence prevention, sexuality, character, and social skills (Payton et al., 2000).

Figure 1: CASEL’s framework for systemic social and emotional learning. (CASEL, 2019b)

Within a classroom or online environment, teachers set the climate for interactions with their students and students’ relationships with their peers. These components are built as experience is gained in the classroom. Forming healthy relationships with students, creating effective classroom management, and identifying support systems build a solid climate for
teaching. Veteran teachers have honed their skills in each of these areas, while novice teachers are still navigating the process of identifying what works for them.

Responsive Classroom Practices

The Responsive Classroom SEL intervention program was developed in 1981 by the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC). It focuses on creating a positive classroom environment that reinforces students’ social and emotional needs as well as academic progress (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). Seven principles guide classroom activities: a) balancing an emphasis on social and academic learning; b) focusing on how and why learning is taking place; c) cognitive growth stemming from social interaction; d) highlighting skills such as working with peers, responsibility, empathy, and self-control; e) establishing student-teacher connections; f) maintaining family connections; and g) fostering positive peer relationships among the teaching staff (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2007; see also Rimm-Kaufman, 2006).

From these seven principles, the Responsive Classroom program incorporates 10 practices that build a foundation for daily classroom activities (Baroody et al., 2014). The 10 practices in the Responsive Classroom program include morning meeting, rule creation, interactive modeling, positive teacher language, logical consequences, academic choice, guided discovery, classroom organization, working with families, and creative problem solving. The practices target “improvement of the classroom social environment by enhancing teachers’ capacity to create a caring community, use proactive approaches to classroom management, and develop student autonomy and engagement in learning” (Durlak et al., 2017, pp. 156-157). Teachers form positive relationships with their students as well as create positive student-student connections (Baroody et al., 2014).
Jennings and Greenberg (2009) developed the Prosocial Classroom Model (Figure 2) for building a classroom environment to promote the learning and positive development of students.

This model is useful for explaining how the two aspects of my theoretical framework interact. The social and emotional skills and wellbeing section, on the left, includes the Social Emotional Competence (SEC) of the teacher.

Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive and encouraging relationships with their students, designing lessons that build on student strengths and abilities, establishing and implementing behavioral guidelines in ways that promote intrinsic motivation, coaching students through conflict situations, encouraging cooperation among students, and acting as a role model for respectful and appropriate communication and exhibitions of prosocial behavior. (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, pp. 492)
The SEC of teachers is based on the SEL model for students and includes the CASEL competencies, the first part of my theoretical framework. The Responsive Classroom practices, the second part of my theoretical framework, are the tools used to facilitate the blue section in the middle: healthy teacher/student relationships, effective classroom management skills, and effective SEL implementation. How these two sections interact was goal of the current research study.

In summary, the CASEL competencies are the foundation on which the Responsive Classroom program was created. Each of the practices supports the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Executing the practices falls on the individual classroom teacher, who is essential to creating an environment where students can practice their SEL skills. The prosocial classroom model, developed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), uses teachers’ competence in fostering positive relationships with their students to successfully implement Responsive Classroom practices.

Problem and Purpose Statement

Elias et al. (1997) introduced the term social emotional learning as a way for teachers to help their students deal with the pressures of the school environment. Since that time, researchers have discovered the benefits of including SEL in daily routines (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017; Zins et al., 2004). Research (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2017; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016) has shown the effectiveness of SEL programs. One problem, however, is that research is lacking in how teachers tasked with implementing the new SEL curriculum blend the new strategies with their existing practices.
Studies have been conducted to identify how veteran upper elementary teachers approach change but not with respect to SEL (Bloom & VanSlyke-Briggs, 2019). Paxton, Wanless, and Rimm-Kaufmann (2013) studied the fidelity of Responsive Classroom implementation using fifth-grade coaches as support systems. The findings focused on the support given during implementation rather than the changes or challenges those teachers faced. Other studies (e.g., Al-Jabouri et al., 2022; Bhatnagar & Many 2022, Chung & McBride, 2015; Denham et al., 2014; Ehret, 2020; Liesch, Morrison, & Giles, 2022; McWayne et al., 2004; Reeves & Mareb, 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2021) focused on different educational levels or other SEL programs. A gap in the current literature is identifying how veteran upper elementary teachers implement SEL programs, the challenges they face during implementation, and the subsequent changes they make to their classroom routines. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how veteran upper elementary teachers implemented the CASEL competencies through the Responsive Classroom intervention program. Additionally, it explored the pedagogic changes those teachers had to make and the associated challenges of time and resource utilization for the implementation to be successful.

Research Questions

The primary research questions that guided this qualitative study were

1. How do veteran upper elementary teachers incorporate SEL practices into their classroom environment?

2. What changes do veteran upper elementary teachers make to their classroom practice to teach SEL to their students and why?
3. What strategies do veteran upper elementary teachers use to overcome the challenges they face when implementing SEL practices in their classroom?

Significance of Study

This study has significance for teachers, administrators, and, most importantly, students. First, the results of this study provide all teachers with information about how to successfully incorporate SEL practices into their daily routines. Veteran teachers, however, will especially benefit from this research. These teachers have worked their entire careers fine-tuning their teaching methods to identify the best practices for teaching the subject matter and for classroom management. The addition of SEL can change daily routines as the teachers incorporate strategies that have not been part of their previous teaching pedagogy. The way the participants in this study integrated the changes into their daily routines and overcame the challenges can help other veteran teachers in the process of implementing an SEL program in their classroom. Administrators can also benefit from understanding the challenges teachers face during the implementation phase of a change initiative to be able to provide assistance and/or address issues. And finally, students benefit from the inclusion of SEL. Teachers who can blend their existing methods with an SEL program can strengthen teacher-student relationships and help students identify and address issues unique to their individual lives as well as understand that some issues are more widely common than the students may have believed.

Specifically, the findings from this research can add to the current body of research in two ways. First, I wanted to gain insight into how veteran upper elementary teachers implemented an SEL program into their classrooms despite having already established teaching methods. Second, Illinois is leading the way by adopting a comprehensive set of standards to
help districts determine what needs to be taught at each grade level (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018), but it is the responsibility of the local districts to identify how they should be taught. The findings from this study help identify how these veteran teachers at the upper elementary level demonstrated the competencies of the CASEL framework to promote non-academic growth, a mandate of ESSA, in conjunction with their established teaching practices.

Definitions

The following terms were utilized in this research:

**Elementary:** grades kindergarten through fifth grade

**Responsive Classroom SEL intervention program:** a social emotional learning program for students from kindergarten through sixth grade offered by the Center for Responsive Schools

**SEL interventions:** activities that have positive results on intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, academic success, discipline, community attitudes and behaviors, and school climate and safety (Grant et al., 2017)

**Upper-Elementary:** third through fifth grade

**Veteran teachers:** teachers who have attained tenure in the district in which this study was conducted.

Methodology

This study was qualitative and utilized a case study design. Participants were veteran third through fifth grade teachers from an elementary school in a suburban school district of a large Midwestern city. Data were collected from a focus group, one-on-one interviews, and
classroom observations. An initial survey was sent to all third through fifth grade teaching staff at the elementary school chosen for this study. The data gathered from the initial survey provided baseline demographic information about the teachers as well as each teacher’s perceptions of the fidelity of implementation of the 10 Responsive Classroom practices. Participants for the focus group were chosen using maximum variation sampling from the pool of third through fifth grade veteran teachers who were willing to participate in this study. Participants for the interview phase were determined through unique sampling based on their responses in the focus group interview.

In the focus group phase, six veteran teachers were asked to meet to discuss the implementation of an SEL program. Teachers participating in the focus groups were presented with a series of open-ended questions to provide a starting point for discussion about their experiences. Data from the focus groups were coded and themes were identified.

Three teachers from the focus group were invited to the interview phase. Three interviews were conducted with each participant. Transcripts from the teacher interviews were reviewed and themes identified. Teachers were asked to identify specific challenges they faced when implementing the SEL program as well as changes they made to their classroom practices as a result of having been tasked with implementing the new curriculum.

In the final phase of data gathering, the three participants from the interview phase were observed while working with their students in their classroom. Descriptive as well as reflective notes were taken. Transcripts from the observation were coded and analyzed.
Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the framework, problem and purpose statements, research questions, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 provides a description of the framework based on the CASEL competencies and the Responsive Classroom practices and a review of literature on the historical perspective of SEL. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, while the findings are presented in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and implications for current practice and future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers are responsible for the academic progress of their students, but in today’s world of standardized testing, there is much more than just teaching the subject matter. As an added component, social emotional learning (SEL) interventions have gained a lot of attention in recent years due to increased pressures placed on students (Ferreira, Martinsone, & Talic, 2020). Remote learning environments, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have made it especially important to help students cope with internal and external pressures (Mariani et al., 2022).

Glennie et al. (2017) studied the role teachers play in the social emotional development of their students. They found that cooperative learning in which teachers incorporate social emotional competencies into the daily curriculum and model positive behaviors so their students can emulate them contributed to their students’ social and emotional well-being as well as academic success. Furthermore, building positive student-teacher relationships contributes to strengthening students’ social emotional skill development and has been found to be critical for students’ overall growth (Grover et al., 2015).

This study sought to understand how veteran upper elementary teachers incorporate SEL practices into their classroom environment as well as identify the changes they made to their classroom practice and the associated challenges they experienced implementing SEL competencies through the Responsive Classroom intervention program. The Responsive Classroom SEL intervention program, developed in 1981 by the Northeast Foundation for
Children (NEFC), focuses on creating a positive classroom environment that reinforces students’ social and emotional needs as well as their academic progress (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006).

This literature review begins with an explanation of SEL and the domains that form SEL education. The review includes a brief history of the legislation mandating SEL in today’s educational environment and an explanation of SEL interventions in the school setting. Examination of SEL programs and their implementation are then presented. Finally, the review examines an SEL framework created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Responsive Classroom practices as well as related research on how experienced teachers adjust when faced with change in the educational environment.

Social Emotional Learning

As long as students have been in the educational environment, SEL has existed, but it is only within the past 20 years that efforts have been made to formally identify and address the SEL needs of students (Osher et al., 2016). As a result of the increased demands placed on students at all stages of the educational process both in and outside of the classroom (Durlak et al., 2017; Glennie et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017), the most recent reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 includes SEL mandates (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The mandates are based on the perspective that regardless of their socio-economic status, race, or location, all students enter the classroom with some challenges and SEL interventions will help all students improve skills and find positive ways to cope with those challenges (Elias & Arnold, 2006; Yeager, 2017). CASEL (2012) – a leader in SEL research, practice, and policy – defines SEL as
the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

**SEL Domains**

Advancing the work in SEL, Jones and Bouffard (2012) created a framework to show the interdependence of the various factors that make up and influence SEL skills and behaviors. Core skills and behaviors can be categorized into three different domains: emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation. Figure 3 shows the factors that influence teaching the skills and behaviors as well as the short-term outcomes and long-term impact of SEL interventions.

**Figure 3:** Framework for social emotional learning. (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 5)
At the center of SEL education are the skills and behaviors students can be taught through SEL education. They can be placed into three categories: emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation. Several inputs influence those domains. Policies at the district, state, and federal level impact the classroom as well as long-term outcomes such as mental health, positive behavior, and achievement. The teachers’ experience and understanding of SEL also influence the classroom climate through classroom management that impacts day-to-day classroom behavior. Ongoing support from the administration will help teachers navigate the ways in which they can support students in the classroom. Managing these short-term outcomes leads to long-term outcomes. Implementing the domains in a positive way at an early age and continuing to reinforce them as students’ progress through their schooling will have positive long-term outcomes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Building and nurturing character skills is an ongoing process that begins at birth. Education and reinforcement of skills at an early age act as building blocks for application as children progress through school and into adulthood (Greenberg et al.; 2017; Heckman & Kautz, 2014; Rikoon et al., 2016). Mindset and character are two domains added to some current research (Jones et al., 2017). Additionally, collaboration, problem solving, and critical thinking are proficiencies students need in the 21st century (Berman, 2018; National Research Council, n.d.). The next sections explain each of the SEL domains: emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation, from the *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning* and then provide research to support their importance in the elementary classroom.
Jones et al. (2017) contend the emotional processes domain includes both identifying internal emotions and processing emotions exhibited by others. Internally, students learn to understand how to identify, direct, and monitor their own emotions. On the other hand, students also need to recognize the feelings of others and be able to empathize with them. In both cases, the situational context is critical to having social interactions and forming connections with others.

McKown et al. (2009) performed two separate studies on students’ emotional processing. The first study used typically developing children ages 4 to 14. The second study used clinic-referred students who faced problems with emotional processing. The findings in both studies showed that SEL intervention improved the children’s ability to interpret non-verbal clues, be empathetic, and solve social problems.

Teh, Yap, and Rickard Liow (2018) conducted the first cross-sectional study to empirically test the effects of social engagement and valiance on emotional language processing in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Children with this disorder do not use emotional language in their descriptions, narratives, and conversations. They do not develop their emotional processing skills in the same way as other children without the disorder. The study compared students with ASD and typically developing children of the same age, gender, nonverbal IQ, and socioeconomic status in preschool and primary elementary. The children with ASD performed lower than the typically developing children as would be expected from their diagnosis. The older children produced more emotional terms than the younger children in both
age groups. A key finding from this study was that the students with ASD were able to make emotional judgements on positive and negative stimuli but not with emotionally neutral pictures.

Nguyen and Dorjee (2023) conducted an 18-week study on the emotional processing of Vietnamese students aged 7-11. Nguyen and Dorjee utilized a mindfulness curriculum to evaluate emotional identification through culturally diverse photographs. Their findings suggest the mindfulness training enhanced the participants’ emotional identification to negative emotions. The next section, social and interpersonal skills, builds on the emotional processes domain by adding interaction with peers.

Social and Interpersonal Skills

Social and interpersonal skills are important for working in groups, solving problems, and getting along with others. Jones et al. (2017) explain that understanding how to handle personal emotions and identify them in others is the foundation for success. Positive interactions can result when students successfully identify social cues and solve problems with others.

Several studies help to understand the importance of teaching social / interpersonal skills for elementary students. In a study by Reynolds et al. (2010), students in kindergarten through fifth grade showed patterns of internalizing and interpersonal behaviors over time. This longitudinal study identified a correlation between internalizing problems and interpersonal skills beginning in kindergarten. Internalizing behavior was demonstrated through fear and distress, which then can result in depression and anxiety. The findings showed that increases in growth rates of internalizing behaviors were related to decreases in interpersonal behaviors.

In another study, Rucinski et al. (2018) examined the teacher-student relationships of 526 third, fourth and fifth grade students and their teachers. In this year-long study, the researchers
examined individual as well as classroom level supports related to social-emotional and academic development. Depression, anxiety, and aggression were assessed for social-emotional progress, and math and reading scores were evaluated for academic progress. Results showed that when students reported higher quality relationships with teachers, lower levels of depression were reported. When teachers reported higher rates of conflict, higher levels of aggression were reported from both students and teachers. Overall, a higher quality classroom emotional climate has a positive impact on the aggression levels of those students who reported poor teacher relationships. Rucinski et al. (2018) found that classroom level emotional support has a positive impact on the overall social-emotional and academic development but cannot compensate for poor student teacher relationships. They concluded, “Teachers in upper elementary school should be trained and supported in developing positive relationships with each of their students individually as opposed to relying solely on the general emotional climate in the classroom to benefit all students” (Rucinski et al., 2018, pp. 3). The next section discusses cognitive regulation, which helps individuals adjust their behavior to various situations.

Cognitive Regulation

Jones et al. (2017) define cognitive regulation as the ability to direct behavior to achieve a goal. Setting priorities and sequencing behavior, understanding proper conduct in situations, remembering task-specific instructions, resisting off-task behavior, changing between different tasks, making sound decisions, and thinking abstractly are all part of cognitive regulation. Students need these skills to attend to daily tasks and prepare for standardized testing of their academic skills. Although not a lot of research studies have looked at the impact of cognitive regulation on elementary students, Jones et al.’s (2017) study of cognitive regulation as it relates
to performance on learning tasks in fifth and sixth grade students showed that cognitive regulation is a significant predictor of task learning. However, while behavior regulation acted as a significant predictor of learning math skills, it was not significant in learning language arts (Jones et al., 2017; Modrek et al., 2019).

Hachem et al. (2022) explored how social and emotional skills impacted the students’ perceived cognitive competence and academic performance. The participants were 29,384 fourth through twelfth grade Canadian students. Data were collected from an online survey. Although the results were not separated into specific age ranges, the overall findings showed a significant positive relationship between cognitive competence and academic performance. The researchers concluded that their study provided evidence to support further development of this aspect of SEL education.

**Summary**

Research on the SEL domains shows that students need support in each aspect of their educational journey whether they are attending in-person or virtually. While the SEL domains have been used for many years, legislation mandating SEL in the school setting has only recently been passed. The next section highlights evolution of the legislation and how school districts can implement these mandates.

**SEL in Legislation**

In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) originally introduced by President Johnson in 1965 to help individual states improve the quality of education by providing
federal funding to schools with disadvantaged students (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). ESEA was reauthorized several times in the decades that followed, with control over funding held at the federal level. In 1983, standards-based reform began after President Reagan’s administration published *A Nation at Risk*. This report warned the American public that schools were not performing as well as other nations’ schools and emphasized that without federal intervention, the school system would continue to deteriorate (Strauss, 2018). The Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) and Goals 2000: Educate America Act, also passed in 1994, continued to provide federal funding to schools. Previous versions had only provided funding to disadvantaged students, so these two acts broadened the scope of those eligible to include all students rather than just those who were disadvantaged (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) introduced standards-based reform. Schools were held accountable for students’ annual progress or face corrective sanctions. High-stakes testing was a result of enacting the standards reform (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003), as NCLB required states to test all students in reading and math in grades three through eight and once in high school. While individual states could determine the testing format, the results needed to pass federal standards (Conley, 2015). Changes in educational policy in the 2000s resulted in imbalanced state and local reform (Hunt Institute, n.d.).

In the current reauthorization, ESSA does not specifically address SEL; however, it gives states and local school districts flexibility in determining student growth. Title IV directly addresses funding for student growth, which is a component of SEL. Titles I and II provide indicators about how schools can support student growth initiatives. At least one of the indicators for growth is non-academically related, which means factors such as engagement,
school climate, and safety can be used to determine student growth. Language that supports academic learning in the school environment was added in Title IV of the legislation (CASEL, 2018; Grant et al., 2017).

Grant et al. (2017) found that school districts implementing SEL programs follow guidelines presented in ESSA to receive federal funding. The guidelines require intervention programs to be evidence-based and can be supported by the funding accessible through ESSA in one of three sections of the Act: improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, preparing, training, and recruiting high-quality school personnel, and improving opportunities for students. ESSA classifies intervention programs into three tiers that identify the quality of research to support the programs. Tier I research provides strong empirical evidence that has a well-designed and implemented program with a significant effect on student growth. Tier II studies provide moderate evidence in which well-designed quasi-experimental research results in a statistically significant effect on student growth. Finally, Tier III provides promising evidence of correlational studies that control for selection bias to support their programs (Hale et al., 2017).

Although the legislation includes cognitive skills used in the mastery of subjects, SEL frameworks utilize intrapersonal and interpersonal skills most closely related to social emotional learning (CASEL, 2018; Grant et al., 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Grant et al. (2017) report several ways school districts can identify Tiers I, II, and III research to help find SEL programs to implement through explicit instruction, general instruction that promotes positive learning environments, integrating social emotional activities into the current curriculum, and schoolwide initiatives to promote a positive school climate. ESSA offers flexibility to individual school districts about how and what to implement as an intervention if it meets their guidelines. In the
current study, the Responsive Classroom program was chosen as the tool for implementation. This program includes all the requirements included above for a Tier I program.

This section explained how current legislation led to mandated SEL requirements. A students’ needs change as they progress through their educational careers. Concepts taught during early stages of development build a foundation for the subsequent skills and concepts. The next section discusses SEL needs in the school setting.

**SEL in the School Setting**

To be successful in college, careers, and lifelong relationships, students need more than just academic skills (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Teachers, administrators, and policy makers agree that SEL skills play an important role in cultivating both academic and personal success (Heckman & Kautz, 2014; West et al., 2018). In today’s educational environment and the onset of virtual learning, the emotional needs of students have gained more importance (Durlak et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on students. SEL education can benefit students whose households experienced economic insecurity, childcare instability, and/or lack of instructional resources (Hardy, 2022).

Longitudinal studies have shown that when social emotional skills are started at an early age, those skills stay with people throughout their lives (Elias et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 2017). The long-term benefits include better relationships, decreased depression, and increased economic opportunities (Grover et al., 2015; Rikoon et al., 2016; Starcher & Allen, 2016; Yeager, 2017). As children age, their needs change. Teaching social emotional learning competencies throughout each of the stages of schooling can build a foundation as students make the transition into adulthood (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; West et al., 2018). The next section
gives a brief overview of each of the SEL skills taught at the elementary level (see Appendix A for a complete list of all grade levels).

**Elementary School**

Alsubaie (2015) describes how elementary students face different challenges than preschool children. During this period, students need to know their teachers care about them and they need guidance when they make mistakes. Jones et al. (2017) explain that elementary classrooms function more efficiently when students learn to focus their attention, control negative behavior, form positive relationships with peers and adults, and overcome difficult situations. Therefore, it is so important for teachers to model and practice SEL skills.

Building on the SEL strategies taught in preschool, students at the elementary level can demonstrate previously learned coping skills and apply them independently. Rimm-Kaufmann and Hullerman (2017) describe this process through the theory of proximal and distal outcomes. “Initiating use of a SEL program sets in motion a process that unfolds over time” (p. 152). Proximal outcomes are ones that can be seen immediately. Distal outcomes are long-term results from ongoing interventions. At the elementary level, SEL interventions introduced in preschool are reinforced and new strategies are introduced. These strategies offer opportunities for students to access them in the future to aid in decision making as they progress through the next phases of their education.

