

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WHO EMBEDDED
BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT IN ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION: A HERMENEUTIC
PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Christina Anderson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral learning support into their academic curriculum and describe the meaning of the perceived influence on academic achievement and social development for elementary students in two elementary schools. What are the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral support as a form of social-emotional learning (SEL) into their academic curriculum? Social constructivism was the interpretive framework used to guide this study, supported by Gagne's and Vygotsky's learning theories. Ten elementary school teacher participants in a metropolitan Atlanta area school district were selected using purposive maximal variation sampling based on the established implementation of evidence-based school culture programs. Imaginative variation was used to describe participants' lived experiences. Data analysis included horizontalization and triangulation of data, note taking, code identification, reduction of codes to themes for theme identification, frequency counts, creation of point of view, memoing, and data clusters. The triangulation of data required three different data sources. Interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires were used to collect data to describe the essence of the participants' lived experiences. This study explored the influence of embedded behavioral support on academic performance and social development. Thematic analysis identified the reoccurrence of three themes: challenges, classroom management, and instruction, along with seven subthemes: time, behavior, relationships, expectations, academic, embedded, and student response. The lived experiences explored support the positive influence of SEL on academic achievement.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, competencies, lived experiences, academics, behavior, embedded, COVID-19, social development, social constructivism, morning meetings

Copyright Page

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, my Lord and Savior, and to whom all good things are granted through His grace.

I dedicate this to my children, who inspired me to become a teacher. May you always strive for knowledge and continue to inspire all you meet on your path. I feel that I am a better person because of you.

To my husband, who has been my biggest cheerleader, encouraging me every step of the way. Thank you for stepping up and ensuring all the household responsibilities are taken care of while I diligently work on my research. Thank you for encouraging, believing in, and praying with me through this process.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my students and students everywhere. May you always have loving and supportive teachers who teach the whole child, supporting your social-emotional learning and academic needs.

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List of Abbreviations

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

Project-based Learning (PBL)

School Crime and Safety (SCS)

Science of Learning and Development (SoLD)

Social-emotional Competencies (SEC)

Social-emotional Learning (SEL)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has a direct correlation to achievement. The first section of this chapter will present the background and the historical context of SEL. The use of literature to promote SEL has been established throughout history. The following section will address the social context. SEL positively affects students' educational experiences (CASEL, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Conversely, inadequate social-emotional learning is detrimental to development and can negatively affect one's health (Jones et al., 2015). SEL positively influences individuals' well-being (Taylor et al., 2017). The theoretical section will describe what research has already been done and how this study will extend the knowledge of the perceived influence of SEL on academic performance. Social-emotional competence significantly influences school connectedness and academic performance (Panayiotou et al., 2019), whereas social-emotional deficits can negatively affect academics and student performance (Cosma & Soni, 2019). Social constructivist theorists support the influence of SEL on cognitive development via the theories of cognitive development, zones of proximal development, and conditions of learning (Gagne, 1965; Schunk, 2012). The problem statement describes how deficits in SEL affect students' and teachers' challenges. The purpose of the student is to develop a greater understanding of the lived experiences that embed behavioral learning into academics. SEL embedded into the curriculum can influence students' academic performance and social competencies (Eun, 2019) and influence student learning and development. The level of fidelity with which a teacher implements SEL in the classroom curriculum directly relates to promoting students' development of social and emotional skills (Thierry et al., 2020). To learn, students require effective teaching and classroom management (Korpershoek et al., 2016).

Background

In May 2021, over 1,200 educators from across the nation were asked to share their concerns on the state of education as part of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) *7th Annual Educator Confidence Report* (ECR). The leading concern for educators was students' social-emotional learning. In the report, 72% of the educators surveyed expressed concerns regarding students' social and emotional well-being, and 82% stated that SEL in the classroom could improve student performance and significantly influence desired performance outcomes. (Harcourt, 2021). Seventy-two percent of educators expressed that they struggled to meet students' social and emotional needs, and 58% of educators expressed concern that students' social and emotional needs will continue to increase post-pandemic (Harcourt, 2021). When asked what resources educators need most, 56% of educators responded that SEL resources were most critical (CASEL, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Harcourt, 2021). The McGraw Hill *2021 Social and Emotional Learning Report* reported that 77% of the 700 educators felt knowledgeable about SEL in 2018, whereas 91% of educators did in 2021 (CASEL, 2019; Hill, 2021). Only 56% of educators reported that SEL plans had been implemented in their schools. Educators reported that SEL implementation improves student learning engagement, motivation, and relationships. 81% of parents reported they believe there is not enough emphasis on SEL, that the need for SEL has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, and 62% of parents surveyed feel it is essential to teach SEL, which is an increase of 7% in the last three years (Hill, 2021).

All 50 states in the U.S. have educational standards supporting SEL in preschool, but only eight states have specified standards for grades K-12 (Allbright et al., 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2018; Marsh & Kennedy, 2020). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has collaborated with 25 states to support SEL efforts in education (Allbright

et al., 2019; Dusenbury et al., 2018; Marsh & Kennedy, 2020). Implementing positive behavior strategies through SEL pedagogies supports all students' learning (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2021). Present-day factors negatively affect students' socio-emotional wellness (Andersen et al., 2021; Irwin et al., 2022; Maclean & Law, 2022; Miskimon et al., 2022; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017; Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2018).

Educators play a pivotal role in students' social-emotional development (Blewitt et al., 2021). A consensus of school principals surveyed agreed that developing social and emotional skills in students is critical and teachable through the promotion of SEL core competencies (CASEL, 2019). The five core competencies of SEL are relationship skills, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and social awareness (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011, 2015). SEL empowers students by applying skills and knowledge to help them effectively manage their emotions and develop healthy relationships. Relationship skills are necessary for students to communicate appropriately, engage in learning, collaborate with peers, resolve conflict, demonstrate leadership, and competently navigate the school environment.

A student's identity is formulated in self-awareness through the ability to define and understand one's emotions, values, and purpose. Self-efficacy, a key component in academic achievement, evolved from self-awareness (Bandura, 1990; Bandura et al., 1996; Jones et al., 2015; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Responsible decision-making is a pre-requisite for students to have problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). Students who demonstrate responsible decision-making skills will be able to evaluate a situation and determine the consequences of their actions. Self-management influences students' motivation, planning, organization, self-regulation, and goal-setting (Hill, 2021; Kustyarini, 2020). The ability to self-

regulate predicts school readiness and academic success (Gagne & Nwadinobi, 2018). Social awareness allows students to consider the perspective of others, resulting in greater empathy and compassion towards others. According to a meta-analysis of over 270,00 students exposed to SEL competencies, academic performance improved compared to students who did not have SEL interventions (CASEL, 2022a).

Elementary school teachers can use social skills literature books to embed social-emotional learning (SEL) into academics while assessing the grade-level ELA standards. Students can cultivate appropriate social-emotional competencies when explicit SEL instruction is embedded into academics (CASEL, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Multiple data sources were for the corroboration of evidence gathered from the lived experiences of educators who implemented social-emotional learning embedded into the academic curriculum to comprehensively understand how social competencies have a perceived influence on academic achievement. Historically, scholars such as Frederik Buytendijk, Edward Casey, Edmund Husserl, and Giorgio Agamben relied on examples as data in phenomenology (van Manen, 2017).

Historical Context

From the beginning of time, humans have been social. The need to manage relationships and emotions has been recorded in historical literature (Elias, 2019). Aristotle and biblical references recognize the necessity for practical social-emotional competencies and learning. (Elias, 2019). Children's literature has historically been used to teach children social skills. According to Dodman (2016) and Will (2020), children's literature on emotional socialization dates back to the mid-1800s in Germany, India, France, and Russia. However, one could argue that children's literature on socialization can be found historically as early as the late 1400s in *Aesop's Fables* (Caxton et al., 1990). Diving further back into history, Plato's *Republic*

addressed that moral fortitude, socialization, and character development can produce good character through nurturing and education (Plato, Republic 357D-360E).

New education has evolved from progressive education reform based on empirical research for a child-centered approach. In the early 1900s, educational reformists sought new strategies and research to support a more active learning style (Schunk, 2012; Will, 2020). At the center of the progressive movement for new education was increased research in developmental psychology (Schunk, 2012). The emergence of psychology was a pivotal factor in the popularity of progressive education reform. Piaget's psychological research in cognitive development is influential in education. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development influenced education by introducing a timeline of developmental appropriateness for learning objectives in four areas of pedagogical practices: understanding students' current functioning and development, creating active learning environments, problems solving cognitive conflict, and social interactions' effect on cognitive development (see Table 1). The stages of development are defined by the cognitive processing that occurs rather than a person's age (Schunk, 2012). Piaget's theory of cognitive development contributed to educational reform during the progressive movement by establishing guidelines based on learners' psychological stages of development, which ascertained that individual learning by discovery and engagement was developmentally necessary for lifelong learning.

Table 1*Piaget's four stages of cognitive development*

Stage of Cognitive Development	Approximate Age Range (Years)	Characteristics	Enhance Learning by	Goal
Sensorimotor	Birth to 2	trial and error, motor activity without symbols, spontaneous, present action, rapidly changing, egocentric, mastery motivation	use of real objects in play, connect the play to the five senses, repetition, routine	Object permanence
Preoperational	2 to 7	conceptual-symbolic, egocentric and intuitive, action awareness (past, present, future), one-dimensional thinking, irreversibility, difficulty differentiating reality and fiction; development of language, imagination, and memory	learn by doing, active interaction, variety of materials for research, discovery opportunities, asking questions	Symbolic thought
Concrete operational	7 to 11	basic skills, honesty, more logical and methodical, manipulation of symbols, less egocentric, heightened awareness of the world around them, reversibility	form connections relate to personal experiences, timelines, 3-D models, experiments, riddles, brain teasers, open-ended questions	Logical thought
Formal operational	11 to adult	hypothetical, reasoning, multi-dimensional, egocentrism, idealistic, symbolism and abstract concepts, relationships	Hypothetical situations, step-by-step explanations, charts, and visual aids	Abstract thought

Note. This table represents Piaget's four stages of cognitive development, the approximate age range of each developmental stage, characteristics of each stage, ways to enhance learning during each stage of development, and goals for each stage. The information in this table was

obtained from [“Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development”] by Schunk, 2012, *Learning Theories* (pp. 319-323).

The Yale School of Medicine’s Child Study Center had a program that addressed children’s psychosocial development and the effect on academic achievement at their Comer School (Squires & Kranyik, 1995). The program would evolve into the New Haven Social Development program, which began the SEL in schools movement (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Yale professor Roger P. Weissberg and Yale graduate Timothy Shriver established the K-12 New Haven Social Development program. The Collaboration to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which also originated at Yale University, was established in 1994 (CASEL, 2023). The U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences partially funds CASEL (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). CASEL identified five core competencies for social-emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (2019). “SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2019, p. 1). Teachers require a better understanding of the development of emotional intelligence (EI), explicit instruction of social skills, and the relationship between social and emotional integration and reading to promote social-emotional learning in the classroom. The movement for SEL in schools has continued to grow over the last several decades.

Social Context

Deficits in social-emotional competence impede students' academic performance. Embedding social-emotional learning into the elementary school curriculum is essential for

improved academic performance and social-emotional competence. Positive social and academic outcomes are linked to the acquisition of learning social and emotional skills (Jones et al., 2017). Elementary-aged students are in a critical state of emotional development (Egan et al., 2021; Eun, 2019; Gagne et al., 1992; Jones et al., 2017; Schunk, 2012). It is an opportune time to embed social-emotional learning into academics to improve students' overall well-being (Cook et al., 2018; Fetting et al., 2018; Fitzgerald, 2020; Goldberg et al., 2018; Tussey & Haas, 2020). The problem is that many teachers lack training or understanding on effectively teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) and embedding SEL into curriculum standards. Providing SEL opportunities that are developmentally appropriate and aligned with student development is more successful than targeting skills across the school environment for the broad scope of the student population with no regard to student age and development (Jones et al., 2017).

The fostering of social-emotional competency is critical for developing cognition and, thus, academic learning. Fostering SEC and relationships has been historically challenging (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). The facilitation of SEL is critical for students to attain academic learning and high-order thinking successfully. Students with SEL deficits have difficulty recalling prior learning and often lack foundational skills due to a lack of attention to instruction (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Banerjee et al., 2014; Barry et al., 2017; Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Blewitt et al., 2020; Brackett et al., 2019; Collie, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018; Elias, 2019; Gagne, 1965; Jones et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2019; Medford & McGeown, 2016; Osher et al., 2016; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Schwab et al., 2015; Signorelli et al., 2022). Their behavior can negatively affect a student's ability to learn (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Bierman & Sanders, 2021; CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2017; Medford & McGeown, 2016; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020a;

Schwab et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2020). Difficulty following directions and accepting feedback negatively influence a student's learning ability (Brackett et al., 2019; Gagne & Nwadinobi, 2018; Hill, 2021; Jones et al., 2015; Kustyarini, 2020; Lim et al., 2019). Positive behavior interventions can motivate students to actively engage in their learning (Blewitt et al., 2020; Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021; CASEL, 2022a; Corcoran et al., 2017; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Theirry et al., 2020).

Schools are microcosms of society reflecting challenges existing within their communities. Schools have a moral and social responsibility to provide a safe learning environment where students' basic needs can be met and for students to be in an appropriate physical and emotional state to learn. SEL results in a positive investment in SEC and is predictive of improved academic performance (Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021; Corcoran et al., 2017). SEL interventions improve cognition, as well as social-emotional targets. When students can self-regulate by managing their behavior, attention, and thinking, they are likelier to score higher on standardized tests (Jones et al., 2017). By embedding SEL into the curriculum, educators set their students up for success by providing a solid foundation for social competencies and academic achievement.

Theoretical Context

In a systematic literature review of early childhood education SEL programs, researchers noted that a synthesis of the effectiveness of SEL interventions is lacking (Blewitt et al., 2020). There is a need for more research to provide qualitative data on how social-emotional interventions influence academic performance. (Goldberg, et al., 2018). Teacher-student interactions affect students' social competencies and academic engagement (Bierman & Sanders, 2021). Self-efficacy, motivation, and attitudes are affected by learning environments (Alzahrani

et al., 2019; Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021; Shafait et al., 2021). A systematic review analyzing 136 studies on the effects of SEL programs on academic achievement and SEC in humanitarian and development settings in Africa associated positive outcomes with SEL instruction (Deitz et al., 2021). The study indicated a lack of research on teachers' lived experiences and knowledge of SEL. Promising outcomes for academics were correlated to SEL even without effects on SEC. Only 24 of the 136 studies on SEL reported how academics were affected. Twelve studies measured outcomes for academics and SEL. A longitudinal study showed positive long-term effects of SEL for primary students.

Researching the lived experiences of teachers who teach social-emotional learning (SEL) pedagogies in elementary school is vital to inform future practices for implementation (Dyson et al., 2021). This study seeks to better understand the lived experiences of educators who embed SEL into academic instruction. It behooves educators to better understand the lived experiences of teachers who deliver SEL instruction and any challenges they may encounter (Marsh & Kennedy, 2020). Factors that influence SEL implementation are teachers' beliefs about SEL, knowledge and skills, predispositions, and teachers' views about their role (Marsh & Kennedy, 2020). The relationship between students' socio-emotional wellness and practical instruction is critical (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2021). Teachers' perspectives on SEL may influence how they implement SEL and their interpersonal relationships with students (Marsh & Kennedy, 2020). This study will provide a better perspective on teacher preparedness to promote SEL by embedding SEL into academic content. Textual meaning and experiences will be interpreted through the understanding of teachers' lived experiences to illustrate what additional training or resources are required to implement and embed SEL effectively. The study will

provide significant insight into teacher knowledge of what educators need to embed SEL into academic content more effectively.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development paved the way for social constructivists like Vygotsky and Gagne. Piaget's theory of cognitive development identifies characteristics based on stages of child development. Effective and equitable pedagogical delivery requires awareness of students' developmental stages. Piaget's theory provides a lens of humanism in the learning process by examining the science of learning and how best to engage learners in the learning process. (Brehony, 2004). The progressive concepts of thematic units, critical thinking, social skills development, learning through action, student-influenced curriculum, and hands-on center-based learning are relevant in education today.

Gagne's conditions of learning theory identify categorical learning in a hierarchy of complexity as they correspond to cognition (Gagne, 1965; Greenberg et al., 2003; Schunk, 2012; Ullah et al., 2015). Social-emotional behaviors affect cognitive learning when the reception of instruction is limited due to a lack of attention. When the behavior has impeded learning foundational skills, students may lack the ability to retrieve prior learning. Additionally, social-emotional competencies influence students' ability to respond appropriately, provide or accept feedback, and perceive the instruction stimuli.

Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the co-construction of knowledge through social interactions, self-regulation, and zone of proximal development, which promote cognitive development (Schunk, 2012). Vygotsky's social development theory identifies social interaction's role in cognitive development. Social interaction is a critical component in the development of cognition. A person's intrapsychological and interpsychological social environments facilitate their learning. Cognitive development depends on continuous learning of

communication, social interactions, and self-regulation. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is viewed through the lens of a Vygotskian perspective to unify academic and social-emotional competencies.

Understanding how students learn and how their social-emotional state influences their learning ability is critical to effectively teaching students. The constructivist theorists Gagne and Vygotsky are influential in studying how social-emotional learning influences academics. Their research and theories regarding cognitive development and learning as influenced by social interactions support the need for social-emotional learning to improve academic achievement.

Problem Statement

School administrators have expressed a need for additional research on the connection between academic performance and SEL when responding to a national survey (Mahoney et al., 2018). The problem is that deficits in social-emotional learning negatively affect students' academic achievement and social competencies (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Banerjee et al., 2014; Barry et al., 2017; Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Blewitt et al., 2020; Collie, 2017; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018; Elias, 2019; Jones et al., 2017; Osher et al., 2016; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Signorelli et al., 2022). Teachers play a critical role in students' social-emotional learning (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021) but are challenged by a lack of time to teach any additional content outside of academic standard requirements. Many teachers lack training in social-emotional learning strategies and are uncertain about incorporating SEL into their daily routines (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Moore et al., 2015; Murano et al., 2019; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020). There is a need for research that extends understanding of teachers' lived experiences when implementing SEL and how their beliefs influence teaching SEL (Collie, 2017).

SEL interventions are an effective way of improving students' social competencies and

thus improving academic performance. Evidence supports the importance of implementing SEL through direct instruction and interventions to promote social-emotional competencies and improve overall academic achievement (Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Thierry et al., 2020). Many teachers express the lack of time or training to implement SEL without compromising the time for academics. However, when SEL is embedded into the curriculum, social-emotional growth can co-occur with academic growth. Deficits in social-emotional learning can negatively influence students' academic performance. Schools play a critical role in students' cognitive and social-emotional development (Barnes & Jones, 2022; Corcoran et al., 2017). A qualitative synthesis literature review on curriculum-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, with ten specified SEL interventions (Blewitt et al., 2020), indicated that implementing early childhood education curriculum-based SEL programs with fidelity can improve teaching practices and the classroom environment. The hermeneutic significance gathered through lived experience provides a point of reference and relatability (van Manen, 2018). The exploration of lived experiences of educators embedding SEL into academic curriculum is significant to the research topic of understanding a perceived effect on social competencies and academic performance. The lived experiences of each participant will be researched, compared, and contrasted amongst those sharing in the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral learning support into their academic curriculum and describe the meaning of the perceived influence on academic achievement and social development for elementary students in two elementary schools. At this stage in the research, academic achievement and social competencies will be defined as the progression or mastery of

academic curriculum standards and the ability to engage in positive and meaningful social interactions and behaviors with adults and peers.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical

This study is theoretically significant in contributing to a greater understanding of how social-emotional learning influences students' emotional and academic competencies. Implementing SEL in early elementary school can improve academic achievement and compensate for deficits in social-emotional competencies (Cook et al., 2018). The lived experiences of educators will give insight into the perceived role emotionality plays in student achievement. Positive outcomes in school require a balance of social-emotional skills and cognition (Goldberg et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2015). Positive school interactions require social skills, which include interpersonal skills, self-control, and attention (Jones et al., 2015). The vitality of early childhood social-emotional skills is the precursor for social-emotional competencies later in life (Blewitt et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2015). When SEL is embedded into the curriculum, students can practice and develop social-emotional skills to improve academic and social experiences (Yang et al., 2019). Research suggests that due to the malleability of social-emotional learning, embedding it into the academic curriculum is an effective way of teaching social skills and improving students' social-emotional competence (Goldberg et al., 2018).

Empirical

The empirical significance of this study is in the lived experiences of educators who embed social-emotional learning (SEL) into their academic curriculum and the perceived resulting influence on a student's academic achievement and social competencies. Social

constructs support learning in social settings to attain knowledge of social and academic norms (Roth, 2016). Neurobiological research supports the need for SEL competencies for people to interact appropriately with others; however, the guidance on promoting SEL is limited. (Elias, 2019). It is extensively recognized that SEL positively affects students. However, there is still a need for equity in SEL instruction (Ramirez et al., 2021). Equitable SEL can be addressed through culturally relevant and responsive teaching that connects academic and student culture, implementing social justice initiatives such as treating people with respect, dignity, and fairness, teaching citizenship, and incorporating a trauma-sensitive approach (Ramirez et al., 2021).

Practical

The practicality of the study is derived from educators' lived experience implementing SEL. A problem educators encounter with SEL is being tasked with the implementation of so many academic demands that leave little room for additional learning opportunities outside of the curriculum (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). Educators do not have the time in their full schedules to add additional learning segments into the day. Therefore, it is necessary to embed learning in the already established curriculum schedule to allow students to facilitate social development. The knowledge gained from understanding the lived experiences of educators who implement SEL can be used to improve SEL initiatives and implementation throughout school districts. The lived experiences of educators who embedded SEL into academics may provide insight into what educators need to embed SEL effectively.

Research Questions

The exploration of lived experiences of educators embedding SEL into academic curriculum is significant to the research topic of understanding a perceived effect on social competencies and academic performance. Teachers' experiences, perspectives, beliefs,

knowledge, and social-emotional competence influence students' social-emotional development (Blewitt et al., 2020). Teacher training influences their ability to teach. Teachers not trained in social-emotional learning may lack the necessary skills to embed social-emotional learning into the curriculum effectively.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in elementary schools who embed behavioral support into their academic English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies lessons?

Sub-Question One

What is the perceived influence of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' academic performance?

Sub-Question Two

What is the perceived effect of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' social development?

Sub-Question Three

What training or resources are required to implement and embed behavioral support effectively?

Definitions

1. *Bullying* – a power imbalance that involves the direct or indirect repetition of unwanted cyber, relational, physical, or verbal aggression by peers (Miskimon et al., 2022).
2. *Emotional Intelligence* – social adaptation, goal attainment, problem-solving, and emotional regulation through perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions to self-regulate emotional responses and communicate in a positive way (Shafait et al., 2021)

3. *Hermeneutics* - Hermeneutics involves understanding meaning and intentions interpreted in words and text (Moustakas, 1994).
4. *Lived Experience* – “life as we live it” or “living through something”; “the active and passive living through experience” (van Manen, 2016, p. 39)
5. *Perceived Effect* – The interpretation of the participant’s description of the experiences and the resulting changes that occur due to the phenomena (Heidegger, 2008; Moustakas, 1994).
6. *Social-emotional Competence (SEC)* – is a noncognitive ability that encompasses practical skills for handling emotional and social experiences, managing responsibilities, and completing tasks (Jones et al., 2015).
7. *Socio-emotional development* – is the process that influences how children learn to establish relationships, appropriately express emotions, engage and interact, and make decisions (Egan et al., 2021).
8. *Social-emotional Learning (SEL)* – is the process people use to obtain and apply core competencies to identify and regulate emotions, achieve goals, empathize, maintain relationships, and engage in responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2019; Hill, 2021; Osher et al., 2016;).
9. *Social Skills* – self-awareness, relationship skills, self-management, responsible decision-making, and social awareness (Hill, 2021).
10. *Sociogenesis* – “the evolution of societies or of a particular society, community, or social unit” (Eun, 2019; Roth, 2016; Zhoc et al., 2020).

Summary

Students’ social-emotional competencies influence their ability to engage in their

learning. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more than ever, there has been a greater demand for implementing social-emotional learning, especially for elementary school children who lack foundational social skills (Campbell, 2021; CASEL 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Egan et al., 2021; Evans, 2022; Hill, 2021; Kardambikis & Donne, 2022; Minkos & Gelbar, 2020; Signorelli et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022). There is a growing demand for implementing social-emotional learning in early education (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). However, teachers struggle to find the time and resources to do so effectively. Historically, social and emotional skills have been taught to children in literature. Vygotsky noted that the environment creates sociogenesis (Roth, 2016). Educators must provide a learning environment rich in academic and social-emotional learning opportunities for student success. Students' learning environments will affect their SEC (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021; Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Shafait et al., 2021). Students spend most of their early childhood at school with teachers and peers. Therefore, educators can significantly affect not only academic but social-emotional development (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020). Since emotional wherewithal is linked to academic achievement, teachers have a responsibility to provide social-emotional and academic learning (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Barry et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018; Mahoney et al., 2018; McKown et al., 2016; Ng & Bull, 2018). This study sets out to understand the lived experience of educators who embed SEL into academics, the perceived effect of SEL, and teachers' professional learning needs to implement SEL effectively. Theoretically, empirically, and practically, this study seeks to understand the perspective of educators who embed SEL into ELA and social studies academic content and to reveal the

perceived effect of SEL on students' competencies and academic performance.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions has been conducted to explore the effect of embedded SEL on academic performance and social-emotional competence. A review of the current literature on the correlation between SEL and academic performance will be presented in this chapter. The first section of this chapter will present educational theories supporting the importance of social-emotional competencies (SEC) in education. The influential theories relevant to SEL are the theory of cognitive development, conditions of learning theory, zones of proximal development, and social development theory. A discussion on incorporating and embedding social-emotional learning into the curriculum will address the importance of preparing teachers and administrators with adequate training for effective behavior prevention and intervention, which will affect overall academic achievement. Lastly, literature on the role of SEC on academic achievement related to self-regulation and self-efficacy will be reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide educational theories to support the necessity for embedding SEL into the curriculum. The theoretical framework supporting the research is social constructivism. Constructivist perspectives of knowledge are exogenous, endogenous, and dialectical (Schunk, 2012). Exogenous constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is influenced through experience, teaching, and exposure to the world. Endogenous constructivism is based on knowledge developed through experience. In contrast, dialectical constructivism derives from human interactions in their environments or lived experiences.

