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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OFFERED
AND RECEIVED FOLLOWING THE RETURN TO SCHOOL DURING THE
GLOBAL PANDEMIC IN TWO SOUTH CAROLINA REGIONS

By
Mindy L. Duckworth

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Mindy L. Duckworth under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dedication

Through family challenges, a first-generation college graduate was able to accomplish something she has always dreamed of. This path was not walked alone. Thank you to my God, family, friends, cohort family, school site team, graduate professors, dissertation committee, and research participants who walked with me.

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Abstract

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This study determined teacher perspectives of the social emotional learning (SEL) support offered and received following the return to school during a global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. The study is important, not only to those who returned during the global pandemic or because states are requiring districts to think of the whole child but for educational leaders who are understanding the importance of delivering SEL for the purpose of educational growth. The research questions were answered through the lens of a mixed methods design through a combination of survey items and the results of the focus group. The findings indicated that teacher SEL was supported by the educational leaders and colleagues and that, in turn, teachers supported their students' SEL. The provision of SEL support begins with educational leaders first supporting adults. The goal of the study was to evaluate teacher perspectives of SEL given and received during the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

Keywords: adult social emotional learning, change theory, COVID-19 pandemic, educational transformative adaptation theory, global pandemic, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), response to intervention (RtI), social emotional learning (SEL), transformative learning theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In March 2020, students and teachers were abruptly sent home as districts struggled to revamp their educational system as quickly as possible due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. Schools offered eLearning or provided learning packets to students for their families to instruct them. As the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020b) indicated, school closures heightened attention on health, social, economic, technological, and racial differences that could not be ignored. In the fall of 2020, the return to virtual, hybrid, or online learning impacted students and educational professionals to various degrees. Slade (2020) explained that everyone in education has been affected in some manner by the COVID-19 crisis and schools should provide support to help decrease the effects. One way to support those in education is through the provision of social emotional learning (SEL; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The provision of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are the five tenets that make up SEL. Aspen Institute (2018a) stated,

Social and emotional development comprises specific skills and competencies that people need in order to set goals, manage behavior, build relationships, and process and remember information. These skills and competencies develop in a complex system of contexts, interactions, and relationships, suggesting that organization must take a comprehensive approach to promoting social and emotional development-addressing adult skills and beliefs, organizational culture, climate, and norms; and routines and structures that guide basic interactions and

instruction-and that such approaches are most effective when designed to match the needs and contexts of specific organizations and communities. Put simply, social and emotional development is not just about the skills that students and adults possess and deploy; it is also about the features of the educational setting itself, including culture and climate. (p. 2)

Student and teacher SEL may be helped by developing five areas of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Vega, 2017). The importance of SEL has been growing in recent years through the Response to Intervention (RtI), Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) era; and it has often been moved to the forefront as schools teach the whole child. In 2007, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) released the whole child initiative, and soon after, multiple states, including South Carolina, began adopting the concept of placing children first in all decisions (ASCD, 2020). The whole child drives the focus for schools to serve student safety, health, engagement, and increase support for individual needs. The whole child focus is similar to Maslow's (1943) theory of hierarchy of needs, where he indicated the importance of meeting physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs (McLeod, 2020). Domitrovich et al. (2017) found that SEL instruction impacts adult outcomes and success, changes behavior, and is part of developing the whole child.

The return to instruction in the fall of 2020 from COVID-19 increased the focus on student and adult SEL development. In South Carolina, the AccelerateEd Task Force (2020) informed the public of the general assembly's debate and subsequent approval of

five suggested Learn, Evaluate, Analyze, and Prepare (LEAP) days provided before the official start of school. Further, these days had the potential to be used to pretest or to provide SEL for students. CASEL (2020b) recommended the school year begin with educators who “reunite, renew and thrive” (p. 1) by offering intensive SEL services to students. Building SEL for teachers and students means developing SEL skills through multi-modality options such as SEL programming and SEL support.

The re-entry of students to school impacted students, families, and teachers (CASEL, 2020b). Supporting students is a monumental task that impacts more than just social emotional improvement. Jones and Kahn (2017) explained that SEL is part of the academic process and is linked with the brain in supporting learning. The impact of SEL is documented by CASEL’s (2020a) description:

More than two decades of research demonstrates that education promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) gets results. The findings come from multiple fields and sources, including student achievement, neuroscience, health, employment, psychology, classroom management, learning theory, economics, and the prevention of youth problem behaviors. (para. 1)

The provision of SEL could encourage teacher satisfaction and develop individual coping skills.

With a long history dating back to Aristotle, SEL has been a part of student development, but not until approximately 20 years ago did a formal curriculum surface to support student development on this subject. The 2020 pandemic forced a great deal of change in the world of education (Rodriguez, 2020). This study explored the ways teachers were supported and the ways they supported students following their return to

school from the global pandemic in the fall of 2020.

Purpose of the Study

The mixed method study has two main points. First, the study aimed to examine teacher perspectives of the social emotional support they offered their students upon their return to instruction in the fall of 2020; second, it aimed to examine participant perceptions of the support they were offered in 2020 when they returned to virtual, eLearning, and/or in-person instruction. The data were gathered from kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers throughout the state of South Carolina. Teacher perspectives were examined through survey and focus group data. Results from the mixed method study intended to give information to guide leaders and to potentially assist them in making better decisions for their teachers' and students' SEL. Through the provision of developing relationships, opportunities, comprehensive support systems, racial equities, and family collaboration, schools can create an environment that supports SEL development of their students and teachers (CASEL, 2020b).

Research Questions

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) explained that the theoretical framework frames the type of research questions a researcher asks. For this study, transformative learning theory in conjunction with change theory will create the historic case for the theoretical framework. Research questions were modeled after Creswell's and Creswell's (2018) recommendation that mixed method research should include at least three research questions, with one question addressing quantitative research, a second question addressing qualitative research, and a third question addressing mixed methods research.

1. What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of

their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms is a list that can assist in understanding common words or acronyms. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained the importance of defining words as they are presented and within the definition of terms to aid in understanding the study.

The selected terms are important to the research study.

Adult SEL

An initiative in skill building for the SEL of adults that results in the added benefit for student growth that is represented by the development of the understanding of personal SEL, naming emotions in front of students, engaging colleagues in problem-solving, and practicing self-care (Woolf, 2020).

Change Theory

A framework that outlines the expectations, activities, goals, and expected outcomes of an event (Center for Theory of Change, n.d.).

Educational Transformative Adaption Theory

An educator's ability to transform through reflective practice and emotionally change their perspective during a traumatic event, which causes the unique phenomenon

of resilience that ultimately leads to adaptation of the new normal.

MTSS

A 3-tiered evidence-based system that includes screening, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making for students in both behavior and academics (Rosen, 2020).

PBIS

A framework that positively addresses behaviors and is often seen as a component of MTSS (PBIS Rewards, n.d.c)).

RTI

In 2004, RTI was introduced as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). IDEA introduced the concept of the implementation and evaluation of research-based interventions and responses to that intervention before a referral to Special Education is made (PBIS Rewards, n.d.b).

Self-Awareness

The understanding of personal thoughts and feelings and expressing those thoughts and feelings in a respectable way (Vega, 2017).

Self-Management

A constructive way to respond to current or past events (Vega, 2017).

Social Awareness

The use of perspective and empathy when respectfully working with others (CASEL, 2017a).

SEL

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2019b, para.1).

Relationship Skills

Demonstrated by positive interactions that foster communication, engagement, rapport building, and working as a team (CASEL, 2017a).

Responsible Decision-Making

Making decisions through identification, analyzation, problem-solving, evaluating, reflecting, and taking responsibility (CASEL, 2017a).

Transformational Learning

Mezirow et al. (2000) described transformational learning as the process that transforms a personal perspective into an inclusive, reflective practice with the possibility of creating more accurate beliefs and practices.

Theoretical Framework

The study will be supported by a new theoretical framework. A theoretical framework supports a theory in a way that draws attention to the study's conceptual framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Two theoretical frameworks, transformative learning theory and change theory, built the historical foundation for a new theory.

Transformative Learning Theory

The transformative learning theory is defined by Mezirow et al. (2000) as, “the

power to control and determine our actions in the context of our desires and intentions” (p. 25). Making meaning from a problem situation is what Mezirow et al. (2000) described as transformative learning.

Adults benefit from various ways of learning. Woolf (2020) explained that helping adults learn the skills to lead social and emotional learning initiatives benefits others. The process of teaching students also builds adult SEL (Woolf, 2020). Transformative learning is a model where adults learn through current needs. Mezirow (1991) explained that adults think for themselves and have experiences that help make their perceptions. Glickman et al. (2018) believed that learning occurs through informal on-the-job training. Transformative learning is an extension of on-the-job training or learning through experience. Culatta (2018) claimed that transformative learning is made up of two types of learning: instrumental and communicative. Instrumental learning is to learn from tasks or through solving problems; communicative learning comes from feelings, needs, and desires (Culatta, 2018). Looking through the lens of transformative learning, the study explored how adults felt supported and how adults supported students through the return to instruction in the fall of 2020.

Change Theory

Change theory is explained by the Center for Theory of Change (n.d.):

It is focused in particular on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and

how these related to one another causally) for the goals to occur. (para. 1)

Change theory grew out of research surrounding program evaluation. Several theorists developed or improved the concept of change theory (Anderson, 2019). Adults and students have been forced into a change due to the pandemic. Hall and Hord (2020) reiterated that change is not an event but a process. Along with learning that is brought by change, some effects such as supporting people and having a change mentor could successfully impact positive change in an organization.

Change occurs in business, education, and even relationships. Hall and Hord (2020) stated, “change is one of the few constants in our world” (p. viii). If change is constant, understanding the theory behind it is essential to support leaders. Change theory can provide a map to aid in understanding the process of change (Anderson, 2019). Understanding how change theory impacts people behind the change may increase the success of the change. Hall and Hord indicated that the people who make up a site will impact the change and leaders have a responsibility to assist in the implementation of the change.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that theory in a mixed methods study can provide the framework for the study. The dual theories will assist in the development of the theoretical framework that will inform the results of the study. The historic combination of dual theories is described visually in Figure 1.

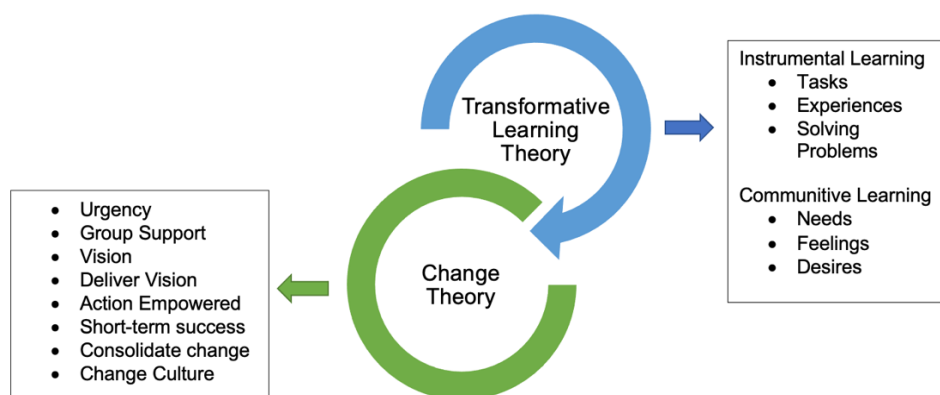
Figure 1*Dual Theories*

Figure 1 connected the two learning lenses of Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory with Kotter's (2012) change theory. The two types of learning, instrumental and communitive, originate from Mezirow's (1991) theory. Instrumental learning are those factors that support a person's learning through doing. Communitive learning are those personal characteristics that support a person's learning. Kotter's theory explains the process of successful change. The combination of transformative learning theory and change theory are the backbone theories of the new transformative change theory.

Scope of Study

The study explored how teachers in South Carolina believe they provided SEL skills to their students and how SEL skills were provided to them upon the return to instruction in the fall of 2020. All kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers in the state of South Carolina were eligible to participate in the study; however, only two regions in South Carolina had participants. The participants provided feedback through their responses to an online survey and a Zoom focus group. The feedback from the

participants was examined through a dual lens. Specifically, the transformative learning theory and change theory were applied.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

An assumption is a belief that something is true (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). There were two assumptions of the study. The first assumption was that all educators implement SEL, even if they do not refer to it as SEL or are not currently implementing an SEL curriculum. The second assumption was that the participants were open and honest with their feedback through the survey and during the open-ended questioning during the online Zoom focus group.

Limitations are another way to describe weaknesses in the study (McKendree University, 2020). There were three limitations for the study. The first limitation was that participants were selected via social media. Bioeth (2017) explained that social media is a viable option for recruitment if the researcher provides their IRB with the sites to be used, a description of recruitment, and how privacy will be maintained. Social media studies may not provide accurate data. The data collected through social media may not be accurate because the study excludes individuals who do not use social media (foodRisc, 2016). The second limitation was that the participants could have felt uncomfortable with the material and may not have provided honest feedback via the self-assessment survey response. Even with the respondents being anonymous, members may have felt uncomfortable with the content, or they may not have wished to provide information to speak ill of their school or district administrators. The third limitation was the ability to gather participants during the pandemic. The participants were under a great deal of stress coping with personal and professional changes in their life. The information provided by

these participants could have impacted their stress levels. CASEL (2020b) discussed how adults and students might be “emotionally charged” (p. 5) following their return to school.

Delimitations are described as the ways the researcher narrows the focus of the study (McKendree University, 2020). The delimitations of the study included the narrowing of the study to the state of South Carolina. Narrowing the study to South Carolina was done because I live and work in the state where the information was collected, and it is of interest to me. Another delimitation was the way the respondents were selected. Respondents were selected by equal numbers in the two South Carolina regions; this method may narrow the information and neglect the use of good responses. I originally wanted to have equal participants from each region so I could take that variable of unequal sample sizes out of my statistical measurements; however, I was not able to gather the same number of participants.

Significance of the Study

History proves that major events such as the current global pandemic cause change. Impacts from the pandemic will likely be noted in social emotional needs, academic regression, graduation rate, and college enrollment (Gosner, 2020b). Gathering information from teachers regarding their perspectives following their return to instruction during a global pandemic could provide data to develop support systems to impact educational change. CASEL (2020b) recommended that returning to in-person education, learning institutions should focus on relationships, connections, safety, and supporting students and families. Durlak et al. (2011) found that student academic performance increased by 11% when they were provided SEL support. A meta-analysis

conducted by Aspen Institute (2018a) suggested that SEL is more than a set of skills for students; SEL is also for adults to explore for themselves. SEL supported classroom increase subject gains for their students (Aspen Institute, 2018a). Student academic improvement is one reason to support SEL education. A second reason for supporting SEL education is to examine the way schools served students during the pandemic. A third reason for supporting student SEL are the stressors that have occurred to families during this time period and they may not have been able to provide the usual SEL support to their children.