O’Connor et al. (2017) reviewed social emotional learning programs targeted toward children in elementary school. Their research revealed three characteristics that make an intervention program effective. First, the lessons need to be a combination of skills-focused and environmental-focused practices. Next, the program must follow a set plan of lessons in which
students actively participate in focused purposeful activities. Finally, there should be ongoing professional development for teachers. The next section explains the SEL program selection and implementation process.

Steed, Shapland, and Leech (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study to explore the perceptions of 1,154 preschool through second grade teachers regarding the effectiveness of their school’s SEL implementation approach. Overall, Steed et al.’s findings showed the teachers viewed the implementation as effective. Table 1 shows the eight themes that emerged from their research.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEL Program</td>
<td>A key component of success was the use of an SEL program. Participants with no specific program expressed frustration with implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL Personnel</td>
<td>The availability of social workers and school psychologists staff helped teachers with SEL lessons for their students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEL Support Team</td>
<td>Having an SEL support team to help teachers when situations arose in their classrooms to help students in need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL Instruction</td>
<td>Effective implementation included time specifically devoted to SEL. Participants whose schools did not allocate time to SEL expressed difficulty scheduling SEL activities into their daily routines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL Training</td>
<td>Participants whose schools offered training had positive views of implementation. Ineffective SEL training resulted in inconsistent expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Expectations and Discipline</td>
<td>Effective implementation was identified with administrators who had specific consequences to student misbehavior. Inconsistent consequences and unclear rules were noted in schools with poor implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Partnerships</td>
<td>The support of parents was identified as a factor in the success of SEL programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support</td>
<td>Building administrators who made an effort to support SEL in the classrooms were viewed as positive. Participants felt that administrators who were ineffective often had student behavior issues due to inconsistent consequences.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Bhatnagar and Many (2022) researched 23 novice teachers’ perceptions of using SEL in their teaching practices. The focus of their research centered on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that there was a greater need to foster teacher-student relationships, establish trust, build a positive classroom climate, acknowledge the trauma from the pandemic, and strengthen family connections. The participants’ biggest concerns were motivating students and reducing stress.

Liesch, Morrison, and Giles (2022) investigated the perceptions of early childhood educators teaching SEL to their students. Among the independent variables included in their study was experience level. The findings showed that both veteran and novice teachers would benefit from more SEL training as well as dedicating time to practicing the teaching methods to become proficient in teaching SEL practices.

Zolkoski et al., (2021) studied the teachers’ perceptions of the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to teach SEL in rural schools. The 76 participants ranged in experience level from novice to veteran teaching fourth grade to senior year of high school. The findings identified the teachers’ likelihood of adopting the Jesse Lewis Choose Love program rather than the participants’ perceptions of the implementation, which is what the current study did.

Al-Jabouri et al. (2022) utilized a randomized control trial design to study the use of a faith-based SEL intervention program. The Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource was used in addition to existing SEL interventions. The participants were Catholic school teachers and students. The results showed that the teachers using the additional intervention included more SEL in their daily routines, had more confidence teaching SEL, and had a more positive classroom climate.
SEL Programs

Since the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015, schools have needed to address a social and emotional curriculum that supports the traditional subject matter taught through intervention programs. Although ESSA does not specifically reference SEL, the language references a) improving school conditions; b) enhancing interactions among students; c) providing a balanced education; and d) offering opportunities for volunteering, community activism, and practicing relationship skills. These interventions help students deal with the pressures of life and school (Durlak et al., 2017). Additionally, these programs can be used to measure student engagement that is part of ESSA (Grant et al., 2017).

Campbell et al. (2016) explored the relationships among the many factors that play a role in the SEL process. They identified age-appropriate skills are the foundation on which the process is developed, and standards are based on those skills at the developmental level. Then there is an iterative process of assessment and evaluation of the standards, with student instruction leading to more changes to assessment and standards.

When selecting an SEL intervention program, schools must assess the needs of their students (O’Connor et al., 2017) and choose one that best suits their goals and objectives. School districts searching for a program need to research how each program works to find the one compatible with their vision. O’Connor et al. (2017) note that four criteria should be considered. First, administrators need to identify what characteristics of the program make it effective. Next, the implementation strategies need to be reviewed to see if they are in line with state and district guidelines. Third, reviews of teacher and classroom strategies need to be done
to identify if they are in line with social emotional learning. Finally, the proven outcomes of the program need to be compared to the school culture.

Research (e.g., Derzon et al., 2005; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Durlak & Weissberg, 2005) has shown that the quality of the implementation of an intervention program is associated with positive student outcomes. Domitrovich et al. (2008) created a multiple-level framework for implementation of an intervention program in schools that considers federal, state, and district policies in addition to school and individual factors.

Implementation quality is the central focus with the intervention and support system creating the foundation. Interventions are the strategies put in place for achieving a specific outcome. The support system is the means through which the intervention establishes the context of the program. “The intervention and the corresponding support system are independent, though interrelated, components of a whole” (Domitrovich et al, 2008, p. 3). Both the intervention and the support system must be specific, contain core elements or features that support the intervention theory, and have a consistent mode of delivery. Based on this premise, administrators who keep the support systems in mind when implementing their chosen SEL program will have a higher probability of supporting student growth. Jones et al. (2017) report that the implementation process is critical to the success of SEL programs. Their research resulted in the following recommendations for effective implementation:

- Allow time to sufficiently and effectively implement the program.
- Extend the tools used in SEL to other school-related and outside activities.
- Help students apply the strategies to real life situations.
- Provide staff sufficient support and training.
- Involve staff in the decision-making process.
While many SEL activities involve face-to-face interaction with students, the increased popularity of online learning has opened new challenges for students and opportunities for new SEL teaching strategies. In a practitioner-focused study, Mariani et al. (2022) studied the impact of school counselors and classroom teachers collaborating on providing SEL strategies to students virtually. Their results showed increases in standardized test scores as well as improved social/emotional knowledge and skill use. Finding the best intervention program that fits the needs of the learning community may be difficult, but when all interested parties come together to overcome challenges, the students benefit from the collaborative process. The next section identifies the theoretical framework used in this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study focused on implementing the CASEL competencies through the Responsive Classroom practices. I sought to identify how veteran teachers incorporate the SEL practices into the classroom environment and the changes they need to make to their existing classroom practices as well as the challenges educators face when presented with a new SEL program. The Prosocial Classroom model connects the CASEL competencies to the implementation of an SEL programs by incorporating teacher competence. This study focused on veteran teachers in third through fifth grade. Veteran educators face a unique set of challenges when educational changes are introduced due to their well-established classroom practices (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 2005, Snyder, 2017).

Yilmaz and Kilicoglu (2013) studied how change occurs in the educational environment. They identified that internal as well as external changes affect what teachers do in the classroom. Internal changes arise from resources, staffing, and administrative structures. External changes
occur due to local, state, and federal laws impacting the educational system. As explained earlier, local school districts need to implement changes to their current structures to comply with the changes to how SEL needs are addressed. These changes trickle down to individual teachers who need to change how they structure learning environments for their students. There is an interrelated relationship between an individual’s readiness to change and their commitment to support the change (Devos et al., 2002). Implementing an SEL intervention requires all stakeholders to change how they have traditionally instructed SEL to their students.

**CASEL Framework**

Several organizations have developed frameworks to support SEL in education. The National Research Council and Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework are two entities that created SEL frameworks. Each has four competencies: self-concept and self-efficacy, self-regulation, social relationships, and emotional and behavioral health. However, the CASEL model is more detailed (Dusenbury et al., 2015). CASEL was created in 1994 by a group of volunteer educators and researchers whose goal was to promote SEL in education. Since then, CASEL’s mission has been to promote evidence based SEL programs in education through research, practice, and policy (CASEL, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). CASEL includes five competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) that are the most widely used framework for SEL (Durlak et al., 2017; Ross & Tolan, 2017) and was used for this study. CASEL (2012) created its framework using age-appropriate concepts that develop as the students’ needs change from pre-K through high school. The CASEL framework centers on the social and emotional health of the student.
The competencies help to integrate cognition and behavior in daily routines so students can effectively manage challenges. Several factors should be taken into consideration outside of the classroom. The school climate, policies, and practices in addition to family and community partnerships play a role in helping nurture an individual’s social and emotional well-being. Additionally, state and federal policies impact how the model is put into practice (Durlak et al., 2017). Durlak et al. explain that by incorporating the competencies into daily routines, students become better at managing their own actions, relating to others, understanding other’s perspectives, and making better life choices.

According to the 2013 CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs (2012), the competencies are best taught starting in preschool and continuing through high school. The first two competencies relate to an internal understanding of self. Self-awareness is related to a person’s ability to understand how emotions affect behavior. Identifying strengths and weaknesses is key to building confidence in one’s own abilities. Self-management takes self-awareness a step further by managing emotions based on the situation. Understanding stress, impulses, and motivation help to foster goal setting and monitoring. The next two competencies involve a social component and how a person relates to others. Social awareness is an understanding of how one fits into their environment. Knowledge of differences between people and empathy toward others is important in this competency. Related to social awareness are relationship skills. Building and maintaining relationships with individuals as well as groups are done by positive communication skills, cooperation, working through conflict, and identifying when help from outside sources is needed. The last competency is the final piece that helps students make responsible decisions. Making good choices for themselves and others is important based on safety, social norms, understanding consequences to their actions. The
next section explains the CASEL competencies and provides research showing how they benefit student achievement.

**CASEL Competencies**

CASEL is a leading authority for the development of social emotional learning for students from pre-kindergarten through high school and was used in this study (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Hanover Research, 2017; Payton et al., 2000). CASEL (2019b) recognizes five competencies in its framework: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The next sections define each of the five CASEL competencies.

**Self-awareness.** CASEL (2012) identifies five components of the self-awareness competency. They are identifying emotions, developing accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, building self-confidence, and increasing self-efficacy. Understanding each of the components helps students recognize how their thoughts and actions influence their behavior. In this competency, students are able to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and increase confidence as well as understand when it is necessary to seek help from others (Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Self-awareness is a multi-faceted concept that is difficult to assess (Durlak et al., 2017; Harter, 1982). The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Piers and Harris Self-concept Scale were introduced in the 1960s to measure cognitive competencies, physical skills, popularity, acceptance by parent, morality, personality traits, physical characteristics, and effective reactions (Harter, 1982). The scores, however, did not capture motivation. The Harter
Scale and the Berkley Puppet Interview were developed later and more accurately assess children’s self-concepts (Durlak et al., 2017).

**Self-management.** CASEL (2012) explains how the self-management competency incorporates emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to help students learn to identify how they feel and find appropriate ways to react to situations. Students also learn about who they are as an individual and how to manage their actions to set and achieve goals. The components for this competency are impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting, and organizational skills. Learning to manage stress and using coping strategies becomes increasingly important as students’ progress through elementary, middle, and high school as demands intensify (CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2017).

Smith-Donald, Raver, Hayes, & Richardson (2007) describe the Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment as one assessment for measuring self-management in young children. This series of tests has proven to be effective because assessments of participants’ emotions, attention, and impulses are recorded and scored. These measures include factor structures and concurrent associations that increase validity (Durlak, et al., 2017).

**Social awareness.** Social awareness is the ability to empathize with those who are different from you and to understand acceptable behavior when interacting with others (Durlak et al., 2017). Recognizing how others feel in different situations is something students need to practice to be able to know how to react. Understanding differences in culture, age, gender, etc. helps students solve problems and identify what is acceptable and not acceptable. Additionally, in this competency, students learn to identify resources they can seek out to help manage stress and solve problems (CASEL, 2012).
In early childhood, social awareness begins to develop. Through contact with parents, friends, peers, and teachers, children react to verbal and nonverbal interactions (Woolfolk, 2010). Durlak et al. (2017) explain there are links between social adjustments at school and academic performance. Additionally, they claim that understanding emotional states can help reduce behavior problems in adolescents.

**Relationship skills.** In the relationship skills competency, students learn to create and maintain relationships with a wide range of culturally diverse people or groups (Durlak et al., 2017). Being able to communicate, interact in social situations, build positive relationships, and work together are some of the skills that are taught and/or reinforced. Making connections with peers and building social networks can foster a sense of belonging and help identify support systems (CASEL, 2012).

Durlak et al. (2017) claim that there is no theory, research, or way to appropriately measure relationship skills. Teaching these skills, however, builds a foundation for interacting with others (Landmark Schools, n.d.). CASEL (2019b) identified how children use skills from other competencies to negotiate relationships with others. Students need to use self-awareness skills and social-awareness skills to build relationships and work productively with others (Jones et al., 2017).

**Responsible decision making.** CASEL (2012) explains that when students are taught responsible decision making, they make positive choices about themselves and others. The underlying concepts in responsible decision making are identifying problems, analyzing situations, problem solving, assessing, reflecting, and moral responsibility. Ethics, safety, and social norms are incorporated into decisions both about themselves as an individual and about others as well the consequences of those decisions. These skills become increasingly important
as students encounter new situations that may present them with decisions that could have severe consequences.

Similar to the relationship skills competency, Durlak et al. (2017) report there is not a theory, research, or way to accurately measure responsible decision making. There is research on the growing popularity of self-directed learning approaches being implemented in many school districts. Mega, Ronconi, and De Beni (2014) researched graduate level students and found that student emotions have an influence on self-regulated learning which then has a positive impact on academic performance. Their study used 5,805 participants who completed the Self-Regulated Learning, Emotions, and Motivation Computerized Battery (LEM–B) composed of 3 self-report questionnaires: The Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (LQ), the Emotions Questionnaire (EQ), and the Motivation Questionnaire (MQ). The findings showed that emotions play a key role in academic success. Although this study used older students, the implications could theoretically support students of all levels.

Implementing the CASEL competencies through SEL interventions takes a lot of time and effort from teachers and administrators. Professional development and cooperation between staff will aid in the process. Ultimately, teachers need to incorporate their individual teaching styles to make the implementation of an SEL program successful. The next section presents the practices of the Responsive Classroom SEL program.

**Responsive Classroom Practices**

The Responsive Classroom program was created to help educators create caring classrooms and provide resources to establish positive classroom management. The 10 classroom practices help teachers form relationships with their students through organized
activities (Baroody et al., 2014). Each of the practices includes goals and strategies to aid in implementation (Center for Research in Education & Social Policy, 2018). Table 2 shows the Responsive Classroom practices and their descriptions.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning meeting</td>
<td>Teachers have a daily morning meeting in which teachers and students greet one another, share personal news, participate in community-building activities, and respond to a message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule creation</td>
<td>Teachers collaborate with students to create rules that are designed to support all students’ learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive modeling</td>
<td>Teachers demonstrate and direct students’ attention to important behaviors that promote academic and social learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive teacher language</td>
<td>Teachers carefully and conscientiously use words that show respect for students and promote and encourage learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical consequences</td>
<td>Teachers respond to students’ misbehavior in ways that are respectful, are supportive, and help students learn from their mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic choice</td>
<td>Teachers allow students to pursue individual interests and help students plan, work, and reflect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided discovery</td>
<td>Teachers encourage students to use materials in responsible, creative, and independent ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom organization</td>
<td>Teachers organize their classrooms in ways to support students’ learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with families</td>
<td>Teachers collaborate with students’ families and establish open two-way communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative problem solving</td>
<td>Teachers help students develop skills to resolve conflicts and academic challenges positively and independently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Baroody et al., 2014, p. 72)
CASEL (2012) rated Responsive Classroom with the highest rating of extensive for a) opportunities to practice SEL skills, b) classroom-wide content, and c) family content. A minimal grade was received for the community context. Additionally, CASEL noted that tools for monitoring implementation and measuring student behavior were part of the program. It was reported that the Responsive Classroom program was evaluated in a quasi-experimental study over a three-year period that showed improved academic performance along with improved academic behaviors and improved school climate. The professional development identified in the evaluation includes initial training with additional support. “Initial training for the Responsive Classroom approach is conducted in two parts that each last four and one-half days (30 hours), training is required, and a train-the-trainer system to support sustainability is offered” (CASEL, 2012, p. 58).

Prosocial Classroom

The goal of teaching SEL to students is to improve their social emotional competence (SEC) or proficiency in interacting with others, monitoring and controlling their cognitive processes, and regulating their emotions and behaviors (Ahmed et al., 2020). These are all skills taught through the SEL practices. With the goal of achieving student SEC, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) developed the prosocial classroom model that shows how student SEC can be attained (see Figure 4). This model is useful for explaining how the two aspects of my theoretical framework (CASEL competencies and 10 Responsive Classroom practices) interact.
Teachers’ social and emotional skills and well-being are directly connected to CASEL competencies, the first part of my theoretical framework. CASEL’s (2012) five major emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) contend that teacher SEC is associated with their well-being and their well-being is directly related to how proficient they are in teaching the SEL. As implementation of an SEL program is initiated, each teacher, whether novice or veteran, comes with their own set of SEC skills. When discussing teacher SEC, Jennings and Greenberg explain:

Given the lack of explicit preservice or in-service training aimed at teachers’ personal development, the current educational system appears to assume that teachers have the requisite SEC to create a warm and nurturing learning environment, be emotionally responsive to students, form supportive and collaborative relationships with sometimes difficult and demanding parents, professionally relate to administrators and colleagues, effectively manage the growing demands imposed by standardized testing, model exemplary emotion regulation, sensitively coach students through conflict situations with
peers, and effectively (yet respectfully) handle the challenging behaviors of disruptive students. (pp. 495-496)

Dweck (2015) posits three characteristics of socially and emotionally competent teachers. The first is having a high social awareness, which is the ability to identify the emotions of the students and empathize with others’ perspectives. The second characteristic is respecting the students and making responsible decisions. The last characteristic relates to teachers being able to regulate their emotions and behavior to manage relationships with their students. These characteristics mirror the core SEL competencies in the CASEL framework (CASEL, 2019a). A growth mindset influences each of these characteristics as well as the free will to put forth the effort to promote emotional competence (Holmes, 2011). Veteran teachers enter the initiation phase with an established set of SEC. However, their SEC can vary in that while a teacher may be proficient in one competency, they may need training in others. Exploring how they incorporate the old methods into the new was a goal of this research.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) also contend teachers’ well-being influences teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and SEL implementation. This is how the CASEL competencies connect to the second part of my theoretical framework. The 10 Responsive Classroom practices are how teachers create a healthy classroom that is the result of positive teacher SEC and well-being that impact teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and effective SEL implementation. These factors influence the students’ social, emotional, and academic outcomes, affecting the overall classroom environment.

Research (e.g., Dorman, 2015; Jennings et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2003) identified the importance of understanding teachers’ social and emotional skills as part of learning process. Supporting teachers’ SEC helps them deal with the challenges in the classroom. “Practices and
policies to support and foster educators’ social and emotional competencies are fundamental to addressing these challenges” (Jones et al., p. 62). School administrators need to provide coaching and support to help teachers foster their SEC as a foundation to then be able to help their students build their own SEL skills. Emotion-focused training, relationship-building interventions, mindfulness and stress reduction techniques, and SEL routine practice are all ways in which school districts can help facilitate positive SEC for their teachers. The next sections look at teacher SEC and its effect on teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and SEL implementation.

**Teacher-Student Relationships**

The relationships children have with adults are an essential part of their development. Their first relationships are with family members. However, as children enter school, teachers become an integral part of helping them learn not only academic skills but interpersonal relationships. High-quality teacher-student relationships result in positive academic and social-emotional outcomes (Williford & Wolcott, 2017).

Glennie et al. (2017) researched the role teachers play in the social emotional development of their students. Cooperative learning, in which teachers incorporate social emotional competencies into the daily curriculum, was identified as a success factor. Building positive teacher-student relationships also contributed to strengthening the foundation for social emotional skill development. Participants in Glennie et al.’s focus-group study also felt it was important for teachers to model positive behaviors so their students could emulate them.

Baroody et al. (2014) reviewed teacher-student relationships as a result of Responsive Classroom training. In their study, 63 fifth-grade teachers were trained in Responsive Classroom
practices. The researchers collected data from classroom observations and teacher surveys. Analysis of the data did not show a direct link between teacher-student relationships, but there was an indirect effect. Teachers trained in the Responsive Classroom practices showed an increased use of the practices in the classroom and adhering to the program’s practices increased the teacher-student relationships.

Classroom Management

In the prosocial classroom model, classroom management is an interactive component between a teacher’s SEC and a healthy classroom environment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The Responsive Classroom approach was developed with classroom management at the foundation and four primary goals (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014):

- Maintain a calm, orderly, and safe environment for learning
- Assist students in developing self-control and self-discipline
- Foster responsibility while creating a democratic community
- Teach respect, kindness, and healthy teacher-student and student-student relationships

The Responsive Classroom program has 10 practices that build a foundation for classroom management. Through these practices, teachers form positive relationships with their students as well as create positive student-student connections (Baroody et al., 2014). The Responsive Classroom “targets improvement of the classroom social environment by enhancing teachers’ capacity to create a caring community, use proactive approaches to classroom management, and develop student autonomy and engagement in learning” (Durlak et al., 2017, p. 156-157). Jones et al. (2003) describe how teachers can be proactive in creating a caring learning environment by focusing attention on social/interpersonal skills and cognitive
regulation. Social/interpersonal skills refer to understanding how social cues, body language, and tone affect interactions with students. Cognitive regulation includes focusing on positive interactions and limiting impulsive interactions that are not appropriate to situations in the classroom.

**SEL Implementation**

Effective implementation of SEL programs is another component of the prosocial classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Research (e.g., Grover et al., 2015; Rikoon et al., 2016; Starcher & Allen, 2016; Yeager, 2017) has shown that implementing an SEL program has long-term benefits, including better relationships, decreased depression, and increased economic opportunities. Additionally, implementing an SEL program can have a positive impact on student achievement (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Jones & Kahn, 2017). However, all school districts may not achieve positive outcomes by having an SEL program in place due to varied implementation practices (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Jones et al., 2018).

