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Social Emotional Learning Policy and Its Implementation in One School District in British Columbia

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Abstract

Social-emotional learning (SEL), is an umbrella term that refers to students' "acquisition of skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively" ("What is SEL", 2018). It has gained popularity in North America over the past two decades as schools see the need to educate students both socially and emotionally to promote responsible citizenship and personal awareness. Despite increasing belief in the importance of SEL, its implementation is still widely inconsistent (Cohen), 2006). Thus, the purpose of this research was to examine SEL as it is implemented in one particular school district in the province of British Columbia, Canada. The Beaver School District, in the province of British Columbia (BC), provided the context for this study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and protect district identification, the school district will be called the Beaver School District from here on for the remainder of this study.

This study specifically looked at how SEL has been implemented, the challenges, the practices, and the strategies used by schools to put this into practice, and why there is an inconsistency in how SEL is implemented throughout the district. . Vice-principals and principals were asked to share their feelings, impressions, and experiences on the implementation of SEL in the district. A qualitative exploratory single-case study approach was used along with a 2-level coding process to identify emerging themes and patterns. Some of the findings of this study include: specifically, how SEL is being implemented in the Beaver School District, the challenges experienced in implementation, the consistency in implementation throughout the district, and the role of principals and vice-principals in implementation. Note that all findings

are drawn solely off the perception of school-based principals and vice-principals expressed

through semi-structured interviews.

The results of this study will be shared with teachers during a professional development

session and with principals at one of their monthly district meetings. It is expected that this

study will aid in improving the district's strategies for SEL implementation as it continues on in

the district.

Keywords

School Leadership, Educational Leadership, Policy Implementation, Social Emotional Learning,

British Columbia School District, Principals, Vice-Principals

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Thank you to my colleagues and friends who have encouraged me along the way and have been a sound board for all my jumbled thoughts. You taking the time to discuss, challenge and at times, just listen, did not go unnoticed.

I would also like to thank the fifteen principals and vice-principals who participated in this study for taking the time in June, the busiest time of the school year, to meet with me and share their thoughts. I learned something new from each and every conversation and was deeply encouraged by the devotion you all have to supporting your staff and students.

Lastly, to my family. Thank you to my mom and dad who have always pushed me to strive for more and believed in my academic abilities. I dedicate this to you both. To my husband, Lucas, and our two sons, thank you for your continued understanding through the last four years and being patient with a wife and mom who was "absent" for long chunks of time. You three are my inspiration and my reason for everything.

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Chapter 1

The Beaver School District in British Columbia (BC) is one of the leading districts in BC

for SEL implementation ("Principles for Social", 2018). On the Beaver Schools Learning

website (2018) it states SEL as one of the priority practices for the district. A priority practice as

defined by the district is an educational practice that is prioritized by the district for all staff and

students ("Principles for Social", 2018). In 2012, the district introduced Social Emotional

Learning (SEL) as one of the five priority practices. Briefly, the Collaborative for Academic,

Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), states that SEL is the acquisition of skills to increase

self-awareness and social responsibility (2018). CASEL is the leading international organization

on promoting SEL. The organization emphasizes that SEL is not a program, but it is a skill, a

way of being that is imperative to the overall well-being of students.

With this initiative, the Beaver district desired to not just educate students' minds, but

also their "hearts" by teaching students the skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions,

develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships,

and handle challenging situations effectively ("What is SEL", 2018). However, five years after

formally starting this initiative, the implementation of SEL in the district is still inconsistent:

some schools have incorporated SEL into their school culture and focus on the informal day to

day integration of SEL, while others have chosen to adopt specific programs which are taught

only at specific times of the day, and some have experienced difficulties implementing SEL on

any level within their schools.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how SEL is being implemented in schools in

the district, as well as to discover any challenges and obstacles in implementation as reported by

principals and vice-principals.

Implementation refers to the process by which an intervention is put into practice (Lendrum & Humphrey, 2012). As Fisher, Smith, Finney, and Pinder (2014) note, "The bridge between a promising idea and the impact on students is implementation (p. 31). In many domains, such as education and health, discussions around implementation must take place in order to evaluate the areas of success and improvement of a new initiative. Implementation is such a critical and complex part to the success of new initiatives that when problems arise in implementation, the objectives of the initiative may not be achieved (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Consequently, stakeholders cannot make appropriate inferences about program effectiveness without integrating implementation data. Without discussions around implementation, systems will be making inappropriate conclusions about educational or developmental programs (Fisher et al., 2014).

Lendrum and Humphrey (2012) argue that "there is a need for school districts to study implementation processes of new ideas and initiatives introduced into schools " (p. 637). Studying the implementation process is critical for the analysis of key program components: what works and what does not. This enables links to be made between the outcomes achieved and the theory of the program, as well as for establishing the program's internal validity. Internal validity in educational research evaluates the causal relationship, essentially that the program itself actually caused the outcomes and were not caused by other outside factors (Lendrum & Humphrey, 2012). In this specific context, internal validity would mean that any successes and failures in SEL are linked to how it is implemented.

One aspect that is potentially critical to understanding the implementation of new policies, reforms or practices, is school leadership. Research findings point to the decisive impact of school principals on the execution of new educational practices (Hadjithoma-Garstka, 2011).

Generally, the principal is characterized as the linchpin for success in any school change

initiative. No matter the policy, because principals' management of their schools and staff differ

from one school to another, studies link leadership to implementation (Hadjithoma-Garstka,

2011).

Context of the Problem

The Beaver School District is one of the largest and fastest growing districts in British

Columbia ("K-12 Schools", 2018).

Although the first conversations with regards to SEL took place in 2011, it was in 2012

that the district created a position titled SEL coordinator. Over the course of 2012-2013, the SEL

Coordinator, in conjunction with the district, began to have conversations with principals and

vice-principals about the importance of SEL and the current research in support of SEL. SEL

became one of five district priority practices along with: curriculum design, quality assessment,

instructional strategies, and communicating student learning ("Learning by Design", 2018). The

priority practices were created as key aspects of school development in order to support the

district's purpose of utilizing an inquiry-based school planning process ("Learning by Design",

2018. The priority practices are also aligned with the BC Ministry of Education's Core

Competencies, which include personal awareness and responsibility, and social responsibility.

The district quotes the meta-analysis conducted out of the University of Illinois as reason

for the district to incorporate SEL as a priority practice. This study conducted by Durlak,

Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) showed that SEL positively affected kids

learning. On the Beaver Schools Learning website it states, "We assume that kids come to school

equipped socially and emotionally, with these skills, but SEL needs to be explicitly taught to

kids. Relationships are key to learning" ("Principles for Social" 2018).

Implementing SEL in the Beaver School District

BC curriculum has recently made a significant push towards promoting self-regulation, especially through the new provincial curriculum. Thus, it was necessary to share current research with principals and vice-principals and be clear about what SEL is and what it is not, in order to motivate principals all throughout the district to adopt the initiative. For starters, it is important to note that SEL is a theory and a way of being, and is not a program. However, SEL programs are formed to help with the teaching and implementation of SEL. And while the benefits of SEL are documented in the literature, there is no consensus on how SEL benefits specific demographics. For example, some believe that students who have behaviour challenges would be the target group for SEL (Greenberg, Bierman, Cole & Dodge, 2010), but there is an equal amount of literature which supports the notion that SEL is beneficial for all students regardless of demographics or behaviour tendencies.

It should be noted that SEL has a wide-scope focus that is integrated into the long-term plans and goals of many schools, regardless of demographics or social status. In fact, one study by Schonert-Reichl and Hymel (2007) which compared the effects SEL teaching had on one group from a low-income area versus a second group from an affluent area, noted that the benefits and efficacy of SEL were consistent between the two groups. In fact, the students from the affluent area actually showing a more positive response to SEL.

As was shared in professional development sessions with the researcher of this study, in order to promote implementation, a SEL coordinator position, as well as a SEL team, were created. The team includes 4 full-time SEL teachers whose primary role is to collaborate, co-facilitate and co-teach with classroom teachers, not to teach on behalf of the teachers. In this way, the SEL team's goal is to build capacity in schools. The following are the strategies and

approaches used to implement SEL and encourage schools to teach SEL: professional

development for principals and teachers, enquiry groups throughout various schools, and

connecting teachers and principals with research and information on various programs such as

Mind Up or Second Step, which are two of the more popular programs chosen by teachers in

aiding SEL implementation. These programs will be described in both chapters two and four.

However, implementing SEL is largely voluntary in the Beaver School District, despite it

being a priority practice in connection with the BC Ministry of Education's Core Competencies.

As such, SEL is not mandated, as it is in the United States ("Federal Policy", 2018), and has no

definite implementation "dos and don'ts". Furthermore, the absence of guidelines on

implementation leads to individual principals and vice-principals varying interpretations of what

implementation looks like, according to the context of each of their schools.

Thus, because SEL implementation in the school district is still in its early stages, the

school district could benefit from a qualitative exploration of the implementation process as there

is no such research on this initiative at its current stage. Some schools promote SEL as a whole-

school approach with every classroom taking part in single or multiple programs in order to

explicitly teach the five components of SEL. Other schools leave SEL as an option only for those

interested in it. And still other schools choose not to engage in any sort of explicit teaching of

SEL. As mentioned, SEL is voluntary and while the SEL team strives to be a presence in every

school, the SEL coordinator reports that there are some schools she visits regularly, and still

others she has never visited in her five years. This is not to say that SEL is not necessarily being

implemented in these schools, but it does mean there are inconsistencies. It is the inconsistencies

in the implementation of this initiative that indicates that SEL varies widely across the district..

The problem of practice lies within an investigation of the inconsistencies in relation to new

initiatives and leadership.

Purpose of Study

Although SEL is included as one of the district's five priority practices implementation is

still widely inconsistent. This study examined the perceptions that vice-principals and principals

had regarding SEL implementation. The participant group consisted primarily of elementary

principals plus a few elementary vice-principals. The investigation focused on the perceived

obstacles and challenges that existed in the successful implementation of SEL in Beaver District

Schools. The primary motivation behind this study was to offer insights for district school

leaders, vice-principals and principals, coordinators and superintendents interested in SEL and its

current status in the district. The hope is that the insights from this study will give them tools and

information to consider and learn from what has been done so far and to improve the

implementation of embedding SEL into students' everyday lives.

Research Questions

The primary research question addressed, is:

- How has SEL been implemented in the Beaver School District?

Sub questions that are asked are:

(1) What have been the challenges at the school level implementing SEL?

(2) Is SEL implemented the same way across the district why or why not?

(3) How do principals and vice-principals view their role in implementing SEL?

This study was conducted based on the assumption that the Beaver School District's

current implementation of SEL is inconsistent and varies in nature. This assumption is reported

by the researcher who is an employee of the district, in her own observations, professional

development sessions, and informal conversations with colleagues.. Thus, this study will be

focused on discovering any reasons behind the inconsistency of SEL implementation. The hope

is that at the end of this study, more knowledge will be contributed to the field of SEL research,

particularly surrounding SEL implementation.

Key Terms

  Educator refers to teachers, administrators, district leadership or anyone who has direct

or indirect teaching influence over students.

  Teacher refers to classroom teachers, student service teachers, social-emotional learning

teachers who have direct contact with students.

  Principal refers to school-based administration who oversee and manage teachers and

school-based programs. Principals may also help with implementation of initiatives.

  Vice-principal refers to school-based administration who also help to oversee and

manage teachers and school-based programs. Often, vice-principals play a major role in

implementation of initiatives.

  District-based principal refers to district-based administration who oversee a certain

department in the district such as education services or counselling.

  Counsellors and school psychologists refer to school-based professionals who are

responsible for monitoring the social-emotional well-being of children at the school.

  SEL coordinator refers to a district-based individual who oversees a team of counsellors

and teachers who travel to various schools to teach SEL.

  School-based leader refers to a principal or vice-principal of any particular school.

  Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the term used to describe the educating of students'

social and emotional intelligence. The five areas that define SEL are: self-awareness, self-

management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL,

2003).

Education Policy is a set of rules, guidelines or principles that help regulate education

systems.

Implementation is taking an initiative or idea and putting it into practice.

Initiative is an act, strategy or process intended to resolve or improve a situation. It is

thought of as a fresh approach to something.

Priority Practice is an educational best-practice that the Beaver School District

encourages educators to embed into their teaching practices.

Core Competencies, as defined by the BC Ministry of Education, are sets of intellectual,

personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to

engage in deep learning and life-long learning.

Positionality

In my day to day job as a social-development and integration support teacher, I work with

students who have intensive behaviour challenges and one of the areas I really focus on with

them is social-emotional learning. As well, working in an inner-city school, it's clear that social-

emotional learning is a school-wide focus and goal, not just for our school, but for the

surrounding underprivileged area.

The Beaver school district explicitly states that SEL is a district wide priority practice

that is to be implemented throughout and to all corners of the district. So as SEL continued to be

taught, I started to notice and wonder about the variation of implementation and if

implementation made a difference in effectiveness. And after ten years of teaching, I knew that

SEL was being implemented, but I knew that there was a wide array of challenging factors, up to

and including leadership factors.

As a teacher of the Beaver School District, I played a dual role as a researcher of the

study and a practicing colleague for the participants in the study. Specifically, as a non-enrolling

teacher, I have been able to work with and collaborate with numerous teachers across the district

on SEL implementation. Furthermore, the countless informal conversations I have had with

colleagues have allowed me to entrench myself in self-reflection and understanding of the

various perspectives when it comes to SEL implementation and the role school-based leadership

plays in the implementation.

When I first began this study, I entered as a teacher of the district with my own biases,

judgments, values, morals and ethical principles. One of the underlying concerns of qualitative

research is that as the researcher I would look for certain results that would affirm my own

hypotheses and judgments (Patton, 2015). To mitigate these factors, I focused on being reflexive

about my own thoughts and how I was forming my own thoughts as a researcher versus a teacher

in my role.

Assumptions

Based on the following literature review, the first assumption is that people have a

general understanding of what SEL is. The second assumption is that there is a need to examine

SEL implementation in the Beaver district, specifically with regards to any challenges educators

and administrators experience with the adoption of this initiative. This is justified by the

inconsistences observed in the current implementation of SEL and the assumption that a more

consistent implementation process would help to progress the initiative. Another assumption in

this study is that educational leaders in this context play a role in implementation of new

initiatives. Finally, it is assumed that the district will likely continue to implement this initiative

with no dramatic changes in the organization of the district. This is to say that the district will

continue to value SEL and implement it according to the continuing nature of the district SEL

team without a dramatic change in the programs already being run.

Challenges and Limitations

Since this study will collect data from semi-structured interviews, there could be a

substantial amount of information collected. In an interview process, participants speak at free

will and are not capped on the amount of information they divulge or what they divulge,

therefore it can be difficult to sift through lengthy interviews and decipher which information to

include in analysis and which to discard. Although data collection and analysis are both time-

consuming in nature, cutting corners on either of these facets is likely to weaken the value and

credibility of any findings produced, especially since the interpretation of all data is left up to the

researcher, which may create bias (Mills & Gay, 2016). The researcher may interpret words in a

manner, which may not be completely accurate of what the speaker was aiming to convey. All

analysis and interpretation are subjective to the researcher. Also, often there are varying

interpretations and understandings of words, definitions, concepts and theories, that much of

what is reported is subjective. A number of credibility enhancing measures, such as member

checking and triangulation will be taken to decrease the influence of subjective bias in the

analysis.

More specifically related to the research itself, there may be challenges in gathering a

large enough sample size to interview. Principals and vice-principals are very pressed for time as

they are continuously occupied managing their school. Amongst this group, there are also

varying interpretations and understandings of SEL and its implementation. Lastly, some

principals and vice-principals may not be as familiar with SEL as others. Another challenge of

this study is formulating the right set of interview questions, which most accurately answer the

research questions and help gather the most in-depth information. Open-ended questions, like the

ones created for the semi-structured interview, allow room for the participants to express as

much as possible, without straying widely off topic. Finally, because all data gathered are based

on experiences and opinion of participants, the results may be more reflective of specific settings

and not all school settings.

Outline of this Dissertation

The following is an outline of this dissertation:

Chapter 1. Chapter one of this dissertation outlines the context of the research

conducted, including a description of the school district and its current status on SEL

implementation. Key terms and the purpose of the study are also stated, as well as, the primary

and secondary research questions this study is seeking to answer. Positionality of the researcher,

any challenges and assumptions are also included in the chapter to further paint a thorough

picture of the study in tow.

Chapter 2. Chapter two of this dissertation is the literature review. It reviews what has

already been written in the field on the topic of SEL implementation and how it has been

implemented. The literature review also includes policy work with regards to leadership and

specifically policy implementation. The literature cited supports the theoretical argument being

made.

Chapter 3. Chapter three of this dissertation describes the conceptual and theoretical

framework. The theoretical framework provides a rationale for the predictions about the

relationships among variables of a research study. The first of the framework is based on Adams

(2015) policy explaining, framing and forming.. The second part of the chapter focuses on

perspectives of leadership that frame the role of the principal and vice-principal in policy

implementation.

Chapter 4. Chapter four of this dissertation describes the methodology. It outlines the

context, the participants, the measure, the design and procedures. It goes over how data was

collected and the process of the semi-structured face-to-face interviews. I discuss the

trustworthiness of the research context and the triangulation of data.

Chapter 5. Chapter five of this dissertation outlines the results and the findings of the

research. The findings are described in tables and direct quotes and divided into themes which

answer the research questions.

Chapter 6. Chapter six of this dissertation summarizes the study and its findings and

discusses the results interpreted in light of the research questions, literature review and

theoretical framework.

Chapter 7. Finally, the last chapter of this dissertation summarizes the thesis, the

findings It also indicates areas of further research and practice and the limitations of the study.

The references and appendices can be found at the end following chapter seven.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

SEL Implementation

SEL has increasingly gained popularity in the last two decades since Daniel Goleman's book, "Emotional Intelligence" (1995) first introduced the idea of what is termed emotional intelligence (EQ). The limited number of replicated studies regarding SEL, tempers with belief that SEL is indeed of value to children. However, thorough examination of SEL program impacts, reveals findings which can be narrowed down to two major themes: (1) there are several roadblocks to why SEL policy implementation has proven to be challenging and inconsistent, and (2) leadership is intrinsically linked to SEL implementation.

A Brief review of the effects of SEL

The following section provides an insight into the effects of SEL. Although the study is about leadership and SEL implementation, it is important to share the effects of SEL as it is the reason behind the increasing amount of SEL research and its popularity in schools. It is important to note that SEL is not simply a behaviour intervention program (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). The term SEL refers to a set of skills which affects the entire person, not for those who have a behaviour diagnosis.