Impact of Research

The impact of this research may provide support to individual sites, districts within the state, the state board of education, and state or private universities. The research findings may provide useful data to develop or make improvements to SEL curriculum at the site and district level. In addition, this research could provide information that the South Carolina Department of Education might use to support their whole child initiative from teacher perspectives of SEL. Finally, the data provided from this study could also be useful for universities that train and support future educators.

Summary of Chapter 1

In unprecedented times, due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, SEL is at the forefront of our society's attention. The nation's schools brought students back to virtual and/or eLearning/in-person models of instruction in the fall of 2020. CASEL (2020b) noted the complexity of bringing students back to school sites and supporting their "academic, social and emotional development" (p. 3). This study researched teacher perspectives of the SEL supports offered and received upon their return to instruction in

the fall of 2020.

The following chapters explore the study in greater detail. Chapter 2 covers theories and research on SEL. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology. Chapter 4 reports the data. Chapter 5 describes the findings of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

As students returned to instruction in the fall of 2020, SEL for faculty, staff, and students was a focus for many districts. The road for SEL to take a more pronounced role began in 2015 with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA informed the nation that students must be offered a more rounded education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). A more rounded education is an educational plan that includes more than core subject development, and SEL fits that bill. SEL was brought to educators in the state of South Carolina through the state's acceptance of educating the whole child. Jones et al. (2017) said, "Over the past two decades, there has emerged a consensus among those who study child development, education, and health that social and emotional skills matter for many areas of development, including learning, health, and general wellbeing" (p. 7).

Effects on Education from the Global Pandemic

Global pandemics are not new; they date back before written record. When the world faces a pandemic, it often impacts history (Jarus, 2020). In March 2020, the director of the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic due to the COVID-19 virus (Bedford et al., 2020). Soon after the pandemic declaration, school districts across the nation began sending students home. South Carolina Governor McMaster directed the closure of South Carolina public schools on Monday, March 15, 2020, by Executive Order No. 2020-09. Following the order, school districts provided worksheet packets or some form of virtual education to students. An online program called Virtual SC that serves students in seventh through 12th grades provided online

resources for parents regarding the way to set up virtual classrooms at home such as, “reliable technology, clear expectations and frequent communication” (Virtual SC, 2020, p. 1). No one could have predicted that the remaining 2.5 months of the 2019-2020 school year would continue as at-home education.

In the fall of 2020, as spread rates from the COVID-19 virus remained high, states mandated in-person and virtual options for the return to school for school districts across the nation. In South Carolina, a task force, AccelerateEd, was created to offer best practice suggestions to the state lawmakers regarding the return to school (Wilkinson, 2020). Gosner (2020b) reported that there would be an impact on student social emotional skills from the pandemic. Dooley et al. (2020) expressed the importance of supporting family decisions regarding either in-person or online schooling for their children.

Related Literature

There are three areas of related literature that have been heavily explored by researchers. The first area is the offering of social emotional support to students in the classroom. Taylor et al. (2017) found improvements in social emotional skills, attitudes, and indicators of well-being when school-based SEL interventions were implemented with students in kindergarten through high school. The second research topic is principal perspectives on the importance of SEL. In 2017, CASEL interviewed 710 elementary through high school principals about SEL and found that 83% believed in promoting SEL skills (CASEL, 2017c). The third area of research is adult SEL. Jones and Kahn (2017) explained, “adults who recognize, understand, label, and regulate their own emotions are less likely to report burnout, demonstrate higher levels of patience and empathy,

encourage healthy communication, and create safe student learning environments” (para. 1).

Child Development Theories

When thinking about how children develop, it is an important process to examine when the intent is to develop student SEL skills. To explore how children develop, we are going to explore Piaget’s (1936) cognitive development theory and Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivism theory.

Cognitive Development Theory

Piaget (1936) established his theory of cognitive development explaining how children develop intellectually from birth to adulthood through four stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational (Cherry, 2020).

Sensorimotor. Cherry (2020) explained that this stage covers birth to 2 years. During the sensorimotor stage, children learn about sensations, sucking, grasping, looking, object permanence, and how they can affect the outside world (Cherry, 2020). Gill (2018) stated that object permanence is the objective for children to meet during the sensorimotor stage.

Preoperational. This stage covers ages 2 to 7 (Cherry, 2020). The goal of this stage is to think in symbols (Gill, 2018). Cherry (2020) explained that during this stage, language grows; the child learns that objects can represent pictures; and children are only interested in their own feelings, wants, and desires.

Concrete Operational. The concrete operational stage occurs from ages 7 to 11 (Cherry, 2020). The goal at this stage is for operational thought (Gill, 2018). At this stage of development, logical thought begins to develop (Gill, 2018).

Formal Operational. Cherry (2020) explained that this stage occurs from ages 12 and up. At this stage, abstract thinking occurs, allowing children/adults to think about morality, ethics, and hypothetical problems (Cherry, 2020).

Piaget (1936) is still widely accepted when thinking about how humans develop and learn. Cherry (2020) explained that Piaget's theory defined that children take an active role in their learning.

Social Constructivism Theory

McLeod (2020) explained that the social constructivism theory is the sharing of knowledge through constructing information. Vygotsky (1978) believed that children's play is how meaning is made throughout human development, and communication is gathered from the adult figures in a child's life (McLeod, 2020). Many of Vygotsky's (1978) ideas conflicted with Piaget's (1936) theory, but both theories play a role in establishing how children learn.

Adult Learning Theories

When examining how to support adult SEL development, it is important to understand how adults learn so educational leaders can make connections with what adults need to learn to increase their SEL skills. Half of the study's theoretical framework stands on adult learning, which makes the history of adult learning important to review. There are many theories of how adults learn that led to the development of transformational learning. Review of early theorists such as Piaget (1936), Vygotsky (1978), and Knowles (1980) provides a foundation that later adult learning theorists built upon. Adult learning theory is important to SEL because educational leaders must understand what adults need to develop programs and supports for adult SEL skill

development.

Andragogy

Adult education has been a focus of institutions and researchers since the work of Knowles (1980) where he publicized the theory of andragogy (TEAL Center, 2011).

Andragogy is another term for adult education that was first used in 1833 by Alexander Kapp (Pappas, 2013). Knowles (1984) made five assumptions of adult learning: self-concept, adult learner experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learn, and motivation to learn.

Self-Concept. An adult progresses from dependency to directed learning (Knowles, 1984). At the dependency stage, the adult learner is dependent on another individual to provide them with information, but through growth, the adult begins to direct their own learning through self-exploration.

Adult Learner Experience. Experience is a great teacher. Adults capitalize their learning from their own successes and failures. Successes drive adults to continue that practice, where failures teach adult learners to change what did not work and try again (Knowles, 1984).

Readiness to Learn. Knowles (1984) explained that through the natural maturity process, adults use their social position to assist in the learning process. Through engagement and connection with others, adults demonstrate a readiness to learn and grow.

Orientation to Learning. Through the aging process, adults start to see the benefit in learning everything they need to know immediately, rather than putting off knowledge and growth (Knowles, 1984). Adults develop and grow by gaining new

information; this happens because they recognize learning new information increases personal and professional success.

Motivation. Adults find motivation from inside themselves rather than through external rewards (Knowles, 1984). Adults may have been motivated to learn because of grades, recognition, or money that would have been earned. As adults mature, the motivation to learn may change to an internal drive for information. Pink (2009) explained internal motivation as the drive to complete a task was the reward.

The learning process is different for adults in many ways. eLearning Industry (n.d.) indicated that adults must be part of the planning process, understand that mistakes support learning, apply their knowledge, and implement problem-solving to support their learning.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is another popular theory that focuses on the concept that adults direct their own learning (TEAL Center, 2011). Garrison (1997) explained that prior to self-directed learning, most of the adult learning concepts came from an outside source teaching a student. Garrison (1997) explained further that self-directed learning is rooted in cognition and motivation.

Experiential Learning

A third theory of adult learning is Garrison (2003) experiential learning. Experiential learning is characterized as a hands-on approach (Coleman, 2019). Kolb et al. (1999) explained how experiential learning was developed from cognitive theory and behavioral theories and the experiential learning theory relies heavily upon personal experiences.

Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow (1978, as cited by Cranton, 2016) built upon earlier adult learning theories and added that adults learn through their ability to transform from experiences. The transformative learning theory was created by Mezirow in 1978, and it will support half of the theoretical framework. Transformational learning focuses on how adults transform through the process of learning (Cranton, 2016). Another definition by Western Governors University (2020) described transformative learning theory as an idea driven by perspectives and the evaluation of ideas. Mezirow (1991) stated that his theory was developed from a constructivist position, specifically social theory. Instrumental and communicative learning are the two learning styles supported by transformative learning (Instructional Design, n.d.). Instrumental learning is defined as learning driven by cause-and-effect relations and problem-solving, whereas communicative learning is the emotional side where needs, desires, and feelings drive learning (Instructional Design, n.d.). Transformational learning is effective due to its diversity of approaches (Taylor & Cranton, 2015).

Mezirow (1978) explained that adults are guided by their perspective and their perspective is shaped by their “social, economic, political, psychological, and religious assumptions” (p. 7). Baumgartner (2012) explained that Mezirow (1998) expanded his position on perspective to include reflection, whereas he defined critical reflection to mean reflecting upon experiences to change or alter their position. Mezirow (1998) explained that perspectives lead to exploration of meaning and when humans cannot find meaning, anxiety occurs. The meanings of adult learning phases are described in Table 1.

Table 1*Transformative Learning Theory Adult Learning Phases*

Adult learning phases	Meaning
New information	When new information changes a previously held belief
Examining beliefs	Reevaluation of previous beliefs leads to the examination and development of new feelings
Evaluation of assumptions	Examining the details leads to the possibility of an alternate viewpoint
Planning action	After the realignment of the personal perspective, a plan of action is developed
Building knowledge	Knowledge of the person is developed by implementing action
Active engagement	Plays an active role in developing new Perspective(s) developed from new knowledge and beliefs
Development of a new way of knowing	Transformation into new beliefs

Note. Information adapted from Western Governors University (2020).

Table 1 reviews that adult learners progress through various steps of adult transformation. Western Governors University (2020) indicated that the transformation phases aid in adult development from insight and knowledge and new ideas promote learning.

There have been those who have critiqued Mezirow's theory. Tisdell (2012) believed that Mezirow's theory of transformative learning had shortcomings because the focus was on the individual and it should have included external factors. The external factors Tisdell explained were the emotions of others, spiritual beliefs, and the individual's way of knowing.

Change Theory

Change theory grew out of research on program evaluation. Weiss (1998) expressed how in the early 1970s, evidence arose from program evaluations. The evidence indicated that there were social impacts on the success or failure of a new program that was caused by the change individuals were forced to make (Weiss, 1998). In the early 1990s, Kotter began researching why change fails and at the same time laid the groundwork for the change process. Fullan (2001) explained how change happens quickly and it does not occur in a straight line but erratically. Hall and Hord (2020) explained that in our world, change is something that consistently happens. Kotter (2012) explained that change theory has been popular since his first article and is still relevant today.

Stages of Concern (SoC)

Kotter (2012) said, “the methods used in successful transformations are all based on one fundamental insight: that major change will not happen easily for a long list of reasons” (p. 22). When change is implemented, not everyone will immediately adopt the new initiative. Hall and Hord (2020) explained that change implementers are impacted at different levels, and they describe how these individuals can move through different SoC as they implement the adoption process. The stages are identified as refocusing, collaboration, consequence, management, personal, informational, and unrelated/unconcerned (Hall & Hord, 2020). How individuals feel regarding the change process is explained using Hall and Hord’s seven SoC as described in Table 2.

Table 2*Definitions of the SoC*

SoC terminology	Definition
Refocusing	Attending to alternatives that positively impact change
Collaboration	Focus on how the change will affect colleagues
Consequence	Consideration regarding how change impacts the recipients of the change
Management	Attending to the processes of the change initiative, like “scheduling, time and organization”
Personal	Demonstration of self-doubt regarding the ability to implement the change
Informational	Recognition of a change initiative, however, these individuals feel the change will not impact them it is only impacting others
Unrelated/unconcerned	Concern for other items/Absence of concern

Table 2 defines each step of SoC as Hall and Hord (2020) explained that refusing collaboration negatively impacts others in the organization. Hall and Hord also explained that those with management concerns have concerns with tasks and are most likely concerned with how the change will affect them. These steps are not naturally cycled through a natural progression. Individuals may show a number of these steps at the same time or bounce through these stages randomly as they adapt to the change (Hall & Hord, 2020).

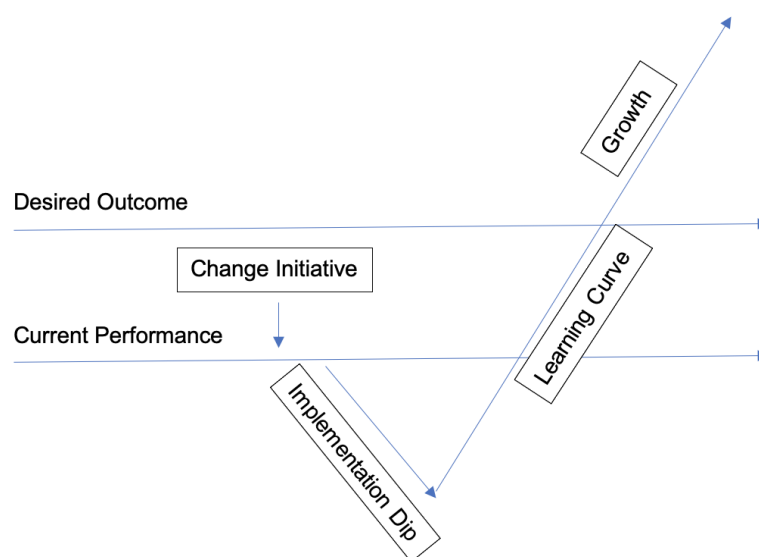
Implementation Dip

An implementation dip is the slowing of productivity when change is implemented (Tejaswi, 2017). After a new initiative begins, it is common to see current

performance regress. This regression is known as an implementation dip. The implementation dip will indicate a decrease in performance from current levels before an aggressive advancement occurs that grows towards and could exceed the desired outcome. Every change initiative causes an implementation dip, and many change initiatives fail because of this dip (Tejaswi, 2017). The failure is caused for two possible reasons: the organizations are unaware of the implementation dip or the organizations become disappointed in the decrease in current performance and stop the new initiative. Fullan (2001) explained that the implementation dip happens because individuals have a fear of change or a fear of the belief in the skills they are lacking. It is essential that organizations are notified of the time factor for the adoption of a new initiative so time is dedicated to the adoption. The implementation dip graphic is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Implementation Dip Graphic



Note. Adapted from Fullan (2001) Implementation Dip.

