Understanding the interpretation and implementation of social and emotional learning in physical education

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11   **in physical education**

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14

15   **Abstract**

16   Social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies such as self-management and relationship
17   skills are associated with positive outcomes for youth. Therefore, educational policies in
18   many countries emphasize the integration of these competencies throughout the curriculum
19   and specifically in physical education (PE). However, little research has examined the impact
20   of such policy in the context of practice. Drawing upon occupational socialization theory, this
21   study assessed how secondary teachers interpret and implement this aspect of the Scottish
22   national curriculum. Data sources included teacher interviews ($n = 14$), pupil focus groups ($n
23   = 32$), and systematic observations of 23 lessons. Quantitative data were analyzed using
24   descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed using constant comparison and
25   thematic analysis. The trustworthiness of findings was supported through triangulation, peer
26   debriefing, and member check. Findings indicate the curriculum is interpreted at several
27   levels driven largely by teachers' background experience and organizational influences.
28   Generally, SEL is viewed favorably, but ambiguity and lack of support are challenges to
29   implementation. Common practice involves creating a positive learning environment as well
30   as implicit and reactive teaching approaches. More robust implementation involves the
31   addition of explicit and empowering teaching approaches. Implications for practice, teacher
32   education, policy development, and research are discussed.

33   *Key words:* Occupational socialization theory; educational policy; curriculum change;
34   health and wellbeing curriculum

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Understanding the interpretation and implementation of social and emotional learning in physical education

There is increasing global consensus that physical education (PE) can promote wellbeing and teach personal and social skills (e.g., managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, resolving conflicts peacefully, solving problems, respecting oneself and others, caring for others) that generalize to other settings (UNESCO; 2015, 2017). Educational policies and curricula in numerous countries reflect this commitment through a range of values, attitudes, and behaviors that can be situated within the broad notion of social and emotional learning (SEL). In fact, the term SEL is now being applied (often retroactively) to pull together a range of skills, learning outcomes, and best-practices that have been developed in PE for decades (Dyson, Howley & Wright, 2020; Wright, Gordon & Gray, in press). For all the attention being paid to SEL in this field, there is still a great deal of work to be done relative to articulating what SEL is and understanding the ways it is interpreted and implemented in practice (Dyson, Howley & Wright, 2020).

Regarding what SEL is, several frameworks attempting to define and promote it have gained international prominence. While there is not universal consensus, there is considerable overlap between frameworks, especially regarding the type of skills and behaviors that characterize SEL. The framework promoted by the Collaborative on Academic, Social and Emotional (CASEL; 2020), for example, is organized around five broad competencies, i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Each of these competencies is associated with specific skills and behaviors. For example, assessing one's strengths and weaknesses and recognizing one's emotions are skills associated with the self-awareness competency. Goal-setting is a specific skill associated with the self-management competency. Being able to give and receive feedback in a constructive manner would map strongly to the relationship skills competency. The social awareness competency may be manifest in recognizing when others need support. Responsible decision-making is a competency that could involve resisting peer pressure or choosing to not to cheat in a game. Another well-established framework promoted by Jones and Bouffard (2012) organizes SEL into three domains. The cognitive regulation domain is comprised of skills such as attention control, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. The emotional processes domain includes specific skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, and perspective taking. Finally, the social and interpersonal skills domain involves skills such as conflict resolution, understanding social cues, and prosocial behavior.

Across frameworks, skills associated with SEL, including the examples above, are believed to promote healthy development, academic success, and the ability to thrive in society (Brackett, 2019; CASEL, 2019; Frey et al., 2019; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). These beliefs are supported by extensive quantitative research indicating that pupils with higher levels of SEL tend to perform better in school; are more resilient in the face of adversity; and experience better health and economic outcomes in the future (Durlack et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). For these reasons, many leading frameworks promote the idea that SEL should be implemented by teachers, aligned with school-wide initiatives, and supported by educational policy (Brackett, 2019; CASEL, 2019; Frey et al., 2019; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). However, innovation in education often meets explicit and implicit resistance when it requires changes in practice (Fullan, 2007; Maclean et al., 2015). Despite research and policy support, such has been the case with SEL (Elias, 2019; Emery, 2016; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). A lack of qualitative understanding related to the policy process as well as the interpretation and implementation of SEL by teachers has been identified as a major obstacle to promoting SEL

83 in general education (Corcoran et al., 2018; Hamre et al., 2013) and in PE (Dyson, Howley &
84 Wright, 2020).

85   Scotland, the setting for the current study, is one of many nations where these issues
86 are in play. Changes called for in the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish
87 Government, 2009) have implications for SEL in PE. To date, there is little research to help
88 us understand and support the translation of such policy into practice (Gray et al., 2015;
89 Hardley et al., 2020; Horrell et al., 2012). To shed light on the interpretation and
90 implementation of SEL in PE, we use qualitative and descriptive methods to examine the
91 perspectives and behaviors among teachers and pupils in Scottish secondary schools.
92 Occupational socialization theory (OST; Templin & Schempp, 1989), explained below,
93 presents a relevant theoretical framework for understanding potential resistance to change
94 when SEL policy intersects with PE .