Despite this fact, some believe SEL is a program designed for behaviour intervention, specifically targeting those students with challenging behaviours (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007), and it is found that SEL programming can be an effective intervention strategy for this designated group. For example, the results of one longitudinal study based out of three U.S. cities showed that when a universal SEL program was implemented over the three primary years with the same group of students, there was significant decrease in aggressive and anti-social

behaviour, especially in boys (Greenberg, Bierman, Cole & Dodge, 2010). In this study, a

universal social-emotional program, the Fast Track PATHS curriculum, was implemented with

the same groups of students as they progressed from grades 1-3. Data was collected and

measured initially in the fall of first grade and then every spring of each grade year. Teachers

were interviewed about each child, in addition to peer sociometric nominations (Greenberg et al.,

2010). The results of this universal-intervention model at the end of third grade provide evidence

of the model's effectiveness both for promoting social competence and for reducing aggressive

behaviour problems.

In another study, Wong, Li-Tsang and Siu (2014) examined the effects of a SEL

program, based on a previous program called "Strong Kids", on a total of 27 participants in

grades 1-3. The results showed a significant decrease in problem behaviours on the participants

in comparison to the control group. Espelage, Rose and Polanin (2015) conducted a similar study

in where a 3-year randomized clinical trial of Second Step was implemented to sixth to eight

graders. The results showed that bullying perpetration significantly decreased with the

implementation of a SEL program in the participant group compared to the control group over

the 3-year period.

However, as mentioned earlier, SEL is not just a behaviour intervention program. Its

effects expand to the wider student population, and not just those deemed "behaviour children"

(Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). A significant study which supports this further is a meta-

analysis of studies conducted by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki and Schellinger (2011), which

included, 213 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through

high school students. It should be noted that the criteria for inclusion were: studies written in

English, emphasized one or more SEL skills, targeted students between the ages of 5 and 18, and

included a control group. The authors also did not include studies that targeted students who had

pre-existing behavioural, emotional or academic problems. The results of this major meta-

analysis showed that there was significant improvement in social and emotional skills, attitudes,

behaviour and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement.

In British Columbia, similar results have been found. In one study by Oberle, Schonert-

Reichl, Hertzman, and Zumbo (2014) conducted at the University of British Columbia (UBC),

the association between social and emotional competence (SEC), another widely recognized term

for SEL, and academic achievement in early adolescence was examined. Self-and teacher-

reported indicators of SEC were given to 461 grade six students. The same group of students

were given a standardized achievement test in math and reading in grade seven. Teacher-reported

SEC in sixth grade was found to be a significant indicator of seventh grade academic

achievement in both math and reading. Self-reports showed that SEC was a significant indicator

in reading for boys.

Two other studies conducted at UBC separately measured the effects of two SEL

programs: Mindfulness (ME) and Roots of Empathy. In the first study, Schonert-Reichl and

Lawlor (2010), compared a control group and ME intervention group of 246 fourth to seventh

graders. The results showed that that those who participated in the ME program, compared to

those who did not, showed significant increases in optimism, social-competent behaviours and

self-concept. Teachers also indicated that the ME program was easy to integrate into their

classrooms. The second study compared 585 fourth to seventh graders as well. The results

showed that, compared to the control group, the experimental group showed significant

improvement in understanding infant distress, prosocial behaviours and proactive and relational

aggression (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait and Hertzman, 2012).

Challenges related to the implementation of SEL

Now that the effects of SEL have been reviewed, the following section outlines the

challenges in implementing SEL. Despite its positive effects, school boards, and schools alike,

have found it and do find it difficult to incorporate SEL throughout the school day. Some of the

challenges which are discussed in this section are: (1) unrealistic expectations, (2) learning

issues, (3) context, and (4) assessment of SEL.

Unrealistic expectations. One of the resounding areas of conflict in SEL implementation

has been the unrealistic expectations SEL programs place on schools. Many teachers, vice-

principals, and principals argue there is no time in the school day to accommodate the activities

required by SEL (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum & Schuyler, 2000). These activities often include:

a 30-minute teaching lesson, a partner or group role play, individual journaling, a discussion

time, and all the time preparing props and the lesson itself. With so many policy mandates to

cover more and more curriculum every year, how can teachers possibly fit a SEL program into

an already overcrowded teaching schedule? Elias et al. (2000) report that some teachers feel that

because school success is still being measured in terms of academic achievement, SEL programs

would take time away from academics, especially at the high-school level. While this argument

is not unreasonable, in a more conservative or neoliberal school environment where performance

is largely hung upon academic proficiency, Durlak et al.'s (2011) study, mentioned above,

showed that SEL implementation yielded higher academic achievement.

In Hoffman's (2009) study, educators claimed that there are already a variety of other

programs like DARE, or AIDS prevention, and Pink Shirt Day against bullying, which are just as

important and touch on the same concepts as a SEL program, so it seems unrealistic to set a

separate time just for SEL. Because some feel that SEL is just a temporary trend, they do not

want to spend hours of their time and thousands of dollars on costly resources which many

schools do not have the budget for (Hoffman, 2009).

Elias et al. (2000) noted that even if SEL is to be implemented and there is money for

resources, educators stress the need to be realistic about classroom makeup. In their study, Elias

et al. (2000) reported that some teachers claim there are just some students who will not

"change" even with programs like these because students' problems these days are too intense

and some just will not reap the benefits of SEL. "Some kids just won't 'get it' - then what will we

do?" (Elias et al., 2000, p. 260). They also argued that when SEL is being explicitly taught in a

more fixed or fabricated environment, it does not allow for students to experience the more

natural contexts of the trials that happen from day to day (Elias et al., 2000). However, in a

similar study conducted by Elias, Zins, Graczyk and Weissberg (2003) they found that even

those students who seemingly would not reap the full benefits of the program, experienced some

amount of success in regulating their emotions even if it did not take place in more natural

contexts.

Elias et al. (2003) noted that in locations where SEL implementation has been associated

with significant improvement in students' social behaviour, parental involvement has been found

to be imperative. In this study, teachers feel that one size cannot fit all because of the varying

contexts of families and the inevitable hardship of poverty (Winton, 2013). However, Elias et al.

(2003) noted in their study that the improvement in students' social behaviour at school,

encouraged parents to try similar strategies at home, which in turn helped to improve the child-

parent relationship.

Cohen (2006) argued that teachers in his study felt that schools, especially public ones,

should not be emphasizing any set of values on what is wrong and right and how students should

and should not feel or respond to life's situations. The teachers in this study feel it is a violation

of rights and it may compromise family privacy. "It's none of our business", one teacher states.

However, Cohen (2006) argued, schools have a role to play in democratic societies. In his view,

teachers have a responsibility to their students to instill some common morality and sense of

right versus wrong, but more importantly, to build resiliency in students who live under

disadvantageous situations

Learning issues. Another theme that emerged from the literature is the different levels of

preparation and learning the teachers and administrators involved in SEL implementation have to

undertake.

Elias et al. (2000) reported that some teachers feel they are not equipped to handle

sensitive issues and that this falls under the responsibility of school counsellors and

psychologists. In a study conducted by Freeman, Wertheim and Trinder (2014), 12 schools were

randomly assigned to either a full or part-time intervention training over an 18-month period.

Post-program, it was found that the teachers who participated in the full-time intervention

training, had a greater understanding of conflict resolution, teaching SEL and implementing

SEL. These schools also engaged in whole-school changes in policy and practice regarding pro-

social behaviour. These findings suggest that providing sufficient professional development and

support is instrumental in policy implementation efforts (Freeman et al., 2014).

In this same study, administrators were required to receive training and hold an

imperative role during the 18-month period. Initially, administrators felt a strain on time as they

viewed the training as one more thing they had to undertake in an already over packed schedule.

However, it was thought that the involvement of leaders in the core team would ensure that

someone in authority could take sustained responsibility for implementing the initiative. One

principal in the study shared that his involvement in the program was only possible because of

shared leadership. He felt that adopting a more supportive role made it easier for him to be

involved as it was something he could do amongst his other responsibilities (Freeman et al.,

2014).

And still others feel that adequate opportunities are not offered to teachers on how to

implement SEL programs. A professional development day here and there is not enough (Cohen,

2006). However, professional development is not a one-day, once every month or so event.

Professional development must be constant as a teacher. There must be ample opportunities for

teachers to self-learn, enroll in secondary programs and build their personal capability in both

understanding and teaching SEL (Cohen, 2006). In addition to this, some educators feel that they

themselves are not knowledgeable enough about their own social and emotional well-being to

teach students about it (Romasz, Kantor and Elias., 2004), and finally, if SEL implementation is

to be embedded into curriculum, the learning needs to start with student teachers so they have

some relevant pedagogy and tools when they start their careers. Teachers should also be offered

periodic times to assess their own progress and booster trainings.

Considering context in SEL implementation. Can SEL be taught and implemented

without taking context into consideration? Evans, Murphy and Scourfield (2015) argue that

much of the differentiation in SEL implementation is due to the fact that interventions are

disentangled from the setting in which they are put into practice. In the same study, Evans et al.

(2015) reported that the failure to understand setting or to clarify purpose and vision, as it

pertains to the individual school, increased teachers' hesitations. While many SEL programs are

implemented in high poverty areas with the thought that it is this demographic of students which

would benefit and need SEL the most, one particular study found that many SEL programs show

a higher level of positive results in school contexts with lower percentages of students in poverty

(McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor & McClowry, 2015). This study revealed that three contextual

factors: leadership, accountability and safety/respect, which contributed to overall school

climate, helped to determine the level of success that SEL intervention achieved. Also, it was

found that schools that were in low socio-economic areas saw an overall lower level of success

in SEL implementation (McCormick et al., 2015).

McCormick et al. (2015) reported that teachers in their study believed that students who

experienced a higher level of love and support at home, did not have to contend with daily needs

such as hunger and hygiene and started off with a higher level of mental stability in order to

focus on SEL. They contended that SEL, while strongly needed in impoverished

neighbourhoods, fails to take into consideration context. "Often these children have mental

illnesses and life situations which make it difficult for these children to focus on emotions and

feelings and properly identifying and resolving them", stated one teacher (McCormick et al.,

2015).

There is also the question of culture: in many countries around the world, discussion

about feelings is not promoted or regular practice (Cohen, 2006). The teachers in Cohen's (2006)

study claim that SEL is more a western buzzword and should not be forced upon those families,

who value academics over recognizing and talking about emotions.

Implementing, assessing and evaluating SEL. Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins,

Fredericks, Resnik and Elias (2003) report that many teachers question how to even measure

SEL implementation. It is true that with such varying definitions and theories of what SEL is,

theories around implementation would also vary as such (Greenberg et al., 2003). In Cohen's

(2006) study some educators defined SEL as educating the heart and encouraging students to

self-reflect on their own characteristics and abilities so they can take advantage of them and

become the best version of themselves. Others believed that SEL is more about teaching students

how to cope in society, especially how to become a responsible citizen that cares for the well-

being of the whole community and not just for themselves. And still some maintained that SEL

was an intervention and program. With such varying definitions, it does make it difficult to pin

point a common goal, let alone a definition of what SEL is. Depending on what definition a

particular school or district may be working with, the resources vary. *Second Step* and *Roots of*

Empathy, are two popular SEL programs, but they are not the only options available. *Second*

Step is a program rooted in social-emotional learning (SEL) that helps transform schools into

supportive, successful learning environments uniquely equipped to encourage children to thrive,

and it comes in varying grade levels ("What is Second Step", 2018). *Roots of Empathy* is an

international, evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant effect in reducing

levels of aggression among schoolchildren by raising social/emotional competence and

increasing empathy ("Roots of Empathy", 2018).

This variety also means that some educators may piece meal resources, taking from one

lesson from here, another from here, or coming up with their very own (Elias et al., 2003). One

of the challenges that Elias et al. (2003) report is poor implementation quality. It is important that

to ensure that programs are fully implemented and delivered with fidelity, in accordance with

content, activities, and delivery methods specified by program creators. School personnel often

make changes to the core components of programs.

According to Elias et al. (2003) one reason implementations fail is because school

districts tend to pay too much attention on building a trend or encouraging local schools to "buy

in" to SEL instead of developing consistent school-based assessment and evaluation tools and

practices. Many programs also come with a form of assessment, whether it is self, peer, or

teacher evaluation. CASEL provides practical tools and methods for evaluating and measuring

SEL progress. However, one of the criticisms of CASEL's assessments is that they are over

focused on specific risk factors such as substance abuse risk factors or predisposition toward

violence (Coryn, Spybrook, Evergreen & Blinkiewicz, 2009). Without properly designed

interventions based on research such as *Second Step* or *Mindfulness*, educators are left to their

own to create assessment tools with which reliability and validity are not properly established.

Moreover, in such situations, instruments are not norm referenced making it difficult to

meaningfully measure data against other programs with common objectives (Coryn et al., 2009).

A designated team of teachers, as Freeman et al. (2014) mentions, could help with the process of

evaluation and data collection. Hoffman (2009) argued that for some teachers, SEL may just be

too "airy-fairy" or not developed enough to properly assess or define. They also feel that if SEL

is about the individual being, then is there a point to having one definition or method of SEL

implementation?

Leadership and SEL Implementation

       This section of the literature review addresses the second stated theme that leadership and

SEL implementation are undeniably linked. Freemean et al. (2014) shared in their results that

teachers expressed that successful implementation of SEL was in large possible because of their

principal's support. Policy implementation almost always must consider the social and

organizational contexts.

       Leading implementation. Even if SEL programming was responsive to the context and

there was proper professional development, and reliable methods of assessment, school

administrators need to be the ones to lead and encourage SEL policy implementation (Elias et al.,

2000). In her study, Winton (2013) observed that insufficient coordination and poorly

constructed programs have an impact in the implementation of policy in schools. An

involvement of school leaders within an ad-hoc implementation team, including an

administrator, would ensure that someone with authority can take continued responsibility for

implementing the initiative. Furthermore, this ad-hoc team could also develop initiatives to

provide professional development to other teachers within their own schools (Freeman et al.,

2014). Freeman et al. (2014) noted that teachers would increasingly become personally

committed to programs and be a part of alignment of the goals with the school's vision and

education systems at a broader level if school-based leaders participated in implementation. Elias

et al. (2000) state that teachers will readily follow an administrator's lead, instead of initiating

change, when it comes to policy implementation.

Accomplishing the changes that are necessary to implement SEL into schools requires the

realignment of structures and relationships to achieve genuine and sustainable change (Elias et

al., 2000). There needs to be the formation of one vision implemented school-wide. Some

teachers feel there is a lack of direction given by school-based administrators on SEL (Elias, et

al., 2000). In Freeman et al.'s study (2014), one of the principals in their study took it upon

himself to collect data as to the number of playground incidents and successful conflict

resolution scenarios and would share the results at every staff meeting. These data provided

information for this principal's school about the effectiveness of the changes that have been

implemented. As well, it informed the school whether goals were being met and where changes

needed to be made. According to Elias et al. (2000) some of the question that school leaders may

need to consider are: is it a whole-school approach, or is it an individual-focus approach? How

important is SEL to the climate and culture of the school? Is there accountability in

implementation?

However, school-based leaders are not the only ones in charge of implementation. Wang

(2015) reported that many principals admit that they are not offered adequate training or

information about SEL and how to implement new policies like SEL into their schools. They

admit that they themselves feel a lack of direction from the top and that they are just handed

down mandates without instructions. One principal says, "It's like having the ingredients to bake

a cake, except you have no directions and so what do you do? You either try your best to figure it

out, look at your neighbour or leave the ingredients" (Wang, 2015). In one study, a school

principal was given the opportunity to visit a school to observe delivery of a program, and

following the visit, the principal decided to adopt the program into his own school (Mart,

Weissberg & Kendizora, 2015). He reported feeling more confident after "seeing it in action"

(Mart et al., 2015).

School-based administrators also claim that they prefer a "bottom-up" approach, in where

teachers are the first to be engaged with a new initiative and then solicit their principals to

support it (Mart et al., 2015). Principals are less likely to engage in an initiative introduced by a

third party, as oppose to one of their own community members, whom they trust knows the

specific context of their school (Mart et al., 2015).

Transformative leadership. One type of leader who can effectively encourage one

vision, is a transformative one. Shields (2010) defines transformative leadership as leadership

that embodies critical reflection and analysis with a move for change towards a more equitable

playing field for all members of an organization. In education Shields (2010) states that

transformative leaders ensure that students are educated in the areas of academic, social and civic

responsibilities. This leader motivates the staff to explore their individual and collective social-

emotional assets and areas in need of improvement, while modeling caring and moral behaviour.

Elias et al. (2003) noted that under this sort of leadership, students would also feel the need to

engage in service-related projects and show care beyond themselves.

In schools pursing SEL, a formal vision statement should convey the importance of social

and emotional skills and positive learning environments. Such a vision can serve as a foundation

for shifting the culture of the district and shaping practices in schools and classrooms (Mart et

al., 2015). This process would involve district staff, school-based administration, school leaders,

teachers, community members and even students. This collaborative process would instill a sense

of ownership in participants and build their commitment to making the vision a reality (Mart et

al., 2015).

In British Columbia (BC), principals are guided by the *Leadership Standards for

Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia* (BCPVPA, 2007). Cherkowski and Brown

(2013) conducted a qualitative narrative inquiry around how leaders experience distributed

leadership and the role that the BCVPA leadership standards play. The results showed that

principals and vice-principals understood shared vision as an essential tool for developing

leadership and instructional capacity, which in turn allows the principal to step away from being

the sole director and play more of a visionary role. One principal said, "If it's a shared vision,

they'll enforce it themselves" (p. 32). Principals and vice-principals also reported that giving

opportunity to teachers to share during professional development and peer mentorship were key

to advancing visions and best practice.

The study also revealed that principals knew that success could only come from them

modeling moral leadership, character and integrity, "It can't be about just me…I'm going to the

support the hell out of you" (p. 33). Leaders who "walk the talk" are also perceived as more

authentic and trustworthy and are therefore better able to inspire systemic change (Evans, 2015).

  Sustainability issues. For starters, making large-scale changes in schools demands

change in policies and programs, which are often not sustained over time (Freeman et al., 2014).

