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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE ELL CLASSROOM:  
A CASE STUDY

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

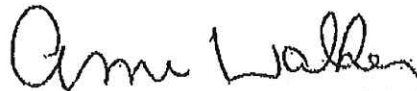
Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota


December  
2017

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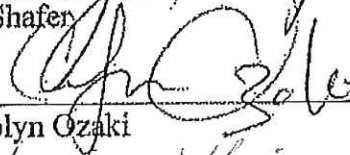
This dissertation, submitted by Satoko T. Kao in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



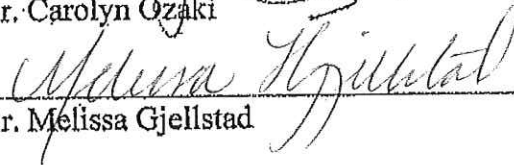
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This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Dr. Grant McGimpsey  
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

November 29, 2017

Date

## **PERMISSION**

Title            Social and Emotional Learning in the ELL Classroom: A Case Study

Department    Teaching and Learning

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Satoko T. Kao  
November 27, 2017

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To my family and my parents in heaven

## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of social-emotional learning (SEL) is to create a safe environment for students to learn in and improve peer relationships, decrease conduct problems and emotional distress, and promote academic achievement. SEL program implementation has grown over the last decade in U.S. schools; however, these programs are designed for general education, not English Language Learner (ELL) students. Furthermore, research on teaching SEL to ELL students is limited.

This study explored what SEL looked like and how bullying prevention and character education programs were adapted in an elementary ELL classroom. The theoretical framework for this study was based on CASEL's "Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2012, p. 9) and "Four Strategies that Promote SEL" (Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, & Weissberg, 2015, p. 2). This qualitative case study utilized ethnographic data collection methods (Glesne, 2011) including ELL classroom observations focusing on two ELL teachers as well as interviews with ELL teachers, a school counselor and the school principal.

Findings indicate that CASEL's framework and four approaches to teaching SEL are suitable for teaching SEL to ELL children. However, to meet ELL children's unique SEL needs, the school and ELL teachers needed to consider both language and cultural background in deciding how to teach SEL and what SEL skills to prioritize.

Key implications of this study include the necessity of a school-wide SEL initiative in which teachers, counselor, and school administrators collaboratively address SEL needs of ELL students, integration of SEL into all aspects of the ELL classroom, teaching English language needed for self-awareness and self-management of emotions and behavior as well as interpersonal conflicts, and the need to assess and prioritize what SEL competencies to teach based on ELL students' unique needs.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

One fall afternoon, when I walked into the English Language Learner (ELL) classroom of a local elementary school, I found the ELL children giggling and laughing together while an ELL teacher was watching and smiling. One of the ELL children, at the beginning level of proficiency, was struggling with new vocabulary words in the ELL classroom. The beginning to intermediate levels of ELL children were trying to help this classmate understand by gesturing and showing facial expressions. One ELL child was gesturing an elephant's long nose, saying "elephant," and moving slowly on the floor. Some other ELL children joined the gesturing of an elephant and moved slowly in a circle. The ELL child finally understood what elephant meant and joined the circle, gesturing and saying "elephant" together with the other ELL children.

It was my first time visiting this ELL classroom to conduct my observations for a teacher education course at the University of North Dakota during the fall semester of 2015. I was interested in observing interaction patterns between the ELL teacher and her students related to the ELL children's language development. However, I soon realized that language learning by itself could not sufficiently explain the dynamics of what was happening in this ELL classroom.

According to the ELL teacher, many of the children I had observed behaving actively and cheerfully in this ELL classroom remained silent and nervous in their



mainstream classes. The ELL child who finally understood the word "elephant" was a first-grade boy from Nepal. The boy was going through an adjustment period in his new school environment and had become socially withdrawn and sometimes resisted coming to school. However, the boy wanted to attend his ELL class. The ELL teacher said the boy felt safe and secure in the ELL class and regarded the ELL classroom as a comfortable place. This observation made me recognize the struggles that ELL students experience when coming to a new school. ELL students are not only struggling with linguistic and academic challenges, but also with emotional, social, and cultural challenges.

### **ELL Students**

Currently, more than 10% of all students in U.S. public schools are ELL students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). ELL students are those who are not able to communicate fluently in English, who come from non-English speaking backgrounds and homes, and who need instruction specifically designed to improve their English language proficiency and help them learn academic content (Hidden curriculum, 2014). The U.S. K-12 ELL population grew from 4.3 million (9% of all students) in school year 2004-2005 to 4.6 million (9.4%) in 2014-2015 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This percentage continues to increase and in 2017, one in ten U.S. school children is designated as an English language learner.

ELL students have been in the U.S. for different lengths of time and have varying levels of English proficiency. For example, newcomer ELL students have been in the U.S. less than a year and may have little or no English proficiency and may be going through an intense period of cultural and linguistic adjustments to U.S. schools. In

contrast, some ELLs may be long-term ELLs “who have been in U.S. schools for more than six years without attaining academic language proficiency” (Breiseth, 2015, para. 15) and who are continuing to struggle with academic language acquisition for school achievement.

ELL students come from different backgrounds. Some ELLs are immigrants from countries where English is not the primary language. They may be considered “new immigrants born outside of the United States [first-generation] or second generation American-born children of at least one foreign-born immigrant parent” (Sharp-Ross, 2011, p. 1). First-generation immigrant children and their families come to the U.S. on their own choice and for different reasons such as employment, education, and economic matters. Segal and Mayadas (2005) state that immigrants are “*pulled* by the attractiveness of living in the United States” (p. 564) and they often plan their entry carefully by leaving much at home and bringing some valuables and assets (e.g., money) from home.

Some ELLs are refugees. Although refugees can receive immigrant status after residing in the U.S. for one year (Segal & Mayadas, 2005), compared to immigrants who came to the U.S. to seek better employment, education or other opportunities, refugees came to the U.S. because they were “*pushed* from their homelands” (Segal & Mayadas, 2005, p. 564) and left their homes unwillingly. They may have escaped from traumatic situations, such as the violence of war, social unrest, disaster, and poverty in their country. They may have left their homes quickly with little or no planning, possibly fleeing danger, and lived in refugee camps in other neighboring countries, which may have lacked the basics of sanitation, electricity, and educational opportunities.

It is important for schools to understand the backgrounds of ELL students, especially their immigrant or refugee status, as this may result in different academic, social, and emotional needs as they enter U.S. schools and begin the process of learning English.

### **The Importance of Students' Social and Emotional Learning**

When students have social and emotional issues, such as emotional (e.g., loneliness, sadness, and anxiety) or social distress (e.g., a lack of social belonging and social withdrawal), they tend to experience more difficulties with focusing on tasks, maintaining attention, and maintaining positive peer relationships (Niehaus, 2012). Research shows that if students have social and emotional issues, their abilities for academic learning can be affected. Osterman (2000) and Furrer and Skinner (2003) stated that students who feel a sense of belonging in schools and classrooms tend to be happier, more enthusiastic, and more confident in learning, whereas, students who feel isolated tend to show more anxiety and frustration that may affect academic learning. It is important for students to acquire emotional skills (e.g., to recognize, express, and regulate emotions, to reduce anxiety and stress) and social skills (e.g., showing kindness, empathy, and respect to others, helping others, cooperating) to best facilitate learning.

### **Social and Emotional Needs of ELLs**

Niehaus (2012) found that compared to non-ELL students, ELL students tend to experience more difficulties with staying on task and maintaining attention, and experience more anxiety, sadness, and loneliness when they have social and emotional problems. Experts explain that ELLs are more likely to experience social and emotional problems because of their unique backgrounds. For example, Igoa (1995) stated that

when immigrant ELL children leave their home country and face a new language, culture, and social system, they experience “a variety of emotional and cognitive adjustments to the reality of life in a new country” (p. xi). They also experience “culture shock” (Igoa, 1995, p. 39) as they are going through the intense stage of adjustment to a new culture and environment. For example, they may not be used to the U.S. style of active participation and collaboration in a classroom. Even when ELL children adapt to their new school environments and become acculturated to appropriate school behaviors, their limited English proficiency may be an obstacle to full participation in their school's academic and social culture (Sharp-Ross, 2011). Emotionally, they may feel anxious, lonely, and exhausted (Igoa, 1995). Additionally, awareness of possible ethnic and linguistic prejudice against ELL students may make them feel alienated and isolated. On top of all these difficulties, some of the immigrant ELL students may struggle with a new school system due to lack of formal schooling.

Experiencing social and emotional issues may hinder an ELL student's acquisition of English. Krashen (1985), an expert in second language acquisition theorizes that language learners have an “affective filter.” Affect means “feelings, motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37) and a language learner who is “tense, anxious, or bored may ‘filter out’ input, making it unavailable for acquisition” (p. 37). Because of these factors, it is especially crucial for ELL students to feel a sense of belonging in their ELL classrooms during their initial school adjustment period (Sharp-Ross, 2011) in order to help them learn both academic content and the English language.

Refugee ELL children may have social and emotional needs unique to their refugee status. They not only face challenges of adjustment and acculturation but also challenges unique to refugees such as having experienced or witnessed trauma and fleeing their home countries. Refugee children may have lost family members or be living in a one-parent or no-parent family as circumstances of refugee resettlement (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002; Williams & Butler, 2003). Consequently, refugee ELL children often face a range of stressful conditions (e.g., trauma, resettlement, family separation, poverty, acculturation, language stress, and a new school environment). Refugee ELL children may also come from refugee camps where opportunities for education may have been limited. With limited formal schooling, it may be difficult for them to adjust to schools, as they may not be familiar with school and classroom rules (Calgary Board of Education, 2017a). Because of these stressors, refugee children's learning and emotional well-being may be especially affected (Calgary Board of Education, 2017b), and schools may need to prioritize social and emotional learning.

### **Current Emphasis on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Schools**

In the past few decades, educational researchers such as Noddings (1984) and Olweus (1993) have emphasized the need for schools to address social and emotional learning (SEL). More recent research in the field of brain-based learning has shown how social and emotional needs, if unaddressed, can negatively affect brain development and impact student learning (Jensen, 2009). Additionally, while parental relationships are the important factor for the development of SEL skills in children, relationships with teachers and peers in schools are also important as they help children learn and develop SEL skills

such as controlling themselves in social contexts (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

However, with the implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, the concept of SEL became overshadowed by a focus on basic skills in math and reading. As schools devoted classroom time to prepare children for high-stakes testing, many essential elements of children's education, such as social and emotional learning, were “compromised or eliminated” (American Psychological Association, 2015, para. 4). When NCLB did not achieve its goals, researchers identified “SEL as the critical piece that was missing in helping their students develop as scholars and citizens” (Civic Enterprises, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013, p. 13).

Thus when educators and policymakers began working on a new national policy to replace NCLB, there was agreement that SEL needed to be part of the new policy. When the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law in December 2015 to replace NCLB, it specifically required schools to implement activities to foster safe, healthy, and supportive environments in order to improve student academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Additionally, when educators from across the nation came together to develop the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), created to help K-12 students achieve higher academic achievement, they realized it was important to “understand all the factors related to learning” (ASCD, 2016, para. 3). They drew upon research studies such as those by The National Research Council (2012) showing that high-achievement schools help students master not just academics (i.e., math, science, history, languages, and the arts) but intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies as well. The National Research Council concluded that what often sets successful students apart from less successful

students is that successful students develop social and emotional skills that help them be successful in academics and life.

With the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in many states, SEL became a buzzword in K-12 schools. However, what social and emotional competencies to address and how to address them were not defined by ESSA or the CCSS, and educators began turning to experts in the field of SEL for guidance.

### **CASEL's Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2012), which has been a leading voice in researching and promoting SEL for over a decade, has provided guidance for school districts in developing and implementing SEL programs. The 2013 CASEL Guide defined SEL as follows:

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2012, p. 4)

The 2013 CASEL Guide (CASEL, 2012) has defined five sets of competencies and researchers at CASEL have identified four approaches to teaching SEL skills (Dusenbury et al., 2015). In this study, I used CASEL's (2012) "Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies" (p. 9) and "Four Strategies that Promote SEL" (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 2) as the theoretical framework to guide the study. The theoretical framework is discussed in Chapter II.

## **Statement of the Problem**

More than 10% of U.S. K-12 students are ELLs and have unique social and emotional learning needs. Many are struggling academically and linguistically, as well as socially, emotionally, and culturally in a new environment. Particularly, newcomer ELL students, defined as ELLs who have been in the U.S. less than a year, and refugee ELL students may have more acute SEL needs. Discussions of ELL education tend to focus on academic and linguistic issues (Coelho, 2012); however, effective ELL education also needs to address ELL children's social and emotional needs in order to optimize both academic and linguistic learning.

While the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs has grown over the last decade in U.S. schools (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), there is little research available on how these programs work for ELL students. Several SEL programs have shown effectiveness in teaching disadvantaged, high-risk, low-income, and ethnic minority students (CASEL, 2012; McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2015; Schonfeld et al., 2014). However, these SEL programs were designed for general education and there is little available information on how they addressed the unique cultural and linguistic needs of ELLs.

SEL skills taught in classrooms often include skills such as kindness, empathy, and respect. While all students can benefit from instruction in developing these skills, ELL children may need extra support in understanding the language used in SEL instruction. There may also be different cultural understanding of SEL competencies. Finally, newcomer and refugee ELL students face unique SEL needs related to their adjustment to school and life in the United States. Thus, SEL programs developed for



general education may not exactly fit the needs of ELL students' social-emotional learning.

### **Need for the Study**

The number of ELL students in U.S. public schools is growing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) and more than 35% of the total ELL students in K-12 are either first-generation immigrant students (Sharp-Ross, 2011) or refugee students. While schools are increasingly implementing SEL programs, many such as CASEL do not specially address ELL students. There is also little research literature on classroom practices related to SEL for ELLs. Thus, there is a need (a) to better understand ELLs, especially newcomer and refugee ELLs' unique social and emotional needs and (b) to identify approaches to teaching SEL in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways in order to meet these unique social and emotional needs.

### **Personal Interest**

I have taught beginning to intermediate ELL classes in community settings for adult ELLs for over 10 years. Although I have not taught ELL children in K-12 settings in the U.S., my adult ELL students have shared with me their worries, concerns, and feelings of helplessness about their school-aged children who have been having difficulties adjusting to their new school life and not wanting to go to school. As I am a first-generation immigrant ELL myself, not only do I understand challenges and struggles that ELL adults and ELL children go through, but I also know that those stressful conditions can affect learning. As I have a background in Psychology, it has always been my interest to help ELL children overcome their challenges by meeting their social and emotional needs.

It was in 2015, while I was observing an ELL classroom for a class assignment, that I witnessed the Nepalese boy introduced at the beginning of this dissertation learn the word “elephant” successfully. I noticed how happy he was, smiling and dancing together with his ELL peers while his ELL teacher watched and smiled. I wondered how the ELL teacher had achieved the kindness and empathy I observed in her students. I wondered if the ELL teacher was explicitly or implicitly teaching social-emotional competencies. These wonders led to me conducting my dissertation research in this classroom.

While I was working on my dissertation topic proposal, I began informal observations in the Fall of 2016 in this ELL classroom at New Bridge Elementary School (pseudonym), located in a small city in the Great Plains. I wanted to see how the ELL teachers created community in the ELL classroom from the beginning of the school year. The summary of my informal observations is presented in Chapter III.

During my informal observation visits, I found that New Bridge Elementary School was implementing two commercial SEL programs, which were mandated by the school district, in addition to the SEL teaching in the ELL classroom. Commercial SEL programs approach social and emotional learning in various ways. One way is to target problem behaviors such as bullying. New Bridge implemented the “Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)” designed to reduce bullying in schools through long-term change and the creation of a safe and positive school climate (Hazelden Foundation, 2007). Another approach used by SEL programs is positive character development. The second SEL program that New Bridge implemented was The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program, which teaches six positive character traits: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c).

Both programs were reinforced and taught at monthly school assemblies, and all teachers, including the ELL teachers, continued to teach anti-bullying rules and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> in their classrooms. However, both programs were designed for students proficient in English and familiar with U.S. culture, not specifically for ELLs. Thus, I became interested in how the ELL teachers were implementing OBPP and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> in the ELL classroom in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine, understand, and describe what SEL looked like in an ELL classroom, how ELL teachers in this study teach SEL, and what SEL skills they teach in their ELL classroom. Additionally, this study explored how ELL teachers adapted and modified two commercially available SEL programs, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program, in their ELL classroom.

The overarching question that this study pursued was: “What does SEL look like in an ELL classroom?” Under the overarching question, the following specific questions guided the study.

1. How do ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills in an ELL classroom?
2. What competency (competencies) of SEL do ELL teachers in an ELL classroom focus on?
3. How do ELL teachers adapt and modify commercial SEL programs for their students?

## **Benefits of the Study**

The results of this study will benefit schools that are seeking to better understand and meet ELL students' unique social and emotional needs. ELL children, especially newcomer ELLs (defined as those who have been in the U.S. less than a year) and refugee ELLs children, are likely to need SEL support that differs from native-English speaking school populations. Recognizing and understanding ELL children's unique SEL needs may promote discussions on how educators (ELL teachers, in-service/pre-service classroom teachers, other professional school staff, and administrators) can effectively teach SEL to ELL children. The results may also benefit the development of SEL programs, whether school-created or commercially-created, that will be implemented with ELL students.

## **Key Terms**

*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*: CASEL is “the world’s leading organization advancing one of the most important fields in education in decades: the practice of promoting integrated academic, social, and emotional learning for all children in preschool through high school” (CASEL, 2017a, para. 1).

*Common Core State Standards (CCSS)*: “The Common Core, a set of clear college- and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in English language arts/literacy and mathematics” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016, para. 2). Forty-eight states came together to develop it to ensure that high school students are prepared to take courses in college or enter the workforce after their graduation.

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*: Signed into law December 10, 2015, to replace the NCLB Act of 2001 and started in the 2017-2018 school year. ESSA promotes

provisions that will help to ensure success for students and schools (e.g., protecting disadvantaged and high-need students, teaching all students to high academic standards, supporting local educators' innovations, making positive change in lowest-performing schools) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

*Explicit instruction:* Explicit instruction is “a structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills” (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 1). Explicit instruction uses direct approach to teaching, which includes procedures for instruction and delivery. Explicit instruction supports students by guiding them through the learning process, providing the clearly stated purpose for learning the new skill, “clear explanations and demonstrations of the instructional target, and supported practice with feedback until independent mastery has been achieved” (p. 1).

*Immigrant:* An immigrant is a person who arrives in another country to resettle by his or her choice. Immigrants come to the U.S. for various reasons (e.g., education, economic, work). Usually, immigrants have time to plan their resettlement carefully and may bring some assets from home to a new country (Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

*Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP):* OBPP is a research-based, comprehensive, school-wide program, which was designed to prevent or reduce bullying in schools, help students (K-8 grades) build better peer relations, and promote a safe and positive place for students to learn (Hazelden Foundation, 2007).

*Refugee:* A refugee is a person “who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” (UNHCR, 2017, para 1). Refugees may not be able to return

home or they may be afraid of returning home, as their leading reasons of fleeing their countries are violence such as war, ethnic, and religious conflicts.

*Social and emotional learning (SEL)*: The process by which “children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decision” (CASEL, 2017e, para. 1).

*The Six Pillars of Character*<sup>®</sup>: This program contains “a framework for teaching good character and is composed of six ethical values (characteristics). . . : Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship” (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c, para. 1). The program is designed to promote “a positive learning environment for students and a ‘culture of kindness’” (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c, para. 1) to make schools a safe place for students to learn.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This case study focused on two ELL teachers in one elementary ELL classroom with a specific ELL population in a small city located in the Great Plains. It is important to recognize that findings from this one classroom and school may not be generalizable to other schools and ELL classrooms.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter examines the literature pertinent to the purpose and research questions of this study. The overarching question this study pursued was: “What does SEL look like in an ELL classroom?” Under the overarching question, the following specific questions guided the study.

1. How do ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills in an ELL classroom?
2. What competency (competencies) of SEL do ELL teachers in an ELL classroom focus on?
3. How do ELL teachers adapt and modify commercial SEL programs for their students?

This chapter begins by defining SEL and its history including why there is a need to teach SEL in schools. The chapter then explains the theoretical framework for this study – CASEL’s (2012) “Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies” (p. 9) and “Four Strategies that Promote SEL” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 2), followed by how the theoretical framework is related to ELLs’ SEL needs. Next, the chapter discusses the SEL programs implemented at New Bridge Elementary School, including the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program. Then, the discussion drills down to present research on ELLs’ unique SEL issues, which

include cultural differences in expressing emotions, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, emotional struggles and stressors unique to the ELL student population, and challenges in adjusting to school rules and norms. Finally, the chapter explores the ELL teacher's role in teaching SEL to ELL students.

Research on teaching SEL has been ongoing for over a decade and examined from multiple perspectives. More and more studies are showing its effectiveness. In fact, from the time I started this research in 2016 to now, the CASEL website has dramatically increased the number of research studies cited; one study showed 11% gain on academic achievement of students who received SEL instruction compared to students who did not (CASEL, 2017d, para. 5). However, with all this new research, a specific focus on SEL for ELLs is missing in the literature, especially how SEL can be implemented in ways that are culturally and linguistically sensitive and appropriate for ELL students.

### **Definition of Social and Emotional Learning**

Social and emotional learning is based on moral and character education such as caring for others, kindness, empathy, respect, tolerance, resilience, and thankfulness (Elias et al., 1997). The term, “social and emotional learning (SEL)” was first introduced by “a group of researchers and practitioners involved in a diverse range of youth-development efforts” (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006, p. 243) at an academic meeting in 1994. The group defined the term SEL as “the process of acquiring a set of social and emotional skills – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making” (p. 243) and recommended that SEL skills be taught within a safe and supportive environment, which promotes social and



emotional development. SEL was introduced to decrease problem behaviors such as bullying in schools and to promote healthy development and school success for students in general. There was not a focus on SEL for students from specific demographic backgrounds or with specific learning needs.

At the same meeting in 1994 when the term SEL was coined, the researchers formally established The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in order to promote positive and healthy development in children (CASEL, 2017c). Over the decades, CASEL has been the nation's leading organization in researching and promoting the development of academic, social, and emotional competencies for all students to ensure that they become responsible, caring, and competent members who will contribute to society (CASEL, 2017a).

### **SEL by Other Names**

Although the acronym "SEL" was first coined in 1994, the concept of SEL is not new to education. Noddings (1984) focused on "caring" in education, claiming the moral education of caring is the foundation needed to produce competent, empathetic, and caring people. Noddings stated that teachers needed to model how to care by creating caring relations with students and providing students with opportunities to practice caring. Later, Noddings (2005) re-emphasized caring and claimed, "When we care for others, we do not try to motivate them by threats, sanctions, invidious comparisons, and harsh penalties" (p. xxi). Noddings' work did not identify students by demographic background or special need; she emphasized that all children needed to be cared for, as well as taught to care, in educational settings.

To reduce students' problematic behaviors and promote positive and healthy social relationships among students in schools, Olweus (1993) focused on "bullying" as a serious issue. Olweus stated, "Bullying among schoolchildren is no doubt a very old phenomenon" (p. 1) that occurs worldwide, citing his own research on bullying in schools in Sweden in the 1960s. Other countries such as the USA, Canada, Japan, and England gradually began to pay attention to bullying among schoolchildren in the 1990s and its impact on children who were the victims (Olweus, 1993). Olweus (1995) concluded that while bullies are typically aggressive, impulsive, and "have little empathy with victims" (p. 197), victims tend to be "more anxious and insecure. . . They are often cautious, sensitive, and quiet" (p. 197) compared to other students. To decrease aggressive behavior and to prevent children from being victimized, it is necessary "to create a school (and ideally, also a home) environment characterized by warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults" (Olweus, 1993, p. 115). At the same time, Olweus (1993) suggested that schools should understand how bullying occurs and that intervention programs should be built to place limits on unacceptable behavior and promote positive relationships among peers.

During the past decade, other theories related to social and emotional learning have become prominent in educational research. Dweck (2006) and Duckworth (2016), focused their research on the SEL concepts of "growth-mindset," "grit," and "resilience." Dweck emphasizes the importance of having a growth-mindset for achievement and success in life as a growth-mindset positively influences one's self-awareness, self-esteem, ability to address challenges, and resilience to setbacks. These are all part of the SEL competencies. Based on the growth-mindset approach, Dweck

recommended that teachers create a nurturing atmosphere in their classrooms by challenging students, yet helping students feel they are nurtured (cared for), similar to what Noddings was promoting decades ago. Duckworth (2016) echoed Dweck (2006) but introduced a different term for what is needed to academically succeed: grit (resilience and perseverance). Students need to have grit, which is a special mix of passion and persistence for long-term goals to achieve success and accomplishment. Grit, again, is directly related to SEL competencies, especially self-management.