Occupational Socialization Theory

96 Occupational socialization theory provides a dialectical perspective on the socialization
97 process that seeks to understand the recruitment, professional preparation, and ongoing
98 socialization of PE teachers in school environments (Richards et al., 2019). The theory is
99 dialectical because it acknowledges individuals' sense of agency and ability to resist the
100 influence of those individuals and institutions seeking to socialize them (i.e., organizational
101 socialization; Schempp & Graber, 1992). A hallmark of OST is the recognition that
102 acculturation (i.e., anticipatory socialization) experiences that occur prior to the initiation of
103 formal teacher education (i.e., professional socialization influence individuals' beliefs and
104 receptivity to subsequent socialization experiences (Curtner-Smith, 2017). Accordingly,
105 many preservice PE teachers hold subjective theories (Grotjahn, 1991), or personal
106 understandings of the discipline, that reflect sport-based PE delivered using teacher-centered
107 instructional approaches they experience during their own formative education (Richards et
108 al., 2013).

109   A recent emphasis within OST relates to understanding the ways in which physical
110 educators interpret, or read (Gore, 1990), pedagogical models and practices based on their
111 prior socialization experiences. This work has illustrated how teachers' pedagogies and
112 practices are influenced by their anticipatory socialization, professional socialization, and the
113 support in their current school (Richards & Gordon, 2017; Starck et al., 2018). Related to this
114 influence, Curtner-Smith and colleagues (2008) argued that teachers' current and prior
115 socialization experiences lead to different interpretations of pedagogical models that manifest
116 as full, watered down, or cafeteria style (i.e., using isolated and selected practices) versions.
117 Cafeteria-style implementation can result in toxic mutations whereby pedagogical models
118 retain their name, but lack critical defining elements (Gordon et al., 2016).

119   Richards and Gordon (2017) conducted research in New Zealand specifically related
120 to teachers' interpretation and implementation of the teaching personal and social
121 responsibility (TPSR) model (Hellison, 2011), which places primary emphasis on the
122 affective domain and the cultivation of SEL competencies. The teachers' use of the model
123 was influenced by their own values and prior socialization experiences as well as school-wide
124 SEL initiatives. However, the teachers' implementation was watered down when their prior
125 socialization experiences led them to emphasize high physical activity during class time.
126 Implementation fidelity was also hindered when empowerment-based teaching practices
127 required them to stray from the more teacher-centered, direct instructional practices. Given

128 the alignment between SEL and TPSR (Gordon et al., 2016), these findings likely shed light
129 on how socialization factors can influence teachers' interpretation and implementation of
130 SEL in PE.

131 While calls to promote SEL are common, this aspect of the curriculum continues to be
132 ill-defined (Jacobs & Wright, 2014). It has been noted that the ambiguous nature of affective
133 learning objectives (e.g., self-expression, enjoyment, personal and social responsibility) in the
134 U.S. national PE curriculum standards (Society of Health and Physical Educators [SHAPE]
135 America; 2014) has made it difficult to define pupil learning and teacher effectiveness
136 (Wright & Irwin, 2018). Given a history prioritizing physical and psychomotor outcomes in
137 PE and the ill-defined nature of SEL as content, we anticipate many researchers and
138 practitioners struggle to articulate relevant objectives and pedagogical practices (Maclean et
139 al., 2015). In fact, little research has directly examined the intersection of SEL with PE,
140 especially related to the interpretation and enactment of policy and curricular change (Dyson
141 et al., 2020).

Scottish Curriculum for Excellence

143 The current curriculum in Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), was introduced in
144 2010 (Scottish Government, 2009). Within this curriculum, PE forms part of a collective
145 alongside physical activity and sport in the curricular area of health and wellbeing. This
146 curricular area has a central role within CfE, largely due to government concerns about
147 increases in the rates of young people suffering from mental health issues such as depression
148 and anxiety (Scottish Government, 2018) and about increases in childhood obesity and
149 physical inactivity (Horrell et al., 2012). Thus, the health and wellbeing curriculum is the
150 responsibility of all Scottish PE teachers and aims to develop pupils' "knowledge and
151 understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social
152 and physical wellbeing now and in the future" (Scottish Government, 2009, p. 1).

153 The implementation of Scottish PE is guided by two key sets of policy statements, the
154 experiences and outcomes for health and wellbeing, and the experiences and outcomes for
155 PE. These documents include first-person statements that outline what young people should
156 experience and achieve as they progress through school (Gray et al., 2012). Regarding SEL,
157 the policy texts indicate that learning environments should support skills and attributes such
158 as self-awareness, relationships, confidence, mental wellbeing, cooperation, and the abilities
159 to assess and manage risk and challenge discrimination (Scottish Government, 2009). While
160 PE teachers must attend to these policy documents in their planning, teaching, and
161 assessment, they were initially given little guidance and professional development to achieve
162 this goal (Horrell & Gray, 2018). The Scottish Government's (2017) reaction to these
163 concerns was the development of Significant Aspects of Learning (SALS) and teaching
164 benchmarks (Scottish Government, 2017) to provide further guidance and specificity. The
165 SALS serve as broad organizing structures and include (a) physical competencies, (b)
166 cognitive skills, (c) physical fitness, and (d) personal qualities. The benchmarks are
167 statements that describe the standards pupils are expected to achieve as they progress through
168 school and are categorized by each of the SALS, including personal qualities SALS that
169 focus on developing skills such as confidence, self-esteem, determination, and resilience
170 (Scottish Government, 2017). The benchmarks are, therefore, intended to present a more
171 holistic perspective and encourage teachers to assess learners in a wide range of social,
172 emotional, cognitive, and physical skills.