Paxton et al. (2013) conducted a randomized controlled trial using the Responsive Classroom program with the quality or fidelity of implementation as the focus of the data collection. Using qualitative data from implementation coaches, this study analyzed the support system put in place for implementation of the Responsive Classroom. The results showed more relational support occurs at low-fidelity schools, while an even amount of relational and strategic support was reported at the high-fidelity schools. The high-fidelity schools engaged in more positive relational coaching support focused on advanced Responsive Classroom approaches, while low-fidelity schools focused on review of the basic components of the program. The next
section describes the research on determining veteran teacher status and discusses the rationale for choosing veteran teachers as the subject of the current research.

**Veteran Teachers**

There is much debate in the literature about the criteria needed to be considered a veteran teacher. Berliner’s (1984) research discusses assessing teacher effectiveness as opposed to length of time in the classroom. Researchers (e.g., Lampert & Clark, 1990; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995) explain that experience in the classroom offers the opportunity to develop expertise rather than just a set number of years. Others (Fessler, 1985; Huberman, 2001; Steffy, 2001) explain stages an educator goes through in the life cycle of their career. Some researchers have defined veteran teachers by length of experience. In the *Handbook of Research on Pedagogical Models for Next-Generation Teaching and Learning*, Keengwe (2018) defines a veteran teacher as an educator who has taught for more than three years of full-time service. For this research study, a veteran teacher was one who has achieved tenure. These educators have more than three years of full-time experience and have been vetted by the district administration through the annual evaluation plan.

There were three reasons I chose to focus on veteran teachers for this study. First, veteran teachers enter implementation of SEL with a vast knowledge of building relationships with students. I wanted to investigate whether and how the participants, if presented with a prepackaged SEL program, would choose to negate their old teaching methods to fully implement the new, would synthesize the old with the new, or would revert to past methods. Novice teachers do not have the wealth of experience to fall back on. Second, prolonged and continued occupational stress can lead to burnout. The high prevalence of burnout in the field of
education has attracted researchers to study this phenomenon. Oliveira et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 empirical studies on the effects of SEL interventions on teacher burnout. Their findings showed a negative correlation between experience level and burnout. The veteran teachers in that study were able to stay resilient in the face of added pressures and blend their existing SEL practices with the new ones. I wanted to investigate this phenomenon. Finally, non-veteran teachers may be more prone to feel they cannot be completely honest with their responses. The “Hawthorn effect” suggests that participants’ behaviors and responses may be affected by the knowledge they are being observed (Oswald et al., 2014). For these reasons, I chose to focus on veteran teachers for the current study. The next section presents how veteran teachers approach educational change.

**Educational Change for Veteran Teachers**

As discussed previously, teachers play a critical role during the implementation and institutionalization phases of educational change (Fullan, 2016). This study focused on the perceptions of veteran teachers in grades three through five tasked with implementing formal SEL interventions through a prepackaged curriculum. Studying experienced educators provided insight into the challenges they faced and the changes they made to their classroom practices during the implementation phase of the change process.

Lortie (1975) explains how teachers seek rewards for their work: extrinsic, ancillary, and intrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards are the most basic form of rewards, and value is not placed on the task but on successful completion of the task (Brophy, 2004). Ancillary rewards are both objective and subjective in that perceptions of the type of work are the foundation and vary by
individual (Lortie, 1975). The final type of reward is intrinsic where value is gained through participation and interest in the given activity (Brophy, 2004).

Lortie (1975) further extends the intrinsic theory, applying it to educators’ motivation to enter the field of teaching and reaction to and/or participation in subsequent changes imposed by administration. Most teachers choose a career in education for the intrinsic, or psychic, rewards. They are motivated by the impact they make on the lives of their students. The rewards vary by the individual, but as their careers progress, each teacher will take action to maintain their individual values. As new initiatives are introduced, experienced teachers seek to protect the elements they perceive as valuable and resist the unproven change.

In this study, I sought to understand veteran upper elementary teachers’ perceptions of implementing an SEL intervention program. I found two studies that relate to teachers’ perceptions of educational change. They are not, however, related to SEL. This study helped to understand if teachers’ perceptions are the same when implementing SEL curriculum.

Snyder (2017) researched the role psychic rewards play in the success of change initiatives. The study consisted of nine veteran teachers (over 50 years old with more than 20 years of experience) from kindergarten through high school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight into each teacher’s perception of change initiatives. Findings of this study showed that veteran teachers resist change for a variety of reasons, including the possibility of affecting relationships with students and reducing autonomy.

Hargreaves (2005) also examined the relationship of teachers’ experience level with educational change. The research revealed four categories into which veteran teachers fall. The first category is where teachers continue to accept new challenges and find alternative ways to incorporate change initiatives. This type of teacher is least common and is more closely
associated with mid-career teachers. The second category into which experienced teachers may fall is identified as positive influencers who tend to focus more on their classrooms and students they directly teach. Large initiatives and educational policy are less important. Negative focusers put themselves ahead of their students and focus on keeping the status quo. Closely related to the negative focusers are the disenchanted. A disenchanted teacher is one who has committed to change initiatives in the past but has been soured by unsuccessful implementation.

Smith (2000) examined the struggles of an experienced teacher with math reform. The dilemma resulted from the tension between the past practices of structuring lessons to provide opportunities for success and the new practice of offering students complex problems requiring perseverance through adversity. Smith’s case study focused on one veteran teacher with 26 years of experience. Data were collected through journal entries, videotapes, observations, and interviews during a full school year. Results from this research showed the subject overcame the challenges through interactions with colleagues and administrators. When considering the dilemma, Smith (2000) explained:

Had the disparity between old and new been too great, rather than developing strategies that would lead to greater understanding, the teacher might have adopted a more superficial practice that incorporated features of the new paradigm but did not represent real change. (pp. 353)

This case study, while not related to SEL, serves as a reference for the current study in that a change initiative was implemented by veteran teachers who risked not fully implementing the program due to proven experience with existing methods.

This case study focused on the perceptions of veteran upper elementary teachers to implement an SEL program during an unprecedented time of altered in-person learning and teaching in a virtual environment. Understanding their perceptions to the change process will
give leaders tools to engage teachers during the initiation and implementation phases of the change initiative (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Chapter Summary

This chapter described SEL and showed how the CASEL framework can be used to implement an SEL intervention through the Responsive Classroom practices. It also presented the legislation leading to mandating SEL in school settings as well as information about SEL interventions in the educational setting. This chapter ended with an explanation of how the theory of psychic rewards relates to educational change. The next chapter will describe the methodology used in the study.
Veteran teachers have spent their careers fine tuning strategies that work for them; however, with the introduction of SEL intervention programs, it may be difficult for teachers to incorporate these changes into their current routines (Hargreaves, 2005; Lortie, 1975; Snyder, 2017). The purpose of this study was to investigate how veteran upper elementary teachers implemented the CASEL competencies through the Responsive Classroom intervention program. Additionally, it explored the changes those teachers made and challenges they faced for the implementation to be successful. The primary research questions that guided this qualitative study were

1. How do veteran upper elementary teachers incorporate SEL practices into their classroom environment?

2. What changes do veteran upper elementary teachers make to their classroom practice to teach SEL practices to their students and why?

3. What strategies do veteran upper elementary teachers use to overcome the challenges they face when implementing SEL practices in their classroom?

This chapter presents the methodology used to answer these research questions. The chapter is organized into the following sections: research design, setting, participants, researcher positionality, data collection and analysis.
Research Design

The research questions in this study sought to identify how veteran upper elementary teachers incorporated SEL practices into their daily routines, the changes they made to their classroom practices, and the challenges they faced when implementing a new SEL curriculum; therefore, a qualitative approach was best suited to answer the questions. Yin (2018) explains that the research design should be determined based on the research questions. In qualitative studies, researchers go into the field to study subjects in their own environment to interpret and make meaning of the actions being observed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The history of qualitative research design stems from an anthropologic and sociological perspective in which researchers observe behavior, interview participants, and analyze artifacts to tell stories of the subjects being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tesch, 1990). This type of research lends itself to studies in the field of education (Tesch).

This study was best suited to case study analysis, which sought to explore participants in real-life situations. The inquiry centered around a bounded system of both time and place (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the time frame was the implementation phase of an SEL program in a Midwestern suburban elementary school. Through a focus group, one-on-one interviews, and classroom observations, this study investigated potential changes in the participant teachers’ teaching methods as well as identified the challenges that occurred when implementing the SEL program at the upper elementary level.
Setting

This study was conducted in an elementary school in a suburban school district of a large Midwestern city. According to the 2022 state report card, this kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school had an enrollment of 662 students. Figure 5 shows the racial/ethnic background of the student population.

![Racial/ethnic Background](image)

Figure 5: Racial/ethnic background of student population.

Low-income students who received public aid, were living in substitute care, or were eligible for free and reduced lunch made up 29.2% of the population. The English language learner population had increased in recent years and was at 23.6%. The average class size was 22.8 students.
This school was one of two elementary buildings in the district that feed into one middle school. The entire population of the district was 2,017 students. The district’s mission statement declared that it strives to be “a fiscally responsible school community that engages all students to become confident, adaptive and productive life-long learners.” As part of the District Improvement Plan for the 2021-2022 school year, the Board of Education included goals for SEL. One of the focus areas was to fully implement SEL programs at each school.

According to the building principal, specific actions for this school included dedicating 15 minutes per day to morning meetings and providing opportunities for staff to collaborate on program components. As part of this school’s action plan, the administration provided opportunities for staff to collaborate on best practices. To accomplish this, two staff members attended a two-day Responsive Classroom workshop. Subsequently, they attended a five-day seminar hosted by the Responsive Classroom during the summer. This train the trainer seminar provided attendees with Responsive Classroom resources to help introduce the program to the entire school at the one-day staff training session. Additionally, school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiatives fostered character building, friendship, mindfulness, and positive self-talk. The initiatives were implemented by the school social workers who introduced Monthly Mantras to support the Responsive Classroom practices, taught classroom mini-lessons, added a recognition program for students who demonstrated positive behavior, and began a goal-setting program with students at-risk.

Participants

The participants in this study were tenured veteran elementary teachers who taught third through fifth grade. The initial pool of participants consisted of all third through fifth grade
teachers at the elementary school being studied. All 14 general education third through fifth grade teachers were asked to complete an initial survey consisting of 15 questions (see Appendix B). Demographic data along with Likert-scale questions about SEL practices were gathered from each participant to gain insight into their educational background and teaching experience. The Qualtrics Experience Management (XM) Platform was used to administer the initial survey. A response rate of 100 percent was achieved.

Since SEL implementation strategies change as children progress through their educational careers, the focus of this study was upper elementary: third through fifth grades. Purposeful sampling was utilized to select six teachers for the focus group. Krueger and Casey (2015) recommend focus groups with five to eight participants; therefore, a group of six participants was manageable while providing a wide range of experiences. Purposeful sampling can take one of several approaches: selecting typical cases, extreme cases, unique cases, critical cases, or sensitive cases as well as convenience sampling, chain sampling, and maximum variation sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019). Maximum variation sampling was used in this phase to identify two third, two fourth, and two fifth grade tenured teachers who had implemented the Responsive Classroom program. To obtain maximum variation, responses from the initial survey were evaluated to identify the lowest and highest scores within each grade level. These teachers were asked to participate in the study. This approach offered a range of perspectives to answer the research questions.

Analysis of the focus group data was used to determine which teachers would be selected for the one-on-one interviews. In this phase, unique sampling was used. Three teachers were chosen based on their unique responses and participation in the focus group and asked to participate in the one-on-one interviews. Following the one-on-one interviews, the three
interviewed teachers were observed in their classroom. Follow-up interviews were conducted after each observation.

Researcher Positionality

There is potential for researcher influence during the research process (Bourke, 2014), so I am acknowledging my history with and perspective of education and SEL. I started my career in teaching after 15 years in the corporate world. I have a Bachelor’s in Finance and have held many positions as a financial analyst. During that time, I trained and supervised many colleagues, which was the spark that led to earning my Master’s in Elementary Education. I have now been in the field of education for 17 years. I have been a teacher at Kent School (pseudonym) for 15 of those years.

During my tenure, I taught fifth grade for nine years, fourth grade for five years and third grade for one year. I have taught students with on-level abilities, gifted students, and students with learning and behavior disabilities. Having taught three grade levels, I have worked directly with many colleagues and have mentored new employees and served on various district committees that afforded me opportunities to collaborate with representatives from each grade level. Additionally, I have presented at several district-wide in-service training events, so I have a relationship with all the participants in the study to various degrees.

While earning my degree in education, focus was placed on teaching the core subjects. I observed in many different classrooms with educators of various experience and student taught with a veteran second grade teacher. At that time, the term SEL was not widely used, but I observed each teacher handle SEL practices. It was during that time I began formulating my own approach toward SEL.
I did not know it then, but from the moment my first student stepped into my first classroom, I was teaching SEL. I greeted each student with a handshake. I felt it was important for each student to be acknowledged, and although they were just one in a classroom full of students, we would have a unique student-teacher connection. I was not taught this in the years I spent preparing to become a teacher. It was instinct. Being an educator is so much more than teaching subject-matter. I believe it is every teacher’s responsibility to teach skills and behaviors to help them in life. I like to call them life lessons, and I believe every teacher needs to participate in these types of activities with their students.

In 2018, the district that is the subject of this study adopted the Responsive Classroom SEL program. This was the first time I heard the term social emotional learning. All employees attended a full-day training session in which the details of the program were presented. As a group, we practiced many of the activities the program suggests doing with our students, and I realized these activities were a formalized version of the lessons I already incorporated into my teaching practice.

My experiences throughout my education as well as working with students and training in SEL are all significant to this research. The combined experiences have led me to want to understand the challenges veteran teachers face incorporating SEL and the changes they have made to classroom routines to best implement SEL with their students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were gathered in several phases. First, a survey on classroom practices was sent to all third through fifth grade teachers. These quantitative data were used to support the overall qualitative design of this study. In the next phase of the study, a focus group
provided data about the implementation of the SEL curriculum. The focus group gave the participants the opportunity to explore their attitudes toward the implementation as well as understand how the group interacts. The focus group information drove the one-on-one interviews. During the interview process, the participants gave detailed descriptions of their personal experiences implementing the SEL curriculum. After the one-on-one interviews, classroom observations were conducted. These data were used to support previously collected data in the interview phase. Finally, a follow-up interview was conducted with the observed teachers. The participants were asked to give detailed explanations about data from the classroom observations. Table 3 shows how the question in the focus group and interviews map to each research question.

Table 3
Research Question Mapping

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<th>Research Question 1</th>
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<td>Q5, 15</td>
<td>Q16</td>
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<td>Q1</td>
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<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>Q2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the focus group and individual interviews, the question protocols were pilot tested with a special education teacher who has general education experience and has worked with the SEL program but is not part of the pool of candidates for this study. This gave me practice with the interview process and confidence in conducting each interview with the participants. The question protocols were determined to sufficiently answer the research questions. The observation protocol was pilot tested in an upper-elementary classroom with a
teacher who was not part of this study. I was able to prepare for the actual observation by rehearsing the descriptive note taking process while also adding reflective notes of my own thoughts on the activities taking place.

Initial Survey

An initial survey was sent to all third through fifth grade teachers (see Appendix B). This survey was adapted from the Classroom Practices Teacher Survey (CPTS): a Measure of Fidelity of Implementation of the Responsive Classroom Approach created by the Social Development Lab at the University of Virginia (2012). The full survey consists of 46 Likert-scale questions identifying the fidelity of the implementation of the Responsive Classroom program. One question was selected to align with each of the 10 Responsive Classroom practices. This was done to identify a general understanding of the teachers’ perspectives of their fidelity of implementation in each of the classroom practices. Additional data such as gender, years of experience, number of years teaching current grade level, and if they had taught the current grade level since implementing the Responsive Classroom were also gathered through this survey. The survey response rate was 100%.

The subjects in this study included 14 third through fifth grade teachers with 5 through 34 years of teaching experience. All participants were female. The experience levels of the surveyed teachers were equally split, with half having up to 20 years of experience and half having over 20 years of classroom experience. Most of the surveyed teachers (79%) had been teaching their current grade level for 10 years or less. However, 79% had been teaching the same grade level since implementing the Responsive Classroom program. Table 4 shows the demographic data from the surveyed participants. Table 5 summarizes the individual teacher
results by grade level and includes their overall CPTS score. The teacher’s name (pseudonym),
years of classroom experience, tenure status, and willingness to participate in the study are given.

Table 4
Participant Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Response / Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years Teaching</th>
<th>Response / Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+ Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years Teaching Current Grade Level</th>
<th>Response / Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+ Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you been teaching this grade since the implementation of the Responsive Classroom?</th>
<th>Response / Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5
Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Teacher (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Years of Classroom Experience</th>
<th>Currently Tenured?</th>
<th>CPTS Score</th>
<th>Willing to Participate in Study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Mrs. Lawson</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Gust</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Doyle</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Carlson</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Mrs. Price</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Mangan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Fannott</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Olsen</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Newsome</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>Mrs. Crawford</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. Coakley</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Kelly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Nelson</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Chriss</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Highlighted teachers were asked to participate in the focus group.
To select participants for the focus group, first, the participants who were not willing to participate in the study were eliminated. Three of the surveyed teachers, two fourth grade and one fifth grade, declined to participate in the full study. One participant did not qualify due to number of years of service and two declined for personal reasons. Since the remaining pool of teachers were all tenured, their overall CPTS scores were reviewed.

Values coding was conducted on the raw CPTS data. Values coding is appropriate for analysis of quantitative data in which participants’ information may be organized and analyzed (Saldana, 2013). The participants rated themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 representing “not at all characteristic” to “extremely characteristic” in each of the 10 survey questions. To assure validity in participant responses, questions 6 and 9 were reverse coded. To reverse code a question, the question is proposed so the responses are reversed. A score of 5 is given to “not at all characteristic” down to 1 for “extremely characteristic.” This approach was used to mirror the original CPTS survey. See Appendix C for full results by participant.

Within each of the grade levels, the respondents with highest and lowest scores were asked to participate. This was a decision by the researcher to achieve a varied level of scores of fidelity of implementation from the survey questions. In third grade, all surveyed teachers were willing to participate in the study, so the highest scoring teacher (35 points) and lowest scoring teacher (32 points) were asked to participate. Next, in fourth grade, three of the five surveyed teachers were willing to participate in the focus group. The highest scoring teacher (35 points) and the lowest scoring teacher (29 points) were asked to participate in the focus group. Finally, in fifth grade, four of the five teachers were willing to participate, with the highest (37 points) and the lowest (31 points) scoring teachers being asked to participate.
Focus Group

In this phase of data collection, I conducted a focus group interview with six teachers. “Focus groups provide insights into how people think and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied” (Nagle & Williams, 2011, p. 2). For this study, I sought to understand how veteran upper elementary teachers implemented SEL practices into their classrooms, the changes they made to their classroom practices, and the challenges they faced during implementation.

Krueger and Casey (2015) cite five focus group designs: single-category, multiple-category, double-layer, broad-involvement, and large-scale. Single-category studies evaluate one category such as an intervention program from a teacher’s perspective at a single school; therefore, the study followed a single-category design of veteran school educators who were implementing an SEL program in third through fifth grade.

During the focus group, a questioning route approach was used. Kreuger (1998) describes two approaches for preparing questions for a focus group. The first is the topic guide approach and the second is a questioning route. In the topic guide approach, the researcher uses words or phrases related to a topic within the research. The moderator must be able to effectively translate the words or phrases into coherent questions for the group. The questioning route approach employs a set of sequential questions in complete sentences to guide the focus group. Krueger and Casey (2015) prefer the questioning route approach “because it forces the moderator or research team to think about the words and phrases to be used ahead of time and it helps the sponsor more clearly understand what will occur in the focus group” (p. 44). Starting
with a complete set of questions gave me confidence to start the conversations and helped keep
the participants on track by discussing information related to the research questions.

During the focus group, the participants were given the opportunity to discuss the
implementation of the SEL curriculum in an open forum with other veteran upper elementary
teachers who have been tasked with implementing the same curriculum. A series of 19 open-
ended questions framed the meeting to provide structure and common elements for the group
(see Appendix D). The questions were created by the researcher to best answer the research
questions. Table 6 shows the focus group research question mapping.

The focus group meeting was held on December 28, 2021, via Zoom and was recorded
using the program’s recording feature. The meeting lasted 1 hour and 58 minutes. Field notes
were also taken to track information not captured on the recording. Merriam and Tisdell (2016)
advise keeping field notes to “track your thoughts, musings, speculations and hunches as you
prepare your data for analysis” (p. 200). Transcriptions of all recordings were done using a
word-processing system and are being stored electronically. Transcriptions were uploaded into
Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis program. Descriptive coding was conducted in which raw
data were summarized into words or phrases (Saldana, 2013). Codes were determined from the
overall topic of the conversations between participants. The codes were then counted to identify
the most coded categories. Codes with more than three occurrences were considered significant
and were included as a first cycle code. Second cycle coding was performed using Pattern
Coding to identify emergent themes from the descriptive codes to help answer the research
questions. Table 7 shows the results of the coding process.
Table 6

Focus Group Research Question Mapping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Research Question 1** | Q1: Tell me about your initial training for implementation of the Responsive Classroom program.  
Q2: What other formal training have you received?  
Q4: Is there a resource that you use for self-directed learning or materials to use with your students?  
Q7: What do you do to prepare for SEL activities?  
Q15: Were there any of the 10 Responsive Classroom practices that you previously did with your students?  
Q16: Were there any activities that you did with your students that are not part of the 10 practices that you feel should be added? |
| **Research Question 2** | Q5: What changes have you made to your classroom practices to support the CASEL competencies?  
Q6: In what ways do you feel that the changes you have made to your daily routines help to support the CASEL competencies?  
Q9: Is there a specific resource you go to when planning?  
Q12: Review the 10 Responsive Classroom practices. Which three do you feel you do the most in your classroom?  
Q13: What is the biggest change to your classroom practice that you have had to make since implementing the Responsive Classroom?  
Q17: Are there any other changes to your daily routines you have made since implementing the program? |
| **Research Question 3** | Q3: Is there an aspect of the program that you feel you need more training?  
Q8: What challenges do you face when preparing for the SEL activities?  
Q10: Do you have difficulty finding appropriate activities?  
Q11: In terms of time and resources, what is the biggest challenge to implementing the SEL practices in your classroom?  
Q14: Are there any that you don’t use? Why? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>First Cycle Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Number of Times Coded</th>
<th>Second Cycle Pattern Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>Morning Meeting tools</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Finding what works for the Morning Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate activities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing for Morning Meeting</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observing other teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborate with peers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing resources</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One day workshop training</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optional observations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online resources</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Utilization of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared resources</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training Manual</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>Dedicating time to SEL</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morning Meeting every day</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student interaction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connect with one another</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily sharing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building a community</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Togetherness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family connections</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>Taking time from instruction</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedules</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much time to spend</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So much to do</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No follow through</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertainty of fidelity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One day training</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the focus group data were analyzed, three teachers were selected for the one-on-one interviews. To accomplish this, unique sampling was used. The three teachers, one from each grade level, were chosen based on their unique responses during the focus group. I chose this approach to obtain detailed descriptions from each of the grade levels.
Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data for analysis. In this approach, a list of predetermined questions is identified, but the interviewer is given flexibility to ask additional questions to gather more details from the participants (Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Jamshed, 2014; Seidman, 2019). Therefore, semi-structured interviews offered an adaptable approach in which unanticipated responses were gathered (Coughlin, 2009).