These SEL-related theories are focused on learners in general. They do not address how SEL can or should be differentiated for students from different demographic backgrounds or with different learning needs, such as English language learners.

### **Need to Teach SEL in Schools**

Several studies have claimed that young children today are entering school without the social and behavioral skills necessary to succeed (Durlak et al., 2011; Gilliam & Shahrar, 2006; Raver & Knitzer, 2002). At the same time, school violence, bullying, and harassment have been increasing (Hazelden Foundation, 2015). Recognizing these situations, experts looked at schools as an important context for children to learn social and emotional skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2012) as students interact with teachers and peers in social context. SEL is needed as it promotes “a schoolwide systematic approach that encourages fundamental social and emotional skills” (Hoffman, 2009, p. 535) for all students. The goal is that SEL will reduce problem behaviors such as bullying at schools (CASEL, 2012) by promoting safer, more positive environments and improving student relationships and social awareness skills (e.g., individuals are empathetic towards others and make respectful decisions about personal behavior and social interactions).

SEL is also necessary for academic achievement. Many studies, including evidence-based SEL studies, have suggested that social and emotional skills are core competencies necessary for a child to achieve academic success (CASEL, 2012; Civic Enterprises et al., 2013; Kendziora, Weissberg, Ji, & Dusenbury, 2011; Niehaus, 2012; Sharp-Ross, 2011; Yoder, 2014). As Cohen (2006) claimed, students who feel positive about themselves, as well as have positive relationships with others, are more emotionally well-balanced and tend to be more successful in school than students who do not view themselves positively.

Although the concept of SEL focuses on all children and does not differentiate by demographic background or learning need, research is beginning to show that the impact of SEL may be different depending on student population, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. One study pointed out that SEL tends to be more effective for “at-risk” students living in poverty (Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011). Becker and Luthar (2002) and Sharp-Ross (2011) agreed with Jones et al. (2011), stating that promoting students’ emotional needs to belong to a school and classroom leads to positive results, and is especially important for students disadvantaged by family income. In fact, some commercially developed SEL programs have proved to be effective in promoting academic performance and social behavior for students who are from low-income backgrounds (McCormick et al., 2015; Schonfeld et al., 2014). However, while research was found on the impact of SEL on students in poverty, no research was found that specifically addressed the impact of SEL on students considered “at-risk” due to other factors such as race or ELL status.

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, I used CASEL’s (2012) “Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies” (see Figure 1) and “Four Strategies that Promote SEL” as the theoretical framework to guide the study because CASEL is the leading authority on current SEL theories and research. I utilized CASEL’s framework to help frame my observations, develop interview questions, and analyze data.



Figure 1. The Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies. Reprinted from the *2013 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs, Preschool and Elementary School Edition*, by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2012, p. 9. Copyright 2012 by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

## **The Five Competencies of SEL**

CASEL’s researchers stated that elementary school children need intrapersonal, interpersonal, and responsible decision-making skills in order to succeed. Based on their extensive research, CASEL “has identified five inter-related sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that comprise social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 3). Benefits of these skills are: “more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores” (p. 3). These five competencies are explained below.

- *Self-awareness*: “The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Self-awareness also includes “accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations, and possessing a growth mindset, a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).
- *Self-management*: “The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Self-management includes “delaying gratification, managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating one’s self, and persevering in addressing challenges” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).
- *Social awareness*: “The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical

norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9).

- *Relationship skills*: “The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Relationship skills include “communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).
- *Responsible decision-making*: “The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). This skill includes “consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).

#### **Four Approaches to Teaching SEL**

In addition to research on SEL competencies, educators have also conducted research on how to teach SEL effectively to students. CASEL’s researchers have identified four effective approaches to teaching SEL competencies. Evidence-based SEL programs use at least one of these four approaches to promote social and emotional skills across CASEL’s five core competencies (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

**One: Free-standing lessons.** A free-standing lesson has SEL as its goal and objectives; it is taught with the sole purpose of teaching SEL and is not integrated with other school curriculums. Explicit, step-by-step instructions are used to teach SEL across

the five core competencies, and topics are age-appropriate, such as “labeling feelings, coping with anxiety or stress, setting and achieving goals, developing empathy and compassion, communicating effectively, resolving conflict, being assertive, and making responsible decisions” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 2). Teachers provide classroom activities for students to develop specific skills by using sequenced strategies within and across lessons. Teachers also use active learning techniques, such as “discussions, small-group work, and role plays” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 2) to keep students engaged.

SEL lessons provide explicit instruction and opportunities for practicing new skills throughout the day. Examples of SEL lessons conducted in an elementary classroom would be:

- Teaching students “how to label feelings using words like ‘pleasant,’ ‘happy,’ ‘irritated,’ or ‘angry’” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 3);
- Students learning various techniques for controlling and managing anxiety and stress (e.g., breathing deeply, doing yoga);
- Students reading a story and reflecting on the content “to explore different perspectives and feelings of others” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 3);
- Through activities, students learning to work together as a class to set a common goal and achieve the goal; and
- Students learning steps for how to solve interpersonal problems.

CASEL researchers have reviewed over 200 commercially developed SEL programs and have identified 23 programs as high-quality programs based on positive outcomes and improvement in students’ social and emotional skills. One of these high-



quality programs that utilizes the free standing lesson approach is *Second Step* which teaches SEL explicitly with units on learning empathy, emotion regulation, relationship skills with peers, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills. The program is for grades PreK-8 and utilizes four teaching strategies: games, weekly theme activities, activities to reinforce new skills and home links. The program provides a framework for each day of the week based on a single topic each week. For example, a prepared script and main lesson for the first day, stories with discussions for the second day, practice activities to reinforce new skills in small groups for the third and fourth days, and reading selected books connected to the unit theme for the fifth day. Students practice new skills daily not only at school but also at home with their caregivers using “a ‘Home Link’ activity” (CASEL, 2012, p. 60) that teachers send home. Weekly topics include learning relationship skills and solving social problems such as following steps to solve problems.

The *Second Step* program also focuses on skills for learning for academic achievement. For example, practicing mindfulness regulates emotions by breathing to calm down and focus attention, encouraging students to “listen, be assertive, and use self-attention” (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015, p. 157). *Second Step* has been evaluated for its effectiveness, and evidence has shown that positive social behavior was increased and both conduct problems and emotional distress were reduced when using the *Second Step* program (CASEL, 2012).

Another free-standing program that CASEL reviewed and identified as effective is *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)* (CASEL, 2012). This program is for grades PreK-6 and “promotes peaceful conflict resolution, emotion regulation, empathy, and responsible decision making” (CASEL, 2012, p. 53). *PATHS* is taught

explicitly in classrooms throughout the school year and “children learn to recognize and label emotions, create and sustain friendships, share, take turns, and show proper manners” (Gullotta, 2015, p. 263). Each lesson is scripted and taught twice a week for 30 minutes, and teachers use teachable moments to reinforce learning between sessions (Gullotta, 2015). *PATHS* lessons are also multicultural by incorporating various cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds into curricula. Evaluation outcomes have shown not only improved classroom climate, but also “improved academic performance, increased positive social behavior, reduced conduct problems, reduced emotional distress” (CASEL, 2012, p. 53). Although each lesson of this program is taught only twice a week, the program is flexible to allow teachers to utilize teachable moments to reinforce SEL skills, which may help ELL students to learn the new skills.

However, some researchers have critiqued the stand-alone approach. Jones and Bouffard (2012) cautioned that this approach may not be the best because short stand-alone SEL lessons, such as weekly half-an-hour classes, do not allow sufficient time to teach and practice SEL skills. Instead, Jones and Bouffard suggested teachers integrate SEL into daily interactions and relationships embedded in everyday interactions in schools. This is congruent with the next approach discussed.

**Two: General teaching practices.** In comparison to the free-standing approach which involves pre-planned lessons and specific times designed for SEL instruction, general SEL teaching practices are woven throughout the day throughout class routines, activities and structures. Teachers use particular interactions and techniques according to students’ needs and developmental levels and stages. According to Dusenbury et al. (2015), teachers using this approach should

- “Establish positive and predictable classroom environments” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 4). For example, students and teachers together can develop classroom rules that foster positive social norms, such as listening actively and respectfully when others are speaking.
- “Promote positive teacher-student relationships” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 4). This can include the establishment of “routines and structures such as morning check-ins” (p. 4) and the development of supportive and trusting relationships between teacher-student and among peers “(e.g., welcoming students to the class by name and interacting with students in a respectful way that promotes trust and models desired behaviors)” (p. 4).
- Use “instructional practices that support students’ SEL” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 4). Teachers using this approach may use collaborative learning strategies and problem-based learning that require students to work together. Teachers can also ask questions and encourage students’ genuine voice “(e.g., ‘Tell me about your favorite passage in the poem, and why you like it.’)” (p. 4) as well as “create opportunities for students to explore their own interests and develop their own strengths” (p. 4). For example, students could create an art project to depict their emotions and passions. This approach also uses effective and genuine feedback for students, for example, praising a child for using a SEL strategies by saying, “I saw you take a breath to calm down” (p. 4) during a classroom transition.

**Three: Integration of SEL and academic curriculum.** Schools can purchase and implement commercially developed SEL curriculum that are integrated with

academics to promote school-wide social and emotional learning. CASEL (2012) identified two high-quality commercial SEL programs that integrate SEL into elementary school-level academics.

- The “*Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution (4Rs)*” (CASEL, 2012, p. 43) approach is a program used at the K-8 level. Through this program, SEL is taught “as part of a language arts curriculum that also promotes reading, writing, speaking, and listening” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 4). Grade-specific materials are provided by *4Rs*, including “book talks, read-alouds, and interactive lessons to develop social and emotional skills” (p. 4).
- “*Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions (the ‘RULER’ skills)*” (CASEL, 2012, p. 59) is a language-based SEL program designed to promote emotional literacy as well as verbal literacy for K-8 students. *RULER* uses explicit instruction to teach SEL skills in lessons that teach students to “recognize emotions in themselves and others, understand causes and consequences of emotional states, label emotions using a range of words introduced in lessons, regulate their own emotions, and express emotions in socially appropriate ways” (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015, p. 159). Teachers administer lessons and create opportunities within the language arts curriculum to practice emotion vocabulary and SEL skills.

The two commercial programs discussed above integrate SEL into the K-8 literacy curriculum and emphasize language and vocabulary. I did not find any programs that integrated SEL into other content areas such as math, science or art.

**Four: SEL as a school-wide initiative.** While the first three approaches focus on SEL instruction at the classroom level, this fourth approach requires that school administration create “policies and organizational structures within a school or school system that support students’ social and emotional development” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 5). Examples of how school administrators can implement this approach include:

- Creation of a leadership team for SEL.
- Creation of a school-wide vision for SEL, for example, “schoolwide goals and objectives, mission statements, and strategic plans” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, p. 5).
- Conducting assessments to identify strengths and areas for improvement related to SEL as well as to measure progress towards SEL goals.
- Selection of evidence-based SEL programs for school implementation.
- Integrating “SEL programming into all aspects of the school’s functioning” (p. 5).
- Conducting professional development for all staff on SEL.
- Utilization of data to “inform decisions that involve students’ academic, social, and emotional learning” (p. 5).

This fourth approach of addressing SEL at the highest administrative levels is important because research shows that SEL practices require school administrators’ strong support for the effective implementation of SEL programs and their endorsement of “the use of SEL practices throughout the school building” (CASEL, 2012, p. 11). Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) emphasized that building strong and positive school environments requires school-wide practices. Therefore, it is important for school administrators to recognize that it takes commitment not only from school leaders but also from classroom

teachers and school staff to create safe, caring, and positive environments. In a school-wide approach, the teaching of SEL occurs both inside and outside classrooms including on playgrounds and in lunchrooms, restrooms, and everywhere on school grounds (LaRusso, Brown, Jones, & Aber, 2009). Building a strong climate for school-wide SEL practices that involves all teachers and staff requires a commitment from the school leaders and administrators.

### **Theoretical Framework in Relation to ELLs**

Nowhere in the review of the CASEL literature were English Language learners specifically mentioned. CASEL's framework, developed in 1994 and including the five SEL competencies and four approaches to teaching SEL, was purposefully designed to be generalizable so that SEL "can be taught in many ways across many settings" (CASEL, 2017b, para. 1). The framework purposefully does not differentiate students by demographics or specific needs. Rather, CASEL highlights research demonstrating that "SEL competencies are critically important for the long-term success of *all* students in today's economy" (CASEL, 2017d, para. 6). CASEL's researchers, based on the research carried out in U.S. classrooms, concluded that SEL must be "culturally relevant, empowering children within their unique cultural contexts" (Denham & Weissberg, 2004, p. 41). However, with ELLs making up more than 10% of the U.S. K-12 population, research is needed to help guide schools in how to best teach SEL competencies and modify approaches to meet ELL's unique needs. CASEL has provided the framework; this research attempts to provide the guidance.

## **The SEL Programs Implemented at New Bridge**

New Bridge Elementary School, where this study was conducted, had implemented two commercially developed SEL programs that utilized the school-wide approach to SEL. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) was implemented in all seven elementary schools in the town's school district over five years ago while the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program was implemented in all schools, elementary through high school, in the district. Neither of these programs was among the 200 reviewed by CASEL or the 23 identified as effective SEL programs since CASEL only reviewed classroom-oriented SEL programs with free-standing SEL lessons. However, other researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of these programs. The two programs are described below.

### **Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)**

Dan Olweus, the founder of OBPP, identified bullying as a serious social and emotional issue in schools back in 1993. More than two decades later, the prevalence of bullying in U.S. schools remains high despite increased awareness and prevention efforts in schools. Almost 1 in 5 students are directly affected by bullying in U.S. school (Hazelden Foundation, 2015). For elementary school ages, the statistics are more alarming; "33% of U.S. elementary students reported being bullied often while at school" (Gundersen Health System, 2017, para. 1). Bullying is defined as follows:

Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending himself or herself.

Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting, verbal harassment, spreading false

rumors, not letting someone be part of the group, and sending nasty messages on a cell phone or over the Internet. (Hazelden Foundation, 2007, p. 2)

Olweus emphasized that both bullies and those bullied have social and emotional learning needs. While bullies are often aggressive, impulsive, and show little empathy for victims, victims tend to show more anxiety, insecurity, and are quieter than students in general (Olweus, 1995). As a consequence of bullying and without intervention, victims may become depressed and bullies may become involved in other delinquent, anti-social behaviors such as breaking rules (Hazelden Foundation, 2007). Bystanders are also affected because they may feel powerless and guilty for not standing up for others.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) is a research-based school-wide program designed to reduce bullying in schools. Dan Olweus has been conducting world-wide, large-scale research on bullying and bullying intervention work for children for over 40 years (Clemson University, 2017). His first large-scale project began in 1970 and based on the positive findings from his research, OBPP gained both international and national recognitions for its effectiveness. The following serve as examples of Olweus national and international influence today: the Clemson University highlights the Olweus program in its Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life, the University of Colorado has designated OBPP as an effective program that promotes healthy youth development, and a Norwegian expert group reviewed and selected OBPP as the only program that could be used against various types of problematic behaviors in Norwegian schools (Clemson University, 2017).

OBPP's primary focus is on bullying; however, it also promotes the development of a safer, more positive school environment where students can learn in (Hazelden



Foundation, 2007). The Hazelden Foundation, a nonprofit organization that offers recovery solutions and care for youth and adults, surveyed 20,000 students (Grades 3-12) across the United States between 2013-2015 who had participated in the OBPP program. Their research concluded that “OBPP has been proven to significantly reduce bullying” (p. 2) in schools.

Students are taught four anti-bullying rules:

1. We will not bully others.
2. We will try to help students who are bullied.
3. We will try to include students who are left out.
4. If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

These four rules are emphasized at monthly school-wide assemblies and every classroom displays a poster with the anti-bullying rules. Both teachers and staff are trained in the Olweus prevention method and the anti-bullying rules are enforced school-wide including the cafeteria and the playground. Students who bully others are given consequences, and students who are bullied are supported by school staff and taught strategies to end the bullying. Teachers meet with parents of both bullying and bullied students.

OBPP was designed for the general student population. A review of the Violence Prevention Works! website, which is operated by the Hazelden Foundation (2016) and which markets the OBPP commercial program, comments that OBPP is designed for all students and does not mention information or resources specific to ELLs or any other specific student population. The Clemson University’s Olweus website also did not mention ELLs or any other specific student population.

## **The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> Program**

The second SEL program implemented at New Bridge Elementary School is the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program developed by CHARACTER COUNTS!, a project of the nonprofit organization, Josephson Institute of Ethics (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017b). CHARACTER COUNTS was founded by Institute of Ethics's director Michael Josephson and a "coalition of 17 nationally prominent youth serving and educational organizations" in 1992 (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017b, para. 4). The purpose of CHARACTER COUNTS! was to promote good moral character in youth based on the belief that the well-being of a society needs future citizens with good moral character. The coalition declared the guiding principles for CHARACTER COUNTS! and stated that character education for young people is a responsibility for families, communities, schools, and youth serving organizations and that developing good character in youth needs conscientious efforts in teaching them core ethical values in society.

Based on the guiding principles, CHARACTER COUNTS! initially focused on the development of core ethical values (the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup>); however, reflecting ongoing research and best practices, the program has evolved extensively to promote student development in academic, social and emotional skills together with the six moral characteristics. CHARACTER COUNTS! has become the largest organization to promote character development in youth in the world (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017b).

The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program (see Table 1) focuses on behavior modification, mindset, and character development. The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program is:

A framework for teaching good character and is composed of six ethical values (characteristics) everyone can agree upon: Trustworthiness; Respect; Responsibility; Fairness; Caring; and Citizenship. Each of the six character traits are used . . . to help instill a positive learning environment for students and a “culture of kindness” making schools a safe environment for students to learn. (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c, para. 1)

Table 1. Six Pillars of Character.

Six Pillars of Character	
<p>Trustworthiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Be honest</li> <li>▪ Don't deceive, cheat, or steal</li> <li>▪ Be reliable – do what you say you'll do</li> <li>▪ Have the courage to do the right thing</li> <li>▪ Build a good reputation</li> <li>▪ Be loyal – stand by your family, friends, and country</li> </ul>	<p>Fairness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Play by the rules</li> <li>▪ Take turns and share</li> <li>▪ Be open-minded, listen to others</li> <li>▪ Don't take advantage of others</li> <li>▪ Don't blame others carelessly</li> <li>▪ Treat all people fairly</li> </ul>
<p>Respect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Be tolerant and accepting of differences</li> <li>▪ Use good manners, not bad language</li> <li>▪ Be considerate of the feelings of others</li> <li>▪ Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone</li> <li>▪ Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements</li> </ul>	<p>Caring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Be kind</li> <li>▪ Be compassionate and show you care</li> <li>▪ Express gratitude</li> <li>▪ Forgive others</li> <li>▪ Help people in need</li> <li>▪ Be charitable and altruistic</li> </ul>
<p>Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do what you are supposed to do</li> <li>▪ Plan ahead</li> <li>▪ Be diligent</li> <li>▪ Persevere</li> <li>▪ Do your best</li> <li>▪ Use self-control</li> <li>▪ Be self-disciplined</li> <li>▪ Think before you act</li> <li>▪ Be accountable for your words, actions, and attitudes</li> <li>▪ Set a good example for others</li> </ul>	<p>Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do your share to make your school and community better</li> <li>▪ Cooperate</li> <li>▪ Get involved in community affairs</li> <li>▪ Stay informed; vote</li> <li>▪ Be a good neighbor</li> <li>▪ Obey laws and rules</li> <li>▪ Respect authority</li> <li>▪ Protect the environment</li> <li>▪ Volunteer</li> </ul>

(CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c, para. 2)

Character is defined as “the sum of one’s distinctive traits, qualities and predilections, and amounts to one’s moral constitution” (Josephson Institute, 2017, para.

1). Everybody has character; however, having good character means that a person is admirable because of his confident, ethical, moral behavior (Josephson Institute, 2017). Therefore, a person having good character may be caring and empathetic for others and will not display immoral behaviors such as bullying others, instead, they may stand up for others.

Evidence-based results have shown that the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program improved students' academic performance, general behavior and attitudes, and promoted student satisfaction (e.g., the program reminds students to make good choices for their behaviors and thinking) (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017a). The CHARACTER COUNTS website is disorganized and it is difficult to find information on how CHARACTER COUNTS programs are implemented in schools; there are posters and videos available for purchase on the website as well as lesson plans and other free resources; however, I was unable to find information specifically on English language learners.

### **Understanding SEL Issues of ELLs**

Research has demonstrated the importance of providing SEL for school children and the effectiveness of SEL in reducing unwanted behaviors, creating a positive school environment and promoting academic achievement (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). However, little research is available on how SEL is taught to ELL students to promote their SEL skills. CASEL, the most prominent organization in SEL, provides no information specific to ELLs, and neither do the commercial SEL programs researched in this literature review. What are the social and emotional needs of ELL students, especially SEL needs of newcomer ELL children and refugee ELL children? How do

teachers focus specifically on ELLs' social and emotional needs, especially since these needs may be different from those of the general population of students? How do teachers teach SEL in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways? The following sections review literature pertinent to ELL students' unique SEL needs that are not addressed in the main SEL literature.

### **Expressing Emotions and Cultural Differences**

Hoffman (2009) stated that SEL needs to put a major emphasis on recognizing and controlling one's emotions in order for individuals to act in socially positive and healthy manners. Identifying, labeling, and sharing emotions are considered key skills, and children in primary schools are expected to recognize and talk about emotions by labeling feelings using words such as happy, sad, or angry (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Hoffman (2009) pointed out that some state standards require students to recognize and identify emotions and label them correctly. In fact, Illinois became the first state to develop specific SEL standards for K-12 students (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016) and currently requires students to identify and label emotions accurately, recognize how emotions are connected to behavior, and use conversation skills such as "I" messages to express and talk about feelings. While this is a major success for SEL standards nationwide, it is important to realize that every culture interprets emotional experiences differently. For example, several studies of emotions in other cultures found that emotional experiences and expressions based on emotions are strongly influenced by culture (Briggs, 1998; Chao, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; White, 1987), and the ways emotions are expressed among/between cultures may differ.

Teachers should be aware that ELL students from different cultures may identify,

label and share their emotions in different ways than what a teacher might expect. For example, an ELL student may not feel comfortable using “I” messages to express and talk about their feelings. When teaching SEL to ELLs, teachers need to realize that the five SEL competencies might be expressed differently by different cultures, and that students come from diverse cultural backgrounds. As Gay (2010) suggested, teachers must be aware of their own cultural learning and how they (teachers) fit or do not fit in with their students’ cultural beliefs and behaviors. When it comes to understanding the relationships between emotion and culture such as expressing self, it is clear that teaching SEL competencies in the same way for all children is difficult and that teachers should teach about emotions in ways that are appropriate for ELL students’ cultural backgrounds.

### **Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors**

Emotions are often expressed through behavior. According to Gage (2013), internalizing behaviors are behavior patterns that are directed inwardly towards oneself (e.g., sadness, anxiety, social withdrawal); whereas, externalizing behaviors are directed outwardly toward others, such as bullying and aggression. To explore internalizing and externalizing behavior patterns in ELL students and non-ELL students, Niehaus (2012) examined self-reported social-emotional skills of ELL children compared to their non-ELL peers and found that compared to non-ELL students, ELL children reported “significantly more social and emotional concerns (e.g., inattention, off-task behaviors, difficulties with peers, worry, sadness, and loneliness)” (p. 64). Based on the findings, Niehaus claimed that compared to their non-ELL peers, ELL children tend to experience more difficulties with staying on task and maintaining attention (externalizing behaviors),

and experience more anxiety, sadness, and loneliness (internalizing behaviors). Having more social and emotional concerns compared to non-ELL peers may cause ELL students not being able to attain academic achievement. This makes sense given all the challenges that ELL students may be experiencing in school and in their home life.

For example, not knowing the English language can be a strong stressor to ELL children (Dawson & Williams, 2008; Igoa, 1995; Sharp-Ross, 2011). ELL children may not be paying attention and seem restless because they do not understand what their teacher is saying. A lack in English fluency may cause ELL children's levels of anxiety to increase at school and they may also feel lonely and isolated in classroom, which may have negative influence on their academic learning. The next section addresses possible stressors more in depth.