Figure 2 represents the implementation dip visually. The dip occurs soon after

change is introduced. The change dips below the current performance and then rises through the learning curve. The change may grow to meet the desired outcome and may exceed expectations if the organization implements the steps to successful change initiatives.

Steps of Successful Change Initiatives

There are steps to assist in a successful change initiative. Fullan (2001) explained that the process to understand change does not begin with who innovates the most, has the best ideas, appreciates the implementation dip, redefines the resistance, improves the culture, or navigates the complexity of the change process, but by leading others through the change. Kotter (2012) explained that urgency, guiding coalition, vision, communicating the vision, empowering action, short-term success, consolidating change, and change culture are the eight steps to support effective change. Kotter's eight steps must be completed in sequence for the success of the change initiative and are explained further in Table 3.

Table 3*Eight Steps of Successful Change*

Steps	Successful change
Urgency	If change is left to chance, it will not happen promptly. Kotter (2012) described that change initiatives must be driven so complacency does not develop.
Group support	For change to happen, a supportive group should be created. Kotter (2012) recommended that a member come from an executive team to help move the process, a knowledgeable person who will inform the team of different perspectives, a person who is well respected so that many outside of the power group will respect, and a person that is going to drive the change initiative.
Vision	Center for School Change (2020) stated, “the vision helps people understand how you hope others will view you and describes some of your highest priorities” (para. 2). The vision of the change initiative is the driving force for how others will view the change.
Deliver vision	Communication of a vision is essential to the success of the change initiative. Kotter (2012) described that accurate communication is imperative to the success of the initiative.
Action empowered	New initiatives can cause process concerns that tend to slow or halt progress. Systems and processes should be aligned to support the new vision and encourage members to act (Kotter, 2012).
Short-term success	When new initiatives are put in place, setting milestones along to celebrate encourages employees to support the new initiative and creates rejuvenation in the vision (Kotter, 2012).
Consolidating change	Causing too much change at one time can impact the initiative negatively. Kotter (2012) explained that it is best to consolidate change.
Change culture	Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explained that if a culture is built upon specific values, it will support those behaviors. Supporting a culture of change is recommended to cause positive results in innovation and growth (Fullan, 2020).

Table 3 further explains the steps to a successful change initiative. Fullan (2020) described how leading through change is messy. Successful leaders understand change,

push through disorganization, and create order from the chaos (Fullan, 2020). It is not enough only to understand why change succeeds, but it is also important to explore why change fails.

Why Change Fails

Change takes time (Hall & Hord, 2020). Often, change implementers want the new process, new initiative, or new program implemented immediately, which is not a reasonable expectation (Kotter, 2012). Hall and Hord (2020) explained that the change process takes time and requires everyone within the institution to take part in the change. “The change process equals the process of innovation plus the interventions and organization culture that are impacted by the external context” (Hall & Hord, 2020, p. 28). Kotter (2012) updated his reasons for change initiative failure, following additional research of change initiative failures. Kotter reported the following reasons for change initiative failure:

1. Complacency allowance
2. Absent guiding coalition
3. Underdeveloped vision
4. Lack of communication
5. Vision blockers
6. Focus on long-term plans
7. Pre-mature celebrations of success
8. Failure to obtain buy-in at the executive level

Complacency Allowance

Complacency allowance occurs when the change leaders do not develop a sense

of urgency for the change initiative (Kotter, 2012). When a leader experiences multiple change initiative failures within an organization, it may be the result of the leader not developing a sense of urgency. Leaders must share the reason behind why the new initiative is important so the adults can begin to make connections with the “why” behind the new initiative.

Absent Guiding Coalition

After highlighting a sense of urgency, a change leader must develop a guiding coalition. A guiding coalition is known as a group that shares the need to develop the change the initiative supports (Kotter, 2012). To help spread the reasons for the new initiative and to answer any questions of those struggling to adapt to the new initiative, a group of people who are already on board with the initiative creates a strong position of why the initiative should be implemented.

Underdeveloped Vision

The development of a vision is not only important but should be widely known and spoken by the individuals of that organization. Kotter (2012) explained, “vision plays a key role in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people” (p. 8).

Lack of Communication

A vision can be underdeveloped, and this occurs because of a lack of communication. Kotter (2012) explained how communication of a vision is demonstrated not only in words but also in aligned deeds. If the actions demonstrated by leaders do not align with the vision or the communication, it can impact the success of the initiative.

Vision Blockers

Through the implementation of new initiatives, there can be various obstacles that block the path to successful change. The obstacles can be people, the organization, conflicting initiatives, or supervisors (Kotter, 2012). People can block the initiative by not believing in it and spreading discourse about the initiative. The organization could block the initiative by not believing in it and refusing to support the new initiative. If two initiatives contradict each other, it leaves the organization to pick one or the other, which will most likely lead both to fail. Finally, if a supervisor is not supportive of the new initiative, they could refuse to support it and may not create the correct environment for the development of the success of the initiative.

Focusing on Long-Term Plans

In all change initiatives, there should be short-term objectives. Those that only focus on the long-term plans may fail to begin the new initiative. Having short-term objectives provides the ability to celebrate success along the path to full implementation of a change initiative.

Premature Celebration of Success

Celebrating before full implementation can negatively impact change (Kotter, 2012). Hall and Hord (2020) informed us that change was a process. Kotter (2012) informed us that we should celebrate short-term success along the way. However, long-term success should not be celebrated until the change initiative has been in place for 3 to 5 years.

Failure to Obtain Buy-in at Executive Level

Kotter (2012) explained that all too often, change is implemented at a lower level

in an organization. Without appropriate buy-in at the executive level, change initiatives could fail. Kotter recommended that change leaders should obtain buy-in from executive-level personnel to help support the change initiatives initiated at a lower level.

Connecting Dual Theoretical Framework to SEL

SEL support has traversed much change over time, beginning with emotional intelligence, character education, and restorative discipline practices. How student SEL needs are assessed has also undergone a great deal of change encompassing RTI, PBIS, the whole child initiative, and most recently, MTSS. Through the research and data collection phase of the study, a new educational theory began to form, but at this time, it still had not developed into something concrete. The visual display showing how transformative learning theory and change theory merged with SEL can be viewed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Connecting SEL to the Dual Theoretical Framework

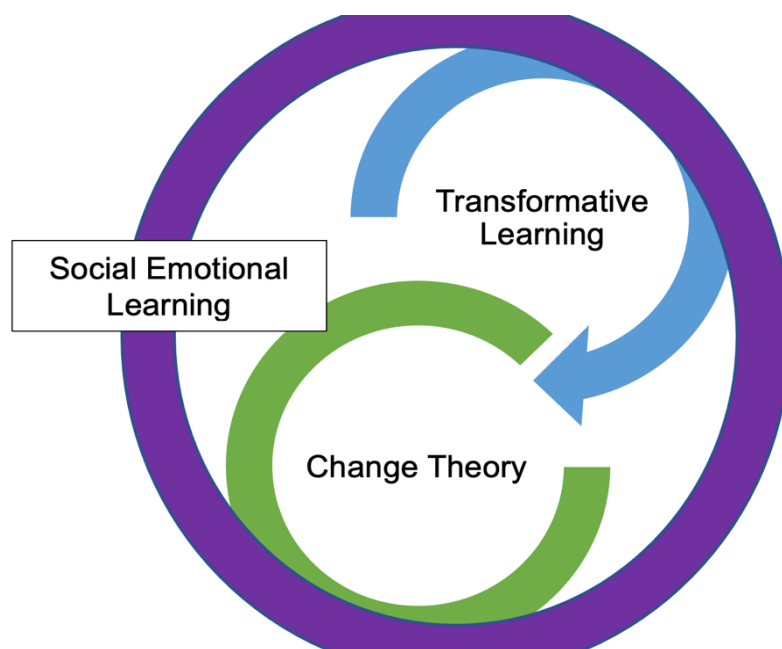


Figure 3 demonstrates how SEL encompasses the dual theoretical frameworks. SEL builds upon transformation and change. When transformation takes place, a person must first understand the new process so their perspective can transform to adopt a new belief system. The entire development of adopting a new belief system requires the person to change. These teachers and students had to transform their beliefs, perceptions, actions, knowledge, and engagement to serve students differently than ever before. These teachers and students had to make an immediate change that may have only worked for those who are initial change adopters. Initial change adopters quickly adapt to change when it occurs (Hall & Hord, 2020). It is highly plausible that the immediate move to virtual education prevented many educators from progressing through the natural change process. I wanted to explore how teachers believed their social emotional skills were supported upon reentry to school from virtual instruction; therefore, this study explored teacher perspectives of the social emotional impacts following a drastic move to and return from virtual instruction. Teachers evaluated the support they have provided.

History of Emotional Intelligence

Emotion has a place in education that dates to the time of Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (340 BC, as cited in The School of Life, 2014), stated that Aristotle posed the question, “What makes people happy” (para. 4). This question suggested that Aristotle may have been interested in SEL. Cohen and Sandy (2003) explained that the study of self is dated back “3,000 years” (p. 4), but most recently, the focus has been on intelligence, not emotional intelligence. Over the late 19th and early 20th centuries, psychologists began to wonder and touch upon the emotional life (Cohen & Sandy, 2003). Goleman (1995) determined that a person’s intellectual level is not the sole factor

of success; there is an equally powerful measurement indicator, and it is emotional intelligence. Emotions are feelings that are often unable to be expressed through words (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence can be described as the combination of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner (1983) said,

There is the development of the internal aspects of a person. The core capacity at work here is access to one's own feeling life--one's range of effects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior. (p. 239)

Bradberry and Greaves (2009) explained that TalentSmart® has collected data on a person's emotional quotient (EQ) through their emotional intelligence test. From 2003 to 2007, EQ scores of the United States workforce have increased 4% (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Many researchers continue to examine EQ. Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (2020) conducted two different studies on EQ: emotion revolution in the workplace and teacher response to promoting SEL in schools for themselves and students in response to the pandemic.

Whole Child Initiative

SEL has moved into the forefront of attention as many states like South Carolina have adopted the whole child initiative. ASCD (2007) wrote a brief where they explained that achievement cannot solely be gained through a focus on academics. This brief began the discussion of the importance of whole child instruction. The Whole Child (2015) described the tenets of whole child instruction as a healthy lifestyle, physically and emotionally safe environment, learning with active engagement, support from schools,

and a focus on career and college ready instruction.

Healthy Lifestyle. The healthy lifestyle tenet represents children learning about healthy practices (ASCD, 2007). A healthy lifestyle can be described as regular physical activity, eating correctly, mental health supports, and sleep (ASCD, 2012). The whole child supports the provision of healthy food being served for breakfast and lunch while decreasing unhealthy food choices. ASCD Whole Child Network (2019) explained the healthy lifestyle tenet as health and wellbeing support, health curriculum, physical education, healthy school environment, supporting faculty members, collaborating with families, healthy community outreach, access to mental health, dental wellness, and good food planning.

Physical and Emotionally Safe Environment. Physical and emotional safety come from home and school environments; if these needs are not met, students struggle to make progress academically (ASCD, 2012). Many school districts have increased supports for students by the provision of mental health workers or made partnerships with medical professionals to support student needs. Promotion of safe environments happens due to school buildings and grounds being safe, traffic patterns providing safe access to students, respect given to individuals, providing support for families and staff behaviorally and academically, practicing social emotional development, conflict resolution and problem-solving, upholding social justice, creating appropriate school climates, having high expectations, and supporting best practice with research (ASCD Whole Child Network, 2019).

Learning With Active Engagement. ASCD (2012) stated,

To learn at their best, students must be engaged and motivated. Substantial

research shows that students who feel both valued by adults and a part of their schools perform better academically and also have more positive social attitudes, values, and behavior. (p. 8)

School districts are moving toward more collaborative planning and adopting curriculum that supports skills greater than recall or memorization and moving toward application of skills. ASCD Whole Child Network (2019) recommended active engagement of students is accomplished through project-based learning, cooperative learning, service learning, civic behaviors, curriculum-related field experiences, various postsecondary exploration, introducing global content, inquiry-based or experiential learning, facilitated learning, student decision-making, and promoting environmental education.

Support. ASCD Whole Child Network (2019) explained that support looks like personalized learning supported by a caring, qualified adult. One way to support students is for teachers to build positive relationships with their students. Relationships are important but equally important is making sure that each student's learning is individualized (ASCD Whole Child Network, 2019).

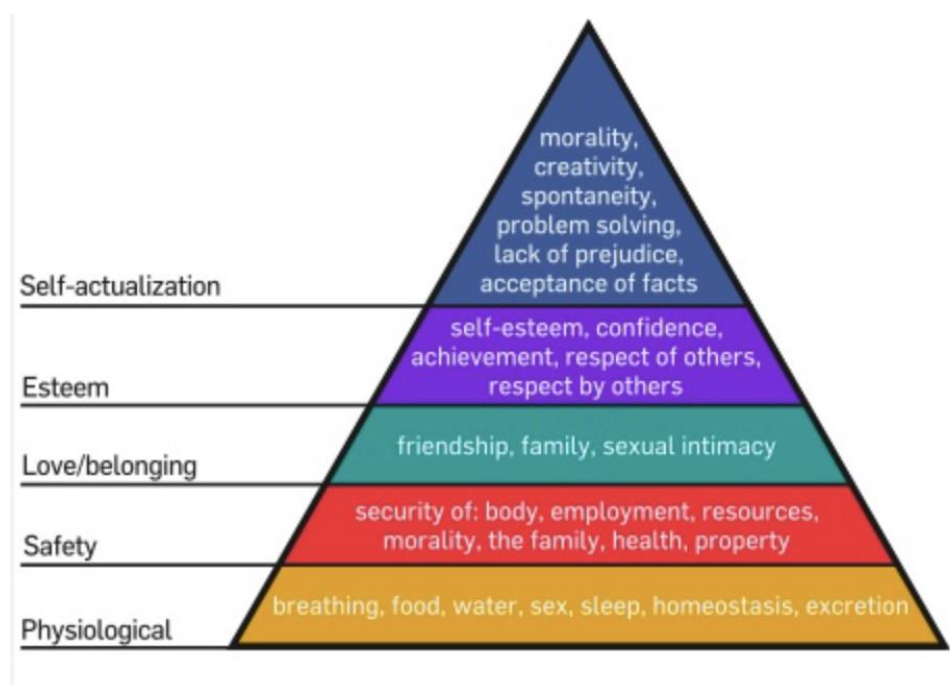
Challenged. The final tenet is focusing on expanding each student's success not only academically, but through employment skills or training (ASCD Whole Child Network, 2019). Many school districts have expanded course offerings by encouraging students to enroll in career and college elective courses, often referred to as career and college readiness skills. ASCD Whole Child Network (2019) indicated that promotion of the challenging tenet is completed by the provision of a challenging curriculum, development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, application of data-based decisions, holding high expectations for students, increasing the family-school-

community connections, increasing community engagement, and provision of technology resources.