Castillo-Montoya (2012) outlines four types of questions utilized in the interview process: introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and closing questions. Introductory questions help gain insight into the background of the participant. These types of questions put the participant at ease and set the tone for the interview. Transition questions change the focus from one topic to another. These questions help build a foundation for the key questions, which are the core of the interview and provide the most valuable information for analysis. Closing questions give the participant an opportunity to provide additional information not previously addressed. Seidman (2019) recommends using open-ended questions to help the participants reconstruct their experience and provide extensive detail.

In this phase of the study, three interviews were conducted with each participant and took place over approximately three months. Seidman (2019) recommends utilizing a three-interview series to collect increasingly detailed data. Classroom observations took place between the second and third interviews. Table 8 provides the timeline and duration for the individual interviews and observations.
Table 8

Interview and Observation Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Gust</td>
<td>03/06/22</td>
<td>49 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>03/24/22</td>
<td>36 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05/16/22</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05/17/22</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Mangan</td>
<td>03/09/22</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>03/24/22</td>
<td>46 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>04/22/22</td>
<td>22 minutes</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>04/27/22</td>
<td>33 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Coakley</td>
<td>04/11/22</td>
<td>49 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>04/25/22</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05/05/22</td>
<td>23 minutes</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05/06/22</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>Interview 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one-on-one interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. The average interview lasted 43 minutes. Field notes were taken during each interview to provide insight into the participants’ responses. Transcriptions were completed following the interviews using a word-processing system and are being stored electronically. Transcriptions were uploaded into Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis program for coding purposes.

In the first interview, I established a relationship with each participant and asked questions about their history in the field of education (see Appendix E). Their past experiences provided insight into how they fit into the context of the study (Seidman, 2019). Additionally, I asked each of the three research questions to obtain a general response. I used this information to ask follow-up questions during the second and third interviews. Table 9 shows the research question mapping from the first interview.
The second interview focused on the implementation of the SEL program (see Appendix F). The participants were asked to reconstruct their experiences with as much detail as possible. As they reconstructed their experiences, focus was placed on their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and actions (Seidman, 2019). Table 10 shows the research question mapping from the second interview.

**Table 10**
Second Interview Research Question Mapping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Second Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>Q1: Since the start of implementation of the Responsive Classroom, how have you incorporated the practices into your classroom environment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Research Question 2       | Q2: Let’s review the 10 classroom practices from the Responsive Classroom program and discuss the changes you made to your classroom practices. We will also discuss the challenges you faced when implementing each.  
Q3: What is the biggest change you have had to make to your classroom practices since implementing the Responsive Classroom? |
| Research Question 3       | Q2: Let’s review the 10 classroom practices from the Responsive Classroom program and discuss the changes you made to your classroom practices. We will also discuss the challenges you faced when implementing each.  
Q4: What is the biggest challenge you have faced while implementing the Responsive Classroom? |
The third interview was conducted after the classroom observation. The participants were asked to expound on their responses from the second interview as well as reflect on their teaching techniques and experiences with their students during implementation of the Responsive Classroom practices (see Appendix G). All questions in the third interview were directly related to Research Question 1.

Transcriptions of all recordings were done shortly after each interview using a word-processing system and are being stored electronically. Transcriptions were uploaded into Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis program. A combination of descriptive and pattern coding was performed on the interview data and field notes to identify segments of data that could be further analyzed. Descriptive coding identifies categories from each participant for comparative analysis (Saldana, 2013). The codes were then counted to identify the most coded categories. Codes with more than three occurrences were considered significant and were included as a first cycle code. After the first cycle coding was complete, pattern coding was performed to identify the emergent themes. The categories were assessed, and interpretations were made with a focus on identifying emergent themes to help answer the research questions. Table 11 shows the results of the coding process.
### Table 11

Results of the Interview Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>First Cycle Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Number of Times Coded</th>
<th>Second Cycle Pattern Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>Successful SEL activities&lt;br&gt;Reasons for the Morning Meeting&lt;br&gt;Structuring the Morning Meeting</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective teacher-student interaction through positive teacher language&lt;br&gt;Facilitating constructive peer interactions&lt;br&gt;Improving listening skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>Incorporating SEL into academics&lt;br&gt;Teachers modeling SEL practices throughout the day&lt;br&gt;Stopping academics to handle student issues</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>SEL All Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting to know how students learn&lt;br&gt;Students understand consequences to their behavior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Personal Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>Set time for Morning Meeting&lt;br&gt;Doubts about fidelity of implementation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Time Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited formal training&lt;br&gt;No follow-up training&lt;br&gt;Concerns about appropriate activities for grade level</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Training Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing ideas with team members&lt;br&gt;Joining social media groups</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Best Practices in SEL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observations

Observations took place during the first period of the school day when the Morning Meeting takes place. Key aspects of the program were noted, and specific interactions were identified for further investigation using an observation protocol form (see Appendix H). The grade level, date, start and end times, and number of students in attendance were recorded, along with a detailed description of the physical setting. The Morning Meeting was chosen because it
is part of the school’s SEL action plan during which observable interactions take place as part of the Responsive Classroom program.

A detailed description of the classroom was recorded prior to the start of each observation, and as the observations progressed, descriptive notes were taken to objectively record the events in each of the Responsive Classroom practices. Reflective notes were simultaneously taken to identify the researcher’s personal commentary that might not have been recorded in the descriptive notes. The observation records were transcribed using a word-processing system and are being stored electronically. Appendix I provides an example of the completed observation notes form for Mrs. Mangan’s observation.

Descriptive coding was performed on the descriptive notes as well as the reflective notes produced during the observation. This process is the foundation for qualitative studies and the primary goal is to help the reader understand what was seen and heard (Wolcott, 1994). Coding of short words or phrases was taken from the raw data (Saldana, 2013), and the codes were categorized and analyzed to help answer the research questions. Codes were determined from the overall topic of the observed behaviors and reflective notes. The codes were then counted to identify the most coded categories. Codes with three or more occurrences were considered significant and were included as a first cycle code. Pattern coding was completed as a second cycle of coding to identify emergent themes to support previously obtained data from the other collection methods. Table 12 shows the results of the coding process. Data collected from the observations were not associated with Research Question 3.
Table 12

Results of the Observation Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>First Cycle Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Number of Times Coded</th>
<th>Second Cycle Pattern Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open ended questions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher circulates</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students engaged</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PowerPoint Slides</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complimenting student work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing feelings and opinions with partners</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>First Cycle Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Number of Times Coded</th>
<th>Second Cycle Pattern Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal opinions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low voice level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking turns</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment and concerns notes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive redirection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Behavior problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolving playground issue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive behavior reward system</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting a timer to get work done</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations

As with any study, there were limitations in the current research. First, the study took place during an unprecedented global pandemic. Students and teachers experienced social and emotional upheavals that required special care and attention. Second, this study was dependent on the honesty of the participants. Research (Oswald et al., 2014) suggests participants may fall victim to the “Hawthorn effect” where behaviors and responses may be affected by the knowledge they are being observed.
Delimitations

This study was conducted in one upper-middle class school with participants at the upper-elementary level. Conducting the study across several schools with teachers who represent other grade levels and demographics may help understand how the perceptions of implementing an SEL program vary. In addition, this study utilized a small sample size. The nature of qualitative research, however, necessitates a smaller sample size than quantitative research.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology used to conduct this study, beginning with the purpose for the study and research questions and followed by an outline of the research design. A description of the targeted school was given along with an explanation of how the participants were chosen for each phase. A researcher positionality section acknowledged the researcher’s perspective of the education and SEL. Finally, the processes for each phase of the data collection and analysis were presented.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter contains descriptions of the participants and presents the recurring themes that emerged from the data to address each of the research questions.

Participants

The participants for the interviews and observations were selected from unique responses given in the focus group. The three members consisted of one participant from each grade level. Table 13 presents their pseudonyms as well as their identified gender, grade taught, years in education and number of years in the current grade level.

Table 13

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade Taught</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Current Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Gust</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Mangan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Coakley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the participants were female. The average number of years in education was 13, with all participants teaching the current grade level for about five years. The next sections give
deeper insight into the individual backgrounds, philosophies, and teaching styles of the teachers in the study.

**Mrs. Gust**

Mrs. Gust was the third-grade teacher selected to participate in the interview and observation phase of the study. She has 20 years of teaching experience and is the oldest of the participants. During each of the interviews, she presented herself in a calm and friendly manner, with an almost Zen quality about her. In our first interview, she explained how teaching was not her first career choice. She initially wanted to go into nursing; however, with a strong love of children, she felt that she could make a bigger impact working with special needs children, which led her into education. In her early career, she worked with a wide range of children with special needs at several elementary grade levels. She had to leave that position after getting married and moving to a different part of the state. She accepted a special education position in her current school and held that position for three years until transitioning to the regular education classroom. After 12 years teaching second grade, she moved to her current third grade level and has been teaching there for four years.

Mrs. Gust explained her teaching philosophy by referencing how she interacts with her students. She identified two things she always keeps in mind when working with them. The first goes back to something her first principal told her: “Behavior is communication.” She explained how children are always communicating with you through their actions, whether good behavior or bad. She said it is her job to figure out what each child is trying to tell her so she can find the best ways to teach them. The second part of her philosophy is that everyone wants to be heard, especially children. She went on to say that it is important for her to listen more that she talks.
While she has had this philosophy her entire career, she feels that with the addition of a formal SEL program, she is more mindful of it each day.

When thinking back to her time as a student, she recalled that her second-grade teacher made a big impact on her. She remembered receiving personalized notes from her. The notes commented on her strengths as well as her weaknesses. While it was not defined back then, this teacher utilized SEL strategies to connect with her and have an impact on her years later as a teacher herself.

During the classroom observation, I was able to see how Mrs. Gust interacted with her students. She wore a headset microphone with a speaker on her waist. She spoke in a calm tone, giving instructions to the class about start of the day activities. The students worked independently, with some moving about the room to turn in homework and check in for attendance. After about five minutes, the students gathered in the middle of the room for the daily Morning Meeting. During the meeting, she let the students express their feelings and helped resolve problems. When some students were not following the rules, she gave them a positive reminder to get them back on track. Throughout the observation, Mrs. Gust utilized many of the SEL strategies from the Responsive Classroom program.

Mrs. Mangan

Mrs. Mangan was the fourth-grade teacher selected to participate in the interview and observation phases of the study. She is the youngest teacher with five years of classroom experience and three years of substitute teaching and student support services. The first thing I noticed in all the interviews was her smile. Her eyes sparkled when she talked about her students. I could tell she loves her job and feels at home in the classroom. In our first interview,
I was able to gain insight into her background in the field of education. She explained how from the earliest memories of her own school experience, she wanted to be a teacher. She recalled coming home from school and emulating what her teacher did earlier in the day with her own pretend students. When entering college, she took a test to identify possible career options. The results of her test showed an inclination to psychology. While she considered that career path, she felt that working with children would be more rewarding.

When asked about her teaching philosophy, she described how she wants to create an environment her students enjoy coming to each day. She said it just is not enough for her to teach subject matter material, it is important for her students to be happy, make friends, create memories, and have a safe environment to be themselves. As she recalled her time as a student, she mentioned how her days would start right away with academics. She explained that the morning worksheet was a staple of the morning routine and recalled that prior to starting the Responsive Classroom program was how she started her day with her students. She indicated the difficulty being out of her comfort zone in the beginning and described how she tried different strategies until she found what worked best for her and her students. With the implementation of SEL strategies at the beginning of the day, she feels she knows her students better and connects with them on another level.

Recalling her time as a student, a science teacher in middle school stood out as making an impact on her. She remembered not having a strong interest in science, but this teacher did activities to make the learning fun. She mentioned songs the class sang together and how he was passionate about teaching. These are things she now brings to her classroom.

When I observed her class, there were several areas with a flurry of activity. Several student aides were helping special education students with their work. Even though there was a
lot of activity, all the students were engaged and working on their morning tasks. To get the day started, she calmly clapped her hands three times. The students responded with three claps and all attention was direct at her. The thing that stood out most for me during the observation was how she constantly circulated around the room. It was as if she was making a point of connecting with each student, even if it was just for a moment or two.

Mrs. Coakley

Mrs. Coakley was the fifth-grade teacher asked to participate in the interview and observation phases of the study. She has eight years of classroom experience at the intermediate elementary level, with another five years as a long-term substitute teacher. Of the three participants, she appeared the most professional, always wearing a dress and responding to questions with as much detail as possible. During the first interview, she explained how her life goal is to make a difference. She loves children and said that entering the teaching profession was a way to help them grow and progress in life. It is often a cliché for a teacher to say it is their “calling” but in this case, I believe that is true.

When discussing her philosophy as a teacher, she said the most important thing is building relationships with her students to show them she cares and is on their side. Building trust is the foundation that opens the door to learning. Additionally, she said that having enthusiasm for what she is teaching helps engage her students and helps them understand why the topics she is teaching are important in their lives.

As she looked back on her time as a student, she referred to her elementary school experience as a “60’s catholic school.” It was not until middle school when a teacher differentiated instruction that she remembers enjoying the learning process. She recalled the
teacher using SEL strategies, and it was the first time she felt like the teacher cared what the students thought. In high school, she experienced more caring teachers who structured their lessons around music and whole-class discussions. One teacher stood out as pushing aside academics to delve into activities centered around building character.

During the classroom observation, the first thing I noticed was how everyone in the class was actively engaged on their laptops and doing their morning activities. Mrs. Coakley was taking attendance and talking with students. Everyone knew what they needed to do and were doing it. Some students were at stand-up tables, while others were at their desks or working on a counter. The tone was relaxed, and work was being done. The front board had an activity the students need to do and then they could choose other activities from a choice menu. It was clear she cared about each one of her students and gave them the freedom to work at their own pace.

Research Questions and Related Themes

This section begins with presenting the recurring themes that emerged from the data (see Table 14). Then each research question is presented, along with detailed support from the data collection process.
Table 14

Research Questions and Related Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do veteran upper elementary teachers incorporate SEL practices into their classroom environment?</td>
<td>All participating teachers described their commitment to starting each day with the Morning Meeting so students can prepare themselves for learning. Throughout the day, the participants detailed how they utilized positive language with the students to help build relationships and strengthen positive student behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What changes do veteran upper elementary teachers make to their classroom practice to teach SEL practices to their students and why?</td>
<td>Incorporating SEL practices changed how participants approach teaching academics because they are more mindful of using the strategies in all aspects of their day. All participants agreed that taking time throughout the school day to teach relationship and communication skills is an important change to their classroom practice to help students become positive members of their school community. Participants revealed that by implementing SEL practices, they make personal connections with each student to understand their individual needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What strategies do veteran upper elementary teachers use to overcome the challenges they face when implementing SEL practices in their classroom?</td>
<td>Devoting sufficient time to SEL was identified as the biggest challenge when implementing the SEL practices. Scheduling the daily Morning Meeting and prioritizing SEL throughout the day helped participants incorporate the practices into their daily routine. Insufficient training in the SEL program was identified as a challenge to implementing the SEL practices. To overcome this, participants relied on collaborating with colleagues and utilizing online resources to find SEL activities to fit their needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1
How do veteran upper elementary teachers incorporate SEL practices into their classroom environment?

Two themes emerged from the data to answer this research question. First, the participants in this study demonstrated that they found success with the new SEL program by starting with one aspect, the Morning Meeting, and committing to it. Additionally, as implementation continued, the participants identified that the use of positive language aided in building relationships and improving student behavior.

Theme 1

All participating teachers described their commitment to starting each day with the Morning Meeting so students can prepare themselves for learning. During the focus group meeting, the participants identified the Morning Meeting as essential for checking the students’ emotional well-being before they get started with their learning for the day. During the Morning Meeting, the class meets in a circle, greet one another, and then share their ideas and feelings through activities such as interactive learning structures and energizers (Baroody et al., 2014; Responsive Classroom, 2022). The participating teachers reported that implementing the Morning Meeting has been a good foundation for starting an SEL program in their classroom. Ms. Coakely said, “Just starting off the day not diving right into the academics. Just having a chance to catch your breath” (Interview 3). Fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Crawford, received extensive training in conducting the Morning Meeting at her former district and has been a resource for other teachers for their team. She stated,

The charter schools put a huge emphasis on teacher trainings for weeks before school started, we would have full day teacher training sessions for ten days and for any program
they were implementing at the time. One of the programs we were consistently trained in was SEL, Morning Meeting, and mindfulness. (Focus Group)

The teachers noted that having resources provided in the initial training provided a starting point; however, they mentioned that individualizing the meeting was accomplished through trial and error. They described how they observed in classrooms of teachers who attended the workshops to gain insight into Morning Meeting routine. During the focus group, a fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Price, said,

I would ask her [Kristie] questions and she would give me tips for more resources. I know I would come and ask you some things not necessarily when the kids would be in there and you would share resources, too, like the agenda with different parts of the Morning Meeting in it so just things like that where you would pick them up through each other but nothing really formal.

Another fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Mangan, recalled “I went into Nikki’s room. I was trying to do the Morning Meeting, the greetings, the sharing circle. I was really getting into it and enjoying it. The kids enjoyed it. I started to have a routine” (Focus Group). However, shortly after the initial SEL training, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred and the teachers were required to interface with students remotely via computer, causing a delay in fully implementing SEL strategies. Even when students returned to in-person instruction, the teachers noted that student interaction was restricted. Mrs. Mangan, expressed frustration with these restrictions regarding the Morning Meeting,

I feel like it happened at such an unfortunate time because right after the training, I was getting into it. I started to have a routine that we would do and then COVID hit and there were so many things with Responsive Classroom that we couldn't do. (Focus Group)

Trying to balance the community building while still keeping kids separate, while masked, another one of our favorite greetings was a no smiling greeting where you would go around the room, but you would always burst out laughing. It was a wonderful start to the day. Now try doing that with a mask on. COVID has really put a big hitch in this roll out. (Focus Group)
When all student restrictions were removed, teachers described how they were able to get back to fully implementing the SEL strategies. An increased importance on SEL was noted by several teachers in the focus group since the pandemic affected the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Mrs. Mangan commented how the administration expressed concern about students: “I remember last year with COVID (administration) would say SEL was really the push because like you were saying the kids were starting to lack some of those appropriate social skills” (Focus Group). Additionally, the teachers detailed how the administration allotted a 15-minute block of time in the daily schedule specifically to incorporate the Morning Meeting. Mrs. Mangan said, “It was nice that the district set time aside for us to say now we have the first 15 minutes of your day for SEL” (Focus Group). Mrs. Gust liked the specific time for SEL placed in the daily schedule and said, “I have been doing Morning Meeting consistently. Every day” (Interview 2). How it is implemented, they noted, is left to their discretion. Mrs. Mangan reported that a member of her team found PowerPoint slides on an SEL website that help guide the Morning Meeting. She shared those with other teachers at the school who consistently use it as part of their daily routine. She noted that when the kids come into the classroom first thing, they have a display on the whiteboard that they see. They see it says Morning Meeting and today’s date and the kids will see different activities that go along with our Morning Meeting. So, they will see the fun fact of the day, which they write down in their composition notebooks. There will be a joke, or a puzzle of the day and we will go over the answer together as a class. They will see a poll, so every Morning Meeting we take a poll which you prefer and then we will do a share out activity. That is when we have like a short video clip that we will watch on our SEL component. I am blanking on which one we did. So, for example we did one on manners, being polite and then we shared out as a class why it is important to have manners. When you need to use those manners and be polite. That’s the components of our Morning Meeting. (Interview 1)

Ms. Coakley created her own slides to guide her Morning Meeting. She customizes them each day depending on the lessons being taught that day. She described her Morning Meeting,
Yesterday it was crazy sock day for the ABC countdown. That was kind of the theme of our slide. Each day, I have the kids come in and I have a slide on the board, and it usually has a fun fact of the day. Sometimes we have a video, sometimes it says get ready, write down some adjectives, we are going to do this coffee pot game. So, it has instructions for the day and it kind of prepares them for an activity. So yesterday the activity was designing your own socks because it was crazy sock day. So, the kids came in, they did their morning routine of unpacking and lunch count and all that good stuff and then they go on SeeSaw to design a pair of their own socks and be kind of creative with that. Then, eventually after they finish with that and we are being close to being done, they have a chance to share their designs with the class. The kids that don’t finish, get that opportunity later that day or the next day if they wanted to share. (Interview 3)

Mrs. Gust preferred to conduct her meetings in a different way. She described them as, “students put concerns and cheers in a box throughout the week and then during Morning Meeting we go through each of those, and we problem solve” (Interview 3). She described how the class solves their problems,

Whenever they or whenever there is an issue that they cannot solve by asking for clarification, and we teach that, or I teach that in the beginning of the year. Clarification is like if someone does something like knocks a pencil off of your desk or accidentally bumps into you then you could solve it by clarifying. Excuse me, was that on purpose or was it an accident? And then the person 99 percent of the time says it was an accident and says I’m sorry and the other person says ok I forgive you. And we always have to end with I forgive you, for some closure. If they don’t forgive them, they say I don’t forgive you and I say ok, that is your choice, you don’t have to. (Interview 3)

Each of the participants who were observed described something different for their Morning Meeting, but all of them agreed that the consistency of the morning routine is the foundation of the SEL program and helps the students connect with one another and prepare themselves for the school day,

Mrs. Gust: It has helped that it’s not just two days a week. Every day the kids are able to connect with one another. (Interview 1)

Mrs. Mangan: I feel that especially with the younger kids' consistency is a lot. It's important for them and the routine of it. They know what to expect when they come in in the morning. (Interview 3)
Ms. Coakley: Just having that part of my meeting time has been one of the biggest things that I have incorporated in the classroom. (Interview 1)

The Morning Meeting has proved to be a valuable addition to the participant’s classroom routine. These veteran teachers have found ways to integrate this SEL practice into their day in their own unique way. Students appreciate the consistency and teachers enjoy starting their day in a positive way. The next section explains the second theme that emerged from the data regarding RQ1.