### **Emotional Struggles and Stressors**

ELL students may experience a variety of emotional struggles and stressors both in and outside of school. Ovando, Collier, and Combs (2003) classified ELL children's emotional struggles into two types. According to Ovando et al., the first type of emotional struggle relates to the uncomfortable feelings people tend to get when they are placed in unfamiliar situations. Ovando et al. stated that those feelings may be nervousness, fear, shyness, loneliness, insecurity, exhaustion, and anger. Interestingly, Sharp-Ross (2011) pointed out that although ELL children may go through emotional struggles, they tend to show their distress as shyness and withdrawal; therefore, teachers may not notice their anxiety. It is clear that many ELL students need to learn coping skills to deal with their school acculturation and overcome adjustment stresses.

Based on their findings, Ovando et al. reported that ELL students experience



many uneasy feelings and show different emotions and feelings in classroom and school environments depending on their native culture and their personality. The second type of emotional struggle is related to racial and ethnic discrimination that ELL students may experience at school (Ovando et al., 2003). Whether actual or perceived, such discrimination may lead ELL students to feel lonely, lack social belonging, and feel unable to control a situation (Banks et al., 2005; Sharp-Ross, 2011).

School is the primary place where ELLs experience and learn the dominant norms and values of a new society (Sharp-Ross, 2011) and where ELLs may experience struggles of both adjustment and discrimination. Newcomer youth generally go through stages of culture shock, which may include short periods of intense adjustment to a new society, new culture, new language, and new school (Igoa, 1995). Sharp-Ross further explained that newcomer ELLs tend to experience a tremendous amount of school acculturation stress, which can be an obstacle to successful adjustment to school culture. In addition, depending on their cultural background, immigrant and refugee ELL children may react differently to a particular circumstance in a new culture; therefore, Sharp-Ross noted that the school adjustment of immigrant and refugee students and their behavior must be understood with regard to their past lived experiences.

In addition to these commonly experienced stressors of adjustment to a new school and culture, some ELL students experience more severe emotional distress. Sharp-Ross stated that immigrant and refugee ELL children may go through psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to immigration and resettlement and possible trauma that they were exposed to due to war in the home country, necessitating involuntary migration. Therefore, some

ELLs may need SEL more than others to be able to cope with the severe social and emotional challenges they are experiencing. Robertson and Breiseth (2017) stated that significant feelings of anxiety can develop after exposure to terrifying events (e.g., physical harm, life-threatening situations) and that PTSD “is a severe and ongoing emotional reaction to an extreme psychological trauma” (p. 4). Many refugee ELL students suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some of the typical signs and symptoms of PTSD are being easily irritated, having difficulty in concentrating, becoming out of control, and not being able to get along with others (Robertson & Breiseth).

PTSD is a serious condition with which “usual psychological defenses are incapable of coping” (Robertson & Breiseth, 2017, p. 4). When refugee students display PTSD symptoms, Robertson and Breiseth recommended that school assist them immediately in getting professional help and treatment and work with school counselors and social workers to help students with post-traumatic stress. However, even when students appear to adjust, they may still be facing difficulties adjusting to their new school, culture, and language; therefore, teachers and school staff need to look for signs of stress. It is also necessary for teachers, administrators, and other school professionals to understand the depth of trauma students might have experienced. Therefore, as Hess (2017) suggested, professional development should be provided for educators of all levels to help them better understand trauma and be prepared to recognize and respond to ELL students who suffer from post-traumatic stress.

In addition to the stress of adjustment and possibly past traumas, ELL students must also contend with the stress of learning a new language. ELL students must achieve

English proficiency to be accepted in a school's mainstream social and cultural life (Olsen, 2000). Many studies have pointed out that limited English proficiency is a major stressor to ELL students, both socially and academically. It may prevent ELL students from fully participating in school culture (del Valle, 2002; Genesea, Paradis, & Crago, 2004; Olsen, 2000; Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Therefore, it is crucial that ELL students acquire English language fluency to feel a part of mainstream school life. However, learning a new language creates its own stress and emotions including frustration and anxiety.

### **Adjusting to School Rules and Norms**

In addition to the various emotions that newcomer ELL students may experience as they adjust to a new school and culture, newcomer ELL students must also learn new school norms. They may come from countries where students are expected to sit at their desks quietly and listen to teachers. Active participation and cooperative learning in U.S. classrooms may be unfamiliar to ELL students and they may not know how to behave or participate in student-centered U.S. classrooms.

Some newcomer ELLs may have limited experiences with schooling. These students are often referred as "students with interrupted formal education" (SIFEs) (Calgary Board of Education, 2017a; del Valle, 2002; Robertson & Lafond, 2017). "SIFEs may come from countries where poverty, disaster, and civil unrest affect the development of literacy and opportunities for education" (Robertson & Lafond, 2017, p. 4). This is especially true for refugee students who have lived in refugee camps where opportunities for education have been limited. When students come to U.S. schools with little or no schooling experience, they are most likely unfamiliar with school routines

(e.g., lining up for recess, walking in the hallways), the behavioral expectations in the classroom (e.g., listening while someone is talking), and social rules (e.g., working together with peers) to name some of the unfamiliar educational traditions (Calgary Board of Education, 2017b). Robertson and Lafond (2017) emphasized that educators must understand the challenges and struggles that SIFEs go through and that educators need to be patient and open-minded with SIFEs because they have much more to learn than the English language in order to be functional at school.

### **ELL Teachers' Roles in ELL Students' SEL**

As discussed above, ELLs, especially newcomer and refugee ELLs, may have a wide variety of social and emotional learning needs as they adjust to school, life in the U.S. and learn English. This is well documented in the literature. Teachers need to recognize the challenges and struggles that ELL children go through and support and respond to their needs by promoting ELL children's social and emotional learning. However, some authors have stated that many teachers may not even be aware of the need to assist ELL students in their school adjustment (Sharp-Ross, 2011; Williams & Butler, 2003).

Although many teachers may not recognize the need to help ELL students' acculturation, several studies have pointed out how ELL teachers directly assist ELL students' school acculturation and adjustments (Chiu, 2009; Roessingh, 2006; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000; Sharp-Ross, 2011). For example, Roessingh reported that ELL teachers may teach school rules and culture to newcomer ELL students informally, such as how to line up for recess and how to catch and ride a school bus. Sharp-Ross (2011) stated other examples of how ELL teachers assist ELL students and their families,

including connecting the families with social service agencies, and buying necessary clothing and school materials for those students and their families.

However, besides teaching rules and making sure that children's basic needs (clothing, food, etc.) are taken care of, there was little literature found on *how* ELL teachers can help ELL students with their SEL needs. The rest of this section discusses ideas for what teachers could do, but none of this was found in SEL literature.

Importantly, a teacher's warmth, acceptance, and caring are referred to as emotional support. Of all types of support, emotional support has the largest impact in fostering student well-being (Sharp-Ross, 2011), especially ELL students' emotional well-being, as they need to feel safe and protected in a classroom. Noddings (2005) emphasized that a teacher being seen as caring is the most important element to support a student's emotional well-being. Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin (2009) and Yoder (2014) agreed with Noddings (2005), stating that social and emotional support that communicates caring promotes a sense of security and protection. Yoder said that "warmth and support" (p. 13) is one of the instructional practices for supporting students' emotional and social development. When students receive warmth and social support from their teachers, students know that teachers care about them and they feel safe in the classroom.

Several authors have discussed the value of incorporating the native language into the ELL classroom. Halle et al. (2014) suggested that teachers show their appreciation and caring for linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse children by encouraging them to use their native languages in speaking and writing. Halle et al. further stated that using a student's home language in classrooms could be a positive, moderating factor for

linguistically diverse children's social and emotional development. Garcia, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) also pointed out that "the development of students' socioemotional well-being is an important part of teaching" (p. 157) because it is difficult for a person to learn if he or she does not feel secure in his or her own identity. The use of an individual's native language in speaking and/or writing in a classroom "enables students to create identities for themselves that are also academic" (Garcia et al., 2017, p. 157). ELL students have a need to feel secure in their identities and feel positive about themselves by using their home language. By encouraging students to use their home language to communicate in their classrooms, teachers help students develop strong identities as bilinguals, not simply as English language learners. Eventually, they may develop a sense of who they are as bilingual Americans.

Teachers can also incorporate the knowledge that students have gained from their family and cultural backgrounds into their classrooms. Educational experts label this "funds of knowledge," the skills and information that are accumulated historically and developed culturally, and that are fundamental skills for household and individual's well-being and functioning within a culture (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Incorporating students' funds of knowledge into classrooms is effective in promoting students' social and emotional learning (Bigelow, Basfourd, & Smidt, 2008; Moll et al., 1992). Moll et al. stated that when teachers get to know students' worlds and their families' funds of knowledge that contain abundant cultural and cognitive resources, teachers will know children as whole persons, not just as students. These behaviors promote students' sense of relatedness and belonging to their schools and classrooms,

which is extremely important for most disadvantaged, low-income, and high-risk students, including ELLs (McCormick et al., 2015; Schonfeld et al., 2014).

Some studies also point out the importance of a school environment with teachers that assist ELL students in learning new cultural skills and competencies in a new culture and society (Liebekind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Opedal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004). However, those studies do not explain how schools may help and assist ELL students in their adjustment and acculturation.

### **Summary**

Research on social-emotional learning (SEL) shows that it can result in “positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 10). This is important for all students. To help ELL children be successful in school and life, educators need to understand the unique SEL needs of ELL students as well as how to teach SEL in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.

The current literature about SEL is focused on the K-12 general education. Evidence-based SEL programs, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program, are designed to be flexible to meet the needs of all students and therefore they do not focus attention specifically on ELLs. Research studies addressing the effectiveness of these programs are all based on the general education population as well. Some research studies address ELL children’s unique SEL needs, especially refugee ELL children’s emotional needs due to their struggles and challenges, and some studies suggest strategies that work with ELL children to meet their SEL needs. However, research findings on this topic are still limited. More investigation and

research is needed to explore how to teach SEL and what SEL competencies to teach in an ELL classroom to meet the unique SEL needs of ELLs.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHOD**

This chapter presents the method of this study. First, the chapter reiterates the research questions, and then offers a methodological framework to explain the design of this study. Next, the chapter provides methods used in the study. The chapter included a summary of informal observations conducted before the formal study began, a detailed description of the context and the participants of the study, and procedures used for collecting and analyzing data. Finally, the chapter discusses validity and trustworthiness of this study and researcher reflexivity.

#### **Research Questions**

The overarching question that this study pursued was: “What does SEL look like in an ELL classroom?” Under the principal question, the following specific questions guided the study.

1. How do ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills in an ELL classroom?
2. What competency (competencies) of SEL do ELL teachers in an ELL classroom focus on?
3. How do ELL teachers adapt and modify commercial SEL programs for their students?

## **Methodological Framework**

Qualitative and quantitative research methods have different goals and answer different types of inquiries. While quantitative research is “useful for describing trends and explaining the relationship among variables found in the literature” (Creswell, 2015, p. 621); qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth and detailed study of issues by “exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (p. 621). The goal of this study was to explore and develop a profound understanding and description of what SEL looked like in an ELL classroom. Thus, the questions this study sought to understand were suited to a qualitative research approach.

### **Case Study Approach Using Ethnographic Data Collection Methods**

A case study approach was used for this study since it was empirical research, which “investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Development of SEL skills in ELL students is a contemporary concern in education, which fits Yin’s definition, as did many other stipulations in the research methodology. It is also important to determine the unit of analysis (case) by setting boundaries for the study, although setting logical and relevant boundaries for each case may be challenging (Yin, 2014). Case boundaries can be set by “the time period, social groups, organizations, geographic locations, or other conditions that fall within the case (as opposed to outside of) the case in a case study” (Yin, 2014, p. 237). Yin also stated “the persons to be included within the group (the immediate topic of the case study) must be distinguished from those who are outside of it (the context for the case study)” (p. 33).

This study sought to explore, understand, and describe what SEL looked like and how ELL teachers adapt and modify commercial SEL programs for their students in an ELL classroom at a single elementary school. The context of this case study was a school, New Bridge Elementary School (pseudonym). The case was two ELL teachers who taught in the same ELL classroom at New Bridge. New Bridge's principal and school counselor were also included to provide contextual information to help better understand how the school context affected the ELL classroom.

This case study was also bounded by time. Data were collected during a mid-academic year between January 2017 and April 2017 by using ethnographic data collection methods, which were field observation and in-depth interviewing (Glesne, 2011). By collecting data primarily from direct observations of the ELL classroom in this study over a period of time (22 times, 60 minutes each, from January 2017 to April 2017) and multiple in-depth interviews, I developed detailed descriptions, which specified many details and meanings I needed for understanding and describing the parameters of SEL in this particular ELL classroom. I also knew that there were situational contexts, which might limit the generalizability of my observations to other schools.

### **Context and Participants**

The research site for this study was an elementary school located in a small city in the Great Plains where I lived, which I refer to as "New Bridge Elementary School." The school was chosen via "*purposeful selection*" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97) because it had an established ELL program with classes especially for newcomers who had been in the U.S. for less than a year. The school called these the "New Americans" classes and

newcomer ELL students were called “New Americans.” The school also had two full-time, experienced ELL teachers who were known for their effective teaching of ELL children. These teachers were selected purposively as their knowledge and experience would provide information that would be especially relevant to the research questions. I also was already acquainted with the teachers and classroom due to an assignment for a doctoral course where I had observed the classroom during the Fall of 2015 when I watched how the student at the beginning of this paper learned the word “elephant.” I also had previously met the school principal when he guest lectured in a doctoral course, and he became a strong “gatekeeper” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 90). Maxwell (2013) stated that gatekeepers are essential components of research methods, and how to initiate and negotiate relationships with gatekeepers is a critical design decision.

At the time of this study, New Bridge Elementary was located in a well-established neighborhood of homes built near the school in the 1960s and 1970s. New Bridge Elementary also drew students from several low-income housing apartment complexes a few blocks from the school. The percentage of the total student population at New Bridge who were receiving free or discounted lunches was the highest of all schools in the district. ELL students were bussed to the school from different areas in the district. Table 2 provides demographic information on New Bridge Elementary.

Table 2. Demographics of New Bridge Elementary School (2016-2017 School Year).

Total Enrollment	210
Total K-5 ELL enrollment	89
ELL percentage of total enrollment	Over 40%
ELL countries of origin	
Nepal	38%
Somalia	21%
Middle East (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Libya)	16%
Mexico	10%
Other African nations	8%
Others	7%
ELL English Language proficiency levels	
Very beginning level (Level 1)	Over 40%
School-wide free & reduced lunch percentage	90%

### **Description of the ELL Classroom**

In order to meet ELL students’ linguistic needs effectively, New Bridge was using an ELL pull-out program as one of its strategies to help ELLs, which was the most commonly implemented program for ELL students in elementary schools across the U.S. (Baker, 2011). Following national best practices, the ELL children at New Bridge would leave their mainstream classrooms to receive ELL instruction in the ELL classroom from ELL teachers in small groups for part of the day.

New Bridge had one ELL classroom and the room was divided into four small areas by partitions. Figure 2 provides a drawing of New Bridge’s ELL classroom. One of the areas was designated for the New Americans class. Two areas were assigned for beginning to intermediate ELL classes, which were taught by an ELL teacher and a

paraprofessional, and the last area was used for occasional one-on-one instruction given by paraprofessionals. The New Americans class area was larger than the other class areas.

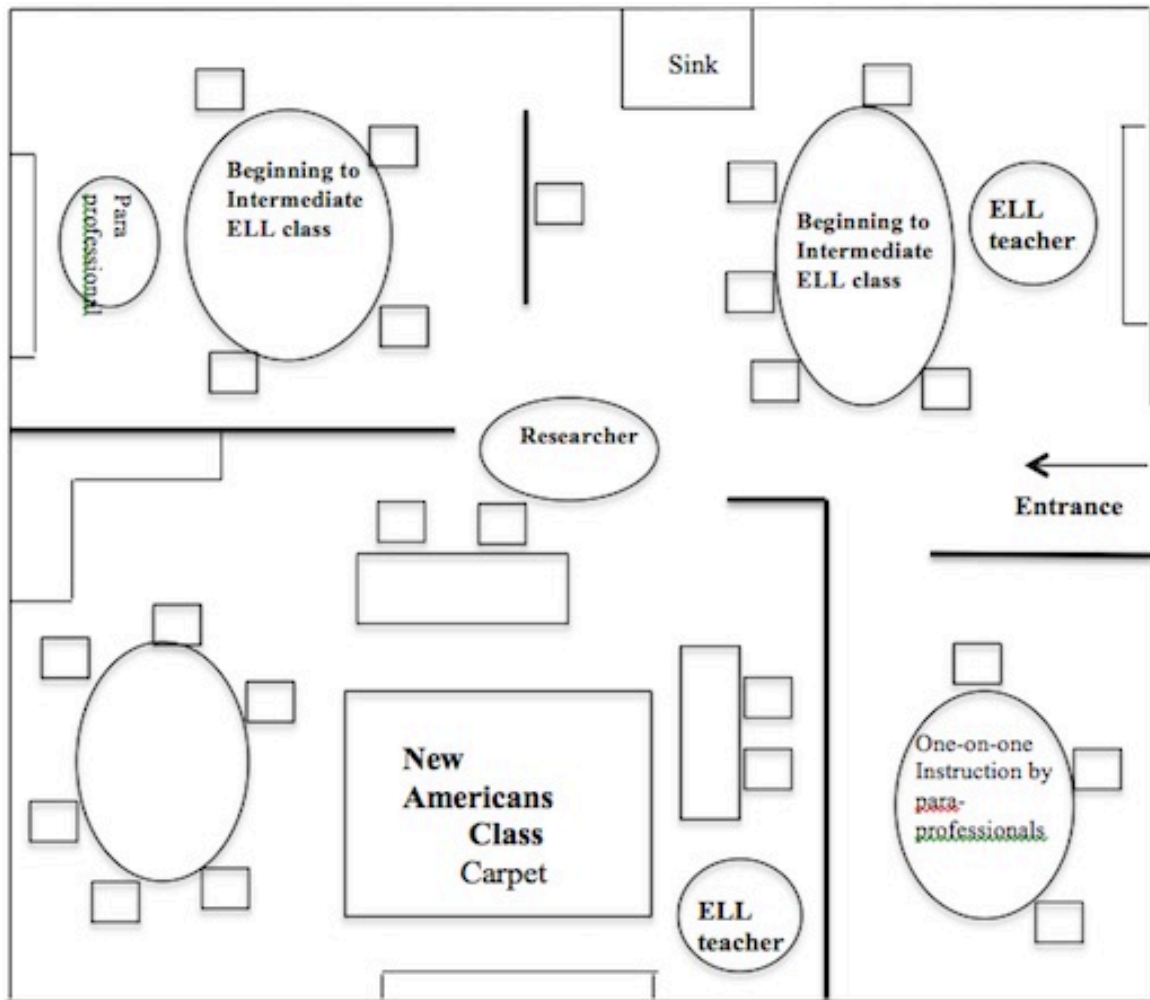


Figure 2. New Bridge's ELL Classroom.

In this study, I observed mainly the New American children in the New Americans class because the newcomer ELL students were likely to need SEL support most. The class period was also much longer (2 1/2 hours daily) than the beginning to intermediate ELL class (30 minutes for each group). The room configuration allowed me to observe both

classes, as they were held side-by-side in the same ELL classroom; however, my primary attention fell on the New American students. The following section describes the New Americans class.

### **New Americans Class**

The New Americans class at New Bridge was designed to serve newly arrived, first through fifth grade ELL children who had been in the U.S. for less than a year with very limited English proficiency. The class was established in the 2015-2016 school year by the principal and one of the ELL teachers at New Bridge to meet these students' needs. New American children were divided into two groups by their grades, third through fifth graders were in a morning session (8:30 am - 11:00 am), and first and second graders were in an afternoon session (12:30 pm - 3:00 pm). The same ELL teacher taught both sessions. These children would leave their mainstream classroom every day to spend more than 2 hours with their ELL teacher in the New Americans classes, receiving ELL instruction focused on functional vocabulary words, communication skills, adapting to the American culture, and beginning academic skills. In this study, I observed the class during the morning session (third through fifth graders) because there were more students in the morning class than in the afternoon one. The New American children usually stayed in this class for a year before they moved on to a beginning to intermediate ELL class.

Newcomer ELL children arrived and enrolled in the ELL class throughout the year at New Bridge due to refugee resettlement, secondary migration, and families relocating. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, seven students (four Nepalese, two Somali, and one Mexican) were enrolled in the third to fifth grade morning

New Americans session and four different languages were spoken (Nepali, Spanish, French, and Somali) in the classroom. In the middle of Fall 2016, two students left the class; one of them moved up to the beginning level ELL class after she spent one year in the New Americans class, and the other transferred to a different school due to his family's relocation. However, two newly arrived ELL children from Somalia joined the class soon after, and two more newly arrived Nepalese students came in the end of Fall 2016. The ELL teachers spent extra time teaching these new students classroom rules and routines. The ELL teachers also asked the ELL peers to help these new students whenever they needed help in the classroom. At the end of April 2017, when I completed my observations, there were nine students (six Nepalese, two Somalis, and one Mexican) in the New Americans classroom. According to the ELL teacher, all of them were refugee students except the student from Mexico whose parents sent him to the U.S. to study English at the beginning of the school year and was living with his aunt.

### **Participants**

Research participants in this study were two full-time ELL teachers, the principal at New Bridge Elementary, and the school counselor. Pseudonyms were used for every participant in this study.

**ELL teachers (Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Fay).** Mrs. Harris was a full-time, certified ELL teacher with 4 years of experience in teaching ELLs at New Bridge. Mrs. Harris started the New Americans class with the principal in 2015. She had been a teacher for 12 years total; she taught 8 years as a kindergarten teacher before she became an ELL teacher. She made the transition and became an ELL teacher after working with some kindergarten ELL children, and she found she enjoyed the experience. Mrs. Harris



earned a bachelor's degree in education and obtained an ELL endorsement and a graduate certificate in ELL education from a local state university. She taught first through fifth grade New American children until they became proficient enough to move to a beginning to intermediate ELL class.

Mrs. Harris was a caring and compassionate person, always concerned about the ELL children and their families' well-being. Mrs. Harris was a monolingual American citizen who was born and grew up in the same region. English was her mother tongue. Mrs. Harris was cheerful, lively, and energetic in her teaching. Her gestures and movements, her voice's variety of sounds and pitches, and her big warm smiles helped children be engaged and interested in learning.

Mrs. Fay was another full-time, certified ELL teacher with 3 years of experience in teaching ELLs at New Bridge. She had been a teacher for 5 years total; she taught 2 years as a substitute ELL teacher in the district before she joined New Bridge. Mrs. Fay earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in ELL education from a local state university. She decided to become an ELL teacher when she saw two ELL students who looked lost without having anyone helping them with their English language during her internship in an elementary classroom. At New Bridge, Mrs. Fay taught first through fifth grade ELLs who were at the beginning to intermediate levels. New American students moved to Mrs. Fay's class after they exited the New Americans class.

Mrs. Fay was a calm and caring person, and her warm smiles helped children feel relaxed in their ELL classroom. Mrs. Fay was herself an immigrant from a middle-east country and had been in the U.S. for more than two decades. Mrs. Fay often helped

Arabic speaking ELL children and their families by communicating in Arabic to facilitate their comprehension.

**Other participants (the principal and the school counselor).** Mr. Jones had been a principal of New Bridge Elementary School for 5 years. He had over 19 years of experience in the field of education and 6 years as the principal of another elementary school in the district. Mr. Jones was an American citizen who was born and grew up in the same region of the Great Plains. English was his mother tongue and he did not speak any other languages. Mr. Jones showed his appreciation for the diversity of New Bridge and welcomed ELL children. As the administrator, Mr. Jones showed his commitment to creating safer, more positive school environments in which New Bridge students could learn and develop by actively promoting school-wide anti-bullying measures together with character education to build a culture of respect and kindness and to improve relationships among students. Mr. Jones perceived that the ELL children's SEL needs at New Bridge were enormous as the majority of them were refugee students who had lived in refugee camps, had limited formal schooling and had experienced trauma.

Ms. Moore was the school counselor at New Bridge Elementary. She had over 6 years of experience in counseling adults, and this was her first year in counseling elementary students. During her internship, she had worked with high school ELL students to help them set their academic goals to graduate. Ms. Moore was an American citizen who was born and raised in the same Great Plains region. English was her mother tongue and she did not speak any other languages. Ms. Moore counseled 2 days a week at New Bridge and 3 days at another elementary school in the district. Her time at New Bridge was spent on small group counseling, individual one-on-one sessions, and

classroom lessons to support students' SEL needs. Most of her job involved teaching students how to regulate themselves by identifying and managing emotions. Ms. Moore was also training all the staff at New Bridge in trauma-sensitive practice in order to recognize behaviors children may show related to high chronic stress.