SEL is supported throughout the whole child initiative, and the whole child initiative was based on an educational theory of the past. ASCD Whole Child Network (2019) explained that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs underpins the five tenets of the whole child approach. The five tenets are displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Note. Figure obtained from open-source images.

Figure 4 demonstrates how children need self-actualization, esteem, love and belonging, safety, and physiological needs to be met before they can focus on learning. ASCD Whole Child Network (2019) noted that the five whole child tenets are based upon Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. By providing support for the whole child's health, safety, and engagement, we meet all of their needs for learning. ASCD Whole Child Network

(2019) explained how the vision for the future must understand the position and have the tools to improve education. “Through the initiative, ASCD helps educators, families, community members, and policymakers move from a vision about educating the whole child to sustainable, collaborative action” (The Whole Child, 2015, para. 3).

The initiative has bridged a partnership between education and the medical field to support children through a 3-year pilot study of 10 schools that aligned their school improvement with the five tenets of the whole child (ASCD Whole Child Network, 2019). The study indicated positive results for all five tenets. The whole child led to districts adopting SEL supports in their schools. Thorson (2018) shared that to increase academic success in school, districts are placing SEL instruction at the top of their list to support student needs.

RTI

Early attempts that subsequently became the foundation for the whole child started with RTI. RTI became the process for school-based teams to examine a student’s academic needs when IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. IDEA (2004) dropped the discrepancy model that looked for a 20-point discrepancy between intelligence and achievement. RTI was different. The South Carolina Department of Education (2011) defined RTI as,

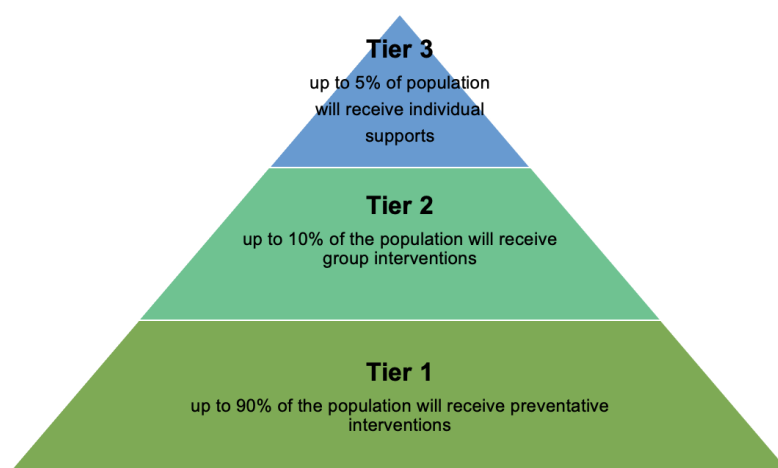
RTI provides a framework for effectively utilizing best instructional practices with a scientific, research-based instructional model. The goal is to deliver early intervention for every student who struggles to attain or maintain grade-level performance. Thus, requiring an ongoing, systematic process of using student performance and response data to guide instructional and intervention

decisions. (para. 6)

In the state of South Carolina, a 3-tiered model was followed that addressed either academic or behavioral concerns. South Carolina Department of Education (2011) defined Tier 1 as the universal instruction and interventions, Tier 2 as target group interventions, and Tier 3 as intensive individual interventions as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5

RTI 3-Tiered Model



Note. Adapted from South Carolina Response to Intervention Framework.

Figure 5 examined the three tiers and the percentages of students who would receive academic or behavioral support at each tier level. Tier 1 would be considered the level at which all students receive proactive universal instruction, Tier 2 would be the targeted at-risk group, and Tier 3 would be the universal instruction and intervention for all students (South Carolina Department of Education, 2011). For placement in the tiered systems, the students would need to participate in universal screenings at least twice a year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2011). The interventions must be monitored to see if the student is making progress. South Carolina Department of

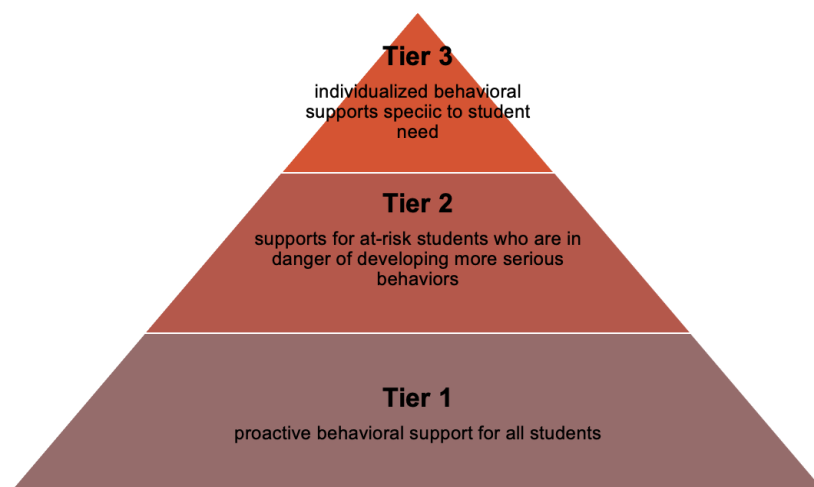
Education (2011) recommended setting goals with baseline data and charting progress. RTI does not have any direct links to SEL; however, it did provide the 3-tiered framework that was used for PBIS and later became part of the framework for MTSS; its importance is invaluable to the SEL process.

PBIS

Similar to RTI, PBIS is a 3-tiered system. The Center on PBIS (n.d.) described PBIS as a 3-tiered framework that, through evidence-based practices, could improve behaviors. PBIS does directly link to SEL support, as it is a positive framework for behavior improvements. The Center on PBIS explained that Tier 1 is universal behavioral supports, Tier 2 is for those students who are at risk for more serious problem behaviors, and Tier 3 is intensive behavioral supports as described in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Tiers of PBIS



Note. Adapted from PBIS Rewards (n.d.c).

Figure 6 begins with most students who are offered proactive behavioral supports to reduce problem behaviors. It progresses into the second tier where students who are at

risk of developing increased behaviors receive research-based behavioral supports to maintain or reduce behavior and then ends with the students who require individualized behavioral supports in Tier 3. PBIS can be implemented at a state, district, school, or classroom level; the intent is to develop social emotional supports to serve a function for the individual and help students understand all behavior can be changed (Sprick, 2006). Ross et al. (2012) explained the implementation of school-wide PBIS has been known to reduce discipline referrals in many schools in the United States. The PBIS process is a step-by-step approach to help assist in the management of behavior. Bear et al. (2015) explained that PBIS was validated by four main practices: clear expectations for behavior, education of expectations, reinforcement of positive behavior, and a system for responding to inappropriate behaviors. McRel International (2015) explained that RTI and PBIS are rooted in research; however, there are many common misinterpretations, such as the belief that PBIS is a special education initiative. The misinterpretations are the reasons the MTSS framework is preferred (McRel International, 2015).

MTSS

MTSS is a combination of RTI, PBIS, and SEL; the combination of supports strongly correlates to the whole child initiative. MTSS supports the development of student academic progress and behavioral needs on a global level throughout schools (McRel International, 2015). MTSS was introduced for adoption in the state of South Carolina in 2018 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a). MTSS is defined as, “a systematic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision-making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students” (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020a, p. 8). The

University of Florida and Florida Department of Education created the six components of MTSS that South Carolina adopted. South Carolina Department of Education (2019a) highlighted the six MTSS components: “leadership, building capacity, communication and collaboration, data-based problem solving, three-tiered instruction/intervention model, and data evaluation” (p. 3). In 2018, South Carolina Governor McMaster signed into law Act 213, which required the use of screening, such as universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments for South Carolina MTSS implementation (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a). There are three ways to successfully implement MTSS: strong leadership to support professional development, data-based problem-solving to build capacity, and communication and collaboration interventions (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a). Strong leadership is represented by professional development that supports the MTSS need. Building capacity is represented by ongoing coaching and the previously discussed professional development that allows staff to work together. One of the keys to effective implementation is the collaboration and communication of stakeholders to support the initiative (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a). The data-based problem-solving approach is supported by the Office of Early Learning and Literacy framework: (a) selecting goals and objectives, (b) problem-solving regarding not making progress to goals; (c) planning for goal attainment, and (d) evaluation of the plan (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a).

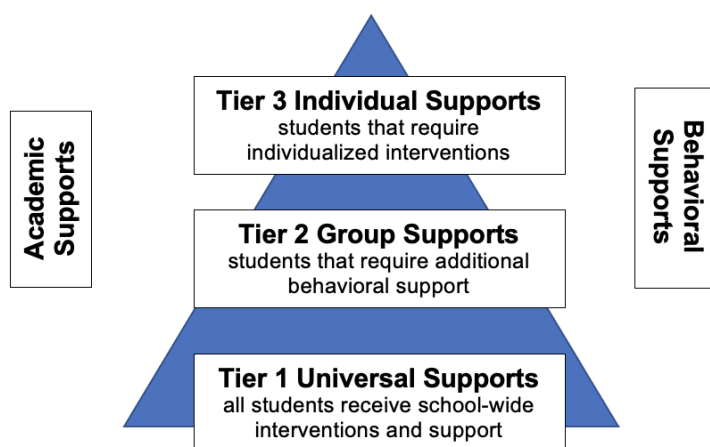
MTSS 3-Tiered Model

The 3-tiered model that was developed earlier during the RTI and PBIS implementations was adopted for MTSS and includes various levels of instructional,

behavioral, and social-emotional interventions for students based on their level of needs (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a). Students should not remain in one tier but should move between the three tiers as they demonstrate success. The MTSS 3-tiered model is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

MTSS 3-Tiered Model



Note. Adapted from PBIS Rewards (n.d.b) model.

Figure 7 indicates that supports can be offered either academically or behaviorally. PBIS Rewards (n.d.b) indicated that the tiered system was set up to offer the minimum amount of support for students to be successful. When employing the MTSS framework, the student population falls into one of the three tiers. The South Carolina Department of Education (2019a) reported that their estimates indicate that 90% of the population will fall into Tier 1, up to 25% of the population will fall into Tier 2, and less than 10% of the population will fall into Tier 3, but variance may occur from site to site.

Data Evaluation

Data-based decisions are important to any initiative. American University (2019) explained that educators use data-based decisions for reflective practice, observations, and making inferences. MTSS supports data-based decision-making for assessment of the supports and to measure the fidelity of the MTSS process (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019a).

PBIS Rewards (n.d.b) highlighted five components of MTSS: universal screening, tiers of support, progress monitoring, schoolwide implementation, and involvement of families. South Carolina Department of Education (2019a) stated,

The optimal district SCMTSS leadership team will use an evidence-based model of schooling that:

- Integrates academic and tools and instruction
- Utilizes decision-making as “need-driven” by ensuring district resources reach the appropriate schools
- Takes responsibility for high quality core instruction being implemented with fidelity
- Ensures a universal screener is used to identify students at risk
- Uses common progress monitoring tools (may be same tool used for universal screening). (p. 17)

One way to optimally implement MTSS is to share knowledge. Hampshire (2016) explained, “MTSS requires extension of lessons about shared and combined knowledge with practice” (p. 56). The Tier 1 supports would be implementation through the use of, as Rosen (2020) suggested, families, teachers, counselors, psychologists, and specialists

to support students through the MTSS framework. The addition of external people supporting students alone is not enough to drive full-scale site SEL improvement (Jones & Bouffard, 2015). Just the support of additional resources such as an MTSS coordinator is not enough; schools must integrate lessons, collaborate, and share knowledge to benefit full MTSS/SEL improvement in schools.

SEL

SEL is beginning to be brought to the forefront of educational policy. SEL is not new to the educational front, but it has previously been branded as character education, conflict resolution, or peacebuilding (Tate, 2019). In recent years, through the whole child focus, SEL has been researched by organizations such as CASEL and Yale Institute of Emotional Intelligence with their research underpinning the importance of SEL in school (Tate, 2019). Darling-Hammond (as cited in Durlak et al., 2015) went as far as to express, “I have no doubt that the human race depends at least as much on the cultivation of social and emotional intelligence as it does on the development of technical knowledge and skills” (p. xi).

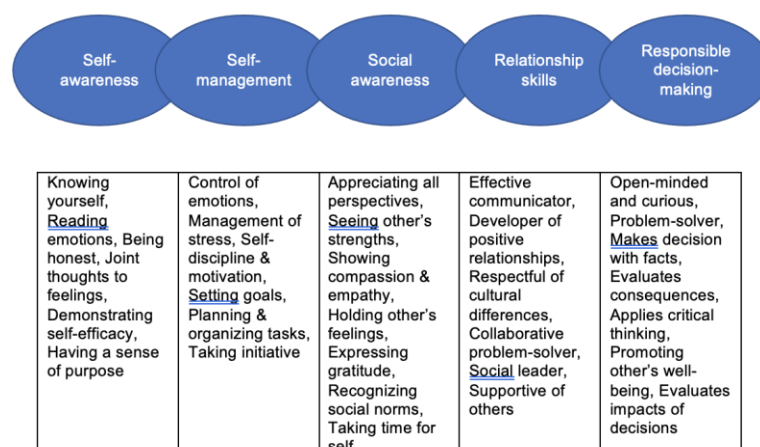
The development of students is impacted by their personal experiences. Allensworth et al. (2018) explained that there is a greater understanding of how children grow and the impact of SEL on their development. CASEL (2017b) outlined the importance of supporting curriculum and instruction, practice and policies, and family and community partnerships for SEL improvement. CASEL (2020a) expressed that “SEL is an integral part of educational and human development” (para. 1).