173   While the benchmarks highlight pupil outcomes, little guidance is provided relative to
174 the pedagogical practices necessary to support these learning outcomes. Teachers are
175 encouraged to seek out and employ best practice from their field (e.g., models-based
176 practice), but no specific models or practices are mandated. Although studies have been
177 conducted to understand teacher (Gray et al., 2012; Maclean et al., 2015) and pupil (Gray et
178 al., 2018) perceptions of PE curriculum changes in Scotland, little is known about how
179 teachers plan and develop their pupils' social and emotional health in the PE context.
180 Education policy often becomes politicalized and is related to prevailing public opinion
181 (DeBray & McGuinn, 2009; Richards, 2015). As a result, the landscape surrounding these
182 policies is often fluid, crowded, and highly contested (Houlihan, 2002). Further challenges
183 are introduced given that policies are reinterpreted at the local level based on the current and
184 prior socialization experiences of individual teachers (Lawson, 2018). Accordingly, any
185 attempt to understand educational policy must account for teachers' interpretation, or reading
186 (Gore, 1990), of the policy as well as their efforts toward implementation fidelity (Curtner-
187 Smith et al., 2008). In the case of the CfE, from the positioning of PE within the curriculum
188 and its connection to health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes to specific skills
189 mentioned in the SALS and benchmarks, the expectation to address SEL is clearly present
190 but muddled. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand how secondary PE
191 teachers interpret and implement the SEL aspect of the Scottish curriculum in the context of
192 practice.

193 **Methods**

194 The current study employed mixed methods (Thomas et al., 2015). The qualitative aspect of
195 the study involved qualitative interviews and focus groups. The quantitative aspect involved
196 systematic observation. All data were collected concurrently during the same four-month
197 period. The study was approved by the ethics review boards of the first two authors'
198 universities and the local school authority where the research was conducted. Pseudonyms
199 are used for participant and school names.

200 *Setting and Participants*

201 This study was conducted in a large Scottish city. Snowball sampling (Patton, 2015)
202 beginning with existing contacts in the second author's professional network was used to
203 recruit 14 PE teachers (9 female, 5 male), including four who served as school level
204 curriculum leaders. In terms of teaching experience, most were early (2-5 years) or mid-
205 career (6-20 years) although one was in her first year (i.e., probation) and another had over 20
206 years of experience (i.e., late career). The teachers represented four high schools. Stewart and
207 Burns were relatively small schools with enrollments of 610 and 620, respectively. Bruce and
208 MacMillan were larger schools with enrollments of 1,059 and 1,260, respectively. See Table
209 1 for participant demographic information. Most of the PE classes taught by these teachers
210 met for approximately 50 minutes, two or three times per week, with an average of 25 pupils.

211   In addition to the teachers, pupils from each school served as contributing informants
212 whose perspectives were used to triangulate with those of the teachers. A focus group was
213 conducted with eight pupils from each school ($n = 32$; 16 female, 16 male). Pupils, ranging in
214 age from 11 to 15 years old, were purposefully selected (Patton, 2015) in conversation with
215 their teachers. Eligibility required pupils to (a) be in a PE class taught by a participating
216 teacher, (b) provide parental consent, and (c) give written assent to participate. Pupils were

217 selected to maximize diversity in terms of gender, involvement in athletics, engagement in
218 PE, socio-economic background, and cultural heritage.

219 ***Data Sources***

220 All 14 teachers participated in one semi-structured, individual interview (Patton, 2015) that
221 was audio-recorded and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted by the
222 first author at a time and place chosen by the interviewee, typically on school property (e.g.,
223 conference room) and during the school day (e.g., planning period). The interview protocol
224 was developed by the first two authors. The interview questions were developed in reference
225 to occupational socialization theory (Templin & Schempp, 1989) with a particular emphasis
226 on how prior and current socialization experiences influence the interpretation and
227 implementation of pedagogies and teaching practices (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Richards &
228 Gordon, 2017; Starck et al., 2018). These questions were grouped into sections related to (a)
229 personal background, (b) school context, (c) teaching philosophy/style, (d) teaching to the
230 affective domain, and (e) interpretation and implementation of SEL. Sample questions
231 included: (a) "how have you learned about ways to address SEL in your teaching?" And (b)
232 "can you give me an example of a recent lesson that you believe promoted an SEL skill?"

233   Pupil focus groups, which lasted approximately 50 minutes, were conducted by the
234 first author on school grounds during the day in a conference room or empty classroom. The
235 PE teachers helped organize the focus groups and sometimes chaperoned pupils to and from
236 but were not present during the conversations. The sections of the protocol included (a)
237 personal information, (b) school context, (c) PE, (d) SEL, and (e) SEL in PE. Sample
238 questions included (a) "can you describe a typical PE lesson for me?" and (b) "can you give
239 me an example of an activity or lesson from you PE class that promoted social and emotional
240 learning?" Through explanations in the consent documents and the verbal consent process,
241 the researcher assured that pupils understood the term "social and emotional learning/SEL"
242 as well as representative behaviors, attitudes, and skills.