The cognitive, social, and learning constructivist dialectical, endogenous, and exogenous perspectives that align with social constructivism are influenced by Gagne and Vygotsky (Schunk, 2012). Theorists Gagne and Vygotsky address social-emotional competencies and their effect on learning in each learning theory. While both theorists had different theories and views on constructivism, learning, social interactions, and their implications for teaching, both agreed that learning developed over time and was influenced by many factors (see Table 1). The synthesis of Gagne's conditions of learning and Vygotsky's social development theory is used to support the necessity of embedding social-emotional learning within the constructs of the academic curriculum for elementary students to improve their overall cognitive and social-emotional development.

Table 2

Constructivism Theoretical Frameworks – Gagne & Vygotsky

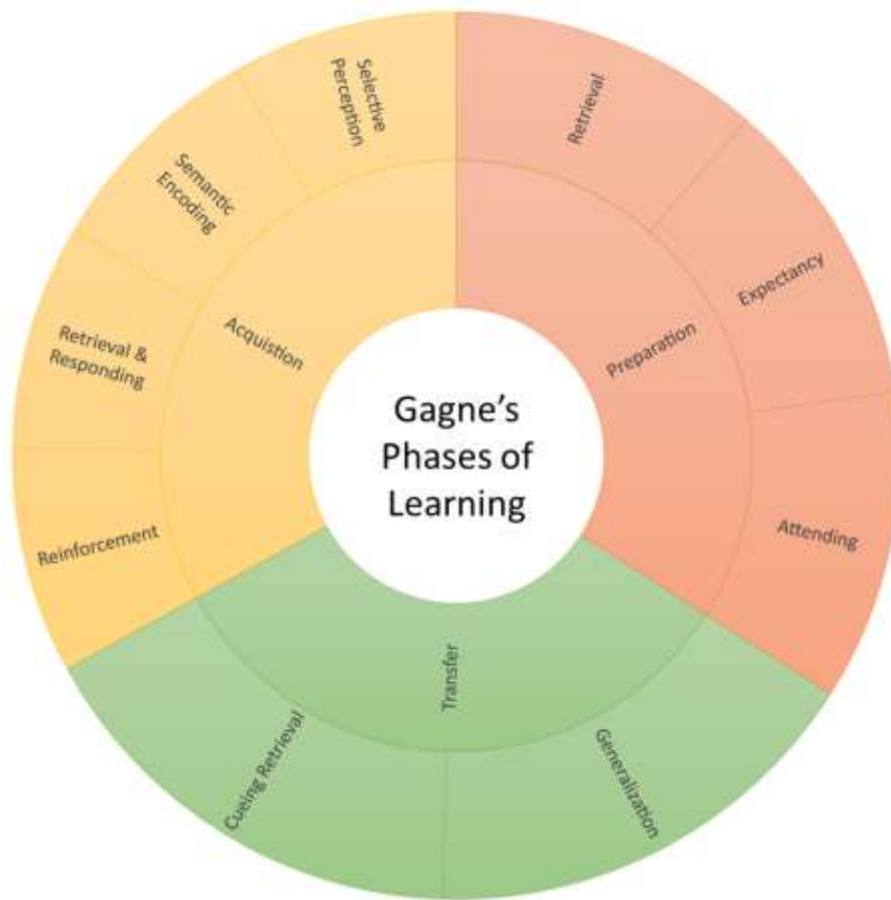
Principle	Gagne	Vygotsky
Theory	Conditions of Learning	Social Development
Learning	Nine levels of learning: Reception, expectancy, retrieval, selective perception, semantic encoding, responding, reinforcement, retrieval, & generalization	Learning is continuous; learn through the zone of proximal development; learning is both interpsychological and intrapyschological; learning is co- constructed through self-regulation and social interactions
Social interactions	Feedback from social interactions provides opportunities for learning	Social interactions are critical to the development of cognition
Constructivism	Constructivist Learning – how learners learn	Social constructivist – learn through social participation
Implications for Teaching	Break down learning tasks by required skills; Categorical, hierarchal learning	Provide opportunities to learn through social interactions with peers and teachers

Note. This table represents the constructivist theoretical frameworks of Gagne and Vygotsky.

The information in this table was obtained from (Gagne et al., 1992; Schunk, 2012).

Social Constructivism - Conditions of Learning Theory

Gagne postulated that intellectual skills are organized and attained through a hierarchy/taxonomy of learning complexity, which are prerequisites for instruction sequencing. There are multiple types of learning, and each learning type requires different conditions of instruction for learning (Gagne, 1965). Cognitive processes correspond to what Gagne identifies as nine instructional events, also known as nine events of instruction: gaining attention (reception), informing standard objectives (expectancy), stimulation of recollection or prior knowledge (retrieval), multimodal content stimulus (selective perception), instructional support for guided learning (semantic encoding), practice to elicit student performance (responding), feedback (reinforcement), student assessment (retrieval), enhanced retention through internalization and transfer of knowledge (generalization) (Gagne, 1965). Those nine steps are reinforcement, generalization, reception, expectancy, semantic encoding, selective perception, retrieval, responding, and retrieval (Gagne et al., 1992). Gagne identified three categories for the phases of learning: preparation, acquisition and performance, and transfer of learning (see Figure 1).

Figure 1*Gagne's phases of learning*

Note. This image was created to visually represent Gagne's learning phases with information obtained from (Gagne et al., 1992; Ullah et al., 2015).

Understanding the conditions of learning is critical in helping students develop social-emotional and academic learning. Actions such as the use of questions, visuals, teaching behavioral expectations, recalling prior expectations and knowledge, and a structured model of behavior through guided learning and reinforcement of desired behaviors through positive feedback are all ways to incorporate Gagne's theory of conditions of learning (Ullah et al.,

2015). The conditions of learning theory can be used to implement SEL in elementary-aged students through an embedded curriculum noting the preparation, acquisition, and performance phases of learning, which are events one through seven of Gagne's nine events.

Social Constructivism - Social Development Theory

Social development theory emphasizes the importance of the social environment (interpsychological and intrapsychological) in the development and facilitation of learning. A person's culture, language, and community significantly affect their ability to learn and the development of high-order thinking through social interactions. There are interpsychological and intrapsychological influences on sociogenesis that affect the mental functions of perception, attention, and memory, which are developed through social relations (Eun, 2019). Learning is a continuous process in which students learn through stages (although specific constructs do not define the stages) and depends on social interactions, self-regulation, and communication. Cognition is derived through social interactions (Eun, 2019). Cognitive development is constricted and limited by time and specific age ranges. The spectrum between children's independent ability and their need for assistance is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Schunk, 2012). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) examines the actual mental development of a person in the present moment, what a student can do, as well as what the student can do through social interactions, what the student can do with help, and what a student cannot yet do. The zone of proximal development is a reference point for a child's independent and codependent problem-solving abilities (Newman & Latifi, 2021). Internalization of learning occurs within zones of proximal development. ZPD has a critical effect on effective learning (Eun, 2019).

Vadeboncour and Collie (2013) support the need for embedded social-emotional learning (SEL) rather than SEL as an occasionally added skill for learning based on Vygotskian principles. Cognition requires social interaction and development. Social deficits will impede the development of cognitive learning. Proximal development zones emphasize the need to implement embedded SEL in primary grades. Students' culture and the school culture should be considered. Language is verbal and non-verbal. More communication occurs through non-verbal language, so educators must understand what their body language communicates to students. Classrooms are small communities for students to learn. Classrooms need to be safe spaces to facilitate social-emotional and academic learning.

Related Literature

There is a greater demand for SEL in education (Mahoney et al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). Research indicates that students with emotional intelligence are more academically successful (Zhoc et al., 2020) and in life (Garbenis et al., 2020). An association between increased academic performance and positive student behaviors with the SEL curriculum has been implemented (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011; Schwab et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2020). Analyses of previous phenomenological and neuroscientific empirical studies support Vygotsky's social constructivist view of sociogenesis through experience (Roth, 2016). Social-emotional competencies (SEC) affect academic performance (McKown et al., 2016). Prosocial efficacy is supported by SEL using a pedagogical approach (Ha & Roehrig, 2022). Synthesized SEL research using correlational evidence, multiprogram studies, and effect variations have linked learning outcomes and student well-being to the presence of cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Barnes & Jones, 2022).

Deficits in SEC can negatively affect student learning and the learning of others. Disciplinary measures to address negative behaviors in school often result in student suspension, resulting in the student's removal from educational settings (Richard Albrecht & Brunner, 2019). Rather than engage in reactive disciplinary methods, educators can instead engage all students in proactive educational opportunities, exposing students to SEL embedded in academic content (Richard Albrecht & Brunner, 2019). Educators can uniquely promote students' well-being academically and emotionally in the school environment (Panayiotou et al., 2019). Explicit instruction of SEL within the curriculum promotes SEC and academic growth (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). Effective SEL implementation improves student outcomes (Mahoney et al., 2018). Literature reviews on the topics of SEL, EI, SEC and academic achievement, promoting SEC, embedding SEL, the roles of teachers and administrators, and the effectiveness of SEL interventions have been performed to develop a better understanding of the current research on SEL, identify gaps in the literature, determine needs for additional research, and provide present knowledge on SEL. Existing knowledge has been synthesized to support the research in this study.

Social-emotional Learning and Emotional Intelligence

Social-emotional learning incorporates self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Osher et al., 2016). These core competencies embody SEL (see Figure 2). Understanding the development of emotional intelligence, explicit instruction of social skills, and the relationship between social and emotional integration and reading is vital to promoting SEL in the classroom.

Effective communication, interactions, and collaboration for learning require social-emotional learning (Signorelli et al., 2022). Many educators are aware of the growing body of

evidence dictating the necessity for social-emotional competencies for effective student academic learning and achievement (Eklund et al., 2018). Substantive research indicates that social-emotional competencies positively affect academic achievement (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Barry et al., 2017; Osher et al., 2016). Students' emotional wherewithal affects their ability to learn. Fostering student social and emotional growth through positive social interactions is necessary for SEL. SEL promotes cognitive development (Alzahrani et al., 2019). Students who are emotionally regulated are more likely to perform well academically. There is a positive correlation between promoting SEL skills and academic engagement (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Barry et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018; Ng & Bull, 2018).

The science of learning and development (SoLD) uses synthesized evidence and vetted strategies to provide principles of practice for instructing the whole child (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Whole child learning addresses a child's academic, physical, cognitive, psychological, ethical, and social-emotional needs. Principles of practice for whole-brain learning include a supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, social and emotional development, and a support system.

Brain development occurs on a continuum, with each brain domain affecting other domains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Social contexts and emotions shape neural pathways responsible for memory, concentration, knowledge transfer, and attention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Therefore, emotions can impede or promote learning. The classroom provides an opportunity to promote SEL by cultivating developmentally appropriate social-emotional and academic support. Opportunities for SEL in the classroom include explicit social skills instruction through infused and embedded SEL instruction in academic learning segments to

address mindset, intrapersonal awareness, decision-making, conflict resolution, and interpersonal skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Figure 2

Core competencies of Social-emotional Learning



Note. This image was created to make a visual representation of the core competencies of social-emotional learning with information obtained from (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011, 2015; Hill, 2021; Osher et al., 2016)

Current research on brain-based learning investigates how the brain affects learning. Twelve main principles of brain-based learning define learning models (Kitchen, 2020). The 12 principles of learning influence educational practices by optimizing neuroscience research and applying it appropriately to education. The complexity of learning involves cognition, attention, memory, social interactions, creativity, organization, and meaning (Kitchen, 2020; Lim et al., 2019). How the brain perceives its learning environment is an influential factor in learning (Lim et al., 2019). Fear and stress impede learning, whereas alertness promotes learning. Creating a positive learning environment that facilitates socialization through group learning is an evidence-based neuroscience research practice for optimal learning.

Neuroscience research indicates that emotional response influences memory (Lim et al., 2019). Motivation influences learning but does not regulate learning. The brain responds to curiosity in the same way as when anticipating a reward. Increasing learners' interest will result in higher levels of learning. Whether intrinsic or extrinsic, motivation and rewards increase task persistence. Creativity and exploration of the learning environment promote learning. Utilization of the senses for learning is an evidence-based practice for learning. Attention is necessary to develop and sustain focus and memorization (Lim et al., 2019). Learning is driven by attention. Lastly, reflection is a critical component of brain-based learning. Reflective learning results in long-term memory development (Lim et al., 2019). Brain-based learning is an effective educational strategy when neuroscience research is understood, interpreted, and applied accurately.

Social-emotional learning is a foundation for emotional intelligence (Brackett et al., 2019; Kustyarini, 2020; Zhoc et al., 2020). Emotional Intelligence (EI) significantly directly and indirectly affects academic efficacy, learning orientation, and learning outcomes (Goleman,

1995; Shafait et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence is defined by one's ability to perceive emotions through cognitive, physiological, and physical expressions and responses (Zhoc et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence is an aggregate of social and emotional competencies that are both intrapersonal and interpersonal (Kustyarini, 2020).

EI influences student learning and academic achievement through emotional regulation, motivation, relationships, and empathy (Kustyarini, 2020). Emotional intelligence requires students to trust their teacher and is influenced by the students' learning orientation. SEL positively affects EI when SEL is age-appropriate, frequent, and embedded across content areas and when teachers can respond to students' needs (Brackett et al., 2019). Social-emotional Learning curriculums are beneficial to students. EI is vital in student development and learning outcomes because students' emotions affect their learning. Empirical evidence indicates that EI positively affects education and students' sociogenesis (Roth, 2016; Zhoc et al., 2020). EI affects student engagement and learning outcomes.

Meta-analysis of SEL revealed improved student SEC and academic performance (Osher et al., 2016). Students' social competencies affect academic efficacy and self-efficacy (Shafait et al., 2021). Self-efficacy skills are necessary to engage learners in collaborative learning and contribute to academic achievement. Learning environments influence students' attitudes, self-efficacy, and motivation (Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021). Students are empowered through trusting pedagogical relationships with their teachers (Shafait et al., 2021). There is a correlation between intrinsic emotional regulation and students' reading motivation, comprehension, and growth (Ha & Roehrig, 2022; Liew et al., 2020). Emotional competence influences students' learning outcomes and behavior (Alzahrani et al., 2019). Meta-analysis of research on factors influencing academic achievement highlights the importance of motivation and emotional and social factors

(Quílez-Robres et al., 2021). Key social-emotional competencies affect students' ability to encode, interpret, reason, and regulate (McKown et al., 2016). Self-efficacy affected students' perseverance and motivation. Students respond to their learning environment to enable self-efficacy through social interactions (Shafait et al., 2021). Relationships play an essential role in students' emotional competencies and academic outcomes.

Present-Day Factors Affecting Students

Socio-emotional factors are foundational for student success (Williams et al., 2018). Students today have several factors that affect their social-emotional competencies and well-being. Education is a critical determinant of social-emotional health, academic achievement, and life expectancy (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022). More students drop out of high school due to poor relationships and school experiences than academic difficulties or disabilities (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017). Emotional and physical health contribute to student absenteeism, as postulated by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Williams et al., 2018). Adverse childhood experiences, mental health, school safety, and the effect of COVID-19 are just a few issues that challenge students today. A by-product of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the negative psychological effect on students, resulting in increased mental health problems (Maclean & Law, 2022). A critical relationship exists between poor education outcomes and adverse childhood experiences (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022). Students' academic performance has been negatively affected by a rise in mental health issues (Andersen et al., 2021). School safety concerns, including bullying, school shootings, drugs, and sexual harassment, inhibit students' desire to attend school or actively engage in learning (Irwin et al., 2022). Negative academic performance has been associated with bullying victimization (Miskimon et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2018).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Student relationships and environmental factors contribute to school success (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011, 2015; Egan et al., 2021; Kustyarini, 2020; Osher et al., 2016; Shafait et al., 2021; Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022; Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). Not all students have healthy, stable, safe, or nurturing environments or relationships critical for their overall wellbeing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022). Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumas that result in toxic stress (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Toxic stress impedes student learning and success. ACEs include economic hardship, racial/ethnic discrimination, exposure to violence (witness or victim of), parental death, divorced parents, incarcerated family members, household member alcohol or drug abuse, and or exposure to family/household members with mental illness. A student's adverse childhood experience (ACE) score can predict a student's school struggles (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020a). Exposure to ACEs can have a negative effect on student development. Research indicates absenteeism, suspension, and lower grades are associated with students with a history of adverse childhood experiences (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends enhancing social-emotional learning skills to help students regulate their emotions, develop healthy relationships and connections with teachers (adults), and promote social norms to prevent ACEs (2021). Educators must acknowledge the relationship between ACEs and how they affect students' education (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022). Analyzed data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance system (BRFSS) concluded that low educational attainment risk increases for those with four or more ACEs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Students with a high prevalence of ACEs (four or more) were "32 times more likely to be diagnosed with

learning or behavioral challenges” (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020a). Children living in poverty were more likely to have ACEs (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020a). Minorities and females are four times more likely to experience ACEs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020b). A study of children with three or more ACEs found that 23% were diagnosed with a learning disability, 49% had difficulties finishing tasks, 48% reported low engagement in school, and 44% had trouble using self-control in the classroom (Moore et al., 2016). Childhood adversity is a leading cause of “detrimental health outcomes,” mortality, and morbidity in adulthood (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022). Because ACEs have a tremendous effect on academic achievement and social-emotional competencies, educators are responsible for promoting social norms and enhancing social-emotional competencies by embedding SEL for overall student success (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

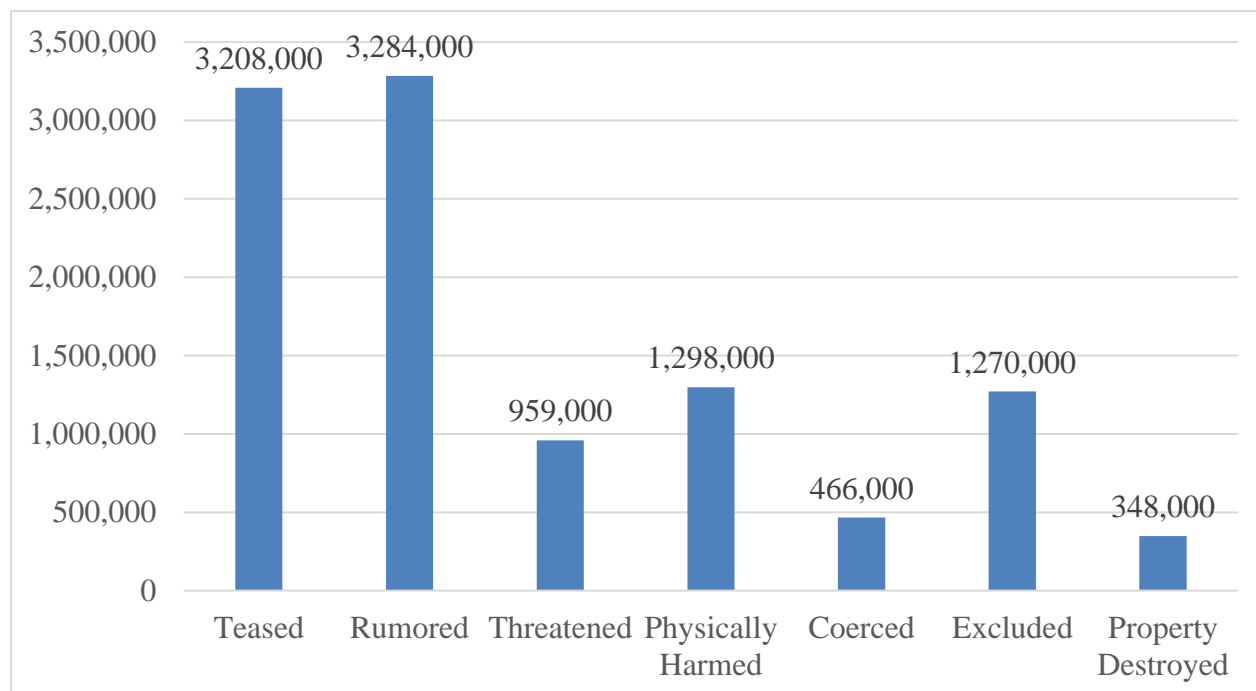
School Safety

Students’ perceptions of school safety are critical for learning and development (Williams et al., 2018). Victimization influences student perceptions of safety (Irwin et al., 2022). The 2021 School Crime and Safety (SCS) report provided startling revelations on students’ perceptions of school safety. Five percent of students ages 12-18 surveyed feared an attack while at school, and 3% feared an attack away from school (Irwin et al., 2022). A 2018 research study revealed that 24.7% of high school students surveyed felt unsafe at school, and 14.4% avoided school due to safety concerns (Williams et al., 2018). Research on SCS indicated that students’ safety concerns were justified (Irwin et al., 2022). Approximately 1.4 million crime incidents occurred in public schools during the 2019-2020 school year (Irwin et al., 2022). Crime

was defined as physical attacks, sexual assault, rape, possession of weapons, drug or alcohol possession or distribution, vandalism, or theft (Irwin et al., 2022).

Victimization of students and educators is a critical safety concern and must be a national priority (Irwin et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2018). The SCS reports that approximately 22% of middle and high school students between 12-18 years old report being bullied at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Public schools reported that teacher victimization occurred when teachers were verbally abused (10%), teachers were disrespected (15%), and classroom disorder was widespread (4%) (Irwin et al., 2022). Elementary teachers in public schools reported that students physically attacked them (9%) or threatened them (11%) during the 2015-2016 school year (Irwin et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Bullying is among the most prevalent safety concerns in schools (Irwin et al., 2022; Miskimon et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2019, 2021). Bullying is defined as a power imbalance that involves the direct or indirect repetition of unwanted cyber, relational, physical, or verbal aggression by peers (Miskimon et al., 2022). Adverse effects of bullying victimization include deficits in academic performance and mental health. Bullying victimization was predictive of and associated with decreased academic performance in a longitudinal study of sixth-grade students (Miskimon et al., 2022). Students who have been bullied are at an increased risk for mental health impairments (Baier et al., 2019). Bullying increases students' risk for suicidal ideations, depression, and dropout (Williams et al., 2018). During the 2019-2020 school year, cyberbullying and bullying were reported to occur weekly in 15-16% of public schools (Irwin et al., 2022). The SCS estimated that 4,986,000 students aged 12-18 reported being bullied during the 2016-2017 school year (see Figure 3).

Figure 3*% of Bullied Students by Type of Bullying*

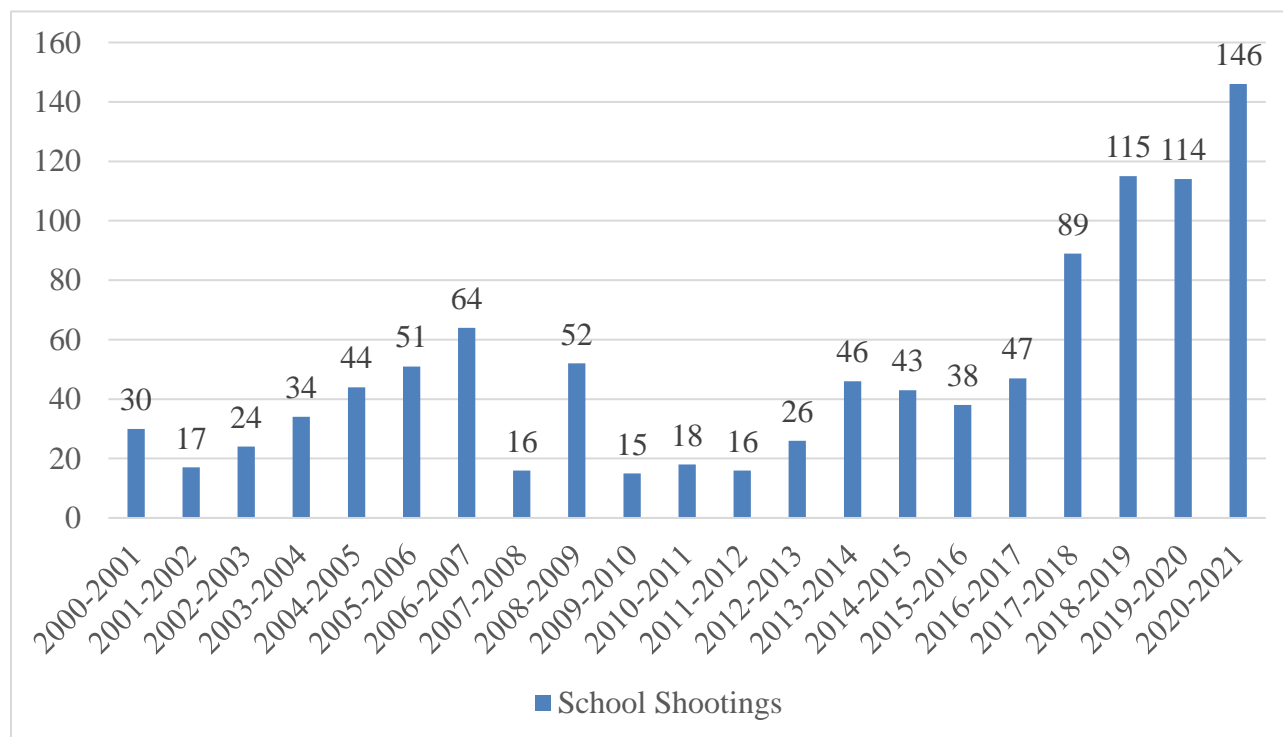
Note. This image was created to make a visual representation of the number of students who reported being bullied at school and the type of bullying they experienced with information obtained from the Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], Web Tables (U.S. Department of Education, 2019)

School shootings have been on the rise at an alarming rate since the early 2000s (see Figure 4). In the first two months of 2023, seven school shootings occurred that involved death or injuries, one of which involved a six-year-old teacher who shot his teacher (“School Shootings”, 2023). During the 2020-2021 school year, 146 school shootings were reported (U.S. Department of Education, 2022b). There has been a 711% increase in school shooting occurrences over the last decade. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that the situations associated with school shootings include dispute escalations, accidental,

domestic altercations with target victims, indiscriminate shootings, anger over school disciplinary measures or grades, bullying, psychosis, hostage standoffs, intentional property damage, self-defense, drive-by, illegal activities, and unknown factors (U.S. Department of Education, 2022b).