Another issue related to the varying nature of SEL implementation is that when new policies are

successfully implemented in schools, the frequent turnover in staff and administration prove it

difficult to keep up with the initiative (Cohen, 2006). This is particularly true in urban schools in

low socio-economic areas. Some research has indicated that turnover rates are as high as 50%

among new teachers in urban school districts (Elias et al., 2003). Teachers tend to burn out and

transfer after two to three years and there is not enough time or resources to train the new

incoming teacher on the policies and culture of the school. What would help to sustain policy

implementation during a time of transition? Kasler and Elias (2012) conducted a study in Israel

that documented how SEL was sustained during a time of two administrative changes. Despite

three years of intense training and implementation of SEL policy, results showed that without

proper administrative support and leadership, SEL quickly was forgotten and put aside. For

example, when principal one headed up SEL in the school, an otherwise unpopular school, the

school became bombarded with cross-boundary registrations because parents wanted to send

their children to the school (Kasler & Elias, 2012). SEL quickly became a part of the school's

everyday language that even the surrounding community was engaging with it. However, when

principal two took over and showed a lack of initiative for SEL, teachers and students also began

to neglect it, resulting in a more fragmented atmosphere. When principal three took over and re-

initiated SEL, staff and stakeholders quickly picked it up again and once again, the school saw a

rise in enrolment and conflict resolution (Kasler & Elias, 2012). Mart et al. (2015) suggest that it

is imperative for SEL coordinators to recruit multiple school representatives to participate in

implementation in order to sustain initiatives in times of turnover.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

This chapter describes the theoretical framework that provides the basis of the research study and

the analysis of the data. The first part of the chapter discusses educational policy implementation

and formation, with an emphasis on the role that educational leaders play in implementing and

forming policy. The second part of the chapter focuses on two perspectives of leadership that

frame the analysis of the role of the principal and vice-principal in policy implementation:

inclusive and transformative leadership.

Policy Implementation

Policies play a role, whether it is big or small, in every organization. This is true for

educational organizations as well. While policy makers work to create innovate policies to

constantly improve education, it becomes relevant to ask: what role do policies actually play in

the school education system and how and why should we implement policies? This section offers

an examination of some traditional understandings of policy, the problems with these

understandings, some alternatives to these traditional understandings, and what these alternatives

offer to the problem of practice addressed in this study, namely, how is SEL being implemented

in schools in the Beaver district, as well as to discover any challenges for SEL implementation as

reported by principals and vice-principals.

Traditional understandings of educational policy implementation. When it comes to

policymaking, there has been a preoccupation with finding "what works". According to

Colebatch (2006), the dominant paradigm in textbooks on policy practice sees the policy process

as an exercise in informed problem-solving: a problem is identified, data are collected, the

problem is analyzed and advice is given to the policy-maker, who makes a decision, which is

then implemented. Policy work was and is often a piecemeal process of "fixing" problems.

Colebatch (2006) calls this "the *textbook account*: policy as a process leading to a known and

intended outcome, in other words, a collective attempt to construct a policy in order to address

some evident problem" (p. 8).

In schools, this "authoritative choice" (Colebatch, 2006, p. 11) has long been exercised in

policy work. Authoritative choice in policy as reported by Colebatch (2006) involves the

government, or in this case, the district, making the choices and the authoritative decision: advice

comes in from an outside party, choices are made and handed down and these choices are then

implemented. This places considerable pressure on teachers and principals and hopes to produce

the desired results of those in authority regardless of any adverse effects this may have on

teachers or students.

According to Colebatch (2006), there is a "disconnect" between the accounts of policy

work found in the instructional texts and the accounts drawn from practice. Colebatch (2006)

argues that this disconnect is due to the differences between the ideal that policy workers aspire

to and the contextual circumstances may prevent these ideals to be attained. This is to say that

the policy set by policy makers, is not necessarily what is followed by teachers in classrooms on

account of various reasons, one being differences in interpretation between these two groups

(practitioners and policy makers). According to Ozga (2000), when asked about the interaction

with other participants, policy workers are not always able to explain the need for collaboration

and discussion with teachers and administrators.

Alternatives to traditional interpretations of policy implementation. So then how

should we look at policy? Adams (2015) suggests examining policy through the lens of

positioning theory, namely: policy-explanation, policy-framing and policy-forming. Explanation

is the interrogation of texts so that as many possibilities and options are given. Framing is the

location of wider frames of possibility. Forming is the ways in which positions are taken up or

resisted at the local level in an attempt to understand policy (Adams, 2015). The idea here is that

interpretations matter. Policies can be read and digested by a multitude of different individuals

and groups, and the meaning of the policy can take on various definitions depending on the

person.

Explaining policy would not be focused then on uncovering "one" truth, but rather giving

rise to a possibility of options. Colebatch (2006) calls this framing structured interaction: rather

than a single actor called "the government", there is an array of organized voices, inside and

outside "government", contending for attention and resources and the ability to define the

question" (p. 12). Policy work is then less about giving well-crafted advice to a decision-maker,

but more about the construction and maintenance of relations among stakeholders. Once options

are presented, how each decides to form perception and course of action is what leads to

framing; but with so many varying opinions, how do we reach an agreement?

Thus, we need policy forming. Policy forming allows for local level understanding so

that teachers and administrators are free to form their own methods in implementation and

achieve results, which are favourable to that specific local setting (Adams, 2015). This then takes

an abstract policy and produces a more concrete reality in each classroom according to context.

Policy forming. Policy cannot be deduced to single formulations of the problem or single

responses and solutions conjured by those who are removed from the reality of the classroom.

Sound policy involves three sorts of knowledge, according to Colebatch (2006): (a) epistemic

knowledge that establishes causal links and chains, (b) practical-technical knowledge derived

from experience and skill which rests very much in implicit personal or institutional practices in

the field, and (c) phronesis, which is a sense of what is ethically practical rather than a technical

or scientific exercise. Good policy arguments must rest on a foundation of all three types of

knowledge. In order for implementation to be successful, policy makers require the creative

agency and knowledge of teachers as a necessary basis for effective enactment. Teachers respond

to teachers, not outside third-party representatives that are brought in (Ball, 2015).

The orientation of policy work should be transferable into the education workplace so

that experimentation, scrutiny of results, teamwork, evaluation and search for improvement in

problem solving become natural resources for pedagogic work (Ozga, 2000). What would it look

like if teachers' needs were at the centre of policy making? Would this not in fact motivate

teachers to fully implement policies and actively engage in producing results that proved that the

given policy was effective in improving the quality of education? Teachers could still be

recognized for their hard work and their contribution to improving student performance and

quality of education (Ozga, 2000).

Policy implementation: context matters. Because policy making and implementation

involves a number of different players, new issues are bound to emerge as the process continues.

According to Colebatch (2006), there is a variety of perspectives when it comes to the policy

process, and all are valid in their own way, available for use only in ways which are appropriate

to context. Riveros and Viczko (2015) argue that teacher learning is actualized in multiple

settings, and is not just a single reality, and that the various realities all coexist within what we

call "school". As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this would mean that teachers need to be

seen as active participants in the deployment of policy initiatives (Riveros & Viczko, 2015).

When we talk about educational and non-educational settings, we invariably see that

context matters: policy forming, framing and implementation are dependent on the specific

context policy is being brought into. Recent policy research has shown that policy

implementation is intricately related to context (Ball, 2015). Take for example a piece of art. One

may look at the piece and feel a sense of peace and tranquility, while another may look at the

same piece and feel confusion and excitement, indeed, beauty *is in the eye of the beholder*.

Maguire, Hoskins, Ball and Braun (2011), use visual materials as a similar example. They argue

that there is an undeniable vast amount of materials and visuals, which are circulated to each

school with various topics such as: bullying, attitude, learning etc. However, how each viewer

makes sense of the visuals depends upon cultural assumptions, personal knowledge and the

context in which the picture is presented (Maguire et al., 2011).

Sense-making, as this is termed, is all about individual interpretation. In their paper,

Maguire et al. (2011) use the examples of "good student", "good teacher" and "good school" as

an example. In the four schools they examined, there were posters about what being a "good

student" entails. There are posters entitled, "How to get an A+ at GCSE" or "The Appropriate

School Clothing" displayed around the school. In this school, a "good student" follows the

guidelines these posters outline and has a chance of becoming the "Student of the Week". These

discourses are emphatic. It is not about persuasion of who and what each individual student

could be, in academic/behavioural terms, but rather it is about what students must and must not

do and how they must do it in order to make up the "good student" (Maguire et al., 2011). The

authors also found that in the four schools they researched, they had a case of "solutionitis"

towards solving problems and using policies to make themselves "good schools" (Maguire et al.,

2011).

According to Maguire et al. (2011) one of the schools reported having a chart in a

hallway, which tracks student progress in order to motivate teachers and students to produce the

desired results of a policy that seeks higher academic outcomes. As for producing the "good

teacher", one of the schools in the study, had a packed bulletin board in the staffroom, which

showed posters of professional development opportunities. The board was used to improve

performance and even recognized certain teachers for what they are doing in their classes to

improve student progress. As mentioned earlier, this sort of public display, places pressure on the

other teachers to perform the same and compete with staff members instead of collaborating to

improve their practice. in this sense, the policy becomes a mode for control, and management.

Mulcahy (2015) reinforces the importance of context as well, claiming that one of the key

qualities of policies is actually that, once created, they often migrate into contexts and settings

and acquire a life of their own that has consequences and results that go beyond the original

intentions of the policy makers. This agrees with the idea of policy enactment (Maguire et al.

2011), meaning that people make sense of educational policy and then put this sense into

individual practice. Under this context, enactment takes on a unique meaning: an understanding

that policies are interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors as they engage in making

meaning of official texts passed down from the top.

In her research, Mulcahy (2015) talks about two specific policies that were taken and

enacted according to the teachers' positions and perspectives. for example, she noted that: "it's

more about what's happening within the spaces than…the spaces themselves" (p. 507). In this

context, two teachers at Wattle Park Primary School combined, but then divided their classrooms

to have a more focused area where selected students could receive more one-on-one more time

while another group of students received group instruction (Mulcahy, 2015). Having separate

spaces helps to mobilize teacher agency and teacher power and collaboration towards turning an

abstract policy into reality in this specific setting. In another example, Mulcahy (2015) indicated

that: "it's the way that you operate….and actually live in the twenty-first century pedagogies" (p.

510). At the same school, teachers maintain that the way they use their space and the order of

their day to day teaching depends on the individual needs of the students and that one method of

enactment may not work the next day or the next year for a different group of students. Thus, the

making and pulling of the given material and policies handed down clearly show that policy

matters, *matter* to students (Mulcahy, 2015).

Let us take a look now at context as it applies to Canadian educational policy. A study

conducted by Winton (2013) asks us to take local contexts seriously in efforts to understand why

policies are enacted differently in seemingly similar schools. In her study, Winton examines how

schools define success in the local contexts of three schools in Ontario, Canada. She found that

how schools define success is connected to how schools implemented different policies (Winton,

2013).

In contrast, many government representatives and others outside of the school setting,

equate success in Ontario schools to increasingly higher test scores and academic achievement

(Winton, 2013)., However, in an interview with teachers, it was demonstrated that teachers make

meaning of policy according to their own environments, through formal and informal

conversations with colleagues and administrators, and through examining the needs of their own

class (Winton, 2013).

Winton quotes Maguire et al.'s (2012) notion of policy enactment, which recognizes how

a policy is enacted is very much dependent on the school contexts. A total of 11-12 staff

members were interviewed at each of the three schools mentioned in Winton's (2013) study.

Over the course of the interviews it was revealed that all schools identified student engagement

and academic learning as important components of school success (Winton, 2013). However, the

interviewees also stated that in order for this to happen, "You do what makes sense. We all want

them to succeed academically and move reading levels, but we start from where we have to and

teach to where our students realistically are" (Winton, 2013, p. 7).

Another key component of school success that was put forward was social responsibility

and overall well-being. Participants at Maple Leaf School (one of the participant schools) said

that many of their students just needed access to basic needs like food and hygiene and that

giving children enough consistency to build mental and emotional stability within the kids was

deemed as success (Winton, 2013). All three schools said that the kids ought to be happy.

Happiness was the evaluator of school success. Ironically, the Ontario's government definition of

school success is students achieving level 3 or 4 on provincial tests or report cards (Winton,

2013). This research shows that context matters. Though policy makers may define and form

policy based on their beliefs, educators are letting it be known that policies can only be

implemented with context in consideration. One school's reality is not always another's.

Administrators: Caught in the Middle

If we are taking local context into consideration, it is imperative we look at one of the key

players in this sense: principals. Implementation, whether it be for teachers or principals,

involves interpretation because implementers must figure out what a policy means and whether it

applies to their school to decide whether and how to ignore, adapt, or adopt policy locally

(Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita & Zoltners, 2002). We can have some sympathy for

school leaders, as it is a controversial terrain for them. On one hand, school leaders are

responsible to their local community stakeholders and the district office for implementing school

policy, but on the other, school leaders depend on classroom teachers for the successful

implementation of these policies.

Spillane et al. (2002) researched three schools that varied in response to accountability policies in a particular district in Chicago, which rewarded schools for strong academic performance and placed other schools on probation until progress is made. If the district decides that a school has not made adequate progress, the district leader can have the school reconstituted and replace the principal and staff. At the first school, the principal responded to probation by empowering teachers. He used test data as an information tool and not a pressure tool to encourage teachers to find their method of working towards higher levels. He did not take the pressure of district as an ultimatum or blueprint for action, but as a starting point for school staff to reflect on their practices and develop alternative strategies. The principal explained, "The more chance people have to talk, the more comfortable they feel with change and the better they get in their practice" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 742). This principal used policy and data as a basis for dialogue not for performance evaluation.

At the second school, Dodge Elementary, the principal came into the school trying to legitimize her role as principal. She used the tests scores and district policy as control and power for change. Being brand new to the school, she tried to change too many things too quickly, thus this affected how she presented the test scores and how she engaged teachers in conversation. Her more structured and centralized leadership proved to repulse teachers and in addition, halted any collaborative approach.

The third school, Waxton Elementary, shows a similar story to Dodge: an appointment of a new principal trying to prove herself, the school's probation status and external pressure for improvement in student achievement from district office. However, different than Dodge, this principal saw the value in building morale and capacity first in teachers before she brought up improving student progress. District policy asked her to perform evaluations on all the teachers,

however, she proceeded to do this only after having lengthy conversations and collaborative

meetings around lesson planning with all staff. Again, she took the time to build capacity and

morale and provided opportunities for improvement before proceeding with evaluations. By

doing this, she earned the trust of the staff, and teachers saw that administration cared more

about how policy affected them and the students and not just producing a mandated result

(Spillane et al., 2002). Consequently, accountability policies were perceived as an opportunity to

build teachers' instructional capacity and not treat them as replaceable commodities.

Educational Leadership Perspective

In this section, two key leadership perspectives will be discussed in relation to leading

change and policy formation. Current literature indicates two key ideas: while the principal is

viewed as a key player in school culture, the *lone hero* is no longer a sustainable model of

leadership in schools (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

Inclusive leadership. Critical theorists argue that leadership is, and must be, socially

critical. It does not reside in an individual but in the relationship between individuals, and it is

oriented towards social vision and change, not simply, on only organizational goals (Gunter,

2001). Leadership in schools have long been centred on traditional managerial duties, or the

vertical relationship. Ryan (2006) argues leadership in education must focus on equitable and

horizontal relationships, which would recognize gender, race and class divisions. Inclusive

leadership is a participative and group-oriented form of leadership and holds similarities to

distributed leadership (Oborn, Barrett & Dawson, 2013). A distributed leadership perspective

does not preclude the role of individuals, but recognizes the inclusive and collaborative nature of

leadership. A chosen leader may play a central role in policy formulation, but on their own he or

she is unable to bring about change and determine new practices (Oborn, Barrett & Dawson,

2013). A key characteristic to this kind of leader is the ability to acknowledge and recognize the

strengths of others and enabling individuals to enact where those strengths lie.

Practically, for a school to function as a learning community, the adults in the school

need to develop a culture of interdependence. Sustainable changes in school require formal

leaders to develop leadership capacity at many levels of the school (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

Learning communities are also built around shared visions, values and goals, have a

collaborative work culture, and focus on reflective practice (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). This

would entail treating leadership as a systemic characteristic, branching away from traditional

forms of hierarchical leadership and towards a more distributed leadership where relationships

and context matter. A re-orientation towards leadership systems thinking and organization would

put a strong emphasis on problem-solving (Glatter, 2006). A systemic change in the organization

of leadership forces a viewpoint that views organizations as complex adaptive systems which

need to include various stances when problem-solving (Glatter, 2006).

Cherkowski and Brown (2013) conducted an initial investigation of distributed leadership

through a narrative study of a group of principals in British Columbia. Three themes were

identified: the importance of (1) sharing vision for distributed leadership, (2) leading with

character and integrity, and (3) helping others find their leadership voices. The practice of

establishing distributed leadership was found to be coherent with the development of a

sustainable learning community (Cherkowski & Brown, 2013).

Inclusive leadership and policy formation. In a school environment, leadership would

extend over curriculum specialists, classroom teachers, vice-principals and parents as they

exercise inherent leadership in their everyday teaching practices (Oborn et al., 2013). Thus,

policy enactment brings about change not necessarily as the result of individual people doing

remarkable things in isolation, but from a variety of people working together in different ways

and roles, using a multitude of various resources (Ryan, 2006).

An inclusive leader advocates for inclusion, educates participants, nurtures dialogue,

adopts inclusive decision and policy-making strategies, and encourages self-reflection (Ryan,

2006). In advocating for inclusion, leaders will connect with those who are like-minded and

harbour similar morals and beliefs in order to create a need for discussion about the specific issue

or policy in question. There is a need to also educate the whole school community on the issues

at hand and ensure that stakeholders understand the theories, language, advantages and

disadvantages of all initiatives to make informed, evidence-based decisions.

An important part of inclusive policy formation is encouraging critical reflection and

dialogue. There is a need for leaders to first and foremost reflect on their own practices,

specifically what message are their words and actions sending to others? There is a need to

examine morals, beliefs, the need for change, how to initiate change, and what sort of role each

leader can play in a given situation. There are times when leaders need to encourage others to

step up and times when leaders need to show others how to start. Staff meetings and professional

development are imperative in promoting this ideal. Leaders can facilitate conversation around

sets of questions, which may include: What is happening here? Who says this is the way this

should be? What overall purposes are being served? Whose voices are being silenced, excluded

or denied? (Ryan, 2006). This work opens up professional practice to not just focus on problem

solving, but also problem posing (Gunter, 2001). An inclusive leader knows how to facilitate

discussion amongst stakeholders so that all voices and opinions are heard and represented, in

order to make informed decisions and policies. It is important to get stakeholders in the room

talking to each other, to take the initiative amongst themselves to make things happen. Some

have strong relationships already, but many are used to working in isolation and focusing on

their own silo, which has always worked for them.