### **Summary of Informal Observations (Fall 2016)**

My knowledge of the school and classroom context as well as my knowledge of the participants in the study was first gained through informal observations conducted during Fall 2016 prior to beginning my formal dissertation study. When I realized that my dissertation proposal and IRB approval would not be finalized by the beginning of the school's academic year, I contacted New Bridge's principal and the two ELL teachers about the possibility of informally beginning my research study early at New Bridge. I felt it was important to observe how the new ELL students adjusted to the classroom and how the ELL teachers created a sense of community in the classroom from the first day of school. Both ELL teachers and the principal were willing to informally open their ELL classroom and the school to my research until I received all the necessary approvals for this study and begin the formal data collections. Therefore, I began my informal observations on the first day of the school year, 2016-2017. I observed the ELL classroom a total of 20 times (twice a week, 60 minutes each, September 2016 to December 2016). During my informal observations, I took observation notes only and did not interview anyone.

While I was observing how the ELL teachers created a sense of community in the classroom at the beginning of the school year, there were four things that stood out to me in the first week of observations. First, the ELL teacher created a sense of community in

the ELL classroom on the first day. I immediately noticed that the New Americans class and beginning to intermediate ELL classes were all small groups and that ELL teachers could give individual attention to a student when needed to make the students feel a sense of belonging. In the New Americans class area, there was a large world map rug placed on the floor. Each child was instructed to sit on a continent on the carpet to show where he or she came from. With the help of their ELL teacher, children talked about themselves (e.g., their countries, cultures, languages, families, and schools). The ELL children were all from different backgrounds and all learning English, and that was one of the things they had in common that helped them to build community.

Second, the ELL teachers taught specific rules on the first day: classroom rules (e.g., no kicking, no pushing, listen when others are speaking, and raise a hand and share), school rules (e.g., walk in the hallway), and school cultures (e.g., recess, school bus). ELL teachers reinforced the rules whenever relevant throughout the day. Third, I observed the first school assembly (kick-off) for half an hour during the first week of the school year. The principal explained Olweus anti-bullying rules and the whole school repeated the rules. The principal also encouraged the whole school and student body to persevere, never give up, and keep going no matter what. The whole school repeated the phrase, “keep going, keep going, keep going.” Fourth, ELL teachers spent 10 minutes going over Olweus anti-bullying rules in their ELL classroom on the first day. Using clear visual chart, ELL teachers explained what bullying was and strategies to deal with bullying, such as tell an adult.

Finally, during my informal observations, one incident made me wonder if the ELL teachers made cultural considerations when they addressed SEL needs of their ELL

students. One day during my observations, I left my pencil on a table. In the next moment, a New American boy came by, quickly picked up the pencil, put it into his pocket, and went away. I was quietly observing him and wondering if this was something that was accepted within his home culture. This incident helped me develop interview questions to explore the ELL teachers' prospective regarding how they would handle their ELL students' behavioral issues, and if they would take students' cultural values and backgrounds into considerations when they address SEL needs of their students.

### **Data Collection**

I began my formal data collection at the beginning of January 2017, as I had received all the needed approvals for this study by that time. This section describes the formal data collection process for this qualitative study. Data was collected through ELL classroom observations, field notes, and individual interviews.

#### **ELL Classroom Observations**

I observed the ELL classroom where both Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Fay taught, focusing on how they taught SEL and what SEL competencies they taught. I also examined how the ELL teachers were adapting and modifying the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program in the ELL classroom. My observation visits occurred 22 times (twice a week, 60 minutes each, January 2017 to April 2017).

#### **Field Notes**

During observations, I kept in-depth field notes, describing actions and interactions of students and teachers through meticulous descriptions, which specified

situations and circumstances of actions and meanings. I noted what the ELL teachers did and said, the time when things happened, and my comments and thoughts. When significant events took place during classroom activities, I wrote down topics that may have represented features of the events in my field notes with a colored pen. I also used my field notes to sketch some classroom events to visualize them.

### **Interviews**

I conducted individual interviews three times with each ELL teacher and one time each with the principal and the school counselor at New Bridge. The first interview with each participant took place during the first month of observations, the second interview with the ELL teachers was carried out during the mid-period of my observations, and the third interview took place when my observations were completed. All participants chose to use their office (classroom for the ELL teachers) at New Bridge for the location of their interview and chose their lunch break or after school when students and other staff were not present as the time of their interview(s). Each individual interview took approximately 60 minutes, and each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed right after the interview. Interviewing participants who held different positions at New Bridge gave me different perspectives on the ELL children's SEL, as the principal and the school counselor were able to give me school-wide, large-picture perspectives, and the ELL teachers offered me ELL classroom perspectives.

Based on "*semi-structured interviews*" (Roulston, 2010, p. 15) as an interview structure, I prepared three interview guides (see Appendices A, B, C) with various questions that had emerged during my informal observations. There was a specific focus for each interview. The first interview with the ELL teachers focused on their

perspectives of ELL students' SEL needs and how the SEL needs were addressed in the ELL classroom. Some example questions included:

- In thinking about the SEL needs of the ELL children in your classroom, which needs do you think are the same needs as all children and which needs are specific to ELL students?
- How do you address these SEL needs in the ELL classroom?

The second interview with the ELL teachers examined their perceptions of SEL practices of the broader school. In addition, questions focused on their perceptions of the anti-bullying program and the character education program that the school was implementing.

Some example questions were:

- How do you see the SEL needs of ELL students being met in the mainstream classroom and the wider school community?
- What impact do you see The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program having on ELL students?

The third interview with the ELL teachers consisted of follow-up questions based on analysis of transcripts from the first two interviews as well as questions developed from analysis of classroom observations. Sample questions included:

- If you could develop a SEL program specifically for ELL students, what would it look like? What would be the focus?
- We have been talking about SEL and ELL students for several months now. Has your thinking or teaching about SEL changed as a result of participating in this research project? If yes, please give me some examples or tell me some stories.

The interview questions for the principal explored his perceptions of the SEL needs of enrolled ELL students and how the school was working to meet the SEL needs of its students. Additionally, questions focused on his perceptions of the anti-bullying program and the character education program that the school was implementing. Example questions included the following:

- How is New Bridge working to meet the social-emotional needs of its students?
- What, if anything, is the school doing specifically to meet the SEL needs of its ELL population?
- What impact do you see Olweus anti-bullying program having on ELL students?

Finally, the interview questions for the school counselor examined how the school counselor was working to meet the SEL needs of students and her perceptions of the SEL needs of the ELL students. Her perceptions of the anti-bullying program and the character education program that the school was implementing were also explored.

Example questions included:

- In your experience with ELL students at New Bridge, how are their social-emotional learning needs the same or different from the mainstream students?
- What could the school or teachers do to better meet the SEL needs of ELL students?

In developing the interview questions, I used open-ended questions so that “interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer” (Roulston, 2010, p. 12). This allowed me to follow up with further questions to probe more deeply into topics that may have come up in interviews in order



to seek further detail and description about what had been said. In addition, I had frequent informal conversations with the ELL teachers after their class periods regarding significant instructional and interactional issues, particularly, what caught my attention during a particular day's observation. Although these conversations were not audio-recorded, I took notes and added them to my observation notes. These conversations allowed me to include in my notes both ELL teachers' feedback on my observations, and teacher impressions of classroom events and interactions.

### **Consent and Confidentiality**

To follow ethical procedures, approval through the University of North Dakota's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to beginning data collection. To protect the confidentiality of participants and the site of the study, no identifiers were used in all interview transcripts, observation notes, and data analysis. Findings were also reported without any identifiers that could expose the identity of a participant, the school, or the school district. Pseudonyms were used for participants and the school to further ensure confidentiality. There were no major unforeseen risks to participants involved in this study.

An informed consent form (see Appendix D) was provided to participants before data collection began. Participants were given enough time to read the written consent form through and ask questions during their first meeting. The participants were also informed that they were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and privacy. Permission to audio record individual interviews was sought. Both the participants and the researcher (I) signed the consent, and a copy of the consent was given to the participants.

Additionally, I asked both participant-ELL teachers to distribute a courtesy letter to the parents of ELL children in the ELL classroom involved in my study. The letter informed them that I would be observing the ELL classroom regularly for my research study. I also noted that the ELL children would not be identified in my study since I would not be talking to them during my observations and that no videos or pictures would be taken, and no conversations in the classroom would be audio or video recorded during my observations.

Interview transcripts, field notes, analysis files, and digital audio files were kept on a password protected computer and were backed up on two flash drives, which were stored in a locked drawer. Printed materials and other written notes were stored in a box with a cover. The consent forms were kept separate from the data, analysis files, and other written or printed materials. They were all stored in secure locations. My dissertation adviser and I have been the only ones who have been able to access the data. After completion of this study, all data including digital audio files, all written notes, printed materials, and consent forms will be destroyed according to IRB guidelines.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Ongoing Analysis**

I utilized ongoing thematic analysis to search “through the data for themes and patterns” (Glesne, 2011, p. 187). Glesne (2011) and Maxwell (2013) suggested that researchers should begin analyzing data immediately after the first interview or observation and continue to analyze data while working on research since ongoing data analysis while collecting data results richer, more profound findings. I typed field notes that included my comments right after each classroom observation and transcribed

interviews right after conducting each interview. I also read the notes and transcripts thoroughly and wrote memos on what I saw as significant in my data since Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated that memos were the particular type of written records that contain researchers' analyses. At the same time, I jotted down any preliminary words or phrases for codes.

### **Coding Process**

In qualitative research, coding is used to “fracture, break the data apart analytically” (Strauss, 1987, p. 29), to rearrange facts or pieces of data into categories to compare items grouped within the same category. Maxwell (2013) described three types of categories:

1. “organizational” categories serve as useful ways of ordering the data and “function primarily as bins for sorting the data for further analysis” (p. 107).
2. “substantive” categories develop a more general theory of what is going on by taking participants' concepts and own words called “emic” (p. 108) that represent participants' meanings and understandings.
3. “theoretical” categories put coded data into a more abstract framework and represent a researcher's concepts called “etic” (p. 108).

I reviewed the data from my observation notes and interview transcripts to identify organizational categories. Based on CASEL's (2012) “Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies” (p. 9) and Dusenbury et al.'s (2015) four approaches to teaching SEL, data were classified into general categories, using terms the 2013 CASEL Guide (CASEL, 2012) utilized as categorical codes for the five SEL core competencies, and utilizing terms Dusenbury et al. used as categorical codes for teaching

SEL. These general categories functioned as bins to classify data into general topics such as *identify/express emotions*, *regulate emotions*, *step-by-step*, and *class meeting*. In the same way, data gathered from my research were categorized into general categories employing terms used by the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (e.g., bullying, tell an adult, include someone who is left out) and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program (e.g., respect, caring, responsibility, fairness).

Data in these bins were categorized further using an “open coding” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107) strategy for the purpose of identifying patterns in participants’ concepts and words (emic), as well as identifying patterns of my ideas and existing theoretical constructs (etic). To identify patterns of participants’ concepts and words (emic), “In-Vivo Codes” (Saldana, 2016, pp. 107-109) which are the actual words, phrases, and language used by participants, were identified and kept (e.g., “Don’t jump on it right away”). Additionally, a “*Keywords-in-Context (KWIC)*” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 594) method was used for interview data to understand the meanings of words participants used in the context of their speech because people use words differently in different contexts. I was able to understand better how participants used a keyword such as “regulate” or “control” for self-management “by finding the keyword throughout the data and looking at the words that surround the keyword” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 594).

Once data were coded, I grouped coded data into categories by focusing on similarities of codes and relationships among groups of codes. For case study analysis, Stake (1995) advocated “Categorical Aggregation” (p. 74) as one of the forms of data analysis and interpretation. Creswell (2013) further explained “In categorical

aggregation, the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (p. 199). Following Stake (1995) and Creswell (2013), I used “Categorical Aggregation” (Stake, 1995, p. 74) to aggregate codes that had emerged from all data for each participant, sorted them alphabetically, and gave a particular color to each datum in an Excel worksheet. I used this process for each of the four participants. Codes emerging from the observation data were colored differently from codes collected from participants’ transcripts. I aggregated and sorted all codes from all the data for the entire study to produce a codebook. The codebook was created based on categories that had emerged from bin codes; however, I identified other themes in some categories that needed to become additional categories by aggregating logical codes together. I created a master code list, which was sorted into categories. While categorizing the data, an Excel worksheet worked well for modifying and allowing new categories to emerge. Using a colorful code list made it easy for me to trace codes back to specific data from individual participants to support each theme.

For analysis, I used only those categories and related codes that were coherent or relevant to research questions. These categories, codes, and definitions of categories are listed in Appendix E. Finally, using "Categorical Aggregation" (Stake, 1995, p. 74), I aggregated codes into categories and looked for patterns of relationships among codes and categories. Four themes emerged as a result; they are presented and discussed in Chapter IV.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

Several methods were used to ensure validity and trustworthiness during data collection and analysis. These methods included a purposeful selection of participants,

audit trail, clarification of researcher bias, member checking, peer review or debriefing, and triangulation (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Purposeful Selection of Participants**

“*Purposeful selection*” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97) was used to select participants, especially two ELL teachers who were known for their effective teaching of ELL children. Their knowledge and experiences could provide information that was especially relevant to the research questions and goals of this study and “that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). New Bridge’s principal and school counselor were also purposefully selected as the core/primary staff members responsible for administering the ELL program, including the New Americans class, and counseling ELL children for their SEL needs.

### **Audit Trail**

Data collected for this study were well-organized and stored. Audio-recorded interview transcripts were transcribed immediately after each interview, and observation notes with my comments were typed immediately after each observation. I also kept memos on observations and interviews and reviewed my memos and interview transcripts often to see if my perceptions and thoughts had changed throughout the study.

### **Clarification of Researcher Bias**

I strove to recognize and manage my subjectivity in the process of taking observation notes. I divided the observation notes into two parts: (1) description of actions, conversations, people, and the settings, and (2) my thoughts, feelings, reactions, ideas, concerns, and questions based on the observations. On the left side of my observation notebook, I recorded only observations as I aimed to record what I saw in the

least biased way possible without analyzing data. On the right side of the notebook, I recorded my reflections on the observations to clarify and monitor my bias. I frequently re-read through the right side of my notebook to help me better understand how my thinking changed during the observation period and to better identify any bias and if I was bringing in my own values or perceptions.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was constantly conducted to ask for feedback on my data from participants. I provided participants with their interview transcripts and asked them to review the transcripts for accuracy. I also shared my notes and interpretations with the participant ELL teachers to receive their feedback. Member checking gave me opportunities to identify and eliminate any possible misinterpretation of the meanings of what participants said and did; member checking also gave me the perspective participants had on what was going on. Member checking was crucial to recognize my “biases and misunderstandings” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 127) of what I observed.

### **Peer Review or Debriefing**

Peer review or debriefing provides an external reflection and input on the research process (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011) to ensure the credibility of the research analysis and findings. In this study, my dissertation advisor reviewed the process of the study to ensure the accuracy of data analysis and interpretations.

### **Triangulation of Data**

A triangulation approach was used to collect data; that is, data was collected using multiple methods (i.e., ELL classroom observations, field notes, multiple individual interviews) and various data sources (i.e., ELL teachers, the principal, the school

counselor). Triangulation “involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strength and limitations all support a single conclusion” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). I used interviews to provide additional information that I might have missed in observations, as well as to check the accuracy of observations. In addition, interviewing participants who hold different positions (ELL teachers, the principal, and the school counselor) in New Bridge gave me different perspectives on the ELL children’s SEL. The principal and school counselor were able to give me school-wide, large-picture perspectives and ELL teachers provided me with localized ELL classroom perspectives on ELL children’s SEL.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is “An approach in writing qualitative research in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 300). Creswell further stated that “the researcher discusses her or his experiences with the central phenomenon and then how these experiences may potentially shape the interpretation that the researcher provides” (p. 300).

I was interested in the findings of this study because it has always been my interest to help immigrant ELL children learn how to overcome their challenges and struggles by the two-part strategy of meeting their emotional and social needs and by assisting them to be successful in academics and life. As a teacher of adult ELL, I have taught immigrant adults at community-based organizations and observed my students tackle related challenges themselves and grapple with family members’ struggles. My adult ELL students have shared with me their worries, concerns, and feelings of



helplessness about their school-aged children who have been having difficulties in adjusting to new schools in the U.S. and have not wanted to go to school. As I am a first-generation immigrant ELL myself, not only do I understand challenges and struggles that ELL adults and ELL children go through, but I know firsthand that those stressful conditions can affect ELL children's successful learning.

Consequently, I was very conscious about biases, values, and experiences that I brought to this study throughout the entire research process. I was aware that I might project my feelings when I observed ELL students in their classroom. I needed to realize that all ELL students' experiences are unique and therefore different from my experiences. I was also aware that my feelings towards ELL students could influence my observations, interviews, and what I emphasized in my findings. Fully overcoming those threats would be difficult I surmised before I began my study, but I tried to be sensitive to the existence of my biases in order to make better observations and conduct interviews. I strove to remain open-minded and unbiased in listening to and hearing participants' stories.

Additionally, I was aware that I felt comfortable being in this ELL classroom, partly because one of the participant-ELL teachers and I went to the same graduate school to study ELL education. Although our interactions were very limited as it was an online program, I felt close to her when I met her in person. I appreciated her willingness always to open her classroom to me for my research. However, I was aware that this close relationship might affect my observations and the interviews with her through my role as a researcher. I was sensitive to this relationship and needed to feel comfortable as a researcher. I was also aware that the ELL teachers and ELL children might change

their behaviors when they were being observed. Spending the semester informally observing this ELL classroom prior to the formal observations allowed the ELL teachers and the ELL children to become accustomed to my presence and let them behave in their normal fashion. In their final interview, I asked them if my presence had had any impact or influence on their thinking of or teaching SEL. Both ELL teachers said that my presence did not have any impact on their teaching. One of the ELL teachers even said that sometimes she forgot I was there.

Finally, as I am also an ELL educator, it was crucial for me to constantly recognize that the purpose of this study was to explore how ELL teachers teach SEL rather than to influence them, judge them, or compare their viewpoints or the school's choice of SEL programs with my views and experiences.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the methodology of this study was presented. The chapter explained the rationale for using a case study. This chapter also included a summary of informal observations that occurred before the formal study began, a description of the context and the participants of the study, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter provided discussion on validity and trustworthiness of this study and researcher reflexivity. Chapter IV contains the results of this study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study. First, the chapter begins with a brief review of the research questions and then offers an overview of themes that emerged from data analysis, and finally, I discuss the findings as they relate to each theme to answer the research questions.

#### **Research Questions**

The overarching question this study pursued was: “What does SEL look like in an ELL classroom?” Under the overarching question, the following specific questions guided the study.

1. How do ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills in an ELL classroom?
2. What competency (competencies) of SEL do ELL teachers in an ELL classroom focus on?
3. How do ELL teachers adapt and modify commercial SEL programs for their students?

#### **Overview of the Themes**

As described in Chapter III, I reviewed the data from my observation notes and interview transcripts to identify organizational categories. Data were classified into general categories as bins, using terms from CASEL’s (2012) five competencies,

Dusenbury et al.'s (2015) four approaches to teaching SEL, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program. Data in these bins were further categorized using an open coding strategy. I grouped coded data into categories by focusing on similarities of codes and relationships among groups of codes. Finally, I aggregated codes into categories and looked for patterns of relationships among codes and categories. As a result, four themes emerged from analysis of data (see Table 3).

Table 3. Data Analysis Map: Categories to Themes.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
New Bridge (NB) embraced diversity, ELL students, and promoted SEL.	ELL teachers used free-standing lessons, general teaching practices, and curriculum integration to teach SEL.	ELL Teachers reinforced the Olweus rules and two of the Six Pillars teachings in the ELL classroom.	ELL teachers focused on all five SEL competencies and taught the skills at various moments.
↑	↑	↑	↑
Categories	Categories	Categories	Categories
NB School culture and environment	Step-by-step explicitly	Bullying at NB School	Identify/express emotions
Refugee ELL students at NB	Morning meetings	Olweus and Six Pillars in the ELL classroom	Regulate emotions
Staff training on SEL	Teachable moments	Morning meetings	Relationship skills
Address SEL needs school-wide	“Talk about it to know”	Teachable moments	Responsible decision-making
	Keep reminding		Empathy and appreciating diversity
	“Don’t jump on it right away”		
	Building relationships with families		

Theme 1 addresses how New Bridge embraced diversity, ELL students, and SEL teaching at the school-wide level. With the leadership of the principal, New Bridge utilized Dusenbury et al.'s (2015) fourth approach to SEL, which provides guidance for school leaders how to develop school policies and structures to support students' SEL (see Table 4). This theme does not directly answer one of the research questions but emerged as an important finding in the study because it influenced how SEL was taught in the ELL classroom. Theme 2, which in part answers the first research question, addresses how ELL teachers taught SEL in their classroom using the first three classroom-based approaches to teaching SEL described by Dusenbury et al. Theme 3, which provides data to answer in part the first research question and the third research question, explains how ELL teachers adapted and modified commercial SEL programs for their students in the ELL classroom. Finally, Theme 4 addresses the second research question in this study and describes what SEL competencies the ELL teachers taught in their classroom. The findings of each theme are discussed in the following sections.

Table 4. Four Approaches to Teaching SEL.

Four Approaches to Promoting Social and Emotional Competence	Specific Teaching Strategies
1. Free-standing lessons	Explicit, step-by-step instruction to teach SEL across CASEL’s five core competencies. Topics are age-appropriate. Teachers use active learning strategies (e.g., small-group work, discussions) and provide students with opportunities for practicing skills throughout the day. Classroom activities can include reading a story and finding different perspectives on the story or recognizing the feelings of others. Students can also learn steps to solve interpersonal issues.
2. General teaching practices	Teachers use specific interactions and techniques according to students’ needs and developmental levels to establish positive and predictable classroom environments (e.g., establish rules such as listen respectfully when others are speaking) and promote positive teacher-student relationships (e.g., routines and structured activities such as morning check-ins, conflict resolutions).
3. Integration of SEL and academic curriculum	Schools can purchase and implement commercially developed SEL programs to promote school-wide social and emotional learning and integrate SEL lessons with language, arts, social studies, or science and math.
4. Guidance to administrators and school leaders how to create policies and structures to support students’ SEL development within a school	School administrators can create a leadership team for SEL and a school-wide vision for SEL, conduct assessments on SEL progress and professional development, select and integrate SEL programs for school, and utilize data to inform decisions related to students’ SEL.

(Dusenbury et al., 2015, pp. 2-4)

## **Theme 1: New Bridge (NB) Embraced Diversity, ELL Students, and Promoted SEL**

New Bridge Elementary School was committed to creating a positive school environment and culture that supported and promoted SEL. The school did this through building relationships with students and families, training all school personnel in SEL issues, and by implementing the Olweus and Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs school-wide. The school principal and the school district provided the administrative guidance for these activities, and thus utilized Dusenbury et al.'s (2015) fourth approach to teaching SEL.

### **Need for SEL Schoolwide at New Bridge**

New Bridge recognized the serious need for SEL school-wide due to its students' diverse backgrounds and demographics (e.g., higher poverty level, living with foster care or no parent family, refugee status of many ELL families). Many of the students at New Bridge came from families with low-income. Mr. Jones, the principal, explained that the number of students living in poverty had increased at New Bridge over the years:

You can even look at the historical data with free or reduced-price meals, which is directly related to poverty levels in our community and those have increased over the years. More than 90% of the children who are going to school at New Bridge are on free or reduced-price meals.

In addition to low-income backgrounds, 40% of the students at New Bridge were ELLs, and the majority of the ELL students were refugee children. In one interview, Mrs. Harris, one of the ELL teachers said, "New Bridge is the right place for diversity where 40% of the school is ELL students. Diversity is not frowned upon but accepted and



embraced.” All of the interviewees made similar comments about how New Bridge was working hard to meet the needs of its diverse students. During my observation visits, several refugee ELL students talked about how their house or camp was intentionally burned down, and their families knew that they would be killed in the middle of the night if they did not leave at that moment. Mr. Jones stated that refugee ELL children’s “SEL needs are far away from learning” due to their traumatic experiences. In his interview, Mr. Jones said:

Our refugee ELL students apparently have experienced traumatic events, fleeing certain situations. So, I think we see more needs of SEL, particularly for those refugee students. I just don’t know if people in our community quite understand the significance of their situations. Some of our refugee families left with nothing.