There are five competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (CASEL, 2020a).

Self-awareness, as Frey et al. (2019) explained, is about confidence, efficacy, growth mindset, perseverance, grit, and resiliency. Taylor et al. (2017) reported that self-awareness is supported by good thoughts and feelings. Social awareness is the ability to empathize with others while recognizing other perspectives (CASEL, 2017a). When a student shares, is a positive teammate, builds relationships with others, and practices empathy, they are considered socially aware learners. Frey et al. explained the correlation between problem-solving and making decisions would be someone who makes responsible decisions. Self-management, as CASEL (2017a) described, is “the ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations—effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself” (para. 4). The fifth and final component of the CASEL (2017a) framework is relationship skills. Relationship skills are explained as building rapport with others through cooperating, communicating, and listening (CASEL, 2017a). Characteristics from CASEL’s (2020a) five components of SEL are depicted in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Characteristics of the Five SEL Tenets



Note. Figure adapted from CASEL (2020a).

Figure 8 reviewed CASEL's (2020a) personal characteristics of their five components that can be developed in students and adults through the delivery of SEL. Through the advancement of SEL, equity may increase and empowerment of students could happen (CASEL, 2020b). Frey et al. (2019) expressed how socialization is part of the human makeup and something that must take place. Frey et al. said that prosocial behaviors occur when demonstrating "sharing, helping, and teamwork" (p. 93) help to build relationships. Sharing is often done reluctantly in earlier years and is a skill that should be fostered in later years, as it is a socially accepted skill (Frey et al., 2019). Helping can be a strategy for use in the classroom. Frey et al. shared how helping can bring about a positive climate in the classroom. Teamwork is a skill that is highly respected in education and the business world. The ability to collaborate with others is defined as teamwork (Frey et al., 2019). Teamwork is rooted in SEL.

SEL in Schools

SEL is a current recommendation for schools. Mahoney et al. (2020) stated, "social and emotional learning (SEL) has become more central to education because of demand from educators, parents, students, and business leaders alongside rigorous research showing broad, positive impacts for students and adults" (p. 1). SEL is more of a focus because of the community outcry and research (Mahoney, et al., 2020). Jones and Bouffard (2012) indicated that positive results have been noted in peer and authority relationships, academic performance, and better mental health when SEL is provided. SEL skills have even been noted to prepare students for career and college ready indicators (Dymnicki et al., 2013). Educators and administrators generally support the addition of SEL into the curriculum. Friedman (2020) reported that the Educator

Confidence Report indicated that administrators and teachers believe in the importance of SEL instruction, specifically “self-discipline, self-regulation, responsible decision making, feeling and demonstrating empathy” (para. 5). Implementation of SEL in schools can take different forms. Tate (2019) reported that the director of research at Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence explained about the various behavior management programs out there, but all of them have roots from SEL. Durlak et al. (2011) researched 213 school-based programs where students in all grades made improvements with their SEL skills through these various programs in comparison to the control groups. Durlak et al. (2011) reported that school SEL programs increase social emotional skills, improve attitudes in schools, decrease violence and referrals, and improve academic performance. Kendziora and Yoder (2016) reported that SEL matters not only in school but in life. CASEL (2017b) conducted a multi-year study covering 10 districts and nearly a million students where an SEL learning lab was implemented. The research indicated that academics, engagement, behavior, social emotional skills, and school climate improved. Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (2020) is at the forefront of research-creating tools that impact skills development to improve school climate. CASEL (2020b) is at the forefront of research in SEL and most recently adult SEL.

School Culture/Climate

SEL can impact a school’s climate by supporting all cultures, closing the achievement gap, and developing a student’s emotional intelligence (Osher & Berg, 2017). The climate of the organization is what outsiders feel when walking inside a building.

School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's

experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

Those employed by the school are aware of the school's culture. (National School Climate Center, n.d., para. 1)

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explained that school culture is essential for survival and that a framework assists in the development of a positive climate in a school. For a successful school climate, students must feel part of their environment (ScholarChip, 2019). In a positive school climate, students feel safe, are respectful, stay engaged, are involved, and share a vision in the school (PBIS Rewards, n.d.a). Thapa (2013) reported that 21st century reformers indicated school culture impacts how students learn. Thapa explained that the idea of cultural change did not begin to impact organizational reform until research was conducted on organizational change. Thapa indicated that improvement of school climate can be accomplished through the involvement of all stakeholders, implementing long-term goals, networking for best practices, student engagement, improving instructional practice, and implementing research-based practice. Osher and Berg (2017) explained how each member in a school provides either a positive or negative impact on the school's climate. Berger (2018) reported that a school in Nashville has changed its climate by the implementation of trauma-informed practices to close its achievement gap. Through the process of trauma-informed education, the staff indicated how they are building relationships and helping to build SEL skills in their students (Berger, 2018). Hecht and Shin (2015) explained that the climate structures inside of a school support all five tenets of CASEL's SEL framework.

SEL in the Classroom

CASEL (2020b) explained how SEL support can be provided through instruction, through the curriculum, or even through a curriculum program. The method and model of how students experience their classrooms is a shift from how classrooms used to be viewed (Allensworth et al., 2018). Classrooms used to be viewed as locations for academic delivery only. PBIS Rewards (n.d.a) stated that students develop socially and emotionally at the same time as they are developing academically. Aspen Institute (2018a) indicated that there is a growing “momentum” (p. 4) across the United States for more than academic support offerings at school. There is an increase in the number of outside service providers providing mental health support in schools (Tate, 2019). When teachers provide SEL instruction, positive developments in motivation and test scores occur for students (Shriver & Buffett, as cited in Durlak et al., 2015). CASEL (2017c) conducted a follow-up meta-analysis and found that the students who participated in SEL interventions for the 2011 study represented a 13% higher academic performance than their peers who did not participate 3.5 years post-intervention. Jacobson (2020) indicated that Penn State researchers found some test score gains; however, they did not represent statistically significant scores. The Penn State study did indicate increases in social emotional skills (Jacobson, 2020). Robinson (as cited in Aspen Institute, 2018a) explained how important it is to look at intelligence in conjunction with social emotional intelligence. Aspen Institute (2018a) recommended the development of social emotional skills in the classroom intentionally. Cantor (as cited in Aspen Institute, 2018a) explained “when children experience a consistent and supportive connection with a trusted adult, it can alter their brain chemistry” (p. 16). CASEL (2019a) recommended the use of

inclusive activities, engagement strategies, and drawing attention to the importance of the activity or individual for the three steps of an SEL classroom.

Elementary Classrooms

There has been documentation of positive long-term outcomes for adults who either experienced or were rated in early education as having high SEL skills. Dodge et al. (2014) found that students who received an SEL curriculum in kindergarten were 10% less likely at the age of 25 to have psychological, behavioral, or substance abuse problems. Jones et al. (2015) found kindergarten students who were rated by their teachers as having positive SEL skills many years later had higher adult outcomes.

Frey et al. (2019) discussed how emotional regulation instruction is part of elementary classroom management. Students in elementary school classrooms are beginning to recognize how to identify emotions they feel and how others feel based on their behaviors (Frey et al., 2019). Determination of what to teach and how to teach SEL usually resides with each individual teacher at the elementary level (Frey et al., 2019). Rimm-Kaufman and Hulleman (2015) explained the implementation of elementary SEL practices and how SEL practices have a positive impact on students and adults. There are three concepts to address SEL in the elementary classroom: the importance of developing adult SEL, peer relationship building, and empowering students to build SEL skills (Philibert, 2016). Basic needs must be met first before learning can occur (Philibert, 2016). Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) found that providing SEL to students in elementary schools could support an increase in academic performance. SEL is commonly thought of to be an elementary curriculum concept but actually, it is equally important in the secondary setting.

Secondary Classrooms

Gosner (2020a) explained, “high school is not the time to let up on SEL” (para. 1). When students are at the secondary level, they are experiencing a great deal of changes physically, socially, and emotionally. Williamson et al. (2015) explained that teenagers must maneuver around the pressure from peers. Pressures also can come from outside sources, such as trauma or reactions to stimuli (Frey et al., 2019). These pressures open a great opportunity for secondary instructors to support students with SEL instruction. Williamson et al. described that SEL in high school is a natural fit, as young adults are emotionally and cognitively capable of growth. Middle school success is a strong indicator of success in high school, so SEL supports are highly encouraged at this level (CASEL, 2015). Gosner (2020a) suggested the beginning of class should be used for mindfulness, homework should be decreased, relationship development should be increased, and teachers should instruct and practice self-care.

Cervone and Cushman (2014) reported about 50 years of constructivist research and how the research led to the determination of six elements of SEL implementation at the secondary level. These six elements include structured support, community development, building rapport and reflection, restorative practices, student engagement, and student growth.

Structured Support. Structured support looks like the provision of a daily advisement period, development of a purposeful relationship between adults and students, small class size, assessment systems that support rather than penalize, and the use of professional learning communities.

Community Development. Community development is supported by a strong

transition support system for new students, student ability to develop norms, rules that support collaboration between students and faculty, problem-solving process, and school safety.

Building Rapport and Reflection. Rapport and reflection are supported by education and practice of social skills, the curriculum that supports equity and justice, zero tolerance for bullying or exclusion, class circles to discuss problems, and a time for group reflection.

Restorative Practices. Restorative practices are positive alternatives to archaic discipline behaviors, implemented empathy practices, group counseling or therapy, and family engagement practices.

Student Engagement. Student engagement is supported through project-based learning, student choice, real-world lessons, allowing students to teach, and service learning.

Student Growth. Student growth occurs with the knowledge that they matter through encouragement and by having a growth mindset. CASEL (2015) reported that many publications cite the importance of soft skills such as SEL are increasingly important for colleges and career readiness.

Educational Equity in the Classroom

SEL in the classroom supports the equity needs of students. CASEL (2020a) defined educational equity as the ability “to promote students’ social and emotional competence” (p. 6). CASEL (2020a) explained the importance of staff creating a supportive environment, developing social emotional skills, and increasing adult SEL knowledge. Frey et al. (2019) expressed that SEL is about educating students to be nice,

cooperative, and engaged. Engagement has been a recent area of focus for student growth. Creating equity in the classroom could help to support the development of adult SEL. Panorama Education (2017) expressed through their research of 1,100 students and 200 schools that that data collected connected SEL to an increase in student outcomes and success. There are three metrics for gauging student success: attendance, behavior, and academic achievement (Buckle, 2018).

Attendance. Panorama Education (2017) reported that chronic student absences from school total eight million. Attendance may be improved through student engagement in material; student behaviors, thoughts, and emotions; and their belief in their abilities (Panorama Education, 2017).

Behavior. The ability to manage emotions, awareness of self and others, and the relationship between students and teachers may impact successful behavior in the classroom (Panorama Education, 2017).

Academic Success. The management of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions; the belief that they can; and their investment in school can impact the academic success of students (Panorama Education, 2017).

Student SEL Needs

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are no longer enough to support students in K-12 education. Maynard and Weinstein (2019) explained that 2011-2012 Civil Rights data indicated that “3.5 million students were suspended in-school, 3.45 million were suspended out-of-school and 130,00 were expelled [in K-12 education during a single school year]” (p. 9). Understanding the number of students who need additional behavior support is just one aspect of building a case for SEL supports for students. Another

concern is the number of students who have or are currently experiencing trauma. Siegel (2019, as cited by Jennings, 2019) addressed how events like “physical, emotional, social, or moral safety” (p. xiii) can impact a student’s life long after the actual trauma takes place. Romero et al. (2018) said that in the late 1990s, a survey was conducted of mostly White middle class participants and found that two-thirds had experienced adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, household challenges, or neglect. In addition to abuse, household challenges, or neglect, school shootings have been on the rise. The Center for Homeland Security and Naval Post Graduate School (n.d.) indicated that there have been over 1,500 K-12 school shootings since the 1970s. These statistics support the need for a change in current practice that should include bringing a heightened focus to SEL instruction in schools.

The addition of SEL curriculum has been implemented by many school districts to support student SEL needs. Jones and Bouffard (2012) completed a social policy brief that outlined how implementing an SEL curriculum is not enough, rather the full integration of teaching and reinforcement of SEL throughout all situations and interactions is recommended. In fact, the best model may be promoting SEL through academic instruction, as they operate together (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Rogers (2019) reported of a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente in the late 1990s that examined the effects negative childhood experiences have on adults. These negative childhood experiences were named adverse childhood experiences. Adverse childhood experiences are described as trauma caused by sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect,

observation of maternal abuse, substance abuse, parental divorce, mental illness, or parental incarceration (Jennings, 2019). Cronholm et al. (2015) and Finkelhor et al. (2015) indicated that effects such as poverty, bullying, violence in the community, and discrimination should be added to the adverse childhood experience descriptors, as those factors impact individuals. The adverse childhood experience studies have naturally encouraged states, districts, and local school systems to accept the responsibility of supporting students who have negative experiences in school. The Center for Youth Wellness (2018) reviewed a study conducted by Felitti and Anda where 17,000 adults were asked over a 4-year period to report on traumatic stress experiences during childhood, and the results were notable. In the Felitti and Anda study, one adverse childhood experience was reported by 63.9% of adults; four or more adverse childhood experiences were reported by 12.5% of adults. The survey went on to explain that the greater the number of adverse childhood experiences a person had, the more mental and physical health problems were reported. Rogers reported that students who have adverse childhood experiences can exhibit challenging behaviors at school. These behaviors are often the result of stress caused by childhood experiences. The behaviors or noted weaknesses are often in executive functioning skills, attention, decision-making, emotional regulation, and task completion (Center for Youth Wellness, 2018). Challenging behaviors occur in the classroom every day. Romero et al. (2018) explained that all behavior is an attempt to tell us something. Educators can support students through teaching responsibility, relationship building, and resiliency (Romero et al., 2018).