243   Systematic observations were conducted using the Tool for Assessing Responsibility-
244 based Education (TARE) 2.0 (Escarti et al., 2015), which is a time-sampling instrument. The
245 original TARE (Wright & Craig, 2011) proposed nine teaching strategies consistent with the
246 TPSR model (Hellison, 2011) but also aligning strongly with SEL in a broader sense (Wright
247 & Irwin, 2018). These strategies include (a) modeling respect, (b) setting clear expectations,
248 (c) providing opportunities for success, (d) fostering social interactions, (e) assigning tasks,
249 (f) providing leadership opportunities, (g) giving pupils choices and voice in the program, (h)
250 letting pupils have an active role in assessment, and (i) promoting the transfer of life skills
251 beyond PE. The second version of the instrument (Escarti et al., 2015) added nine pupil
252 behaviors, including (a) participation, (b) effort, (c) showing respect, (d) cooperating with
253 peers, (e) encouraging others, (f) helping others, (g) leading, (h) expressing voice, and (i)
254 asking for help. All teacher and pupil behaviors are rated on a five-point, Likert-type scale
255 from 0 (not observed) to 4 (extensive) in three-minute intervals throughout the observed
256 lesson. Eleven teachers across the four schools were observed teaching at least two lessons
257 each for a total of 23 lessons yielding 335 observed intervals (i.e., 1,005 minutes of instruction).
258 Classes sampled for observation varied in terms of grade level (S1 through S5), gender make-
259 up (co-educational vs. single sex), setting (indoor gymnasia, outdoor fields, dance studios,
260 weight rooms), and physical activity (e.g., physical fitness, team sports, individual sports,
261 dance, gymnastics). Content validity and inter-rater reliability above 80% agreement has been

262 demonstrated with the TARE in PE settings through previous research (Escarti et al., 2015;
263 Wright & Craig, 2011).

264   After teachers had been interviewed and observed, they were invited to participate in
265 a one-hour group interview (Patton, 2015). This group interview had the dual purpose of
266 generating additional data elicited in a more interactive and conversational manner as well as
267 providing an opportunity for member checking to bolster trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba,
268 1985). Nine teachers accepted and attended an evening meeting hosted at Burns High School.
269 In this meeting, the first two authors shared an overview of the data collected and initial
270 interpretations. Each participant had been given a transcript of their interview prior to the
271 meeting and school level TARE results were provided at the meeting. Participants were
272 invited to comment on the accuracy of transcriptions, data summaries, and interpretations.
273 They also had the opportunity to ask questions, add details, and discuss the research process.

274 *Data Analysis*

275 Descriptive statistics were used to analyze systematic observation data. Using the five-point,
276 Likert-type scale, means and standard deviations were calculated at the interval level for each
277 of the nine teaching strategies and nine pupil behaviors. Sums of all teacher strategy ratings
278 and pupil behavior ratings for a given interval were calculated at the school level and in the
279 aggregate. The reason for disaggregating data at the school level was to assess the
280 consistency of patterns across contexts.

281   Approximately 19 hours and 380 pages of transcribed interview and focus group data
282 were analyzed using a combination of inductive and deductive analysis (Patton, 2015).
283 Deductive analysis involved assigning *a priori* codes and organizing data based on topics of
284 interest (i.e., SEL) and the guiding theoretical framework (i.e., OST). Inductive analysis
285 involved open and axial coding to identify units of meaning emerging from the data that
286 could extend or challenge understandings of both SEL and OST. Through constant
287 comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) a coding system was developed, refined, and applied
288 until several distinct and overlapping themes were defined that characterized the data set.

289   The trustworthiness of the findings is supported by several procedures recommended
290 for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and evaluation (Patton, 2015). The study
291 involved triangulation of data sources, methodologies, and stakeholder perspectives in order
292 to better understand teachers' interpretation and implementation of SEL. We employed peer
293 debriefing throughout the research. Specifically, the first two authors developed the coding
294 system and thematic analysis through an iterative process. At key points in the process,
295 however, the third author engaged in conversations about the data analysis and provided
296 feedback on the thematic structure. The group interview with teachers described above
297 provided an opportunity for member checking. An audit trail was maintained through the
298 documentation of all original transcripts, coding procedures, operational definitions, and
299 theme construction. Final themes were developed based on complete research team
300 consensus.

301 **Results**

302 **Curricular Interpretation**

303 Interpretation is the process by which individuals read, process, and come to understand the
304 formal, written curriculum (Schubert, 1986). The two subthemes that comprise this theme
305 characterize (a) the participants' interpretation of the curriculum as a moving target, and (b)
306 their mixed opinions about SEL. The primary data source supporting these subthemes is
307 teacher interviews as they have the most direct knowledge of curriculum, however, pupil
308 perspectives are integrated in the second subtheme. Because this theme is focused on
309 interpretation, observational data are not included here but presented in a subsequent theme
310 focused on the actual implementation of the curriculum.

Curriculum is a moving target

311

312 Participants described curriculum change as a fluid, complex process with perceived
313 ambiguity and limited support. Regarding the dynamic nature of the curriculum, Evelyn
314 lamented, "The framework's constantly changing; we'll start teaching it one way and then a
315 term later we're sent something new". Although Scottish schools are organized into local
316 authorities that facilitate professional development, teachers, including curriculum leaders
317 like Gordon felt it was like "the blind leading the blind" as they were left on their own to
318 interpret curriculum. Combining this lack of direction with frequent changes left participants
319 frustrated. Martin, another curriculum leader, described the curriculum interpretation process
320 as, "a lot a' time consuming work and nobody knew whether they were right or wrong".

321 Despite perceived challenges, participants worked together. Participants described a
322 group effort at the school level where subject matter teams come together with a curriculum
323 leader to interpret the curriculum and establish their school-level scope and sequence.