Some refugee students, perhaps because of their stressful and traumatic past experiences, also needed SEL instruction in order to address their aggressive behavior towards other students. While bullying was a focus of SEL school-wide at New Bridge and across the entire school district, the school counselor, Ms. Moore’s perception was that bullying needed to especially be addressed with the refugee students, stating:

From what I have seen how the students were interacting, I have seen more refugee ELL students bullying, instead of being bullied. They are the ones doing the bullying. I have not heard of non-ELL students making fun of the ELL students. The ELL children whom I work with are strong and tough children. They can hold on [to] their own. They have gone through a lot, so they have

become strong. That clashes with some children who have not had that experience.

For the ELL refugee students, showing aggression may have been the result of their stressful past and current life experiences and the need to have survived difficult situations. These students needed to know that bullying was not tolerated in U.S. schools as well as needed SEL skills in order to regulate themselves and to get along with others.

Based on the interviews, Mr. Jones and Ms. Moore were aware of the demographics of the students at New Bridge and the SEL needs of its diverse students, especially its refugee ELL students. They both were dedicated to addressing SEL school-wide.

### **Schoolwide SEL Practices**

New Bridge demonstrated its promotion and support of SEL through the implementation of commercial SEL programs as well as through other activities and practices that supported SEL school-wide. Each month the school conducts a school-wide assembly as part of the Olweus and Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs. Large posters of anti-bullying rules and the six pillars of character are displayed in the assembly hall. At the beginning of each assembly, the principal leads the whole school in repeating the Olweus anti-bullying rules aloud. This is followed by having one grade of students do a presentation focused on the pillar of the month. The students make posters and perform skits that model the pillar to help the student body understand the character trait. Each pillar of character was connected with “soft skills” such as growth-mindset (e.g., effort, challenges, setbacks) and grit (e.g., perseverance, never give up, keep going). The school enforced using a lot of visual aids (e.g., posters, charts, videos) and demonstrations (e.g.,

role-plays, skits) at assemblies to help students, especially ELL students, understand anti-bullying rules and the six character traits. Visual aids and supplemental materials were beneficial to ELL students for comprehending information as they may have difficulty processing verbal information in English. New Bridge needed to make these accommodations for their ELL students at assemblies since almost half the ELL students at New Bridge were at a beginning level of English proficiency. At the same time, the school made sure that ELL students felt they were included, and not left out in the school-wide activities such as monthly assemblies. Theme 3 discusses how the ELL teachers continued to reinforce Olweus and the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program in the ELL classroom.

In addition to the commercial SEL programs, New Bridge implemented several school-wide practices in order for all students, including ELL students, to feel welcome, safe, cared about, and supported. The school worked to build strong relationships with the students and their families with the idea of working as one team (school and parents) to support students' SEL needs. The teachers, the principal, and other school staff welcomed students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) to the school by name in the morning and saw the students off to a school bus by name in the afternoon. Mrs. Fay, one of the ELL teachers, said:

Building healthy relationships is our culture here. We do not just come to school for reading, writing, and doing the math and leave. We always welcome kids in the morning and say, "Good morning so and so" by name and make an eye contact to build the relationships. We want them to feel safe and welcomed here.

In order to build relationships with parents, the school utilized interpreters as well as translation services over the phone in order to communicate with parents who did not speak English. The school also sponsored several family events during the school year including an end of year family picnic.

Importantly, the school worked together to support students' SEL needs. Teachers, principal, and school staff collaborated to help students and their SEL needs by sharing information about students who had emotional and behavioral issues. For example, one particular ELL student often came to the ELL classroom just to give Mrs. Harris notes or just to greet her. Mrs. Harris explained:

We have a student who just needs time away from the class to reset himself. So, the classroom teacher might have him come to my room and give me an envelope or talk to me and then he goes back. However, the other teachers and staff are all informed about him so that they are not saying to him like, "Where are you supposed to be? Why are you walking around?"

When an ELL student was experiencing social or emotional issues, Mrs. Fay and Mrs. Harris would discuss the situation together with the classroom teacher and the school counselor. Strategies and solutions were collaboratively developed and implemented. However, although the ELL teachers discussed this collaboration, I did not witness it during my observations.

Ms. Moore, the school counselor, supported SEL school-wide by delivering SEL lessons in each classroom and also providing group and individual counseling for students who had higher needs for SEL. For example, Ms. Moore went into each class at New Bridge to teach "mindfulness" so students could learn how to regulate themselves,

such as breathing to calm down. Ms. Moore said in an interview that New Bridge's support for SEL is strong and that she has received an enormous amount of support from the classroom teachers who welcomed her into their classrooms and prepared the students for the SEL lesson before she arrived. According to Ms. Moore, the number of referrals has been decreasing since she began teaching "mindfulness" in each classroom.

Ms. Moore explained that the school does not formally assess students' SEL skills or progress. However, she told me that the school district conducts an Olweus Survey once a year that asks questions such as: Have you been bullied before? Have you seen someone being bullied? Ms. Moore said that ELL students do not take the survey due to their lack of English proficiency. Mrs. Moore also said that classroom teachers watch students daily and informally assess their SEL skills. Ms. Moore also informally assesses students' SEL skills during small-group counseling sessions. She added that "for the ELL students, informal SEL assessment is difficult due to the language barrier." The implications of this will be discussed in Chapter V.

### **School Personnel Training in SEL**

All school personnel, including ELL teachers and certified staff, had received training in understanding and meeting the SEL needs of the diverse student body. School personnel had attended school district mandated training sessions on SEL issues. For example, all staff had gone through child protection training because of the need to recognize and report signs of abuse. Teachers had also gone through district-wide training on both the Olweus and the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs. The school had also provided training of its own. For example, trauma sensitive training was given by the school counselor to help teachers become more aware of students who have

experienced trauma and to encourage teachers to be sensitive to how students with high chronic stress behave (e.g., stress from immigration/being a refugee, family separation, poverty).

Additionally, all teachers and staff went through training on understanding the specific social and emotional needs of ELLs. This training was conducted by Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Fay who presented information about New American ELLs and their families. Just as the counselor was not solely responsible for teaching SEL but rather the whole school, Mrs. Harris said, “ELL students are not just my students. We educate the whole school, all of our students.” This again speaks to New Bridge’s school-wide approach to meeting the needs of its diverse students.

### **Theme 2: ELL Teachers Used Free-Standing Lessons, General Teaching Practices, and Curriculum Integration to Teach SEL**

This theme addresses the first research question, “How do ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills in an ELL classroom?” Findings suggested that ELL teachers in this study used the three classroom-based approaches (Dusenbury et al., 2015) to teaching SEL: free-standing lessons, general teaching practices, and integration of SEL and academic curriculum to teach SEL to ELLs (refer back to Table 4). More importantly than the approaches however, is how the ELL teachers always kept in mind the language needs of the ELL students and integrated language-based strategies and methods in all three approaches to address both the students’ SEL and language needs.

#### **Free-Standing Lessons**

Both ELL teachers frequently taught SEL through free-standing lessons. Free-standing lessons provide explicit, step-by-step instructions to teach age-appropriate SEL

topics such as the following skills identified by Dusenbury et al. (2015): “ labeling feelings, coping with anxiety or stress, setting and achieving goals, developing empathy and compassion, communicating effectively, resolving conflict, being assertive, and making a responsible decisions” (p 2.). Classroom activities use active learning strategies (e.g., discussions, pairing students or small-group work, practicing skills) that are sequenced to develop specific SEL skills.

Mrs. Harris developed units which consisted of several free-standing lessons on one topic to teach specific SEL skills and provide step-by-step instructions for New American students to develop their SEL skills. I observed her teaching four different units: Respect, Caring, Emotions and Feelings, and Fairness. Mrs. Harris created the units on respect, caring and fairness because these represented the three character traits that had been the focus at previous monthly assemblies and she felt it was necessary to reinforce these pillars of character in the ELL classroom. “Respect” was the focus at January’s assembly. “Caring” at February’s assembly, and “Fairness” at March's assembly. Although “emotions and feelings” were not the focus of an assembly and are not one of the character traits in The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program, Mrs. Harris taught the unit on “emotions and feelings” because she felt it was necessary for her students to learn how to recognize and show their feelings and emotions as many of them were suffering from emotional issues such as traumatic stress and they needed to learn how to release their tensions by identifying and sharing their emotions in the classroom.

To develop New American students’ specific SEL skills, Mrs. Harris used several methods and strategies (e.g., SEL words, videos, pair-work, games) to teach SEL through step-by-step instructions. Many of these methods and strategies were to make the

language and content comprehensible for the ELL students. One strategy used was when Mrs. Harris introduced key SEL words such as respect, caring, and fairness, she encouraged students to generate their own definitions in words they understood. For example, the Six Pillars' definition of "respect" uses difficult vocabulary such as "to be tolerant and accepting of differences" and "to be considerate" (CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c, para. 1). Because the ELL students did not understand these words, Mrs. Harris' students defined the concept by explaining respectful actions such as "to use good manners like listen to a teacher and raise a hand and talk." Mrs. Harris honored the students' definitions and did not force the use of the formal definitions.

Two other language strategies that Mrs. Harris used were synonyms and explaining words using familiar classroom examples. Mrs. Harris introduced synonyms of SEL words to help New American students build their vocabularies, and she creatively explained the synonyms to help them understand new words. For example, Mrs. Harris defined "caring" as "kind to others," and at the same time, she introduced some synonyms for "caring" (e.g., compassionate, empathy) to help build students' SEL vocabularies. Mrs. Harris explained "empathy" to the students by using a classroom example as follows: "Do you remember when [newcomer student's name] first came to America and joined us in our classroom? She was frustrated. We all felt how she felt. Empathy means that you put yourself in someone else's shoes." "Putting yourself in someone else's shoes" was rather difficult for some New American students to comprehend as they could not find the similar idiomatic expressions in their native languages; however, Mrs. Harris was creative and used a classroom example to teach the meaning of the SEL word to her New American students.



Another method Mrs. Harris used to reinforce New American students' SEL skills in her free-standing lessons was the use of videos as visual aids. For example, Mrs. Harris showed a video on "respect" which demonstrated how to be a respectful person by following school and classroom rules. Mrs. Harris used this particular video since many New American students seemed to be struggling with school rules. Another example of using videos was when Mrs. Harris taught "respect" as part of a *Martin Luther King, Jr., Day* topic. The video biography on Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) talked about how people should work together even though they are all different.

Other methods Mrs. Harris often used in her free-standing lessons were pair-work and games to teach specific SEL skills. For example, during the lesson on "Respect through MLK," Mrs. Harris showed three questions on a Smartboard and asked students to pair up and respond to the questions regarding each other. The questions were: "How are you the same as [the] person sitting next to you? How are you different? Do we still respect each other?" Mrs. Harris demonstrated how to play this game by pairing up with one of the students herself to model the instructions. I noticed that the students were enjoying finding similarities and differences with each other (e.g., same color of hair, speak different language, different home country). I asked Mrs. Harris about the purpose of this game, and she told me that she used this activity to have students practice recognizing and accepting the differences of their peers so that they could work together in the classroom. Mrs. Harris demonstrated other examples of teamwork and gaming in the ELL classroom, as when her students played a puzzle and Twister game to practice specific SEL skills (e.g., be polite, respectful) and to work together while playing a game. Mrs. Harris said to the class, "be respectful to work to play the game together." By

having the students work together, Mrs. Harris deliberately promoted her students' relationship skills and social awareness skills as her students were from all different backgrounds and they needed to learn to accept and respect diverse peers and work together.

Another game that Mrs. Harris used in her free-standing lessons was for students to practice recognizing and expressing their feelings. This game was related to a unit that Mrs. Harris taught on "emotions and feelings." A student who got a ball had to say how he or she was feeling and why s/he was feeling that way. Mrs. Harris used this game to help students learn to label feelings using appropriate words to show emotions appropriately with the right people. Mrs. Harris said in an interview:

How the ELL children express and deal with their emotions is important, but the language is another aspect that plays into SEL. Not being able to verbalize how they are feeling is hard for them, so helping the ELL children find the words to express their feelings and thoughts is critical in our class.

In conclusion, the free-standing lessons allowed for Mrs. Harris to both reinforce the SEL topics focused on at the monthly assemblies and to teach SEL topics that the teachers felt the students needed. The free-standing lessons were created using language-based strategies to ensure that the ELL students understood the concepts and learned SEL vocabulary.

### **General Teaching Practices**

Both ELL teachers, Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Fay, used general teaching practices to teach SEL integrated methods and strategies to ELL students. General teaching practices create classroom conditions that support students' SEL development. Teachers use

specific interactions and techniques (e.g., routines, structures, and conflict resolutions) according to students' needs and developmental levels to establish and promote positive, trusting, and social classroom environments (Dusenbury et al., 2015). The ELL teachers in this study used a variety of general classroom practices to teach and reinforce SEL skills such as morning meetings, teachable moments, "talk about it to know," keep reminding, and "don't jump on it right away" as well as general education practices of building relationships with ELL families. Some of these practices are commonly used in classrooms across the United States and are taught in teacher education programs such as morning meetings and teachable moments. Other general practices that the ELL teachers used, such as "keep reminding" and "talk about it to know" have no specific name in educational literature but were practices the ELL teachers had developed based on their experience learning how to best meet ELL students' needs.

**Morning meetings.** A common SEL teaching practice in elementary school classrooms is to begin the school day with a "morning meeting." According to Dusenbury et al. (2015), one purpose of these morning meetings is to build relationships in the classroom so students feel comfortable and talk about how they are feeling. I observed Mrs. Harris's morning meetings many times. Every morning at the beginning of the two-hour New American class, Mrs. Harris held a morning meeting with the students for half an hour. The children all gathered together on the carpet and Mrs. Harris led the meeting as more of a facilitator than a teacher. Every child was expected to participate in the morning meeting. Mrs. Harris explained:

When the ELL students are immersed in their classrooms, they tend to be a little quieter among their English-speaking peers. I want my students to feel

comfortable, secure, and safe to talk in the ELL classroom as we have a smaller setting and all the children are in the same place when they come to know English.

This was important because Mrs. Harris was aware that her ELL students tended to be quiet in their mainstream classrooms and did not share their feelings.

ELL students showed they felt safe to talk about many different things, especially about their feelings, during morning meetings. Mrs. Harris asked each student, “How are you feeling this morning?” and “Why are you feeling that way?” so that students could practice identifying, labeling, showing, and sharing their feelings in the class. Students could look for appropriate words to label their feelings in an emotions/feelings chart on the wall, a visual strategy to help ELL students learn SEL vocabulary. For example, one student said she was not happy, but she found the words, “sleepy” and “tired” on the chart to label her feelings more appropriately. Then she talked about why she was sleepy and tired, as she had to get up early in the morning to catch a school bus to come to school. Mrs. Harris also tried to reach some of the quiet students by using things that they liked, such as asking one boy who loves soccer, “What did you do last night? Did you play soccer?” Although the child said only, “Yes,” Mrs. Harris accepted that as participating in the morning meeting. One of the purposes of the morning meetings was for everyone to participate and Mrs. Harris felt it was important for everyone in the New Americans class to say at least a word to show they were participating because participation in activities could promote students’ relationship skills, as well as improving speaking skills in English.

As well as sharing and talking about issues and problems that were bothering them, students and Mrs. Harris also discussed solutions in the morning meeting. For example, one student walked into the ELL classroom with a mad and frustrated face and sat down, turning her back against everybody. Mrs. Harris immediately asked her how she was feeling and what was bothering her. The girl said she was unhappy because she was elected as a class leader in her mainstream class and one responsibility was reading in front of the class. The girl said she did not want to read in front of the class. Mrs. Harris suggested the girl bring the paper in so that Mrs. Harris and the girl could practice reading the paper together. This made the girl happy and she was relieved. Mrs. Harris was willing to spend extra time with the girl before or after school to help her overcome both the language and emotional difficulty of reading in front the class.

Sometimes, entire morning meetings were spent teaching SEL skills or reinforcing pillars featured at assemblies. For example, when one ELL student swore in the ELL classroom in his native language, the class spent almost an entire morning meeting to learn SEL skills that addressed that issue. Some students complained about some of their ELL peers saying bad words to one another in their home language. Mrs. Harris told the class, “It is not okay to say bad words, even in your native language. If someone talks bad words, say, ‘Stop, please don’t use bad words.’” Students needed to learn two things: Bad language would not be tolerated and what to say to stop someone speaking bad language. Mrs. Harris stated in an interview:

When someone is bothering them (the ELL students), and the students do not know what to do and how to stop him or her, we teach them words or examples of

what to say to someone who is bothering them. It is a crucial thing to teach in the ELL classroom.

New American ELL children needed to learn to be polite and respectful of their peers even when they speak to one another in their home languages. It was also important that New Americans know how to protect themselves by learning words and phrases to stop someone's offensive behaviors toward them. It was usually during morning meetings that these teachings occurred.

Another time, almost an entire morning meeting time was utilized to reinforce the pillar Fairness which was the theme of an assembly that month. One girl complained that her parents bought a bicycle for her brother and new clothes for her. She wanted a bike instead of clothes. The class discussed the solution to her problem together. Mrs. Harris told her, "Your brother needed a bike to go to school, and you needed some new clothes to fit first. Remember, 'to be fair' is everybody gets what he or she needs." Mrs. Harris used the same phrase that was used in the last assembly meeting. Although the girl did not seem to be satisfied yet, Mrs. Harris used character that was taught and the phrase that was used to enforce character at the assembly to reinforce the character development in the student.

Frequently half an hour was not enough time for all the students to share and discuss their issues during morning meeting. After some morning meetings, some students looked dissatisfied or frustrated after the meeting was over since they were not given enough time to fully express themselves or talk about things they were eager to share. Sometimes, Mrs. Harris rushed through the morning meetings as she had to move onto another curriculum or someone dropped in to talk with her. It would be beneficial

for ELL students if there could be more time for students to talk and more time for classroom discussions.

**Teachable moments.** Teachers often use the general practice of teachable moments, which is teaching a concept on the spur of the moment when the need arises. This practice is common in educational literature and taught in teacher education programs. Although effective teachers plan their instruction carefully, sometimes, “something unexpected can occur during a lesson that offers the teacher a chance to teach students unplanned, yet truly important and impactful information” (Linde, 2017, para. 3). Teachers, therefore, need to recognize a teachable moment and be flexible so that they can modify or adjust plans and instruction to meet the students’ needs and interests. During my observation visits, both ELL teachers sensed and captured any fleeting opportunity to teach SEL even though it required temporary sidetracks from an original lesson plan. For example, when her class was preparing for taking the annual English language proficiency assessment test, Mrs. Harris noticed that students showed anxiety and lack of confidence in their ability to take the test. One student even said that her brother called her a loser because she was not making any progress with her English. Mrs. Harris stopped her lesson and taught students how to set a goal and work hard to reach the target. Mrs. Harris took time and showed last year’s results to each student individually and helped them set a goal for the current year to achieve higher scores. Mrs. Harris told the girl whose brother who called her a loser, “You were 1.9 in listening. You can do better because you have been here almost a year. Set your goal higher to 3. You are not a loser.” Mrs. Harris felt that her students needed to be assured and encouraged; at the same time, they needed to learn self-management skills to know how

to set a goal and work hard to achieve their target. In this example, she used a teachable moment to improve student's SEL skills.

The ELL teachers often used teachable moments to help students feel safe and cared for in the school environment, a key focus of SEL in schools. Because of past traumatic experiences, many of the ELL refugee students struggled with emotions related to fear and anxiety, and they needed to feel safe and cared about at New Bridge. One day, when Mrs. Fay was having her students write about their schools in their home countries, the assignment triggered traumatic distress in one of the students. The student remembered her school in a refugee camp and said that when she made a mistake at school, even going to a wrong classroom, her teachers would beat her and make her sit on the floor. She quit going to school because she was afraid. Mrs. Fay stopped her lesson and listened to her story compassionately and told her, "In New Bridge, nobody hits you here. In America, we do not hit anybody. I am glad you are here. You are safe here." Mrs. Fay noticed that the student was going through traumatic distress and needed to work on her feelings and emotions immediately to be assured that the student was safe and protected at New Bridge. When students show emotional distress, it is important to work on their emotions immediately at teachable moments to alleviate their stress so that they can focus on learning.

Mrs. Harris also talked about the importance of creating a safe environment and explained that because many ELL students had experienced harsh school punishments in their home countries, when they came to a new school, they were nervous and worried what discipline would be like. They needed to be assured all the time that New Bridge was a safe school. To make the students feel safe and protected all the time, the ELL



teachers used any teachable moments to listen to students' stories and assured them that they were in a safe place.

Teaching about safety also meant using teachable moments when students were being hurtful to their peers. During one lesson, a couple of girls verbally teased two of their peers about being a boyfriend and girlfriend to each other. While the rest of the class was giggling, the boy and the girl being teased were upset. Mrs. Harris stopped everything and told the class that the boy and the girl did not like the class to say they were boyfriend and girlfriend because they were just friends. Mrs. Harris taught the boy and the girl what to say in order to stop their peers from teasing them, and told the girls who teased their peers to apologize and say, "Sorry." Mrs. Harris explained in her interview:

We stop and talk. If we have some disagreement in the class or if a student is not considerate of classmates, then we stop and talk about that. How would that make you feel if your friend did that to you? These are all teachable moments that lesson plan does not have, but anything that is important, you have to stop and teach or talk about it.

Mrs. Harris felt that behaviors such as teasing were not acceptable in the ELL classroom and she needed to teach SEL skills (e.g., empathy and relationship skills) immediately by using teachable moments so the students learned to be considerate of others and the ELL classroom was a safe place.

The ELL teachers also used teachable moments to discuss personal hygiene, an important topic in this ELL classroom. Many of the ELL students had dental problems due to lack of dental care and lack of dental education in the refugee camps. During one

observation, Mrs. Harris stopped her lesson on bathroom vocabularies and taught the class to brush their teeth every day because one student said his tooth was coming out, and it was hard to brush his teeth. Mrs. Harris explained to her students why they needed to brush their teeth every time they ate and told them it was their responsibility to do that regardless of whether or not they had a loose tooth. Dental hygiene was a common problem in the class. In fact, Mrs. Fay, the other ELL teacher, mentioned the same issue during her interview. Mrs. Fay said:

Last year, I had a couple of students. When they finished their breakfast (at school), I had them come to the ELL room to brush their teeth. No matter how many times I told them that they had to brush their teeth at home, I could tell that they were not doing it. I even sent the students home with toothpaste and toothbrush. They lived with grandparents and hygiene was not a priority.

Although teaching how to brush teeth to students may not be included in ELL teachers' job description, both Mrs. Fay and Mrs. Harris felt their job duties and responsibilities included taking care of their students' health needs and used teachable moments and other opportunities to do so.

Another teachable moment was when Mrs. Harris stopped her lesson on summer-related vocabulary (e.g., sweat, hot, sun) in order to teach personal hygiene to the class. It was spring time and some New American students were going through puberty and had body odor. Mrs. Harris pulled out a stick of deodorant from her school bag and showed it to the class and said:

When you sweat, you sweat under your arms, too. You need to take a shower and wash your body every day. If you do not wash your body every day, you will

smell bad. If you do not wash your clothes and wear the same clothes every day, you will smell bad, too. Sometimes, your underarms smell bad. You can put the deodorant under your arm.

Mrs. Harris was working closely (physical space) with her students and she felt that it was her responsibility to let her students know that they needed to start paying attention to their personal care. This is an important SEL topic because body odor is not socially acceptable in U.S. culture and ELL children with body odor may have difficulty making friends or be teased or bullied by American students.

Mrs. Fay also emphasized the need to teach about personal hygiene. She explained in an interview:

The students who come from refugee camps, hygiene is not their priority because they did not have hot water all the time. So, this is an issue we face in our school. We teach them to take a shower all the time and pay attention to their body odor.

The ELL teachers did not teach free-standing lessons about body order or taking showers. Instead they used teachable moments to provide this instruction.

Lastly, it was interesting to observe that Mrs. Harris also taught “eating etiquette” to ELL children at teachable moments. One day Mrs. Harris introduced American eating etiquette to New American students while celebrating a student’s birthday in the classroom. While the students were sitting at a round table together, they had to name items such as napkins, forks, and paper plates and explain how to use them. A birthday student had to say, “Would you like a piece of cake?” and then offer that cake to another student, and the other student had to say either, “Yes, please” or “No, thank you.”

Students had to use a fork to eat their cake. Then, they put their used plates and forks in the garbage. In one of the interviews, Mrs. Harris said:

[On] more than one occasion on home visits, I have seen families eating on the living room floor together with just their fingers and hands when they have a kitchen table. When those students come to school, they eat with their hands. Although I recognize that is what they have grown up doing, we expect the student to eat with utensils, use a fork when they eat. Not that they are not polite, but manners are something that they have to have here, so we teach them.