Mindfulness

Siegel (2016) described mindfulness as awareness and acceptance of experiences. Srinivasan (2019) described mindfulness as the ability to be present in the moment while focusing on what is going on inside of ourselves (our breathing, our thought processes) to increase our capacity for caring about others. Mindful Schools (n.d.) reported their research findings indicated improved attention, emotional regulation, greater compassion, reduction of stress, and a reduction of anxiety from mindfulness training of adults. There were also noted benefits for students, such as improved attention and learning, social emotional skills, and resilience (Mindful Schools, n.d.). Mindful Schools reported behavioral improvement from the implementation of the mindful curriculum with nearly 940 students and almost 50 teachers over 6 weeks during the 2011-2012 school year. Tatter (2019) discussed the Boston Charter Research Collaborative and their partnership with Harvard University in 2019 where they determined if school-based mindfulness training could help students improve academically and behaviorally. Throughout the 8-week program, the sixth graders made improvements in self-control, stress, and attention skills (Tatter, 2019). Henriksen and Shack (2020) indicated there are factors outside the control of an educator but suggested mindfulness and creativity are within the educator's ability to support student SEL.

Racial Equity

During the pandemic when most of the world was sent home to quarantine from the virus, racial inadequacies were noted (CASEL, 2020b). Jagers et al. (2018) explained educational equity means every student has access to every resource. Racial equity is supported by SEL instruction (CASEL, 2020b). SEL “affirms diverse cultures and

backgrounds” (CASEL, 2020b, p. 1), provides interventions for at-risk students, and provides a voice for community engagement. Aspen Institute (2018b) indicated,

U.S. schools systematically provide fewer resources to students of color and students from low-income families, including less funding, fewer enrichment activities, less rigorous coursework, lower-quality materials and other physical resources, curriculum that doesn’t reflect their background and culture, and unequal access to highly effective teachers. (p. 1)

Schools must develop all students into well-rounded functioning members of society. One factor of supporting well-rounded individuals is to reduce bias and build a student’s mindset by supporting their development (Aspen Institute, 2018b). SEL instruction should support steps that effectively improve racial inadequacies. Aspen Institute (2018b) recommended following a system that focuses on “building strengths, attending to root causes, addressing stereotypes, supporting learning environments, respecting all cultures, improving discipline practice, providing resources, investing in adults, supporting adults’ SEL and engaging the family and community” (p. 4). Jagers et al. (2018) released a brief that aligned equity through SEL. The development of school culture and the provision of practice that supports student awareness increase the likelihood of successful SEL implementation in school (Jagers et al., 2018).

Adult SEL

Learning is a lifelong process, and SEL for adults is just as important as it is for students. Woolf (2020) defined adult SEL as, “the process of helping educators build their expertise and skills to lead social and emotional learning initiatives. It also involves cultivating adults’ own social and emotional competencies” (p. 2). Srinivasan (2019)

described adult beliefs to be the core focus of successful SEL implementation. Adult beliefs have not been taken into consideration in many instances. Jones and Bouffard (2012) indicated, “adult training and support for developing student’s SEL skills is very limited in most schools today” (p. 13). Providing professional development to support adult beliefs, such as a common SEL vision, could be an effective way to promote student success. CASEL (2017b) indicated that when schoolwide SEL is implemented, adults benefit from relationships, feelings of safety, decrease burnout, and increased trust with coworkers. Another suggestion for supporting adult SEL would be through coaching (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Kotter (2012) determined that a unified vision drives the change process toward success. Jones et al. (2017) supported that a teacher’s SEL development and educational policy are the external factors impacting SEL in schools. School leadership is responsible for supporting the site’s adult SEL (Woolf, 2020). Supporting adult SEL can be accomplished by promoting cultural change (Berg, 2018). The cultural change could be impacted by CASEL’s (2020b) adult learning system. CASEL’s (2020b) 3-tiered SEL learning system for adults focuses on learning, collaborating, and modeling.

Learning

Learning with regard to adult SEL can be described as professional development. Adult professional development supports a variety of topics. Woolf (2020) suggested “modeling behaviors, labeling emotions, demonstrating empathy” (p. 2), and building positive relationships, environmental supports, and self-care practices are the ways to help adults learn about SEL.

Collaborating

Brown (2018) said, “in the absence of authentic connection, we suffer” (p. 25).

Collaborating is an essential practice of supporting teacher SEL. Woolf (2020) recognized that adults who support each other create positive feelings of self-worth, decrease stress, and are more likely to have students with strong SEL skills.

Modeling

The opportunity to model positive behaviors, provide words to the emotions being felt, show empathetic behaviors, and develop strong positive relations with others are just a few ways to model behaviors for students (Woolf, 2020). Aspen Institute (2018a) reported that students who received SEL skills through modeling demonstrated higher SEL skills than students who did not receive SEL skills through modeling.

Another method of supporting adult SEL would be to measure adult SEL skills (Woolf, 2020). Measurement of adult SEL will provide information to improve school climate, support educators, and possibly decrease teacher burnout (Woolf, 2020).

Following the pandemic outbreak, CASEL (2020b) suggested a 4-step plan to address site-wide SEL: (a) build a support plan to address SEL needs, (b) provide a way to address adult SEL skills through the process of modeling and practicing SEL skills, (c) encourage development of student SEL through social emotional engagement that celebrates equity, and (d) develop an improvement cycle to maintain SEL development continually.

Stress and Burnout of Educators

Another reason for adult SEL implementation is the amount of stress teachers undergo on the job. The National Council on Teacher Quality (2014) indicated that 40%

of new teachers were either somewhat or not prepared for the behavior in the classroom. Cody (2014) reported that a Gallup Poll indicated 46% of teachers confirmed high levels of daily stress on the job. Greenberg et al. (2016) described four categories of stress for teachers: organization of the school site, demands of the job, availability of resources, and the struggle to manage workload. A Swedish study indicated teacher burnout was due to increased job demands and a sense of inadequacy of teachers (Arvidsson et al., 2019). Spending time, effort, and financing on SEL can result in better outcomes for students and teachers who are healthier (Rogers, 2019). Educators need to take care of themselves before helping others so compassion fatigue does not cause burnout (Romero et al., 2018). Improvement from stress and burnout seems to stem from support. Jennings (2019) said that supporting social emotional skills positively can help heal stress. Woolf (2020) explained, “adults who recognize, understand, label, and regulate their own emotions are less likely to report burnout, demonstrate higher levels of patience and empathy, encourage healthy communication, and create safe student learning environments” (p. 3).

Summary of Chapter 2

The research reviewed in Chapter 2 described the research documenting the importance of all the building blocks that make up SEL for adults and students. SEL research is a support system that is proactive in changing behavior. Brackett (2019) stated that he intended to make a case for SEL in schools to reduce the number of childhood psychologists needed to support students. Beginning SEL at a young age and supporting SEL development throughout schooling is a great way to begin the process of emotional development (Brackett, 2019). Schools should use proactive approaches to support

student SEL development through MTSS supports and SEL supports. The failure to proactively support student SEL can lead to overwhelming resources such as guidance counselors and mental health therapists within schools.

Chapter 3 explores the methods that were used for the research study. The chapter also explains the relationship between the research questions and the data that were collected.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction and Restatement of the Problem

Coming off a drastic move to virtual schooling or the provision of learning packets in the spring of 2020 was difficult for many students and school employees. Page (2020) reported that results from an Ipsos poll conducted by USA Today indicated one in five teachers reported they were unsure if they would return to school in the fall. Teachers reported extreme difficulty in doing their jobs during the coronavirus pandemic, specifically due to distance learning, student progress, technology, safety concerns, and social distancing (Page, 2020). CASEL (2020b) indicated that a return to schools required making safety a priority, supporting staff and students, and promoting SEL. This study determined teacher perspectives of social emotional supports they offered students and those teachers received from their schools or districts following their return to school in the fall of 2020.

Research Questions and Rationale

Research questions organize and guide the study (Butin, 2010). Three questions were developed to explore different components of the study's research design. The first question explored information through the collection of quantitative feedback. The second question provided qualitative responses. The third and final question combined quantitative and qualitative feedback and provided a more rounded response.

1. What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?

Research Question 1 was included to obtain teacher perspectives regarding the support teachers gave to students. The data for Research Question 1 were analyzed by running a univariate multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine the differences in the way Midlands and Upstate participants responded to the five SEL tenets. Research Question 2 was included to obtain teacher perspectives of the SEL skills they were provided to ultimately support student SEL development. Research Question 2 was answered through educator responses to focus group questions. The rationale for Research Question 3 was to gather teacher perspectives on how the global pandemic has impacted their provision of SEL skills to students. The data were analyzed quantitatively by three independent sample *t* tests and qualitatively through coding and theme development.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in South Carolina. U.S. News & World Report (2019) explained that South Carolina is ranked 42nd of 50 U.S. states when considering health care, education, economy, infrastructure, opportunity, fiscal stability, and crime and corrections. South Carolina has a “population of 5,024,369, a gross national product of \$221.69 billion, and a median income of \$27,909, and is known for agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism” (U.S. News & World Report, 2019, para. 1).

The state is split into four regions most commonly referred to as Upstate,

Midlands, Pee-Dee, and Lowcountry (Saunders, 2018). The Upstate is a mountainous area sitting at the bottom of the Blue Ridge Mountains (Saunders, 2018). The Midlands region is so named because of its location. The Midlands includes the state capital of Columbia. Saunders (2018) explained that the Pee-Dee region is named for the Native American tribe that once lived in this region; it has many tourist areas due to the many beaches this region holds (Saunders, 2018). The Lowcountry is so named because it is the lowest part of the state, and it is known for its humid and hot climate. Each region consists of a near equal number of counties; however, the number of school districts in each region varies as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Counties in the Four Regions and the Number of School Districts

Upstate	Midlands	Pee-Dee	Lowcountry
Oconee (1)	York (4)	Chesterfield (1)	Calhoun (1)
Pickens (1)	Chester (1)	Marlboro (1)	Orangeburg (1)
Anderson (5)	Lancaster (1)	Dillion (2)	Berkeley (1)
Greenville (1)	Fairfield (1)	Darlington (1)	Bamberg (2)
Abbeville (1)	Kershaw (1)	Lee (1)	Dorchester (2)
McCormick (1)	Newberry (1)	Florence (5)	Allendale (1)
Greenwood (1)	Richland (2)	Marion (1)	Hampton (2)
Laurens (2)	Lexington (5)	Horry (1)	Colleton (1)
Union (1)	Saluda (1)	Sumter (1)	Charleston (1)
Spartanburg (7)	Edgefield (1)	Clarendon (3)	Jasper (1)
Cherokee (1)	Aiken (1)	Williamsburg (1)	Beaufort (1)
	Barnwell (3)	Georgetown (1)	

Note. Information adapted from the map on <http://sc.gov/government>

Table 4 displayed the various counties and school districts that reside in each of the four regions and the number of districts in each county. It is important to note that this information can be deceiving as there is much variance between district sizes. For instance, in the Upstate region, Greenville County has one school district but a total of 51

elementary schools, 23 middle schools, and 16 high schools. whereas McCormick County also has one school district but only one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school (South Carolina Department of Education, 2020b).

U.S. News & World Report (2019) indicated that the state ranks 41 of 50 in Pre-K through 12 education when examined by preschool enrollment, college readiness, high school graduation rate, and student scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress assessment metrics. The state ranks 46 of 50 in higher education when examined by 2-year/4-year college graduation rates, low debt at graduation, education attainment, and tuition and fee metrics. The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, & Advancement (2020) indicated that teacher turnover rates for the state were down from 9% the previous year to 7.3% for the 2019-2020 school year. The South Carolina Department of Education (2019b) documented the 2019-2020 school year as having a total of “53,488 teachers for 783,419 students” (para. 2). Understanding the gender and race of the teachers and students in South Carolina helps to understand the population the research examined. The South Carolina Department of Education (2019b) reported on the race and ethnicity of the state as seen in Table 5.

Table 5*South Carolina Teacher/Student Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity*

Race/ethnicity	Percent of population
Teacher	Teacher
White	78.2
African American	15.1
Hispanic	1.7
Two or More Races	Not gathered
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.2
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2
Not reported	3.6
Student	Student
White	50.6
African American	33.6
Hispanic	9.7
Two or More Races	4.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.6
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.3
Not reported	0.1

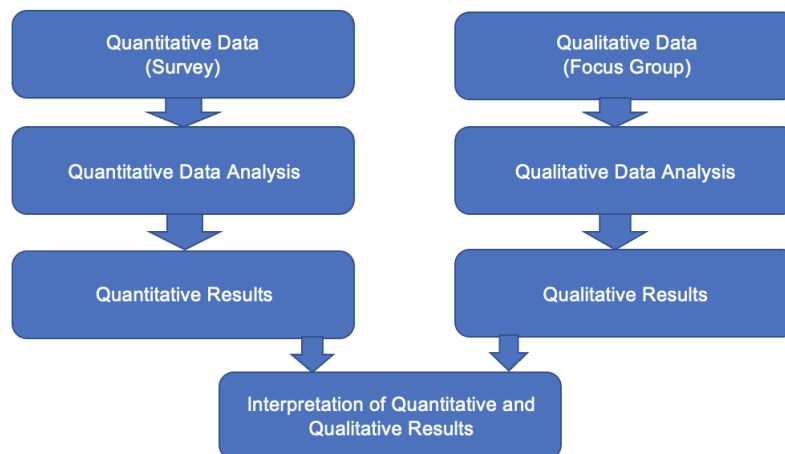
Note. The information was gathered from the 2017-2018 school year.

Table 5 indicated that most of the teacher population in South Carolina is White, and 15% of teachers are African American. Most of the South Carolina student population is either White or African American. South Carolina students who are classified as Hispanic, Two or More Races, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native, and those not reported fall into the minority.

Research Design and Rationale

This study determined how teachers supported students with SEL and how the teachers felt their own SEL was supported during the fall of 2020. The study was conducted through a mixed methods approach. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained a mixed methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative data to thoroughly

explore all aspects of the study through a pragmatic worldview. Creswell and Creswell stated, “[mixed methods approach] can be seen as a methodology originating around the late 1980s and early 1990s in its current form based on work from individuals in diverse fields such as evaluation, education, management, sociology, and health sciences” (p. 215). Qualitative and quantitative data collection provides the researcher the ability to explore a topic with increased depth. This study presented findings from both close-ended and open-ended responses. Creswell and Creswell described how close-ended questioning provides information rooted in the theory being explored, whereas open-ended questioning allows the researcher to gain perspective through interaction with participants. The one-phase convergent design was utilized in this study. Creswell and Creswell explained that in a convergent design, the researcher completes the qualitative data collection and analysis at almost the same time as completing the same steps for the quantitative data collection. The results of both the qualitative and quantitative research are then merged, and the results are interpreted and compared. The convergent mixed method design is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9*Convergent Mixed Method Visual*

Note. Figure adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Figure 9 displayed the steps of data analysis through the result phase of the research. The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed at nearly the same time. The results were integrated and interpreted in the final step of data analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection includes many decisions that occur in conjunction with each other (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The data collected in this study contained quantitative data from the survey and qualitative data from the focus group participants. The population, sampling, and instrumentation are described in the next sections.