Figure 4

U.S. School Shootings in 2000-2021



Note. This image was created to make a visual representation of the number of U.S. school shootings from the 2000-2021 school years with information obtained from the Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], Digest of Education Statistics on school shootings (U.S. Department of Education, 2022b)

Mental Health Issues

Student victimization is associated with mental health issues (Miskimon et al., 2022).

Teachers play a critical role in supporting students' mental health and wellness, but the lack of

knowledge and training is a barrier to promoting mental health and wellness (Maclean & Law, 2021). Meta-analyses of SEL research resulted in a direct correlation between mental health and academic achievement (Panayiotou et al., 2019). Mental health and behavioral disorders have various mitigating factors that can affect and impede students' overall well-being. Poor academic performance can lead to mental health issues. Studies by Almroth et al. (2018) and Panayiotou and Humphrey (2018) revealed that the internalization and externalization of students' problems were predicted by academic incompetence, and Orozco et al. (2018) reported suicide attempts were associated with students who perceived their academic performance as poor (Miskimon et al., 2022). Meaningful improvements in academics and social-emotional skills were found in meta-analyses of SEL interventions (Panayiotou et al., 2019). In general, students' anxiety levels have increased, disrupting academic achievement (Andersen et al., 2021). In the 2019-2020 school year, 40% of schools reported inadequate or limited access to mental health professionals (Irwin et al., 2022). Only 55% of public schools could provide mental health assessments, and only 42% could provide treatment services (Irwin et al., 2022).

The Socio-Emotional Effect of COVID-19 on Learning

The long-term effect of COVID-19 restrictions and virtual instruction remains unknown. What has become apparent to educators is that students are demonstrating deficits in social competencies, presumably due to a lack of socialization over the last few years (Campbell, 2021; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2021; Sun et al., 2022). The negative affect on students' socio-emotional development was reported by 87% of public schools for the 2021-2022 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2022a). Approximately 50% of teachers reported that the COVID-19 pandemic affected engagement for students with learning and attention

deficits, and one-third of teachers noted engagement was affected for students of poverty and English learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Students who struggle with emotional regulation are not available for academic instruction. Emotional regulation is important in educational outcomes, particularly for students with adverse childhood experiences (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022). Students with SEL deficits may have difficulty maintaining attention, following instructions, accepting feedback, and recalling prior learning (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Banerjee et al., 2014; Barry et al., 2017; Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Blewitt et al., 2020; Brackett et al., 2019; CASEL, 2019; Collie, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011; Eklund et al., 2018; Elias, 2019; Gagne, 1965; Hill, 2021; Jones et al., 2015, 2017; Kustyarini, 2020; Lim et al., 2019; Medford & McGeown, 2016; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020a; Taylor et al., 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2020). In the U.S., one in five children struggles with attention and learning issues (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2021). Key findings from Boston University's CERES Institute and the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) studies of teachers' perceptions revealed that almost half of the more than 2,400 teacher respondents said with attention and learning deficits exhibited lower engagement levels (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2021). Younger children who have had limited exposure to socialization due to their age and maturity may benefit from direct social skills instruction. By providing students with social skills and strategies to regulate their emotions, students will be better able to focus on their learning. SEL elements are referenced in Common Core standards (Effrem & Robbins, 2019).

Educators surveyed as part of the McGraw-Hill *2021 Social and Emotional Learning Report* reported that COVID-19 significantly affected students' social-emotional well-being,

noting an increase in students' emotional distress, attendance problems, disengagement students, and academic loss (Hill, 2021). In the HMH 7th Annual Educator Confidence Report (ECR), teachers expressed concerns over the need for increased SEL interventions to address the harmful effect the pandemic has had on students' mental health (CASEL, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). There is an increased need for SEL interventions (Osher et al., 2016). Students' classroom behavior influences their learning ability (Medford & McGeown, 2016). Students who are disengaged or emotionally distressed are not able to fully access their education. Students with SEL deficits in elementary school have an elevated risk for educational and social maladjustment problems, including truancy, dropping out, alienation, school disengagement, and risky behaviors (Bierman & Sanders, 2021). Effective implementation of SEL in the classroom benefits the well-being of teachers and students and enhances teacher-student relationships (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). When SEL is embedded in the curriculum, self-management and relationship skills help students improve their SEC (Collie, 2017). Problem-solving strategies positively affect students' SEL and academic performance (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected society socially and emotionally (Campbell, 2021; Egan et al., 2021; Evans, 2022; Kardambikis & Donne, 2022; Minkos & Gelbar, 2020; Signorelli et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022). Triangulation of data researching the effect of COVID-19 on young children's socio-emotional development determined that children had higher levels of anxiety and isolation while missing their peers, routines, and structured activities they had prior to the shutdown (Egan et al., 2021). Due to distance learning, SEL is necessary to bridge the gap in socio-emotional development (Evans, 2022). With the return to more traditional school settings as opposed to virtual instruction, educators must provide support

for students' emotional and academic deficits as they reacclimate to social settings in schools (Minkos & Gelbar, 2020).

A study investigating the effect of COVID-19 on education majors determined that students' academic success was significantly impaired, as was their emotional well-being (Kardambikis & Donne, 2022). If adult students, who in theory should have the socio-emotional development and wherewithal to regulate their emotions appropriately, were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is feasible to assume children would also be significantly affected. Socio-emotional maladjustment in children is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting SEL in students will likely increase academic achievement and improve SEC (Kardambikis & Donne, 2022).

Role of Social-emotional Competencies on Academic Achievement

The core competencies of SEC, as defined by CASEL (2019), align with three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Tarbetsky et al., 2017). SEC, when taught effectively, has positive academic outcomes (Brackett et al., 2019; Corcoran et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2015; Tarbetsky et al., 2017). Learning is influenced by cognition, self-regulation, attention, and social interactions. Cognitive skills and emotional intelligence affect student learning readiness (Jones et al., 2015). Social-cognition influences impulse control, problem-solving, empathy, motivation, and self-regulation and is supported by positive social behavior. Self-regulation is necessary for students to attend and access their education.

According to psycho-educational literature, academic buoyancy, need satisfaction, and adaptability are basic psychological needs that influence SEC (Tarbetsky et al., 2017). Positive correlations have been noted between SEL integration and reading (Schwab et al., 2015). Educators are responsible for meeting students' needs to engage them in the pedagogical

delivery of learning strategies. Students must meet their basic psychological needs to be motivated and engaged and achieve academically (Tarbetsky et al., 2017). Student motivation and engagement in learning are critical factors in academic achievement (Brackett et al., 2019; Roth, 2016; Tarbetsky et al., 2017; Zhoc et al., 2020). Self-esteem and self-motivation are contributing factors to student performance. However, younger students tend to express lower self-esteem and self-motivation. Targeted and un-targeted activities to address social-emotional intelligence are critical for student development and success. Positive self-worth, motivation (both extrinsic and intrinsic), relationships (peer, teacher-student, family), adaptability, and the appropriate perception, expression, and regulation of emotions are structural components of social-emotional learning and emotional intelligence.

Deficits in SEC impair academic and social-emotional learning (Brackett et al., 2019). Neurobiological studies on brain development found that stress and trauma affect learning and behavior (Brackett et al., 2019). Toxic stress makes it difficult for students to regulate emotions and behavior and interferes with executive function (Brackett et al., 2019). Research on neurodevelopment and self-regulation through explicit SEL intervention programs determined that tiered SEL programs consistency implemented in schools were most effective in promoting social competence and self-regulation in populations of students identified with emotional and behavioral disorders (Bierman & Sanders, 2021).

SEL is developed over time in stages. Socio-emotional development is crucial during early childhood for children to learn how to appropriately manage their emotions and develop social-emotional skills like attentiveness, problem-solving, and persistence, in addition to the five core competencies of SEL (Egan et al., 2021). Executive function skills emerge in students' primary years, early preschool through second grade (Brackett et al., 2019). During this time,

children should develop self-regulation skills, inhibitory control, focus and attention, and the ability to carry out multistep tasks (Brackett et al., 2019). These noncognitive skills are critical for students to attend to their learning. A growing body of literature highlights the importance of noncognitive skills, such as social-emotional competence, and the affect those skills have on cognition and academic learning (Jones et al., 2015). SEC is an influential determinant in student outcomes.

Evidence-based SEL practices enhance academic performance and social-emotional competencies (Mahoney et al., 2018). Frequent exposure to SEL is most effective for the development of SEC. Students exposed to SEL have improved learning outcomes (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). Meta-analysis of SEL interventions used in schools revealed significantly improved academic performance, behaviors, and student relationships when SEL interventions were implemented (Mahoney et al., 2018). Using a conceptualized framework for SEL, student outcomes were noted in the short-term, intermediate, and long-term. Short-term student outcomes included social and emotional skills, improved attitudes, and positive perceptions of the classroom and school (Mahoney et al., 2018). Intermediate student outcomes included decreased conduct referrals, emotional stress, drug use, increased social behaviors, positive relationships, and academic success (Mahoney et al., 2018). Long-term outcomes included increased high school graduation rates, college and career readiness, citizenship engagement, healthy relationships, safe behaviors, mental health, and reduced criminal behavior (Mahoney et al., 2018). Critical areas for promoting SEL include building a foundation, strengthening SEL competencies in adults, promoting SEL for students, and continuing improvement practice (Goodman et al., 2015; Mahoney et al., 2018).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) reported significant improvements in student outcomes in academics, social behavior, attitudes, and skills, a significant decrease in emotional distress, and conducted problems when SEL programs were implemented (Mahoney et al., 2018). When SEL programs were employed, 27% of students improved their academic performance, and 57% demonstrated gains in skill levels (Mahoney et al., 2018). Student attitudes improved by 22%, with a decrease of 22% fewer conduct problems and an increase of 24% in improved social behaviors and decreased levels of emotional distress (Mahoney et al., 2018). Students' competencies increased, most notably academic and skill development, as social-emotional regulation increased.

Social-emotional competence is an integral part of student growth. Social-emotional competence affects mental health, which is relational and influential in academic performance (Panayiotou et al., 2019). The synergizing of cognition and behavior is required to self-regulate one's emotions effectively through social skills, attitude, and knowledge (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Longitudinal research associates SEC with success, noting it is fundamental for enhancing performance (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Researchers conducted two meta-analyses of qualitative research, using a phenomenology approach, of 11 social-emotional learning (SEL) programs using a framework to review intervention approaches in cognitive regulation, emotional processes, and social/interpersonal skills reviewing two collective case studies (Jones et al., 2017). Core components of SEL were used to set measurable outcomes of effective SEL interventions. There was a statistically significant positive effect derived from social-emotional learning programs. Outcomes for student participants in SEL programs were significantly better than non-participants in SEL programs.

Students' educational experiences are affected by their relationships with educators and peers and how they perceive their learning ability. Previous research on SEL indicates that child learning engagement is directly influenced by SEC and is a predictive factor in academic achievement (Alzahrani et al., 2019). Social-emotional skills affect student interactions with others and their responses to learning environments (Alzahrani et al., 2019). SEC sets a precedent for future positive outcomes in development (Panayiotou et al., 2019).

Promoting Social and Emotional Competencies

There is a growing body of evidence that supports the cruciality of implementing SEL through direct instruction and interventions to promote social-emotional competencies and improve overall academic achievement (Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Thierry et al., 2020). It is evident SEC significantly influences cognitive abilities (Schwab et al., 2015). Schools have a crucial effect on fostering students' social-emotional and cognitive development (Corcoran et al., 2017). The necessity for promoting SEC in elementary school through explicit instruction has been affirmed through meta-analyses of 28 reviewed research studies with a moderate effect (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Self-regulation, interpreting, reasoning, and encoding are derivatives of social-emotional competence (Blewitt et al., 2020; Brackett et al., 2019; Gagne & Nwadinobi, 2018; Hill, 2021; Kustyarini, 2020; Liew et al., 2020). Cognition influences self-regulation (Quilez-Robres et al., 2021). A heterogeneous sample of 340 elementary students measured student social-emotional comprehension and academic achievement (McKown et al., 2016). The consistent relationship between academic achievement and social-emotional comprehension was evident, thus supporting a growing body of research on the role of SEC on academic achievement (McKown et al., 2016). Meta-analysis of early childhood curriculum programs that promoted SEL curricula

revealed a positive effect on students' SEC for low-income children (Yang et al., 2019). There is a positive relationship between prosocial behaviors and reading growth (Ha & Roehrig, 2022). SEL is interrelated with critical intercultural competencies such as self-awareness, communication skills, self-management, and empathy (Nielsen et al., 2019). The effects of active learning and learning outcomes can be mediated by self-efficacy (Kustyarini, 2020).

Cognitive competencies are influenced by self-efficacy (Bandura, 1990). A student must believe they are capable of learning before they can attain learning academically. Scholastic achievement requires self-efficacy and self-regulation (Bandura et al., 1996; Jones et al., 2015; Zimmerman et al., 1992). According to Bandura's social learning theory, behavior is influenced by the interaction and responses of environmental stimuli on cognitive factors. Social learning theory encourages collaboration, increased engagement of disengaged learners, and the development of self-efficacy skills, including self-organization. Self-efficacy influences cognitive competencies (Bandura et al., 1996; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Three key concepts of social learning theory are observation, imitation, and modeling. Children encode the modeled behavior they have observed and then emulate the behaviors they observed through modeled behavior. The four components of Bandura's Social Learning Theory: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation affect behavioral and cognitive frameworks. Attention refers to noticing the modeled behavior. Retention is the ability to remember what was observed, reproduction is the ability to perform or mimic observed behavior, and motivation is the desire to emulate what was modeled, known as vicarious or self-reinforcement. Raised self-efficacy is a direct result of motivation and meeting expectations. Self-efficacy contributes to academic attainment.

Social-emotional competencies (SEC) are critical to child development and academic achievement (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018; Fitzgerald, 2020; Jones et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). Embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities into the curriculum are one-way educators can promote social-emotional competencies in A qualitative synthesis literature review on curriculum-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, with ten specified SEL interventions (Blewitt et al., 2020) indicated the implementation of early childhood education curriculum-based SEL programs with fidelity could improve teaching practices and classroom environment. their classrooms. “SEL-focused curricula provide opportunities for young children to practice skills that may lead to the development of improved long-term SEC as they facilitate the development of children’s social-emotional skills, social behavior, relationship, and even academic performance” (Yang et al., 2019).

Embedding SEL into Curriculum

Social-emotional learning is praxeological learning, human action that results in purposeful behavior (Winterbottom & Schmidt, 2022). When SEL is embedded within pedagogy, teachers integrate social norms, character education, social skills, and life skills that positively influence students through example. The integration of SEL is critical in early childhood education. Academic development is positively influenced by the development of social-emotional skills (Cook et al., 2018). Barriers to SEL in students affect school readiness and academic achievement (Fettig et al., 2018). SEL skills that emerge during early childhood are influential in developing social-emotional competence (Blewitt et al., 2020). Combining SEL and academic instruction is the most effective way to develop SEC for students through engaged practice (Cook et al., 2018). Meta-analysis of well-designed SEL programs implemented with fidelity is associated with positive academic and SEL outcomes (Fitzgerald, 2020).

The reviewed literature endorses teachers integrating SEL skills with learning objectives within academics (Barry et al., 2017). Research suggests that for optimal effect, SEL needs to be embedded (Fettig et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018; Tussey & Haas, 2020). SEL can be embedded throughout the day through explicit instruction, decision-making, modeling, and social interactions. Common Core standards are intertwined with SEL (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Teachers can embed social skills that address problem-solving, perseverance, and collaboration in academic instruction (Tussey & Haas, 2020). When implemented effectively, SEL is affectual (Wang et al., 2015). The compatibility between SEL and curriculum allows teachers to promote social-emotional competencies using evidence-based learning strategies for pedagogical delivery (Wang et al., 2015).

A body of evidence indicates the necessity for SEL; however, teachers are challenged with having the time to meet all of the necessary academic demands (Fettig et al., 2018). A natural way to embed SEL into the curriculum is through literacy. While teaching literacy standards, teachers can use books to promote SEL (Connelly et al., 2022; Cook et al., 2018; Fettig et al., 2018; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2021; Ng & Sun, 2022; Pysarenko, 2021; Storey, 2019; Tussey & Haas, 2020; Wang et al., 2015). SEL must be embedded into academics for sustainable outcomes (Barry et al., 2017). Ideally, SEL should be embedded into all curricula; however, ELA is the most accessible content area to adapt to SEL due to the alignment of assessment methods and curriculum content for both SEL and ELA (Storey, 2019). Multimodal SEL instruction is evidence-based and can be supported in the classroom using text sets (Tussey & Haas, 2020).

The interpersonal and intrapersonal components of SEL can be addressed using books on SEL topics (Ng & Sun, 2022). SEL concepts of social interactions (verbal and nonverbal),

conflict resolution, anger management, behavior expectations, emotion identification and regulation, contingent reactions, and relationship skills can all be addressed in ELA through social skills books. A positive effect on behavior and socioemotional adjustment has been noted for children with a higher frequency of shared book reading on SEL topics (Ng & Sun, 2022).

Teachers promote literacy and SEL through shared reading. Shared reading experiences potentially affect emotional competencies and academic development (Fettig et al., 2018; Ng & Sun, 2022). Shared reading employs counseling techniques that promote literacy and academic learning (Cook et al., 2018). Shared reading allows children to make personal connections to the stories being read. Picture books allow students to engage in discussions, connect, and apply what they have learned while building community and encouraging collaboration. Picture books can provide meaningful and engaging learning opportunities to embed SEL into instruction (Pysarenko, 2021).

There is a correlation between emotional deficits and reading difficulties (Medford & McGeown, 2016; Schwab et al., 2015). A longitudinal study on the relationship between reading and social and emotional integration suggests students are better able to learn when they are socially and emotionally integrated (Schwab et al., 2015). Significant associations between social-emotional and cognitive readiness have been identified in elementary-aged children (Quirk et al., 2017). School readiness predicts academic success in elementary school (Quirk et al., 2017). Studies examining the relationship between social-emotional development and school readiness have found that social-emotional competencies have a lasting effect on student development (Quirk et al., 2017). Reading fluency was negatively affected by deficits in social-emotional development in the study (Quirk et al., 2017).

SEL deficits negatively affect students' academic performances, specifically reading development (Medford & McGeown, 2016; Womack et al., 2011). Pre-reading and word-reading skills predict reading success (Medford & McGeown, 2016). Deficits in emotional behavior affect the acquisition of pre-reading and word-reading development (Medford & McGeown, 2016). Behavioral symptoms negatively affect learning. However, pro-social behaviors predict increased learning (Medford & McGeown, 2016). Literacy development is supported when SEL is embedded in ELA (Cook et al., 2018). The motivation to read must be intrinsic for students and can be facilitated through text connections to a story (Cook et al., 2018). Children emotionally connect to book characters and learn from story meanings (Fettig et al., 2018). Emotional connections to text are relational to memory, attention, decision-making, and learning (Fettig et al., 2018). Attention, memory, decision-making, and direct learning affect academic achievement. Elementary grade-level Common Core Standards for Reading Literature (CCCS.ELA-Literacy.RL) include key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, and text complexity (Common Core State Standards Commission, 2022). Embedding SEL into ELA is a natural way to improve student social and academic development.

The CASEL model for SEL exemplifies the compatibility between SEL literacy connection and ELA curriculum objectives (Signorelli et al., 2022; Storey, 2019). Teachers can empower and support students with embedded SEL in the curriculum while adhering to the ELA pedagogy. Embedding SEL allows teachers to positively and significantly improve students' SEC without the constraints of a specific SEL program and without compromising instructional time. Text sets can be incorporated into ELA to embed SEL using a multimodal approach to address topics such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making (Tussey & Haas, 2020). Reading social skills books embedded into ELA

provides opportunities for engagement, reflection, inferencing, and connectedness. Conventional standards in the ELA curriculum provide opportunities to explore and embed social-emotional learning topics such as relationships, conflict management, point of view, motivation, and a greater worldview in a multitude of literary genres (Storey, 2019).

Role of Teacher & Administrative Preparedness in Embedding SEL

Educators play a pivotal role in promoting SEC (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020). Research is limited, however, on teachers' perspectives on their comfort, commitment, and culture of SEL (Brackett et al., 2019; Collie, 2017). Teacher promotion of SEC is pivotal (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Tussey & Haas, 2020; Wang et al., 2015; Will, 2020). Teachers can use read-aloud books to affectfully promote SEL while simultaneously teaching ELA standards (Connelly et al., 2022; Cook et al., 2018; Fettig et al., 2018; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2021; Ng & Sun, 2022; Pysarenko, 2021; Storey, 2019; Tussey & Haas, 2020; Wang et al., 2015). A study by Brackett et al. synthesized literature reviews on teachers' perspectives on SEL and spotlighted the importance of SEL reporting lower burnout and higher teaching self-efficacy for teachers with positive attitudes (Collie, 2017). Teacher SEC fundamentally affects classroom management (Collie, 2017). Student-teacher relationships are an integral part of SEL and instruction. The facilitation of SEL is most effective for students when a relationship has already been established with the facilitator of instruction (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). When teachers model expected social skills through engaging interactions with students, they contribute to improved SEC for students (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020).

CASEL surveyed school principals nationwide regarding their perspectives on social-emotional learning implementation (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; DePaoli et al., 2017). A major finding in their research was that administrators and teachers recognize their important role in supporting students' social-emotional competencies (SEC) and the effect of SEC on academic achievement (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; DePaoli et al., 2017). The continued research by CASEL on the importance of SEL is further supported by other researchers (Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Thierry et al., 2020). An underlying problem, however, is how to effectively implement social-emotional learning (SEL) with fidelity in schools (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2017; DePaoli et al., 2017; Thierry et al., 2020). Educators understand the importance of SEL; however, there is a disparity in professional development and preparedness for implementing SEL (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2017; DePaoli et al., 2017; Thierry et al., 2020). Teachers are challenged with having enough time, receiving enough professional development training, collaboration, and consensus on what SEL skills to teach, and a lack of prioritization (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; DePaoli et al., 2017; Thierry et al., 2020).

Teachers and administrators are critical in embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) skills and interventions, especially in elementary grade levels, to improve student social-emotional competencies (SEC). Research has proven SEL interventions are effective when implemented with fidelity; however, the challenge remains in ensuring teacher and administrator preparedness, which includes time management, resources, effort, and consistency (Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Thierry et al., 2020). Teachers' SEC is an integral factor in effectively implementing SEL (Fitzgerald, 2020). The interconnectedness of academic

skills and SEL requires adequate teacher training to effectively implement SEL into daily academic practice (Barry et al., 2017).

Effectiveness of Interventions

Effective classroom management is essential for students to learn. Meta-analysis of 79 intervention studies revealed significant improvement in children's emotional and social competence, learning skills, and self-regulation for those who participated in curriculum-based SEL programs (Blewitt et al., 2020). Interventions are necessary for classroom management. A positive relationship between teachers and students is necessary for classroom management and a positive learning environment (Korpershoek et al., 2016). Educational advocate Rita Pierson famously said in her TedTalk, *Every Kid Needs a Champion*, "Kids don't learn from people they don't like" (Pierson, 2013). Students need a positive learning environment in which relationships are nurtured to have positive school experiences. When surveyed, 81% of school principals believed their schools benefited from implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions, resulting in a positive school climate (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). Poor classroom management results in defective teaching and learning (Korpershoek et al., 2016).

Furthermore, students have more meaningful learning experiences when they have a positive relationship with their teachers. Negative relationships with teachers are a risk factor for student success (Cosma & Soni, 2019). Students with positive relationships with their teachers and staff are likelier to enjoy school, have more positive school experiences, and be more invested in their education. Student achievement is directly proportional to the effectiveness of their teacher (Korpershoek et al., 2016). Finding a balance between social-emotional learning and academic learning is critical for students. Establishing a positive learning environment with appropriate social-emotional learning opportunities embedded in the curriculum for general and

special education students is essential to ensure positive learning experiences and create a foundation for future learning success.

Research on SEL outcomes examining four meta-analyses suggests that students benefit significantly from SEL programs (Mahoney et al., 2018). The meta-analyses examined four domains of social-emotional learning outcomes: SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance (Mahoney et al., 2018). When synthesized, the research found that students who participated in SEL programs showed more remarkable improvement in SEC and academic performance when compared to non-participating peers (Mahoney et al., 2018). The immediate effect benefits of students who participated in SEL programs have been measured to be statistically significant (Mahoney et al., 2018). The follow-up effect of SEL programs indicates strong mean effects of 0.26 and 0.33 in academic achievement, meaning SEL has a long-term effect on the student's academic growth (Mahoney et al., 2018). The meta-analyses of four research studies showed that students' academic performance was positively affected by SEL programs (Mahoney et al., 2018).