324 It's very much a discussion at departmental meetings, and ideas about how many
325 activities we want in a year group, how long we want a year group to be on a
326 particular activity, what activities we'd like to offer, and which we think will engage a
327 percentage of pupils. (Roger)

328 Even the school-level scope and sequence were viewed as guidelines. Neville
329 observed, "It'll always be a sorta working document…we always make wee, little tweaks
330 here and there". Participants were committed to being in compliance with the curriculum.
331 However, as explained by Nancy, they were not willing to reinvent their approach with every
332 change, "It comes from the CfE, but we kinda do our own thing with them, we create our
333 own curriculum almost, but incorporate all that stuff into it". Most participants indicated this
334 layer of interpretation is based on the teachers' subjective theories about PE and dominant
335 teaching practices. Ultimately, according to Roger, "It's completely up to the individual
336 teacher".

Mixed Opinions on SEL

337

338 Participants supported the holistic approach to PE within the CfE. Connecting to broader
339 aspects of development resonated with teachers who agreed PE was previously too narrow in
340 its focus. Several embraced "opportunities to develop the whole person as opposed to just the
341 physical" (Martin). Regarding examples of SEL skills, "like teaching pupils how to talk to
342 each other, to communicate, how to manage their emotions", Helen said "that is part of our
343 lessons now". Many, including Sean and Nancy, attributed this new guiding philosophy and
344 corresponding changes in practice to the CfE.

345 Even though teachers' initial reactions to the notion of SEL were positive, further
346 discussion often revealed challenges to implementation. Based on their prior socialization
347 experiences, many teachers were accustomed to direct instruction, a content-centered view of

348 the curriculum, and a primary focus on psychomotor learning. As Roger explained it, "I did
349 view PE as physical and felt like some of the social skills I was developing would transfer
350 automatically into their life. I never thought it as something that I'd teach explicitly". This
351 common mindset left many teachers feeling pressure and viewing SEL as "extra things"
352 (Jennifer) they had to balance with other expectations.

353   I need to be teaching them about social and emotional behavior. I need to be teaching
354   them how to do a badminton overhead clear, I need to be teaching them teamwork,
355   leadership. And actually what you end up doing is a scatter gun approach that actually
356   doesn't tick any of the boxes properly. (Tori)

357   Many teachers were apprehensive about implementing SEL because of previous
358 unsuccessful experiences with pupil-centered teaching. In some cases, these attempts lacked
359 intention. Hellen, describing one class that had become problematic, explained that "pupils
360 didn't take it seriously" because they were initially given too much freedom without clear
361 structure or expectations. Regarding trepidation about pupils who were not ready for
362 leadership roles, Tori shared, "I don't know that they're mature enough to have that
363 conversation…I feel like they'd be right up in my face and I don't want that confrontation".
364 Even pupils expressed doubts about teachers sharing control. A male pupil from MacMillan
365 stated, "most people think because they're your fellow classmate you don't really have to
366 respect them as you would a teacher".

367   As participants interpret SEL and its role in the curriculum, they draw primarily on
368 their practical experience in school environments. Most reported learning little about pupils'
369 social and emotional needs during their initial teacher education except, in some cases, during
370 their clinical placements. After joining the profession, many reported learning through
371 experience and in some cases through professional development or school-wide initiatives
372 related to SEL (e.g., cooperative learning or restorative practice). However, during individual
373 interviews and the group interview, teachers consistently reported developing their approach
374 to SEL on the job and with their peers, i.e., "learning from other teachers" (Hellen).

375 **Implementation**

376 This theme is focused on the participants' experience of implementation (i.e., delivery of the
377 interpreted curriculum in practice). Two subthemes that characterize their implementation are
378 (a) common practice, and (b) promising practice. Supporting evidence for both comes from
379 teacher interviews, pupil focus groups, and direct observation. As illustrated in Table 2, there
380 was slight variation in TARE 2.0 observations across schools, but generally patterns were
381 consistent. Therefore, when we refer to these quantitative data, we highlight the aggregate
382 findings.

383 *Common practice*

384 Participants emphasized the importance of a positive learning environment based on
385 enjoyment, social interaction, and participation. Teachers and pupils believed such a climate
386 fosters involvement in physical activity and sport. For example, Martin said, "Our big push is
387 participation, enjoyment and lifelong physical activity", and a male pupil from Burns
388 concurred that, "the main aim for the PE program is to provide a fun environment that
389 encourages participation in sport". A female pupil from MacMillan explained that their
390 teachers "make it fun" by doing things like playing music and allowing pupils to work
391 together in teams and socialize. In such an environment, pupils reported feeling comfortable
392 and having good rapport with each other. Even though his peers vary in terms of how
393 competitive they are, a male pupil from Bruce shared, "When you get them all together it

394 really does create a nice vibe actually". A female counterpart of his added, "Most of the time
395 it's quite positive. If you win, they clap or something like that". A positive learning
396 environment was frequently described by teachers as a necessary ingredient and precursor to
397 promoting SEL, e.g., "building relationships is really important with pupils" (Neville). Beth
398 made the connection even more concrete by saying, "I think if they're enjoying it and they
399 have a good relationship with the teacher they're gonna be a lot more comfortable talking
400 about emotions".