Theme 2

Throughout the day, the participants detailed how they utilized positive language with students to help build relationships and strengthen positive student behaviors. The participants identified opportunities throughout the school day for students to share their ideas and feelings to resolve conflicts. They reported that connecting with students through open dialogue helped the students understand the consequences of their behaviors and reinforce positive actions.

Participants expressed the importance of using positive language when implementing SEL strategies. They specified that utilizing positive language encourages students to persevere. Mrs. Doyle stated: “I know with the growth mindset and the positive verbiage, that has made a difference in my classroom. They are not allowed to say I can’t do this unless they say yet after it” (Focus Group, emphasis from discussion).

Mrs. Mangan reflected on her time as a student when discussing the importance of encouraging students through positive language; “I remember teachers being like, nope that is wrong. I always felt that as a teacher, I can’t be doing that. Instead of saying that is incorrect, I choose the term Keep Thinking instead” (Interview 3, emphasis from discussion). She took it a
step further by saying, “I think that kids are so influenced the people they are spending the most time with and if I can remain positive and reinforcing that positive language with them, I think they start to feed off of that” (Interview 3).

The participants also mentioned that communicating with students in a positive manner goes beyond just the words that are being said. Ms. Coakley expressed that the importance of how you say the words can impact how the messages are received:

Another is really and I think with this group in particular has really been again it goes along with the positive teacher language is being respectful and kind to one another. I have been noticing especially the tones of voice that I have had in my class compared to others. I take the time to really redirect that and not be angry or make a huge thing of that but just know that consistently, I am going to correct you and I am going to step in, and we are going to talk about this if you are being rude to somebody or using that tone of voice. (Interview 3)

Later in the interview, she explained how this practice extends further into the lives of her students:

It’s really just kind of being a good person and we go through it and talk about these things stick with people. I am sure you have seen it too as we talk about SEL is more important than ever for various reasons whatever its lessons are not being learned at home. All these different influences in the world, this world of social media and everything it’s teaching people to be narcissistic, and they are better than others and it’s all about them and teaching them that no it is so much more than that. A lot of our students are on the right track with that. There are wonderful things they are interested in and want to help others so it’s great. It’s consistently reinforcing that because sometimes I feel we have to work against that, what they are exposed to all the time. (Interview 3)

Communication is a key component in the student-teacher relationship. Maintaining positive teacher language builds trust with students. This helps when issues arise with behavior and struggles with learning. Additionally, communicating with students instead of at them lets the students understand the consequences of their behavior.

In addition to building relationships, utilizing positive language also strengthens student behaviors. When students demonstrate inappropriate behavior, the participants addressed the
issue by employing positive language to problem-solving strategies and working with the student to find reasonable consequences to their actions. The next section details how the participants utilized positive language to work with students to problem-solve and identify reasonable consequences to help them learn from their mistakes.

**Problem-Solving**

Problem-solving in the classroom can be viewed through SEL interventions in two ways. The first is resolving conflicts and the other relates to academic challenges (Baroody et al., 2014, p. 72). During the participant interviews, it was revealed that Mrs. Gust and Ms. Coakley focused on resolving conflicts, while Mrs. Mangan focused on academic challenges.

While discussing the observation with Mrs. Gust, she stated that when she meets daily with her students, they focus on problems that arise between students. She described how she approaches this with her students,

This is probably the biggest change since Responsive Classroom is I feel like I am involved in almost every little problem in the beginning, then once I teach the students, we have hot words, one is clarification, so if they think there is a problem, I ask did you ask for clarification? And that is always step one and if they didn’t then you have to go do that first. Usually, clarification means did you do this on purpose or was it an accident? And so, I would say 75% of the time the kids say it was an accident, do you forgive me, yes, and we move on. So, in the beginning it’s all about teaching them how to ask for clarification. Then you go into what is a small problem, a medium problem, or a big problem. After that you have to teach them how to problem solve those small problems versus the big problems. (Interview 2)

Ms. Coakley also approached conflict resolution by utilizing communication with and between peers to solve disagreements. She described a recent situation when she aided in an interaction with her students to resolve a conflict,

We have some video games issues outside of the classroom that are starting to spill into the classroom with hurt feelings. So, during recess we took about four of the boys that
were involved and just, we didn’t have a room to go to, so we just sat in the hall. We just
kind of sat in the hall and just tried to talk some things through. Try to figure out what the
issue was. (Interview 3)

She detailed how students were able to express their feelings in a safe environment with her
acting as a facilitator during the session. She explained:

I was kind of guiding it. Let’s start, let student A start talking and kind of let him say his
peace. Then student B or C were trying to interject. Let student A finish. You are going to
get a chance. Then they started discussing it, then when it was getting tensions were
rising their voices were getting a little angry. Ok, let’s calm down and kind of redirected
everything. Letting them lead it but then stepping in as necessary. Then trying to discuss
possible solutions or bringing it back to so we have identified this is the issue, what can
we do? Then it was pretty quiet. Then, do you think we can try this? Offering suggestions
can be good instead of just saying stop that. Just try to talk it out a little and get to the
root of the issue. It’s still not completely resolved but we made progress. (Interview 3)

She described how the students had the freedom to express their feelings about the situation
without escalating into an argument. By facilitating the interaction, she explained how the
students were able to come to an agreement collaboratively and begin to move forward. She
contrasted this process with prior methods in which students would be told to stop arguing
without offering them the opportunity to express their feelings.

Mrs. Mangan took a different approach when conflicts arise with her students. Her focus
centered on providing the students with learning opportunities to work collaboratively to
understand academic concepts. She described how the students work together to learn concepts,
specifically in science,

Mystery Science is actually a really good example of that because when we do the
exploration, like the hands-on activities the students are in pairs or small groups.
Throughout doing the exploration they are answering questions, they are learning, they
are working together. Then we discuss together as a class. There is a wrap up video. Then
we discuss what did you see? What did you get for this answer for this question, and we
will talk about it as a group? (Interview 3)
In both uses of problem-solving, the teachers indicated that they were able to work with their students as facilitators. They explained how their students work through the problems in a constructive manner by expressing their thoughts and feelings, which provides them training in the skill so they can use it later when similar situations arise. The next section describes how the participants utilized positive language to work with their students to determine reasonable consequences to their actions.

**Reasonable Consequences**

During the focus group interview, Mrs. Crawford explained how there was a shift in the way she helped her students understand logical effects to their actions through implementation of SEL strategies. She stated, “I do logical consequences of like if you forgot your homework, you have to do it at a different time.” She explained how the consequence of time spent on making up the homework may be during free time or time when students are doing more appealing tasks. The shift moves from a punitive, losing points or moving a card as a warning, to having the students understand the results of their actions.

By implementing SEL strategies, Ms. Coakley changed her classroom management system from a card system of levels of misbehavior to writing reflection notes to identify the behavior and determine the consequence. When recalling a situation when students misbehaved for a substitute, she explained,

I came back on Tuesday and the three of us had a talk. I brought them out and I asked why are you out here? And they all recognized why they were out in the hallway and what they did. So, I went back to that reflection note and did a reflection note on what happened and I sent it on SeeSaw to the parents, so the parents were aware. And so, they had to also write an apology note to the sub saying what they were going to do different next time. (Interview 3)
She concluded that the change in how the situation was handled helped the students understand why their behavior was not acceptable. The consequence was meaningful and helped the students understand why their actions were not acceptable. Ms. Coakley added, “To their credit, I had a sub on Wednesday afternoon, and I got a good report from everyone” (Interview 3).

Overview of Research Question 1

Facilitating the Morning Meeting was the first step in implementing the Responsive Classroom practices in the school, which was the subject of this study. Although implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants continued to dedicate time to the social and emotional well-being of their students by conducting daily meetings. These meetings set the stage for students to prepare for academic learning. Additionally, the participants provided their students with opportunities to have open communication to discuss their thoughts and feelings. In doing so, their students were accountable for their actions and reflected on how to handle similar situations in the future. The next section discusses the themes that emerged for RQ2.

Research Question 2
What changes do veteran upper elementary teachers make to their classroom practice to teach SEL practices to their students and why?

Through years of experience veteran teachers have honed their skills to find the best ways to connect with their students. The participants in this study have found success by incorporating new SEL practices to their existing pedagogy. The data gathering process resulted in three themes to answer RQ2. First, the participants changed how they taught academic subject matter because they were more mindful of including SEL strategies throughout the day. Second, the
participants recognized the value in teaching relationship and communication skills throughout the day, which resulted in a stronger sense of community in the classroom. Finally, implementing the SEL practices resulted in building stronger student-teacher relationships and helped identify individual learning styles.

**Theme 1**

Incorporating SEL practices changed how participants approach teaching academics because they are more mindful of using the practices in all aspects of their day. As veteran teachers, it can be a difficult to change routines when well-established practices are interrupted with new ways of teaching. The participants overcame this challenge and realized the importance of monitoring the social and emotional levels of their students during their daily core instruction to identify moments when the focus needed to change to SEL rather than academics. When referring to the overall implementation of SEL practices, Mrs. Price said, “It’s no longer just the core curriculum. You are adding in the human element to it. The feelings of the children and the whole child as opposed to just the academics of it” (Focus Group). Mrs. Mangan agreed by noting, “I definitely think it impacts how I teach. I am more aware of the students’ social emotional well-being whereas before I maybe wasn’t as aware of it” (Focus Group).

During the focus group, Mrs. Gust identified her biggest change while implementing SEL practices,

> My biggest change is, and this is something that has really been progressive for me. Realizing that Responsive Classroom isn’t just for that amount of time. It’s something that I have to keep up all day long and throughout my career. For me, I don’t want to say it’s a lifestyle but it’s just a habit. It’s just what my class is now. And I have to remember that because sometimes I get off track and I do but I am sticking with it.

Mrs. Doyle reflected on the lasting effects of incorporating SEL practices with her students,
I think that implementing SEL strategies, or the Energy Bus, or Responsive Classroom, any of those the positive talk, the growth mindset has changed the way I view education particularly because if you get the kids to believe in themselves that they are worthy and you are trying your best to take care of those little things that they may not be getting at home. It helps them to learn better. I am more cognizant of it, especially after the pandemic. I see the need even more so. (Focus Group)

Several teachers mentioned how, prior to implementation, they were wary of taking time away from academics to address the social and emotional needs of their students. Ms. Coakley explained:

I think it has helped me to be more mindful of making sure I am including the social and emotional component. Sometimes we get so caught up in ok we have to get into math, or we have to do this. Before we started doing Responsive Classroom even though I still want to make connections with my students and things like that sometimes those moments to really connect and have a conversation and discussion outside of academics got pushed to the side. (Focus Group)

Ms. Coakley also discussed the need to pause academics throughout the day to check the emotional well-being of her class. She said,

I think I am more cognizant of the energy level in the classroom and when we need an energizer or when we need a little bit of a break or whatever. We have a little breathing technique where I can almost feel that the energy. It's like ok, let's calm down or refocus. I think I am attuned to that and it's also even for myself it's like oh I'm like all over the place, so I need to calm down too. I am more aware of keeping it at a positive balance level. (Focus Group)

Letting the students refocus through SEL activities is important; however, Mrs. Crawford revealed that there are times in her day when she needs to refocus. She detailed a time when she paused instruction to regain her composure. She said she demonstrated to her class how she can use SEL activities to refocus,

I have also started to, kind of, that teacher modeling but have extended that to my self-regulation. So, there are days where I have a staff meeting for nothing and I am irritable and annoyed and just coming back into the classroom and I will say to the students I feel really annoyed right now. The reason I feel really annoyed right now is because we had to do this, and I was rushing. I will explain everything and then I will talk through my regulation. OK so one thing I can do is identify that I am feeling off. Two, what is my
intent? You guys didn’t do any of this to me. What am I going to do so you guys are not the ones bearing the brunt of it? I can take deep breaths, I can sit quietly, I can think about what it is that I am grateful for. I can go through different ways to show is how I plan to get down to where I want to be. Watch me do it. (Focus Group)

Mrs. Gust also commented on the importance of teachers utilizing the SEL practices throughout their day. She noted that the focus is not just with students, but with everyone in the school. She said:

When you are doing SEL in the classroom, especially responsive classroom, the adults have to do it as well, not just with the kids but with each other. Because kids notice how adults treat other adults. When someone comes in your classroom, if there is not a really good sub and the teacher is like ‘Oh that sub did that again.’ The kids pick up on that. They pick up on how admin is. I pick up on how other teachers act to custodians. It needs to be something where everybody is doing what they are teaching the kids. It’s crazy because I have heard kids talk about how some adults treat other adults. Ooh they sound like they are on fire they are not getting along today. I’m like oh. It’s just eye opening. It really needs to start at the top and be everyone. (Focus Group)

There are many pressures placed on students in today’s classroom. The participants in this study recognized the importance of letting their students express their feelings and help them work through frustrations with peers and academics throughout the school day. Additionally, they understand the significance of using the strategies themselves and leading by example. The next section details the second theme that emerged from the data to answer RQ2.

**Theme 2**

All participants agreed that taking time throughout the school day to teach relationship and communication skills is an important change to their classroom practice to help students become positive members of their school community. This realization is something that veteran teachers may be able to understand better than novice teachers whose focus is more on learning the curriculum and developing classroom management practices. During the focus group and
interviews, the participants detailed how they use SEL strategies to build relationships and communicate with one another throughout the day. Mrs. Price said, “It’s always important for me to have the sense of community” (Focus Group). She explained how interactions between students during the Morning Meeting build the connections with one another: “Some of the kids have been quiet or have not gotten the specific hello from somebody in class but everybody is participating, and everybody is listening, everybody is getting that feeling that they are all part of the classroom a lot stronger” (Focus Group).

Mrs. Mangan also mentioned that fostering a sense of community with her students is an important life skill. She explained, “I also talk to them about just being a good person. Being a good citizen and part of a community” (Interview 3). She noted the importance of these skills to build character, “Skills such as when we talked about manners and being polite. It’s not something that you do with just me in my classroom, but it is something that makes you a good person” (Interview 3). By fostering social relationships among the students, the participants cultivated a sense of community in their classrooms. The participants identified the Morning Meeting as a time when students could practice their relationship and communication skills. The following section illustrates examples of how this was accomplished.

**Relationships Skills**

Mrs. Crawford identified an example from her classroom in which students who were too weary to participate in group activities were more inclined to participate using SEL strategies.

There was another thing that I was trained in at my old school which was Kagan strategies which were an engagement piece. You have those kids that would rather die than talk in front of the entire group. In a group of three they are a lot better off. (Focus Group)
She explained how she used them with her students during the Morning Meeting,

I would use Kagan strategies for the share. I would have them move around the room or we would do an inside outside circle, so they were always sharing with different people. It’s not – they are with their friends – their friends that they talk to everyday – not anybody new. It really does help with the time element. I make sure that when I teach the Kagan strategies of you go around – the person with the longest hair starts then keep going until I say time, or I will have them switch at an appropriate time so that everyone is speaking. That is how I get everyone to talk. (Focus Group)

Several teachers described how working on relationship skills through the SEL practices improved the way students interacted with one another. Mrs. Doyle explained an SEL practice that encourages positive peer interaction, “I’ve switched to the Energy Bus. After reading The Energy Bus for Kids, we follow those rules. They give someone a positive message or when someone does something nice for them, they put a note in the person’s box” (Focus Group).

Mrs. Crawford explained how she takes time in her day to strengthen her relationships with her students,

The social awareness and relationship skills are ones that I hit hard during Morning Meeting. I put a lot of emphasis on look who is talking and responding and saying the full name and smile. The interactive element of because they are programmed to not – look at phones all day. So, I would teach them how to shake a hand and then how to look your neighbor in the eye, and smile, the greeting should be good morning, name, and then good morning to you, name. So, the relationship skills and social awareness that was one of the things that I would really hit in the Morning Meeting. (Focus Group)

Mrs. Price echoed the importance of practicing these skills during the school day,

I would agree that that was one of the changes that I focused more on actually doing regularly. I didn’t really have a regular greeting time and some teachers naturally did but I did not. I kind of mixed it up and we made it part of our day instead of just every now and then or what have you. That made a change in my day which was good for the social skills. (Focus Group)

Mrs. Doyle explained how practicing the SEL strategies changed her focus from talking with adults to having conversations with peers:
It wasn’t just their relationship skills and how to talk with one another. It used to be like if I was talking to a child and encouraging them to make eye contact. The emphasis is with one another and that was a change. They are interacting and talking to one another more than just to adults. So that would probably I think the relationship skills with the greetings was a change for me. (Focus Group)

Building relationships has many components. Communication is a component that participants revealed was lacking in their classrooms. Modeling and offering opportunities to practice communication skills also strengthened the sense of community in their classrooms. The next section explains how the participants provided time to practice communication skills.

Communication Skills

During the focus group interview, several teachers discussed the need for teaching communication skills as part of the SEL program. Mrs. Gust contended, “There is a lack of awareness that I see a lack of awareness that other people exist sometimes” (Focus Group). Ms. Coakley added that there is an increased importance of teaching students’ communication skills after the pandemic. She said, “I think that was an issue before, something discussed before COVID, and obviously it made it just that much more important. The listening skills and the eyes on the speaker. When the kids have been doing Zoom, some of our kids have been remote all of last year. You do see the difference in socialization” (Focus Group). Mrs. Crawford also noticed a change in how students communicate and commented, “You know now some kids are so egocentric. I’ve got something to share but they are not listening to each other. They need to learn listening strategies of just when someone is talking, you are looking at them” (Focus Group). Mrs. Gust explained how she utilizes the Speech Pathologist to do activities with her whole class. “They did whole body listening. There were posters and its things that you take for granted or you think that kids know how to do but they don’t” (Focus Group).
In the second interview with Ms. Coakley, she detailed how her students with special needs have developed their communication skills by providing them with opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas. “It’s been a good time for kids to participate especially the special ed students who don’t always feel like participating.” She described how her regular education and special education students interact and encourage one another:

I see them participating in Morning Meeting and then my students who are on the quieter side, I have a couple who are very, very introverted, and quiet, but they have started sharing more. Especially because they are very artistic, and I love to hear the kids encourage them. I want to see your artwork and at the beginning of the year they would not share and now they share more and more, and I like to see that. (Interview 2)

However, Ms. Mangan noted that just providing students with communication skills is not enough. It is necessary for teachers to model them and have students practice so they can best use them in real world situation.

I would say for me definitely modeling would be one of the three especially when they are so young they need to see what that looks like they need to see what appropriate peer interaction looks like and they need to communicate how they are feeling to someone and why they are feeling that way and how they can fix it communicating but I don’t think that kids know just to do that I think they need to have someone teaching them this is how to tell someone you are feeling upset. This is the conversation that needs to happen between you and another peer if you are looking to kind of get past an argument that you are having. (Focus Group)

She also emphasized that having students practice this skill in a variety of ways is particularly important after the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that students were limited with their social interaction during remote instruction resulting in an eagerness to share their ideas with others. She explained how her students have reacted to providing them with the opportunity to share their ideas with others in the class,

I think COVID had an impact with them not being able to share as much. So now that this year we don’t have to wear masks every day, it is ok for the kids to work together for some of the time. I feel the kids have not felt like they could share before, now that they can, I think they love to share. They love to share with each other and with the class.
Especially for the more shy students that don’t share as much, I love this part, because I have gone up to that poster so many times and I’ve read their responses and so many times I will see one of my shyer student’s responses and it’s like oh my gosh it’s wonderful and I will ask them to share their response and most of the time they are fine with it and so the other kids will get to hear their thoughts as well. They love sharing no matter how it is, they love it. (Interview 2)

Ms. Coakley identified a change in the way that she communicates with her students regarding behavior issues. She explained how working through the issue with her students helps them take ownership for their behavior and improves the situation:

One of the things that I started doing this year was a reflection note system instead. If there is a problem, they fill out ok what did I do that caused this issue to arise and then how am I going to change my behavior? And then it makes them reflect but it’s not so much me lecturing them. It’s them taking ownership and being self-aware what they have done and how they can change. (Focus Group)

Mrs. Gust identified and defined specific words with her students to help them resolve problems. She explained how she communicates with her students using these words to have her students address behavior problems between students.