A qualitative case study investigating the effect of social-emotional learning in project-based learning science and literacy curriculum revealed that synergizing project-based learning and social-emotional learning was beneficial to students and resulted in higher levels of academic achievement, concluding the malleability of SEL competencies and skills (Fitzgerald, 2020). The study also revealed that student response was an integral component of instruction. Students developed connectedness to their academic learning through ownership. SEL can potentially be transformative for classrooms, teaching, and learning (Fitzgerald, 2020).

Implementing a phenomenological qualitative approach to research design, researchers conducted a secondary meta-analysis of quantitative and qualitative research, using an

integrative model of longitudinal design, to measure the indirect effect and direct effect of social-emotional competence on school connectedness, mental health difficulties, and academic achievement for students who received social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions (Panayiotou et al., 2019). Social-emotional competence correlates to mental health difficulties, which can predict academic attainment. Mental health difficulties can negatively affect social-emotional competence, academic attainment, and school connectedness. Social-emotional competence affects mental health, which is relational and influential in academic performance. SEC is a protective factor for positive development (Panayiotou et al., 2019).

A systematic review of case studies measuring the effect of school-based SEL interventions in pre-k through twelfth grade on academic learning was conducted using inclusion criteria (Corcoran et al., 2017). The review spanned almost 50 years of articles on SEL interventions from 1970-2016 (CASEL, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). The research indicated that SEL interventions are influential and predictive of positive academic achievement (Corcoran et al., 2017).

Two independent researchers performed a meta-analysis of 29 articles assessing the independent variable of interventions, along with dependent variables of positive and negative outcomes, and five moderating variables on type of curriculum, the fidelity of curriculum intervention, duration of intervention, type of measures, and quality of study design, and determined implementation of the social-emotional curriculum had a moderate effect size on education in low-income students (Yang et al., 2019). A significant effect was measured for both dependent variable categories of positive and negative social-emotional outcomes. The meta-analysis confirmed that integrating social-emotional learning into the early childhood curriculum positively affects social-emotional competence in students of economic disadvantage. A

curriculum focusing on SEL provides students with opportunities to practice and apply social skills, which may result in improved academic achievement and SEC (Yang et al., 2019).

Summary

Educators are responsible for cognitively and socially-emotionally preparing students for life. Students' emotional competencies are positively influenced by exposure to SEL. Five core social-emotional competencies facilitate positive relationships, behaviors, and academic performance: relationship skills, self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making (Mahoney et al., 2018). Student SEC is critical to their success (Mahoney et al., 2018). Social skills lessons must be embedded within the curriculum to teach SEL effectively and equitably with fidelity. Explicit instruction of social skills can be integrated within pedagogy to foster SEL and prosocial behaviors (Blewitt et al., 2020). Providing educators with a conceptual framework for implementing SEL may be necessary for it to be effective (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). Social relations affect SEC and psychological function (Roth, 2016). Research indicates a relationship between academic outcomes and SEC exists (McKown et al., 2016). Embedding SEL opportunities in the elementary curriculum to improve student SEC and overall academic performance is essential. Social deficits impede academic achievement. EI positively affects students' engagement and learning outcomes (Zhoc et al., 2020). Self-efficacy is a contributing component of academic achievement. Self-efficacy skills are necessary to engage learners in collaborative learning. Self-efficacy influences psychological processes that affect cognitive competence (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Understanding the conditions of learning when embedding SEL into academics is critical for students to be prepared, acquire skills, and perform. Utilizing Gagne's nine events as a framework for teaching SEL engages learning and improves knowledge retention (Ullah et al.,

2015). Through structured and modeled behavioral expectations, guided learning will reinforce desired student outcomes. SEL improves students' overall well-being and academic outcomes (Ramirez et al., 2021). Educators are responsible for equitably implementing SEL into the curriculum (Ramirez et al., 2021). What is not yet known is the lived experiences of educators who embed SEL into academics and the perceived effect of the implementation of SEL on SEC and academic performance. Educational researchers have the opportunity to understand better how SEL affects academic achievement (Roth, 2016). Vygotsky claimed that consciousness derives from societal experiences (Schunk, 2012). Reflexivity correlates to socialization and lived experiences (Roth, 2016). This study intends to provide practical understanding through the lived experiences of educators on the perceived effect of implementing SEL into academics. Ideally, the study will reveal what teachers need and find relevant to embed SEL effectively.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of educators who embedded behavioral learning support into their academic curriculum and describe the meaning of the perceived influence on academic achievement and social development for elementary students in two elementary schools. Researching lived experiences using hermeneutical phenomenology was used to find meaning through social encounters via the framework of social constructivism. At this stage in the research, academic achievement and social competencies was defined as the progression or mastery of academic curriculum standards and the ability to engage in positive and meaningful social interactions and behaviors with adults and peers. Students benefit from social-emotional interventions, both socially and academically. Students' academic achievement can be predicted by the level of their social-emotional competencies (Corcoran et al., 2017).

Research Design

The focus of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral support into the academic curriculum. Phenomenology was chosen as the research design to “understand the essence of the experience” and “lived phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). van Manen (2018) addressed the methodologies needed for phenomenological research in educational situations that explore lived experiences. Hermeneutical phenomenology is the best qualitative research design to understand teachers' lived experiences better because it is centered around the explored lives of others and interprets lived experience through reflections on deeper significances and central meanings of the phenomena experienced using thematic analysis (van Manen, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Interviewing teachers to explore their lived experiences allowed the researcher to investigate and better understand the phenomena of embedded behavioral support and its perceived effect. Understanding the lived experiences of teachers who embed behavioral support can assist educators and administrators with what preparations and training are necessary to create a positive and supportive learning environment for students.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in elementary schools who embed behavioral support into their academic English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies lessons?

Sub-Question One

What is the perceived influence of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' academic performance?

Sub-Question Two

What is the perceived effect of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' social development?

Sub-Question Three

What training or resources are required to implement and embed behavioral support effectively?

Setting and Participants

The research was conducted using teachers who embed behavioral support into academic content using ELA and Social Studies standards in the elementary school setting in the Atlanta metropolitan area in Georgia. Ten teacher participants were chosen using purposive maximal

variations sampling based on the established implementation of evidence-based school culture programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018) from a pool of approximately 100 teachers from two different elementary schools. Integrating behavioral support within academics is endorsed in research and is most effective when embedded within the curriculum for engaged practice (Cook et al., 2018; Fetting et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018; Tussey & Haas, 2020). Participants were K-5 ELA or Social Studies teachers from two locations that have schoolwide initiative programs. The schoolwide initiative programs for supporting positive behavior differ from each participant location.

Setting

The Honeybee School District serves over 106,000 suburban preschools through twelfth-grade students and is one of 14 districts in the Atlanta metropolitan area of Georgia. The school district reports there are more than 7,000 teachers in the district, with 66.8% of the teachers holding advanced degrees, which is slightly above the state average of 64.7% of Georgia public educators with advanced degrees (Flamini & Steed, 2022). The district repeatedly scores above the national and state averages for ACT and SAT scores and graduation rates. The Honeybee School District has 66 elementary schools, of which 17 have implemented evidence-based, school-wide initiatives. Four elementary schools are *Leader in Me* (FranklinCovey Co., 2023), and 13 are *PBIS* schools (PBIS, 2023). The setting of the study was two large suburban elementary schools in the Honeybee School District. Demographic data from the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Honeybee School District was obtained. The chosen schools will henceforth be referred to as North and West. Each school has implemented evidence-based, school-wide initiatives to improve school culture, behavior, and academic achievement. North is a certified

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) school (PBIS, 2023), whereas West is a certified *Leader In Me* school (FranklinCovey Co., 2023). Both school buildings have the same footprint for building structures, each with a student population of fewer than 800 students (see Table 3). Each school has a student/teacher ratio below the school district average of 14.59 (see Table 3). Neither school is a Title 1 school. The schools significantly differ in demographics regarding socio-economic factors (i.e., free lunch eligibility) and race/ethnicity (see Tables 3 & 4). The West school has fewer students eligible for free lunch, with only 6.6% eligible, whereas 19.2% of North school students are eligible for free lunch (see Table 3). The North school administrative leadership has one principal, two assistant principals, and a student support administrator specializing in special education services. The West school administrative leadership comprises a principal, assistant principal, and student support administrator. Both the North and West schools have a school leadership team comprised of grade-level representatives who serve in leadership roles to support school initiatives.

Table 3

Setting School Details

School Details	North	West
Total Students	763	683
Male	419	358
Female	344	325
Student/Teacher Ratio	12.45	13.19
Classroom Teachers (FTE)	61.30	51.80
Free Lunch Eligible	147	45

Note. The data for this table was obtained from the [“Search for Public Schools School Directory Information”] from the Institution of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) Public school data 2021-2022 school year (2023).

Table 4

Setting Enrollment Characteristics

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	North	West
American Indian / Alaska Native	1	4
Asian	27	21
Black	208	82
Hispanic	163	97
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1	0
White	292	447
Two or More Races	71	32

Note. The data for this table was obtained from the [“Search for Public Schools School Directory Information”] from the Institution of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) Public school data 2021-2022 school year (2023).

Participants

Participants in this study were elementary school teachers who teach English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies standards in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The sample group of 10 people consisted of teachers in various classroom settings, which included general education and special education co-taught, also known as inter-related resource (IRR). This sample group size was chosen to provide the opportunity to collect data extensively for the

participants and sites as provided in general guidelines for phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants spoke English and were between the ages of 25 and 60. Eight of the participants were female, and two were male. Six of the participants chose education as a second career, whereas four of the participants began teaching immediately after graduating with their undergraduate teaching degrees. Participants' educational experience levels ranged from teachers with at least five years of experience to teachers with 20 or more years of teaching experience. Participants' higher education degrees ranged from bachelor's, master's, education specialist's, to doctorate.

Researcher's Positionality

A growing body of evidence supports the importance of implementing SEL through direct instruction and interventions to promote social-emotional competencies and improve overall academic achievement (Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Thierry et al., 2020). A qualitative synthesis literature review on curriculum-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, with ten specified SEL interventions (Blewitt et al., 2020), indicated that implementing early childhood education curriculum-based SEL programs with fidelity can improve teaching practices and the classroom environment.

Colleagues have expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness and the preconceived challenges of embedding SEL into the curriculum. However, there is a gap in the literature. Most literature on SEL in schools is specific for schoolwide programs or addresses the need for SEL but is not specific to embedding SEL into the curriculum. As a special education teacher working with students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD), I have extensive experience embedding SEL into academics. My experiences with SEL imply that embedding SEL into the curriculum should not interfere with the teaching of common core standards curriculum. The

research aimed to explore the lived experiences of the teachers who embed behavioral support into academics as an example of how SEL can be embedded into the academic curriculum without losing instruction time for the standards while empowering students' social-emotional well-being and social development.

Interpretive Framework

Hermeneutical phenomenological research uses the lens of social constructivism to “seek understanding” of the lived experiences of others (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). The influence SEL has on cognitive development is supported by social constructivism. The framework of social constructivism is used to find meaning in the lived experiences of educators who embed SEL into academics using hermeneutical phenomenological research. I sought to understand phenomena through the eyes of their participants' perspectives. Using the lens of constructivism, I gained knowledge through the lived experiences of teachers through our interactions in the individual interviews, as well as through the participants’ detailed experiences shared in their journal responses and questionnaires.

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumptions align with notable behaviorist theoretical philosophers Gagne and Vygotsky and the Bible. Like Gagne and Vygotsky, I believe social-emotional competencies influence academic learning. The Bible is an excellent resource to guide social-emotional learning through God’s word. The foundations of social-emotional learning are present in the bible, addressing each of the five core competencies of social-emotional learning. Verses for encouragement, spiritual guidance, and reflection on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. It is written in Genesis 1:26 that man is made in God’s

image. There is comfort in knowing that God has created humanity in His likeness and that all humanity is beautifully and wonderfully made (King James Bible, 2023). Ephesians 2:3-6, Romans 5:8, Psalm 91:4, John 3:16, and 1 John 3:1 all serve to remind Christians they are loved (King James Bible, 2023). Galatians 5:22-23 is an excellent resource for spiritual guidance in self-management (King James Bible, 2023). Social awareness and relationship skills are derived from love, as is written in John 13:34 (King James Bible, 2023). All of humanity is broken but restored in the blood of Christ. Temperance and emotional regulation are referenced in Galatians 6:1, Proverbs 16:32, James 1:19, and Mark 9:50. Proverbs 12:25 addresses anxiety. It is important to treat others the way one would prefer to be treated, but also to not become so self-involved but rather to be an active listener. Using God's word to guide empowers Christians to make responsible decisions through reliance on God. The nature of this study has been shaped by my assumptions and its central tenets (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ontological Assumption

Lived experiences construct realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). God's truth is perfect and divine, while humanity is imperfect. Humanity as a whole requires growth toward becoming more like Christ. My experiences tell me that SEL is critical to student development. As a teacher serving students with emotional behavior disorders, I have witnessed how emotional dysregulation negatively affects academic achievement. Teachers' perspectives on teaching and student learning influence how the teachers teach and students learn. I believe society has not prioritized social skills and supporting social-emotional competencies. It seems that since social distancing was required due to COVID-19 restrictions, people, in general, have regressed in their ability to appropriately engage socially, and that is resulting in challenged emotional well-being. I believe the effect of COVID-19, coupled with other present-day challenges to students' socio-

emotional wellness, has created social deficits that require educators' intervention.

My biblical worldview aligns with the scripture verse found in Psalm 107:35-27: "He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase" (King James Bible, 2023). Children's minds must prepare for learning. Children are born into a wilderness of sorts with abundant knowledge that may spring forth through preparation and active engagement in learning. Much like sowing fields and planting vineyards, abundant knowledge yields the fruit of labor and effort. As I see it, the reality is that students have been negatively affected by the lack of socialization and negative societal influences, which have increased the need for direct social skills instruction to fill the void in their emotional development.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological social constructivist beliefs are that individual experiences and the researcher shape reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research data will provide knowledge of teachers' lived experiences because "all objects of knowledge must conform to experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.44). It is my belief that students' socio-emotional health has become a national crisis. Present-day factors challenging students' SEC have been significant. I believe students lack the emotional wherewithal to problem solve, cope, and regulate their emotions appropriately due to a lack of social exposure. The truth is students learning and the learning of others have been negatively affected by deficits in social-emotional competencies (SEC). I feel students need guidance on appropriately navigating their emotions in the school environment. Gauging from perspectives shared by my colleagues, I believe teachers are already overloaded with responsibilities and do not have the time to add additional content outside of the required

curriculum. Teachers want to provide socio-emotional support, but many lack training or understanding. Knowledge of what teachers need and their perspectives on how SEL affects students has been derived from teachers' lived experiences.

Axiological Assumption

I assume that teachers chose their profession because they wanted to provide an education to their students and for their students to be successful. Education is not limited to academic instruction. My bias is that I believe teachers are responsible for providing social-emotional and academic learning. I believe students are more successful when SEL is embedded into academic instruction than peers who are not exposed to SEL. I believe it is not complicated to embed SEL into the curriculum. Jesus Christ's parabolic method, the use of stories listeners could identify and relate to providing guidance and problem-solving, has similarities to embedding SEL into academics. Christ's use of parables to teach aligns with SEL pedagogies. Teachers' perspective on curriculum and student engagement is integral in understanding the effectiveness of the SEL curriculum. If a teacher finds implementing SEL intrusive, they are less likely to embed the learning.

I feel teachers' values should be honored, and their feedback is integral in developing a curriculum that benefits all students effectively. In the context of this research, the axiological role of teachers' lived experiences is valuable. I believe teachers' lived experiences who embed SEL into academics will reveal students' exposure to SEL will be positive and will provide practical information on how effective embedding SEL is and what challenges exist to implement SEL into academics effectively. Conversely, if they can successfully implement SEL while embedding it into the curriculum, they will be more likely to engage students in SEL. I understand that participants' lived experiences and perspectives may not align with my

axiological assumptions. My axiological assumptions, however, will not hinder participants' lived experiences.

Researcher's Role

My role in the setting was as a mentor and colleague, in addition to the role of researcher. Using systematic methods developed by Moustakas (1994), I conducted interviews as the human instrument with participants to gather their perspectives and a questionnaire to get a perspective of the participants' lived experiences. Phenomenological methodologies allowed me to interpret the data collected to develop a better understanding and meaning of the participants' lived experiences in this study (Peoples, 2021). I have extensive personal and work experience with emotional behavior disorders. I have eight years of experience as a special education teacher serving students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) in a small group, self-contained classroom. I have served as a behavior interventionist on elementary school Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) teams. I have trained annually in Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) and also have been trained in MindSet Safety Management. I have experience in trauma-informed care. I have previously taught in and currently teach in each school site included in the research setting. I believe there is no such thing as bad children, but instead, there are children who sometimes make bad choices. We are responsible as teachers to guide students and provide them with the tools to regulate their emotions effectively to improve their learning. Teaching students how to respond rather than react is critical for social-emotional learning and academic achievement. I believe embedding SEL into academics should not disrupt standards teaching when adequate materials and training are available.

Procedures

The procedures used to conduct this study have been outlined for replication purposes. Permission to conduct research was obtained from the site. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured. A recruitment plan was developed to solicit participants. These procedures have been explained to ensure the study could be replicated.

Permissions

Participation in the study was voluntary. Conversations with gatekeepers (i.e., school secretaries) began with the setting locations prior to site approval from the district to conduct research. The Honeybee School District required prior IRB approval (Appendix A) before they would accept an application to conduct research in the school district. Additionally, they required a signed access to confidential data applicant agreement. I contacted the Honeybee School District's research office to obtain the research application form and confidential data applicant agreement (Appendix C). These forms were completed and submitted to the school district to obtain site permission upon IRB approval to conduct research. I was required to provide IRB approval to the school district to obtain written permission to conduct research from the district. At the behest of the study site, the terms "behavioral support" and "social development" were used instead of social-emotional learning (SEL) and social-emotional competencies (SEC) in the data collection methods. Because changes were made to the data collection questions and title of the research, an IRB modification was submitted and approved (Appendix B). I gained permission from the school district site to conduct the study before the beginning of the research (Appendix D).

The questionnaire was created with guidance from CASEL (Appendix L) and Panorama (Appendix N) questionnaires. Written permission to use the *SEL in the Classroom Self-*

Assessment has been provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Appendix K). Written permission to use the *Panorama Teacher Perceptions of Students' SEL* has been provided by Panorama (Appendix M). The Panorama survey is free and open-source. Participants signed consent forms to participate. A blank participant consent form has been provided in Appendix G.

Recruitment Plan

Participant recruitment began with a recruitment form documented in Appendix E, including participant criteria and a brief explanation of the research study. The recruitment form was emailed to participants using a schoolwide distribution list for each site in the setting provided via the gatekeeper. The participant screening has been included in Appendix F. The participant screening included criteria for participation in the research study. Participants were elementary school teachers who teach English Language Arts (ELA) or social studies to students who receive a general education curriculum. During the research study, participants were required to have experience embedding behavioral support into the ELA or social studies curriculum. Participants spoke and taught in the same language as the researcher, English, to avoid misinterpretation of data and ensure understanding of the central meaning. Ten teacher participants were selected from a sample pool of approximately 80 teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who embedded behavioral support into the ELA or social studies elementary grade-level curriculum. Participants represented multiple grade levels in more than one location to extensively collect the details from the lived experiences of elementary educators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant consent was obtained before the beginning of the research. Prior to their participation in the study, all participants signed consent forms (Appendix G) that included information on the purpose of the study, risks and benefits of participation,

compensation, confidentiality, right to withdraw, a summary of results, and voluntary consent (Peoples, 2021).

Data Collection Plan

Data collection in hermeneutical phenomenology can consist of interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2021; van Manen, 2018). In this study, three data sources were used to collect and triangulate data: interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires. The interpretation of collected data led the researcher to a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Evidence was corroborated through the triangulation of data. Multiple data sources were used to obtain experiential descriptions from participants.

Individual Interviews

To find the meaning in the lived experience of others, researchers must first collect data on experiences. Phenomenological data consists of examples of lived experiences. The in-depth individual interview consisted of questions that allowed the researcher to understand the interviewee better. Interviews create insight into participant perspectives. The significance of an experienced phenomenon is interpreted through insight and wonder (van Manen, 2017). To garner participant perspective, it was essential to gather the information that created a better understanding of who the participant was and why their perspective was relevant to the research. Interviews are a data source for hermeneutical phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2021; van Manen, 2017).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Why did you become a teacher, and what are your current position and educational background? CRQ
2. What are the greatest challenges you feel teachers face today? SQ1, SQ2

3. How would you define social development? SQ2
4. What do you consider to be behavioral support? CRQ
5. What experience do you have embedding behavioral support in the classroom? CRQ
6. What training or resources do you already have, or feel is needed to implement and embed behavioral support? SQ3
7. What strategies do you use to gain students' attention? CRQ
8. How do you inform students of their learning objectives? CRQ
9. What do you do to stimulate recall of prior learning? CRQ
10. How do you present lessons and guide student learning? CRQ
11. What do you do to engage students to elicit their participation? CRQ
12. What opportunities do students have for practice? CRQ
13. In what ways do you provide feedback to students? CRQ
14. How do you assess student performance? CRQ
15. What do you do in the classroom to enhance retention and generalization of knowledge?
CRQ
16. How does students' ability to regulate their behavior affect their learning? CRQ
17. What role does social development play in student learning? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2
18. How do you facilitate responsible decision-making for your students? CRQ
19. What is your perspective on how behavior supports embedded in the academic curriculum impacts student academic performance and social development? SQ1

The first interview question aimed to break the ice and establish the relevance of the person's perspective to the research. The second question established a rapport with the participant and opens discussions about challenges affecting the classroom. Literature supports

social-emotional deficits contributing to classroom challenges (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Moore et al., 2015; Murano et al., 2019; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020). Questions three, four, and five aimed to establish a baseline of the participant's understanding and background knowledge of social-emotional learning, specifically in the areas of behavioral support and social development, for the participant's role in the study. The participant's perspectives on behavioral support and social development are relative to their lived experiences. Participant training and professional learning may directly affect their ability to embed SEL through behavioral support. Embedding SEL into academics is necessary and can be done so using books to promote SEL (Barret et al., 2017; Connelly et al., 2022; Cook et al., 2018; Fetting et al., 2018; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2021; Ng & Sun, 2022; Pysarenko, 2021; Storey, 2019; Tussey & Haas, 2020; Wang et al., 2015). Question five will provide information on educators' perspectives on the need for more professional learning opportunities.

Questions six through 17 delved further into teachers' lived experiences with SEL, aligning with Gagne's conditions of learning theory (Gagne, 1965) and the five core competencies of SEL (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011, 2015). Questions three, four, five, 16, and 18 exposed potential biases about social competencies and learning and provide greater insight into the participant's perspectives. Many teachers lack the training, experience, comfort level, prioritization, resources, or interest in SEL to effectively implement it (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; DePaoli et al., 2017; Fetting et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2015; Murano et al., 2019; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020). Teachers' social-emotional competencies correlate to classroom management and their ability to implement SEL (Fitzgerald, 2020) successfully. Understanding

previous or anticipated challenges is necessary to understand better what may inhibit embedding SEL with fidelity.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Inductive methods of analysis were used to assess thematic and narrative content. Textual descriptions were used to reflect participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thematic content was assessed through the finding of commonalities in lived experiences. Narratives were assessed to highlight what resonates most among the teachers' lived experiences. All interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams so that the interviews could be recorded and then transcribed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Note-taking occurred while rereading the transcriptions using data analysis strategies by Huberman, Miles, and Wolcott (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A summary sheet of collected interviews used Huberman and Miles's analytic strategy of summarizing field notes for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data was segmented using open coding. To immerse in details and reflect on data, memoing was used to reduce codes to themes. Data was coded categorically to develop themes based on the analytic strategies of Madison, Wolcott, Huberman, and Miles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Imaginative variation was used to construct an interpretation of participants' lived experiences to form the essence of their experiences. Huberman and Miles count frequency of codes was used to count the frequency of codes in interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A point of view was developed through the perspectives of teachers interviewed using data analysis strategies by Madison (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview data will be compared, contrasted, and then displayed in charts and tables.

Journal Prompts

Journal prompts are a heuristic tool for research that allows the writer to reflect upon and deepen their knowledge of experiences through sharing their voice (Janesick, 1999, p. 506). Journal prompts were used to explore the lived experiences of educators. The “art of journal writing and subsequent interpretations of journal writing produce meaning and understanding that are shaped by genre, the narrative form used, and personal cultural and paradigmatic conventions of the writer who is either the researcher, participant, and/or coresearcher” (Janesick, 1999, p. 507). Journal prompts allowed educators to reflect on their experiences as they embed behavioral support into academics and any observations they had. The use of journal prompts is complementary to the individually conducted interviews. It is well-established that journal writing is a helpful way of recording insight, discerning patterns, and reflecting (van Manen, 2018). Phenomenological reflection included bracketing and imaginative variation to separate researcher biases and constitute the meaning of lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Personal judgments or biases were suspended to focus on analyzing participants' lived experiences (Peoples, 2021).

Participants were asked to complete three journal prompts anonymously, to be returned within two weeks. The journal prompts consisted of strategies or resources used to embed behavioral support, the week's academic focus, and the teacher's feedback on the lessons. Journal prompts used one of Rainer's Seven Techniques lists (Janesick, 1999). Participants were asked to explain the strategies or resources used to embed behavioral support in the first journal prompt. Specifically, why the strategies or resources were chosen, what was their purpose or intent, and what was the observed outcome from using the strategies or resources in the lessons? The second journal prompt requested participants to list the learning outcome objectives of the academic

standards and describe how they felt behavioral support applied to the academic standards addressed in their academic lessons. The third journal prompt requested participants provide a narrative on their perspective of embedding behavioral support, providing details regarding challenges or successes they experienced.