401   Many participants provided examples of an implicit approach to promoting SEL. One
402 teacher felt SEL "is taught primarily through the teacher modelling the behavior, rather than
403 it being taught explicitly" (Roger). This aligns with Evelyn's explanation that, "A lot of it
404 comes down to who I am as a person…what my beliefs are, basic fundamentals of what it is
405 to be respectful, be polite, looking out for others". Beth was one of several who indicated
406 SEL was naturally embedded in PE, i.e., "It's something that would come from the overall
407 lesson and atmosphere and content". Many pupils also recognized this implicit approach as a
408 way they learn about SEL. A female pupil from Stewart described the general but consistent
409 use of SEL related messages, "Like every time you play a team sport, you're reminded that
410 you have to play fairly and things." A male pupil from Bruce was one of many who also
411 believed in the organic nature of SEL in PE, stating simply, "In any team sport, you get to
412 know your team better, and then you play better".

413   Another way teachers promote SEL is responding to incidents or situations. Most
414 teachers recognized the importance of SEL, but did not necessarily view it as content they
415 proactively teach. Jennifer reflected, "social and emotional are things that can only be
416 addressed through a reactive situation, because emotions aren't something you can see unless
417 they're intense." This perspective led teachers to conflate SEL with behavior management.
418 Many examples of teaching SEL were based in reacting to behavior problems, e.g., when
419 pupils act out because they are "frustrated with their own performance, with their peers, with
420 their teacher" (Evelyn). This was also evident in pupil examples. A female pupil from
421 Stewart explained that some pupils "lose their temper" or "laugh at you because they won"
422 and "sometimes it does get quite serious". However, from her perspective, "Teachers are
423 good at dealing with that sort of stuff. They calm everybody down". However, the reactive
424 approach was not restricted to managing negative behaviors. There were examples of
425 teachers reacting to situations positively by praising and motivating pupils. Hellen described
426 an adapted PE class that "took six weeks of throwing and catching to get good at it". She
427 recounted coaching them on being "resilient" with encouragement like, "It's okay if the ball
428 drops on the floor, it doesn't matter. Just pick it up, try again".

429   The qualitative findings presented above indicate common practice was described as a
430 general but strong commitment to creating a positive learning environment and promoting
431 SEL through implicit and reactive approaches. These qualitative accounts were consistent
432 with direct observation (see Table 2). Of the nine teaching strategies assessed, those with the
433 highest ratings included *Modeling Respect* ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .68$), *Setting Expectations* ($M =$
434 3.05, $SD = .87$), and *Opportunities for Success* ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.07$). These ratings were
435 often associated with teacher actions such as using pupil names, making eye contact, actively
436 listening, providing clear explanations, managing space and activities effectively, giving
437 behavioral feedback, and differentiating instruction. Two strategies that were implemented
438 with slightly less regularity were *Fostering Social Interactions* ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.17$) and
439 *Giving Choices and Voices* ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 1.06$). These ratings were often associated with
440 teachers having pupils work together in teams or pairs, creating space for pupils to interact
441 with one another, and giving pupils activity choices. Accordingly, the pupil behaviors

442 observed with the greatest strength also reflect a structured and safe learning climate
443 characterized by *Participation* (M = 3.11, SD = .86), *Effort* (M = 2.44, SD = .86), and
444 *Showing Respect* (M = 3.10, SD = .67). Pupils were observed *Cooperating with Peers* (M =
445 1.92, SD = 1.17) and *Expressing Voice* (M = 1.25, SD = .98) less often.

446 **Promising practice**

447 Many participants could also provide examples of an explicit approach to promoting SEL.
448 This involves active planning and delivery of lessons with clearly stated SEL objectives. In
449 some cases, examples involved explicit discussion of specific SEL skills. Several teachers
450 reported integrating SEL learning objectives with other best practices from PE (e.g., models-
451 based practice) or the broader field of education (e.g., restorative practice). Jennifer, who
452 reported integrating SEL objectives with her delivery of the sport education model in a
453 basketball unit, explained, "Their roles are changing every week so they all have different
454 roles and responsibility."

455 Many examples involved modifying a drill or presenting scenarios to highlight a
456 specific SEL skill, e.g., "Within that lesson you might concentrate on communication and set
457 up a few games where nobody's allowed to talk…you can only use gestures to try and get
458 them thinking about how important communication is" (Neville). When teachers took this
459 approach, they appeared more likely to address SEL skills explicitly. Beth described a
460 badminton activity in which doubles partners had to take turns sharing a racquet to "get them
461 to understand the concept of pressure". Afterward, she debriefed with the pupils about their
462 emotional response to increased pressure. Because this explicit approach tends to focus on
463 discrete skills, it was a source of several examples from pupils. A male pupil from Bruce
464 perceived it this way, "Before we start, they'll talk about something like what we're
465 doing…teamwork and stuff…then at the end, we'll have like a big talk about communication
466 and that, and make sure that we've communicated, like that we're working together".

467 Although less common, participants shared examples of teachers sharing power and
468 control with pupils. This empowering approach often involved promoting autonomy,
469 prosocial behaviors, and higher order thinking. An example of a teacher allowing pupils to
470 set their own goals came from a female describing an aquatics unit at MacMillan in which,
471 "You have to try and do as many widths as you could, or try and move closer to the deeper
472 end, or improve on a stroke". A female pupil and her peers at Steward were empowered and
473 challenged in a dance unit, "We have to try and choreograph a dance and get it finished in
474 two lessons". Self- and peer-assessments were other ways of sharing power with pupils. For
475 example, Hellen encouraged pupils to monitor their progress and think critically about their
476 performance. She explained that at her school, "We've got a little booklet that each pupil gets
477 and it's got all the different activities and they self-assess in it…the sort of outcomes are
478 related to the SALS".