To nurture dialogue, trust must be established. One of the merits of inclusive leadership

in policy enactment is the emphasis on relationships. In a case study of a health policy enactment

by Oborn et al. (2013), a renowned cancer surgeon, Arego, was brought on to lead at a UK

university medical school. In this study, Arego reports that one of the first steps of his leadership

was to engage others and build relationships. Arego's readiness to emphasize his own lack of

expertise and his reliance on the expertise of the multidisciplinary groups aided the development

of internal cohesiveness within new policy coalitions and enhanced the legitimacy of the process

(Oborn et al., 2013). Trust is an important asset to gather when there is uncertainty in a situation.

It makes for a unified front if there is mutual trust between leaders and followers. By engaging

others and building trust, it builds relevance and motivates everyone to take action.

Transformative leadership. Inclusive and transformative leadership begins with

questions of justice and democracy. According to Shields (2010), "transformative leadership

critiques inequitable practices, therefore, inextricably links education and educational leadership"

(p. 559). She also contends that transformative leadership and inclusive leadership are also

related (Shields, 2010). Shields (2010) defines transformative leadership as leadership that

embodies critical reflection and analysis with a move for change towards a more equitable

playing field for all members of an organization. In education Shields (2010) states that

transformative leaders ensure that students are educated in the areas of academic, social and civic

responsibilities. This leader motivates the staff to explore their individual and collective social-

emotional assets and areas in need of improvement, while modeling caring and moral behaviour.

Elias et al. (2003) noted that under this sort of leadership, students would also feel the need to engage in service-related projects and show care beyond themselves.

A trustworthy leader does not lack moral courage. One cannot enter into a leadership position without clearly knowing what guides and what grounds you, what you want to accomplish, and knowing what your "non-negotiables" are (Shields, 2014). Followers have to know that the leader believes firmly and passionately in what they are preaching. Leaders have to be the first willing to die on the hill if it comes down to it. This type of leader is not afraid to re-examine policies, to sustain those which must continue and to dismantle those which do not accurately and equitably represent all stakeholders (Shields, 2014).

In Shield's (2010) study of two transformative leaders, she found that common to both leaders was an explicit identification of a need to challenge current practices and to begin to do things differently. Both leaders were cautious in their thinking, recognizing that "teachers have to overcome deficit thinking and blame and take responsibility for the success of all children" (Shields, 2010, p. 575). A key factor found in both case studies was the careful and consistent deconstruction of old knowledge frameworks as they are replaced with new frameworks (Shields, 2010). In one case study, the principal also acknowledged her use of power to bring about change. She encouraged her teachers to experiment, but that if something went wrong, they could blame her (Shields, 2010). Both leaders focused on instituting changes to structures, culture, and pedagogical practices. They challenged teachers' current understandings and assumptions on frameworks and policies in order to construct new ones. Accomplishing the kinds of changes needed to integrate SEL into schools requires transformative leadership: leadership that is willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve genuine and sustainable change. According to Elias, O'Brien and Weissberg (2006),

there are three characteristics that are essential to bring transformation: leading with vision and

courage, beginning and integrating efforts schoolwide, and implementing with integrity. The first

outlines a courageous leader that is committed to the vision of "whole education" and the

development of the social-emotional skills and interpersonal relationships of staff members (p.

12). When integrating SEL schoolwide, the starting points are: (1) create, organize and unify

themes, values, and visions, (2) involve students in integrative service-related projects, (3)

implement skill-building curricula that are linked to existing school subject areas and (4) infuse

SEL into existing academic subjects. Implementing with integrity as a transformative leader

means finding a starting point, getting it going, expanding it, linking it and growing the process

in a spirit of continuous improvement (p. 12).

Chapter Summary and Reflection

In summary, this chapter discusses two aspects of policy: the traditional approach to

policy formation versus alternatives to the tradition. The traditional approach emphasizes the

need to identify a problem, a solution and then the implementation of the solution. Colebatch

(2006) argues that the problem with this approach is its complete disregard for the stakeholders.

In relation to education, this would be the exclusion of administrators and teachers in

implementing educational policy. Colebatch (2006) and Adams (2015) call for the inclusion of

local stakeholders to allow for proper policy formation, which also take context into

consideration. When policy is taken into specific contexts, it takes on new meanings as teachers

and administrators are allowed to explore multiple interpretations. Thus, this places great

importance on administrators as the middle man. As Shields (2010) indicates in her two case

studies, administrators as the middle man, allows for discussion, collaboration and empowerment

to take place amongst teachers at the local level.

This chapter lays the foundation for this thesis in that it asks the question of how policy is formed in the Beaver District. Specifically, how is the priority practice of SEL, formed and implemented both at the district level and at the local school level? Did the district approach this practice with a traditional mindset or is the alternative method practiced? Are administrators allowed to be effective middle men, allowing for teachers' interpretations to be included in collaboration and implementation? Finally, could the formation and implementation of this policy play a bigger role in the success and challenges of SEL implementation in the Beaver School District?

Chapter 4

Methodology

Context of Research

The context of this research study is a school district in British Columbia. The Beaver

School District is one of the biggest districts in Canada and is divided into five zones: north, east,

central, south, and west. This study includes participants from all five zones.

According to the district's website, in 2014, SEL was made one of the four core pillars of

learning for the entire district, meaning that SEL is a district-wide priority practice covered in K-

12, early learning, adult learners and indigenous education. As part of the initiative, a former

school psychologist for the district took on the role as SEL coordinator. A team of 4-6

counsellors and psychologists lead by the coordinator were given the role of promoting SEL and

educating teachers and administrators about SEL and its implementation. Team members offer

in-service sessions before, after or during school time as well as professional development

sessions on various SEL programs. They also offer support and intervention strategies for any

teacher specifically requesting this in their own classroom. Currently, several schools have a

designated SEL teacher who goes into various grades 3-5 classrooms to explicitly co-teach SEL

lessons with the classroom teacher, thereby building capacity with classroom teachers.

I am a current employee of the district and I had numerous opportunities to hold informal

conversations with colleagues surrounding SEL implementation. I have been able to witness the

implementation firsthand, and in recent conversations with colleagues, I have been able to

understand how teachers perceive SEL and its implementation. In general, most teachers have an

understanding of what SEL is. Some believe it is a program and some believe it to be a

philosophy, but no teacher is completely unaware of SEL and its role as a priority practice in the

district. Many teachers employ SEL strategies such as deep breathing, *Zones of Regulation and MindUP. Zones of Regulation* is a systematic cognitive behavioural approached used to teach self-regulation by categorizing all the different ways we feel and states of alertness we experience into four concrete coloured zones: red, yellow, green and blue ("Learn More About", 2018). *MindUp* is grounded in four core pillars: Neuroscience, Positive Psychology, Mindful Awareness, and Social-Emotional Learning which drives positive behaviour, improves learning and scholastic performance, and increases empathy, optimism and compassion ("MindUp", 2018). Some schools have SEL as a school-wide goal and the use of a common language is encouraged. However, while SEL is implemented in a wide array of methods, some of the identified challenges surrounding implementation are: (1) teacher buy-in and understanding of what SEL is and its importance, (2) shortage of resources and release time for implementation, (3) lack of principal and vice-principal support, or harboring a shared vision. Despite the fact that "teacher buy-in" plays a central role in SEL implementation, it was evident from my initial conversations with colleagues and my review of the literature that the leadership role of the principals and vice-principals is key to successful implementation.

Although SEL is one of the four pillars of learning for the district, it is still in its early stages of implementation and it has been implemented in varying degrees. Thus, this study aimed to examine how SEL has been implemented throughout the district from the perspective of principals and vice principals.

Research Design

Qualitative research. To address the research questions of this study, a qualitative approach has been chosen. Qualitative research focuses on rich and in-depth observations and descriptions and is not concerned with measuring data or outcomes in quantifiable ways (Yin,

2003). Patton (2015) further supports the notion that qualitative inquiry is more about in-depth

investigation through a smaller sample, to gain understanding of a specific question. Because

SEL implementation is still a fairly new initiative and arguably the experiences of implementers

are not always quantitatively measurable, a qualitative approach was selected as it allows for an

in depth, contextualized and situated study and it is exploratory in nature (Cooper, 2013).

Qualitative descriptive case study. Specifically, for this qualitative research, a

descriptive case study design was chosen. Case study research is appropriate when the researcher

wants to address a descriptive situation such as a "why" or "how" something is happening or

happened. This case study is a single descriptive type, as the purpose is not to explain, but to

explore and describe what is currently taking place within a specific district. As well, this

methodology should be employed when you cannot or do not want to manipulate the behaviour

of those involved. In a case study, one purpose is to investigate contextual conditions because

they are relevant to the study. This method is appropriate when the boundaries are not clear

between the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2003). It takes into consideration real-life

situations and allows for context to hold importance. By emphasizing the study of a phenomenon

within its real-world context, the case study method favours the collection of data in natural

settings, compared to relying on derived data (Yin, 2003). Case study research is heuristic in

nature making it more tangible for readers, thus a case study on SEL, like this one, makes this a

more relatable research topic for educators and leaders. An advantage of this approach is that it

allows for close interaction between the researcher and the participants, enabling them to tell

their individual stories (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Because SEL implementation has not been widely

researched, a case study approach would allow for a more descriptive study, which will add to

the knowledge of SEL and spur further research in the field. Case studies are useful when

describing the extent to which a particular program or innovation has been implemented (Mills &

Gay, 2016). Thus, the research focus of this study, namely, how has SEL been implemented in

the Beaver School District, is best approached through a case study.

      Unit of Analysis. When engaging in a qualitative case study research, it is important to

determine the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis, or the case, is defined by Miles and

Huberman (1994) as a phenomenon of some sort. The case is in effect your analysis (p. 25).

Simply put, the unit of analysis is the "who" or "what" that is being analyzed for the study. It

could be an individual, a group, or even an entire program. For this particular research, the unit

of analysis is a group of principals and vice-principals in the district who are playing a role in

implementing SEL in their schools.

Population and Sampling

      Principals and vice-principals in the district who have implemented SEL in their schools

were selected for this study. The criterion for their inclusion was: currently administrating in the

K- 7 system in one of the more than 100 elementary schools across the School District. Schools

that have made a focused effort to implement SEL. This was determined by identifying schools

that have a SEL teacher, and/or have SEL resources currently on site, and/or have set SEL as a

school-wide goal. The goal was to obtain a purposeful sample size (Yin, 2003) consisting of 15-

20 principals or vice-principals. This sample size would allow for data saturation, that is, the

point where the themes identified in the analysis start to repeat (Patton, 2015). An initial email

was sent out to all elementary principals and vice-principals asking for participation. This initial

strategy did not yield enough participants, thus snowball sampling, which involved referrals from

current participants for potential participants (Yin, 2003), was utilized.

Recruitment. From the initial email invitation, seven administrators volunteered to participate. Upon the use of snowball sampling, another ten participants were recruited, totaling 15 participants. Of the 15, four were vice-principals and 11 were principals. Every effort was made to recruit participants from all five zones of the district.

This number of participants allowed for the identification of a specific context surrounding SEL implementation. As noted by Patton (2015), a small number of important cases, "yield[s] the most information and ha[s] the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (p. 276).

The following is a chart of the participants. It outlines a pseudonym of each participant, their gender, their position, years of experience or years in their current position, and finally, the type of school.

Table 1 - *Table of Participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Current position	Years of experience	School type (grades)
Aaron	M	Principal (P)	6 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)
Bianca	F	Vice-principal (VP)	14 (teaching)	Elementary (K-7)
Bryan	M	Principal	18 (teaching)	Elementary (K-7)
Billy	M	Vice-principal	3 (as VP)	Elementary (K-7)
BJ	M	Principal	7 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)
Daniel	M	Principal	26 (teaching)	Elementary (K-7)
Danica	F	Principal	30 (teaching)	Elementary (K-7)
Laura	F	Principal	4 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)
Linda	F	Vice-principal	21 (teaching)	Elementary (K-7)

Lucy	F	Principal	10 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)
Peter	M	Principal	8 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)
Sam	M	Principal	18 (teaching)	Elementary (K-7)
Stanley	M	Principal	11 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)
Tanya	F	Vice-principal	2 (as VP)	Elementary (K-7)
Zoey	F	Principal	1 (as P)	Elementary (K-7)

Data Collection

   Semi-structured Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to

collect the research data. Patton (2015) argues that interviews yield true personal experiences,

opinions, feelings and knowledge from participants. Face-to-face interviews allowed me to

establish positive rapport with each participant where conversation flowed back and forth and a

connection was made. One participant in particular, thanked me at the end of the interview,

stating, "It's been a long time since I've had a conversation that challenged my practice and

inspired me to do more. Thank you." (Laura)

   For those who showed interest, a letter was sent to their personal emails outlining the

purpose and process of the study. Once an individual agreed to participate, a date, time and

location of their choice was agreed upon, and the interview questions were emailed to them

ahead of the interview time

   Each participant then participated in a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the

researcher with the exception of one principal who requested a phone interview. The interview

consisted of 8 open-ended questions pertaining to SEL implementation within their own school

and the district. Any follow-up questions or clarification were asked for during and at the end of

the interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and participants were given the

opportunity to review transcripts if they wished to.

The questions focused on, but were not limited, to the following: (1) which SEL

programs are implemented, (2) SEL culture in the school, (3) what factors have helped to

promote SEL, (4) what factors have challenged SEL promotion, (5) in-service to teachers

offered, and (6) the perceived current leadership stance on SEL in the school or district.

Data Analysis

Through analysis of each interview, the goal was to synthesize information and decipher

themes in order to create one coherent story (Patton, 2015). Data collected was analyzed through

a 2-level coding process. First, the interviews were cross-analyzed and open coded to check for

discrepancies and similarities. Second, as the interviews were analyzed, axial coding was utilized

to determine any major categories and themes (Saldaña, 2015). The information was then used to

build a compelling narrative that informs and engages the reader (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2012).

At the end of the analysis, various themes pertaining to SEL in the Beaver School District

emerged, these themes are reported and described in Chapter 5.

Validity and Credibility

In any research study it is important to establish a certain degree of validity and

credibility, this can be more challenging in a qualitative case study research. To ensure validity

and credibility, the following methods were employed: (a) the research questions were clearly

stated, (b) justification as to why the case study approach is appropriate, (c) purposeful sampling,

(d) data were collected and managed successfully, and (e) accurate analysis of the data (Baxter &

Jack, 2008). It is important to note that this particular study, the goal was to unveil multiple

perspectives and focus on personal experiences, rather than reveal a single truth (Patton, 2015).

Throughout the analysis, my supervisor and myself conducted reviews of the data and all parts of the study. As well, my own personal thoughts and reflection on the entire process, especially the analysis, helped to increase the validity and credibility of the study. Researchers should also seek to establish rapport with all participants so that participants are comfortable expressing their views and the analysis allows for multiple perspectives. This allows participants to not feel pressure to give what they feel are just socially acceptable answers (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Participants were given the opportunity to check and clarify their own interview transcripts. As well, the gathering of multiple perspectives increased the credibility of information collected as different individuals reported similar themes and answers.

Ethics Approval

There were a number of ethical issues to be considered. First, I am an employee of the school district. I have played a part in implementing SEL in a few of the schools represented in the study and over time, I have formulated my own answers and opinions on the research questions. This may have opened the door for bias to be included both in the questions and interpretation of the data. Because of this, I have made notes on transcription data, to focus solely on data collected and not on self-made assumptions and interpretations. As well, I have personal connections and relationships with several of the principals and vice-principals involved in the study, which may be a conflict of interest.

Confidentiality should always be considered in research with human participants and I ensured that those who participated in the study felt confident that their answers would not be connected to them in case of judgement or fear of being ostracized for their opinion. As well, because the intention of this study is for it to be shared with the School district so that both district and school leaders can grasp the current state of SEL implementation, it was imperative

that no one in the district be pin-pointed or demoralized. This means that when the data from this

research is shared with the district that the researcher will have to take great care to hide any

identifiers that may lead people to assume that certain answers came from certain individuals.

All information was coded and no identifiers are present on the questionnaires or interview

transcripts. Questionnaires and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet or external drive and

will be destroyed 5 years after the study has been completed. However, it is also important that

the results stay true to the nature and purpose of the study to remain valid and reliable, as well as

to promote any transformative initiative in the district when it comes to SEL policy

implementation. Therefore, ethics approval had to be gained by the school district as well, who

had requested that the study focus specifically on the district's particular context. Context

specific wording had to be used when speaking about the district in this study. All documents,

including ethics approval certificates from the Western Research Board and the Beaver School

District, are included in the appendices.

Chapter 5

Findings

In chapter 4 I provided an overview of the methodology employed to collect the data. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the responses to the interview questions from the fifteen participants. The course of data analysis was driven by the main research question: how has SEL been implemented in the Beaver School District? Specifically, what is the experience of vice-principals and principals of implementing SEL in their schools? The data collected is focused primarily on elementary principals plus a few vice-principals. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describes the process of data analysis as "making sense out of the text. It involves [...] moving deeper and deeper into the understanding of the data and making an interpretation of [it]" (p. 183). Data analysis in a qualitative case study research approach involves collecting data, analyzing it for themes and then reporting on the main themes identified (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). *Figure 1* shows the steps taken in data analysis in qualitative research. and is adapted from Creswell and Creswell's (2018).

Raw Data (transcripts)

Organizing and preparing data for analysis

Reading through all data

Coding the Data

Themes

Interrelating themes

Interpreting the meaning of themes

Figure 1. (Adapted from Creswell & Creswell's, 2018)

Trustworthiness of the Thematic Analysis Process

To achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research, each stage, including the analysis, must be carefully carried out. The quality of the interpretation is inevitably dependent on the quality of the data collected and its relevance to answer the research questions (Patton, 2015). For starters, establishing rapport was fundamental in creating participants' trust around me as the researcher. With all fifteen participants, I drew upon a personal mutual connection or interaction we had. This helped to put participants at ease.

Participants were also generous with their time outside of school hours. Principals, and vice-principals especially, had more demands placed on their time due to end of year duties, but I was pleasantly surprised to listen to how candid, genuine and open they were with their answers. They were relaxed, conversational and deemed the work I was doing as important.