Mrs. Harris was not disrespectful of students' cultural backgrounds; rather she treated these teachable moments as cross cultural learning opportunities and taught both U.S. cultural skills and vocabulary to her students in order to help their social adjustment to the United States.

**“Talk about it to know.”** Another general teaching practices that ELL teachers used was a method Mrs. Harris called “Talk about it to know,” a technique she used occasionally in her classroom. Since ELL students come from different backgrounds, both ELL teachers provided opportunities for students to talk and share their cultures, languages, and life stories whenever there was a chance so that students could learn about their ELL classmates, feel empathy for each other and create a sense of community in the classroom.

Sometimes, students talked about how life was in their home countries, such as how many days a week they had to go to school and how teachers treated students. When students were absent because they were celebrating their ethnic holidays at home, Mrs. Harris explained the reason for the absence to the rest of the class. When students

returned from their holidays, they talked about what they did during their holidays and showing pictures. Mrs. Harris thought it was important for students to know about their peers. In one interview, Mrs. Harris said:

Knowledge is power. Just to talk about it gives us knowledge. The more the students know about their classmates, the better they understand them as a peer.

The more I know the students, the more I understand them as a learner, and the better I can teach a whole person.

“Talk about it to know” was important in the ELL classroom and helped children build relationships with their peers. Sharing their life experiences promoted social awareness and feeling empathy for others, important SEL competencies. Talking about and sharing students’ culture and language also helped build the students’ identities and sense of pride in backgrounds and native languages. The students were always eager to talk about their culture and stories and there was often not enough time for discussion. It would be beneficial for the ELL classroom to create more opportunities for the students to talk and share about themselves because this promoted both oral English development and SEL development.

**Keep reminding.** Another method ELL teachers used to facilitate ELL students’ learning SEL skills through general teaching practices was a simple approach: “Keep reminding.” This approach played a significant role in reinforcing ELL students’ SEL skills in terms of both helping students make responsible decisions and creating a safe and positive learning environment. Reminding ELL students, especially refugee students, of classroom and school rules was crucial in this ELL classroom. During my observation visits, I noticed many times that students were reminded of the rules. For

example, while students sitting at a table, Mrs. Fay was re-teaching school and classroom rules to her second grade ELL students by showing the rules on a Smartboard and she had students read the rules aloud. Indeed, I noticed some students were restless, pushing, and touching others while they were sitting at the table. Mrs. Fay said:

Overall, [compared to other grade students] second grade boys [including ELL boys] are misbehaving school-wide, and classroom teachers are trying to teach and re-teach rules to control them. One time is not enough, so, you have to keep reminding them. So, while I teach, I remind them of proper behaviors and being respectful to others all the time.

Although non-ELL second graders also needed to work on school rules, Mrs. Fay felt that it was her responsibility to teach school rules, especially to her second grade ELL boys because she knew that these boys were misbehaving. She constantly reminded them of not running in the hallway. In fact, a couple of male second graders dashed out of the ELL classroom as soon as Mrs. Fay's lesson was over, running back into their classrooms. Mrs. Fay called them back in and had them start from the beginning by pushing their chairs in, walking out of the room, and walking back to their classroom. Both ELL teachers mentioned that many ELL students, especially refugee ELL students, struggled with school rules because many of them had little or no schooling in their home countries or an ELL student might be a "student with interrupted formal education" (SIFE). Classroom rules such as "hands to yourself" and "take a turn and listen" were often new to them. As an example, Mrs. Harris described a former SIFE student as follows:

Last year, we had a fourth grader who had no schooling because his camp was not safe. So it was tough for the fourth grader coming and learning the routine of the school. He did not know what a school system was like, such as how to line up for lunch and how to rotate rooms.

Obviously, both ELL teachers felt the ELL children who had limited schooling before they came to New Bridge needed extra assistance in mastering school rules. Teachers needed to be understanding and patient with SIFE ELL students. The ELL teachers implemented the “keep reminding” approach calmly but firmly, never raising their voices but also not letting students get away with negative behavior. The “keep reminding” practice promoted students’ SEL skills in order to become a respectful person who followed the rules in social context and made responsible decisions about their own behaviors and thinking of their well-being and others.

**“Don’t jump on it right away.”** Another general teaching practice that the ELL teachers used but does not have a well-known name in educational literature was “don’t jump on it right away.” This was a phrase Mrs. Fay used in an interview to describe how she made cultural and personal considerations when working with ELL students. I decided to use the phrase to name this approach. When the ELL children showed behavioral issues such as stealing, ELL teachers did not admonish the students right away; instead, they considered cultural differences and personal factors in students’ behaviors and tried to understand their students’ perspectives first. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to observe this approach during my 22 observations. However, when telling them about the ELL student who stole my pencil, they explained that instead of immediately punishing the child, they would have talked with him calmly about why

he did it. Both ELL teachers and the principal said they made cultural considerations when they addressed ELL students' behavior. For example, when Mrs. Fay saw an ELL student helping her peer who was taking a test in the ELL classroom, instead of jumping on it right away, she thought about a cultural difference. The student may not have realized what she was doing was called cheating or plagiarism in the United States. Mrs. Fay found out from the student that helping others on tests was acceptable in her classroom in her home country. Mrs. Fay realized that the student's behavior derived from her cultural background. Mrs. Fay, therefore, taught the student the vocabulary and difference between helping and cheating in U.S. society.

In the same way, Mrs. Harris tried to understand the perspective of a student who stole food from someone's backpack. The student said he and his family needed food. Mrs. Harris taught him the word "stealing" and signed him up for the school food program. Mrs. Harris said, "It is important to give children the vocabulary, and get a perspective of why they took something, and think about how we can help them, because they are not mean, they just did not know and did it."

Both ELL teachers felt that instead of reprimanding students right away when they were misbehaving, it was important to talk to the students first and ask them why they were behaving a certain way so that teachers could help them with both the problem and the language. In this way the teachers also modeled empathy and caring. Both ELL teachers knew that many ELL children may behave according to their home culture and how their living situation. The students needed to learn cultural norms in U.S. classrooms.



The principal also used a practice similar to “don’t jump on it right away” when addressing academic and behavior issues of ELL students. Since ELL students come from different schooling backgrounds (e.g., SIFE – students with interrupted formal education, refugee camps with various degrees of formal education), the principal addressed their behavior on a case-by-case. He explained in the interview that he took several factors into account including their acculturation level, level of English proficiency, time in the U.S. and their cultural or ethnic identity when making disciplinary decisions. The principle’s approach was slightly different from that of ELL teachers as he took each student’s acculturation level into consideration when addressing behavioral issues. The principal felt that acculturation factors such as length of time in the U.S. would be essential to first-generation immigrant and refugee ELL children to acquire socio-cultural skills in the U.S. and therefore you do not “jump on” students’ problematic behaviors until after they have had the opportunity to learn school expectations.

**Building relationships with families.** The final general practice that emerged as a finding in this study was building relationships with students’ families. The importance of building good parent-teacher relationships has been well documented in educational research, reporting that good relationships between parents and teachers benefit not only the child but the parents and teachers as well (Loughran, 2008) because teachers can provide information for parents “about the child’s classroom achievements and persona” (p. 35) and parents can provide teachers with information “about the complementary elements in the home environment” (p. 35).

In order to build parent-teacher relationships and support both the social emotional and academic needs of their ELL students, the ELL teachers frequently contacted students' families to inform them about their children or to find out if the families had any concerns. I observed how Mrs. Fay, who is bilingual in English and Arabic, contacted the parents of one of her ELL students on the phone, and talked to them in Arabic. Mrs. Fay told me later that she just wanted to let the student's parents know that their daughter was making significant progress at school and just wanted to check to see if they were doing fine since Mrs. Fay had not seen them for a while. Mrs. Fay was always concerned about her students' and their families' well-being and was always interested in talking with the ELL children's families to find out how they were doing. While it is common practice for teachers to build relationships with parents through written and oral communication (email, phone) and through parents visiting the school (student conferences, school events), the ELL teachers placed great importance on this.

It is not common practice for teachers to make home visits, however both the ELL teachers in this study did just that. The ELL teachers visited New American children's families twice a year either with the school counselor or a social worker or on their own. The ELL teachers agreed to do this by their own choice in order to connect with ELL families. According to the ELL teachers, home visitation has been successful as families felt more comfortable being at home and talking with teachers than coming out to school and having a conference with teachers. The ELL teachers also could understand newcomer and refugee children and their families better by seeing students' home environments so that the teachers would know how to assist them with their needs.

In conclusion, the ELL teachers in this study used free-standing lessons, a variety of general teaching practices, and integration of SEL and academic curriculum to teach and emphasize SEL in the ELL classroom, which are three of the four approaches to teaching SEL identified by Dusenbury et al. (2015). How the ELL teachers used the fourth approach to support the school-wide emphasis on SEL will be discussed in the next section.

**Theme 3: ELL Teachers Reinforced the Olweus Rules and Two of the Six Pillars Teachings in the ELL Classroom**

Theme 3 answers in part the first research question and the third research question, “How do ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills in an ELL classroom?” and “How do ELL teachers adapt and modify commercial SEL programs for their students?” The findings suggested that ELL teachers reinforced both Olweus anti-bullying rules (see Table 5) and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> (see Table 6) program for their students in the ELL classroom during the morning meetings and during teachable moments.

Table 5. Olweus Anti-Bullying Rules.

Olweus Anti-Bullying Rules	
1	We will not bully others.
2	We will try to help students who are bullied.
3	We will try to include students who are left out.
4	If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

(Hazelden Foundation, 2007, p. 1)

The ELL teachers did not modify these programs; instead, they simplified the language used in these programs for the ELL students and reinforced some SEL practices more than others due to the basic SEL needs of the ELL students.

Table 6. The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> Program.

Six Pillars (or Characteristics) of Character	
1	Trustworthiness: Be honest • Don't deceive, cheat, or steal • Be reliable - do what you say you'll do • Have the courage to do the right thing • Build a good reputation • Be loyal - stand by your family, friends, and country
2	Respect: Be tolerant and accepting of differences • Use good manners, not bad language • Be considerate of the feelings of others • Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone • Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements
3	Responsibility: Do what you are supposed to do • Plan ahead • Be diligent • Persevere • Do your best • Use self-control • Be self-disciplined • Think before you act • Be accountable for your words, actions, and attitudes • Set a good example for others
4	Fairness: Play by the rules • Take turns and share • Be open-minded: listen to others • Don't take advantage of others • Don't blame others carelessly • Treat all people fairly
5	Caring: Be kind • Be compassionate and show you care • Express gratitude • Forgive others • Help people in need • Be charitable and altruistic
6	Citizenship: Do your share to make your school and community better • Cooperate • Get involved in community affairs • Stay informed; vote • Be a good neighbor • Obey laws and rules • Respect authority • Protect the environment • Volunteer

(CHARACTER COUNTS!, 2017c, para. 2)

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs were mandated by the school district for promoting and supporting

SEL district-wide. The principal's perceptions of the Olweus and character education program were that they complemented each other:

The Olweus matches well with everything else we do. Character education is all about the Olweus. Social and emotional learning is all in the Olweus. The program prevents bullying by building culture and community. One way that New Bridge builds community is their classrooms where they practice being together, working together, listening to one another, and talking to one another.

The principal felt it was vital that the classroom teachers practice the Olweus rules and the six pillar character traits in the classroom. Following monthly assemblies, all teachers in the school, including the ELL teachers, continued to reinforce the Olweus anti-bullying rules and the pillars of character in their classrooms. How the ELL teachers reinforced the Olweus and Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs in their ELL classroom is discussed in the following sections.

### **Reinforcing the Olweus Anti-Bullying Rules in the ELL Classroom**

The ELL teachers in this study reinforced the Olweus anti-bullying rules during their morning meetings and during teachable moments if any issues or questions related to bullying arose. For example, one incident I observed in the New American class was about name-calling. One girl brought up an issue in the morning meeting, complaining about a boy who kept calling her and her friend, "Nepalese girl" on the school ground. Mrs. Harris thanked the girls for telling her and pointed to a clear visual Olweus anti-bullying chart posted on the wall, which was "limited language" friendly, and said to the girls that they did a right thing by following the school rules to tell an adult at school.

She took notes and said to the girls that she would talk to the boy. In the meantime, she taught the girls how to deal with the issue and the language required as follows:

Did you tell him to stop calling that way? Did you tell him that it is not nice to call someone that way? Tell him, "Please stop doing it." Did you tell him, "My name is A [student's name], you can call me A, instead of calling me that way?"

Mrs. Harris dealt with the bullying incident immediately based on school policy, which requires all staff to deal with any bullying incident immediately. She also reinforced the anti-bullying rules in the classroom and taught the students what to say to stop the bully, which was important for the ELL students to protect themselves from further bullying. It was also important that Mrs. Harris acknowledged the girls' action to come and tell an adult (Mrs. Harris in this case) at school about bullying.

The Olweus program's fourth rule, "if we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home," was a priority in the ELL classroom. Mrs. Fay and Mrs. Harris could not help an ELL student unless they knew about the situation, especially because many of the bullying and behavior instances occurred outside the ELL classroom, often on the bus or playground. For example, one day I observed Mrs. Fay helping solve an issue of bullying on the school bus. A couple of ELL girls complained about an ELL boy saying bad words (cursing words) and kicking the girls on their bus. Mrs. Fay thanked the girls for telling her about it and told them that she would talk to the boy's parents to tell him to stop bothering others on the bus, because it is a school rule and that if the boy continued to misbehave, he would have to face the consequences. In an interview, Mrs. Fay said:

Having the Olweus program makes the students aware that bullying is something we do not tolerate in New Bridge. The ELL kids have to know that they have “the power to tell an adult.” They should be aware that nothing will happen to them or nobody will come to hurt them if she or he tells.

Mr. Jones, the principal, also emphasized the importance of the “tell an adult” rule in his interview:

We stress at every single assembly and in every one of our class meetings that “tell an adult, tell somebody,” and I think for ELLs, that is the most important thing we can do because they do come to say this is happening.

Mr. Jones shared a story about a couple of ELL girls who followed the “telling an adult” rule. The girls got off their bus one morning and were very upset because they were getting blamed for throwing things at other boys, and they were concerned they would have to fill out an incident form in order to notify the school about this negative incident. The form was a child-friendly form designed for both students and teachers to report an incident where a school rule had been broken such as bullying or cheating. Mr. Jones said to the girls, “Why did you think you had to fill out the form?” The girls said, “You told us. The first thing we do is to tell an adult.” Mr. Jones said to the girls that they did not have to worry about filling out a form because they had told him already. The girls knew that the school required the students to fill out the incident report form, as well as tell an adult when they encounter negative social behaviors at school. However, this example shows that the school encouraged the ELL students to come and tell an adult first, and not necessarily required them to fill out the form. The principal wanted to know a problem existed in order to help the ELL students with the problem and he thought it

may be easier for the ELL children to tell an adult at school first than filling out the form due to their lack of English language skills.

Often ELL students told their teachers about other issues than bullying, maybe because of a need to talk and share their feelings with a trusted adult, or they simply did not understand the difference between bullying and other negative social behaviors. For example, during a lesson on “emotions and feelings,” one of the New Americans students complained to Mrs. Harris, all of a sudden, that she felt hurt because some of her friends in her mainstream class did not want to work with her and were not including her in their group. Although this was not an instance of bullying, Mrs. Harris stopped the lesson and referred to the third Olweus rule. She pointed at the visual Olweus chart on the classroom wall and said to the class, “Remember what you have to do. Include students who are left out.” Mrs. Harris suggested the girl have a class meeting with her friends in the mainstream classroom.

Sometimes students came to the ELL teachers with complicated issues. Mrs. Fay told the story of a boy and a girl who lived in the same apartment building who had told both her and the school principal about a fight between their families. The girl had been teasing the boy with bad language and the boy’s way of handling it had been to punch the girl. The girl told her mother, and the mother started a fight with the other mother. The boy and the girl came to talk to both Mr. Jones and Mrs. Fay about their parents’ fighting. Mr. Jones asked the school social worker to deal with the family issue while Mrs. Fay addressed the SEL needs of the students involved. Mrs. Fay felt the issue was culturally gender-based and explained, “Even though the girl may not be in his classroom next year, the boy will meet many females in his life. He needs to know how to handle his



behaviors when someone is bothering him, especially females.” Mrs. Fay further explained, “I told him, ‘You do not touch females. You do not physically hit them, that is not okay. You don’t hit a girl here.’”

As was discussed in theme 2, Mrs. Fay did not “jump on it” and discipline the boy. Instead, she considered the cultural situation and used it as a teachable moment for the boy. More important to her than the negative behavior was that the students trusted her enough to come to her for help and followed the fourth Olweus rule. She concluded, “The boy and the girl at least knew what they needed to do, that was to come to tell an adult at school.”

### **Reinforcing the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> Program in the ELL Classroom**

Both ELL teachers in this ELL classroom reinforced The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> during their morning meetings and during teachable moments. As described in Theme 2, I had opportunities to observe some of Mrs. Harris’s lessons, which reinforced the school assembly teaching about Respect and Caring. In addition to lessons, Mrs. Harris reinforced the characters through modeling them. For example, one day a student said she was excited because her grandmother was coming to visit the family. Other children started talking excitedly about visits from their relatives. Mrs. Harris used this as a teachable moment to model caring, especially because she was concerned about one boy who did not live with his parents and did not have relatives visiting. Mrs. Harris pulled out her cell phone and showed some of her family pictures to the class and said, “I sent these family pictures to my husband’s parents because they live far away.” Then, Mrs. Harris asked the boy who lived with his aunt, “Do you send your pictures to your

parents? Be kind and caring, send your mom and dad your pictures.” After class, while chatting informally with Mrs. Harris, she said:

It is not practical just to tell the children to be kind and caring. We need to show and teach how to be kind and caring, so I always show my students what I do to be kind and caring to my family.

The phrase “Be kind and caring” was frequently used in the ELL classroom. One time, I had the opportunity to observe two sisters who were enrolled in the same New Americans class arguing with each other in their native language. They often came to school angry with each other and talked about why they were frustrated during morning meetings. This day the sisters were fighting because one sister threw water at the other sister to wake her up in the morning. Mrs. Harris said to the one sister, “Instead of throwing water, what could you have done to wake your sister up? Try to be kind and caring to her. Your sister cooks for you, so what can you do for her to be kind to her?” The girl mumbled, “Cook rice, eggs, . . . for my sister.” Mrs. Harris said, “That is very kind of you.” Later, Mrs. Harris told me:

These girls live in a small apartment with many family members, and that is affecting their well-being. That is why the girls need to learn how to be kind and caring to each other, instead of taking their stress out on each other.

Mrs. Harris was aware of the home life situations of her students that affected their SEL needs. Mrs. Harris created a safe and comfortable space for these children to talk about their problems freely and to discuss solutions that reinforced positive character traits.

Both ELL teachers also frequently reinforced the need to be respectful of other people. One day a student who had been in the U.S. for a while shared her opinion of a

brand new ELL student's family after she had visited them at their home. The girl said to the whole class during a morning meeting with the newly arrived student present, "[new student's name]'s parents are nice, but they do not do anything." Mrs. Harris said, "Yes, they are nice, but what do you mean by 'they do not do anything?'" The girl explained that the friend's parents did not do anything because they just stayed home. Mrs. Harris said to the girl:

[New student's name]'s parents are new to this country, and they do not have a job yet, and they are learning English. They are not just staying home; they are trying to learn English. You need to understand and respect them. They are working hard.

Taking advantage of a teachable moment, Mrs. Harris asked the students to recall a time when they and their families first arrived in the U.S. with no English, no job, no friends, and no social network. Mrs. Harris said, "You need to feel how your friend and her parents feel, and help your friend when she needs help." Although Mrs. Harris did not use the word "empathy," she reinforced the concept in this scenario.

### **Reinforced Some SEL Practices More Than Others**

Although both ELL teachers reinforced the Olweus rules, they focused the most on "tell an adult." They prioritized this rule over the other three because it was important for them to know a problem existed in order to advise the student how to handle it and teach them the English necessary to do so.

Similarly, the ELL teachers reinforced two of the Six Pillars of Character more than others. Caring (kindness) and respect were heavily emphasized for character traits

but I did not observe lessons or teachable moments on trustworthiness or citizenship.

Mrs. Harris explained the reason for this as follows:

Some of the characters [pillars], like citizenship and trustworthiness, are difficult to explain...Citizenship and trustworthiness can be explained as being honest and being an active participant in school and outside. Empathy can be explained as respecting the feelings of others.

Concepts such as citizenship and empathy are difficult concepts for all children, and for ELL students who do not have the language to be able to understand complex explanations, these concepts are even more difficult to teach. The ELL teachers also reinforced these SEL practices in a way that prioritized the students' SEL needs and met their linguistic needs.

#### **Theme 4: ELL Teachers Focused on ALL Five SEL Competencies and Taught the Skills at Various Moments**

The last theme addresses the second study question, "What competency (competencies) of SEL do ELL teachers in an ELL classroom focus on?" Based on the analysis of data, findings suggested ELL teachers in this ELL classroom focused on all five SEL competencies (see Table 7) and taught these skills whenever relevant throughout the day.

Table 7. The Five SEL Competency Clusters.

Competency Clusters	The Abilities
<i>Self-awareness</i>	“The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Self-awareness also includes “accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations, and possessing a growth mindset, a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).
<i>Self-management</i>	“The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Self-management includes “delaying gratification, managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating one’s self, and persevering in addressing challenges” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).
<i>Social awareness</i>	“The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9).
<i>Relationship skills</i>	“The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Relationship skills include “communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).
<i>Responsible decision-making</i>	“The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). This skill includes “consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others” (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017, p. 4).

Both ELL teachers, Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Fay, stated they focused on all five competencies, responding to the interview question, “What does the term ‘social-emotional learning (SEL)’ mean to you?” Their response was that SEL was to learn or

teach skills to identify and express emotions, regulate emotions, build relationships by learning social skills, and make right decisions. Both ELL teachers were aware of all five SEL skills and they thought that these skills were important for the ELL children to learn. However, the competencies they focused on most frequently were self-awareness and self-management because these competencies were the most fundamental skills for the ELL children to acquire. The following sections describe each competency of CASEL's (2012) five SEL abilities that the ELL teachers taught in the ELL classroom.

### **Self-Awareness and Self-Management**

Although the ELL teachers in this study focused on all five competencies, it was apparent that Mrs. Harris focused more on self-awareness and self-management in her morning meetings with New American children. Self-awareness is the ability to recognize one's feelings and thoughts accurately, and self-management is the ability to control one's emotions and behaviors to fit in with society. During my observation visits, Mrs. Harris asked each student, "How are you feeling this morning?" and "Why are you feeling that way?" to start the daily morning meeting. While some students were always eager to share their feelings and talk about their issues, some students were hesitant to share even though Mrs. Harris helped them with words to label their feelings. In one interview, Mrs. Harris mentioned that ELL children were from different cultures, languages, and different parenting and their ways of showing and dealing with emotions might be different. Mrs. Harris was aware that some children came from cultures and families where they talk about feelings and emotions openly, and some were from cultures where they tend to hide emotions, and Mrs. Harris was sensitive about the cultural differences in showing emotions.

Regardless, it was apparent that the ELL teachers were extremely sensitive to the moods and feelings of their students, and they wanted to know if anything was bothering them so that they could discuss how to deal with emotions and find solutions together. The ELL teachers were sensitive to their students' feelings because many of the ELL students at New Bridge, especially refugee ELL children, were facing stressful conditions (e.g., immigration/refugee resettlement stress, trauma, acculturation stress, language stress, and family separation). Showing and sharing their feelings would help them alleviate their stress.

Mrs. Harris expected every student to share their feelings and why they were feeling that way, as well as talk about issues that were bothering them so the class could discuss those issues and find solutions together. For example, one student in the New Americans group said she was frustrated because she had to babysit some of her relatives' small children when the relatives got together at her apartment during their ethnic holidays. The student said that since a baby was misbehaving, and she was getting irritated, she threw water at the baby. Mrs. Harris said, "You do not do that to a baby. You still need to talk to her even though she is a baby." Mrs. Harris asked the class, "What do you do when you are angry or mad?" The students suggested several different ideas for dealing with anger, for example, take time to calm down, breathe in and out many times, scratch your head, and squeeze both your legs. After that, the whole class found a solution for their peer's issue, which was to take the children outside to a playground instead of staying inside. Mrs. Harris said in her interview:

Many of refugee students live in a small, crowded apartment with many family members and that creates chronic stress such as frustration for some students. So,

talking about how they feel and why, talking about how to deal with different emotions like frustration, think about the solutions, those are a huge part of our everyday ELL classroom life here.