Journal Prompts

1. Provide the behavioral supports embedded in your academic segment, why you chose them, and observations during or after the lesson.
2. What were the learning outcome objectives for the embedded behavioral support, and how do you feel the behavioral support applied to the academic standards?
3. Describe your experiences embedding behavioral support into your academic segments (e.g., Students' responses, conversations, dialogue, frustrations, observed reactions, etc.).

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

Note-taking occurred while reading the journal responses using data analysis strategies by Huberman, Miles, and Wolcott (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Emergent ideas were sketched using the reflective thinking strategy of Huberman and Miles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lists from the journal prompts were used to identify codes and themes. Axial coding made connections and identified a relationship between journal prompt responses. Data from journal prompts were contextualized using Wolcott's data analysis strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data was reported and displayed in a graph using Madison's data analysis strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Questionnaire

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) *SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment* (2019) and the *Panorama Teacher Perceptions of Students' SEL*

(2022) were used as a guide to developing the researcher's questionnaire. Permission was gained from CASEL (2019) and Panorama Education (2022) to use their questionnaires for research purposes (see Appendices K & L). Reliability and validity evidence for those questionnaires is based on content, response processes, and internal structure.

The questionnaire was designed to understand teachers' lived experiences and their perspectives on students' social competencies and academic performance when behavioral support is embedded into the academic curriculum. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, which took an average of 23 minutes to complete at the end of the research period. The questionnaire was sent directly to the participants via email with a Microsoft Forms link. The researcher was the only person who had access to participant responses, which were submitted anonymously. The questionnaire helped provide a better understanding by answering the central research question on the lived experiences of teachers embedding behavioral support in academics (CRQ), as well as the perceived effect on academic performance (SQ1) and social development (SQ2).

Questionnaire Questions

1. How often did you facilitate class meetings or community-building activities to cultivate a culture of personal connection, mutual support, and belonging?
2. How did you teach, model, and reinforce strategies that help students to express empathy, resolve conflicts, self-reflect, and self-regulate?
3. How did you discuss their perspectives and concerns with students?
4. What behavioral supports were effective for students' learning?
5. How would you describe your students' participation and effort during class?
6. What tools or strategies did you observe students use for self-control and behavior

regulation?

7. How did your students react to making mistakes?
8. How well did students persevere through setbacks?
9. What is your perspective on students' abilities to model citizenship and the consideration of others?
10. What is your perspective on how confident your students are in achieving academic outcomes successfully?

The questionnaire will be used to interpret the essence of lived experiences. The first question and questions three and five will provide insight into the classroom community and student engagement. Questions two, four, and six reveal what SEL strategies were implemented and how effective they were perceived to be. Teachers' perspectives on student social-emotional competencies are addressed in the remaining questions.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

The questionnaire responses were analyzed using a variety of data analysis strategies. The data was analyzed by note-taking, reflective thinking, summarization, code identification, frequency counts, imaginative variation, and clusters of meaning. A point of view was created using Madison's data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The questionnaire analysis used the same methods as described by Moustakas (1994) for individual interview analysis. Horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, clusters of meaning, bracketing, and reduction were used to constitute the meaning of lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Data Synthesis

The researcher's interpretation of data was the focus of hermeneutic phenomenology (Peoples, 2021). Interpreting collected data led the researcher to a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Data collection in hermeneutical phenomenology consists of interviews, observations, literature reviews, document analysis, artifacts, journal prompts, surveys, and questionnaires (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2021; van Manen, 2017). Evidence was corroborated through the triangulation of data. Multiple data sources were used to obtain experiential descriptions from participants. Triangulation of data from interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires was conducted to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of teachers who embed behavioral support into academics. The interviews provided insight into teachers' perspectives and experiences. The journal prompts collected information on what resources were used, what behavioral supports were addressed, and participants' observations and perspectives, which included a narrative on successes and challenges. The questionnaires provided an overall composite perspective of teachers' perspectives on academic skills, self-awareness, relationship skills, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and core skills (CASEL, 2022a, 2022b), and gauged their perspectives on student mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors to understand better how behavioral support affects social development.

Data was analyzed using the data analysis spiral, a visual image that is used to manage and organize data, memo emerging ideas, identify themes, and interpret data before presenting them visually as part of the data analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thematic analysis was used to identify reoccurring themes interpreted in the data collected. Analysis of participant responses was necessary to glean an understanding of hermeneutic research. The continuous process of interpreting meanings and text is referred to as the "hermeneutic circle" (Gall et al.,

2007, p. 521). The lived experiences of those affected by phenomena were analyzed for a central meaning. Participants' phenomenological experiences were compared and contrasted with interpreting meaning (Peoples, 2021). Transcribed interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires were analyzed. Horizontalization of the data was done to cluster data into themes for thematic analysis. Horizontalization of the phenomenon disclosed the nature and value of the phenomenon equally (Moustakas, 1994). Themes can be identified in lived experiences. Themes are determined by analyzing experienced phenomena (van Manen, 2018). A search for idiomatic phrases and repeated texts was conducted and reviewed. Idiomatic phrases come from lived experience (van Manen, 2018). These phrases, though common, had a similar theme and could be associated with the phenomena being researched. These were compared to the experiential descriptors in the literature reviewed.

Data was synthesized using van Manen's methods of hermeneutic reduction (Heinonen, 2015; Major & Savin-Baden, 2012; van Manen, 2018). Hermeneutic reduction allowed the researcher to understand through reflection (Heinonen, 2015; van Manen, 2018). Three key phases were used for synthesis: a "critical appraisal of work," "supporting appraisal with evidence," and "using reflection to plan future work" (Major & Savin-Baden, 2012, pp. 54-55).

Trustworthiness

Data collection and analysis trustworthiness was prioritized. Research that is guided by "an interpretive epistemological orientation," as explained by Guba and Lincoln, uses the terms dependability, transferability, dependability, and credibility. (Gall et al., 2007, p. 473). This qualitative research study employed strategies for usefulness, participatory models, truthfulness, triangulation, rich data, coding checks, and member checking.

Credibility

Credibility in this study's findings was in confidence to the extent that the findings accurately described the lived experiences from participants' perspectives of the phenomenon using evaluative criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Employing evaluative criterion techniques for accuracy was necessary for credibility. Established evaluative credibility techniques I used to corroborate data and justify themes were prolonged engagement, member-checking, and triangulation (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Member checking is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 314). Member checking shows that participants can be confident in the accuracy of their lived experiences. Participants had the opportunity to review transcriptions of interviews for member checking (Crabtree & Cohen, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018), provide feedback, and make corrections (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which results from the study can be generalized and applied to other situations or settings, thus making them transferable (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher, I established conditions for transferability but cannot make assurances of transferability as the research readers will judge that. Lived experiences may provide insight to others experiencing the same phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). The research presumes that when the same methodologies are implemented in a different setting with the same demographic of participants and applied research, similar insights will be derived from participants whose experiences are similar. As the researcher, I reviewed and coded data. Encoded data consisted "of terms and procedures...of all facets of research design" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 324). Detailed or thick descriptions were used to determine order in the research data constructs and identify themes (Gall et al., 2007; Geertz, 2008). Data synthesis is the

“integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Triangulation of data, audit trails, and visual diagrams were used to identify data clusters and synthesize data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability

The dependability of research will lie in the repeatability of the study. To ensure the dependability of research, study procedures must be consistent and able to be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) supports the consistency of findings. Qualitative research dependability can be achieved by replicating the study with consistent results. Thorough procedure descriptions and details regarding the study are necessary for repeatability and consistency. The criterion for the study procedures has been provided in detail to ensure dependability. Study criterion includes the research design, research questions, settings, participant, procedures, and data collection tools such as interview questions, journal prompts, and surveys. Additional research on the same phenomenon repeating this study's criterion should yield comparable findings (Peoples, 2021). Additionally, an inquiry audit by the research director at the institution was conducted. Auditing research processes ensures dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

Personal bias has been documented and explained to protect the research. Triangulation was used to ensure the confirmability of the research. Researchers triangulate data using multiple data sources and methods to corroborate evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The triangulation of data in this research study required three data sources. Interviews, journal prompts, and a questionnaire were used to collect data to develop a deeper understanding and perspective on the

perceived effect of behavioral support on elementary students' academic performance and social development. An audit trail was performed. Audit trails allow the researcher to “retrace the process” they used to arrive at their findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 323).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guide researchers' work with participants to ensure research requirements are met, consent is obtained by participants, and confidentiality is kept (Moustakas, 1994). Before the study, I sought approval from Liberty University to conduct the study. To comply with the institutional review board's (IRB) expectations, ethical considerations regarding confidentiality, data storage, and consent have been addressed (Peoples, 2021). I gained permission from the school district to conduct the study before the beginning of the research. Participants signed consent forms to participate. Participation in the study was voluntary. The privacy and anonymity of participants was respected. Participant responses have been kept confidential through pseudonyms or codes. Interviews were conducted in a location where others would not easily overhear the conversation. Data has been stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings have been stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. All information has been stored in digital files and transcriptions on a password-secure computer. Data will be kept for three years to ensure accuracy and provide an audit trail of the collected data. An audit trail of all the documents utilized within the research, including raw data, data analysis, and synthesis, has been kept with the research study materials (Gall et al., 2007).

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological research study was to explore the phenomena of lived experiences of elementary teachers who embed behavioral learning support into academics for a better understanding of the perceived effect of the phenomena.

Phenomenological research interprets phenomena for a better understanding and to evoke the meaning and intention of the experiences lived by study participants (Santiago et al., 2020). The researcher conducted a reflective study (Adams & van Manen, 2017), seeking to explore the lived experiences of teachers who embedded behavioral support into academics. The study was conducted through the lens of social constructivism. The central research question sought to understand the lived experiences of teachers who embedded behavioral support into their curriculum. Triangulation of data from individual interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires occurred. These data collection methods were chosen to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences of the study participants as they pertain to the research questions. Interviews, questionnaires, and journal prompts allowed participants to share their experiences with the researched phenomenon. These data collection methods provided the participants' perceived effect of embedding behavioral support on academic performance and social development and collected information through questionnaires, interviews, and journal prompts on their overall lived experience with the phenomenon. Challenges experienced by the participants provided information to understand better what training or resources are necessary from participants' perspectives. Data analysis consisted of textual descriptions, interview summaries, horizontalization, note-taking and summarization of notes, phenomenological reflection using bracketing and reduction, imaginative variation, audit trails, clusters of meaning for thematic content and thematic analysis, audit trails, and written presentation of essences. The

researcher interpreted the participants' lived experiences to understand the essence of their experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of educators who embedded behavioral learning support into their academic curriculum and to describe the meaning of the perceived influence on academic achievement and social development for elementary students in two elementary schools. Data in the form of narrative descriptions of participants, as well as visual representations of participant demographics (see Table 5), corroboration of evidence through data triangulation, themes and subthemes (see Table 6), and research question findings describing the participants' lived experiences are provided in Chapter Four.

Participants

Principal consent was obtained from the sites to recruit participants once the Honeybee School District granted permission to conduct research. The Honeybee School District required receipt of principal consent prior to providing their site consent to conduct research (Appendix D). A recruitment email was sent with a recruitment screener (Appendix F). Ten participants responded, provided consent to participate (Appendix G), and met the recruitment criteria. Five participants were from the North site, and five were from the West site in the Honeybee School District. The participants' highest level of education varied from bachelor's degree to an educational doctorate. Participants' teaching experience ranged from eight to 27 years. The participants represented a variety of grade levels ranging from kindergarten through fifth grade at each of the sites. Three of the teachers were interrelated (IRR) special education teachers, and seven of the teachers were general education teachers. Each participant taught general education content in all academic areas. Four of the participants became teachers as a second career, while

six became teachers immediately after their college graduation. All of the participants had experience embedding behavioral support into the academic curriculum. Saturation was remarkable with the data collected from the ten participants. The table below (Table 5) outlines participants' demographic information using pseudonyms. A detailed portrait of participants who participated in the study follows.

Table 5

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Elizabeth	24	Master's	All Content Areas	5th
Hannah	16	Bachelor's	All Content Areas	3rd
John	13	Doctorate	All Content Areas	3rd
Leah	17	Master's	All Content Areas	2nd
Martha	11	Bachelor's	Special Education	5th-IRR
Mary	27	Bachelor's	All Content Areas	K
Paul	12	Bachelor's	Special Education - All	5th-IRR
Rachel	27	Specialist's	Special Education - All	K/5th-IRR
Ruth	21	Specialist's	All Content Areas	K
Sarah	8	Master's	All Content Areas	3rd

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was inspired as a child to become a teacher by her fifth-grade teacher. A veteran teacher of 24 years, she currently teaches fifth grade in the Honeybee School District. She feels the greatest challenges teachers face are the demands. “We teach everything, we are parent, we are nurse, we are tooth fairy, we are everything, and we don’t have time to meet the needs of our kids where they are.” Elizabeth feels behavioral support “absolutely” needs to be implemented in every classroom and that behavior “tremendously” affects students’ ability to learn, noting fifth-grade students get “caught up in their own drama” socially. She uses modeling, coaching, humor, positive incentives, and positive praise for classroom management. She feels behavior support is necessary for students to access academics. “I think you need to embed the behavior so that once they understand the behavior expectations, once we fix the behavior, we can focus on the academics.” Elizabeth believes behavioral support must be embedded “across the board,” and behavioral concerns should be addressed immediately.

Hannah

Hannah began her career as a social worker. After discovering she enjoyed teaching and helping others, she opted to change careers and become a teacher. She feels she has always been a teacher at heart, having babysat and then teaching preschool at her church before becoming a teacher. She has two bachelor’s degrees in social work and in education. She also has endorsements in reading and special education. From her perspective, the biggest challenge for educators today is behavior. Hannah feels “like the students are not coming to school ready to learn” and that the curriculum is “more difficult and maybe not developmentally appropriate for all of our students,” which can lead to student frustration. She also believes students are spending “too much time on technology” and not enough time socializing with peers. She referenced

Maslow's hierarchy in a discussion about students' deficits in social development. Hannah feels embedding behavioral support in instruction is "necessary," noting there is no time to do a separate lesson on SEL, "and by embedding it in the curriculum, you're putting it in places where it's going to make more sense than in isolation."

John

John is a third-grade teacher in the Honeybee School District with 13 years of teaching experience and recently earned his educational doctorate. He has taught second-grade, third-grade, fourth-grade, and instructional technology. When he was a child, John pretended to be a superhero and wanted to save the world. Leaning on his childhood aspirations, he chose a career path that would allow him to have an impact on the world, choosing to become an elementary school teacher. John attributes building relationships as being critical to student performance. He believes that embedding behavioral support into academics "would be two birds, one stone" and that students are "better off in the long run" when behavior support is embedded into academic instruction. He begins the school year prioritizing building relationships with his students. John believes "that when students feel comfortable, when they feel love, when they feel supported, any human, whenever they feel that way, they're going to do more." John noted several academic standards naturally align for interdisciplinary instruction and behavioral support.

Leah

Leah is a second-grade teacher in the Honeybee School District with 17 years of experience teaching at primary grade levels. Leah did not set out to be a teacher when she first enrolled in college. She took an education course while pursuing her business degree and determined she "really loved it" and decided to pursue education instead. She has two bachelor's degrees in business management and sociology and a master's degree in early childhood

education. She has endorsements in reading and mathematics. She embeds the seven habits from the Leader In Me program in conversation throughout the school day. In addition to embedding the seven habits, she incorporates Zones of Regulation in her classroom. She feels Zones of Regulation “is a great support for some of my students that emotional issues, behavioral that need help.” Leah believes embedding behavioral support into academics affects students “Positively because if you can address behaviors in a positive way, in a timely manner, they’re going to learn a lot more because the behavior is not slowing them down from the academic work that they need to complete.”

Martha

Martha was inspired to become a teacher after being repeatedly asked what grade she taught while she was a stay-at-home mother. Having obtained a bachelor’s degree in finance, she began her second career as a teacher through the alternative teacher certification program issued by the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GATAPP). She has worked as an IRR teacher, serving students in fourth and fifth grades, for 11 years in the Honeybee School District. She says her passion is working with “neurotypical and neurodivergent” students. She describes the biggest challenges for educators as having the time to meet the ever-increasing teaching demands and to do so with fidelity. Martha believes embedding behavioral support has a positive effect on students, “setting them up for success” when “expectations are clearly set,” “consistently reviewed,” and “part of the daily routine.” Martha is certified in nonviolent crisis prevention intervention from the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) and is the PBIS behavior specialist for her elementary school.

Mary

Mary discovered she wanted to become a teacher while working with children as a lifeguard, camp counselor, and in a gym daycare in college. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. As a veteran teacher with the Honeybee School District, Mary has 27 years of experience teaching kindergarten. Mary noted two major challenges for teachers today: demands and behavior. She feels there are too many demands placed on teachers, especially compared to when she first began her career as a teacher, noting teachers are putting in "countless hours" outside their contractual obligations and that teaching is not a job that you can do unprepared. "I don't always think it's easy for teachers because they can't balance their lives enough with everything that we are being asked to do." She has witnessed an increase in behavior challenges in students. "Every child needs assistance, rules that they have to adhere to, to learn and be trained to conduct themselves in a daily routine, to learn and grow and complete all their work." Mary feels students perform "way better" when behavioral support is embedded throughout academic instruction and that without it, the classroom would be "a free-for-all all."

Paul

When Paul was in the 11th grade, he was encouraged by a teacher to pursue a career in teaching because people listened when he talked. Paul has a bachelor's degree in special education. He has been an IRR special education teacher for 11 years in elementary and middle schools and taught students with moderate intellectual disabilities (MOID) for one year. He currently teaches 5th grade IRR in the Honeybee School District. Paul is certified in nonviolent crisis prevention intervention from the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). Paul said building a rapport with students is essential with students and that relationship building is key to preventing negative behaviors. He felt it is crucial to "foster the environment before you do anything else"

because if students “aren’t emotionally stable, they’re not going to learn anything.” Paul noted consistency and clear expectations are critical for classroom management. “I think if you don’t have a system in place that works for you, then you are setting yourself up for failure in the classroom...the expectation has to be communicated upfront.” One of the ways he embeds behavior support is by incentivizing work. He facilitates responsible decision-making with clear expectations. Paul believes you can implement social development through reading instruction and embed it into the curriculum.

Rachel

Rachel is a veteran teacher with 27 years of teaching experience in both general education and special education. She also has educational leadership experience from when she was an intern, learning about becoming an assistant principal. She has a master’s degree in elementary education and a specialist’s degree in educational leadership. Rachel is currently an IRR teacher in both kindergarten and fifth grade. Initially, she went into business as a career but chose education as a second career. The process of advocating for her daughter, who struggled in school, gave her a new perspective on education and inspired her to become a teacher. Rachel believes students “learn better” when behavior expectations and support are embedded into instruction.

Ruth

Ruth is a kindergarten teacher in the Honeybee School District. She became a teacher after her daughter had what she describes as an “inferior” teacher. When Ruth questioned the principal about her daughter’s teacher, the principal suggested she become a teacher. Ruth has a specialist’s degree in education and has been teaching for 21 years. Ruth identifies behavior issues as one of the greatest challenges teachers face today, specifying that increased negative

behaviors in students are a result of isolation due to COVID. “No matter how you look at it, COVID has played a role in our students, especially coming into kindergarten these days.” Despite having a school-wide system of support for behavior, she feels additional training is necessary to address behavioral concerns, noting behavior “tremendously” affects students’ learning “because if they’re not paying attention, they’re missing what’s being taught.” She uses books to embed behavioral support and social development by talking about “the problem and solution” in a story and how to “make the right decision.” It has been her experience that students love to be read to and can make connections to stories. Ruth embeds behavior support into academics as much as she can.

Sarah

Sarah became a teacher because she always wanted to work with children. As a child, she loved being in school because she felt like it was a safe place. She strives to make her classroom a safe place for learners. Sarah has been a third-grade teacher in the Honeybee School District for eight years. She has a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in reading and literacy and plans to pursue an educational doctorate later this school year. She has a reading and literacy endorsement, advanced content and gifted endorsement, as well as a coaching endorsement. She uses positive reinforcement and praise in the classroom. It has been her experience that when students are dysregulated emotionally, “they’re unable to be in the moment and learning, they’re not listening, not engaging, and most likely missing the whole lesson.” She gave an example of a student from the previous school year who struggled to regulate their behavior, which resulted in poor grades. When the student was able to regulate their behavior, their grades improved. She saw “a direct correlation” to improved academic performance when behavioral support was embedded. She feels student’s ability to regulate their

emotions and readiness to learn in combination with the teacher's knowledge is essential for a successful classroom.

Results

Data were collected on participants' lived experiences embedding behavioral support into academics and the perceived effect on academics and social development through individual interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires. Each of the participants' interviews was conducted, recorded, and transcribed via Microsoft Teams. Participants' journal and questionnaire responses were recorded in a digital format using Microsoft Forms. The digital files have been stored on a password-protected computer, in password-protected files, and per requirements will remain stored for three years.

Participants conducted member-checking to approve transcriptions prior to initial coding. Microsoft Excel was used to organize and pull data in the form of in Vivo codes from the individual participant interview transcripts. Evidence was corroborated through the triangulation of data. Data was analyzed using the data analysis spiral. Data was synthesized using van Manen's methods of hermeneutic reduction (van Manen, 2018). Horizontalization of data (Moustakas, 1994) clustered data identifying three themes and seven subthemes.

Table 6

Themes, Subthemes, & in Vivo Evidence

Theme	Subtheme	in Vivo Evidence
Challenges	Time	Time, time management, demands, standards, assessments, meetings, planning, meeting student needs, professional development, all other duties assigned, stress, prioritizing
	Behavior	Challenges, problems, circumstances, technology, interactions, influences, coping, problem-solving, disengaged, disrespectful, trauma, distracted, reach

		them, reactive participate, ready, disruptions, dysregulated, tragedy
Classroom Management	Relationships	Making connections, interactions, learning something about, caring, family, community, positive, praise, incentives, rewards, reinforcement, safe, sense of belonging, humor, fun, token-economy, pluses and deltas, tangibles, Fun Friday
	Expectations	Consistency, routine, modeling, explicit, structure, reteaching, repetition, Leader in Me, 7 Habits, PBIS, accountability, daily, morning meetings, role-playing
Instruction	Academic	Learning targets, objectives, I can statements, student practice, mini-lessons, workshop model, stations/centers, manipulatives, PowerPoints, visuals, small group, retention, prior knowledge, feedback, explicit language, repetition, spiraling, scaffolding, participation, engaged, effort, understanding, working, confidence, encouraged, perseverance, growth, ownership, empowered collaboration, multi-sensory, Orton-Gillingham, Heggerty, science of reading, remediation/extension learning blocks
	Embedded	Daily, morning meetings, read-aloud, one on one, small group, conversations, throughout the day, as needed, class discussions, role playing, modeling, positive praise, positive feedback, incentives, connections, key details, prior knowledge, citizenship, speaking and listening, rules and procedures, Zones of Regulation
	Student Response	Participation, engaged, effort, understanding, working, confidence, citizens, role models, modeling, respectful, responsible, empathy, maturity, getting along, movement breaks, breathing, self-regulation, handled/celebrated mistakes, take breaks, asked for help

Challenges

Teachers are riddled with many challenges today. Education is evolving with new practices and research. Teachers are overwhelmed with expectations and challenges that go

beyond the scope of academic instruction. All of the teacher participants shared their passion for teaching during their interviews, discussing their lived experiences while also sharing challenges they've encountered. Rachel, Martha, Ruth, Hannah, and Elizabeth felt frustrated with decisions being made for educators by people who do not have classroom experience. Each of the participants expressed how difficult it is to manage all of the demands in the school day which is magnified by challenging student behaviors. Elizabeth, Ruth, and Hannah voiced concern that "teachers are not necessarily allowed to teach" because they're "being micromanaged." Ruth expressed concern over "behavior issues in the classroom and not having control over what is going on" coupled with a "lack of support from administration." Veteran teachers, Hannah, Mary, and Rachel expressed that teaching "is not how it used to be" and "a lot has changed" since they graduated college," recalling how years ago socialization was a part of the kindergarten standards, but now the academic demands, especially in reading, are much higher. Special education teachers Martha, Paul, and Rachel shared they are often asked to take on roles and responsibilities in a category defined as "all other duties assigned" in addition to their other duties. During participant interviews, when asked what the greatest challenges teachers face today, the most reoccurring theme was time and behavior. These challenges have led to increased stress for teachers as they try to meet the needs of their students while balancing their work expectations and a life outside of school.

Time

The workday does not end for teachers when the school bell rings. Many teachers put in "countless hours" beyond their contractual duties because there is more to do than what "can get done in a day." There is simply not enough time in the day to meet teaching demands and the needs of students. John feels the greatest challenges teachers face today are meeting students'

needs, noting every student comes to school with a unique set of challenges, backgrounds, and abilities. Elizabeth felt discouraged, recognizing her students' needs require more; however, "We don't have time to do that because the county is putting so much on us, saying you have to do this, this, this, and this, but yet not letting us do what we need to do to." Leah feels teachers have a difficult time managing "the demands of teaching and the lack of time" and that "the demands are getting more each year." Repeatedly, teachers provided examples of the demands and time constraints they were challenged with. "There's a lot of documentation, a lot of assessment, a lot of planning, and a lot of paperwork all the time, and it's too much," said Mary. Paul noted prioritizing what is "important" and "in the best interest of the students" is necessary for time management, but even still, there is "not enough time to meet students' needs."