I also transcribed my interviews myself so as to get closer to my data. Overall, the integrity and rigor of data collection and analysis process was maintained by participants' active participation, rich detail, and engagement in the interview process (Patton, 2015).

Overview of the Analysis Process

As I worked through each transcript, I followed the open coding process, jotting down key words, and highlighting significant phrases in the answers of the participants. I noted an emerging master list of 4 themes and the following sub-themes:

1) Implementation of SEL

    a) Collaboration

    b) Common language and programs

    c) SEL as a school goal

2) Challenges in implementation of SEL

    a) Understanding of SEL

    b) Consistency

    c) Teacher buy-in

    d) Prioritizing and sustainability

    e) Funding

3) SEL throughout the district

    a) Priority practice and size of the district

    b) SEL coordinator and teachers

4) Principal or vice-principal role

    a) Modeling and being relationship focused

    b) Creating opportunity

    c) Managerial duties

Implementation of SEL

In all fifteen interviews, it was evident that SEL was being implemented in some degree

or capacity in each school. All fifteen participants were able to state the main ideas and

principles of SEL and were confident that SEL was being implemented in their schools whether

it was minimally or extensively.

    Collaboration. Teaching has been historically a form of isolated work, but policymakers

have increasingly promoted regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate with teams of

colleagues Furthermore, collaboration has been shown to increase professional development for

teachers, as well as, achievement for students (Ronfeldt, McQueen & Grissom, 2015).

    All of the participants of this study cited collaboration as a key piece in the

implementation of SEL. Many of them used the term "sharing out" as a pseudonym for

collaboration. Bianca stated, "That [SEL] is where that has to start, to take examples and bring

them in and share them out". In Aaron's interview, he said,

> "[…] people had to really have good open conversations at staff meetings and when
>
> people share out what they've done or what they're doing and how they're using it, then
>
> it's just oh that's a good idea, I'll try that".

Many of the participants agreed that staff meetings or having curriculum cafes at lunch are a

venue for facilitating conversation around SEL implementation. Linda shared that a lot of the

"learning that's done in the classroom has actually been shared out at our curriculum café lunch

time conversations". Lucy said that she gets "guest speakers come into staff meetings. And then I

kind of just pop things into staff meetings to promote table talk". Often staff meetings, lead to a

committee of staff members who are interested in developing SEL implementation further. The

participants called this a team of people or an inquiry group, which they believe is also

paramount to easing and encouraging the rest of the staff members into implementation. When

asked about his role as principal, Peter said "I think you need a team". Sam echoed this

sentiment stating,

> "It definitely takes a team. At our school, we have a social emotional learning committee.
>
> This year we broke up into four subcommittees and each has a different set of
>
> responsibilities and then they bring it back to staff meetings and share it out".

The participants agreed that promoting collaboration and open and honest conversation is a much

more effective implementation strategy than just principal and teacher conversation. Danica said,

> "I've been the most successful or being able to make the most inroads when I provide
>
> opportunity for teacher to teacher to work together. Using the expertise in the building

that we have. So, using that and figuring out ways to foster. How can I create

opportunities for teachers to teach teachers about [SEL] in a non-threatening way?"

Lucy noted, "…[with] an administrator you might be concerned about them judging your

practice, but [not] with a colleague. I think that's the best way to build capacity". Some of the

participants also stated that collaboration started with an inquiry group or book club. Bryan

stated, "Books is definitely one way! Books for summer reading". Billy agreed, "It all started

three years ago for us with an inquiry group reading up on Mind Up". Collaboration was talked

about heavily in all fifteen interviews as an imperative component of implementation and

sustainability of SEL in their schools.

Common language and programs. As collaboration increased in the schools, the

participants found that a common language developed within the school and one or two

programs were adopted as the primary means of SEL implementation. In all fifteen schools the

Zones of Regulation (The Zones) (for a description of this approach to SEL please see Ch. 4)

was a common approach, which was identified as being their program of choice. Although a few

of the schools where the participants work did not necessarily implement the program in great

detail, all fifteen stated that they used this program in some capacity, mostly the language.

Daniel said, "Most of our teachers are using the Zone's language. It helps to have common

language". Laura stated that she started introducing SEL by talking about the Zones, "I use the

Zones quite a bit. For example, now you're in the yellow and not the red zone. That's fantastic!"

In Tanya's school she says The Zones language has helped put the entire school on the same

page,

"We have uniform language that goes throughout the building. All the kids can tell you

what zone they're in. When I first got to this school, I had to learn it. So, I'm using their

language which is now my language".

The Zones is just as successful in Billy's school, "99 percent connect to the language around

Zones. And 97 percent are able to correctly identify strategies associated to each".

While The Zones was uniformly recognized as the program of choice in all fifteen

participants' schools, many supplemented with other programs as well including Mind Up and

Daily Physical Activity (DPA).

"…it was actually a really powerful moment for me when I stood back and we had 500

kids doing a mindful moment in the gym and led by kids. That was a really powerful

moment," shares Linda.

Zoey shared that what started off as a few classes running had turned into a school-wide thing.

"It's now turned into most of our kids run. After recess most of our school runs or we will set

mats up and all do yoga together". For Billy, morning DPA happens as a school. "We have a 15-

minute window in the morning where the entire school does DPA of their choice. The whole

school does it. At the same time".

A part of using the same programs comes with common visuals around the school

building. Some of the participants had posters up in their individual offices which outlined the

Zones and multiple strategies for self-regulation that they could refer to while conversing with

students and even staff members. In Tanya's school, and many of the other participants' schools,

there is a big Zones of Regulation board near the office as a daily reminder when kids are

walking into the building. She also says, "In addition to this, every classroom has reminders up

on their walls".

To further implementation, the participants also expressed the need for ensuring that the school staff and students were not only using common language and programs, but that there was a need to make this explicitly known at school-wide assemblies or morning announcements. "All or our assemblies this year have been around Social Emotional Learning. As well, we introduced Zones of Regulation in the assembly to the whole school," Aarons says proudly. Bryan also incorporated SEL into his assemblies, "At assemblies, I'd always leave the kids with the learning intentions and they would always have a SEL focus".

> "We start each day off from the get go with the chime you know on our morning
> messages. So, everybody focuses on their breathing in the morning. And it sets the tone
> for the entire school for the day," Zoey shared.

Several of the participants shared that they even put a SEL message in their weekly staff memo that goes out through email to all staff at the beginning of each week.

SEL as a school goal. Another similarity amongst all fifteen participants' schools was that in conjunction with common language and program usage throughout the school, SEL was one of the, if not, the primary school goal. Participants felt that making SEL a school wide goal or focus put a certain formality of importance, as well as, a level of accountability in the implementation of SEL. "It's one of our primary focus points in our school plan," shared Bryan. Even at BJ's school where he admitted SEL is minimally present, he stated, "It's all about literacy here, but we did still make SEL as one of our main school goals". Daniel echoed the importance of making SEL a formal school-wide goal:

> "It is our main school goal here. We have a school wide inquiry question around social
> emotional learning. All teachers are committed to the goal one way or another and are
> working on it".

Peter also shared this sentiment and said,

> "It's [SEL] has actually been [the goal] the last two years. What started as an inquiry
> developed into common language, but we wanted it to be a little more cohesive and a
> little bit more of kind of all on the same page rather than just kind of experimenting with
> the language. How do we know it's working right?

At Sam's school social emotional learning is the only school goal they have. He shared that the staff feels there are so many facets to SEL that they wanted to exclusively focus on SEL, especially given that 70% of the school population came from broken family situations. Sam stated, "On our school website, the school plan focuses only social emotional learning. To build capacity in our students, in our parents, in our community and in our staff".

Collaboration, commonplace language and programs, and creating a school-wide focus were reported as the main components in how all fifteen schools implemented SEL. Through each of the interviews, it can be seen that all three areas are intrinsically connected and help to promote each other.

Challenges in Implementation of SEL

While all fifteen participants were well-versed in what SEL is and could confidently speak to the fact that SEL was in fact being implemented in one way or another, all fifteen participants agreed that implementation comes with its challenges as with any new initiative or policy undertaken by the school system. The common challenges are presented below.

Understanding of SEL. One of the challenges of SEL implementation is the varying definitions or understandings of what SEL is and what implementation looks like. Bianca shared, "For starters, I mean thankfully, [the principal] and I, we're very in line in our philosophies on SEL and implementation, so it's way more organic and coherent". Danica stated this challenge

the most explicit. When asked about how her school incorporates SEL into the school culture,

she answered,

> "I would say at very different levels. The thing is, there's a very different level of
>
> understanding of SEL throughout the school. Some would say 'Oh it's Zones of
>
> Regulation' or 'It's using a chime and having deep breathing' whereas other people can
>
> incorporate [SEL] into everything that they do throughout the entire day. It's the makeup
>
> of their classroom. The problem is that people think they're doing it, but they don't really
>
> understand how much they're not actually doing it".

Linda agreed that the understanding of SEL varies amongst the staff at her school, "That's

always been our struggle. Seeing SEL as a common thread throughout the day and not as a

separate entity". Sam admitted that he himself does not understand all of SEL, "Do I understand

all of it? No, I would just break it up into a couple of general areas". Tanya said that it is a

challenge to keep the understanding of all staff up to date. "…new staff and making sure that

they understand what SEL is and how it is being implemented in this particular school".

Consistency. When there is such a varying understanding of SEL, it is difficult to keep

implementation consistent. Most of the interviewed participants agreed that consistency is one of

the most challenging areas of SEL implementation. By consistency, in this particular research,

we are referring to the "how" of implementation.

> "I think for me one of the biggest challenges that I see is consistency whether that's
>
> classroom, non-enrolling, class structure, kid to kid. So many people want that
>
> consistency, but given everything we know about our kids, you just can't provide it".

Bryan agreed, "One of the challenges is how deeply people are embracing it because that will

obviously impact how they do it". BJ explained that at his school

"Six to ten teachers explicitly teach some SEL strategies through programs. Then there's

two teachers who really, it's a focus of every single day in every single thing they do.

And there's a few teachers that don't do it at all."

Linda said it is no different at her school, "So here, we've had teachers come to social emotional

learning in different ways. Although we have a school-wide focus, in the classroom it's up to

you as far as where you want to go with it". Relatedly, Lucy noted that while a homogeneous

level of understanding and similar work within one program would be nice, "it's just not

realistic," she said. Stanley indicated that because the district has been pushing grades four, five

and six as the focus group of SEL, in his school, "K, 1, 2, 3, and 7 classes are really missing that

piece".

Peter argued that while being consistent throughout is a challenge, and perhaps an ideal,

it is not realistic, because of the varying nature of kids and context: "kids are in different places.

They're so complex". BJ and Aaron agreed that different schools need different modes of SEL

implementation: "At my other two schools, they were very inner city, and the need for SEL was

obvious there. Here, not so much, but if you talk to teachers here who have been here for 15

years, they see kids in their class that really need this," said BJ. Aaron said that, what one teacher

might see as "bad behaviour" another might see as an opportunity, "We might differ in our

philosophies".

Teacher buy-in. Still a large component of consistency in implementation is teacher

buy-in. The interviewed participants agreed that varying levels of teacher buy-in is challenging.

Bianca said that, whether it is teacher or administration, people must see a need for it: "You need

to see it as value added for your student population, otherwise there can be fourteen other things

that are going to take its place". Bryan agreed that teachers need to see the value of SEL

themselves: "This isn't just Bryan saying this is what we need to do because SEL is the big buzz word. No, this is actually something that's really important". When asked how to comment the issue of lack of teacher buy-in, Billy replied, "It was something that was a big challenge, getting every teacher to try it at least a little bit. What's the minimum? What's an entry point that everybody would be agreeable to?" Similarly, Danica agreed that no matter how much the district and administration support, the challenge really is getting teachers to a point where they want to do [SEL] and where they feel the need to do it.

No one voiced this concern more than Laura. In her interview she expressed the need to really get staff all on the same page:

"Some teachers, they just don't look at the kid. They look at the curriculum and it's about teaching the curriculum, not the children. And if people are resistant to the concept of social emotional learning, it just doesn't work. It doesn't".

Laura spoke not only of teachers and staff members, but also of administration.

"I think surprisingly not a lot of people, even principals, I'll be honest, not everyone values it…There's a lot of principals that don't really see the value of SEL and I think we'd have to start there".

Sam, who is a principal of one of the biggest schools in the entire district, said it is also a bigger issue of personal practice:

"Everyone talks about self-reflection, but not everybody is actually self-reflective…teachers who themselves struggle with some basic things. How do they teach it? The assumption is that everybody can kind of teach it. But it's much more complicated than that. Can they actually teach it?"

He furthered this comment that principals are not at an advantage because they are principals.

"How is a principal who may not have self-awareness, how are they supposed to lead a school in

that area?" Tanya echoed all the above sentiments:

> "I can support the teachers and the kids until the cows come home, but it's whether or not
>
> those classroom teachers believe it, welcome it, and use it. I can buy all the resources,
>
> and talk about it at length. But unless it is something that is a priority of those teachers, I
>
> can't force them to teach [SEL]".

Once again, the participants unknowingly agreed in their interviews that the challenges around

consistency and understanding of SEL implementation were largely affected by the level of

teacher buy-in. Teachers who were consistent and had a sound understanding of SEL and its

implementation clearly believe in SEL, welcome it and use it as Tanya shared. "It's a choice for

a lot of people," said BJ.

Prioritizing and sustainability. Though the participants commented on teacher buy-in,

many of them were mindful of the fact that it is not necessarily a question about willingness.

Most are willing and wanting to implement SEL, but it becomes a challenge to prioritize SEL

amongst the many responsibilities that teachers carry, thus making sustainability an issue. In this

regard, Daniel noted:

> "I think with any school goal trying to keep that alive over time can be a challenge.
>
> Keeping it alive and keeping it central over time because are so many great things
>
> constantly happening in the district and we're bombarded with opportunities and changes
>
> or new things and exciting things, so maintaining a goal over time is a real challenge,"

Lucy, who has been a principal for 10 years in the district, said that over the years more and

more has been downloaded onto teachers.

"The most universal challenge is the fact that everything is new and teachers are

absolutely overwhelmed with what they're having to grapple New report cards, new

curriculum, all within a couple of years. Who does that? So, then they say you know I

have to do SEL too? Well then what am I giving up?"

Stanley could not have agreed more with Lucy. In his interview, he talked about the constant

disruption teachers' experience:

"Teachers, they like those times when there's not all these things interrupting them. And

yet I find we do a pretty god job of interrupting them. If you want to keep attracting the

right people to the school district then you the job has to be sustainable and it's certainly

not".

Bryan commented in his interview about sustainability over time. When asked if he felt the

initiative of SEL implementation would continue if he were to be transferred to another school

tomorrow, he replied, "Absolutely. If the staff keep it a priority then they will find time for it and

it will continue".

Funding and resources. Finally, the participants commented on the challenge of funding

and resources for SEL implementation. While a few of the participants agreed that there were

areas in the budget where money could always be found, accessing funding was not necessarily

that easy. It would often take probing different district personnel, moving different budgets

around and justifying their spending. Laura commented on how she spent a lot of money on

equipping classrooms with tennis balls so that four could go on the bottom of every chair in the

school to help prevent the noise of chairs scraping along the floor. She reported that coming up

with SEL tool boxes for each class were also not "budgeted" but she had to find money to make

sure that each class had a toolbox of fidget toys, sensory and self-regulation tools to support

SEL. She also commented on the lack of funding for extra support staff: "We all know our counselling time is not anywhere near where it needs to be".

Half of the participants stated that having a district-based SEL teacher in their school was really what got the ball rolling. They felt that having a SEL teacher helped others feel at ease about implementation and teachers did not find it as daunting when having that go-to person who would help them through the lessons and programming. However, all of the participants who had had a SEL teacher commented that it was just a one-year pilot program and they wished that there was funding for more SEL teacher time. Lucy said,

> "I keep going back to that SEL teacher thing because it really helps to develop capacity
> with teachers. I was disappointed this year that they have decreased the budget for SEL
> teachers. It really depends on where the thinking is with our superintendent too. Different
> priorities may mean different funding, right?"

While most participants quoted funding and resources as a challenge, there was also agreement that funding could be accessed if needed.

SEL Throughout the District

Reading through the above findings, it could be inferred that consistency in implementation could be a potential challenge for schools in the district. In this section, I will be reporting on what the participants reported on the implementation of SEL throughout the district.

Priority practice and size of district. The Beaver School District is a large school district in British Columbia and is growing exponentially each year with more schools always being built. In such a big district, the participants agreed that consistency in the implementation of SEL was a challenge. While the participants felt implementation was a challenge, they also all

agreed that SEL was undoubtedly happening all throughout the district. For instance, Brian

suggested:

> "For starters, it's coming from our senior team. It's a priority practice in the district. It's
>
> filtering down from the top. Anybody who is paying attention to that and values the
>
> priority practices know [SEL] is actually a really important piece in our district".

Similarly, Billy indicated, "The fact that it is throughout the entire district in some capacity is

success. It seems like every school somehow is bringing it into their environment". Daniel

commented, "If it weren't a priority practice then there wouldn't be priority practice grants that

we received, like five thousand dollars from the district". Danica echoed this: "In our district

because it's one of the pillars of learning, because it's a priority practice, if we don't have money

within our school budget, I know I can access money from the district".

To further emphasize the importance of SEL in the Beaver District, several participants

also commented on the release time provided to teachers, paid for by the district in order for

teachers and staff to attend professional development on SEL or to run inquiry groups. It should

be noted that it is stated right on the school district's website that SEL is a priority practice and

one of the pillars of learning throughout the district.

SEL coordinator and teachers. In addition to making SEL a priority practice, the

district created a SEL coordinator position in 2011. In informal conversations with Tia, the SEL

coordinator, indicated that she was the only one of her kind in the entire province. No other

district employed a SEL coordinator. To enhance the development of SEL, the district then went

on to create district-based SEL teacher positions as part of a pilot program. The SEL teachers

were assigned to various schools in the district for one year and asked to focus on explicitly

teaching SEL to grades four to six, all the meanwhile building capacity in teachers so that SEL

could continue to be taught with or without SEL teachers.

"Having [the SEL teacher] started the conversation. She had great resources and great

lessons. People got to see her you know teach and then have teachers share in that

learning in a very non-judgmental way".