We have hot words. One is clarification. If they think there is a problem, I ask, “Did you ask for clarification?” And that is always step one. If they didn’t, then you have to go do that first. Usually, clarification means did you do this on purpose or was it an accident? And so, I would say 75% of the time the kids say it was an accident, do you forgive me, yes, and we move on. So, in the beginning it’s all about teaching them how to ask for clarification. (Interview 2)

She went on to explain how she takes it a step further by releasing the responsibility of resolving the problem to her students,

Then you go into what is a small problem, a medium problem, or a big problem. After that you have to teach them how to problem solve those small problems versus the big problems. It’s this whole triangle of like flowcharts almost. But now I feel like the kids are really good at knowing, did I ask for clarification without coming to me first and taking a child out in the hall. Now I can just say, yes, you can take them out in the hall, and I will pop out three minutes later and I will say, “Are you guys good?” And sometimes they will say we are almost done. So, I know they are working through it. Sometimes they are not almost done, there are a couple of kids that I need to be out there
because they have done something that needs more of a consequence than they are going to get from their friend. (Interview 2)

The addition of SEL practices in today’s classroom is an important tool to help students feel part of a community of learners. The need to emphasize these skills is essential after the COVID-19 pandemic when students’ social interaction was limited. The next section details the third theme that emerged to answer RQ2.

**Theme 3**

The participants revealed that by implementing SEL practices, they could make personal connections with each student to understand their individual needs. When referring to the biggest change she has seen with her students since implementing the SEL practices, Mrs. Doyle said,

Mine is more of an awareness of my individual students like just getting to know them and I feel like you know by doing any type of classroom meeting or just this SEL activity. I feel like I see if my students are coming in or if they are just not themselves for some reason, I am more in tune to that than I was before when I was just thinking academically. (Focus Group)

She mentioned how the connections extend to the personal lives of her students, “Getting to know them besides just on an academic level. You learn about the family and how the families work and their values. It kind of comes out when things get shared” (Focus Group).

Mrs. Gust explained how she connects with her students throughout the day to form bonds and interact with them on a personal basis: “Since Responsive Classroom I am more available to listen to kids. I know how important it is, so I think I carve out more of my teaching time to devote to SEL” (Interview 1). She went on to explain how she forms relationships with her students by implementing SEL practices,
I think what has changed for me is that I really see the kids as they are. You really get to know them. Just by listening to them maybe one minute a day on a nonacademic task. I feel like I know them better and I feel like they know me better. It’s more togetherness because we do know each other more. It’s a relationship. (Interview 1)

Ms. Coakley agreed that forming personal relationships with her students has helped her to understand their needs and willingness to learn. She explained, “Having that idea of that I really care about them, and they care about each other and try their best. I think Responsive Classroom really speaks to that” (Interview 1).

Mrs. Mangan described how the beginning of her day has changed how she interacts with her students from the moment they enter the classroom,

When the kids come in and taking that time to really ask how they are doing and really get from them how they are feeling about school and what's new with them. Just learning more about the kids. I think that is something that really shifted my thinking and really getting to know these kids better. (Interview 3)

She also revealed that through the SEL practices, her students understand her better as a person.

She explained:

I like that because it shows the kids, we are people too. We are humans too. We are not that different from them. We were in their shoes at one point and sometimes kids forget that. Kids are under the impression that we sleep at school. It's nice that they get to see that we get angry too just like they do. We get frustrated. We get annoyed. I think it's great that you show that to your kids too. (Focus Group)

Through the SEL practices, participants described how their relationships with their students improved. Connecting with students helped them improve their teaching and understand their students’ strengths and weaknesses.

Overview of Research Question 2

All participants in this study agreed that implementing an SEL program changed their approach to working with their students. They revealed that it is a process that takes time to
develop and practice; however, as time goes on, the changes become engrained in their teaching methods and extend to all aspects of their day. Through the SEL practices, students formed positive relationships with their peers as well as their teacher. The next section details the themes that emerged to answer RQ3.

Research Question 3
What strategies do veteran upper elementary teachers use to overcome the challenges they face when implementing SEL practices in their classroom?

Throughout the implementation process, teachers in this study faced several challenges. Time was identified as the biggest challenge. Additionally, insufficient training in the SEL program was specified as an aspect the participants had difficulty overcoming. In the following sections, each challenge is presented as a theme followed by an explanation of how the participants resolved the issue.

Theme 1

Devoting sufficient time to SEL was identified as the biggest challenge when implementing the SEL practices. Scheduling the daily Morning Meeting and prioritizing SEL throughout the day helped participants incorporate the practices into their daily routine.

Challenge: Devoting Sufficient Time to SEL

During the focus group interview, participants were asked what the biggest challenge to implementing the SEL practices in their classroom was. All six participants unanimously responded: “Time.” Mrs. Price added, “Dedicating the time.” The difficulty of dedicating time to SEL practices was influenced by the teachers’ schedules. Mrs. Mangan said, “I did feel
overwhelmed thinking how am I going to find the time to get this in with their day. We have so much to do, with kids there is always so much to do. I remember feeling overwhelmed.”

(Interview 1). Mrs. Gust struggled with dedicating sufficient time to SEL and added,

The greatest challenges, I think the first one being how much do we do? If I recall, there were three different levels. The quick check, then the lesson, then the discussion. Some days it can be a quick, everybody make up a quick handshake. So, for me, the biggest challenge was Is it effective? Is it ok to do just something from that little flip chart or do I have to everyday put a sticky note on a piece of paper and later in the day go back to it. (Interview 1, emphasis from participant)

There are periods throughout the school day when groups or clusters of students leave the general education classroom for special education services. Ms. Coakley explained how that impacted the time available to work with her whole class,

They said that they wanted us to start incorporating certain aspects of the program after winter break. That’s how it was introduced to us. It was kind of a strange time of year obviously to do that. At that time, I had 9:05 specials that year too which made it really hard. And I had an instructional cluster that left. I feel that is still something that I still struggle with today where I have such limited time where I have my whole class. (Focus Group)

Mrs. Price echoed her frustration with being able to implement the SEL practices when her whole class was present. “You’re right about the time and the clusters of kids that leave. You can’t do them when somebody is missing. I struggled with it that year and trying to start a lot of normalcy this year” (Focus Group). Mrs. Mangan added, “I would agree with having the time and being consistent with it. We have a 9:05 special on Tuesdays and late start Wednesdays. I have a group that goes to Kristie’s room, so they are in and out” (Focus Group).

Additionally, other factors contributed to the issue of time. Mrs. Crawford mentioned that “one of the things I have struggled with the Morning Meeting is that it was just another thing to plan so that was one of the areas that I saw that being an issue” (Focus Group). Mrs. Mangan mentioned,
When we first implemented Responsive Classroom, I remember taking plan periods or coming in early to plan for the lesson. Making a schedule and structuring what that would look like, gathering the materials to use for it. Responsive Classroom involved various materials to use so I would remember that was time consuming. (Interview 1)

Problems with technology added to issues with time. Each morning, students access Rhythm, an online SEL tool, to help the teachers monitor their well-being at the beginning of the day. Mrs. Gust noted, “I think consistency and then having to do Rhythm, even though Rhythm is short, for the tech issues sometimes it takes a big chunk of the Morning Meeting time” (Focus Group). Mrs. Mangan stated,

It can be a little disruptive when you have kids that don’t have their device that day. Mom is dropping it off in the office or they need a charge or whatever it is. I think that definitely effects the Morning Meeting because in order for it to be effective, you have to have the whole class there and you have to have a solid chunk of time. (Focus Group)

Mrs. Price affirmed the technology problem by explaining, “The tech issues or if one is five minutes late, it throws everything off. So, time, time. Fitting everything in that we want to. It’s tough” (Focus Group). Adding additional activities to their daily routine is difficult when there is a set amount of time in the school day. By instituting the Morning Meeting, the participants realized the importance of the SEL program and were able to incorporate the SEL practices throughout the school day. The next section explains the resolutions that emerged from the data to solve the problem of insufficient time to implement SEL.

Resolution 1: Committing to the Morning Meeting

As stated earlier, the participants started implementation of the SEL practices by instituting the daily Morning Meeting. While issues with training and the COVID-19 pandemic delayed full implementation of SEL practice, the participants affirmed the importance of scheduling the Morning Meeting. Mrs. Mangan explained, “Since being introduced to
Responsive Classroom, I now have a Morning Meeting every day in my classroom. I did not have that before being trained on it or knowing about Responsive Classroom” (Interview 2).

When discussing the impact on her classroom, she added:

> That was a change I noticed in my class. If we are starting our day with a bell ringer, I would have these kids that were just not motivated to come into the room to start their day. Then when we switched to more fun things and discussing things as a class in a Morning Meeting, I really did notice a change. Their mindset was different. They were positive. They were happier at school. They had these moments that they had with their friends where their friendships were becoming stronger. I found that my energy was different. I was more positive and happy starting my day with them. So, I think that was the biggest change for me was just starting on that happy positive note and it carried through the rest of the day. (Focus Group)

Ms. Coakley also mentioned how the Morning Meeting has impacted her classroom, “The biggest one is definitely starting the Morning Meeting. We didn't have anything like that before. We went from zero to a hundred with that. It's been a good change” (Interview 2). Mrs. Gust noted, “I do like that it is consistent. I feel that especially with the younger kids' consistency is a lot. It's important for them and the routine of it. They know what to expect when they come in in the morning” (Interview 2).

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the district administration recognized the importance of addressing the SEL needs of students. A mandatory 15-minute block of time was added to the daily schedule at every grade level. Mrs. Mangan commented that “it was nice that the district set time aside for us to say now we have the first 15 minutes of your day for SEL. So, I did appreciate that that was set in stone as far as you have just those 15 minutes just for SEL” (Interview 2). While this helped identify a place in the daily schedule, Mrs. Gust said, “The schedule, even though it was already done for us, teachers had to find time for everything else” (Interview 1). Mrs. Mangan noted,
In reality, we need more than 15 minutes to do all of these things that go along with Responsive Classroom. Like even just the greeting alone can take ten minutes. Especially your first time going through the different activities and the greetings, it does take a long time at the beginning of the school year to start these things. It is manageable but time is always one of those things that teachers don’t have a lot of. (Interview 2)

Ms. Coakley added,

We have 15 minutes in the morning for our Morning Meeting. There have been times when I have had to be flexible with getting through everything I have wanted to get through. It’s unfortunate but some of that doesn’t get completed based on things that have come up. (Interview 1)

Resolution 2: Prioritizing SEL throughout the Day

By implementing the SEL practices in their classrooms, the participants agreed that recognizing the importance of SEL has a positive impact in the long term. Mrs. Mangan explained,

In the beginning, I felt overwhelmed trying to incorporate it into my classroom, but I think it impacts the kids positively. It’s important and I think it is worth the time. Even when the classroom teacher feels stress, how am I going to do this with time, how am I going to get it done? I do feel that it is worth it and the time you take to build those relationships with kids and to have them interact with each other in that kind of way. (Interview 1)

Mrs. Price felt that having a consistent time set in the schedule had a positive impact on her classroom:

I would agree that that was one of the changes that it caused was that I focused more on actually doing that regularly. I didn’t really have a regular greeting time and some teachers naturally did, but I did not. I kind of mixed it up and we made it part of our day instead of just every now and then or what have you. That made a change in my day which was good for the social skills. (Focus Group)

Taking time away from core instruction was a struggle in the beginning, but the participants expressed the importance of using the SEL practices at the time they are needed
during the school day. Mrs. Mangan said, “I would say SEL is more so on my mind than it has before. I have taken more time this year especially more than any other year” (Interview 1). She explained:

I think it’s just taking the class time to do it. If there is an issue, you have to stop teaching then I have to go over that, and it might be our reading time when I have to stop. Or if it’s an ongoing issue I’ll have to stop teaching and go over it. It takes up class time. I know it’s important in the long run but it’s something you shouldn’t have to do but it takes up time. (Interview 2)

Ms. Coakley added, “It’s ok to take the four or five minutes to do that and I think before when I first started out teaching I just maybe I felt like that wasn’t ok to do” (Interview 1). She considered: “Can I really play a 3-minute video about breathing right now? Going into Responsive Classroom, not only does it give me permission, it's not just allowed, it's something we need right now, it's encouraged.” (Interview 1). Mrs. Gust affirmed the importance by stating,

My biggest change is, and this is something that has really been progressive for me. Just realizing that Responsive Classroom isn’t just for that amount of time. It’s something that I have to keep up all day long and throughout my career. For me, I don’t want to say it’s a lifestyle but it’s just a habit. It’s just what my class is now. And I have to remember that because sometimes I get off track and I do but I am sticking with it. (Focus Group)

Veteran teachers can find themselves relying on teaching methods that have proven to work with their students. Adding an SEL program can be difficult to incorporate when there is only so much time in the school day. By committing to the Morning Meeting and prioritizing SEL throughout the day, the participants were able to find the value of integrating the new with their existing teaching methods. The next section details the second theme that emerged from the data to answer RQ3.
Theme 2

The participants identified insufficient training as a challenge to implementing the SEL practices. While they felt the one-day Responsive Classroom training session was inadequate, the lack of administration follow-up contributed to their frustration. However, as veteran teachers, they recognized the value of SEL and persevered by collaborating with colleagues and utilizing online resources to find SEL activities to fit their needs. The following section illustrates this challenge.

Challenge: Insufficient Training

During the focus group interview, the participants described their training in the Responsive Classroom. Mrs. Mangan lamented that “the one-day Responsive Classroom training would be the only training.” Mrs. Price added, “It was one day, one formal day. Like a workshop in-service. That was my whole training.” She went on to identify how the training could have been improved, “Walk us through the whole time. I know we did some activities but more in-depth would have been nice.” Mrs. Doyle indicated that the training was lacking: “I think we could have used more in-depth training in this program if that's what they wanted us to use.” Mrs. Gust reflected on the big picture of SEL and Responsive Classroom and noted that she would have liked to know more about the research behind the decision.

I would have liked to see the why it was implemented, and I would like to see what percentage of kids have benefitted from it and what is the age level that works best with it. I would have liked to have known why there was such a push for it. I’m 100% all for it, but sometimes I think we lack the background and the research. We are kind of like here it is. I think a little more history about it would have been good and useful.
During the individual interviews the participants went into more detail about their training in Responsive Classroom. Mrs. Gust discussed her biggest challenge in implementing the SEL practices: “I think in general, the training or the lack of it and the follow-up training. That is a challenge. I don't know what to do next” (Interview 2). She discussed the materials that were provided as part of the training: “I feel I have looked in my flip book so many times. I am making stuff up and then I think is this really beneficial? You know what I mean? I think a fresh batch of ideas would be nice. Not having those is definitely a challenge” (Interview 2). Additionally, she went into detail about the information she would like to see about the effectiveness of the program, “I would like to see some follow-up research. I don't know if Responsive Classroom has any but is there any data showing how effective this is? That would be nice to see” (Interview 2). She questioned, Is it ok to do just something from that little flip chart or do I have to put a sticky note on a piece of paper and later in the day go back to it? So, for me the hardest part of Responsive Classroom is to take it full circle and know how much to do. (Interview 1)

While being interviewed individually, Ms. Coakley also expressed her frustrations with the one-day training,

My thought on the training was, I feel like we were trained on it, but it felt like we are trying out all of these energizers out and having fun. It was almost like selling us on these ideas and oh I'm buying. But it was like, am I really understanding the whole scope and sequence of this program? (Interview 1)

She explained: “I think part of it is still, I'm like, I don't know if I am implementing it to the full extent of what is supposed to be done” (Interview 1). The lack of follow-up training has made her question her expertise in the program, “I feel I have done the best I can with the resources I have been given. I have been given the resources. I improved in my SEL responsibilities. Has it
changed my classroom for the better? Absolutely. But no, I don't feel like I am an expert on it by any means” (Interview 1).

The in-service training was provided to all kindergarten through fifth grade teachers at the same time. Mrs. Mangan explained the challenge of understanding how to use the SEL practices at her individual grade level. “Another challenge was just the training, just being shown this is what it looks like at the fourth-grade level. With our training it seemed like a lot of that was geared toward the younger grade levels” (Interview 2). She stated:

I feel I would benefit from more training, modeling, what Responsive Classroom looks like for a fourth-grade teacher. I had to go observe other teachers when we first started to implement Responsive Classroom but at the time it was only first-grade. Seeing it at a first-grade level kind of helped but not really because when you are working with fourth grade of course you want to see what it looks like at my current grade level. I liked being able to observe another teacher, but I do think that more training would be beneficial. (Interview 1)

The participants agreed that the training in the new SEL program was limited. To overcome this, they worked collaboratively to find additional online resources. The next section explains how the participants resolved the problem of insufficient training.

Resolution: Collaborating with Colleagues and Using Online Resources

The participants overcame the challenge of insufficient training by collaborating with colleagues and using online resources. During the focus group, when discussing the materials provided during training, Ms. Coakley said, “I think they are a good jumping off point. Then what teachers do, we kind of develop things and borrow ideas.” Mrs. Gust noted, “I have used what other teachers have done. Other teachers have shared some really great resources that go along with Responsive Classroom. Working smarter, not harder.”
The theme of pulling SEL activities from other resources was echoed by other participants. When discussing an online resource, Mrs. Price said, “One thing that our team has found too was great Morning Meeting Google slides. That helps us prepare a general Morning Meeting” (Focus Group). This resource was used by several other participants at all grade levels. Mrs. Mangan agreed: “I’ll be honest, the best part about that is that it’s already done for me” (Focus Group). Mrs. Doyle added, “I use those too it’s like a nice starting point. The kids really like it. I like the fact that you can actually edit it. I’ll look at a different day and just change the date depending on what our need is. I won’t always use it as it’s set up” (Focus Group).

The participants discussed other resources that they accessed online. When the subject of greetings at the Morning Meeting came up, Ms. Coakley mentioned, “There was one teacher where they show it on YouTube – a handshake with each kid. I don’t think I could do that where I stand out in front of the class as they come in each day. I wanted to base it off of that idea” (Focus Group). She added, “I am in some social media groups that people post on so sometimes I get ideas from there.” To further explain, she said,

I started using Flipgrid more, especially this year when we were trying to do SEL, and the kids couldn’t move around. We used Flipgrid a lot where the kids would post a Would you Rather question. They would do their response and add things to the video then the kids could respond to that. It was a way for them to respond to their classmates whether we were in a pause or in person. Padlet was another one. The funny thing was that I would have kids that were absent, and they would actually participate in the SEL that day. They saw it posted and they would still do it. It was kind of cool to keep them involved.

Mrs. Gust also identified how she accesses SEL activities online, “I look at articles. I am really big into what is kind of new, so I just read different articles. For me it’s not one program it’s different strategies and I look at what works for the class at the time” (Focus Group).
Overview of Research Question 3

The participants in this study agreed that time was the biggest challenge to implementing the SEL practices. To overcome this challenge, they agreed that having a set block of time for SEL helped them begin the process of consistently including SEL activities in their daily routine. Additionally, they described how collaborating with colleagues to find the best practices for their grade level was beneficial to continuing the process of helping their students meet their SEL needs.

Conclusion

This chapter described the results of the analysis for the study’s three research questions. The results show that the participants in the study started implementation by instituting the daily Morning Meeting. Next, they incorporated the SEL practice of positive teacher language to build relationships which resulted in students accepting responsibility for their behaviors. Several changes needed to take place to their classroom practices to find success with the SEL program. The participants realized the importance of utilizing the SEL practices while teaching lessons in each subject area. Focusing on relationships and communication skills resulted in a cohesive classroom community. These personal connections helped the participants learn about the individual personalities and learning styles of their students. Implementation, however, did not come without its challenges. Taking time from academics and lack of formal training were two areas that the participants struggled with through the implementation process. Collaborating with colleagues and finding online resources aided in the development of their own individual
SEL teaching methods. Discussion of the results, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

No longer are the three R’s the most important aspects of education. In the past decade, the social and emotional well-being of students has moved to the forefront and plays a key role in how students learn. To successfully implement an SEL program, teachers must function as a role model, facilitate problem solving, and create a positive learning environment (Jennings, et al., 2014). This study emerged from curiosity about understanding how veteran upper elementary teachers incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) practices into their classroom environment. Additionally, it sought to identify the changes they made to their classroom practices as well as the associated challenges. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings that emerged from the data gathered in the current study as well as recommendations for the field of education and future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework

This study focused on implementing the CASEL competencies through the teachers’ Responsive Classroom practices. The Prosocial Classroom model connects these aspects through the teaching methods of individual teachers demonstrated though their Social Emotional Competence (SEC). Much like the research by Smith (2000), the participants were faced with a dilemma that resulted from the tension between incorporating new methods with existing pedagogy. In both cases, the participants relied on colleagues and outside resources to advance
their knowledge of the subject matter. In the first interview with Ms. Coakley, she described how she did not feel she had mastered teaching SEL to her students; however, she is committed to improving her SEC to best teach the skills to her students.

The major themes that emerged from the study regarding how the veteran teachers implemented the Responsive Classroom practices support the CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) by offering tools for teachers to use throughout the school day. During the data gathering process, the participants revealed that they utilized some practices more than others. While Guided Discovery, Classroom Organization, and Working with Families were practices on which the participants provided significant information, Morning Meeting and Positive Teacher Language stood out as the practices the participants concentrated on the most. A reason for this could be that the one-day training provided by The Responsive Classroom focused on these two practices in the initial phase of implementation. Table 15 shows how I linked the top seven Responsive Classroom practices to the CASEL competencies based on the data gathered through a focus group, interviews, and observations. Examples from the data follow to illustrate each classroom practice and its relationship to the CASEL competencies.

Table 15

Classroom Practice Mapping to CASEL Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsive Classroom Practice</th>
<th>CASEL Competency</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Teacher Language</td>
<td>Relationship Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table continued on next page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The daily Morning Meeting is when the entire class comes together to greet one another, share personal opinions, and participate in team building exercises (Baroody et al., 2014). Each of these activities supports the self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship competencies. The teachers explained that the Morning Meeting was their first step in implementing the Responsive Classroom program. During the data gathering process, the participants explained the interactions that take place during this time. They noted that by sharing personal opinions and information, the students were supporting their self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship competencies, as demonstrated during the observation with Mrs. Gust. The students
discussed their concerns and cheers with other students. They expressed their feelings directly to the other students and considered possible resolutions together.