Behavior

Teachers were emphatic about how this generation of students is "growing up in a different era than we did." Students are coming to school disrespectful, disengaged, and presenting difficult behavioral challenges. Hannah, Ruth, Mary, and Martha all believe the rise in students' behavioral problems, as well as social and academic deficits, can be attributed to "isolation" due to imposed COVID restrictions and remote learning. To that end, Rachel pointed out, "We need to consider that perspective for these kids if they're in some sort of crisis; we can't give them a demand that they're not ready to meet." Sarah feels students today are "being pulled in so many directions" and are not being taught problem-solving or coping skills at home. Martha attributes increased behavior challenges to "outside influences, such as tragedies...loss of a parent or grandparent or a loved one...death...incarceration...divorce...lots of different factors." Teachers are challenged with addressing and meeting students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs to "reach" them. Technology is a common theme in participants' responses

regarding behavior, specifically students' need for "instant gratification all the time" and the resulting undesired, reactive behaviors when that doesn't happen. Many students do not know how to appropriately interact with peers because of "too much technology." Significantly, students "don't know how to make friends because they were isolated for so long," as Ruth pointed out. Sarah expressed concern about students who play sports stating these children aren't getting enough sleep because "they wake up at 6:00 AM, and don't get home until midnight." Students depend on their teachers to help them navigate their circumstances because "they're developing almost like they're being just like, thrown into this world."

Classroom Management

Most significantly, classroom management was the number one strategy for embedding behavioral support for students in journal responses and personal interviews. A supportive classroom culture was evidenced through expectations, routines, communication, morning meetings, reinforced language, teaching, modeling, accountability, and relationships. Compellingly, several teachers noted that classroom management wasn't something they learned in college but had to learn what did and did not work for themselves while on the job. Universally, teachers believe consistency is essential to elucidate effective behavioral management in the classroom. Positivity was a key factor in classroom management. The majority of teachers found positive reinforcement was more effective than negative reinforcement. To that end, teachers provided positive classroom environments using praise, reinforcement, rewards, and humor. Chiefly, teachers prioritized building relationships with their students.

Relationships

Relationships are pivotal to students' social and academic development. Teachers

repeatedly spoke of the importance of relationships to promote positive behavior and learning in personal interviews, journal responses, and questionnaires. Martha referenced a Rita Pearson quote (Pierson, 2013), saying, “In the words of Rita Pearson, kids don’t learn from teachers they don’t like.” Building a relationship is crucial to “knowing your students” and understanding them. Teachers ardently agreed the best way to gain students’ attention and prevent negative behavior was through relationships. Mary believes behavior support starts with relationships. “If I had to say, how can you get them to behave the best, it would be forming relationships with them.” Teachers build relationships by “learning something about them,” making their class “a family,” “making connections,” “building community,” and interacting with one another daily in morning meetings.

Expectations

Classroom expectations have been prioritized, repeated, and retaught daily. All teachers adhered to their school-wide program for positive behaviors with fidelity in their classrooms. Explicit instruction of expectations occurred during morning meetings and was reinforced throughout the day. Teachers found it most effective to consistently “use the language” and ‘model’ expectations rather than have students memorize expectations. Interview, journal, and questionnaire responses revealed modeling was the preferred method for teaching expectations. Many of the teachers “incentivized” expected behavior, which had positive results.

Instruction

Teachers exemplified explicit instruction of academic standards and integration of behavioral support embedded into academic instruction. Journal responses revealed teachers were embedding behavioral support far more frequently than they had realized, noting behavioral support is relevant across all academic areas. Participants taught, modeled, and reinforced

behavioral support strategies through class discussions, role play, read-alouds, social stories, and providing examples of effective problem-solving routinely throughout the day, across all academic content areas, often addressing problems as they occurred.

Academic

Learning targets and objectives for standards being taught were presented at the beginning of each lesson using PowerPoints and visuals. Teachers rephrased learning targets using kid-friendly language, such as “I can” statements or essential questions that are on the students' level of understanding. Teachers engaged students in learning through evidence-based practices, using mini-lessons, a workshop model, station teaching, and multi-sensory instruction, balancing teacher-led instruction with opportunities for student practice. The teachers collaborate weekly with peers in grade-level team meetings to create lesson plans that engage all learners and provide opportunities for remediation and extension. Spiraling, scaffolding, and repetition are used to present lessons, stimulate recall of prior learning, and enhance retention of knowledge.

Embedded

Above all, consistent conversations in morning meetings and throughout the day were provided for behavioral support. “The biggest impact we see with having embedded behavioral supports is the consistency.” Echoing the positive effect of consistent behavioral support, another teacher shared they are “beginning to see the results from consistently using them,” as evidenced by a student using “breathing techniques” during an assessment. Another key point was teachers must try to “understand” why students are demonstrating behavior to successfully “embed support” throughout the day. Referring to several of their students who have experienced trauma, one teacher shared, “By providing the opportunities for the students to see and learn from people

who care about them and who are embedding the behavioral support they crave, it helps them to better learn.” Teachers encouraged effort and participation through incentives. Students were empowered to “believe in the power of yet” and to “keep trying” to promote perseverance. One teacher elicited recall of prior knowledge by referencing what a character, Nellie Neuron, needs to calm down, to which the student replied, “Oh, that’s right, she can’t hook up with her friends when I’m upset and make me smarter.” The student was able to self-correct and recover from frustration.

Student Response

Students demonstrated increased rigor, perseverance, and an improved growth mindset. Teachers remind students mistakes are a part of learning. “None of us are perfect, and when we make mistakes, we talk about how it shows that we are learning.” Students were more willing to accept making mistakes and even celebrated their mistakes as growth opportunities. One participant noted students' reactions “are becoming more positive every week” and that students are “learning to ask for help and use breathing techniques before reacting.” Teachers utilized multiple strategies such as breaks, visuals, role-playing, or verbal prompts to help students prevent or recover from setbacks. “Some of the successes include noted improvement in behavior with fewer individual reminders.” Having observed students increased self-awareness, one teacher reported simple prompts such as “try,” “rephrase,” and “I need help, please” were enough to help some students recover from setbacks. Teachers observed students advocating for themselves using self-control strategies to regulate their behavior, as evidenced by “students removing themselves from games or situations when frustrated rather than acting out towards each other,” “taking a sip of water,” using “break cards,” “positive self-talk,” “breathing,”

fidgets, movement, counting, closing their eyes, and conferencing one on one with teachers to problem-solve.

Outlier Data and Findings

One unexpected finding arose while analyzing the participant interviews. For the majority of the individual interview questions, participants' responses aligned cohesively, representing similar points of view that resonated amongst their lived experiences. In light of the fact that all participants work in the same school district and thus have similar demands for pedagogy delivery and assessments, and both study sites have school-wide initiatives supporting positive school culture and behavior, I anticipated responses would be somewhat similar. However, when asked about how student performance was assessed, despite my assumption that participants would respond and feel the same regarding assessments, one true outlier emerged.

Assessments

Teachers expressed strong opinions in view of assessments. Assessments provide student data, and as several participants reported “data drives instruction.” Teachers use a variety of assessments in the classroom in a lot of different ways, notably observations, anecdotal notes, exit tickets, interims, formatives, and summatives. Additionally, there are formalized tests. Sarah pointed out “The IOWA and the CogAT take two weeks, and then we have the milestones, which is another week, and it’s a lot.” Mary said kindergarten is “overloaded with assessments – GKIDS, MI, Acadience, Amira, EIP...” Nine participants shared the same belief there are “too many” assessments and that “too much” time is spent on assessing, whereas not enough time is spent on instruction. Elizabeth said, “I think it’s ridiculous; we do not have time to teach with all of these assessments.” One out of 10 participants in the study felt that educators do not do enough assessments. “As far as what’s required for the assessments, I don’t believe it’s enough,”

noting more data is needed to drive their instruction.

Research Question Responses

Throughout this study, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of teachers who embedded behavioral support into their academic instruction. Review and analysis of triangulated data was interpreted using imaginative variation to develop a point of view through the participants' experiences embedding behavioral support. Narratives highlight what most resonated with the teachers, as evidenced by responses to the research questions guiding this study.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in elementary schools who embed behavioral support into their academic English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies lessons? Eight teachers embedded explicit behavioral support instruction in ELA, whereas two teachers did during their social studies segment. Teachers' lived experiences provide a persuasive argument for embedding behavioral support into academics. Teachers embedded behavioral support in ELA by connecting to the ELA standard for point of view, key details, story elements, as well as speaking and listening. From Hannah's perspective "implementing behavioral support in ELA is very easy." Conversely, Leah shared that "most of the challenges of embedding behavioral supports in ELA centers around the constraints of time." Paul and Ruth embedded behavioral support into social studies connecting to standards for citizenship, rules and procedures, and economics. Ruth felt embedding behavioral support in social studies was "perfect" for teaching the positive character traits of "honesty," "respect," self-control" and "how to be a good citizen" to kindergarten students. Paul embedded the concept of gratitude while teaching about resources, noting students were surprised to learn about "living conditions,

wages, and types of jobs” and that those discussions “always make them grateful for their phones and things they take for granted.”

Sub-Question One

What is the perceived influence of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students’ academic performance? It is Elizabeth’s perspective that behavioral support is something every teacher needs to embed in their classroom because “if you get the behavior under control, you can teach.” John said, “If they don't have the tools to regulate their behavior, I’m not going to say it’s impossible, but it's near impossible for them to learn.” Increased confidence in academic achievement was a reoccurring theme in journal responses. “With positive encouragement, they believe they can improve and master skills taught.” One teacher reported, “At least $\frac{3}{4}$ of our class have shown confidence.” “Kindergarten students are all confident they will achieve academic outcomes unless someone tells them otherwise.” “I think most of my students are confident in their academic success.” Furthermore, teachers reported that embedding behavioral support increased student participation and positively influenced academic learning due to the increase in students’ confidence. “Participation is directly related to their understanding and confidence with the topic being discussed.” One participant noted all students want to be successful academically, but they do not all have the same starting point. Referring to behavioral support, Rachel said, “Academics get strong because of it,” and “you’re not going to get the growth, and you’re not going to get them to believe and trust in the fact that they can actually do it if you do not give them behavior supports throughout all the academic parts.”

Sub-Question Two

What is the perceived effect of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on

students' social development? Student-led discussions allowed them to reflect on their own behaviors and mentor peers, which "encouraged them to reflect on their own choices and how they as an individual could contribute to the learning environment." Moreover, students looked to peers for guidance in social situations, relying on their classroom community to help determine if an issue was a "big problem" or "small problem" and ways to solve those problems. Students engaged in think, pair, share discussions on problem-solving and making good choices after listening to a read-aloud. "I think students are some of the best role models for each other when it comes to modeling citizenship and consideration of others." Students are able to better connect with peers "when they realize that they share experiences or feel the same about a topic it creates better friends and a family class." Students were more accepting of their peers, as evidenced by one teacher who said, "Our daily classroom conversations are positive, and peer reactions have been sympathetic and supportive."

Sub-Question Three

What training or resources are required to implement and embed behavioral support effectively? Nine out of 10 teachers felt they had already received and were sufficiently prepared to embed behavioral support effectively. The greatest hindrance to embedding behavioral support was time, especially with so many academic demands. Several teachers felt a review of training might be necessary for colleagues who did not have "buy-in" to the school culture and that those were the teachers who typically had the most behavioral challenges in their classrooms. Mary suggested new teachers, both new to the profession and new to the school culture at their site, should be given a teacher mentor to guide them with embedding behavioral support. Ruth identified a need to know how to respond rather than react when students are in crisis, saying, "I understand now at this point in my life why they're doing it, but I don't know what to do to help

them.”

Summary

All of the participants agreed that embedding behavioral support in academics was necessary to maintain a positive classroom culture and address problems as they arose throughout the day. Provided that behavioral support was embedded, time continued to be a challenge for some teachers, as evidenced by journal responses. By celebrating growth, the lived experiences of teachers were that students' confidence improved along with student effort and academic achievement. There was a resounding response to students' levels of participation, effort, and engagement. Overall, teachers responded students are showing “more effort” and are “more engaged” in lessons and that students demonstrated “ownership of their learning.” Students demonstrated leadership skills as role models for their peers, helping one another learn by encouraging them through compliments and focusing on how their classroom community could better work together. Teachers reported decreases in student power struggles and arguments.

Each of the participants had previously implemented behavioral support in their classrooms with a strong focus on classroom management prior to this study. Universally, teachers believe consistency is essential to facilitate effective behavioral support. Teachers mentored students to consider the perspectives of others in addition to providing opportunities to self-reflect to improve social interactions. In light of the fact both sites have implemented evidence-based, school-wide initiatives to improve school culture, behavior, and academic achievement, the participants felt they had a strong foundation of training and support to embed behavioral support. The sites provided training for their school-wide initiatives to all of their staff members. When these programs were implemented with fidelity, teachers saw results.

Unanimously, the teachers felt behavioral support positively affects students' learning and social development.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of educators who embedded behavioral learning support into their academic curriculum and describe the meaning of the perceived influence on academic achievement and social development. This study was theoretically framed through the scope of social constructivism. In reviewing the literature on SEL in schools, most literature was specific to using specified schoolwide initiatives or to the need for SEL but was not specific to exploring the lived experiences of teachers who embedded SEL, specifically behavioral learning support, into the curriculum. While both sites in this study have schoolwide initiatives supporting SEL, the researcher focused on the essence of the experiences when behavioral learning support was embedded into academic instruction. Teachers felt, as evidenced by their lived experiences, that students' social development has been negatively impacted by distance learning. To that end, SEL is needed to bridge the gap in socio-emotional development for students to be able to access academic learning (Evans, 2022). The evidence from this study may be used to fill the gap in the literature. The essence of participants' lived experiences who embedded SEL through behavioral support into their academic curriculum provides insight into the perceived influence of SEL on academic performance and social development. Using van Manen's methods of hermeneutic reduction (van Manen, 2018), data was synthesized to understand a central meaning through reflection and construct an interpretation of the participants' lived experiences using imaginative variation. The interpreted essence of the participants' experiences is discussed in Chapter Five, along with implications for policy and practice, empirical and theoretical implications, limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Throughout this study, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of teachers who embedded behavioral support into their academic instruction. Corroboration of evidence through data triangulation led to the development of thematic findings of participants' lived experiences on the researched phenomena. The interpreted results used imaginative variation to form the essence of their experiences. Behavioral learning support embedded into the academic curriculum is necessary to meet students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs within the time constraints of the school day. The hermeneutic significance of this study makes the relatability of the interpreted essence of the participants significant for educators striving to meet their students' SEL and academic needs. The perceived effect of embedding behavioral learning support is positive both socially and academically. A discussion on themes and findings is supported by empirical and theoretical sources. The limitations and delimitations of the research are discussed, along with future research recommendations.

Summary of Thematic Findings

This study was guided by the central research question: What are the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in elementary schools who embed behavioral support into their academic English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies lessons? Two sub-questions focused on the perceived influence of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' academic performance and social development. A third sub-question sought perspective on what training or resources are needed to effectively implement and embed behavioral learning support. Using van Manen's methods of hermeneutic reduction (van Manen, 2018), multiple data sources were synthesized using horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Triangulation of data corroborated evidence to develop an understanding of the essence of participants' experiences. Thematic

analysis identified the reoccurrence of three themes and seven subthemes interpreted in the collected data. The three emergent themes were challenges, classroom management, and instruction. Seven subthemes within the three themes were identified: time, behavior, relationships, expectations, academic, embedded, and student response. The most prevalent theme was challenges. The lived experiences of participants were that teaching is challenging and demanding. The most harrowing demands, as evidenced by participant responses, were defined by two subthemes: time and behavior. These challenges have led to increased stress for teachers as they try to meet the needs of their students while balancing their work expectations and a life outside of school. To bridle these challenges, teachers prioritized instruction and classroom management. Classroom management was a major theme across all data sources. Building relationships and setting expectations were subthemes in narratives about classroom management. Provided that participants were teachers, their lived experiences were based on instruction, with subthemes of academic, embedded, and student response.

Interpretation of Findings

The essence of the phenomena is portrayed through the participants' lived experiences. Previous research was limited to teachers' perspectives on implementing SEL (Brackett et al., 2019; Collie, 2017). The teachers' perspectives in this study support the need for equitable SEL instruction that is relevant and responsive to students through connection to the curriculum. This study contributes to a growing body of research supporting the implementation of SEL through direct instruction for academic and social development (Barnes & Jones, 2022; Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Blewitt et al., 2020; CASEL, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2017; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Fettig et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018; Mahoney et al., 2018; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Ramirez et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Tussey & Haas, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2020).

Purposefully embedding direct instruction of SEL improves students' academic and social development (Mahoney et al., 2018; Winterbottom & Schmidt, 2022). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for SEL has increased due to the negative psychological effect on students' mental health and social-emotional development, which are the by-products of isolation and school closures (Campbell, 2021; CASEL 2021; Egan et al., 2021; Evans, 2022; Hill, 2021; Kardambikis & Donne, 2022; Maclean & Law, 2022; Minkos & Gelbar, 2020; Signorelli et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022). The most effective way to facilitate SEL is through teacher-student relationships (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Irwin et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2019; Miskimon et al., 2022; Shafait et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2018). Students learning environments, as well as their relationships with teachers and peers, can affect their school experience (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021; Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Irwin et al., 2022; Maclean & Law, 2022; Miskimon et al., 2022; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017; Shafait et al., 2021). The challenge with embedding SEL is balancing the already imposed instructional demands and initiatives required of teachers with students' increased behavioral needs, as evidenced by the subthemes of time and behavior. Teachers are aware of the academic and social benefits of implementing SEL in the curriculum but struggle to meet the increasing demands of teaching and the needs of their students. As evidenced in previous research, teachers encounter time challenges to meet demands (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; DePaoli et al., 2017; Fettig et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2017; Thierry et al., 2020). Teachers are passionate about meeting the needs of their students and make every effort to create a positive learning environment that fosters relationship-building. Further interpretation of the themes identified three key findings: teachers believe behavioral learning support has value, positive relationships are essential, and teacher demands need rebalancing.

Teachers Believe Behavioral Learning Support Has Value

Respondents' lived experiences indicated that student engagement, participation, confidence, motivation, and effort improved, which led to academic gains. When students' social development is prioritized, it contributes to academic performance, as observed in the essence of the phenomena of embedding behavioral learning support. Teacher participants recognized students carry many burdens with them to school that are beyond the students' scope of understanding. Students need guidance to navigate their social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Teachers reported that dysregulated students had difficulty engaging, maintaining focus, understanding, persevering, or accessing academics. Martha gave an example of a student whose dog was run over on the way to school, referring to the student's focus on learning; the teacher said that day was a "non-learning" day. The teacher provided the student with a stuffed animal dog to comfort him and made sure the student felt comforted. Academic instruction needed to be paused for that student until they were emotionally capable of focusing on learning. For two weeks, the student required the dog to regulate their emotions while at school. The emotional distress the student was in was not immediately resolved; rather, it was a process. It is important for educators to remember students are still children who are continuing to develop emotionally and socially with their cognitive development. Furthermore, providing students with behavioral learning support further develops their social-emotional competencies. Social, emotional, and behavioral deficits are contributing factors to academic deficits, especially in the post-COVID era. Respondents noted students were able to better self-regulate, using pre-taught strategies, which helped them attend learning and persevere through setbacks. Students' cognitive and social-emotional development improved when behavioral learning support was embedded into instruction.

Positive Relationships Are Essential

Compelling and persuasive arguments for developing positive relationships were key points in teacher responses. The classroom community has a profound influence on students' social development. The lived experiences of teachers emphasize the importance of building positive relationships between teachers and students, as well as students and their peers. Teachers were able to proactively prevent potential behavioral disruptions by observing their students and recognizing their needs before the students became dysregulated. Relationships allow teachers to better understand their students. Establishing a safe place for students to express themselves emotionally led to confidence and willingness to ask for help when needed. Positive relationships were cited as the most effective classroom management tool in teachers' lived experiences. The lived experiences of teachers noted modeling expectations repeatedly and teaching problem-solving as problems arose were beneficial for students and teachers alike. Moreover, it was the experience of teachers that proactive, positively reinforced, explicit expectations were powerful and effectual rather than reactive disciplinary measures.

Teacher Demands Need Rebalancing

A recurring theme throughout this study was the overwhelming demands on teachers' time. While recruiting participants, several teachers advised they would not be able to participate in the study because they did not have the time. A lack of time is an echoing sentiment for teachers across the country, as evidenced by reports of teacher burnout and resignations. When the demands outweigh the time to complete the required tasks, teachers are being set up to fail. The demands infringed upon teachers are unprecedented, having increased significantly in the last decade, notably since returning from remote learning after COVID.

Participants in this study embedded SEL into academic instruction throughout the day,

but even still, several teachers felt they did not have enough time to meet their students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Teachers are unable to balance the growing demands within their contracted hours, often working in the evenings and on weekends. Participants in this study voiced if teachers were to stop working when at the end of the school day, they would be unable to fulfill their responsibilities nor meet the needs of their students. However, in working beyond the scope of the contracted hours, teachers are creating a culture that expects overwork, ultimately leading to teacher burnout. Teachers are frustrated and overwhelmed when they are unable to meet the demands. Teachers want to meet the needs of each of their students but are struggling to balance students' needs with their job demands. Chiefly, teachers' time needs to be valued and protected. Teachers need to have more control over decisions that affect their classrooms. They need explicit advisement from administrators to prioritize instruction. Moreover, teachers' planning time should be protected. Teachers' demands need to be rebalanced to decrease stress, exhaustion, and burnout and prioritize SEL for everyone.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The lived experiences of teachers who embedded behavioral learning support provided practical insight into the perceived influences on academic achievement and social development. The exploration of those lived experiences creates a point of view that can help drive change in policies and practices. The knowledge gained from understanding the phenomena can be used to improve SEL initiatives, as well as promote a more positive teaching and learning experience for educators and students. Specifically, there is a need to allocate appropriate time for teachers to prepare and teach to meet students' needs for interdisciplinary training for embedding SEL equitably in multiple content areas.

Implications for Policy

Policies are needed to retain teachers and protect them from increasing demands. Regulations are needed to protect teachers' planning time. Outside influences, such as meetings, student behaviors, parent phone calls, collaboration with peers, and "all other duties assigned," impose on teachers' planning times. If we want to retain highly qualified educators, we must provide them with time and resources to meet the demands of their profession. School board officials who are setting the demands for teachers should be required to spend one full school day in each of the schools they represent, attending class in a variety of classroom placement settings to better understand what the implications of their demands are and the feasibility of implementing them within the time allotted. Curriculum standards need to be developmentally appropriate. A balanced curriculum that supports social, emotional, behavioral, and academic learning is needed to meet the needs of students.

Implications for Practice

The association between social-emotional development and academic learning (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Barry et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018; Mahoney et al., 2018; McKown et al., 2016; Ng & Bull, 2018), as well as the increased demand for SEL, support the need for equitable SEL standards (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021). Practices are needed to establish equitable SEL standards. Equitable standards exist for academic content areas in each state; however, SEL has no equitable standards. Teachers are influential in students' academic and social-emotional learning (Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Lee & Zulikowski, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020). Effective SEL implementation benefits students' and teachers' well-being, relationships, and the classroom environment (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Shafair et al.,

2021). Standards that address the social development needs of students go beyond a checklist of behavioral criteria on a report card. Establishing best practices to embed SEL into academics to meet students' needs will inevitably lead to improved student school performance academically and socially. A proactive, pedagogical approach that supports prosocial efficacy through the implementation of SEL may provide proactive educational opportunities for students, thus preventing adverse behavior outcomes, rather than engaging in reactive disciplinary methods (Albrecht & Brunner, 2019 Ha & Roehrig, 2022; Panayiotou et al., 2019). SEL is foundational for emotional intelligence, which affects academic efficacy and sociogenesis (Brackett et al., 2019; Goleman, 1995; Kustyarini, 2020; Roth, 2016; Shafait et al., 2021; Zhoc et al., 2020). Universal SEL standards are needed to provide consistent opportunities to embed SEL through explicit instruction in academic content areas.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This hermeneutical phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of educators who embedded behavioral learning support into academic curricula to describe the meaning of perceived influences on academic achievement and social development for elementary school students in two schools. The ability to engage in positive and meaningful social interactions and behaviors with adults and peers, as well as academic progression, defined academic achievement and social development. The empirical significance of this study is found in the lived experiences of teachers who embedded SEL into academics and their perception of how academic achievement and social development were influenced. The theoretical significance of this study is found in the essence of understanding the teachers' perspectives on embedding behavioral learning support and the influences on students' emotional and academic competencies. The cognitive, social, and learning implications from embedding behavioral

support align with social constructivism theorists Gagne and Vygotsky (Schunk, 2012), who addressed social-emotional competencies and their effect on learning. Empirical implications have been explored, followed by a discussion of theoretical implications.

Empirical Implications

This research contributes to a growing body of research (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Ramirez et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015), which indicates that the demand for implementing SEL is growing. Equitable, relevant, and responsive behavioral learning support can be embedded into the ELA and social studies curriculum, specifically in the areas that address student culture, citizenship, and point of view (Ramirez et al., 2021). The practicality of this study is derived from the lived experiences of teachers who embedded behavioral learning supports and their perceptions of challenges and needs that arose. Learning and the acquisition of knowledge require attention, social interactions, and meaning (Kitchen, 2020; Lim et al., 2019). There is a positive correlation between SEL and academic engagement (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Barry et al., 2017; Eklund et al., 2018, Ng & Bull, 2018). Two key factors in students' academic achievement are engagement and motivation (Brackett et al., 2019; Zhoc et al., 2020). Embedding behavioral learning support positively affected students' social development. These observations were similar to previous research (Ha & Roehrig, 2022) using a pedagogical approach, which observed prosocial efficacy was supported when SEL was embedded. The classroom provides opportunities for explicit SEL infused with academic instruction to address deficits in social development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Embedding SEL, specifically problem-solving strategies, positively affects students' academic achievement and social development (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). Neurodevelopment research determined that SEL programs effectively promote social competence (Beirman &

Sanders, 2021). SEL is foundational for the development of emotional intelligence (Brackett et al., 2019; Kustyarini, 2020; Zhoc et al., 2020). In this study, students' sociogenesis was observed to be positively affected by embedded behavioral learning support, reaffirming previous research on the significance of emotional intelligence (Shafait et al., 2021). To exemplify the positive effect of explicit SEL instruction embedded in the curriculum, teachers' narratives of student responses provided an association with increased academic achievement and social development, which aligns with previous studies (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011; Scwab et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2020). Teachers, peers, and the learning environment affects students' SEC (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Blewitt et al., 2020; Boz & Cetin-Dindar, 2021; Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Shafait et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2020; Will, 2020).