Linda agreed that having Tia as a district coordinator, helping teachers for SEL, and SEL

teachers, set the initiative in motion at her school. "It's a stumbling block for teachers. 'I've got

this book, but I don't know where to go. I just need someone to start my first two lessons and

then I can do it".

For those schools that were not chosen as a pilot school to have a SEL teacher, there were

still opportunities to work with Tia and the other SEL teachers. "We had one of the SEL teachers

come in for our summer pro-d and also here and there for short lunch time curriculum cafes". All

fifteen participants stated that at one time or another they had invited Tia or a SEL teacher in to

present to their staff. All fifteen agreed that having them in, significantly improved the response

to SEL implementation in their staff. "It's very unique province-wide to have a SEL coordinator

and SEL teachers. We're very fortunate," stated Linda.

The Role of Principals and Vice-principals in SEL Implementation

Finally, the data collected from the fifteen interviews revealed commonalities on how the

participants viewed their role, as administrators, in implementing SEL.

Modeling and being relationship focused. Sun Tzu in *The Art or War* once said, "A

leader leads by example not by force" (Sun-tzu & Griffith, 1964). When asked about how they

incorporate SEL into their daily work as a principal or vice-principal, all fifteen participants

unanimously agreed that they tried to model SEL as much as possible, both in their interaction

with kids and with staff members. Danica stated it this way:

> "I model it or at least I definitely aim to model it. The way my office is set up, the way I
>
> welcome children into my office, welcome staff into my office. I don't want to be the
>
> principal who is only about discipline, but the principal who is here to help. I want to sit
>
> down and talk with everyone".

No other participant echoed this sentiment more than Laura:

> "You model it as a leader and you model it, then you model it and you just keep
>
> modeling it and you model it with your parents, you model it at staff meetings, school-
>
> based team meetings and then you model it at all of the IEP meetings and with all the
>
> kids and eventually it does create a significant shift".

Laura furthered this with her personal philosophy:

> "It's just who I am. I try to live and breathe SEL. I would check in with people personally
>
> and make sure they knew I cared about them personally. I always remember this quote,
>
> 'no significant learning can take place without a significant relationship.'"

When asked about how he incorporates SEL into his daily work, Bryan stated that it was all

about relationships with people for him:

> "For me I have to be a role model to my students, but to my staff as well…as a principal
>
> you play a big role in the tone that you set and how you articulate what's important. The
>
> way you articulate what's important then staff will start to embrace and they'll see it as
>
> important especially if there's trust in who you are as a person and as a leader".

All fifteen participants expressed that their primary role in the implementation of SEL is to

model it as much as possible with all stakeholders of their individual school communities.

Participants showed a desire to form genuine relationships with kids, staff, parents and the

surrounding community.

      Creating opportunity and building capacity. Another common element that the fifteen

participants agreed was that part of their role in implementing SEL was "creating opportunity".

They defined creating opportunity in terms of providing collaboration or release time; resources,

such as books and professional development, through inquiry groups and guest speakers. "The

big things that we have done is provide time and resources," said Billy. "I think people always

appreciate time and money," agreed Daniel in his interview. Danica put it the simplest:

> "Basically, materials wise, purchase. Equipment for classrooms, purchase. Carpets,
>
> lighting, whatever, purchase. That's really the easiest way to support…If a teacher
>
> wanted to visit another classroom or a different school and bring back and share with our
>
> staff here then absolutely I'd pay for a TOC in a heartbeat".

The participants also agreed that a large reason behind creating opportunity and encouraging

staff to take on the lead is to build capacity. "Any educational leader that comes into a building,

it's about building capacity within staff," said Zoey. "My role is to support and work alongside

my staff and students. I think that if I was to leave tomorrow I still believe that this work would

continue".

      Bianca expressed the importance of providing mentorship and direct in-class or out-of-

class support to teachers in her role as vice-principal. "Ideally, we want to play a back seat in

that leading though and let teachers lead. But those little gentle nudges it has to come from

admin".

      Managerial duties. As stated in chapter 2 of this dissertation, administration has always

played a role in being the middle man and managing the building as a whole. In the interviews

with the fifteen participants, all participants also expressed that, as a principal, they felt

challenged in balancing managerial duties and encouraging new initiatives such as SEL. This

was most evident in the interview with Stanley:

> "There's a life that's gotten so busy as a principal with the number of emails and
>
> initiatives and dinner meetings and workshops and inquiries, right? [SEL] becomes one
>
> of the hard ones to prioritize. It gets a little too busy and then you forget stuff and then
>
> you're just managing. And then as soon as you walk into your office there's deadlines for
>
> this, deadlines for that program. This is cancelled, this is on, deadlines to spend money. I
>
> think that's the biggest hurdle in a principal's role".

Stanley expressed what other participants also echoed in terms of making time and opportunity

for their own growth.

> "[There is] a lot of managerial business. The further and further away from the classroom
>
> you get, sometimes [admin] lose perspective and you get caught up in the managerial
>
> piece. If you see value in [SEL] then you'll make time for it. And if you don't see value,
>
> then there are going to be 14 other things that are going to take its place".

Most of the participants agreed that professional development on SEL implementation was

available through the district, but it was not mandatory, thus leaving it up to principals and vice-

principals to prioritize what it is they value and want to bring to their schools. "There's

opportunities to go to workshops. But again, you're fitting that in the millions of things, right?"

said Stanley. And while participants agree that there is the pressure of managerial duties, they

also agree that it is a necessary part of the role in order to allow teachers to take the lead and

build capacity.

Conclusion

The data collected shows that the fifteen participants are all aware of how SEL is being implemented within their schools, although at varying degrees. They also are aware of the challenges that their staff face currently in the implementation, however, they seemed to agree that SEL, as a priority practice, is valued throughout the entire district. Lastly, the participants view their role as "very important, but not necessary" as Billy put it. Bryan put it this way, "It can't be about me, the principal, it's got to be about the relationships in the building between staff, students, admin and community".

Chapter 6

Discussion

This chapter will present an analysis of the findings. This study explored primarily how

SEL is being implemented in the Beaver District from the perspectives of principals and vice-

principals. It also investigated any challenges principals and vice-principals experienced in SEL

implementation, the consistency in the implementation, and finally, the role school-based

administrators play in implementing SEL. Again, the primary focus group of this study was

elementary principals plus a few elementary vice-principals. The previous chapter revealed key

themes from the semi-structured interviews. In particular, this chapter will focus on 1) SEL

implementation, 2) Challenges experienced during SEL implementation, and 3) The role of the

principal and vice-principal in the implementation of SEL in the district. These themes will be

analysed through the lens of the literature and the theoretical framework.

SEL Implementation

Context matters in policy implementation. Policy forming, according to Adams

(2015), refers to the ways in which positions are taken up at the local level in an attempt to

understand policy. The main idea is that interpretation matters and interpretation depends on

context. Policy forming allows for teachers and administrators to form their own practices in

implementation and achieve results that are favourable to their specific setting (Adams, 2015).

The participants expressed the need for teacher autonomy when implementing SEL because

teachers needed to be able to adapt SEL to their own teaching styles, students, and classroom

environments.

Riveros and Viczko (2015) argued that teacher learning is actualized in multiple settings

and that various realities coexist within what we call "school". Relatedly, Winton (2013), using

the notion of "policy enactment", showed that how an external policy is enacted is very much

dependent on the school context. One of the participants spoke of his experience implementing

SEL in a low-income, inner city school, versus an affluent school. He reported that in an inner-

city school SEL seemed to play a more important role and seemed more prominent with teachers,

who felt the need to take SEL implementation seriously. This was in stark contrast to his current

more affluent school, in which children did not seem to require SEL in an urgent or explicit

level.

In Winton's study (2013) one of her participants commented on how people do what

makes sense to them. Similarly, several participants in this study indicated that teachers and staff

start where they have to and where their students are in terms of emotional and social

development, however, it was all about individual interpretation. This is what Maguire, Hoskins,

Ball and Braun (2011) term "sense-making": it is all about the way school actors interpret

policies in their particular contexts. Sense-making, as described by Maguire et al. (2011), situates

policy enactment in the practices of the stakeholders. In their study related to visuals and

artefacts in policy enactment, they found that various visuals were positioned as policy

translation devices, intended to convey the position of the school on a certain policy. They

contended that viewers make sense of visuals pertaining to policies depending on context,

cultural assumptions, personal knowledge and past experiences (Maguire et al., 2011).

Despite the calls for collaboration in policy work, Adams (2015) and Colebatch (2006)

noted that policy work still starts from the top. Adams (2015) talks about policy work through

the lens of positioning theory: policy-explanation, policy-framing and policy-forming. Policy

explanation has to do with the "what" and "why" of the policy, while policy framing has to do

with the "where" and "when" of the policy and finally, policy forming has to do with the "how"

of the policy. In the interviews, all the participants agreed that they knew that the district felt

SEL was important since it was listed as one of the Beaver District's Priority Practices. They

agreed that because SEL was important to the board's executives, it was prioritized in the

district, which supports the idea that policy still often starts from the top down.

In relation to policy explanation, the district has used Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki and

Schellinger's (2011) meta-analysis to show to different stakeholders that SEL had a positive

effect on academic performance. Also, the district has invested in the initiative by hiring a SEL

coordinator and SEL teachers. Through the work of these professionals, the district is mobilizing

SEL, showing why this initiative is important to the Beaver District. Policy framing is evidenced

through the district's request that SEL would be implemented across the board, whether it be

taught as one explicit block in the day, or embedded throughout the new BC curriculum, within

the day-to-day teaching. Finally, policy forming is evidenced in the autonomy given to teachers

to implement SEL in their individual classrooms. Ozga (2000) believes that Adams' (2015)

theory of policy explanation, framing and forming is important in order to recognize teachers'

work and contribution to improving the quality of student education, despite policies and

initiatives being "handed down" from the top.

Collaboration is key in policy implementation. Ozga (2000) and Colebatch (2006)

explain that traditionally policy implementation has been portrayed as an authoritative choice

and that policy actors are not always able to collaborate and discuss the adoption of policies.

However, both authors and Adams (2015) counter this tradition by suggesting that policy

implementation requires the participation of diverse policy authors, and not only those at the top

of the organizational structure. Colebatch (2006) calls this "structured interaction" where "rather

than a single actor called 'the government', there is an array of organized voices inside and

outside" (p. 12). Relatedly, all the interviewees in this study stressed the need for collaboration: they claimed that SEL implementation could not take place without a team and without open and honest discussion with teachers. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) term this process a learning community. In a learning community, leaders are collaborative, recognizing the strength in team and abandoning the *lone hero* approach. Practically, for a school to function as a learning community, let alone implement policies, the adults in the school need to develop a culture of interdependence. This would entail adopting a systemic viewpoint of leadership, branching away from traditional forms of hierarchical leadership. Learning communities provide an opportunity for inclusive leadership, which is addressed later in the chapter, as the basis for learning communities is an inclusive approach to change which involves a variety of stakeholders.

Colebatch's (2006) also noted the "disconnect" between the accounts of different policy actors. The participants in this study echoed Colebatch's (2006) notion when they explained that there is disconnect between district personnel and classroom teachers due to the fact that district personnel are too far removed from the classroom. They stated that the only way to counter this disconnect is collaboration between district personnel and amongst teachers. There are multiple actors involved in the implementation process and each actor brings a different set of skills and knowledges. According Colebatch a "good policy" involves three sorts of knowledge: (a) *episteme*, the establishing of causal links and chains (b) *praxis*, deriving from experience and skill and (c) *phronesis*, looking for what is ethically practical rather than a kind of science. Thus, drawing on the knowledge of all involved, and not just outside experts or district leaders, is a necessary component of effective implementation. The interviewees in this research agreed that it can never be about the principal as the individual, but it has to be about the whole school, staff and students included. When it comes specifically to SEL implementation, it is clear that the

district is doing important work drawing on evidence to inform SEL practice. Colebatch's

argument suggests that teachers' knowledge and experience of SEL, their praxis and phronesis,

are also important. To elaborate, the episteme would be evidenced in the district reflecting on the

current status of student learning, collecting evidence and then finding links to inform SEL

policy for the district. The praxis would be seen in the experience and skills of all involved,

especially teachers, and finally, the phronesis would be the gained ethical judgment in practice,

based on the knowledge and experience on SEL implementation.

Challenges with SEL Implementation

   Prioritizing new policies and sustainability are always challenging. In the literature

review conducted for this research it was found that one of the challenges in SEL

implementation is the unrealistic expectations that some teachers and administrators have around

SEL implementation. Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum and Schuyler (2000) reported that educators

felt that there is no time in the school day to accommodate SEL with so many policy mandates to

cover more and more curriculum every year. The interviews revealed that one of the more

prominent and common challenges that schools felt in SEL implementation was that teachers

were being stretched too thin. One of the participants shared that the demands of new curriculum

in BC, plus a new reporting format, a plethora of other initiatives, and then SEL, made

prioritizing a real struggle for teachers. Another participant shared that teachers are being

interrupted constantly and being bombarded with more "new and improved" initiatives. Elias et

al (2000) also reported that teachers felt that because SEL programs can be fixed and scripted,

which do not allow students to have more organic experiences with it. The participants in this

study agreed that the key in SEL implementation was to embed it throughout the day in order to

make it not only realistic, but to eliminate the need to prioritize it as another separate subject to

be included in the curriculum.

Because prioritizing SEL can be proven challenging, the sustainability of SEL is also in

question. Freeman, Wertheim and Trinder (2014) state that large-scale changes in policies and

programs are often not sustained over time. Cohen (2006) adds to this by stating that frequent

turnover in staff and administration contributes to the difficulties of long-term sustainability. The

interviewees expressed that sustainability was definitely on their minds and that the hope was

that SEL implementation would continue, regardless of administration or staff turnover.

Relatedly, some participants agreed that keeping new staff up to date with the current status of

initiatives in each school did make sustainability a challenge.

In Kasler and Elias' study (2012) on SEL implementation and administrative turn over,

the data showed that despite three years of intense implementation, administrative turnover had

an adverse effect on implementation and SEL was quickly forgotten. As a result, SEL was put

aside in favour of another initiative. Although the participants in this study believed that

principal support did play an important role in advancing and sustaining SEL, they also believed

that SEL implementation would continue in their schools, even if they were to be transferred to

another school the next day, because if teachers saw the need to prioritize SEL in their practice,

then SEL would continue.

The participants also stated that in order for teachers to see the need for SEL, the district

must build capacity for long-term sustainability. Spillane et al. (2004), claimed that distributed

leadership could be a way to generate long-term sustainability. The distributed leadership

approach moves way from the sole individual's ability towards the recognition of the inevitable

interaction between school actors to achieve organizational goals (Spillane et al., 2004). Change

would take place systemically over time after involving district personnel, teachers, students and

the community. Spillane et al. (2004) argue that leadership that results in systemic change

correlates to the long-term sustainability of policy initiatives. The participants in this study saw

the need to distribute leadership amongst their staff, students and community, involving them in

the process in order for all parties to see the need for change, thus ensuring SEL implementation

would continue no matter who the administrator was.

Varying understandings of SEL make consistency a challenge. All participants

interviewed in this study agreed that there is a wide array of understandings when it comes to

SEL and what its implementation looks like. A few participants went further to say that some

teachers and principals are not self-reflective regarding SEL or do not practice SEL in their

schools. Further, some participants noted that that the understanding of what SEL in the district

is not homogenous, making consistency in implementation a challenge.

Elias et al. (2000) reported that some teachers feel that are not knowledgeable enough

their own social and emotional well-being, which would make them ill-equipped to administer a

social-emotional learning program. Elias et al. (2000) also reported that teachers might not feel

they are trained to teach SEL the way school counsellors and psychologists are. The interviewees

also revealed that some schools could run a program such as *Second Step* or *Mind Up* or *Zones of*

Regulation and consider that they are doing SEL, while others "live, breathe and embed SEL into

the makeup of the classroom and the day-to-day," as Laura said in her interview. The

participants agree that for some their understanding of SEL implementation involves running a

program, while others understand SEL implementation as connecting social-emotional learning

to as many subjects as possible, intertwining it within the curriculum, for example, by having

moments of self-reflection and goal setting in all subjects, including Math and Science. Both

methods are widely accepted as SEL implementation, however this variation in the understanding of implementation results in the inconsistencies in implementation seen throughout the district.

As mentioned previously, another contributing factor to the emergence of multiple forms of SEL implementation is the school context. One of the participants interviewed in this study shared that in his school seventy percent of the students experienced difficulties with their families with complicated background stories, thus requiring the teachers' approach to SEL to be more personalized. However, it should also be noted that in the Beaver School District, SEL teachers travel to the different schools to provide a basic general foundational understanding of what SEL is and how it can be implemented, which contributes to consistency in the implementation.

Despite the efforts of district SEL teachers to make the implementation more uniform, the local process of sense making still contributes to SEL implementation. Spillane et al. (2002) explain sense-making in terms of interpretation: "implementation involves interpretation because implementers must figure out what a policy means and whether and how it applies to their school to decide whether and how to ignore, adapt or adopt policy locally" (p. 733). School leaders then are influenced by two factors in their sense-making process: the institutional context and their political circumstances. Spillane et al. (2002) notes that principals are local agents in constructing policy messages passed down from the upper levels of the organization. Principals also have to contend with the politics of being accountable to the district, but also to the community and teachers. Following Spillane et al.'s (2002) view, it could be concluded that all these factors influence policy implementation.

The Principal and Vice-principal's Role in SEL Implementation

Administrators, as intermediaries between the district policy and the classroom,

model practice and oversee the implementation. The analysis reflects a key theme in

the literature on school administration and leadership, that is, school-based administrators,

principals and vice-principals, play an important role in policy implementation. According to

Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita and Zoltners (2002), administrators have long been

known to play the role of a middleman. It is a difficult terrain for them to be, as they are

accountable to three parties: the district, the community and classroom teachers (Spillane et al.,

2002). In the interviews conducted, the participants expressed that as principal or vice-principal

they viewed their role as important, but not always necessary for policies and initiatives to be

successfully implemented.

All participants agreed that the one way they incorporated SEL implementation into their

daily work as administrators, was to model SEL in their language, demeanour and interactions

with staff and students. They also expressed that they had to show that they believed in the

importance of SEL. In Cherkowski and Brown's study (2013), which involved interviewing

principals in British Columbia, one of the themes that emerged from the data was the need for

school-based leaders to lead with character and integrity, characteristics they felt strongly needed

to be modeled in their daily practice for staff to engage with new initiatives and to create a

sustainable learning community. Cherkowski and Brown (2013) drew on the BCPVPA

leadership standards, which state that moral stewardship is one of the central characteristics of a

sustainable learning community.