Population. The population was prekindergarten through 12th-grade teachers who teach at any level in any public school in two regions in South Carolina. It is important to note that most public schools offered a virtual option during the 2020-2021 school year voluntarily for families, and some teachers may have taught virtually during this time.

Gathering of Participants. The participants were gathered through random

sampling through two different social media sites. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that random sampling means that each person has an equal chance of being selected. I made two social media posts. The first post requested teacher participants from all pre-K through 12 public schools in South Carolina (Appendix A). A second social media post was made to gather additional participants (Appendix B). Focus group participants were gathered following their acceptance to participate in an online Zoom focus group meeting at the bottom of the survey.

Survey Sampling. The intent was to gather 25 participants through a digital survey from each of the four South Carolina regions which would have resulted in a total participant number of 100 teachers. A second social media post was made to request additional participants, as I had not gathered 25 participants from each region. In the end, I obtained 11 participants from the Midlands and 25 participants from the Upstate. Had I obtained more than 25 participants from a region, I would have randomly selected 25 participants from the returned surveys by placing the respondent emails into a container and selecting the first 25 emails drawn. I obtained three responses where the candidates opened the survey but did not return any responses. I chose to report only the 36 completed surveys. The candidates were selected anonymously to protect them from any bias I have, due to my previous employment as a district administrator in the Upstate region.

Focus Group Sampling. The focus group participants submitted their consent to participate in the Zoom focus group through a Google form (Appendix C) that was linked at the bottom of the survey. I would have randomly selected two participants by dividing the participants' emails into the four regions and pulling out two from each region;

however, this was not required. If I had not received participants from each region, I would have conducted a third social media blast specifically for the region or regions that were missing two participants (Appendix D).

Instrumentation. The survey was obtained with permission from the American Institutes for Research (2014) for use in this study to obtain teacher perspectives of the supports they offered their students in the fall of 2020. The survey was originally developed as a 3-part self-assessment tool with 105 sections. American Institutes for Research explained the reason why it “develop[ed the] Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers began in 2011 with the goal of characterizing and operationalizing teacher social and emotional competencies (SECs)” (p. 7). I selected to use only Part 2 of the survey because it focused on SEL. The SEL self-assessment had a total of 21 items that could be divided into five SEL tenets, namely self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Teachers had the option of selecting four Likert responses from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The study was designed to utilize 25 participants from each of the four South Carolina regions for a total of 100 in all; however, only 36 total respondents from two of the four South Carolina regions responded to the social media requests for participation.

The questions for the focus group were developed by the researcher. Data were collected in sequential steps. The sequential steps are outlined next.

1. The initial step was to collect participants.
 - a. For the survey, 25 participants were gathered from two South Carolina regions for a total of 36 participants.

- b. For the focus group, two participants were gathered from the same two regions for a total of four participants.
- 2. The Informed Consent Form for the survey and focus group participants was signed by all participants (Appendix E). There were three participants who opened the survey but did not complete the survey and were able to exit the survey and leave the focus group immediately without penalty.
 - a. The participants completed the survey without any personal identifying information to protect their anonymity. Participants provided their educational level, their teaching level, and their district region in South Carolina.
 - b. The participants participated in the focus group with cameras on and amended names of Midlands 1, Midlands 2, Upstate 1, and Upstate 2 to protect their identities. Participants were notified that the session was video and audio recorded, that it would be used for coding purposes, and that the data collected may be used for future publication.

The alignment of the research questions with data collection can be understood through a review of Table 6.

Table 6*Research Items/Focus Group Questions Data Alignment*

Research question	Quantitative topic/number of items	Qualitative topic/number of questions
What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Self-awareness/Questions 1-5	None
	Self-management/Questions 6-9	
	Responsible decision-making/Questions 10-14	
	Relationship skills/Questions 15-18	
How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Social-awareness/Questions 19-21	
	None	Explanation of SEL/Question 1
		Support for teachers/Question 2
		Self-care/Question 3
How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?		Support from leaders/Question 4
	Agreed/Question 22	Support from colleagues/Question 5
	Adult impact/Question 23	Agreed/Question 6
	Student impact/Question 24	Adult impact/Question 7
		Student impact/Question 8

Table 6 describes the 25 total quantitative survey items and the eight focus group questions. The first 21 survey items were obtained with permission from the American

Institutes for Research (2014) where they were used with the five CASEL SEL tenets: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness to provide the framework for their survey items. There were eight total focus group questions. The focus group gathered qualitative responses. The first four questions supported Research Question 2. The last four focus group questions supported Research Question 3.

Research Methodology

The action taken to implement the study is described as the methodology. Butin (2010) explained, “At the heart of any research project is the key step of translating an idea into a specific procedure, question, or term” (p. 69). This research was conducted through an empirical lens by applying theories already in the field of education: the transformative learning theory and change theory. A new theory emerged during the study, and the two previous theories were combined to create the transformative change theory.

The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through a survey and focus group. The tools selected for data collection are essential to the development of the study. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) explained that the choices made regarding what to study affect how to study the research.

An alignment table is an effective way to display the selected methodology and the outline for the research that will be conducted. Butin (2010) explained, “your methodology will help you answer how you will actually accomplish [your research]” (p. 69). An alignment table visually depicts the research questions, tools/instruments, and how those relate to the data that will be collected and the method that will be used to

analyze the data. The research alignment table can be viewed in Table 7.

Table 7

Research Alignment Table

Research question	Tools/instruments	Data collected	Method(s) of analysis
What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Survey results from 21 Likert scale items	Quantitative	Descriptive statistics, MANOVA
How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Four focus group question responses	Qualitative	Inductive coding
How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?	Four focus group question responses, survey results from three Likert scale items	Quantitative/qualitative	Descriptive statistics, independent sample <i>t</i> tests, inductive coding

Table 7 described the methods to be used in this mixed methods study. The research questions follow the Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended approach of designing different questions to collect different types of data. The quantitative data were interpreted by application of a MANOVA while using CASEL's (2020a) five SEL tenets. A MANOVA was conducted to examine whether or not teachers from the two South Carolina regions have statistically significant differences in how they perceive the five tenets from CASEL's (2020a) SEL framework. Inductive coding was used to analyze the qualitative data. Creswell and Creswell stated that inductive coding is the process of

categorizing information into themes. The themes begin to develop a pattern, or a theory emerges from the theme development (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Tools

This study relied on two data collection tools for research, the survey and focus group. The survey provided quantitative feedback that answered Research Questions 1 and 3. The focus group provided qualitative feedback to answer Research Questions 2 and 3.

Survey. Surveys gather information quickly and efficiently. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated surveys examine “trends, attitudes and opinions” (p. 147) of a group. The quantitative data were collected through a Likert survey. Each respondent began the survey by completing three questions that indicated their educational setting and experience and the geographic region their school resides. Respondents then progressed to Part B where they evaluated their SEL practices. The survey was divided into five SEL sections that are aligned to CASEL’s (2020a) tenets. The respondents rated the 21 survey questions from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Respondents finished with the final three questions by providing close-ended responses based on their perspectives of the return to instruction in the fall of 2020. The American Institutes for Research (2014) self-assessment survey was used (Appendix F). This survey was selected because it answers Research Question 1 and is aligned to CASEL’s (2020a) framework by asking questions that support each of the five tenets. The American Institutes for Research survey tool was developed by American Institutes for Research staff through “characterizing and operationalizing” (p. 1) the role of the teacher. The survey was validated by their completion of a literature review, interviewing experts

in the field as well as teachers who taught in Chicago and Washington D.C. public school systems (American Institutes for Research, 2014). The validation information was not included in the published article. I gained permission from American Institutes for Research in June 2020 to use their survey (Appendix G). The purpose of the survey was to determine how teachers believed their students were impacted by their SEL supports (American Institutes for Research, 2014).

Focus Group. When the focus group questions were developed, I gave them to four teachers who were not eligible to participate in the study. I did this to obtain feedback on my questions and to determine if my questions gave me the information I was looking for. I amended the questions based on the feedback obtained. The first participant's feedback was to change my questions that contained either/or options to definitive questions. The second participant provided feedback regarding terms that were used that could be confusing. The third participant found no errors. The fourth participant's feedback included defining SEL. I edited my questions to incorporate their feedback.

Focus groups allow researchers to obtain both responses and nonverbal communication (Quain, 2019). I gathered qualitative data by conducting a focus group over Zoom with four participants from two South Carolina regions. There were eight questions (Appendix H). The first four focus group questions aligned with Research Question 2 through the collection of teacher perspectives of the support they were given to support student SEL in the fall of 2020. The last four focus group questions aligned to Research Question 3 were designed to obtain teacher perspectives of agreement, safety, and ability to strengthen SEL support for students during the return to instruction in the

fall of 2020. The focus group was recorded so I was able to go back and verify responses, observe facial expressions, and verify the information I gathered by notetaking. I member checked the information with participants by sending emails of the verbal feedback they provided to make sure I correctly recorded their feedback.

Measures of Ethical Protection of Data

There are many ways to ethically protect participants and the data provided by them. American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (2014) explained that there are three standards for test users: validity of interpretations, dissemination of information, and test security and protection of copyrights. I applied a few of Creswell's and Creswell's (2018) ethical recommendations to this study. Participants were fully informed of what they participated in and how the data collected was used. I determined that I maintained anonymity and that the focus groups in no way harmed the participants.

Steps of Data Analysis

The initial step of data analysis was completed through a variety of methods dependent upon if the data were collected quantitatively or qualitatively. Following the data collection, the quantitative and qualitative data were combined and findings were interpreted. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that the third part of the study is the interpretation, which combines the data collected from both methods and informs the reader of how the qualitative results provide greater information to the quantitative results.

Quantitative Data Analysis

I completed the data analysis with the use of JASP software. JASP (n.d.) is a free

and open-source program for statistical analysis supported by the University of Amsterdam. It is designed to be easy to use and familiar to users of SPSS. It offers standard analysis procedures in both their classical and Bayesian form.

The quantitative research process occurs when the data are entered, sorted, classified, and interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I selected a MANOVA because I had five outcome variables: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. I presented the results of quantitative research. The following steps of data analysis were used.

1. I only reported data on the participants who returned the survey fully completed because I already had 25 respondents from the Upstate who fully completed the survey; and the three who opened it but did not complete it were also from the Upstate. I did not have response bias for the survey, as I did not collect data that would notify me of any identifying factors of participants. Response bias is the lack of participation and there is an impact from a lack of response on the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
2. The quantitative data were entered into JASP, and the data were verified by a second person to confirm the accuracy of the information entered.
3. A MANOVA was completed. Statistics.com (n.d.) defined MANOVA as, “a technique which determines the effects of independent categorical variables on multiple continuous dependent variables” (para. 1).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data were collected through a focus group. The focus group was recorded for the ability to look back and view nonverbal communication in field notes.

The participants were provided with instructions and a review of the previously completed informed consent document to begin the focus group process. Next, I defined SEL for the participants, using CASEL's (2020a) definition:

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. (para. 1)

The participants were asked a total of eight open-ended questions. Following the completion of the focus group, the information provided was verified through a second checker for accuracy. Upon completion of the transcription, I emailed the participants to member check the accuracy of feedback provided. My participants reported that I had provided correct information. I completed the qualitative analysis through collaboration with the software system Quirkos. The qualitative data analysis visual can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Qualitative Data Analysis Visual

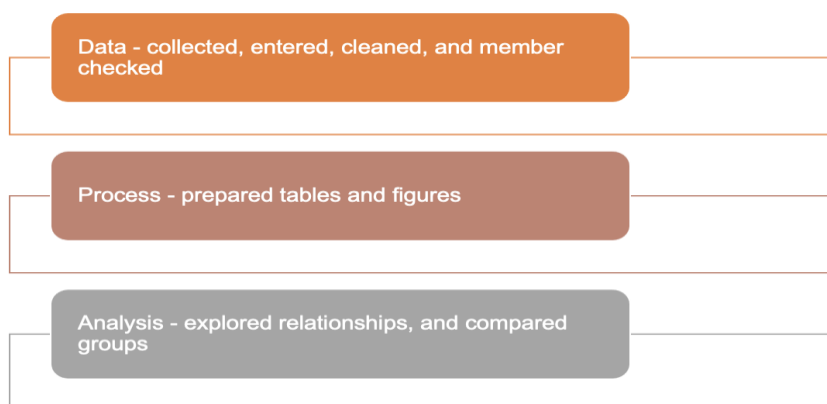


Figure 10 described the qualitative data analysis breakdown into three large parts. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described the process of data analysis similarly but with four categories: organizing, examining, coding, theme development and theme description. Part 1 explained the data collection process. The information collected was recorded, transcribed, and checked with the participants by email before the data were entered into Quirkos for later analysis. Part 2 was to take the information and prepare tables and figures for later comparisons. Part 3 was the examination of relationships. I looked for relationships by comparing differences between the respondents in Midlands and Upstate by aligning the participant responses to the conceptual framework.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained coding as, “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text and assigning a word or phrase to the segment in order to develop a general sense of it” (p. 247). The qualitative information was coded through grounded theory. Quirkos (2021) explained that grounded theory is the absence of a preconceived notion of what information will be provided. I allowed the participants to drive the coding, meaning that if the participants used the term “unsupported,” I used that term in my coding. I divided the participant-developed codes into three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and unusual codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The thematic coding is displayed in Chapter 4 through tables that demonstrate participant feedback.

Next, I used the Quirkos software to find common themes for each of the questions asked. Quirkos (2021) described themes as words that develop a recurrent pattern, idea, or concept. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained the steps in grounded theory as generating categories, selecting the categories, and positioning them within the

theoretical model to tell a story from the categories. I used the grounded theory responses from participants to develop themes. Once the themes were developed, I built additional layers to interconnect these themes by region and by my theoretical framework. I then used narrative to support each determined theme.

Merging the Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

The final step of analysis was to integrate the quantitative data with the qualitative data to explain the results of the study. The data analysis followed the convergent mixed methods. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that both methods will be explored through data collection and then the data will be analyzed before being integrated and results being interpreted. I determined if the results from the two databases represented a convergent or divergent connection. Convergent can be described as the merging of quantitative and qualitative data, whereas divergent would be contradictions or findings that warrant additional exploration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I followed Peng's (2018) method of divergent and convergent phases of data analysis. Peng explained the four steps to convergent and divergent data analysis as exploring the results; refining the problem by developing scenarios based on ideas; creating models, such as figures that support the ideas; and finally, creating a narrative that explains the models.