This study adds to research previously highlighting improved social development as evidenced by self-efficacy through social interactions (Shafait et al., 2021). Students' perception of their learning environment is influential to learning (Lim et al., 2019). Embedding SEL into academic content proactively engages students in academic and behavioral learning opportunities (Albrecht & Brunner, 2019), promoting a positive learning environment to develop academically and emotionally (Panayiotou et al., 2019). Effective classroom management requires an established relationship between students and their teacher, where teachers model expectations engaging with students, which thereby enhances teacher-student relationships (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020).

Teachers are struggling to juggle the increased demands on their time, coupled with student behavior management, the fear of school safety, which is intensified when there is a lack

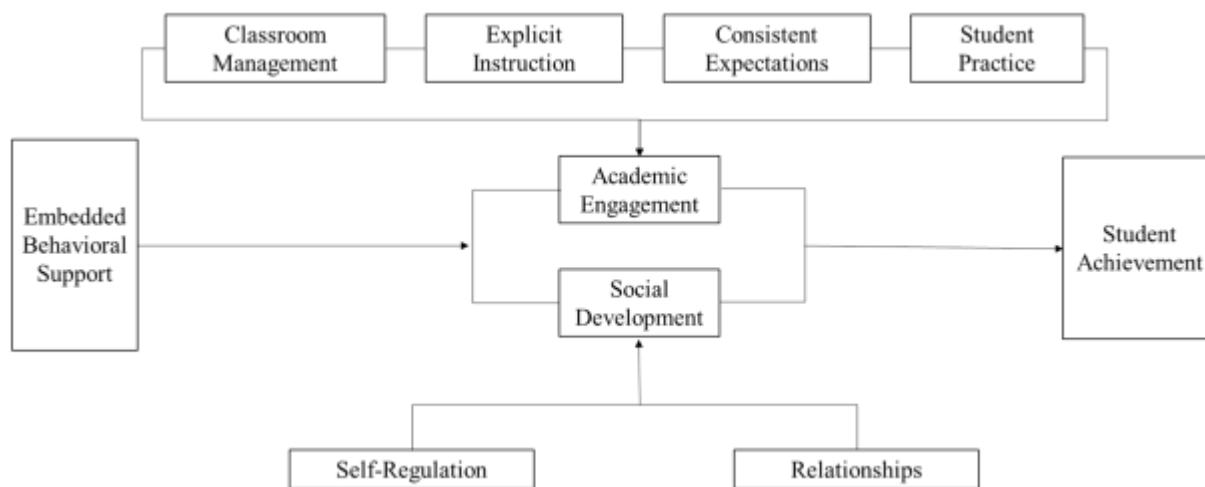
of parental or administrative support (Collie, 2023; Jeon et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). Students notice teacher stress and are negatively affected by teacher burnout (Oberle et al., 2020). Despite the body of evidence supporting SEL, teachers are challenged to find the time to implement it with fidelity (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Blewitt et al., 2020; Corcoran et al., 2017; DePaoli et al., 2017; Fetting et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2017; Theirry et al., 2020). Time pressure and student behavior are associated with increased teacher turnover (Collie, 2023; Jeon et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). When teachers' SEC are balanced, they are able to provide a more positive learning environment for themselves and their students (Oberle et al., 2020).

Theoretical Implications

Embedding SEL with the constructs of academic curriculum to support students' cognitive and social development is supported in the synthesis of Gagne's conditions of learning and Vygotsky's social development theory (Schunk, 2012). Gagne (1965) postulated that organization and intellectual skills are prerequisites for instruction sequencing and must be attained through the complexity of learning hierarchy. He identified three phases of learning categories: preparation, acquisition and performance, and transfer of learning. Students must be emotionally prepared to attend to their learning. They must know and understand their expectations before they are able to acquire new skills to perform academically and transfer their learning in context. Cognition is derived and developed through social interactions (Eun, 2019). Vygotsky's zones of proximal development (Schunk, 2012) examined what students can do independently, through social interactions, with help, as well as what they are not yet able to do. Understanding what a student is able to do or not yet able to do is essential in meeting the student's social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive learning needs. Students learn through social interactions, self-regulation, and communication in a continuous process (Eun, 2019).

Vygotskian principles support embedding SEL to support social interaction and cognitive development (Vadeboncour and Collie, 2013).

Social constructivism, as influenced by Gagne and Vygotsky, supports embedding the five core competencies of SEL, which are relationship skills, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and social awareness into instruction (CASEL, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011, 2015; Hill, 2021; Osher et al., 2016). Embedded behavioral support positively influences academic engagement and social development, which leads to student achievement (see Figure 5). Academic engagement requires effective classroom management, explicit instruction, consistent expectations, and student practice. Social development requires self-regulation skills and positive relationships. The integration of SEL into academic instruction is supported through evidence-based practices (CASEL, 2019). Embedding SEL into academic lessons allows students to make connections and engage in social interactions and conversations that lead to self-reflection and improved self-awareness.

Figure 5*Theoretical Implications of Embedding Behavioral Support*

Note. This image was created to make a visual representation of the theoretical implications of embedding behavioral support.

Limitations and Delimitations

During research and analysis, limitations and delimitations were discovered. The parameters in which this research was conducted, and the potential weaknesses identified by the researcher are limitations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Joyner et al., 2018). The delimitations of this study are “ways the finding may lack generalizability” (Joyner et al., 2018, p.194). These limitations are further defined as potential weaknesses outside of the researcher’s control. The researcher was intentional in establishing boundaries for the study. These intentional parameters have been defined as delimitations.

Limitations

This study was limited to a participant pool size of 10 teachers in two schools from one suburban school district. Eight out of 10 participants were female. While several grade levels were represented in the research, there were no teacher representatives who currently teach first

and fourth grade. Small group and self-contained special education teachers were not represented. The participants in this study had more than five years of teaching experience. New teachers were not represented in this study.

Delimitations

The scope of this study required an already established school-wide initiative for behavioral support so that participants had experience implementing behavioral support. The setting of the study was two large suburban elementary schools in the Honeybee School District. Two of 17 schools in the Honeybee School District that implemented evidence-based, school-wide initiatives to improve their school culture, behavior, and academic achievement were chosen for this study. Neither school was a Title I school. Both schools had a school leadership team comprised of grade-level representatives who served in leadership roles to support school initiatives. The overall school culture for both schools was described as positive by administrators and participants. These schools were chosen because the teachers had previous experience embedding behavioral learning support.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the findings, future research is recommended on the perceived impact of embedding behavioral learning support in schools that do not have an existing school-wide system of support already established. Similarly, it is recommended to research the lived experiences of teachers who do not have experience embedding behavioral learning support into academics to develop a better understanding of what professional learning is necessary for equitable SEL implementation. This study was limited to the scope of elementary school teachers' perspectives. To better understand how SEC affects older students and add to the already existing literature on how the internalization and externalization of students' problems

predict academic performance, it is recommended future research be done on middle school and high school students (Almroth et al., 2018; Irwin et al., 2022; Miskimon et al., 2022; Orozco et al., 2018; Panayiotou & Humphrey, 2018). Specifically, how do student SEL and perceptions of academics influence their truancy, dropout rates, and suicidal tendencies? Furthermore, more research is needed to better understand the long-term perceived effects of COVID on social, emotional, and behavioral development in students to add to the body of research on post-pandemic demands for SEL (Campbell, 2021; CASEL 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Egan et al., 2021, Evans, 2022; Hill, 2021; Kardambikis & Donne, 2022; Maclean & Law, 2022; Minkos & Gelbar, 2020; Signorelli et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study explored the influence of embedded behavioral support on academic performance and social development to describe the essence of participants' lived experiences. Social constructivism was the interpretive framework used to guide the study, which was supported by Gagne's conditions of learning and Vygotsky's social development theory. Ten participants from two school sites were chosen for this study. Since each site had established school-wide initiative programs, the participants felt they had a strong foundation to embed behavioral support. Triangulation of data from three data sources was analyzed and synthesized to develop a practical understanding of the lived experiences of the study participants as they pertain to the research questions.

The lived experiences explored align with recent studies reporting a positive influence of SEL on academic achievement. The identified link between emotionality and academics implies teachers should embed SEL into academic instruction to meet students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. The need to embed instruction is supported by a reoccurring

theme across data sources: a lack of time and teacher workload make it difficult to provide SEL outside of content areas. Students require safe learning environments that cultivate positive relationships to enhance their learning experiences. The association of relationships, behavior, and academic were highlighted by five core social-emotional competencies: relationship skills, self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. The findings met the researcher's expectations based on related literature. The results of this study are in keeping with previous observational studies, which suggest there is a growing demand for SEL as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The essence of participants' lived experiences was behavioral support positively affected students' learning and social development.

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Appendix A

IRB Application

IRB approval was obtained prior to conducting research.

Date: 4-25-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1288

Title: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS WHO EMBEDDED SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Creation Date: 3-24-2023

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Christina Anderson

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Limited	Decision Exempt - Limited IRB
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Christina Anderson
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Role	Principal Investigator
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Contact	
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Member	Christina Anderson
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Role	Primary Contact
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Contact	
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Member	Sharon Farrell
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Role	Co-Principal Investigator
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Contact	
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Appendix B

IRB Modification

At the behest of the research site, changes were made to the data collection questions and title of the research. An IRB modification was submitted and approved.

Date: 7-19-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1288

Title: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS WHO EMBEDDED BEHAVIORAL LEARNING SUPPORT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Creation Date: 3-24-2023

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Christina Anderson

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Limited	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB
Submission Type	Modification	Review Type	Limited	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member	Christina Anderson	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	[REDACTED]
Member	Christina Anderson	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	[REDACTED]
Member	Sharon Farrell	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	[REDACTED]

Appendix C

Site Confidential Data Applicant Agreement

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the sites' school district according to the district research procedures guidelines in their District Administrative Rule. The school district required prior IRB approval before it would accept an application to conduct research in the school district. Additionally, they needed signed access to confidential data applicant agreements. These were submitted to obtain site permission upon IRB approval to conduct research.

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE

Curriculum Research

RATIONALE/OBJECTIVE:

The [REDACTED] acknowledges the importance of educational research, but balances this activity with student privacy and the need to utilize instructional time effectively. The District will annually notify parents/guardians and students of their rights under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232h. Where notice and consent is required by this Rule, the District will directly notify parents/guardians through e-mail, U.S. mail or other methods.

RULE:

A. RESEARCH PROCEDURES:

1. Persons, including District employees, and/or groups, including school support organizations [REDACTED] [Use of School Facilities]) desiring to conduct research activities in the District must apply for permission through the Accountability and Research Division. Included with the request must be a copy of any document, printed material, surveys or tests to be utilized during the project. Also included with the request must be a description of what record(s) and data, if any, the applicant reasonably anticipates needing in order to conduct the research project. Although the District will comply with the requirements of the Georgia Open Records Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70, et. seq.) to provide records and data as required, the District will not be responsible for conducting analysis or for creating programs to search for requested records or data.
2. The District prefers that the researcher obtain approval from the applicable Instructional Review Board (IRB) prior to submitting an application for research within the District. IRB approval must be obtained before the initiation of research. IRB approval does not guarantee District approval of the proposed research.
3. The completed application is to be submitted to the Accountability and Research Division, and must include all questionnaires, surveys or materials to be used with the research.
4. The Accountability and Research Division will review the application and, if acceptable, will seek approval of the project from the appropriate Division(s). The applicant shall be responsible for administrative approval from the principal(s) of the school(s) involved if the application is approved at the District level.
5. The applicant will be notified in writing the approval status of his/her request.
6. The researcher must follow all terms found in the Applicant Agreement.
7. The District, school(s), student(s) or participant(s) shall not be identifiable in any research activity. All research activity will comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232h (See Section B below).
8. The District is to receive a copy of all completed research findings. The Accountability and Research Division will maintain a copy of these findings which may be subject to disclosure in whole or in part pursuant to the Georgia Open Records Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70, et. seq.) and other applicable laws.
9. Approval of research projects within the District shall be subject to the project's having no undue effect or interference with the operations of the schools. The District may terminate research being conducted within the District at any time for any reason deemed appropriate by the District.

B. STUDENT PRIVACY AND PARENTAL/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT:

1. Protected Information Survey:

- a. Written parental/guardian consent will be obtained before students are required to submit to a survey that concerns one or more of the following protected areas ("protected information survey"):
 - (1) Political affiliations or beliefs of the student or student's parent/guardian;
 - (2) Mental or psychological problems of the student or student's family;
 - (3) Sex behavior or attitudes;
 - (4) Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior;
 - (5) Critical appraisals of others with whom respondents have close family relationships;
 - (6) Legally recognized privileged relationships, such as with lawyers, doctors, or ministers;
 - (7) Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or parents/guardians; or
 - (8) Income, other than as required by law to determine program eligibility.
- b. When parental/guardian consent for a protected information survey is solicited, the consent form will contain instructions to allow a parent/guardian to inspect the survey prior to administration, as well as contact information for questions or concerns.

2. Non-Invasive Screenings and Marketing Materials:

- Parents/guardians will receive notice and an opportunity to opt a student out of:
- a. Any non-emergency, non-invasive physical exam or screening required as a condition of attendance, administered by the school or its agent, and not necessary to protect the immediate health and safety of a student, except for hearing, vision, or scoliosis screenings, or any physical exam or screening permitted or required under State law; and
 - b. Activities involving collection, disclosure, or use of personal information obtained from students for marketing or to sell or otherwise distribute the information to others. Upon request, parents/guardians will also have the opportunity to inspect materials for this purpose prior to use or administration. Such requests for inspection will be granted in a reasonable amount of time after the request is made. (See also [redacted] [Student Records]; Directory Information Notice contained in the Family Information Guide; Rule [redacted] [Solicitation and Advertising on School Property]).

3. Other Surveys:

- Parental/guardian consent shall be obtained in writing unless:
- a. The Chief Accountability and Research Officer, or designee, approves an exception to this requirement; or
 - b. The survey is required by the State of Georgia or United States Government and provides for a different form of parental/guardian consent.

4. Inspection:

Parents/guardians may conduct a reasonable inspection, upon request and before administration or use of instructional material used as part of the educational curriculum. Inspection will be permitted within a reasonable amount of time of such request. Instructional materials means instructional content that is provided to a student, including printed/representational materials, audio-visual materials, and materials in electronic or digital formats. This term does not necessarily include academic tests or academic assignments. Parents/guardians should contact their students' Principal or designee with such requests.

Department of Research, Evaluation, Student Assessment

PROCEDURE TITLE	RESEARCH BY EXTERNAL AGENCIES OR INDIVIDUALS
What is the purpose of these procedures?	<p>The overall purpose of these procedures to establish a standard manner of application review for either individuals or external agencies wishing to conduct research in the [REDACTED]. Standard procedures protect staff and student time from unnecessary data collection, allow the district to review applications in light of existing laws and statues about privacy and research, and encourage quality research to improve practice in [REDACTED].</p>
What does district policy require of research projects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written permission to conduct research that is granted by the Research Office. • Assurance that individuals, schools, or the district are not identifiable in the final research study or report. • That the project has no undue effect or interfere with the operation of schools in the district.
How is research defined?	<p>Research is defined as any data collection from or about [REDACTED] students, parents, or staff. Research includes, but is not limited to, data collection for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a theses or dissertation, publication in a journal or book, or completion of a higher education class project.</p>
What are external studies?	<p>External studies to be conducted in the [REDACTED] are those initiated by an outside agency or individual; those initiated by a staff person as an individual for purposes or uses outside his or her district role. External studies also include either national or statewide studies (except those mandated by the state).</p>
What is the research application process?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make initial contact with the Research Office to obtain a research application and applicant agreement form. 2. Complete the application and have it signed by the sponsoring agency. 3. Read and sign the applicant agreement form. 4. Attach copies of any questionnaires, interview protocols, tests, or data collection instruments that will be used in the study. 5. Prepare participant consent forms. If data will be collected from or on individual students, parents or staff, permission to participate will be required in most cases and a copy of the participant agreement must be included with the research application. The letter should permit the parent, student, or staff member to give full and knowing consent. Consent cannot be passive. The final permission letter must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be in writing. • Be signed by the parent or guardian giving consent, as well as the student, if applicable. • Be dated on the date consent is given. • Specify the reason for data collection or release. • Specify the data to be collected or the student data records to be released. • Identify the persons and institution to which the information will

District Research Procedures

be released.

- Describe any feedback to be provided to the parent, student, or staff member.
 - Indicate that participation in the project is voluntary; will not affect student grades or staff evaluation; and that consent may be withdrawn at any time without penalty.
 - Provide the name and contact information for the individual or agency conducting the information should the participant have additional questions.
6. Submit the completed application with supporting documents (participant consent forms, instruments or protocols) to the Research Office a minimum of three weeks prior to the beginning of the study.

What happens after the application is submitted?

1. As applications are received in the Research Office, each is logged and reviewed for completeness. If any information/documentation is missing or incomplete, the review process is suspended until the researcher is contacted and complete information/documentation is provided.
2. The Manager of the Research Department establishes a review committee of central administrators and routes the application to committee members for review and recommendations. Central administrators are asked to evaluate the application and recommend whether it should be accepted, rejected, or accepted with required changes. Central administrators are asked to respond to the application within 4 working days.
3. After all central level administrators have provided recommendations for the project, the Manager of Research reviews the recommendations of committee members and judges whether the application should be administratively accepted, rejected, or accepted with changes.
4. The researcher is notified in writing that the project has been administratively approved and he/she must contact the individual schools to obtain approval for participation. At the same time the researcher is notified of administrative approval, a list of schools and principals to contact for approval will be provided.
5. Schools or affected departments are sent copies of the research application and notified that the researcher will be contacting them personally within a few days. If the school/department chooses not to participate, it must notify the Research Office it does not wish to participate.
6. Administrative approval does not necessarily constitute approval for the study to be conducted in any specific school. Prior to final approval to conduct research in specific schools, approval of principals and others involved must be obtained.
7. Once the *Principal Agreement to Participate* is completed and returned to the Research Office, a final approval letter will be sent to the researcher.

Is there any way to enhance the probability of getting the research application approved?

Studies related to topics of concern for [REDACTED] will receive high priority for approval. See Attachment A for a list of [REDACTED] research priorities. Researchers are encouraged to contact the Department of Research prior to completion of theses or dissertation plans to ensure closer coordination between the district and the researcher. Discussing a specific project with a member of the Research Department before details are complete may also assist a researcher in creating a viable research design.

District Research Procedures

What is the basis for decisions on research applications?

The criteria by which research applications are reviewed include the following:

- Study results should have high value to an individual school, [REDACTED] or to education in general.
- Study should be compatible with [REDACTED] policy and sound educational practice.
- The design and implementation of the project should be sound and acceptable to the school system.

What happens if the application is rejected?

- If it appears that an application could be approved with revisions, the applicant may be advised to resubmit.
- In some cases, the Manager of Research may convene the review committee to hear an appeal of the decision.

What are the requirements while the project is conducted?

The researcher is responsible for returning the signed agreement forms from individual principals/departments. Final approval from the district will not be made until forms are received from the researcher. Meetings, interviews, the administration of instruments must be scheduled far enough in advance to allow adequate planning. Parental permission for direct participation of any student in the research project is usually required. The researcher must provide sufficient copies of an approved parental permission form to permit collection of two copies of the permission slips. The principal will retain one copy of the parent permission at the local school. **Information about the student will not be made available to the researcher until parental permission is secured.** The confidential nature of records must be observed and privacy and rights of the individual and schools must be respected. Data with names or other identifiers (such as student numbers) **MUST** be disposed of when their use is complete. Individuals conducting research in the [REDACTED] must abide by standards of professional conduct at all times while they are working in the schools. Failure to do so will be sufficient cause for terminating the research study. Any violations of procedures noted by teachers or other participants in the study will be reported to the school principal. The principal should then discuss any such violations with the Director of the Research Office who will address the matter with the sponsoring agency or individual researcher. Studies should be completed by May 1st.

What happens after the study is completed?

The Research Office must be provided with summaries of the data collected and conclusions drawn from the research as soon as the researcher has them completed. If the study is reported in a journal or other format (book, presentation, etc.) the author will provide [REDACTED] with a copy for the professional library. Personal feedback to principals or others involved in the study is strongly encouraged.

Who administers the procedures?

Procedures are administered through the Research Office [REDACTED]. The Executive Director of Accountability & Research Office is responsible for administration. If there are questions or concerns regarding the research process, they should be addressed to [REDACTED].

Research Priorities for [REDACTED]

The research priorities listed below are considered important questions which, when answered, would significantly benefit the [REDACTED] in planning for increased student success. Research projects that address a priority area will have a greater likelihood of approval than research projects that do not.

Advanced Learning Options

This topic includes issues of college bound curriculum, magnet programs, Advanced Placement, AVID, International Baccalaureate, and Honors Courses. Research is needed to identify the effects of such programs and if such programs best meet the needs of [REDACTED] students.

Instructional Techniques

Research is needed on which instructional techniques or strategies are the most effective with students of different ages and/or types of student learners across all instructional areas.

Literacy

The district has been engaged in numerous literacy initiatives at all levels (elementary, middle and high) . Research is needed to determine if literacy initiatives have been effective in increasing student achievement in reading. Additionally, research is needed to understand best practices for integrating literacy across the high school program.

Transitions

Research is needed to identify effective strategies and techniques to assist students in transitioning from one level of schooling to another. Also, research is needed on the integration of school-to-work strategies into the high school academic curriculum.

Professional Development

Research is needed regarding the effects of mentoring new teachers. For example, do teachers who are mentored have a higher retention rate or higher job satisfaction level than those who are not mentored? A second area of interest to the district is the development of leadership as related to the ISLLC standards.

School Reform Models

Several whole school reform models have been implemented in different schools in [REDACTED]. Research is needed to examine the outcomes of these reform models for students, staff, and community members. A second area of interest to the district is the identification of effective leadership strategies necessary to establish and sustain these reform models.

Services to Special Needs Students

There are several areas of interest to [REDACTED] in this category. What impact has IDEA had on the way students are served in [REDACTED]? What are effective strategies for working with special education students in the regular curriculum? What has been the impact of the [REDACTED]? For students attending an ESOL school, what are the short and long term benefits?

Technology and Student Learning

Implementation of a new information system represents an excellent opportunity to research the impact of these technologies on student learning and instructional processes. Over time, it is expected that more students will participate in classes through technology (such as Virtual High School) and the district is interested in learning more about the impact on student achievement.

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN

Researcher: Christina Anderson

Title of Proposed Research Study: The Lived Experiences of Elementary School Teachers Who Embedded Behavioral Support in Academic Instruction: A Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Proposed Project Starting Date August 15, 2023

Proposed Project Ending Date September 30, 2023

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH: Y/N Y **UNIVERSITY:** Liberty University

Purpose of the Study:

This hermeneutical phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral learning support into their academic curriculum and the perceived influence on academic achievement and behavioral and social development for elementary students in two elementary schools.

Rationale for the Study (How will the study contribute to this field of research?)

This study's theoretical, practical, and empirical significance are in the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral support into their academic curriculum. Implementing behavioral support in early elementary school can improve academic achievement and compensate for deficits in social development. The lived experiences of educators will give insight into the perceived role student behavior and social development play in student achievement. The vitality of early childhood social development is the precursor for social, emotional, and behavioral competencies later in life. Reviewed literature endorses teachers integrating social development and behavioral support with learning objectives within academics. Significant associations between social development and cognitive readiness have been identified in elementary-aged children. There is a correlation between social development deficits and reading. Behavioral and social development deficits negatively impact students' academic performances, specifically reading development. Deficits in behavior impact the acquisition of pre-reading and word-reading development. Behavioral symptoms negatively impact learning. However, pro-social behaviors predict increased learning. Positive outcomes in school require a balance of cognition with pro-social behavioral skills such as self-regulation, social cognition, inhibitory control, focus and attention, ethics, respect, critical thinking, communication skills, self-direction, collaboration, perseverance, patience, civility, sportsmanship, dependability, and responsibility. Positive school interactions require pro-social behaviors, including interpersonal skills, self-control, and attention. When behavioral learning support is embedded into the curriculum, students can practice and develop skills to improve academic and social development.

A problem educators encounter with implementing behavioral support is being tasked with prioritizing academic demands that leave little room for additional learning opportunities outside of the curriculum. Educators do not have the time in their full schedules to add learning segments to the day. Therefore, it is necessary to embed behavioral learning in the already established curriculum schedule to allow students to facilitate pro-social behavioral development. Research suggests that due to the malleability of behavioral support, embedding it into the academic curriculum is an effective way of teaching pro-social behavioral development and improving students' academic performance. Literacy development is supported when behavioral support is embedded in ELA and/or Social Studies. Teachers can empower and support students' success with embedded behavioral support in the curriculum while adhering to the ELA and Social Studies pedagogies. Embedding behavioral support allows teachers to improve students' social development positively and significantly without compromising instructional time. Text sets can be incorporated into ELA and/or Social Studies using a multimodal approach to address self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making. Teachers can promote literacy, citizenship, and social development through shared reading. Shared reading experiences potentially affect social, behavioral, and academic development. Shared reading employs counseling techniques that promote literacy and academic learning. Behavioral support can be embedded as part of our balanced literacy instruction. Student connections to text are relational to memory, attention, decision-making, and learning. Attention, memory, decision-making, and direct learning influence academic achievement. Teachers can empower and support student success by embedding pro-social and behavioral support in the curriculum.