In the interviews that Cherkowski and Brown (2013) conducted, each participant reported

that they felt the need to demonstrate (a) that they were there to serve the staff and students and,

(b) that they themselves believed in the common goal or initiative, in order to inspire others to

join them. Similarly, Ryan (2006) argued that a critical part of the administrator's role is the

ability to reflect on their own practices including morals, beliefs, words, actions, and plans on

initiating and implementing change. The participants in this study agreed that a large part of how

they implemented SEL was expressed in words and actions towards their staff and students. One

participant said that rarely a day goes by without her reflecting on her day's work. Freeman,

Wertheim and Trinder's study (2014) noted that teachers become more committed to programs

and policy implementation if school-based leaders participated fully and modeled that the

initiative was important to them.

All the participants in this research agreed that prioritizing was a challenging part of the

role as principals. Between the paperwork, deadlines for spending, and every day regular duties,

implementing new initiatives had to be constantly put at the forefront, otherwise the new policy

would be forgotten. Not to mention that with the number of new initiatives continuously being

introduced, principals found it difficult to navigate which ones to bring up with staff and which

ones to let go. Particularly in the Beaver School District, there has been new provincial

curriculum, new district priority practices, and a new form of reporting, all within a couple of

years. Administrators want to offer professional development for all the new initiatives,

however, they find it increasingly difficult to fit it all in for the staff, let alone themselves.

Spillane et al. (2004) recognizes that there is a concern regarding the relationship between

leadership work and managerial duties. They note that the "managerial imperative" often

dominates the work of school leaders and that managerial tasks differ from leadership ones.

However, Spillane et al. (2004) also argue that executing leadership tasks such as policy

implementation, may be difficult if managerial tasks are neglected. One of the participants of this

research expressed that although he found it challenging to stay on top of all the managerial

tasks, one of those tasks involved sharing out professional development opportunities for

teachers to support district initiatives. Thus, this particular managerial task seemed to connect

strongly to the leadership task of providing opportunity for teachers and policy implementation.

Another piece of the puzzle is finding time to share experiences and knowledge on SEL.

The participants felt that staff meetings and lunchtime curriculum cafes were imperative to

facilitating a time where people could share out their experiences. In Freeman et al.'s (2014)

study, a principal took it upon himself to collect information on the new initiatives and share

them out with the staff, which proved to be an effective strategy to bring people on-board and

initiate collaborations. Winton (2013) stated that insufficient coordination has a negative impact

in the implementation of policy in schools. It is clear that the participants in this research, feel

the pressure of leading their schools, which in turn influences policy implementation, this case,

specifically, SEL implementation.

Finally, in order for leaders to effectively lead their schools and initiate collaboration,

creating a learning community is key. Learning communities according to Mitchell and Sackney

(2009), reflect a more ecological understanding of the organization. Practically, for a school to

function as a learning community, the adults in the school need to develop a culture of

interdependence. Typically, the principal is key, though not solitary, actor in shifting school

culture toward a learning community (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). A learning community in

schools in the Beaver District would widen accountability and distribute leadership for more

effective implementation of SEL, as principals and teachers and community members would

become more interdependent as they grew their common goal or vision.

Within their role as intermediaries between the district policies and the classroom practice, administrators adopt inclusive and transformative perspectives. In this research, the participants agreed that forming trusting relationships with their staff was of utmost importance. Staff needed to be able to engage in open dialogue with the school leaders and needed to feel comfortable coming to their principals for support in any situation. Greenberg et al. (2003) reported that to successfully implement SEL into schools, genuine and honest relationships needed to exist between all stakeholders so that the accountability of change and leadership does not just rest with one individual. Gunter (2001) argues that leadership does not reside in one individual but in the relationship between individuals, working towards social vision and change. Ryan (2006) defines this as the inclusive leader. An inclusive leader is one who focuses on equitable relationships that recognizes differences in gender, race, class, ability or sexual orientation.

Inclusive leadership entails a team mindset, which is highly participatory and group-oriented. This means that those who occupy formal positions of leadership would be seldom able to create a long-standing sustainable systemic change on their own, they will need to work in cooperation with other community members. Thus, schools improve not necessarily as a result of an individual's work, but as a result of a variety of people working together (Ryan, 2006). Ryan (2006) furthers the definition of inclusive leadership through a series of distinctive practices: advocating for inclusion, educating participants, nurturing dialogue, developing critical thinking, emphasizing student learning, adopting inclusive decision making, and incorporating whole school approaches. This approach to leadership was strongly expressed through all the interviews of this study. All of the interviewees said that SEL implementation, or any policy

implementation for that matter, required a team approach. This resonates with Greenberg et al.'s

(2003) study, which also found that school-based administrators prefer a "bottom-up" approach.

An inclusive approach allows for open and collaborative discussion with regards to new

initiatives and policies and their implementation. The more people have the chance to discuss

and share their ideas, the more comfortable they will feel about change and take on a leadership

role in their own right. As more individuals take on leadership roles then ownership of the

initiative becomes distributed amongst stakeholders and creates a more effective learning

community as discussed earlier (Spillane et al., 2004; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009)). When

working in learning communities, leadership becomes about building capacity (Cherkowski &

Brown, 2013), which was at the forefront of the minds of the interviewees. They all expressed

that they viewed a large part of their role as school leaders was to build capacity within the

school for initiatives and best practice to continue with or without them.

For any initiative to be sustainable and successfully implemented, teachers had to be

included as much as possible and given the responsibility to lead. The participants expressed that

building capacity gave ownership of SEL to the staff and students and not just to the

administrators. This, in turn, meant that if administrators were to be transferred to another

school, SEL initiatives would continue. Administrators may play a central role in the policy

implementation, but by themselves they would be unable to bring about any sustainable change

(Oborn, Barrett & Dawson, 2013). One of the interviewees shared that for her it was all about

ensuring that she tapped into the strengths of the teachers in her school. A key characteristic of

an inclusive leader is the ability to recognize the expertise of others and enabling them to act

upon that expertise. An inclusive leader, according to Ryan (2006), educates participants,

nurtures dialogue, adopts inclusive decision and policy-making strategies and encourages self-

reflection, all attributes which the participants in this research claimed were essential to SEL

implementation.

For SEL implementation to be carried out and successfully implemented in schools, not

only does a leader need to be inclusive, but he or she also needs to be transformative. Shields

(2010) defines transformative leadership as leadership that encourages critical reflection with a

move towards social change. In a transformative environment, all stakeholders, including the

community, staff and students, would be educated in the areas of academic, social and moral

behaviour. This leader motivates the staff to explore their individual and collective social-

emotional assets and areas in need of improvement, while modeling caring and moral behaviour

(Shields, 2014).

Transformative leadership critiques "inequitable practices" which embodies critical

reflection and analysis, moving towards a more equitable playing field for all members of an

organization (Shields, 2010). This leader acts with courage and conviction to bring about a

collective goal. Shields (2014) says that the transformative leader has to be ready to be the first

to die on the hill in order to show his or her commitment to the movement and to those involved.

The interviewees in this research study expressed the need to promote critical reflection in their

staff in order to bring about change in implementation. They also recognized that in order for this

critical reflection and change to take place, they had to be the first ones to step up to the plate by

modeling the behaviour and showing their support for SEL as one of the Beaver District's

priority practices, and their support for the staff implementing SEL.

In a study conducted by Shields (2010), two transformative leaders saw the need to

challenge current practices but recognized the need for teachers to come to that realization on

their own through the guidance and encouragement of the leader. Similarly, the participants in

the Beaver District reported that part of their role was to guide and to encourage the members of

the school community to participate in change initiatives. However, they also agreed that while

they could encourage and guide people, the ultimate change had to take place within the school

community's perceptions and beliefs. Cherkowski and Brown (2013) conducted a qualitative

narrative inquiry around how principals and vice-principals in British Columbia experience

inclusive and transformative leadership. The results showed that they believed in the importance

of building capacity and sharing a common vision and goals. This finding was echoed strongly

by the participants in the Beaver District.

Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the findings from the fifteen interviews conducted for

this research in light of the literature review and the theoretical framework presented in chapters

two and three. An analysis of the qualitative data, showed that viewpoints shared by the

participants largely supported the findings of the reviewed literature in the areas of education

policy implementation and education leadership, and more specifically, in the area of SEL

implementation.

The analysis revealed that SEL, as an initiative implemented in the Beaver School

District, resembles Adams (2015) theory of policy-explanation, policy-framing and policy-

forming, which takes into account the specificity of context in the implementation process.

Based on the analysis, it was suggested that district personnel must work in conjunction with

principals and teachers in order for policies to be framed and formed in schools. The analysis

also revealed that the implementation of SEL has its challenges, which reflects findings from

other studies in this area.

Spillane et al.'s (2002) and Maguire et al.'s (2011) notion of sense-making was useful to understand how individual interpretation can lead to varying modes of policy implementation. Lastly, from an educational leadership perspective, the analysis found that administrators, as intermediaries between district policy and classroom practices, must be inclusive and transformative in order for SEL to be implemented successfully in the Beaver District. This finding was previously highlighted in the literature, specifically, in Shields (2010 & 2014) transformative leadership and Ryan's (2006) inclusive leadership models. These models offer a suitable framework to understand how school leaders in the Beaver District view their role in SEL implementation. That is, as modelling, supporting, nurturing dialogue and having moral courage to lead staff towards long-term systemic change.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Summary of Thesis

This study examined SEL implementation in the Beaver School District from the

perspectives of principals and vice-principals. The purpose of this study was to document the

school leaders' experiences with SEL and to produce knowledge and awareness about SEL

implementation as a priority practice in the district. The narratives in this study are crucial

elements in the depiction of the current status of SEL implementation. Also, this research aimed

to gain insight on the challenges around SEL implementation, the consistency of implementation

throughout the district, and the role that principals and vice-principals play in SEL

implementation.

The findings show that there is a need to further examine SEL implementation in the

district. Policies, like the district's SEL initiative, play a role, whether it is big or small, in every

organization. Throughout this thesis, I drew predominantly upon the work of Adams (2015),

Maguire et al. (2011) and Spillane et al. (2002) as a framework to comprehend policy work.

Adams (2015) outlines an alternative to the traditional approach to policy implementation:

policy-explanation, policy-framing, and policy-forming. Under this theory, the district would be

responsible for gathering information and explaining the policy, framing would involve other

district personnel and school-based leaders, while forming puts the policy into specific context

for local stakeholders to interpret and implement. It is important then to compare the Beaver

District's approach to policy through this lens. As is described in the findings district quotes

CASEL and subsequent research to explain SEL. SEL coordinators and SEL teachers are

involved in the framing of SEL and then individual schools in the district adapt SEL to fit the

needs of their students. Maguire et al. (2011) and Spillane et al. (2002) explain policy work

through the lens of "sense-making" which places emphasis on context to interpret and implement

policy. Sense making focuses on the organizational actors' interpretations and explains the

variations in implementation.

Spillane et al. (2002 & 2004) and Mitchell and Sackney (2009) speak to the importance

of collaboration in implementation, citing learning communities and distributed leadership as the

key components to effective policy implementation, leading to long-term sustainability. Spillane

et al. (2004) notes that the constituting elements of leadership involve not just the leader, but the

followers and the situation, which echoes Mitchell and Sackney's (2009) argument that

sustainable change requires the school to function as a learning community where all

stakeholders become interdependent.

Learning communities emphasize the need for inclusive leadership. Ryan's (2006)

inclusive leadership and Shields's (2010 & 2014) transformative leadership provide the

undergirding for the conceptualization of leadership in this thesis. Ryan (2006) defines inclusive

leadership as leadership that stretches beyond administrators, including teachers, students,

community members and other professionals; all working together with the end goal of equity in

mind. Proponents of inclusive approaches to leadership believe that many educational

institutions and communities are inherently unfair: some people consistently enjoy advantages at

the expense of others (Ryan, 2006). The task for an inclusive and emancipatory leader is then to

get people to recognize these injustices and work together to "level out the playing field" (Ryan,

2007, p. 94). In an inclusive spirit, leadership does not reside in a position or a person, but in

equitable, caring, and fluid relationships among various individuals (Ryan, 2007).

Adding to Ryan's (2007) arguments, Shields (2010, 2014) argued that transformative

leadership and inclusive leadership are inextricably related. She defines transformative

leadership as leadership that embodies critical reflection and analysis with a move towards social

change. Transformative leadership also focuses on equity, questioning inequitable practices and

"offering the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in

common with others" (Shields, 2010, p. 559. Transformative and inclusive leadership focuses on

not just building a certain type of leadership, but stretches to include equitable principles and

practices by identifying shared goals and a restructuring framework that may counter inequity

and disadvantage (Shields, 2010; Ryan 2007). Both inclusive and transformative leadership

approaches contend that without including all stakeholders, leaders cannot bring about change

and determine new practices by themselves.

Other key authors in the field of SEL implementation, which are included in the literature

review of this thesis, include: Elias et al. (2000), Freeman et al. (2014), Cohen (2006), and

Evans, Murphy and Scourfield (2015). These authors speak to the challenges in SEL

implementation. Elias et al. (2000) speak to the difficulties of prioritizing and making time for

SEL, Freeman et al. (2014) discuss the lack of training available, and Cohen (2006) and Evans et

al. (2015) contend that consistencies in implementation re due to varying context of each school.

In my findings and analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews,

the primary finding was that SEL was being implemented throughout the Beaver School District

at varying natures. The findings revealed that each school, according to the principal or vice-

principal, viewed SEL implementation as a key contributor to student learning, however, they

implemented SEL in different ways. The inconsistency in implementation was found to be due to

different challenges each school faced, which mainly surrounded each school's local context, not

limited to just demographics, but also to the staff's understandings of SEL, staff collaboration,

and training and opportunities provided via professional development. The findings also showed

that school-based leaders viewed their role as more of a "middle person" that promote the

district's policy and provide improvement opportunities to their staff, supporting them in the

implementation process in whichever way they could.

Addressing the Research Questions

My key research question was: how has SEL been implemented in the Beaver School

District? To answer this question, I devised three sub questions to be explored. In this section I

will address each sub question before addressing the overall research question.

What have been the challenges at the school level implementing SEL? This study

found that there are a number of challenges at the school level in implementing SEL. The first

challenge cited by the participants was the varying understandings by different staff members of

what SEL implementation was. They reported that some understood SEL to be more of a one-

time program to be carried out during one specific block of the day, while others felt SEL needed

to embedded throughout the day and curriculum. Although neither is deemed "better", the

difference in viewpoints does account for the inconsistency of implementation, which was

dubbed as the secondary challenge of implementation. For example, some teachers ran *Second

Step* or *Mind Up* in one block of the day and only addressed SEL during that block. Other

teachers felt that in order for any learning to take place in the day, SEL had to be constantly

incorporated in the curriculum by integrating breathing exercises, movement breaks and self-

reflection throughout the day.

The findings related to this research question speak to the idea that policy implementation

is intricately related to context (Ball, 2015). Principals of inner-city schools noted that their staff

saw a more explicit need to incorporate SEL as an on-going, all-day practice. However,

principals of schools in more affluent areas felt the same amount of urgency given their specific

contexts of dysregulated children and families. For these principals, context mattered. They felt

that the context of their schools had an effect on how teachers made sense of policy enactment

(Maguire et al., 2011). Teachers can only enact on policy based on what makes sense in their

own given environment. For instance, one participant noted that newer and inexperienced

teachers were coming out of teacher's college with the idea that SEL was a major component of

the new curriculum. This contributed to the inconsistency in SEL implementation, as many more

experienced teachers did not feel SEL was property incorporated into their daily work.

The third challenge reported by the participants was teacher buy-in. Convincing teachers

to join the initiative was difficult, mostly due to the pressure teachers felt with regards to finding

time and prioritizing SEL in a busy school day. The interviewees explained that many teachers

felt they would have to give something up in their day in order to include SEL, for example, to

shorten their math lesson or to forego art. One participant expressed that with the number of

district initiatives constantly being introduced such as a new reporting system and a brand new

provincial curriculum, that teachers were put under a lot of pressure, thus leading to SEL being

put on the bottom of the list of priorities for many.

All the participants agreed that if teachers did not see the need for SEL, then it would not

be prioritized nor would it be sustained over time, therefore making teacher buy-in imperative.

Teachers needed to see the importance of SEL so they would make it part of their daily activities.

This finding reflects the idea that in policy forming and enactment, context matters. Again, if

making time for SEL made sense to a teacher given his or her individual classroom context, then

SEL could became a priority. Lastly, lack of funding in certain areas, was cited as a challenge by

the participants. They felt that while district did prioritize SEL, the fact that funding was being

cut, meant fewer district SEL teachers being hired and sent into schools to teach alongside

classroom teachers. The participants cited having district SEL teachers has been key to

encouraging teachers and guiding them in SEL implementation. The cutting back of this support

over the last school year came as a disappointment and was viewed as an upcoming challenge in

implementation.

The district's choice to cutback funding can be seen as a reflection of a somewhat more

traditional approach to policy forming as the district has authoritative choice on where to place

certain amounts of funding. However, we can also see this as a reflection of the variance in

contexts. District personnel view the context of the district differently, as they are unaware of

smaller local school contexts and have a larger whole-district picture in mind. For the context

that district personnel see, they may view that a different approach to SEL may be more effective

or that the funding is needed in a direr area of learning. No matter it be a smaller or larger

context, the findings of this research show that a major challenge in implementing SEL comes

down to the varying nature of context.

Is SEL implemented the same way across the district, why or why not? The

participants in this study believed that SELwas being implemented because SEL is one of the

district's priority practices. The priority practices outline the district's commitment to the areas

that are at the forefront of student learning in the Beaver School District. Given the size of the

district, the participants also agreed that implementation was not widely consistent throughout.

They stated that some schools had just begun exploring SEL implementation through

professional development, book clubs and discussions, while other schools had made SEL as a

school-wide goal for the last three years, having it strongly embedded in every classroom of the

school. Some schools used common language and programs such as a school-wide daily run or

soft start, while other schools were still in the discussion and planning stage of how to implement

SEL school-wide. Though there may be variation throughout the district, the participants still felt

that at the core of it, the message was the same, namely, that SEL was important and that

implementation did not have to be complex, especially since the district provided SEL teachers

and employed a district SEL coordinator, a position unique to the province. The SEL teachers

and coordinator supported various schools throughout the district, making implementation

somewhat consistent when it came to training and working with staff on the basics SEL, how it

could be implemented, whether it be through explicit programs or through implicit methods

throughout the day. Again, for the participants, the fact that SEL was being implemented

throughout the district, in one way or another, was consistent enough. The participants felt

strongly that they knew that SEL was important to the upper leadership of the district and that

there was support provided to schools in a way that made sense from an upper leadership

standpoint.