479 Several teachers discussed the relevance and possible transfer of SEL skills to other
480 settings. Neville was one of several who described using analogies to the workplace and
481 careers to help pupils understand the relevance of specific SEL skills. Evelyn described doing
482 this as part of a school-wide improvement initiative at Bruce:

483 Teachers were doing loads of teaching these [SEL] skills but the pupils didn't know,
484 they couldn't vocalize it, because they didn't really know they were learning that…So
485 the school have been making a really big effort to actually verbalize it to the pupils and
486 get them to be able to speak to you about it.

487   Many pupils were able to verbalize such connections. One female pupil at Stewart explained
488   that in PE, "A lot of the team sports helps you really get to know people and, like, what they
489   can do" and connected this skill to other classes "like, geography and history" in which "they
490   do a lot of group work". A male peer in the same focus group provided an example of how
491   overcoming fear when competing in sport might generalize, stating, "I think it's quite good to
492   do things like that so that you're more confident so that you won't withdraw from things just
493   because you're scared".

494   The qualitative data above indicate promising practice involves explicit and
495   empowering approaches to teaching SEL. These subthemes are also supported by
496   observational data summarized in Table 2. Teachers were rarely observed *Assigning Tasks*
497   ($M = .54$, $SD = .84$) to facilitate management and organization (e.g., time keeper, setting up
498   equipment) and giving pupils a *Role in Assessment* ($M = .57$, $SD = .88$) of their own
499   performance or that of their peers. The two strategies observed the least across all settings
500   were giving pupils *Leadership* ($M = .24$, $SD = .51$) roles (i.e., supporting others' learning) or
501   *Promoting Transfer* ($M = .31$, $SD = .74$) of SEL skills outside of PE. Perhaps because of the
502   limited use of explicit and empowering teaching strategies that promote prosocial behavior
503   (e.g., leadership, peer-assessment, urging pupils to encourage their peers), pupils were
504   infrequently observed *Encouraging* ($M = .61$, $SD = .75$) and *Helping Others* ($M = .44$, $SD =
505   .62$). Pupils were least likely to be observed *Leading* ($M = .30$, $SD = .53$) and *Asking for Help*
506   ($M = .27$, $SD = .47$). However, it should be noted that these prosocial behaviors were
507   occasionally observed in the interactions among the pupils even in the absence of prompting
508   by the teacher. Such examples connect to findings about the positive learning environment
509   described above.

Discussion

511   The purpose of this study was to understand how secondary PE teachers interpret and
512   implement the SEL aspect of the Scottish curriculum. Findings confirm that interpretation of
513   the curriculum occurs at multiple levels. For example, local education authorities and school
514   curriculum teams digest changes handed down from the government, but individual teachers
515   make final interpretations that guide their implementation. Consistent with previous research,
516   PE teachers' interpretation, or reading (Gore, 1990), and implementation of the curriculum
517   was shaped primarily by prior socialization experiences that influenced their subjective
518   theories about the goals and purposes of PE (Richards et al., 2019). When these prior
519   experiences aligned with SEL (e.g., creating a positive learning environment),
520   implementation was facilitated. When the experiences contrasted with SEL, such as
521   emphasizing physical activity and sport content over holistic education, implementation was
522   inhibited (Richards & Gordon, 2017). Also consistent with previous studies, teachers
523   perceived a lack of clarity in the Scottish curriculum (Gray et al., 2012; Horrell & Gray,
524   2018; Maclean et al., 2015). This was in part because the implementation of the curriculum
525   occurred across multiple phases and reflected a dynamic and fluid public policy space
526   (Houlihan, 2002; Richards, 2015) that did not include appropriate provisions for teacher
527   reskilling and professional development.

528   While both teachers and pupils had a favorable view of the new and more holistic
529   aims of PE, specific engagement varied widely and included a spectrum of strategies that
530   ranged from implicit and reactive to explicit and empowering. The range of approaches
531   teachers used to promote SEL are not mutually exclusive. In fact, a comprehensive approach

532 to SEL implementation may involve all of them. For instance, creating a positive learning
533 environment builds a foundation for pupils to feel safe, included, and motivated (Gray et al.,
534 2018; Wright & Burton, 2008). While the implicit approach alone is insufficient, role
535 modelling and consistent messages about behavioral norms, values, and expectations are
536 important in developing SEL instruction and are an important element of the TARE 2.0
537 observation system (Wright & Craig, 2011). Similarly, the reactive approach by itself often
538 lacks intentionality, is conflated with behavior management, and only reaches pupils
539 presenting with issues (Lavay et al., 2015). However, as part of a comprehensive strategy, the
540 reactive approach has its place. Reframed as teachable moments and combined with a
541 broader, more holistic approach to SEL integration, the same situations provide teachers
542 opportunities to clarify expectations, encourage reflection, and reinforce positive examples of
543 SEL in action (Hellison, 2011). In this study, direct observation of teacher and pupil
544 behaviors triangulated with qualitative data to illustrate that that when teachers create a
545 positive learning environment and make some use of the implicit and reactive approaches, a
546 solid foundation can be laid for SEL implementation characterized by respect, participation,
547 engagement, and cooperation. This is consistent with previous studies using the TARE in PE
548 (Hemphill et al., 2015; Richards & Gordon, 2017; Wright & Craig, 2011; Wright & Irwin,
549 2018).