District Research Procedures

It behooves educators to understand better the lived experiences of teachers who deliver behavioral instruction and any challenges they may encounter. This research is vital to inform future practices for implementation. Factors that influence behavioral support implementation are teachers' beliefs about behavior, knowledge and skills, predispositions, and teachers' views about their role. This study will provide a better perspective on teacher preparedness to promote pro-social behavior. Textual meaning and experiences will be interpreted by understanding teachers' lived experiences to illustrate what additional training or resources are required to implement and embed behavioral instruction effectively. The study will provide significant insight into teacher knowledge of what educators need to embed pro-social behavioral support into academic content more effectively. Multiple data sources will be used for the corroboration of evidence gathered from the lived experiences of educators to comprehensively understand how behavior and social development have a perceived influence on academic achievement.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

Central Research Question: What are the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in elementary schools who embed behavioral support into their academic English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies lessons?

Sub-Question One: What is the perceived influence of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' academic performance?

Sub-Question Two: What is the perceived effect of behavioral support embedded in the curriculum on students' social development?

Sub-Question Three: What training or resources are required to implement and embed behavioral support effectively?

Does the study relate to an identified research priority of [REDACTED] (Attachment A)?

YES NO

If yes, identify the area: Instructional Techniques, Literacy, Professional Development, and Services to Special Needs Students

Describe how the study relates to the [REDACTED] current research priorities.

The need for fostering social development and behavioral skills is critical for developing cognition and, thus, academic learning. Schools have a moral and social responsibility to provide a safe learning environment where students' basic needs can be met and for students to be in an appropriate state to learn. Elementary-aged students are in a critical state of social development. Deficits in social development impede students' academic performance and the learning of others. Positive social and academic outcomes are linked to learning social, emotional, and behavioral skills. Facilitating social, emotional, and behavioral learning is critical for students to attain academic learning and high-order thinking successfully. Responsible decision-making is a prerequisite for students to have problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Self-management influences students' motivation, planning, organization, self-regulation, and goal-setting. Relationship skills are necessary for students to communicate appropriately, engage in learning, collaborate with peers, resolve conflict, demonstrate leadership, and competently navigate the school environment. The ability to self-regulate predicts school readiness and academic success. When students can self-regulate by managing their behavior, attention, and thinking, they are likelier to score higher on standardized tests. Students with social and behavioral development deficits have difficulty recalling prior learning and often lack foundational skills due to a lack of attention to instruction. Difficulty following directions and accepting feedback negatively influence a student's learning ability. Positive behavior interventions can motivate students to engage in their learning actively.

The [REDACTED] Board of Education Policy [REDACTED] Student Performance Standards and Expectations describes a [REDACTED] graduate as a leader when they encompass communication skills, self-direction, and personal responsibility. Graduates demonstrate citizenship with critical thinking skills, collaboration skills, and community awareness. The [REDACTED] District Administrative Rule [REDACTED] states that the alignment of learning standards is essential for lifetime success and that student success is a district mission. The [REDACTED] requires curriculum to be consistent with the district mission, support standards, promote higher-level thinking, provide appropriate emotional and social development, enhance user experience and have literary value, avoid bias, and adhere to standards and compliance. [REDACTED] requires instruction to meet a real or potential need. [REDACTED] Administrative Rule [REDACTED] supports the formation of response to intervention (RtI), also known as a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), and student support teams (SST) to address the need for behavioral interventions designed to provide early and effective assistance to students with learning and/or behavioral problems. [REDACTED]

District Research Procedures

Administrative Rule [REDACTED] requires implementing the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) to maintain accreditation. The GSE standards support pro-social behavioral learning in elementary school through the following standards:

- ELA - Speaking and Listening Comprehension and Collaboration (ELAGSESL1-3) for students to follow agreed-upon rules, summarize understanding of written text and read aloud, and ask and answer questions.
- Social Studies - Civic Understanding (SSG1-3) for students to understand good citizenship and demonstrate positive character traits of good citizens (honesty, respect, pride, self-control, responsibility, courtesy, fairness, courage, equality, perseverance, patience, dependability, trustworthiness, honor, civility, good sportsmanship, patience, and tolerance/respect of others)

Learning is influenced by cognition, self-regulation, attention, and social interactions. Cognitive skills and emotional intelligence affect student learning readiness. Social development influences impulse control, problem-solving, empathy, motivation, and self-regulation and is supported by positive social behavior. Self-regulation is necessary for students to attend and access their education. Students must meet their basic psychological needs to be motivated and engaged and achieve academically. Executive function skills emerge in students' primary years, early preschool through second grade. During this time, children should develop self-regulation skills, inhibitory control, focus and attention, and the ability to carry out multistep tasks. When behavioral support is embedded within pedagogy, teachers integrate social norms, character education, social skills, and life skills that positively influence students through example. Academic development is positively influenced by the development of social, emotional, and behavioral skills. Barriers to behavioral and social development in students impact school readiness and academic achievement. Pro-social and behavioral skills that emerge during early childhood are influential in developing competence. Special education students, particularly those with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) or other health impaired (OHI) conditions (e.g. ADHD) benefit from behavioral support embedded into academics. As a special education EBD teacher in the [REDACTED] I embed pro-social and behavioral support throughout the day. There is a growing need for all educators to embed behavioral support especially post-COVID. Combining behavioral support and academic instruction is the most effective way for students to gain social development through engaged practice.

Methodology

Participants

Students:	Number _____	Grade(s) _____
Teachers:	Number <u>10-15</u>	Grade(s) <u>K-5</u>
Administrators:	Number _____	
Support Staff:	Number _____	
Parents:	Number _____	

How were participants selected for the research project?

The setting of the study is two large suburban elementary schools in the [REDACTED]. Each school has implemented evidence-based, school-wide initiatives to improve school culture, behavior, and academic achievement. [REDACTED] is a certified *Positive Behavior Intervention and Support* (PBIS) school, whereas [REDACTED] is a certified *Leader In Me* school. Both school buildings have the same footprint for building structures, each with a student population of fewer than 800 students. Each school has a student/teacher ratio below the school district average of 14.59. Neither school is a Title 1 school. Both schools have a school leadership team comprised of grade-level representatives who serve in leadership roles to support school initiatives.

The participants for the research will be chosen using purposive sampling based on the established implementation of evidence-based school culture programs. There will be ten to fifteen teacher participants in the study using purposive maximal variation sampling. Participants in this study will be elementary school teachers who teach English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies standards in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The sample group of approximately ten to fifteen people will consist of teachers in various classroom settings, including general education, special education co-taught, and special education small groups. This sample group size has been chosen to provide the opportunity to collect data extensively for the participants and sites as provided in general guidelines for phenomenological research. Participant demographic information will be available upon participant volunteer selection.

How much time will be required for individuals participating in the study?

District Research Procedures

Approximately 2 hours

What will participants be asked to do?

Participants will be asked to participate in an individual interview, respond to three journal prompts, and answer a questionnaire.

Proposed Schools to be included in the research project (Please do not list "All Schools")

How will consent be obtained from all research participants, and if necessary, from parents/guardians?

See the sample Parental Permission Form in Attachment C.

Participants will be asked to sign a Participant Consent Form (see Attachment)

Identify any potential benefits or risks for participants that might result from the research.

Potential Benefits	Potential Risks
Insight to what teachers need to better implement behavioral support in their classrooms	Triggering of previous negative experiences with the phenomenon
Identify areas for professional learning	Possible loss of confidentiality
Develop a better understanding of how behavior and social development are perceived to influence academics	Emotional anxiety or pressure to participate.

Research Design Information

Quantitative Qualitative Mixed Methods

Briefly describe your design.

This hermeneutical phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral support into the academic curriculum. Phenomenology was chosen as the research design to "understand the essence of the experience" and "lived phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). van Manen (2018) addressed the methodologies needed for phenomenological research in educational situations that explore lived experiences. Hermeneutical phenomenology is human science research centered around the explored lived experiences of others and the interpretation of data. Hermeneutical phenomenology is the best qualitative research design to better understand teachers' lived experiences. The foundational theoretical frameworks of hermeneutic phenomenology are based on the philosophies of Martin Heidegger (Peoples, 2021; van Manen, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Is this a single case study or one of a series studies? Single case study

Data Collection and Analysis

List the data that will be collected for this study. Include a copy of all surveys, interview protocols, tests, checklists or other data collection instruments.

Data to be Collected	Data Collection Instruments	Data Source	Anticipated Date of Data Collection
Lived Experiences	Individual Interview Questions	Personal interview	8/15/23-9/30/23
Lived Experiences	Journal Prompts	Journal responses	8/15/23-9/30/23
Lived Experiences	Questionnaires	Questionnaire responses	8/15/23-9/30/23

Describe your data analysis procedures. Identify descriptive and/or inferential statistics that will be used to test the hypotheses.

Data collection in hermeneutical phenomenology consists of interviews, observations, literature reviews, document analysis, artifacts, journal prompts, surveys, and questionnaires. Evidence is corroborated through

District Research Procedures

the triangulation of data. Multiple data sources are used to obtain experiential descriptions from participants. Triangulation of data from interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires will be conducted to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of teachers who embed behavioral support into academics. The interviews will provide insight into teachers' perspectives and experiences. The journal prompts will collect information on what resources were used, what behavioral and social development targets were addressed, and participants' observations and perspectives, including a narrative on successes and challenges. The questionnaires will provide an overall composite perspective of teachers' perspectives on academic skills, self-awareness, relationship skills, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and core skills, and gauge their perspectives on student mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors to understand better how social development and behavior affect academic performance.

Data will be analyzed using the data analysis spiral, a visual image that is used to manage and organize data, memo emerging ideas, identify themes, and interpret data before presenting them visually as part of the data analysis process. Thematic analysis will be used to identify reoccurring themes interpreted in the data collected. Analysis of participant responses is necessary to glean an understanding of hermeneutic research. Participants' phenomenological experiences will be compared and contrasted with interpreting meaning. Transcribed interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires will be studied for analysis. Horizontalization of the data is done to cluster data into themes for thematic analysis. Themes can be identified in lived experiences. Themes are determined by analyzing experienced phenomena. A search for idiomatic phrases and repeated texts is conducted and reviewed. Idiomatic phrases come from lived experience. These phrases, though common, have a similar theme and can be associated with phenomena being researched. These are compared to the experiential descriptors in the literature reviewed.

Will anyone other than the researcher be involved in the data analysis process? YES NO

If yes, who will assist with data analysis procedures?

- Researcher Applicant Checklist
Have you included?
- Signed Applicant Agreement
 - Participant Consent Form
 - Data Collection Instruments



Appendix D

Site Consent

Site consent was obtained from the school district. Upon district approval to conduct research, the researcher obtained administrative permission from each school, then submitted those to the school district. The school district then provided site consent.

August 28, 2023

Ms. Christina Anderson

[Redacted]

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Ms. Anderson,

Your research project titled, *The Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers Who Embedded Behavioral Support In the Academic Instruction: A Hermeneutical Phenomenology*, has been approved. Listed below are the schools where approval to conduct the research is complete. Please work with the school administrator to schedule administration of instruments or conduct interviews.

Schools

[Redacted]

Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research project, changes must be submitted in writing to the department of Accountability, Research & Grants prior to implementation. At the conclusion of your research project, you are expected to submit a copy of your results to this office. Results cannot reference the [Redacted] or any District schools or departments.

Research files are not considered complete until results are received. If you have any questions regarding the process, contact my office at [Redacted]

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Assistant Director, Grants & Research
Office of Accountability & Research

Appendix E

Participant Recruitment

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, researching the lived experiences of elementary school educators who embed behavioral support in academic instruction.

I am conducting a research study to explore the lived experiences of educators who embed behavioral support into their academic curriculum and describe the meaning of the perceived resulting effect on academic achievement and social development for elementary students in two elementary schools.

I am writing to invite you to participate in the study. Participation will take approximately two hours. Participants must be certified elementary school teachers (K-5) who teach English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies to students who receive a general education curriculum. During the research study, participants must have experience embedding behavioral support (e.g., morning meetings, read-aloud, character education, Leader In Me lessons, PBIS lessons, etc.). If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview (one hour), journaling (three journal responses, which will take 10-15 minutes each), and a questionnaire (ten to fifteen minutes). The journal prompts and questionnaire can be sent electronically. The individual interview will be virtual and scheduled at your convenience. All participants' personal information will remain confidential. There are no known risks involved in this research. Please contact me to discuss any questions you may have regarding this study.

To participate in the study please provide your contact information and complete the initial screening questions found at this link: <https://forms.office.com/r/EzGXzU3QBe>

I have attached a consent document to this email for your review. Participants will need to sign the consent prior to the agreed interview date.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Christina Anderson, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University

Appendix F

Participant Screener

The participant screener consists of 10 questions that will be completed via Microsoft Forms.

<https://forms.office.com/r/EzGXzU3QBe>

1. Participant Name

2. Today's Date

3. Participant email

4. Participant phone number

5. Preferred method of contact

email phone

6. Are you a certified elementary school teacher?

Yes No

7. Do you teach English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies?

Yes No

8. Do you have any experience with behavioral support?

Yes No Maybe

9. Are you able to embed behavioral support into the curriculum during the research period?

Yes No Maybe

10. Are you interested in participating in this research study on the lived experiences of elementary school teachers who embedded behavioral support in academic instruction?

Yes No

Appendix G

Participant Consent

Participant consent forms were emailed to participants. Participants signed their consent and received administrative approval prior to participating in research. Consent forms were returned to the researcher via district mail.

Participant Consent

Title of the Project: *The Lived Experiences of Elementary School Teachers Who Embedded Behavioral Support in Academic Instruction: A Hermeneutical Phenomenology*

Principal Investigator: Christina Anderson, Ed.S., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an elementary teacher who teaches English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Social Studies standards in grades kindergarten through fifth grade and are willing to embed behavioral support into the curriculum. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to learn about the phenomena of improved academic achievement and social development when behavioral support is embedded into the elementary school academic curriculum.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview, approximately 30-60 minutes, about your school experiences. I would be recording the interview for transcription and data collection purposes.
2. Respond to 3 journal prompts, approximately 10-15 minutes each, and submit it back to me for data collection purposes.
3. Complete a questionnaire, approximately 10-15 minutes, on school experiences and submit it back to me for data collection purposes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

The societal benefits include contributing to increased public knowledge of behavioral support and improved social development and academic learning outcomes. The information gained may benefit future interventions and applications to embed behavioral support in the classroom for student success.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as a teacher in the [REDACTED]. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, the study results will be published anonymously, so as not to disclose who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Christina Anderson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Participant Name

Participant Signature & Date

Printed Researcher Name

Researcher Signature & Date

Printed School Principal Name

School Principal Signature & Date

Appendix H

Individual Interviews

The individual interviews consisted of 19 questions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams.

Individual Interview Questions

2. Why did you become a teacher, and what are your current position and educational background? CRQ
3. What are the greatest challenges you feel teachers face today? SQ1, SQ2
4. How would you define social development? SQ2
5. What do you consider to be behavioral support? CRQ
6. What experience do you have embedding behavioral support in the classroom? CRQ
7. What training or resources do you already have, or feel is needed to implement and embed behavioral support? SQ3
8. What strategies do you use to gain students' attention? CRQ
9. How do you inform students of their learning objectives? CRQ
10. What do you do to stimulate recall of prior learning? CRQ
11. How do you present lessons and guide student learning? CRQ
12. What do you do to engage students to elicit their participation? CRQ
13. What opportunities do students have for practice? CRQ
14. In what ways do you provide feedback to students? CRQ
15. How do you assess student performance? CRQ

16. What do you do in the classroom to enhance retention and generalization of knowledge?

CRQ

17. How does students' ability to regulate their behavior affect their learning? CRQ

18. What role does social development play in student learning? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2

19. How do you facilitate responsible decision-making for your students? CRQ

20. What is your perspective on how behavior supports embedded in the academic curriculum impacts student academic performance and social development? SQ1

Appendix I

Journal Prompts

The journal prompts consists of three journal entries that were completed via Microsoft Forms.

1. Provide the behavioral supports embedded in your academic segment, why you chose them, and observations during or after the lesson.

<https://forms.office.com/r/Q9zeFVgMpQ>

2. What were the learning outcome objectives for the embedded behavioral support, and how do you feel the behavioral support applied to the academic standards?

<https://forms.office.com/r/BWyYGuvpWR>

3. Describe your experiences embedding behavioral support into your academic segments (e.g., Students' responses, conversations, dialogue, frustrations, observed reactions, etc.).

<https://forms.office.com/r/tyj8eCTdcm>

Appendix J

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions which were completed via Microsoft Forms.

<https://forms.office.com/r/Ba9zWRmXs8>

1. How often did you facilitate class meetings or community-building activities to cultivate a culture of personal connection, mutual support, and belonging?
2. How did you teach, model, and reinforce strategies that help students to express empathy, resolve conflicts, self-reflect, and self-regulate?
3. How did you discuss their perspectives and concerns with students?
4. What behavioral supports were effective for students' learning?
5. How would you describe your students' participation and effort during class?
6. What tools or strategies did you observe students use for self-control and behavior regulation?
7. How did your students react to making mistakes?
8. How well did students persevere through setbacks?
9. What is your perspective on students' abilities to model citizenship and the consideration of others?
10. What is your perspective on how confident your students are in achieving academic outcomes successfully?

Appendix K

CASEL Permission

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) *SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment* (2019) was used as a guide to develop the researcher's questionnaire. Reliability and validity evidence for those questionnaires is based on content, response processes, and internal structure. Permissions have been gained from CASEL (2019) to use their questionnaires for research purposes.

[External] Re: Permission

CASEL School Guide <schoolguide@casel.org>

Mon 12/19/2022 10:42 AM

To:

- Anderson, Christina Marie [REDACTED]

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Good morning Christina,

Thank you for reaching out to CASEL and we're glad to hear that SEL is your area of interest and you'll be exploring this topic in your research. You are welcome to use or modify the [SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment](#) in your research, with attribution to CASEL and a link back to the original tool on our site (e.g. if you modify, clarify that it is adapted from CASEL's tool). However, please understand that this tool is based on our framework for describing an SEL-integrated classroom but has not undergone testing for reliability and validity, so we do not use it as a formal evaluation tool and our recommendation is that it be used for personal professional growth. It can work as a pre and post test to show change in teachers' perception of their use of SEL in the classroom but should not be presented as a measure of change in practice – for that you may want to use either the [Schoolwide SEL Walkthrough Protocol](#) or the [Staff Survey](#), both of which are valid/reliable measurement tools.

From: Anderson, Christina Marie [REDACTED]

Date: Friday, December 16, 2022 at 3:28 PM

To: CASEL School Guide <schoolguide@casel.org>

Subject: Permission

To whom it may concern:

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University, preparing to conduct research on embedding social emotional learning (SEL) into academics. I am also a special education teacher serving students in a small group, self-contained, special education program serving students with emotional behavior disorders. SEL is my passion. I am currently in the prospectus phase of my dissertation. I would like permission to use the CASEL SEL Classroom Self-Assessment for data collection in my research. What is the process for gaining permission to use the copyrighted assessment tool? Please advise.

Thanks,

Christina Anderson, Ed.S.

Doctoral Student of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D.) Special Education Concentration

Liberty University
[REDACTED]

Appendix L

CASEL SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment

<https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sel-in-the-classroom-self-assessment/>

TOOL: SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment

TEACHER/CLASSROOM: _____ DATE: _____

Use this self-assessment three to four times over the course of the year to assess your strengths and areas to develop as you promote SEL through explicit instruction, integration into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate. Place a check in the column that indicates the frequency of each indicator. For indicators that you rate as “sometimes” or “infrequently,” consider what strategies, resources, or support you may want to use to deepen your SEL practice. For indicators you rate as “unsure,” consider what additional information or feedback you want to gather.

Markers of SEL in the Classroom		Often	Sometimes	Infrequently	Unsure
Explicit Instruction	I use an evidence-based approach to teach social and emotional skills in a <u>sequenced, active, focused, and explicit</u> way and on a regular schedule.				
	I teach SEL in a way that is developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive for my students.				
	My students lead routines, share their perspectives, and reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction.				
Integration of SEL into Academic Instruction	SEL standards/goals are embedded into my academic lessons (see <u>sample lesson plans</u>).				
	Students make connections between SEL and what we're learning and initiate reflection and discussion.				
	I foster academic mindsets by helping students set goals, commending academic risk-taking and incremental progress, showing students how to correct mistakes, and framing struggle as a key part of the process of learning.				
	I select content and plan instruction that links to students' lived experiences and frames of reference and by <u>anticipating</u> support that individuals may need to access content and participate fully.				
	I design learning activities that allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community.				
	Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.				
	I prepare students to engage in classroom discussions by actively listening to their peers, affirming and respectfully challenging each other's ideas, and formulating questions.				
	I ask open-ended questions to surface student thinking and probe students to elaborate on their <u>response</u> .				
	I use collaborative structures that require students to communicate, cooperate, share responsibility, monitor that all ideas are heard, and problem-solve.				
	Students reflect on what made their collective work successful and/or challenging and plan for improvement.				

For more information, tools, and resources, visit schoolguide.casel.org.
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TOOL: SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment

Supportive Classroom Climate	My class has co-developed shared agreements for how we will treat one another, and we check in regularly about how we are living by our shared agreements.				
	Students know, follow, initiate, and provide input and feedback on our regular classroom routines and procedures.				
	I communicate that I appreciate each student as an individual and am interested in knowing them.				
	I check in and follow up with students about their perspectives and concerns.				
	I facilitate class meetings, circles, or other intentional community-building activities to cultivate a culture of personal connection, mutual support, and belonging.				
	I vary student grouping so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else.				
	My classroom environment, activities, and interactions affirm students' diverse identities and cultures. We share and learn about each other's lives and backgrounds.				
	I teach, model, and reinforce language and strategies that help students to express empathy, resolve conflicts, repair harm, self-reflect, and self-regulate.				
	When classroom agreements are breached, I respond in a way that is discreet, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and restorative (such as using empathetic listening, "I" statements, and open-ended questions).				

Appendix M

Panorama Permission

The *Panorama Teacher Perceptions of Students' SEL* (2022) was used as a guide to develop the researcher's questionnaire. Reliability and validity evidence for those questionnaires is based on content, response processes, and internal structure. Permissions has been gained from Panorama Education (2022) to use their questionnaires for research purposes.

Appendix N

Panorama Teacher Perceptions of Students' SEL

<https://panorama-www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/sel/Teacher-Perception-Student-Guide.pdf>

[External] Re: Permission

Panorama Support <support@panoramaed.com>

Thu 12/22/2022 10:10 AM

To:

- Anderson, Christina Marie [REDACTED]

1 attachments (6 MB)

Teacher-Perception-Student-Guide.pdf;

You don't often get email from support@panoramaed.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Hi Christina,

Thank you for your patience here! Panorama's software tools and services are available to K-12 schools and districts, and require a paid contract with us in order to use. However, the survey content itself is free and open-source. You can find downloadable copies of all survey content at the page below:

[Understanding Panorama's Survey Instruments](#)

I'm attaching the downloadable PDF copy of the Teacher Perception of Student SEL survey for your convenience as well.

I hope this is useful! Please let us know if you have further questions - we're here to help.

Warmly,

[REDACTED]

On Fri, Dec 16, 2022 at 4:36 PM EST, Christina Marie Anderson
[REDACTED] wrote:

To whom it may concern:

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University, preparing to conduct research on embedding social emotional learning (SEL) into academics. I am also a special education teacher serving students in a small group, self-contained, special education program serving students with emotional behavior disorders. SEL is my passion. I am currently in the prospectus phase of my dissertation. I would like permission to use the Panorama Teacher Perceptions of Students' SEL for data collection in my research. What is the process for gaining permission to use the copyrighted assessment tool? Please advise.

Thanks,

Christina Anderson, Ed.S.

Doctoral Student of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D.) Special Education
Concentration

Liberty University
[REDACTED]

Grit - How well students are able to persevere through setbacks to achieve important long-term goals

Item	Responses				
If this student fails to reach an important goal, how likely is she or he to try again?	Not at all likely	Slightly likely	Somewhat likely	Quite likely	Extremely likely
How often does this student stay focused on the same goal for several months at a time?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always

Self-Management - How well students manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations

Item	Responses				
Overall, how focused is this student in your classroom?	Not at all focused	Slightly focused	Somewhat focused	Quite focused	Completely focused

Social Awareness - Teachers' perceptions of how well students consider the perspectives of others and empathize with them

Item	Responses				
During the past 30 days, how considerate was this student of his/her classmates' feelings?	Not at all considerate	Slightly considerate	Somewhat considerate	Quite considerate	Extremely considerate

Self-Efficacy - Teachers' perceptions of how much students believe they can succeed in achieving academic outcomes

Item	Responses				
How confident is this student in his or her ability to learn all the material presented in your class?	Not at all confident	Slightly confident	Somewhat confident	Quite confident	Extremely confident

Learning Strategies - How well students deliberately use strategies to manage their own learning processes generally

Item	Responses				
Overall, how well do this student's learning strategies help her/him learn more effectively?	Not at all well	Slightly well	Somewhat well	Quite well	Extremely well

Classroom Effort - How much effort students put into school and learning

Item	Responses				
Overall, how much effort does this student put forth during your class?	Almost no effort	A little bit of effort	Some effort	Quite a bit of effort	A great deal of effort

Social Perspective-Taking - The extent to which students consider the perspectives of their teachers

Item	Responses				
Overall, how much effort does this student put into figuring out what you are thinking?	Almost no effort	A little bit of effort	Some effort	Quite a bit of effort	A great deal of effort

Emotion Regulation - How well students regulate their emotions

Item	Responses				
How often is this student able to control his/her emotions when s/he needs to?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always

Engagement - How attentive and invested students are in school

Item	Responses				
Overall, how interested is this student in your class?	Not at all interested	Slightly interested	Somewhat interested	Quite interested	Extremely interested