SEL being included as a priority practice is reflective of Adams' (2015) theory of policy-

explaining, policy framing and policy forming. The district saw causal links between SEL and

academic achievement and overall quality of education for students. Therefore, taking evidence

from current literature, the district felt that SEL needed to become a priority practice. By

drawing on this evidence, the importance of SEL as a policy was explained, SEL coordinators

and teachers were brought into frame this policy and help explain the rationale behind SEL. SEL

coordinators and teachers played an important role in framing SEL into schools so that SEL

became more accessible. However, the district has allowed for context to once again play a role

in policy forming. The findings of this research show that though the district explained and

framed SEL, the forming of it as a policy as it is in its current state, was left up to teachers.

Policy enactment then would be inconsistent in nature because of the varying roles district,

school-based leaders and teachers play, however it should be noted that inconsistency was not

seen as a weakness or a negative point to SEL implementation. Rather, the variance in

implementation throughout the district was seen as a natural consequence of a flexible and

adaptive educational policy enacted in a large district.

How do principals and vice-principals see their role in implementing SEL? When

asked to share about the role they play in implementing SEL, the participants agreed that while

they viewed their role as important, they did not view it to be central to it. They echoed Ryan

(2006), Shields (2010 & 2014), and Spillane et al.'s (2002 & 2004) theories that in order for

policies to be implemented for change and long-term sustainability, school administrators must

be inclusive leaders. The participants felt they if they wanted teachers to implement SEL, the

principal and vice-principal had to be willing to model the policy themselves. Forming

relationships with staff members and district personnel were found to be key in building trust and

developing open and honest discussion about policy work. If the principal showed they cared

about the initiative, then the staff cared too. As is stated in chapter 6, the leader must be willing

to die on the hill first if it comes down to it. The participants expressed that they could never

force staff to undertake a new initiative, but could only facilitate discussion and bring about

critical reflection on personal practice. They felt that the single and most prominent strategy of

leading through new policies was to be inclusive and transformative. All participants expressed

that that it could never be about them, it had to be about everyone seeing a common vision and

being included in every decision and step of the process. Again, promoting inclusive leadership

and practices were seen as what they could offer in the implementation process in order to

combat any challenges or make any headway with SEL in their schools.

While the literature and framework of this study stated that administrators felt caught in

the middle, the participants in this study did not view this necessarily as a negative aspect of their

role, but as a necessary part. Being in the middle, the participants viewed their role as supportive

and providing opportunities in any way they could. They all cited the purchasing of resources,

finding funding wherever they could, and creating times for professional development, as part of

their role in implementation. They felt that as school leaders, they wanted to primarily support

teachers in the way of providing opportunities for individual teacher reflection and learning so

that SEL knowledge could be shared out and spread throughout the school. Spillane et al. (2002)

cited this as opportunity for discussion. The findings in this research cited that the more they

facilitated discussion the more staff felt comfortable with SEL. Further to this, the participants

viewed this as building capacity and long-term sustainability. When it comes to new policies and

initiatives, the participants felt that a part of their role as a middle person, was to ensure that staff

were being supported to confidently carry out implementation as they saw fit, which in turn

would contribute to long-term sustainability. They wanted to empower their staff. In this way,

being caught in the middle was seen as being supportive. While the participants shared the above

as part of their role, they also stated that the everyday managerial duties were part of supporting

teachers in their work.

Being caught in the middle, school-based administration carry the added pressure of

ensuring the everyday maintenance of the building and school community, whether through

meetings with parents, PAC meetings, meeting district-based deadlines, or cleaning up a mess in

the front courtyard. They admitted that with all the managerial duties, it was difficult to stay on

top of opportunities for professional development, both for the staff and for themselves. There

was also the added pressure of applying for funding and more resources, and also finding time to

partake in the various initiatives promoted by the district. One of the participants expressed how

he found it overwhelming to keep on top of the numerous opportunities provided by the district,

but he felt a responsibility to share everything available with the staff because "you never know

who will be interested in what and you don't want them to miss out an opportunity because you

didn't share it," he stated. The participants also felt that it was important for them to stay updated

with current educational trends and evidence-based practices through professional development,

but once again, noted that, just like teachers, they found it difficult to find time to prioritize their

personal professional development. While they agreed that their own professional development

was important in helping cast the vision and priorities in their schools, their primary role was to

provide opportunities for learning and to support teacher endeavors. So in the end, it was more

about being an inclusive leader that helped to bridge theory and practice.

   How has SEL been implemented in the Beaver School District? So, then we are left

with the main research question of how SEL is being implemented in the Beaver School District.

First, it is safe to say that SEL is being implemented: the district places SEL as a priority practice

and school leaders have expressed the importance of it. The implementation process starts with

making SEL a priority practice. The school district's learning website explicitly states social-

emotional learning as one of their five priority practices. This sends a message of accountability

and importance to the entire community of the Beaver School District, placing the expectation on

schools that SEL is being prioritized. Furthermore, the district has employed a district SEL

coordinator and SEL teachers to help build capacity in schools and train staff on how to

implement SEL. The SEL coordinator and teachers will travel to schools all over the district

holding before school, after school and even during lunch hour information sessions on SEL and

strategies for its implementation. These positions of SEL coordinator and teacher are unique to

the Beaver School District which shows the importance and the progress the district has made of

SEL for its students. The information sessions involve professional development and learning on

programs such as *Mind Up, Zones of Regulation,* and *Second Step.* The SEL teachers will often

co-teach a string of lessons with classroom teachers in order to build comfort and capacity

within. As capacity builds, many schools have made SEL a school-wide goal, including it in their

school plans for growth and stating it as so on their individual school websites. This information

is then being shared with parents and community members in order to make sustainable change

over time through educating an entire community and not just the students. Some schools have

held parent information nights on SEL and how it effects families and implementation strategies

for parents at home.

The participants also adopted a common language throughout their schools and

incorporated school-wide blocks of time, or daily physical activity. The school district allows for

varying indicators to guide implementation such as individual school data and teacher readiness.

To further show their commitment to SEL implementation, the school district has turned to

looking at assessing and evaluating SEL, using the Middle Schools Index (MDI) in order to

guide future practice. So while funding for SEL teachers may have been cut for the coming

school year, the district has shown no signs of slowing down in furthering SEL implementation.

So how has SEL been implemented in the Beaver School District? Overall, the answer to the

main research question of this study is that SEL is being implemented with importance and

centrality throughout the district as a district priority practice and a large amount of resources

allocated to this initiative. However, in its implementation, there is room for individual

interpretation and comfort levels to be considered, making it inclusive of all stakeholders, including district personnel, principals, vice-principals, teachers, students and parents.

Limitations of the Study

There were a number of limitations to this study. For starters, the time constraint made it challenging to recruit more participants. Because, the timeline of this study called for the interviews to be conducted in June, it was difficult to recruit more than 15 participants as June is one of the busiest times of the year for schools. 15 participants is a relatively small sample number considering there are over one hundred elementary schools in the district. meaning there was a possibility of at least one hundred elementary principals, plus vice-principals to interview. However, the qualitative analysis of the interviews offered useful insights to conduct further studies in this area.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of variation of the sampling. While educational leadership is a main focus of this study, the data collected was solely based on interviews with school-based leaders and did not include teachers' viewpoints or other district personnel. This may affect the reliability the analysis as it was somewhat based on a partial view of how educational leadership influence on policy work. Further to this, the sample of participants was gathered through snowballing, rather than a completely random sample. Most participants were able to recommend another participant based on what they knew was taking place with regards to SEL in that school.

Another limitation to this study involves the fact that the Beaver School District already views SEL as important, making it a priority practice, which means that the data collected may not be transferable to other districts where SEL is not explicitly stated as a priority practice.

Finally, the last limitation to the study is that given the time constraints of the EdD

program, I was unable to thoroughly explore all of the themes and topics that arose through the

analysis process, thus only themes that presented data saturation were explored. The study is

limited to the specific data collected at a specific time.

Recommendations for Practice

With every study, there is the question of "so what" and why was this study important to

conduct and what does it contribute to the field. For starters, this particular research revealed the

important role that leadership plays in policy work and implementation. Transformative

leadership, as Shields (2010) explains, is paramount to encouraging teachers, because it shows

that the leader is an active participant and ready to be the first one to take on the failure of an

initiative should it come down to that. Education is always revolving through the introduction of

new initiatives and this study shows the point of view that principals and vice-principals have of

their own roles when it comes to new initiatives. This study also put forward the notion that

transformative leaders and inclusive leaders are more effective in policy implementation, thus it

would be advisable that principals and vice-principals are offered information sessions on how to

be a transformative or inclusive leader to be effective an effective leader. Overall, this study

revealed the importance of SEL and how leadership is intricately connected to the efficacy of

SEL programs and initiatives introduced by districts or provincial education organizations.

Leadership has to be taken into consideration when planning for implementation and without

proper consideration, it may lead to instability and inconsistent implementation, which in turn

will be a disservice and a lack of SEL for all students.

This study highlights a need for greater understanding around policy work and

implementation, specifically SEL implementation. All participants agreed that SEL was

important to the district, but that consistency in implementation was difficult to achieve. For

starters, they cited funding as an area for improvement. The participants felt that there was great

value to employing SEL teachers throughout the district and expressed the need to have more

SEL teachers in schools so that every school received some support from these professionals.

They felt that this would level out the starting point so that all schools had the same foundational

understanding of SEL and how to implement it.

By leveling out the playing field, consistency of implementation would increase and the

discrepancies in understandings and implementation of SEL would decrease. Local contexts

could still be taken into consideration, but the types of programs used and the methods of

implementation would be consistent throughout the district. Also, by providing consistency, SEL

teachers would act as a hub that could connect and share the different schools' knowledge about

SEL in order to prevent needless reinvention of implementation approaches. As also expressed

by the participants, SEL teachers helped classroom teachers ease into SEL as they felt more

comfortable to have someone to teach alongside and share ideas with, thus increasing teacher

buy-in.

The participants also felt that both teachers, as well as principals and vice-principals,

needed to ease the pressures of prioritizing and making time for SEL through reducing the

number of new district initiatives introduced every year. Again, with the introduction of a new

reporting system, new curriculum and district priority practices, teachers are forced to pick and

choose which initiatives to focus on. Similarly, the participants felt that there needed to be more

emphasis placed on professional development and training for principals and vice-principals on

new initiatives, as opposed to emphasis placed on managerial duties. The participants agreed that

the retention level of school-based administrators would increase if the job responsibilities

became more manageable. The participants found it challenging to take it upon themselves to

seek out their own professional development and to fit it in amongst the many other duties under

their job description. This would allow principals and vice-principals to partake more in the

implementation of initiatives through distributed leadership, by building a team to undertake the

adoption of various district initiatives.

Lastly, it would be helpful for the school district to address the evaluation and assessment

of SEL and its implementation. Although it was not reported on in this study, both the literature

and a few of the participants mentioned that being able to assess or evaluate SEL growth would

be useful. This information would help administrators and teachers gauge where they are at on a

spectrum of implementation and encourage further grown in the area. This information would

also guide district personnel in forming vision, goals and evidence-based implementation

strategies.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study contributes to an existing body of research exploring educational policy work

and its implementation, as well as the role that principals and vice-principals play in it. The

interviews conducted evidenced the voice of the principals and vice-principals in the district who

have first-hand experience on how a district initiative is being implemented in their individual

schools. The participants expressed that they felt their role was important, but not necessarily

central in effective implementation. They described their role as supportive and more of a type of

guidance. An area that could be researched further would be the perspective of teachers on the

role that their principal or vice-principal plays in policy implementation and whether there is

correlation with what the participants in this study reported. It would be helpful to also gather

information on teachers' experiences implementing SEL. Gathering the teachers' perspective

would illuminate our understanding on how distributed leadership is practiced in the district.

Another area for further study could be an examination of another initiative or priority

practice in the district to see if the type of initiative made a difference in implementation

consistency, strategies and challenges. For example, if the new reporting system were to be

evaluated and researched on, would the findings be similarly even though reporting on student

learning is mandated, and SEL is not?

Finally, the district would benefit from a research study on leadership models and the

affects different forms of leadership have on policy implementation. For instance, what type of

result do inclusive and transformative leaders yield in the implementation of initiatives and how

do teachers respond to different styles of leadership when it comes to policy implementation?

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Appendix A

Western Research

Research Ethics

**Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Amendment Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera
Department & Institution: Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108593
Study Title: Study of the implementation of a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program in a school district in British Columbia

NMREB Revision Approval Date: April 12, 2017
NMREB Expiry Date: January 30, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Western University Protocol	Received March 30, 2017	
Recruitment Items	Revised Interview Questions	2017/03/30
Revised Letter of Information & Consent		2017/01/01

The Western University Non-Medical Science Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the amendment to the above named study, as of the NMREB Amendment Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

_____   _____
Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair
EO: Erika Basile ___ Grace Kelly ✓ Katelyn Harris___ Nicola Morphet ___ Karen Gopaul ___

Appendix B

Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title: Study of the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in a school district in British Columbia

Principal Investigator: Dr. Augusto Riveros, Faculty of Education, Western University

Secondary Investigator: Jenny Kim, Doctoral candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University

Dear Paul,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

1. Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Dr. Augusto Riveros, assistant professor and Jenny Kim, doctoral candidate at Western University. This study investigates how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is being implemented in the district. This investigation will take place within the Surrey School District. You are being asked to participate because you are involved in the implementation of SEL in your school.

2. Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) in the Surrey School District. The Surrey School District has been chosen because SEL is one of the pillars of learning in the district, as well as because the district has made SEL a district-wide initiative.

3. How long will you be in this study?

This interview should take a maximum of between 30-60 minutes.

4. What are the study procedures?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview regarding your experience with SEL implementation. Phone interviews are also an option. Interviews will be conducted in the district premises or in a location of your choice where privacy and confidentiality can be guaranteed. The intended approximate number of participants are 35-40 principals and vice-principals. Interviews will be audio recorded. Only participants who agree to be audio-recorded will be included in this study.

5. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?

The possible benefits to participants may be that they are able to openly share how they feel about the how and why SEL is being implemented in the district. In turn, the possible benefits to society may be that schools in the district can make informed decisions on how to implement SEL.

7. Can participants choose to leave the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future career.

8. How will participants' information be kept confidential?

All study data will be anonymized and no personal information or identifiable characteristics will be included on the transcripts or recordings. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database.

The researcher will keep any personal   information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of 5 years. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place; separate from your study file. All data collected in the interview will be retained for a minimum of 5 years and then destroyed.

While we will do our best to protect your information there is no absolute guarantee that we will be able to do so. Please note that if you provide consent to use direct quotes from your interview in the study, there is a very low, but potential risk of identification.

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

9. Are participants compensated to be in this study?

You will not be compensated to participate in this study.

10. Whom do participants contact for questions?

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study
you may contact Dr. Augusto Riveros or Jenny Kim.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may
contact The Office of Human Research Ethics.

The results may be shared with district personnel and/or schools. If the results of the study are published,
your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please
contact Jenny Kim.

If you agree to participate in this study, please fill in the bottom portion indicating your consent and
respond to this email with the best email and/or phone number to contact you at in order to set up a date
for the interview. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

Thank you,

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Jenny Kim, Doctoral candidate
Faculty of Education
Western University

Dr. Augusto Riveros,
Assistant Professor
Faculty of Education
Western University

Appendix C

Western

Consent Form

Project Title: Study of the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in a school district in British Columbia

Principal Investigator: Dr. Augusto Riveros, Faculty of Education, Western University

Secondary Investigator: Jenny Kim, Doctoral candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to be audio / video-recorded in this research

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

_____   _____   _____

Print Name of Participant   Signature   *Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)*

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____   _____   _____

Print Name of Person   Signature   *Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)*

Obtaining Consent

Appendix D

Western

Email Script for Recruitment

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Augusto Riveros and Jenny Kim, doctoral candidate, are conducting.

Participation includes a face-to-face semi-structured interview that should take between around 60 minutes. Phone interviews are also an option. The interviews will be audio-recorded and only participants who agree to be audio-recorded will be included in this research. The interview will consist of 10 questions regarding your experience with implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) in your school and/or the district. The interviews will take place in the district premises or at a location of your choice where confidentiality and privacy can be guaranteed.

Participation is voluntary and is completely separate from any professional responsibilities. All information collected, including identifying factors, will be kept strictly confidential.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please contact the researcher at the email address given below. In order to maintain confidentiality, please send your email response from a personal email address and not your work email address.

Thank you,

Jenny Kim, Doctoral candidate
Faculty of Education
Western University

Dr. Augusto Riveros,
Assistant Professor
Faculty of Education
Western University

Appendix E

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Principals and Vice-Principals

1. Tell me what you know about SEL. Can you please explain its main ideas and principles?

2. Describe how you incorporate SEL into your daily work as a Principal or Vice-Principal.

3. Describe how your school incorporates SEL into the school culture and/or environment.

4. Describe how you, personally, support your staff to in implementing district initiatives such as SEL.

5. Explain any challenges your school experiences in incorporating SEL into the school culture and/or environment.

6. What would be, in your opinion, an example of SEL successfully happening in your school and throughout the district? How can we improve SEL implementation?

7. Describe any training or professional development you personally have received in relation to SEL.

8. How important is the role of the principal or vice-principal in implementing SEL?

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jenny Kim

**Post-secondary Education
And Degrees:**   Western University (UWO)
                                   Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
                                   2014 – 2018

                                   University of Victoria
                                   Master of Education, Special Education with a specialty
                                   in Autism and Behaviour Disorders
                                   2010 – 2012

                                   University of British Columbia
                                   Bachelor of Education, Secondary Education
                                   2006 – 2007

                                   University of British Columbia
                                   Bachelor of Arts, English Literature
                                   2002 – 2006

Related Work Experience   Surrey School District
                                   Acting Vice-Principal
                                   May 2018 – June 2018

                                   Surrey School District
                                   Integration Support and Social Development Teacher
                                   2013 – Present

                                   Coquitlam School District
                                   Resource and Skill Development Teacher
                                   2011 – 2013

                                   Coquitlam School District
                                   Secondary English and Dance Teacher
                                   2007 - 2011