Mrs. Harris knew that some refugee students' social and emotional needs were unique due to their home living conditions and she felt that she needed to prioritize helping students with their emotions such as frustration and corresponding behaviors such as impulsivity.

In addition to morning meetings where students talked about their feelings and emotions, one of the unit lessons that Mrs. Harris developed and delivered was on "emotions and feelings," focusing on self-awareness. New American students learned new words to label and express their feelings and practiced identifying and expressing their feelings during the unit's lessons. In one interview, Mrs. Harris said:

Language is what helps us express our feelings and our needs. So, I feel that is a significant need and sometimes that holds the students back when we are not always able to understand what they are trying to say. So, we teach words to express their feelings and how to say it.

Mrs. Harris always put a priority on her students' language development when teaching SEL skills since language is critical to expressing emotions and communicating feelings.

In addition to self-awareness, the ELL teachers also prioritized self-management which includes motivating one's self and persevering in addressing challenges (CASEL, 2012). I noticed that Mrs. Fay, the other ELL teacher, encouraged her students by saying, "keep going" all the time. Mrs. Fay said, "When the ELL students are frustrated, teachers need to teach them, 'It is okay to get frustrated and feel it is too hard to do, but



you just keep going. Never give up.” Not surprisingly, the students knew the phrase, “keep going, keep going, keep going” since the whole school repeated the phrase aloud at assemblies to reinforce students’ perseverance. Mrs. Fay utilized the phrase that the students were familiar with to empower and encourage her students, many of whom were experiencing challenges both in school and at home.

### **Relationship Skills**

ELL teachers in this study focused on relationship skills whenever relevant. Relationship skills include “communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). During my observation visits, I noticed that the ELL teachers focused on several relationship skills, such as “helping others,” “cooperating,” “listening actively,” and “negotiating conflict constructively.” For example, Mrs. Harris asked her students in the New Americans group to help newly arrived peers whenever they needed help. Students helped new peers by showing where things were in their classroom and how to dance along with an ABC song to learn the English alphabet. Most importantly, some students helped new peers with their language needs by translating between English and their home languages, especially when Mrs. Harris needed to communicate with the new students, such as explaining about their school calendar (no school days and early release days). Mrs. Harris said, “I encourage my students to help their friends whenever they need help. Helping their friends builds the relationships with their friends.” Mrs. Harris focused on building positive and healthy relationships among students in the ELL classroom. She knew that students

helping each other would build the healthy relationships and trust among/with peers and improve their communication skills.

One of the relationship skills, the ability to cooperate, was important in the New Americans class. Mrs. Harris brought the students together and encouraged cooperation by working on activities in pairs or small groups. For example, I observed one event when New American students worked on a game with a partner to name some objects. Each pair was actively involved in the activity and helped each other solve problems. Mrs. Harris chatted with me and said, “Through pair-work or small group work, my students learn how to work together. Helping each other, interacting, and cooperating with one another, it helps build the relationships among the students.” ELL students were all from different backgrounds. The ELL students learn to accept diverse peers and work together with the peers by helping each other, interacting and cooperating with one another in the ELL classroom.

Another relationship skill, to “listen actively,” was reinforced in the New Americans class. For example, Mrs. Harris instructed her students to listen carefully whenever their classmates were sharing feelings and issues during morning meetings because some students were sometimes not actively participating in meetings and behaved as if they were bored, a common behavior when students do not understand what is being said due to language differences. Mrs. Harris said to the class, “You need to listen carefully and pay attention to what your friend is saying. When someone is sharing, you need to be respectful to one another and listen.” I remember what Mr. Jones, the principal mentioned about relationship skills in his interview. He said, “Social

and academic skills rely on good speaking and good listening skills, and that has a lot to do with the students' relationship skills – how the students interact with one another.” Again, teaching students the importance of listening helped them both with developing SEL skills as well as English proficiency.

Finally, how to negotiate interpersonal conflict constructively was important in teaching relationship skills in the New Americans class. For example, a New American girl (Girl A) who was from a culture where boys and girls do not play with each other, made fun of her peer (Girl B) who was paired up with a boy to work on an activity. Mrs. Harris stopped her lesson and explained to the class:

Nothing is wrong with a boy and girl hanging out with each other or being friends at school or partner or play with each other. They are just friends. You should not make fun of a girl together with a boy.

Mrs. Harris told Girl B to say, “Please stop doing that,” to Girl A, and Mrs. Harris said to Girl A to say, “Sorry” to Girl B. Gender issues were dynamic in the ELL classroom since the ELL students were from all different cultural backgrounds and some of the ELL students were brought up in the cultures where boys and girls do not mingle. As a part of cross cultural gender roles, it was crucial to teach U.S. classroom norms, which allow co-educational classroom environment. Mrs. Harris was aware of the students' backgrounds and needed to assist her students with acculturation regarding gender roles in U.S. classroom. While all school children can experience interpersonal conflict, some of the conflicts in the ELL classroom were unique based on cultural and background differences.

## **Responsible Decision-Making**

ELL teachers focused on responsible decision-making skills whenever relevant. Responsible decision-making skills involve making “constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, . . . and the well-being of self and others” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Both ELL teachers focused on teaching and reinforcing school and classroom rules whenever necessary throughout their school day. Responsible decision-making includes obeying and following the school rules for the safety and well-being of self and others.

As described in Theme 2, both ELL teachers perceived that a behavioral issue of some ELL students, especially refugee students, was their struggle with school rules. Some ELL students had no schooling in their home countries, or their education was interrupted, and those students struggled with school rules and academics the most. During my observation visits, I saw Mrs. Fay constantly reminding her students of walking in the hallway, not running, and she made sure that students walked back to their classrooms from the ELL room. Mrs. Harris described some students who struggled with the rules. Mrs. Harris said:

We had students who ran wide-open spot, [they were from] open country in a village. So, they could just run whenever doors were open. When they come here, they are expected to walk in the hall, and that is hard for them. It took months to finally have one of our students walk from his room to the ELL room. It is a simple thing, but he just needed that time to experience schooling at his rate.

Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Fay felt that their ELL students, especially refugee students, needed extra help and time to build their responsible decision-making skills. This started with basic concepts such as following school rules.

### **Social Awareness (Empathy and Appreciating Diversity)**

Empathy and appreciating diversity are included in social awareness skills, which are “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). The ELL teachers focused on social awareness competency in their morning meetings, in unit lessons, and when teachable moments occurred. For example, Mrs. Harris taught “empathy” during unit lessons on Respect and Caring. In both units, Mrs. Harris used classroom examples to explain what empathy was. While Mrs. Harris was teaching “caring” in her unit lessons, she introduced the word, “empathy” to relate to “respect and caring.” Mrs. Harris explained what “empathy” was to the class:

Do you remember when A (one of the students) got sick and went home? I [Mrs. Harris] felt how A was feeling. I asked you to feel how A was feeling, too. That is empathy. We need to respect how A was feeling and care for her feelings.

Mrs. Harris felt that using a classroom example was an effective way to teach social awareness skills such as empathy to her New American students as the students experienced the incident together in the ELL classroom.

Another time, Mrs. Harris explained empathy as “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes” by using a classroom example. When a newly arrived peer was struggling and frustrated in the ELL classroom, Mrs. Harris told the class to understand what the new friend was going through and to feel how she was feeling by putting themselves in

her shoes. At first the ELL students struggled with this idiomatic expression, but because Mrs. Harris repeated this frequently during different incidents, the students gradually understood the meaning. Mrs. Harris expected all her students to understand how their new peers felt since they had gone through the same struggles and experiences when they first arrived.

Another skill of social awareness is accepting differences (diversity). Embracing diversity has been part of the school culture at New Bridge, and both ELL teachers helped their ELL students understand that diversity meant when something is different and still accepted. The ELL teachers focused on social awareness skills in unit lessons or just by talking and sharing about their students' cultures, languages, and their life stories whenever relevant. In order to create a safe classroom where students felt they belonged, it was important for the Somali, Nepali and Mexican students, whose cultures and languages differed widely, to accept each other. For instance, Mrs. Harris had students work in pairs and identify to each other similarities and differences between themselves in a unit lesson on "respect." Mrs. Harris used this activity to promote her students' ability to recognize and accept the differences of their peers so that they could work together in the classroom while respecting and accepting the differences of others.

Additionally, as was discussed in Theme 2, both ELL teachers created opportunities for the students to talk about their cultures, languages, and their life stories whenever relevant so students would better understand their diverse peers and appreciate their differences. Some ELL children talked about how dangerous their refugee camps were because there were many poisonous snakes around, and sometimes, a large number of elephants came to attack their village. Sometimes, students talked about how they

used to celebrate their holidays in their home countries and how they used to play with their friends. Also, both ELL teachers celebrated the diversity of language. Mrs. Harris often asked students, “How do you say this English word in your language? In Spanish, in French, Nepali, Somali?” Students repeated the words in their peers’ languages. In the same way, Mrs. Fay encouraged students to share their languages in the classroom by naming things or saying things in their languages. Mrs. Fay said, “I am always interested in hearing about my students’ backgrounds. My students like to talk about themselves, too.” Both ELL teachers felt that the ELL students learn social awareness skills by talking and sharing their stories and languages so that they could recognize, appreciate, and respect the differences of their peers. By sharing their life stories, the ELL children developed empathy for one another and recognized that they were all there in the ELL classroom to learn English together, which created a sense of community and belonging to the ELL classroom.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the themes that emerged from data analysis, discussed the findings of each theme, and answered each research question. Findings from Theme 1 suggest that New Bridge Elementary School was committed to creating a positive and safe school environment and culture that supported and promoted SEL by building relationships with students and families, training all school staff in SEL issues, and implementing the Olweus and Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs school-wide. The school principal and the school district utilized Dusenbury et al.’s (2015) fourth approach to teaching SEL which was to provide administrative guidance for these activities.

Theme 2 answered Research Question 1. Findings suggest that ELL teachers in

this study used the three classroom-based approaches (Dusenbury et al., 2015) to teaching SEL: free-standing lessons, general teaching practices, and integration of SEL and academic curriculum to teach SEL in the ELL classroom. In order to provide comprehensible input, which makes information understandable for students, and language development, the ELL teachers integrated language-based strategies and methods in all three approaches to address both the students' SEL and language needs.

Theme 3 addressed in part the first research question and the third research question. The findings suggest that ELL teachers reinforced both Olweus anti-bullying rules and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program for their students in the ELL classroom during the morning meetings and during teachable moments. However, the ELL teachers did not modify these programs, instead, they simplified the language used in these programs to accommodate the ELL students' linguistic needs. The ELL teachers also prioritized some SEL practices more than others because of ELL students' emotional needs and behaviors as well as language needs (i.e. "tell an adult" rule, emphasis on caring and respect).

Finally, Theme 4 answered Research Question 2. The findings suggest that the ELL teachers taught all five of CASEL's (2012) SEL competencies whenever relevant throughout the day in the ELL classroom; however, they focused more on two competencies, self-awareness and self-management, more than the other three in order to support the ELL students' most fundamental SEL needs related to expressing and dealing with emotions. Chapter V discusses implications related to the findings from this study.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter presents a discussion related to this study's findings compared to relevant research and literature. Implications and limitations, followed by suggestions for future studies, are also included.

Five key implications emerged from this study. The first is that SEL is best taught and addressed as a school-wide initiative with a strong school leader providing administrative support and that for ELLs, it is best taught using all four approaches so as to make SEL an integral part of everything that occurs in the ELL classroom. The second implication is that teachers and schools may need to prioritize the teaching of some SEL competencies and skills more than others for ELL students, especially refugee ELL students, who may need to learn basic SEL concepts such as caring and respect before more complicated ones such as fairness and citizenship. They may also need to learn life skills such as eating etiquette and personal hygiene to help their social and cultural adjustment to school in the U.S. The third implication is that linguistic modifications need to be made to ensure that ELL students understand and learn SEL competences. Teachers also need to teach ELL students the language necessary to discuss emotions, build peer relationships and handle interpersonal conflicts. The fourth implication is that ELL teachers modeling positive character traits for ELL students. Finally, the last

implication is that it is difficult to evaluate how successful a school is in improving SEL without a formal assessment system.

**Implication 1: Importance of School-Wide Collaboration and  
Using All Four Approaches Together**

While the ELL teachers could have taught SEL just in the ELL classroom using only one approach, the combination of all four approaches and the school working together made a difference because of its comprehensiveness.

First, utilizing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program as a framework at the monthly school assemblies provided a foundation for what SEL skills and character to teach and emphasize in the ELL classroom, as well as in the mainstream classrooms. All teachers, including the ELL teachers, continued to reinforce anti-bullying rules and six character traits in the classrooms based on what was emphasized at the assemblies.

Second, while the school was using the fourth approach to reinforce these programs, the ELL teachers used the combinations of three classroom-based approaches to both emphasize the school-wide teachings as well as address unique SEL needs of ELL students; free-standing lessons, general teaching practices, and integration of SEL and academic curriculum. In this way they were able to teach SEL from all angles, utilize a variety of opportunities to teach SEL and to integrate it into almost everything they do in the classroom.

Third, a strong school leader at New Bridge was crucial as a key person to creating a school environment for appreciating diversity and building systems and processes to meet individual students' needs. At New Bridge, more than 40% of the total

school population consisted of ELL students and the school principal was committed to creating safe, welcoming, and positive school environments for all students, particularly for refugee ELL students in their new home community, so they would feel safe and be able to learn. While he was in charge of the school-wide approach, he expected teachers to then continue SEL teaching in their classrooms.

Forth, the principal, the ELL teachers, and school counselor worked together to support the ELL students' needs. They all agreed that ELL students' SEL needs are unique, especially refugee students' needs, and they collaborated together to share information about ELL students who may need SEL support due to their traumatic distress. When ELL students displayed aggressive behaviors at school, the principal did not think that standard consequences would work because of their trauma; therefore, those students were referred to the school counselor immediately to work on regulating emotions with the help of one-on-one counseling.

The findings from this study were congruent with the existing research that suggested that the school should refer students who display trauma related symptoms to professional assistance (e.g., school counselors) to help students with traumatic stress (Robertson & Breiseth, 2017). However, at New Bridge, the school counselor was there only 2 days a week. Students and teachers might not be getting assistance as quickly as they needed at school. Although the district has been aware of this situation and is trying to increase the number of school counselors, it is crucial that the ELL students who need assistance with their emotional and behavioral problems receive counseling immediately. The findings from this study were also congruent with CASEL's research that stated that

a commitment from both school leaders and classroom teachers are necessary to build strong and positive school environments (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

While CASEL's framework outlines the different approaches that can be used to teach SEL, the framework does not mention how these approaches could or should be used together. This study found that all four approaches can be used together and that by using the four approaches together along with ELL teacher/principal/counselor collaboration, New Bridge and the ELL classroom provided comprehensive SEL instruction for its ELL students.

### **Implication 2. Prioritize the SEL Skills and Competencies ELL Students Most Need**

The second implication is that teachers and schools may need to prioritize the teaching of some SEL competencies and skills more than others for ELL students, especially refugee ELL students, who may need to learn basic SEL concepts and competencies before more advanced ones. ELL teachers may also have to teach life skills such as hygiene and eating etiquette which are not SEL skills by themselves but are important to establishing peer relationships, reducing possible bullying, developing U.S. cultural social skills and helping with overall SEL as ELL children adjust to school and life in the U.S.

#### **Prioritize Self-Awareness and Self-Management**

The ELL teachers in this study prioritized self-awareness and self-management skills in the ELL classroom. Prioritizing these two areas has been noted in the literature; Hoffman (2009) emphasized the need for SEL to focus on two competencies; identifying and regulating one's emotions. The ELL teachers knew that many ELL students at New

Bridge, particularly newcomer and refugee ELL children, were facing stressful conditions at school and outside in the community (e.g., immigration/refugee resettlement, trauma, acculturation, new language, family separation, belonging to a low-income family). As a result, the ELL students were experiencing a range of emotions such as anxiety and loneliness. This situation is not unique to the ELLs at New Bridge and is a common theme in the literature about ELLs (Igoa, 1995; Niehaus, 2012; Ovando et al., 2003; Sharp-Ross, 2011)

The ELL teachers knew it was important for the ELL students to talk about how they were feeling and to learn the language associated with the emotions so that the students could identify their emotions, a key step in developing self-awareness. Self-awareness must be developed *before* students can learn how to manage their emotions; if they cannot identify them, they cannot manage them.

Niehaus (2012) concluded that compared to non-ELL children, ELL children tend to experience more difficulties with externalizing behaviors such as relationships with peers and focusing on task. This was true in the ELL classroom. Interpersonal conflicts and difficulty with peer relationships was a common topic at morning meetings and a cause for teachable moments because the ELL students were under so much stress and didn't always have the language or knowledge of culture to understand and communicate with each other. Behaviors also included running in the hallways, not paying attention to lessons and acting out because of frustration. Because of this, the ELL teachers knew they needed to prioritize self-management skills so that emotions and behavior would not distract from learning.

### **Prioritize Teaching of Caring and Respect**

The ELL teachers in this study prioritized two character traits, caring (be kind) and respect, over other traits such as fairness, responsibility and citizenship. Many of the ELL students needed to first learn the basic traits of caring and respect in order to navigate through U.S. classrooms and culture. They were not yet at a level where they could understand citizenship or fairness because of the difficulty of the concepts and the language needed to teach it. No literature was found discussing the order in which to teach character traits, let alone the possible need to prioritize teaching certain traits for ELL students, especially for refugee students. The findings from this study add to SEL literature suggesting that some character traits are more of a priority than others depending on ELL students' situations and that caring and respect are two basic SEL concepts that teachers may need to teach to ELL children, especially refugee children.

### **Prioritize “Tell an Adult”**

The ELL teachers emphasized and prioritized “tell an adult” rule when students encounter bullying. This was only one of the four OBPP rules; the other rules such as “helping students who are being bullied” may be difficult for ELL students to follow due to their language limitation and cultural differences. “Tell an adult” at school may be the easiest rule for the ELL students as well as the most important so that ELL teachers and the school could know that a problem existed and they could help the ELL student immediately. The findings from this study contribute to existing OBPP literature suggesting that “tell an adult” should be a priority for ELL students until they have the language and cultural skills necessary to understand and follow the other three rules.

## **Need to Teach Life Skills that Promote SEL**

ELL teachers often teach much more than just language; they need to assist ELL students with their acculturation process and this may include teaching life skills such as cultural etiquette and personal hygiene. These are not SEL competencies but are important in order for the ELL students to be accepted by their mainstream peers.

In this study, Mrs. Harris taught eating etiquette while the class was celebrating a birthday. She showed her students how to use a fork and where to put a paper napkin (e.g., on the lap). Mrs. Harris respected ELL children's cultural backgrounds; however, she thought it was important for ELL children to learn American social and cultural manners. Mrs. Harris also taught students about personal hygiene and deodorant because the ELL teachers did not want the ELL students to be bullied because of body odor as U.S. culture is sensitive about people's body odor.

Some studies pointed out that teachers needed to help ELL students in learning new cultural skills in a new society (Liebekind et al., 2004; Opedal et al., 2004). In fact, several studies discussed how ELL teachers help their ELL students' go through acculturation and adjustments at school (Chiu, 2009; Roessingh, 2006; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000; Sharp-Ross, 2011) by informally teaching school rules and culture, such as rules for riding a school bus (Roessingh, 2006). Adding to the literature, Sharp-Ross (2011) pointed out that ELL teachers help ELL students by making sure that their basic needs (food, clothing, etc.) are met and introduced ELL children's families to social services. However, none of these studies explained how ELL teachers help ELL students with their acculturation and adjustment in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways to fit ELL children's backgrounds and cultures. None of the studies discussed how ELL

teachers assist newcomer and refugee ELL children with their acquisition of American culture, such as eating etiquette, and introducing personal hygiene and self-care, which are important basic needs of some ELL children such as refugee children. This study contributes to SEL literature demonstrating how ELL teachers assisted ELL children's basic needs such as introducing eating etiquette, hygiene and health care with culturally sensitive manners. The findings from this study also add to the SEL literature suggesting that ELL teachers understand and respect students' cultures and backgrounds so that teachers do not force U.S. culture to ELL students but introduce new cultural norms to promote students' social skills in a new culture.

In summary, the ELL teachers in this study understood the SEL needs of their ELL students and instead of trying to teach and emphasize all of the OBPP rules and the six character traits, they prioritized teachings that met the basic social emotional needs of their students.

### **Implication 3: Need to Integrate Language Development and Comprehensible Input into SEL**

The third implication is that linguistic modifications need to be made to ensure that ELL students understand and learn SEL competencies and skills. Teachers also need to teach ELL students the language necessary to discuss emotions, build peer relationships and handle interpersonal conflicts.

#### **Language Development Together with SEL**

The ELL teachers always kept the ELL students' language needs in their mind and promoted student language development through SEL instruction and activities because they knew that language was the most important element for the ELL children in



order to learn SEL skills, adjust to a new culture, as well as to learn academics. This included teaching synonyms of SEL vocabulary to build students' SEL vocabulary, teaching emotions words to express feelings, teaching words for problematic behaviors in U.S. culture, and teaching phrases to use for interpersonal conflict. The ELL teachers also knew that not knowing English can be one of the ELL students' stressors. The ELL teachers assisted the students' language development through teaching SEL skills.

Several researchers have reported that limited English proficiency can be a main stressor to ELL students (Olsen, 2000; Dawson & Williams, 2008; Igoa, 1995; Sharp-Ross, 2011) and that they need to learn to be fluent in English in order to be accepted in mainstream school culture and life. Adding to the literature, many researchers reported that ELL students may not be able to participate in school culture fully due to their limited English proficiency (del Valle, 2002; Genesea et al., 2004; Olsen, 2000; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) and because of that, they may feel lonely and isolated in school. The findings from this study agree with the existing literature suggesting that it is critical for ELL students to acquire English language proficiency in order to be accepted and become a part of school life. However, these studies are based on general knowledge about ELL students regarding the importance of learning English; none of the studies discuss how ELL teachers teach and promote language development together with SEL improvement. Therefore, the findings from this study add to the gap in existing literature suggesting that ELL teachers embed language development in SEL instruction to improve ELL students' language skills.

## **Comprehensible Input**

In addition to teaching English, the ELL teachers made sure that the ELL children understand the language of SEL by using a variety of strategies. For example, rather than using the word “empathy,” they re-defined it in simpler terms such as “be kind” and “think of others’ feelings.” They also repeated phrases and words over and over and referred students to the Olweus poster and emotions poster on the classroom wall.

In order to help all students, but especially the ELL students’ comprehend anti-bullying rules and the six pillars of character traits, the school utilized a lot of visual aids (e.g., posters, charts, videos) and demonstrations (e.g., role-plays, skits) at the assemblies. None of the studies reviewed in Chapter II included information on how to make SEL language comprehensible because Olweus anti-bullying rules and six pillars of character traits since these programs were developed for general population of students and not for ELLs. Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2010) stated that visual aids are essential tools to use when teaching ELLs, as ELL students may have difficulty processing auditory information, and visual clues are beneficial to them for understanding information. The findings from this study add to the SEL literature suggesting that plenty of visual aids and other strategies should be used to help ELL students understand SEL teachings in school assemblies and in classrooms.

### **Implication 4: Core Traits of the ELL Teachers**

The fourth implication of this study goes beyond approaches and competencies and focuses on the ELL teacher’s modeling of positive character traits.

## **ELL Teachers Need to be Caring, Calm and Patient but Firm to Teach SEL**

The ELL teachers in this study showed their caring for their students all the time. The ELL teachers knew that the ELL students, particularly refugee ELL students, needed to feel safe and cared for in their new environment as they had gone through traumatic experiences. The ELL teachers in this study also knew that the majority of their ELL students were still in the initial stages of resettlement in a new country, and their basic needs such as safety, caring, and a sense of belonging had to be met as a priority.

The findings from this study agree with the existing studies which suggested that teachers need to be caring to support students' emotional well-being (Noddings, 2005) and teachers' caring supports students' social and emotional well-being and promotes a sense of security and protection in students (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009; Yoder, 2014). A teacher's caring was fundamental for the ELL children's SEL development in this study because the ELL students knew that their teachers cared about them and they felt comfortable coming to the teachers when they needed help.