The participants expressed how their understanding of the Morning Meeting changed and improved their teacher SEC. Mrs. Mangan said, “I have changed my mindset on how to start a school day and forming relationships with these kids. It has been a positive experience” (Interview 3). Ms. Coakley also utilized the activities in the Morning Meeting to improve her relationships with her students. She stated, “I feel that the Morning Meeting helps me to connect to my students on a level that we didn’t in the past. I know right away if someone is having a bad day. It makes me a better teacher” (Interview 2).

**Positive Teacher Language**

Teachers express positive teacher language by choosing words to support and encourage their students’ learning (Baroody et al., 2014). The CASEL competency that directly relates to this practice is relationship skills. The participants explained how this practice is essential for building teacher-student relationships, as evidenced by Mrs. Doyle when she described how she encourages her students to persevere in difficult times. Mrs. Mangan also described how she uses the term “keep thinking” to offer positive feedback and encourage her students to keep trying. Additionally, Mrs. Mangan revealed how she uses non-verbal positive redirection. “As much as I can give a direction or redirect without having to say it, I try to do my best with it. So, using hand signals or a little tap on their desk or their shoulder” (Interview 3). These actions correct the behavior without calling attention to the student.
Collaborative Problem Solving

To meet the collaborative problem-solving practice, the teachers worked with their students to resolve conflicts and foster a positive learning environment (Baroody et al., 2014). This practice supported all five of the CASEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The participants explained how this practice is woven through all parts of the students’ school day through their peer and teacher interactions. Additionally, they all agreed that through the Responsive Classroom practices, the classroom becomes a community, and the student-student and teacher-student relationships are built on the activities done together. Mrs. Price discussed how the Morning Meeting is especially important for fostering these relationships in the classroom. Mrs. Gust detailed the importance of teaching her students how to resolve problems. She explained, “In the beginning it's about teaching them how to ask for clarification. Then you go into what is a small, medium, or a big problem? After that, you teach them how to problem solve small problems versus the big problems” (Interview 2).

Logical Consequences

Responding to students’ misbehavior in a respectful and supportive way was how the participants worked toward logical consequences for their actions (Baroody et al., 2014). By using this practice, the teachers were supporting the self-management and responsible decision-making competencies. Ms. Coakley explained that, since the implementation of the Responsive Classroom, she has her students write reflection notes to explain their behavior and offer reasonable resolutions. Mrs. Crawford also described how she works with her students to
determine consequences for misbehavior. In this process, the teachers noted the students are involved in the process and understand when their behaviors warrant a consequence.

**Academic Choice**

Academic choice allows students to explore their own personal interests through activities of their choosing (Baroody et al., 2014), thereby developing self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making. All participants agreed that this practice was challenging and one they are still working on implementing throughout the school day. Ms. Coakley, however, explained how she incorporates this into the daily Morning Meeting. She discussed how she customized her share activity to include a choice element. She described that students are given a general task but can complete it however they choose.

**Interactive Modeling**

Interactive modeling occurs when teachers support positive actions by demonstrating those behaviors to the class (Baroody et al., 2014). Through interactions with students, the social awareness and relationship skills competencies were reinforced. Mrs. Crawford described how she used calming strategies for herself when her day was not going as planned. She said she explained how she was feeling and walked her students though the steps necessary to regulate her emotions.

**Rule Creation**

In the rule creation practice, the teachers worked with their students to identify norms to support the learning of all members in the classroom (Baroody et al., 2014). This process
supports the self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making competencies. All participants discussed how they worked with their students to establish basic classroom rules at the beginning of the school year. Through the data gathering process, it was revealed that the participants also established a set of social rules to use when interacting with each other. Mrs. Gust explained that she taught her students whole body listening techniques, and Ms. Coakley noted the importance of these social rules while interacting with others after the COVID-19 pandemic when students’ interactions were limited.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Research

In addition to having a strong connection to the theoretical framework, the current study also has a strong connection to prior research and provides insight into how implementing an SEL program meets the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and connects to SEL in the classroom setting.

SEL Domains

The framework for SEL by Jones and Bouffard (2012) explains how many factors influence the skills and behaviors taught through SEL programs as well as the related short- and long-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes include decreased aggression/depression, increased social competence, and improved attention. Long-term outcomes include improved mental health, positive behavior, and academic achievement. The three domains of emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation can be linked to each of the CASEL competencies. The next sections illustrate the links and provide an example from the current study to support the research.
Emotional Processes

Jones et al. (2017) describe the emotional processes domain of SEL as being able to identify their own emotions and process emotions displayed by others. Two studies from McKown et al. (2009) found that SEL interventions improved students, ages 4 to 14, ability to interpret non-verbal clues, be empathetic, and solve social problems. Data from the current study support this research through the Responsive Classroom practices that connect to the self-awareness and self-management competencies. When discussing the Morning Meeting, Mrs. Gust described how she works with her students to resolve conflicts between students. She explained how she gives each student time to express their feelings and state their problem. The students then work together to resolve the issue. By working with students in this way, each student is aware of the others’ feelings and is learning how to manage their actions in the future.

Other research studies (e.g., Nguyen & Dorjee, 2023; Teh, Yap, & Rickard Liow, 2018) found the importance of addressing the emotional processing of students. The study by Teh et al. (2018) is especially important since an estimated one in 36 children aged 8 years old is diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorder (Maenner, 2023). Teaching emotional processing SEL skills to these students will give them the tools they need to progress through elementary school and beyond.

Social and Interpersonal Skills

Studies by Reynolds et al. (2010) and Rucinski et al. (2018) examined interpersonal skills and teacher-student relationships. The results showed increased internalized behaviors such as fear and distress lead to decreases in interpersonal behaviors. The higher quality relationships,
especially with teachers, lead to lower levels of depression. Social and interpersonal skills focus on working in groups, solving problems, and working with others (Jones et al., 2017). These skills can be addressed through the Responsive Classroom practices that support the social awareness and relationship skills competencies. Theme 3 of Research Question 2 gives insight into how the participants helped their students develop interpersonal skills and make connections with each student to understand their individual needs. During the focus group interview, Mrs. Doyle explained how the connections she makes with her students give her insight into how they are feeling as soon as she sees them in the morning. She noted that by nurturing this relationship, she better understands the family dynamics and can best help that individual student.

Cognitive Regulation

The cognitive regulation domain includes one’s ability to control behavior to achieve goals (Jones et al., 2017). Jones et al. found that cognitive regulation was a significant predictor of task learning, which connects to the responsible decision-making CASEL competency. Data from the current study shows how the participants took time throughout the school day to teach relationship and communication skills to help students become positive members of their school community. Interactions with teachers and peers provided students with an opportunity to practice these skills. Mrs. Price explained how addressing cognitive regulation during the Morning Meeting changed how some of her students participate in sharing activities.
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 gives local school districts flexibility in determining non-academic student growth. Indicators of non-academic student growth can be student engagement, school climate, and safety. The 5Essentials Survey is an evidence-based survey measuring changes in a school organization (University of Chicago, n.d.). Students at the fourth and fifth grade level complete questions about students’ experiences, attitudes, and activities. Table 16 shows the results of the student responses to the Supportive Environment section from 2019 through 2022 for the school in which the study took place.

Table 16

Student Responses to Supportive Environment Section of the 5Essentials Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>Increase / Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer support for Academic Work</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>+13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Trust</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Personalism</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>+21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>+13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(University of Chicago, n.d.)

All four measures of the Supportive Environment section of the survey showed increases. In 2022, Peer Support for Academic Work had the highest score (99%). In this section, students responded about whether they believe their peers feel it is important to attend school every day, pay attention in class, do homework, and try hard to get good grades. The section on Student-Teacher Trust had a score of 97%. Students responded to questions about whether they feel safe with their teachers, comfortable with their teachers, and if their teachers keep their promises, listen to their ideas, and treat them with respect. Student responses measuring Academic
Personalism saw the largest increase (21 points). In this section, students were asked if their teachers help catch them up if they are behind, give extra help if they need it, notice if they have trouble learning something, give specific suggestions about how to improve their work in class, and explain things in a different way if they do not understand. The last section, Safety, had the lowest overall score but increased by 13 points. Students responded to how safe they felt in the bathrooms, outside around school, traveling between home and school, and in their classroom. All the measures in this section of the 5Essentials Survey are related to activities taught through the SEL classroom practices.

The Responsive Classroom program was implemented during this period. The daily Morning Meeting set the foundation for each day by fostering peer interaction and building personal relationships with students. The data show the participants utilized other Responsive Classroom practices to reinforce a supportive environment in their classrooms. First, Theme Two of Research Question 1 shows how the participants built relationships and strengthened positive student behaviors through Positive Teacher Language. Additionally, the participants expressed the importance of taking time throughout the school day to teach relationship and communication skills (answering Theme Two of Research Question 2). In doing so, the students become positive members of their school community. Finally, regarding Theme Three of Research Question 2, the participants revealed that by implementing SEL practices, they made personal connections with each student to understand their individual needs. This is directly related to the Academic Personalism section, which showed the highest increase over the last three years.
SEL in the School Setting

From the first day a kindergartener enters the classroom, they begin their journey of education; however, throughout that journey, their needs change (Alsubaie, 2015). Jones et al. (2017) described how supporting students with SEL strategies helps them focus their attention and control negative behavior. O’Connor et al.’s (2017) examination of social emotional learning programs identified three characteristics that led to successful implementation. First, the lessons need to be a combination of skills-focused and environmental-focused practices. Similarly, data from the current study showed that the participants used some skills-focused lessons from the Responsive Classroom program but also used materials found from other SEL programs. Second, according to O’Connor et al., the program must follow a set plan of lessons during which students actively participate in focused activities. The current study’s participants revealed that while they use some of the Responsive Classroom materials, they felt some activities did not fit well with the age level of their students. The participants detailed how they collaborated with their colleagues to identify appropriate materials for their students. Finally, O’Connor et al. identified that there should be ongoing professional development, but the findings in the current study revealed that this characteristic did not happen. The participants had attended a one-day workshop on the Responsive Classroom, but they all noted there was no ongoing professional development provided.

Other research (i.e., Al-Jabouri et al., 2022; Bhatnagar & Many, 2022; Liesch, Morrison, & Giles, 2022; Zolkoski et al., 2021) studied teachers’ perceptions of SEL; however, they focused on different age groups and programs than the current study. The current study supports their findings by stressing the importance of creating a positive classroom community and
building relationships, as well as teachers benefitting from more training in SEL. While also focusing on a different age group, the study by Steed et al. (2022) showed many of the same themes as the current study. In both studies, using an effective SEL program, utilizing social workers and school psychologists, devoting specific time to SEL, and having support from parents were viewed as positive aspects of implementation. Steed et al.’s study included additional themes; forming an SEL support team and administrators that set clear discipline expectations. These were not themes in the current study but would be helpful to teachers implementing an SEL program.

Implications

The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature regarding the implementation of SEL interventions at the upper elementary level. This study sought to fill gaps in the literature by investigating how veteran upper elementary teachers implemented an SEL program, the changes those teachers made to their classroom practices, and the challenges they faced during the implementation process. The implications are detailed below.

How Veteran Teachers Implemented an SEL Program

While teachers play a role in the change process at the organizational level (Fullan, 2016), existing research is lacking on identifying veteran teachers’ perceptions of implementing an SEL initiative. Research by Snyder (2017) sought to investigate teachers’ perceptions of educational change. In that study, the participants were veteran teachers from kindergarten through high school. The findings showed that veteran teachers resist change initiatives for a variety of reasons, including diminished relationships with students and reduced autonomy. That
study, however, was not SEL related. Therefore, the current study sought to identify how individual veteran upper elementary teachers implemented an SEL program. This study found they embraced the SEL initiative and were committed to the implementation process.

Hargreaves (2005) researched the relationship of experience level with educational change and categorized teachers into four categories – from accepting the change initiative to being disenchanted. In contrast, the current study identified that all participants accepted the challenge of implementing the change and finding alternative ways to incorporate the initiative into their daily routines.

Paxton et al. (2013) researched the implementation of the Responsive Classroom program, the program used in the in the current study. Their study focused on the support systems put in place by the administration to determine the quality of implementation. Low-fidelity schools relied only on relationship support, while the high-fidelity schools engaged in a combination of relational and strategic support. The current study reinforces the participants’ diligence in successfully implementing the SEL program without ongoing support from the administration.

Teaching SEL “focuses on helping students gain awareness of their emotions and teaching them how to self-regulate” (Todd, 2022). This is much different than how teachers facilitate subject-based learning. At its foundation, SEL is about building relationships and supporting students’ well-being. The participants in this study all agreed the initiative was valid and, as a result, they worked to incorporate the new curriculum into their existing pedagogy. Even though implementation looked different in each participant’s classroom, each teacher in this study was willing to commit to finding the right combination of SEL practices that helped their students grow as learners.
The current study identified the changes experienced teachers made to their classroom practices when implementing an SEL program that are not evident in previous research. Glennie et al. (2017) sought to examine the role teachers play in the social emotional development of their students. The focus of Glennie et al.’s research was using SEL competencies along with modeling positive behaviors to identify student well-being and academic success. The current study also used SEL competencies but was focused on the specific changes teachers made to their classroom practices to facilitate implementation. Rucinski et al. (2018) researched the classroom level supports implemented related to social-emotional as well as academic development. The focus of their research was on student outcomes. However, the current study was focused on the changes made to the classroom practices from the perspective of the classroom teacher.

The first theme that emerged from the data in the current study regarding the changes the participants made to their classroom practices to teach SEL was to learn how to balance their approach to teaching academics. The participants admitted they struggled with taking time away from the core subjects to teach SEL, but by creating a foundation of the SEL skills, they were able to incorporate the skills into their daily routines and while teaching subject matter material. They realized that by integrating the skills throughout the day, it did not impact the time teaching the core subjects as much as they had anticipated.

Another theme to come out of the current study was that teaching relationship and communication skills helped their students connect with one another and form a community. The participants utilized several of the SEL practices to reinforce these skills and let the students...
express their feelings. They found that fostering a strong sense of community made the students comfortable in the school setting and strengthened their peer relationships.

The final theme connected to how they made personal connections with each student to understand their individual needs. Today’s students enter the classroom with many struggles, and they found that connecting with each student and identifying the best ways they learn promoted a strong sense of their own self-awareness. The participants felt this awareness will continue throughout their students’ education and prepare them for their futures.

**Challenges Faced During Implementation**

Another gap in the literature is identifying the challenges experienced teachers faced when implementing an SEL program, particularly the Responsive Classroom practices. The existing literature offers administrators general guidelines for possible challenges to implementation to help select a program to fit their needs and to provide ongoing support. The current study, however, reported on the specific challenges from the teachers’ perspective.

The first theme that emerged from the data regarding challenges the participants faced was devoting sufficient time to SEL. Prior to implementing the Responsive Classroom program, the participants in this study felt pressured to allocate their time sufficiently to the core academic subjects. With only so many minutes in the school day, taking the time to spend on non-academics was viewed as non-productive. However, after working through these struggles, they were able to recognize the importance of incorporating SEL strategies into their daily routines.

The second theme to emerge from the data regarding the challenges faced during implementation was training. With little formal training, the participants overcame this challenge by relying on their colleagues and by utilizing online resources. Each teacher started
the implementation process with their own level of expertise in each classroom practice. They persevered through their deficits and built their knowledge and resource base to create a solid foundation of competence in teaching SEL.

Summary

The findings of this case study add to the current body of literature by examining how these veteran upper elementary teachers incorporated SEL practices into their daily routines. By viewing the implementation through the lens of the CASEL competencies and the Responsive Classroom practices, I was able to identify how these teachers changed their classroom practices to facilitate the implementation and how they dealt with challenges that arose during the process.

The participants in the current study committed to the addition of the SEL initiative even though it took time away from teaching subject matter. They found that committing to starting each day with the Morning Meeting helped begin the school day in a positive way. With many stressors placed on students in the classroom today, creating an encouraging learning environment is important. Additionally, children emulate what they see. The participants detailed the importance of using positive language to build relationships with their students and to strengthen positive behaviors. Utilizing the Responsive Classroom practices and creating a positive environment helped these teachers work with the students to understand their negative behaviors and take responsibility for them. They found that character education is as important as the subject matter curriculum.

Implementation of the SEL practices was a slow process; however, as the teachers became comfortable with the activities, they were able to incorporate them throughout the day, which no longer separated the SEL curriculum from the subject matter, but instead blended it
into a seamless teaching method. In doing so, the students were more apt to participate and share their ideas with the class throughout the day. The student-teacher relationship was strengthened, and the teachers could understand the students’ individual strengths and weaknesses to differentiate instruction to fit the students’ needs. These practices set the foundation for students to incorporate the skills into other aspects of their life and into subsequent learning environments.

The implementation process also had its challenges; however, the participants in this study showed they persevered and did not revert to their previous methods. They demonstrated they were using the same strategies they teach their students to persevere through difficult times. In the focus group interview, the teachers discussed how they stressed a growth mindset with their students. Mrs. Doyle explained how she teaches her students to add the word “yet” to the end of a sentence when they say they cannot do something. The teachers in this study embraced that attitude and continued to try new and inventive methods to teach SEL.

Recommendations

This research stemmed from an interest in finding out how veteran teachers implemented an SEL curriculum into their existing pedagogy. The participants in this study showed they could incorporate new methods into existing ones, and in the end, the teachers as well as the students benefited from the addition of SEL practices in the classroom. As a result, several recommendations can be made from the current study for classroom teachers and SEL program creators regarding implementing SEL interventions.
Recommendations for Teachers

Students in today’s classrooms have many stressors. Standardized testing, peer interaction, and learning disabilities are just a few. Additionally, influences outside the classroom such as family situations impact the individual student. Addressing these stressors is an important task for teachers; therefore, I recommend that all classroom teachers dedicate time in their busy day to focus on SEL interventions to facilitate the well-being of their students.

The findings show that the Morning Meeting and positive teacher language were the two practices the participants focused on during the initial phase of implementation. While they successfully integrated them into their daily routines, I recommend that staff members who attended Responsive Classroom workshops should help create an action plan for adding additional practices so all teachers eventually gain confidence in them all of the areas.

The lack of formal training was a major theme identified from the data. Although the school administration did not offer training beyond the initial one-day session, the participants should take a proactive role with the administration to advance their SEC through further training. They should seek SEL courses as part of their continuing education credits.

Veteran teachers have a unique position in a school. They have attained tenure and have the experience to be experts in their field. While the participants in this study overcame the challenge of insufficient training by seeking out ways to facilitate the Responsive Classroom practices, they could have taken a stronger role with the Responsive Classroom training at their school. Nowhere did the participants say that they reached out to administration to request additional training. I recommend that the veteran teachers in this school partner with the administration to organize a group devoted to identifying best practices and sharing resources.
The participants in this study struggled with implementation of the Responsive Classroom program. They found that researching online resources and collaborating with colleagues proved to be helpful tools in finding SEL activities that work in their classrooms. I recommend that teachers should continue to seek new and unique ways to address the SEL practices in their classrooms. In today’s world of social media, there are many online groups that share ideas and best practices. As veteran teachers, they should join these groups to share their expertise and help countless others who struggle to navigate SEL in their classrooms.

Recommendations for SEL Program Creators

The 10 Responsive Classroom practices facilitate all the CASEL competencies and are general enough to give teachers opportunities to include real world activities. Several participants detailed how their previous SEL methods included activities that specifically focused on creating real world activities for their students to understand how they will use their learning in the future. In my opinion, real world activities help students prepare for their futures. I recommend adding a separate practice specifically addressing real world issues.

The participants noted that they were at different stages of implementing all the Responsive Classroom practices. Some were implemented fully, and some were in the initial stages. I recommend breaking the practices into groups. The first group should include those practices that were most important and should take priority. For example, the Morning Meeting, Positive Teacher Language, and Collaborative Problem Solving could be in the first stage so teachers can find success and build a foundation of SEC. Additional practices could be added as implementation proceeds. This will organize the process and teachers will not feel overwhelmed.
Future Research

Gaps in the current study offer recommendations for future research on implementing an SEL intervention program. First, the current study focused on only third through fifth grade teachers in a suburban school in a Midwestern city. During the data collection process, the participants noted that some of the activities provided in the Responsive Classroom program did not fit the needs of the students at that age level. Future research could be expanded to other grade levels to identify the perceptions of the Responsive Classroom program with teachers in the primary elementary grades as well as the middle school level.

Additionally, the current study took place in a predominantly white suburban elementary school. The students in other socioeconomic areas face other problems than the students in the school where the study was conducted. This study could be replicated in a school that implemented the Responsive Classroom program but was in a culturally diverse setting to identify the teachers’ perceptions of implementing the SEL competencies for a more diverse student population.

The 10 practices used in the Responsive Classroom program each have individual and unique characteristics to help students advance their own SEC. Future research studies could focus on a specific practice. For example, focusing only on the Morning Meeting would help teachers identify how to incorporate existing methods into new ones. Understanding the best ways to teach these skills will have an impact on how teachers approach them with their students.

The Responsive Classroom program was used in the current study. Jones et al. (2021) identified 33 leading SEL programs targeted to preschool and elementary students. Future
studies could do a comparative analysis of teachers’ perceptions of other programs and the Responsive Classroom at different schools.

Finally, this study was conducted during an unprecedented time. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on students and teachers, and the combination of remote and in-person learning added difficulties to the learning process. It is impossible to tell what will happen in future years, but this study could be replicated at another school during an uninterrupted school year to identify if and how perceptions differ.