550 Teachers elevate their SEL implementation when they layer explicit and empowering
551 teaching approaches onto common practice (Jacobs & Wright, 2018). Teachers' use of the
552 explicit approach to SEL integration corresponds with more social interaction, management
553 tasks, and decision-making among pupils. As reported by Wright and Irwin (2018), the
554 explicit approach in this study was characterized by teachers treating SEL as content, setting
555 learning intentions, and planning lessons accordingly. Findings reported here indicate when
556 teachers flipped this switch, pupils demonstrated and understood discrete SEL skills such as
557 communication, teamwork, and goal setting. While participants were comfortable and
558 satisfied with the explicit approach, findings demonstrate setting higher expectations for SEL
559 development is feasible. When teachers did employ the explicit approach, they seemed to
560 gravitate toward familiar affective learning objectives gleaned from the CfE that were
561 concrete and easily featured in PE settings (e.g., communication and teamwork). However,
562 previous research (see Dyson et al., 2020; Pozo et al., 2018) has demonstrated adolescents in
563 secondary PE are capable of higher levels of SEL development including leadership, roles in
564 assessment, and reflection on the relevance and transferable nature of such skills. Participants
565 in this study saw value in empowering experiences, but implementation in this area was
566 sporadic. This trend is reflected in TARE data and mirrors other findings in the literature
567 (Hemphill et al., 2015; Richards & Gordon, 2017; Wright & Craig, 2011; Wright & Irwin,
568 2018).

569 This study illustrates the value of using qualitative and descriptive methods to
570 understand the translation of SEL from policy to practice in contextualized ways (Corcoran et
571 al., 2018; Dyson et al., 2020; Emery, 2016; Hamre et al., 2013). Above, we highlighted
572 several insights into the teachers' interpretation and implementation. However, pupil voice is
573 also sorely lacking in PE research and curriculum development. By integrating pupil
574 perspectives and behaviors into this study, we can see their potential to be active participants
575 in as well as consumers of SEL in PE. If teachers were to include pupil perspectives as they
576 work to understand and integrate SEL, they may improve their practice and could implement
577 the empowering approach in the process. Consistent with previous studies using the OST
578 framework in PE, current findings suggest that the ill-defined nature of SEL, competing

579   pressures, and traditional views on teacher-pupil roles are barriers to teachers fully realizing
580   the empowering approach.

581   Our findings highlight opportunities for teacher preparation and continuing
582   professional development. The participants' professional socialization often did not focus on
583   SEL, but when it did, these experiences seemed to increase receptivity (Curtner-Smith et al.,
584   2008; Richards & Gordon, 2017). We recommend teacher preparation programs become
585   more explicit in articulating what SEL is, why it is important, how it is addressed in the
586   curriculum, and what it looks like in practice (Jacobs & Wright, 2014). Regarding continuing
587   professional development for in-service teachers, action research and communities of practice
588   could foster greater ownership as well as more consistent interpretation and implementation
589   among practitioners. Such approaches have already proven effective for bringing about
590   teacher change in countries including Scotland (Gray et al., 2019), New Zealand (Richards &
591   Gordon, 2017), Spain (Escarti et al., 2018), and the U.S. (Hemphill et al., 2015). Many of
592   these initiatives have used the TARE instruments (Escarti et al., 2015; Wright & Craig, 2011)
593   to introduce specific teaching strategies and to provide feedback for improvement. As
594   suggested in previous studies (Gordon et al., 2016; Melo et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020), our
595   findings strongly support the alignment between the TARE and a broad conceptualization of
596   SEL. Therefore, the TARE may be an effective tool to support and assess SEL
597   implementation as called for by new or existing policy.

598   This research also has implications for policymakers. Previous research highlights the
599   challenges that teachers face when interpreting new curricula, especially when they have had
600   limited involvement in the curriculum development process (Gray et al., 2012). Research also
601   indicates that teachers find curriculum interpretation and enactment challenging because they
602   are not afforded the space, time, support or resources to critically engage with concepts
603   related to curriculum design and pedagogic innovation (Horrell & Gray, 2018), particularly
604   given the pace at which policy shifts are introduced (Houlihan, 2002; Richards, 2015). Our
605   results offer some evidence to support these claims and, consequently, provide a basis from
606   which future curriculum developments might be considered. As part of the process, policy
607   makers should consider the complex challenges that new curricula present for teachers,
608   conduct a needs assessment to support teachers' on-going professional learning, consider the
609   allocation of time for reflection, and foster a safe space for pedagogical innovation.
610   Supporting this view, Priestley (2010) suggests that a clearly articulated process for
611   engagement with externally initiated policy is necessary for better engagement and
612   understanding. Embedding these ideas in future curriculum development processes may help
613   teachers engage with new curricula in meaningful and transformative ways.

614   **Conclusion**

615   In conclusion, our research contributes to the literature in several ways, but primarily
616   by highlighting how teachers have responded to recent curricular changes within PE in the
617   Scottish context. It focuses on the ways in which Scottish teachers have grappled with the
618   challenges of curriculum change, a reconceptualization of PE, and greater responsibility for
619   the development of SEL. Given the international movement (Dyson et al., 2020; 2015, 2017;
620   Wright et al., in press) toward integrating SEL in the PE curriculum, future studies should
621   examine the development, interpretation, and implementation of such curricular changes in
622   other countries as well. Researchers should continue identifying common and promising
623   practices and examine linkages between their implementation and pupils' SEL learning
624   outcomes. Finally, it was beyond the scope of this study to examine learning transfer in

625 depth, but future studies should make use of existing frameworks (e.g., Jacobs & Wright,
626 2018) and instruments (Wright et al., 2019) to better understand the transfer process as an
627 important aim of teaching SEL in PE.

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