When addressing ELL students' behavioral issues, such as cheating and stealing in the classroom, both ELL teachers were calm not jumping on the students right away to reprimand them and instead they talked to the student first to get his or her cultural or personal perspectives on their behavior. After getting students' perspectives, the ELL teachers taught vocabularies of the behaviors (e.g., cheating, stealing) and explained that those behaviors were not accepted in U.S. classrooms. The ELL teachers were calm and treated their students with respect, even when they were misbehaving.

The ELL teachers also need to be patient, calm but firm when they reminded the students of school rules such as "walk in the hallway," especially when working with

SIFE ELL students. SIFE ELL children need extra time, more assistance, and constant reminders to learn some school rules. Both ELL teachers were patient with the students, calm and firm, not raising their voice when they reinforced school rules. Robertson and Lafond (2017) stated that teachers must be patient and open-minded with SIFE ELLs as they are facing more learning to do other than just learning the English language. The ELL teachers in this study were aware of the SIFE ELL children's challenges and struggles and they were open-minded with the students. Sometimes, the ELL teachers did raise their voices and show frustration. However, they appeared to use their own self-management skills and would be silent for a moment and then they would resume talking to the students in their soft, caring voice.

### **ELL Teachers Need to Demonstrate Effective Character Traits**

Both ELL teachers in this study promoted good character by modeling effective character traits such as being calm and firm as described above and caring and being respectful to their students all the time. They modeled caring and being respectful to others by listening to individual students' stories actively and showing empathy. The findings from this study agreed with existing studies, which concluded that in order to promote students' good character traits such as be respectful and caring, adults (teachers, school leaders, school staff) in the school must model good character behaviors toward students and one another (CASEL, 2012; Noddings, 1984).

However, modeling is not listed as one of Dusenbury et al.'s (2015) four approaches and in this study it was an important approach, especially so that the ELL teachers could demonstrate the behavior they wanted rather than having to use complicated language to explain it. In this way, modeling served as a visual aid. It is

crucial that ELL teachers model effective character to the students in order for the students to learn desired character.

**Implications 5: Need to Create a Formal System to Assess Students' SEL**

Finally, the last implication is that it is difficult to evaluate how successful a school is in improving SEL without a formal assessment system.

Although New Bridge strove to support and meet all students' SEL needs, including ELL students, the school did not formally assess students' SEL skills or progress. Classroom teachers informally assessed SEL skills through observation. The school counselor also informally assessed students' SEL skills during small-group counseling sessions. However, for the ELL children, the school counselor thought that even informal SEL assessment was difficult due to their lack of English proficiency. This finding addresses Dusenbury et al.'s (2015) fourth approach, which suggests that districts and schools conduct assessments to measure students' SEL progress and improvement. If schools are going to assess SEL skill development, then it is important that they do so in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for ELLs. New Bridge could consider some assessment methods or approaches that account for ELL students' linguistic needs and measure their SEL progress. Assessment on SEL progress does not apply to the purpose of this study; however, there are some studies that discuss SEL assessment methods and some approaches may be beneficial to ELL students. Elliott, Frey, and Davies (2015) suggest some methods that could be also utilized to measure ELL students' SEL improvement and progress. Those methods include:

1. Rating scales, as they are “efficient tools for representing summary characterizations of individuals’ observations of other people or their own behavior” (p. 304),
2. Direct observations, as students’ actual behaviors and what they say can be observed,
3. Teachers’ perceptions of students’ SEL progress, as teachers work with students daily and watch how they behave in their classrooms, so their perceptions could be realistic.

These methods do not require ELL students to be fluent in the English language. Because there was no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of New Bridge’s SEL teachings or the SEL teaching in the ELL classroom, this study cannot conclude that New Bridge or the ELL classroom was effective at improving SEL of its students. The study can only describe how the school and ELL teachers taught SEL, not evaluate it.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study**

This study has several limitations, which calls for future studies. First, this study focused on only two ELL teachers to examine how they teach SEL and what competencies of SEL they taught to ELL children in one elementary ELL classroom in a city in the Great Plains. Further research could include other ELL teachers to explore how they teach SEL and what skills of SEL they teach in other elementary ELL classrooms in the same school district or in other regions throughout the United States with different populations of ELL students.

Second, this study included only the principal and the school counselor from the same study site to obtain their perspectives and experiences on SEL practices. Future

research could include others who may be able to offer insights about SEL practice for elementary ELL students, such as classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers, and parent-volunteers.

Third, this study examined how the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program, which were district-mandated programs, were adapted and modified in one elementary ELL classroom. Future studies could explore how these programs are adapted in other elementary ELL classrooms.

Fourth, this study did not include ELL children and their families' perspectives. It would be fascinating to ask ELL children and their families to share their perceptions about SEL. Since first-generation immigrant and refugee ELL students and their families come from all different backgrounds, they may perceive SEL differently (e.g., there may be cultural differences in how different cultures perceive, express and deal with emotions). Future studies could also examine perceptions of ELL children about SEL instruction given to them at school, and how they benefit from SEL, including the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program.

Finally, findings from this case study may not be generalizable to other schools and ELL classrooms; however, the findings promote opportunities for educators and SEL programs to discuss effective ways to meet ELL children's, especially refugee children's, SEL needs.

### **Conclusions**

At the beginning of this study, I watched the Nepalese boy learn the word “elephant” successfully. While the ELL children were showing kindness and empathy to their new peer and helping him, the ELL teacher was smiling and watching the ELL

children help their peer. I wondered about the social and emotional learning taking place in their ELL classroom. I also wondered what the ELL teachers were doing to promote student social-emotional competencies. I decided to explore what SEL looked like in that ELL classroom, as well as how the ELL teachers adapted the anti-bullying and character education program in that particular ELL classroom.

The findings show that New Bridge was promoting SEL practices school-wide. With a strong leadership of the principal, all teachers and school staff collaborated to work as one team to meet students' SEL needs, especially ELL students' needs. Combinations of all four approaches (Dusenbury et al. 2015) to teaching SEL and the school collaboration helped the ELL teachers to teach all five SEL competencies (CASEL, 2012) effectively in the ELL classroom. The school was implementing Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and the Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program to create a safe and positive place to learn and these programs provided the ELL teachers what SEL skills to teach in the ELL classroom. However, the ELL teachers focused on language and cultural learning for the newcomer ELL children by prioritizing two character traits (caring and respect), one of the anti-bullying rules ("tell and adult") and two competencies (self-awareness and self-management) in order to teach basic skills that the ELL children, especially refugee children, needed for their emotional and physical well-being, as well as improving their language skills to fit in a new school and society. The ELL children, especially newcomer and refugee ELL children in this study, had different SEL needs than mainstream students due to their past experiences, backgrounds and current situation and the ELL teachers understood these unique needs and made SEL an integral part of what occurred in the ELL classroom.



Looking back, I recognize that the ELL children at the beginning of this study were demonstrating their SEL competencies and positive character traits. They were kind and caring to their peer and in helping him learn the word “elephant,” they were contributing to the ELL classroom being a safe and comfortable learning environment for learning English. I have to wonder if this incident would have occurred if New Bridge and the ELL teachers had not placed so much emphasis on social and emotional learning.

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
**Interview Protocol for ELL Teachers**

Interview Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

- I. Digital recorder tested and spare batteries available.
- II. Verify consent form was signed and copy given to participant.

III. Review purpose of the interview:

The purpose of this study is to explore how ELL teachers teach SEL and what skills of SEL they teach to ELL children in an elementary ELL classroom. Additionally, the study examines how ELL teachers implement Olweus-anti bullying and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs in an ELL classroom.

It is estimated that interviews will last 60 minutes. If you are willing, this interview will be digitally recorded (without your name or any identification) for the purpose of review and transcription.

IV. About this interview:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Location: \_\_\_\_\_

V. Interview Questions.

A. **First Interview (SEL in the ELL Classroom)**

The purpose of this first interview is to discuss ELL students' SEL needs and SEL in an ELL classroom.

- 1. How many years have you been a teacher and an ELL teacher? What other grades have you taught?
- 2. What prompted you to become an ELL teacher?
- 3. What does the term "social-emotional learning (SEL)" mean to you? Please explain.
- 4. Have you had any training in SEL in any of your courses or professional development? If yes, please describe the training you had.

5. In thinking about the SEL needs of the ELL children in your classroom, which needs do you think are the same needs as all children and which needs are specific to ELL students? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
6. Why do you think ELL children have unique SEL needs? Please describe or tell me some stories. (Prompts: new school environment, language & academics, culture, etc.)
7. How do you address these SEL needs in the ELL classroom? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
8. How do these SEL needs impact the learning of ELL students? Please describe how or tell me some stories.
9. Are there cultural considerations you make when addressing SEL needs? If yes, please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.
10. For example, if a child steals something, are there any cultural considerations you would make in how to address this? If yes, please describe or tell me some stories.
11. In your experience, what are the most important behavioral, emotional, and social issues your ELL students struggle with? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.

**B. Second Interview (School Environment and SEL Programs)**

The purpose of this second interview is to focus on the broader school, discuss the school environment, Olweus anti-bullying program and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program that the school is implementing.

1. In our last interview, we talked about SEL in the ELL classroom. In this second interview, let's focus on the broader school. How do you see the SEL needs of ELL students being met in the mainstream classroom and the wider school community? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.
2. What impact do you see the Olweus program having on ELL students? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.
3. Are there aspects of the Olweus program that could be improved or modified for ELL students? If yes, please give me some examples and describe.

4. What impact do you see The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program having on ELL students? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.
5. Are there aspects of The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program that could be improved or modified for ELL students? If yes, please give me some examples and describe.
6. In terms of SEL, what advice would you give mainstream classroom teachers who are working with ELL students? Please describe.
7. What role do paraprofessionals play in the social-emotional learning of ELLs at New Bridge Elementary? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.
8. What else could the school do to better meet the SEL needs of ELL students? Please describe.

**C. Third Interview (Concluding Thoughts and Follow-Up Questions)**

The purpose of this third interview is to conclude thoughts and for follow-up questions.

1. We have been talking about SEL and ELL students for several months now. Has your thinking or teaching about SEL changed as a result of participating in this research project? If yes, please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.
2. Had the researcher's presence impacted or influenced on your thinking or teaching SEL?
3. If you could develop a SEL program specifically for ELL students, what would it look like? What would be the focus? Please explain and give me some examples.
4. What strategies have you found most successful in helping ELL students with social-emotional learning needs? Please give me some examples and describe or tell me some stories.

**VI. Close the interview.**

- Thank participant
- Assure him/her confidentiality
- Remind about member checking
- Ask if he/she has any questions

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Protocol for the Principal**

Interview Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

- I. Digital recorder tested and spare batteries available.
- II. Verify consent form was signed and copy given to participant.
- III. Review purpose of the interview:

The purpose of this interview is to explore how the school is working to meet the SEL needs of its students and what impact Olweus anti-bullying and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs have on ELL students.

It is estimated that interviews will last 60 minutes. If you are willing, this interview will be digitally recorded (without your name or any identification) for the purpose of review and transcription.

- IV. About this interview:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

- V. Interview Questions.

- 1. How many years have you been a principal at New Bridge? Did you work with ELL students as a teacher or principal before being at New Bridge?
- 2. What does the term “social-emotional learning (SEL)” mean to you? Please explain.
- 3. From a principal’s perspective, why do you think there is so much emphasis on SEL currently in the schools? Do you think students have more SEL needs now than in the past? If yes, please explain why?
- 4. How is New Bridge working to meet the social-emotional needs of its students?
- 5. Based on your experience as principal at New Bridge, in what ways are the social-emotional needs of ELL students the same or different from the mainstream elementary students? Please give me some examples based on your experience at New Bridge.

6. As the principal, what do you see as the most important behavioral, emotional, and social issues the ELL students struggle with? Please give some examples.
7. What, if anything, is the school doing specifically to meet the SEL needs of its ELL population? If any, please give me some examples and explain.
8. What impact do you see Olweus anti-bullying program having on ELL students? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
9. What impact do you see the The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program having on ELL students? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
10. (If principal has worked with ELL students before). Are the SEL needs of the ELL students at New Bridge similar to what you have experienced in other schools? If yes, please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
11. Are there cultural considerations the school needs to make when addressing SEL needs of the ELL children? If yes, please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
12. If there were no resource constraints, how else do you envision New Bridge being able to address the SEL needs of ELL students? Please explain.
13. Is there anything else about the SEL needs of ELL students that we haven't yet discussed?

VI. Close the interview.

- Thank participant
- Assure him/her confidentiality
- Remind about member checking
- Ask if he/she has any questions

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Protocol for the School Counselor**

Interview Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

- I. Digital recorder tested and spare batteries available.
- II. Verify consent form was signed and copy given to participant.

III. Review purpose of the interview:

The purpose of this interview is to explore how a school counselor is working to meet the SEL needs of students and what impact Olweus anti-bullying and The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> programs have on ELL students.

It is estimated that interviews will last 60 minutes. If you are willing, this interview will be digitally recorded (without your name or any identification) for the purpose of review and transcription.

IV. About this interview:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

V. Interview Questions.

- 1. How many years have you been a school counselor? What experience did you have with ELL students before becoming a counselor at New Bridge?
- 2. What does the term “social-emotional learning (SEL)” mean to you? Please explain.
- 3. In your experience as a school counselor, what are the most common social-emotional learning needs of elementary children? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
- 4. How does New Bridge work to meet the SEL needs of its students?
- 5. In your experience with ELL students at New Bridge, how are their social emotional learning needs the same or different from the mainstream students? Please describe. (Prompts: social, behavioral, emotional).



6. (If different in the question #5 above). Why do you think ELL children have unique SEL needs? Please explain. (Prompts: new school environment, language & academics, culture, etc.).
7. Based on your experience with the population of ELL students at New Bridge, what cultural considerations, if any, should teachers make when addressing SEL with their ELL students? Please explain.
8. What impact do you see Olweus anti-bullying program having on ELL students? Are there ways it could be improved or modified for ELL students? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
9. What impact do you see The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> program having on ELL students? Are there ways it could be improved or modified for ELL students? Please give me some examples or tell me some stories.
10. What else could the school or teachers do to better meet the SEL needs of ELL students? Please explain.
11. What additional information do you have to share that we have not already discussed?

VI. Close the interview.

- Thank participant
- Assure him/her confidentiality
- Remind about member checking
- Ask if he/she has any questions

**Appendix D  
Consent Form**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**TITLE:** Social and Emotional Learning in the ELL Classroom: A Case Study

**PROJECT DIRECTOR:** Satoko Kao

**PHONE #** 701-777-3149 (UND)

**DEPARTMENT:** Teaching and Learning

**STATEMENT OF RESEARCH**

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

You are invited to be in a research study about the ELL teachers' role in social and emotional learning of ELL children, because you are an ELL teacher and teaching ELL students, or a principal who oversees ELL Education, or a school counselor who assists ELL children with their social and emotional needs at your elementary school, which is one of the schools that the school district has established ELL programs.

With the new Every Student Succeeds Act, requiring schools to comprehensively support all students' learning, including low-income, at-risk, and ELL students, educators are now identifying social and emotional learning as a critical piece in student achievement. Social and emotional skills are critical to promoting academic achievement and preventing risky behaviors. Implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs has grown over the past decade. Several SEL programs have shown to be effective with low-income, at-risk, and ethnic minority students.

However, SEL programs are designed for general education; there are no programs specific to ELLs. Currently, 10% of the K-12 student populations are ELLs and have unique social and emotional needs. Many are struggling academically and linguistically, as well as socially and emotionally in a new environment with limited English. It is necessary to teach ELL children social and emotional skills to promote competencies necessary not only for academic, but for life skills, as well.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to investigate how ELL teachers teach SEL to the students in the ELL classroom, what competencies of social and emotional skills ELL teachers focus on, and how SEL programs and mainstream classroom teachers can use this information to improve SEL for ELL students.

### **HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?**

Four people will take part in this study at your elementary school.

### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in the study will vary. ELL teachers will participate in three individual interviews. The principal and the school counselor will participate in up to two individual interviews. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

ELL teachers will be observed how they teach SEL in the ELL classroom for 4 months (twice a week, 60 minutes each).

You will continue to teach ELL children in the ELL classroom, or oversee ELL Education, or assist ELL children with their social and emotional needs at your elementary school.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?**

You will be asked to participate in individual interviews to share your thoughts on ELL children's social and emotional needs and how you teach SEL at your elementary or in the ELL classroom. ELL teachers will participate in three individual interviews and the principal and the school counselor will participate in up to two individual interviews. The interviews will be audio recorded. You will be asked to review and edit the interview transcriptions.

The researcher will be observing the ELL classroom twice a week, 60 minutes each, for four months, focusing on how the ELL teachers teach social and emotional skills to the ELL children. The researcher will be taking notes during the observations. Additionally, the researcher will have frequent informal conversations with the ELL teachers after the class is over to receive their feedback on the day's observation.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?**

There will be no physical or financial risks for you; however, there may be minimal emotional risk in this study. You may feel uncomfortable talking about your experiences in teaching social and emotional skills to the ELL children or sharing your thoughts on their learning of social and emotional skills during the interview(s). However, such risks are not viewed as being in excess of "minimal risk." If, however, you become uncomfortable with interview questions, you may stop at anytime or choose not to answer

an interview question. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

You may benefit personally by reflecting on how you teach social and emotional skills to the ELL children at your elementary school or in the ELL classroom to meet their unique social and emotional needs. The results of the study will enable schools to consider how SEL programs and mainstream classroom teachers can use the information from the findings to improve SEL for the ELL students.

### **WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

### **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

### **WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?**

The University of North Dakota and the researcher are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The study may be reviewed by government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of pseudonym instead of names as identifies. Audio-recorded data and the transcriptions (with pseudonym) will be stored in a locked storage cabinet in an office at UND. The researcher, Satoko Kao, and Dr. Anne Walker have access to the research data. Consent forms will be stored separately from research data at a second office at UND.

Research data and consent forms will be shredded, deleted, or destroyed in three years of writing a report or article about this study. If there are any publications about this study, you or the school will not be identified.

## **IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?**

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation as any time without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

## **CONTACT AND QUESTIONS?**

The researcher conducting this study is Satoko Kao. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Satoko Kao at (701) 777-3149 (UND office) or Dr. Anne Walker at (701) 777-2862 (UND office).

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at **(701) 777- 4279** or **[UND.irb@research.UND.edu](mailto:UND.irb@research.UND.edu)**.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking “Information for Research Participants” on the web site:  
<http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm>

**I give consent to be audio recorded during the interview(s).**

**Please initial:**         **Yes**         **No**

**I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.**

**Please initial:**         **Yes**         **No**

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's (Participant's) Name:

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Signature of Subject (Participant)

---

Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

---

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

---

Date

## **Appendix E Codes in Categories**

### **Category: NB School Culture and Environment**

Definition: Describes New Bridge's school climate and culture to support SEL

Relevant Codes:

- Embrace diversity and ELLs
- Support SEL practices
- Safe and caring
- School as one team
- Relationship building
- Strong needs of SEL
- High poverty level

### **Category: Refugee ELL Students at NB**

Definition: Describes the refugee ELL students' unique situations and their SEL needs.

Relevant Codes:

- "SEL needs are far away from learning"
- Traumatic experiences
- Low-income and poverty
- Family separation
- Interrupted formal education

### **Category: Staff Training on SEL**

Definition: Describes professional development for all staff to learn about students' SEL needs.

Relevant Codes:

- Trauma-sensitive training
- Acculturation process
- Cultural and SEL needs
- Child protection issues
- Profiles of new American ELLs and their families

### **Category: Address SEL Needs School-Wide**

Definition: Describe how New Bridge addresses the students' SEL needs school-wide.

Relevant Codes:

- Monthly assemblies
- Educate ELL students by the whole school
- Mindfulness training
- Counseling

### **Category: Step-by-Step Explicitly**

Definition: Explicit, step-by-step instruction to teach SEL and include opportunities for practicing skills through connections during unit lessons.

Relevant Codes:

- Unit lessons
- Teach emotion vocabularies in unit lessons
- Teach good character in unit lessons
- Discussions in unit lessons
- Video/Books in unit lessons
- Pair-work, group work in unit lessons
- Play games to practice in unit lessons

### **Category: Morning Meetings**

Definition: Routines and structures to support students' SEL needs and promote positive relationships.

Relevant codes:

- Student-led
- "How are you feeling this morning?"
- "Why are you feeling that way?"
- Teach vocabularies for expressing emotions
- Talk about issues and problems
- Talk about solutions
- Talk about what you did
- Talk about school rules
- Talk about bad words
- Talk about priority in life
- Talk about Hygiene/Healthcare
- Reinforce six pillars of character
- Reinforce Olweus anti-bullying rules



### **Category: Teachable Moments**

Definition: Teach SEL at teachable moments. During the lessons, if issues or questions emerged, stop and talk about it immediately to support students' SEL needs.

Relevant codes:

- Teach respect at this moment
- Teach caring at this moment
- Teach setting the goals at this moment
- Teach school/classroom rules at this moment
- Teach hygiene/health at this moment
- Teach eating etiquette
- Stop and talk right away
  - Issues/questions came up and need the solutions
  - Feelings came up and need to release anxiety
  - “Nobody hits you here”

### **Category: “Talk about it to know”**

Definition: Whenever relevant throughout the day, let students talk about their cultures, languages, and stories to build their knowledge about their peers and build their own identity.

Relevant codes:

- “Knowledge is power”
- Knowing promotes whole child development
- Knowing peers' cultures, languages, life stories
- Knowing promotes empathy for peers
- Build identity and pride in own culture and language

### **Category: Keep Reminding**

Definition: Throughout the day, ELL teachers remind ELL students of rules and SEL skills.

Relevant codes:

- “What do you say?”
- Remind classroom behaviors
- “Walk in the hallway”

### **Category: "Don't jump on it right away"**

Definition: ELL teachers make cultural considerations for ELL students' behavioral issues.

Relevant codes:

- ELL's cultural perspectives
- Teach vocabularies for correct and incorrect behaviors
- Teach behavioral expectations in U.S. classrooms
- Review acculturation factors
- Consider school expectations
- Case-by-case

### **Category: Building Relationships with Families**

Definition: ELL teachers build relationships with families.

Relevant codes:

- Make a phone call to families
- Home visitations

### **Category: Bullying at NB School**

Definition: Bullying situations at NB School.

Relevant codes:

- Refugee ELL kids bully more
- Non-ELLs do not bully ELLs
- ELL boys pick on ELL girls
- Cultural differences in aggression control

### **Category: Olweus and Six Pillars in the ELL Classroom**

Definition: Reinforce Olweus anti-bullying rules during morning meetings and at teachable moments. Reteach the six characteristics in unit lessons and reinforce during morning meetings, as well as, at teachable moments.

Relevant codes:

- School assemblies
- Visual Olweus charts for ELL students
- Bullying is not tolerated
- "Power to tell an adult"
- "Tell an adult" is the best strategy for ELLs

- “You don’t hit a girl here”
- Reinforce Olweus as needed (morning meetings, teachable moments)
  - Name calling
  - Being left out
- Reteach The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> in unit lessons
- Reinforce The Six Pillars of Character<sup>®</sup> as needed (Morning meetings, teachable moments)
- ELL friendly vocabularies for character
- Use a vocabulary word of character

**Category: Identify/Express Emotions**

Definition: Identify and express one’s feelings and emotions

Relevant codes:

- “How are you feeling this morning?” (Morning meeting)
- “Why are you feeling that way?” (Morning meeting)
- Teach vocabularies to express emotions (Morning meeting)

**Category: Regulate Emotions**

Definition: Regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations, stress management, working to achieve goals.

Relevant codes:

- “It’s ok to get mad, but cannot get mean”
- How to deal with negative emotions
  - Calm down
  - Stop and take a breath
  - Reset
- Solutions to reduce stress
  - Crowded home
  - Babysitting for siblings
- Teach "Keep going"
- Set the goal and do the best

**Category: Relationship Skills**

Definition: Builds “healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9). Skills include listening and communicating, cooperating, and helping others.

Relevant codes:

- Helping others
  - Translating for newcomer peers

Helping newcomer peers with classroom routines

- Cooperating and working together
- Listen actively
- Be kind and caring to peers
- "Bad words"
- Interpersonal conflict, "PLEASE STOP DOING THAT"
- It is okay for girls to play with boys

**Category: Responsible Decision-Making**

Definition: Be able to “make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9) based on social norms, safety, and the well-being of self and others

Relevant codes:

- Respect and follow classroom/school rules
- “Walk in the hallway”
- Family chores
  - Cook for family
  - Clean the house

**Category: Empathy and Appreciating Diversity**

Definition: Be able to “take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse background and cultures” (CASEL, 2012, p. 9).

Relevant codes:

- Empathy
- Think about peers’ feelings
- Understand peers’ situations
- Appreciate similarities and differences
- Talk about cultures, languages, and life stories

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