Conclusion

This study explored how veteran third through fifth grade teachers implemented an SEL intervention program using Responsive Classroom practices. Through a focus group, interviews, and observations, the participants described how they implemented the SEL competencies, the changes they made to their classroom practices, and the associated challenges during those processes. Findings from the current study, along with connections to the theoretical framework and past research, have driven the recommendations presented in this chapter.
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APPENDIX A

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS
**Social Emotional Learning Standards**

**Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.**

*Why this goal is important:* Several key sets of skills and attitudes provide a strong foundation for achieving school and life success. One involves knowing your emotions, how to manage them, and ways to express them constructively. This enables one to handle stress, control impulses, and motivate oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles to goal achievement. A related set of skills involves accurately assessing your abilities and interests, building strengths, and making effective use of family, school, and community resources. Finally, it is critical for students to be able to establish and monitor their progress toward achieving academic and personal goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early Elementary</th>
<th>Late Elementary</th>
<th>Middle/Junior High</th>
<th>Early High School</th>
<th>Late High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.</strong></td>
<td>1A.1a. Recognize and accurately label emotions and how they are linked to behavior.</td>
<td>1A.2a. Describe a range of emotions and the situations that cause them.</td>
<td>1A.3a. Analyze factors that create stress or motivate successful performance.</td>
<td>1A.4a. Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision making and responsible behavior.</td>
<td>1A.5a. Evaluate how expressing one’s emotions in different situations affects others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1A.1b. Demonstrate control of impulsive behavior.</td>
<td>1A.2b. Describe and demonstrate ways to express emotions in a socially acceptable manner.</td>
<td>1A.3b. Apply strategies to manage stress and to motivate successful performance.</td>
<td>1A.4b. Generate ways to develop more positive attitudes.</td>
<td>1A.5b. Evaluate how expressing more positive attitudes influences others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.</strong></td>
<td>1B.1a. Identify one’s likes and dislikes, needs and wants, strengths and challenges.</td>
<td>1B.2a. Describe personal skills and interests that one wants to develop.</td>
<td>1B.3a. Analyze how personal qualities influence choices and successes.</td>
<td>1B.4a. Set priorities in building on strengths and identifying areas for improvement.</td>
<td>1B.5a. Implement a plan to build on a strength, meet a need, or address a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1B.2b. Explain how family members, peers, school personnel, and community members can support school success and responsible behavior.</td>
<td>1B.3b. Analyze how making use of school and community supports and opportunities can contribute to school and life success.</td>
<td>1B.4b. Analyze how positive adult role models and support systems contribute to school and life success.</td>
<td>1B.5b. Evaluate how developing interests and filling useful roles support school and life success.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.</strong></td>
<td>1C.1a. Describe why school is important in helping students achieve personal goals.</td>
<td>1C.2a. Describe the steps in setting and working toward goal achievement.</td>
<td>1C.3a. Set a short-term goal and make a plan for achieving it.</td>
<td>1C.4a. Identify strategies to make use of resources and overcome obstacles to achieve goals.</td>
<td>1C.5a. Set a post-secondary goal with action steps, timeframes, and criteria for evaluating achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1C.1b. Identify goals for academic success and classroom behavior.</td>
<td>1C.2b. Monitor progress on achieving a short-term personal goal.</td>
<td>1C.3b. Analyze why one achieved or did not achieve a goal.</td>
<td>1C.4b. Apply strategies to overcome obstacles to goal achievement.</td>
<td>1C.5b. Monitor progress toward achieving a goal, and evaluate one’s performance against criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Emotional Learning Standards

Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

Why this goal is important: Building and maintaining positive relationships with others are central to success in school and life and require the ability to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others, including those different from one’s own. In addition, establishing positive peer, family, and work relationships requires skills in cooperating, communicating respectfully, and constructively resolving conflicts with others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early Elementary</th>
<th>Late Elementary</th>
<th>Middle/ Junior High</th>
<th>Early High School</th>
<th>Late High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.</td>
<td>2A.1a. Recognize that others may experience situations differently from oneself.</td>
<td>2A.2a. Identify verbal, physical, and situational cues that indicate how others may feel.</td>
<td>2A.3a. Predict others’ feelings and perspectives in a variety of situations.</td>
<td>2A.4a. Analyze similarities and differences between one’s own and others’ perspectives.</td>
<td>2A.5a. Demonstrate how to express understanding of those who hold different opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A.1b. Use listening skills to identify the feelings and perspectives of others.</td>
<td>2A.2b. Describe the expressed feelings and perspectives of others.</td>
<td>2A.3b. Analyze how one’s behavior may affect others.</td>
<td>2A.4b. Use conversation skills to understand others’ feelings and perspectives.</td>
<td>2A.5b. Demonstrate ways to express empathy for others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.</td>
<td>2B.1a. Describe the ways that people are similar and different.</td>
<td>2B.2a. Identify differences among and contributions of various social and cultural groups.</td>
<td>2B.3a. Explain how individual, social, and cultural differences may increase vulnerability to bullying and identify ways to address it.</td>
<td>2B.4a. Analyze the origins and negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice.</td>
<td>2B.5a. Evaluate strategies for being respectful of others and opposing stereotyping and prejudice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B.1b. Describe positive qualities in others.</td>
<td>2B.2b. Demonstrate how to work effectively with those who are different from oneself.</td>
<td>2B.3b. Analyze the effects of taking action to oppose bullying based on individual and group differences.</td>
<td>2B.4b. Demonstrate respect for individuals from different social and cultural groups.</td>
<td>2B.5b. Evaluate how advocacy for the rights of others contributes to the common good.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.</td>
<td>2C.1a. Identify ways to work and play well with others.</td>
<td>2C.2a. Describe approaches for making and keeping friends.</td>
<td>2C.3a. Analyze ways to establish positive relationships with others.</td>
<td>2C.4a. Evaluate the effects of requesting support from and providing support to others.</td>
<td>2C.5a. Evaluate the application of communication and social skills in daily interactions with peers, teachers, and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C.1b. Demonstrate appropriate social and classroom behavior.</td>
<td>2C.2b. Analyze ways to work effectively in groups.</td>
<td>2C.3b. Demonstrate cooperation and teamwork to promote group effectiveness.</td>
<td>2C.4b. Evaluate one’s contribution in groups as a member and leader.</td>
<td>2C.5b. Plan, implement, and evaluate participation in a group project.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Social Emotional Learning Standards

**Goal 2 (cont.): Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early Elementary</th>
<th>Late Elementary</th>
<th>Middle/Junior High</th>
<th>Early High School</th>
<th>Late High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.</strong></td>
<td><strong>2D.1a.</strong> Identify problems and conflicts commonly experienced by peers.</td>
<td><strong>2D.2b.</strong> Apply constructive approaches in resolving conflicts.</td>
<td><strong>2D.3a.</strong> Evaluate strategies for preventing and resolving interpersonal problems.</td>
<td><strong>2D.4a.</strong> Analyze how listening and talking accurately help in resolving conflicts.</td>
<td><strong>2D.5a.</strong> Evaluate the effects of using negotiation skills to reach win-win solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2D.1b.</strong> Identify approaches to resolving conflicts constructively.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Social Emotional Learning Standards

Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

Why this goal is important: Promoting one's own health, avoiding risky behaviors, dealing honestly and fairly with others, and contributing to the good of one's classroom, school, family, community, and environment are essential to citizenship in a democratic society. Achieving these outcomes requires an ability to make decisions and solve problems on the basis of accurately defining decisions to be made, generating alternative solutions, anticipating the consequences of each, and evaluating and learning from one's decision making.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early Elementary</th>
<th>Late Elementary</th>
<th>Middle/Junior High</th>
<th>Early High School</th>
<th>Late High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.</td>
<td>3A.1a. Explain why unprovoked acts that hurt others are wrong.</td>
<td>3A.2a. Demonstrate the ability to respect the rights of self and others.</td>
<td>3A.3a. Evaluate how honesty, respect, fairness, and compassion enable one to take the needs of others into account when making decisions.</td>
<td>3A.4a. Demonstrate personal responsibility in making ethical decisions.</td>
<td>3A.5a. Apply ethical reasoning to evaluate societal practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A.1b. Identify social norms and safety considerations that guide behavior.</td>
<td>3A.2b. Demonstrate knowledge of how social norms affect decision making and behavior.</td>
<td>3A.3b. Analyze the reasons for school and societal rules.</td>
<td>3A.4b. Evaluate how social norms and the expectations of authority influence personal decisions and actions.</td>
<td>3A.5b. Examine how the norms of different societies and cultures influence their members' decisions and behaviors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.</td>
<td>3B.1a. Identify a range of decisions that students make at school.</td>
<td>3B.2a. Identify and apply the steps of systematic decision making.</td>
<td>3B.3a. Analyze how decision-making skills improve study habits and academic performance.</td>
<td>3B.4a. Evaluate personal abilities to gather information, generate alternatives, and anticipate the consequences of decisions.</td>
<td>3B.5a. Analyze how present decision making affects college and career choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B.1b. Make positive choices when interacting with classmates.</td>
<td>3B.2b. Generate alternative solutions and evaluate their consequences for a range of academic and social situations.</td>
<td>3B.3b. Evaluate strategies for resisting pressures to engage in unsafe or unethical activities.</td>
<td>3B.4b. Apply decision-making skills to establish responsible social and work relationships.</td>
<td>3B.5b. Evaluate how responsible decision making affects interpersonal and group relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.</td>
<td>3C.1a. Identify and perform roles that contribute to one's classroom.</td>
<td>3C.2a. Identify and perform roles that contribute to the school community.</td>
<td>3C.3a. Evaluate one's participation in efforts to address an identified need.</td>
<td>3C.4a. Plan, implement, and evaluate one's participation in activities and organizations that improve school climate.</td>
<td>3C.5a. Work cooperatively with others to plan, implement, and evaluate a project to meet an identified school need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C.1b. Identify and perform roles that contribute to one's family.</td>
<td>3C.2b. Identify and perform roles that contribute to one's local community.</td>
<td>3C.3b. Evaluate one's participation in efforts to address an identified need in one's local community.</td>
<td>3C.4b. Plan, implement, and evaluate one's participation in a group effort to contribute to one's local community.</td>
<td>3C.5b. Work cooperatively with others to plan, implement, and evaluate a project that addresses an identified need in the broader community.</td>
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APPENDIX B

CLASSROOM PRACTICES SURVEY
Informational Questions

1. Gender?  F    M

2. How many years have you been teaching?
   a. How many years have you been teaching at this school?
   b. How many years have you been in your current grade-level?

3. What grade do you currently teach?
   a. Have you been teaching this grade since the implementation of the Responsive Classroom?
   b. If no, what other grades have you taught with the program?

4. Are you currently tenured?
   Y    N

Classroom Practices Survey

5. In the morning, we have a class meeting where we sit in a circle facing one another.

   Not at All  A little bit  Moderately  Very  Extremely
   Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic

6. I create the rules and expectations for the class. (Reversal item)

   Not at All  A little bit  Moderately  Very  Extremely
   Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic

7. When a rule is introduced, I ask students to model what following the rule looks like (e.g., role play).

   Not at All  A little bit  Moderately  Very  Extremely
   Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic

8. I tell students what they should be doing when they are not following the rules (e.g., “Carlos, put away the scissors and return to your seat”).

   Not at All  A little bit  Moderately  Very  Extremely
   Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic  Characteristic
9. I have standard disciplinary consequences that apply to all students (e.g., name and checks on the blackboard where name is warning 1 check is loss of 5 minutes recess). (Reversal item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
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10. I provide students a set of choices about what kind of work to do, how to do the work, or both (e.g., if we’re studying marine biology, students choose an animal to research and/or choose how to show what they’ve learned).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
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</table>

11. When my students are working on activities of their own choosing, I have structures in place that assist them in planning their activity.

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<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
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</table>

12. When introducing new materials, I ask students to demonstrate ideas for how to use and care for the materials.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
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<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
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13. I communicate one-on-one with more than half of my students’ parents before the first parent-teacher conference (e.g., this does not include general class notes/letters or open houses).

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<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
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14. I use “time out” or “take a break” as a way to help students regain control (e.g., “Timmy, I see you are having some trouble not talking. Go to time-out until you can control your talking.”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tr>
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</table>

15. Would you be willing to participate in an in-depth study about SEL implementation?

<p>| Y | N |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Teacher (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
<th>Q9</th>
<th>Q10</th>
<th>Q11</th>
<th>Q12</th>
<th>Q13</th>
<th>Q14</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Mrs. Lawson</td>
<td>Moderate Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Gust</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Doyle</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
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<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Carlson</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>A Little Bit Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Mrs. Price</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Mangan</td>
<td>Moderately Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Not At All Characteristic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Fannott</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
<td>Extremely Characteristic</td>
<td>Very Characteristic</td>
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APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS
1. Tell me about your initial training for implementation of the Responsive Classroom program. RQ1

2. What other formal training have you received? RQ1

3. Is there an aspect of the program that you feel you need more training? RQ3

4. Is there a resource that you use for self-directed learning or materials to use with your students? RQ1

5. What changes have you made to your classroom practices to support the CASEL competencies (Self-awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making) RQ2

6. In what ways do you feel that the changes you have made to your daily routines help to support the CASEL competencies? (Self-awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making) RQ2

7. What do you do to prepare for SEL activities? RQ1

8. What challenges do you face when preparing for the SEL activities? RQ3

9. Is there a specific resource you go to when planning? RQ2

10. Do you have difficulty finding appropriate activities? RQ3

11. In terms of time and resources, what is the biggest challenge to implementing the SEL practices in your classroom? RQ3

12. Review the 10 Responsive Classroom practices. Which three do you feel you do the most in your classroom? RQ2

13. What is the biggest change to your classroom practice that you have had to make since implementing the Responsive Classroom? RQ2

14. Are there any that you don’t use? Why? RQ3

15. Were there any of the 10 Responsive Classroom practices that you previously did with your students? RQ1
16. Were there any activities that you did with your students that are not part of the 10 practices that you feel should be added? RQ1

17. Are there any other changes to your daily routines you have made since implementing the program? RQ2

18. Is there anything else you would like to add?

19. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX E

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROMPTS – INTERVIEW 1
1. What grade do you currently teach?
2. Can you tell me about your reasons for going into the teaching profession?
3. Starting with your student teaching experience, what grade levels have you taught and for how many years?
4. What is your teaching philosophy?
5. Has your philosophy changed since implementing the Responsive Classroom? RQ2
6. Thinking back to your experience as a student, do you recall a teacher who made an impression on you? Do you remember them using SEL techniques?
7. In what ways do you think it is most important for your students to develop socially?
8. In what ways do you think it is most important for your students to develop emotionally?
9. What problems do you believe are of most concern to your students?
10. Do you feel that the Responsive Classroom program addresses their needs?
11. Which classroom practice(s) best helps them solve those problems?
12. Are there parts of the Responsive Classroom program that were previously part of your classroom practices?
13. Prior to starting the Responsive Classroom program, what kinds of activities did you do with your students to promote Social Emotional Learning? Do you still do them?
14. How have you incorporated the new SEL practices into your classroom routines? RQ1
15. What changes did you make to your classroom practices to implement the Responsive Classroom? RQ2
16. Overall, what were the greatest challenges you faced when first implementing the program? RQ3
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

18. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX F

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROMPTS – INTERVIEW 2
1. Since the start of implementation of the Responsive Classroom, how have you incorporated the SEL practices into your classroom environment? RQ1

2. Let’s review the 10 classroom practices from the Responsive Classroom program and discuss the changes you made to your classroom practices. We will also discuss the challenges you faced when implementing each. RQ2 and RQ3

   a. Morning meeting
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   b. Rule creation
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   c. Interactive modeling
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   d. Positive teacher language
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   e. Logical consequences
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   f. Academic choice
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   g. Guided discovery
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   h. Classroom organization
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   i. Working with families
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges
   j. Collaborative problem solving
      i. Changes
      ii. Challenges

3. What is the biggest change you have had to make to your classroom practices since implementing the Responsive Classroom? RQ2
4. What is the biggest challenge you have faced while implementing the Responsive Classroom? RQ3

5. Is there anything that you would like me to look for during the classroom observation?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

7. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX G

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROMPTS – INTERVIEW 3
1. Is there anything that you would like to discuss from the first two interviews?

2. Now I’d like to move on to the observation. I would like to go through the 10 Responsive Classroom practices, and have you recall a time during the observation when you utilized the practice. If you didn’t use it during the observation, could you think of a time when you used the practice and explain the situation? RQ1

a. Morning meeting
   i. Could you describe the morning meeting?
   ii. How do you think the morning meeting went?
   iii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

b. Classroom rules
   i. Describe a time during the observation when you needed to enforce the classroom rules. If you did not use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

c. Interactive modeling
   i. Describe a time in your morning meeting when you did interactive modeling. If you did not use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

d. Positive teacher language
   i. Describe a time in your morning meeting when you did interactive modeling. If you did not use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

e. Logical Consequences
   i. Describe a time during the interview when you responded to a student’s behavior with logical consequences. If you did not have to use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?
f. Academic Choice
   i. Describe a time in your morning meeting when you provided academic choice. If you did not use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

g. Guided Discovery
   i. Describe a time in your morning meeting when you utilized guided discovery. If you did not use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

h. Classroom organization
   i. Describe how you organize your class to support SEL.
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

i. Working with families
   i. Describe how you communicate with parents.
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

j. Collaborative Problem Solving
   i. Describe a time in your morning meeting when you utilized collaborative problem solving. If you did not use this practice during the observation, could you think of a time that you did and explain the situation?
   ii. Do you feel that this classroom practice is an effective part of the program?

3. Are there any practices that you use with your class that are not part of the Responsive Classroom program?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

5. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX H

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
MORNING MEETING
Descriptive Notes: Reflective Notes:

RULE CREATION
Descriptive Notes: Reflective Notes:

INTERACTIVE MODELING
Descriptive Notes: Reflective Notes:

POSITIVE TEACHER LANGUAGE
Descriptive Notes: Reflective Notes:
LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES
Descriptive Notes:                      Reflective Notes:

ACADEMIC CHOICE
Descriptive Notes:                      Reflective Notes:

GUIDED DISCOVERY
Descriptive Notes:                      Reflective Notes:

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION
Descriptive Notes:                      Reflective Notes:

WORKING WITH FAMILIES
Descriptive Notes:                      Reflective Notes:

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING
Descriptive Notes:                      Reflective Notes:
APPENDIX I

EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATION NOTES
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Grade level: 4  Date: 04/22/22
Name: Mrs. Mangan  Start Time: 9:00 am
Activity: Morning Meeting  End Time: 9:22 am

Number of Students: 24

The classroom was set up with student desks facing the front of the room. A Smartboard is at the front of the room. A PowerPoint presentation was projected on the screen. Two aides were in the room to assist with special education students. One was in the front of the class, and one was in the back. Student desks were in pairs. There was a kidney table in the back of the classroom with chairs surrounding it. The walls were covered in brightly colored posters and reference materials. The teacher’s desk was off to the side with a computer. Around the room were various storage areas for materials to be used throughout the day.

MORNING MEETING

Descriptive Notes:
- PowerPoint to lead the discussion.
- Sections related to SEL.
- There were several sections for students to respond to with their personal opinions and just for fun.
- Some students had aides to help with responses.

Reflective Notes:
- I like how she is circulating the room giving students individual help and encouragement.
- She always has a calm voice.
- The teacher is always moving.
- She is smiling at students.
- She seems to enjoy herself.
- Students engaged all the time.

RULE CREATION

Descriptive Notes:
- Set of rules on a poster in the front of the room.
- The teacher counted down from 3 to get the student’s attention.

Reflective Notes:
- Students followed rules: Raising hands, getting materials, Low voice levels, stopping peer discussions and returning to the teacher’s attention, Quick and quiet movement of student to their next class.
- Her classroom management is great.
### INTERACTIVE MODELING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher started by clapping her hands and several students responded with the same clapping pattern. This brought the attention of the students to the teacher. Some students continued to work at their desks with the help of aides.</td>
<td>The teacher’s voice was always at a level that was enough to be heard but was not shouting. The students mirrored this level when responding.</td>
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### POSITIVE TEACHER LANGUAGE

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<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>She circulated and joined several conversations. One student did not have a complete response written down, and the teacher instructed him to say what he was going to write. The teacher reminds the students to return to their desks when they are finished putting their response on the board.</td>
<td>Enthusiastic comments Smiles to students Non-verbal encouragement – thumbs up The teacher used location control to help redirect a student back to the classroom discussion.</td>
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### LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

<table>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher tapped on a student’s shoulder to gain her attention and redirect her to the whole class discussion.</td>
<td>Aides were helping special ed students, but I could not hear if there were behavior issues. There were no major behavior issues with the regular ed students during the meeting.</td>
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### ACADEMIC CHOICE

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<td>Students were encouraged to write their opinions on their sticky notes. An option of drawing a picture was also given. Some shared with the class. She asked the students to discuss their responses with the student sitting next to them. She circulated and joined several conversations.</td>
<td>The poll question gave the students an opportunity to share their choices. I like how everyone has a chance to talk with someone even though it is not sharing with the whole class. There were not third and fourth choice on the PowerPoint, but the students had that as a response. I wonder why. If some students had difficulty writing, oral responses were ok.</td>
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### GUIDED DISCOVERY

**Descriptive Notes:**

During the meeting, the teacher posed several open-ended questions for the student to respond to.

**Reflective Notes:**

- Encouraging statements were given while the students wrote their responses.
- Open ended questions help students to think about their responses.
- Good wait time was given so students had time to think about responses.
- Students had lots of choices.
- No response was viewed as wrong.

---

### CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

**Descriptive Notes:**

The classroom was set up with materials easily accessible.
Students were in pairs to facilitate sharing ideas.
Special ed students were grouped so aides could help them without disrupting the other students.

**Reflective Notes:**

- Students knew where to place their sticky notes and moved about the room quietly.
- Students were close enough to others so they could share with their partner without disturbing others.

---

### WORKING WITH FAMILIES

**Descriptive Notes:**

Not observed.

**Reflective Notes:**

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### COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

**Descriptive Notes:**

Not observed.

**Reflective Notes:**

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