Reliability and Validity

Understanding how data are measured, that data measure what they are supposed to measure and how accurate the data are, is important. Middleton (2020) pointed out that reliability and validity are concepts used to evaluate the quality of research. The convergent mixed methods will be examined by construct and triangulation for the two paths of data received (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The convergent approach does

challenge the validity of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated validity difficulty in the convergent approach because it is difficult to determine what way the data should be merged. In other words, the convergent and divergent information is up to the interpretation of the researcher, which is not always viewed to be the most accurate way to analyze data. Another challenge to validity is the difference in sample sizes between the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A final challenge to the validity is the possibility that the results may yield different information that could impact the merging of the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data obtained from each of the research strands demonstrated different concepts, specifically the social emotional skills teachers provided to their students and the social emotional skills that were provided to teachers to best support their students' SEL. American Institutes for Research (2014) explained the validity of their survey by detailing the completion of a comprehensive literature review, interviews with SEL experts, and interviews with Chicago and Washington, D.C. teachers.

The focus group questions were determined to be valid through a multi-level process. Prasad (2017) explained that the process of keeping the questions under 10, developing simple questions, clearing up confusing language, making sure the questions were not embarrassing to respondents, and asking open-ended questions were the recommended steps for creating focus group questions. The focus group questions were compared to these recommendations. Another way the focus group questions were evaluated was through the process of seeking feedback from members who are not eligible for the study. Feedback was obtained and applied from these four members.

Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 was the methodology of the study. After restating the problem, the research setting was explained. A thorough explanation of the research questions was conducted. The chapter notified readers how the participants and their data were collected, stored, and analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The research included in this study was intended to examine how South Carolina teachers provided support to their students and received support from their districts at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the study was designed to collect data from teachers living in each of the four South Carolina regions, only participants from the Midlands and Upstate regions participated in the survey and focus group. The Midlands had partial participation with 11 of the requested 25 teachers completing the survey. The Upstate had a full 25 participants complete the survey. Both the Midlands and Upstate had two members who participated in the focus group. Chapter 4 reviews the findings of the study by the three research questions.

Research Questions

The study was supported by three research questions that explored different components of the study's research design. The first question examined 21 survey responses and compared the responses to CASEL's (2020a) five subsets of SEL. The second question was supported by focus group data analyzed through a qualitative lens. The third and final question examined responses to three survey items through descriptive statistics.

1. What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they

received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?

Research Process

The research was gathered through a 2-step process. Participants were invited through two social media posts on two different platforms. Two posts were made 1 week apart to gain increased participation in the study. Participants who agreed to the informed consent were given access to a 24-item survey. I gained 11 participants in Midlands and 25 participants in Upstate, for a total of 36. Respondents were given the opportunity at the end of the survey to include their email addresses for possible participation in a focus group. Four individuals responded and were chosen to participate in the focus group: two participants were from the Midlands and two participants were from the Upstate. The focus group protocol contained a total of eight open-ended questions.

Research Findings

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?” To answer this research question, survey results were analyzed through the completion of a MANOVA. A MANOVA is an extension of a one-way ANOVA and is known as an *omnibus* test that examines the effects of independent variables on multiple continuous variables (Laerd Statistics, 2021).

MANOVA results. I began by running descriptive statistics in the JASP

software. There were 36 total respondents from Midlands and Upstate geographic regions in South Carolina. All respondents answered all the survey questions. Means and standard deviations of the five CASEL (2020a) SEL tenets, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are provided in Table 8.

Table 8

Research Question 1 Descriptive Statistics

	Self-awareness		Self-management		Social awareness		Relationship skills		Responsible decision-making	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Mean	3.52	3.30	3.40	3.09	3.43	3.23	3.63	3.17	3.34	3.08
Std.Deviation	0.39	0.33	0.46	0.38	0.40	0.45	0.43	0.42	0.42	0.33

Note. Group 1, Midlands, N = 11, Group 2, Upstate N= 25.

Table 8 showed the means and standard deviations for the five tenets in the survey. The respondents selected from a total of four Likert options with a minimum selection of 1 and a maximum selection of 4. The Midlands self-awareness mean value was 3.52 with a standard deviation of 0.39 and the Upstate mean value was 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.33. For self-management, the Midlands had a mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.46 and again, the Upstate had a lower mean of 3.09 and a standard deviation of 0.38. For the third SEL tenet, social awareness, the Midlands had a mean of 3.43 and a standard deviation of 0.40, while the Upstate had a slightly lower mean of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 0.45. The Midlands had a mean of 3.63 and a standard deviation of 0.43, whereas the Upstate had a mean of 3.17 and a standard deviation of 0.42 for the relationship skills tenet. The final mean and standard deviation

statistical measurements were for responsible decision-making. The Midlands had a mean of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.42, and the Upstate had a mean of 3.08 and a standard deviation of 0.33. All the standard deviation measurements were small, indicating the differences in the groups' responses were more concentrated.

The next statistical measure completed was an assumption check for MANOVA. Box's M test for homogeneity of covariance reported $p < 0.95$, indicating the assumption had been met because the p value > 0.05 the result indicated that the data set met the MANOVA assumption. The third statistical measure completed was the MANOVA Pillai Test. The Pillai Test was selected due to the unequal size in the comparison groups, specifically group $n_1 = 11$, and group $n_2 = 25$. The results of the MANOVA are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9

Research Question 1 MANOVA Group Result

Variable	Approx F.	Trace Pillai	Num df	Den df	P
Group	1.88	0.23	5	30.00	0.95

Table 9 MANOVA results obtained a $p = 0.95$ when applying the most widely accepted threshold for p value, $p < 0.05$. The MANOVA results indicated that there was not a significant difference in the responses obtained from Midlands and Upstate.

Finally, I used a univariate ANOVA test to explore how the Midlands and the Upstate responded with regard to the five SEL tenets separately. The results of the univariate ANOVA test can be reviewed in Table 10.

Table 10*Research Question 1 ANOVA Group Results*

Variables	Sum of squares/mean square	F	<i>p</i>
Self-awareness	0.38	3.03	0.09
Self-management	0.77	4.68	0.03*
Social awareness	0.31	1.62	0.21
Relationship skills	1.66	9.02	0.00*
Responsible decision-making	0.52	3.93	0.05

Note. *Statistical significance at $p < 0.05$ level

Table 10 examined the dependent variables Midlands and Upstate and the separate ANOVA results completed for each variable. The results indicated statistical significance, $p < 0.05$ for two subsets: self-management $F(1, 34) = 4.68$, $p < 0.05$ and relationship skills $F(1, 34) = 9.02$, $p < 0.01$.

A MANOVA was run to determine the effect of how the groups responded based on the five SEL tenets to answer Research Question 1. The MANOVA results did not indicate a difference in the way the groups responded when combining the dependent variables. A test of homogeneity of variance was conducted, as assessed by Box's M test and the result of $p = 0.95$ was found, indicating the MANOVA assumption was met. The descriptive statistics was run and there were differences noted in all mean comparisons; however, they were minor. The pattern of the descriptive statistics dataset indicated nonsignificant findings between the two groups. Finally, the univariate ANOVA test was used to explore the differences for the combined group for each of the five SEL tenets. Statistical significance was found for self-management $p < 0.03$, and relationships skills $p < 0.005$. Teachers from the Midlands and the Upstate indicated they supported student SEL upon their return to instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Differences were noted in the two groups based on how they supported student self-management and relationship skills.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?” Data were gathered through the analysis of responses from an online focus group. The focus group consisted of four participants, two from the Midlands and two from the Upstate of South Carolina. Each group represented regions in South Carolina. The participants were asked a total of eight questions, with the first four of those questions supporting Research Question 2. The data were analyzed using Quirkos software, and several codes emerged from focus group participant responses. The respective codes and focus group questions can be viewed in Table 11.

Table 11

Research Question 2 Focus Group Codes by Region

Focus group topics	Midlands codes	Upstate codes
FGQ1: District SEL support for adults	Unaware of Support	Felt supported
FGQ2: Self-care supports for teachers	Loosened requirements Rewards	Check-ins
FGQ3: Support from leadership members	No known policy Trustful people Supervisor support	No known policy Trustful people Supervisor support
FGQ4: Support from colleagues	Team/department Another teacher	Team/department Another teacher Collaborate through technology
FGQ5: Personal comfort about return to instruction	Resilience Anxiety Continual change Lack of preparation	Resilience Anxiety Supportive administration

Table 11 displayed the coding results from the focus group respondents by region. Results from FGQ1 indicated both Midlands 1 and Midlands 2 reported they were unaware of any support for adults in their respective districts, whereas both Upstate participants reported supportive environments in their districts. Upstate 2 stated, “Our district offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for adults on an as-needed basis. We have a social worker on staff who puts together activities for teachers at our school.” Data from FGQ2 indicated that Midlands participants noted self-care offerings of “morale” boosters and “workdays” where they did not have to report. The Upstate participants reported administration and colleagues who would check in to see how they were doing, which made them feel supported. All participants noted resilience when FGQ5 was analyzed. Midlands 1 said, “It was funny, as the year went on, we learned to roll with it and cope with the changes because they were coming.” Upstate 2 stated, “I was surprised how well the students did with meeting the [COVID] guidelines.”

I further examined the data codes by dividing them into codes that I expected, codes that were surprising, and codes that were unusual, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Expected codes are the codes that, through personal experience and focus group question testing, I had already heard from other teachers. Surprising codes are codes that I did not hear prior to data interpretation either from personal experience or from the focus group question testing. Finally, the unusual codes were the codes that were shocking, and ones I could not have imagined. These codes are explored further in Table 12.

Table 12*Research Question 2 Focus Group Questions 1-4 Coding*

	FGQ1: Explain how your district offers SEL supports for adults?	FGQ2: Describe the self-care support that your district promotes for teachers?	FGQ3: How do you receive support from a colleague when you need emotional support?	FGQ4: How do you receive support from a colleague when you need emotional support?
Expected codes	Employee assistance program (EAP)	Rewards, check- ins	Trusted people, supportive supervisor	Team/department, another teacher, collaborate through technology
Surprising codes	No policy for SEL support	Unaware of support		
Unusual codes		Loosened requirements		

Table 12 lists the focus group responses. The data obtained and analyzed included 10 expected codes, four surprising codes, and two unusual codes. The 10 expected codes were found from the responses in all five of the focus group questions. I expected to see that SEL support was given. Additionally, I expected to see that self-care was offered through check-ins by administration and tangible rewards such as ice cream socials and secret gifts for morale boosters. I was not surprised to see that the participants sought out emotional support from trusted people, their supervisor, their team members, another teacher, their department, or through technology when needed. The final expected codes were anxiety and continual change. These emotions were expected because they aligned with tenets of change theory.

The surprising code found was from the Midlands participants who were unaware of any district SEL policy. With SEL being at the forefront of research and even part of

South Carolina state expectations, I believed that school districts would make their SEL supports, at minimum, known inside their districts. I was also surprised to find that the Midlands participants' districts and schools were not indicating what self-care options and support from leadership were available to their staff during the return to instruction. Upstate 2 said, "I don't know of self-care options my district offers, but my school does." Likewise, Midlands 1 shared that there was not a known district program but that their school offered a no report workday. Finally, the last surprising item was that all focus group respondents reported answers indicating personal resilience and even resilience of students. Upstate 2 said, "If you think about how much adapting we did from the beginning to the end, it was just amazing!"

The unusual codes were codes that were unusual, unique, and unexpected responses to the focus group questions. When asked about self-care, both Midlands respondents shared that their schools had loosened requirements such as not requiring bulletin boards and allowing teachers to wear jeans. Midlands 2 shared that their school leadership allowed teachers to wear scrubs to school. Midlands 1 said that their school held ice cream parties for the faculty and had random drawings for free items.

Responses to Support Research Question 2. The data were analyzed by coding. From the codes, themes emerged using Quirkos software. Research Question 2 asked how South Carolina teachers describe the supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP). FGQ1 asked participants to explain how their district offers SEL supports for adults. The theme that emerged from the coding was EAP. The Upstate participants indicated an EAP for teacher support, whereas the

Midlands participants did not. Both Upstate participants specifically referenced their employee support framework and school-based processes for supporting adults in their buildings. Midlands participants reported the absence of a support framework. However, the absence of this support framework did not seem to hinder the process of gaining support, as both participants spoke of how they would just seek out a leader with whom they were comfortable. The presence of an EAP or absence of an EAP became the first theme that supports how districts supported adults.

Tangible Rewards. FGQ2 asked participants to describe the self-care support their district promotes for teachers. The theme that developed from the coding was tangible rewards. The Midlands participants reported loosened requirements and rewards. Midlands described how they were offered morale boosters and dress code changes. The Upstate participants reported leadership and colleague check-ins. Upstate participants both discussed how their administrators at the district and school level would come to check in on them. Tangible rewards explained how adults were supported with self-care by their districts at the height of the pandemic.

Trusted Leader. FGQ3 asked participants how they receive support from someone in a leadership position when they need emotional support. The theme that emerged was trusted leader. All participants reported seeking out a trusted leader to share with when needing SEL support. Upstate 2 discussed how they would seek out members from their department rather than someone in leadership. Midlands 1 explained that they would go to their department administrator if support was needed. Upstate 2 explained how they were the only teacher in the building who taught Special Education, but they would seek out support from their district supervisor when they needed support.

Seeking a Trusted Colleague Who Listens. FGQ4 asked the participants, how they receive support from a colleague when they need emotional support. The participants discussed that they would seek out a trusted colleague who was willing to offer their time and listen to them about what was on their minds. Midlands 1 explained how their room became a hub for her team members to talk. Upstate 1 said they had morning coffee with a colleague. When SEL supports were needed, participants would seek out a trusted colleague in or outside of their academic department who would dedicate their time to listen to them. The theme that emerged from FGQ4 was seeking support from a trusted colleague who gives their time and listens to their concerns.

The EAP, tangible rewards, trusted leader, and seeking a trusted colleague who listens were the concepts noted as support during the return to instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, “How can teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development be described?” The data for Research Question 3 were gathered by analyzing responses to three Likert survey items as well as responses to focus group questions. First, the data were interpreted quantitatively by running descriptive statistics with JASP to examine the mean and standard deviation of the four responses. Second, the focus group data were reviewed qualitatively with Quirkos software for coding, coding interpretations, and theme development.

The last three survey items were designed to gauge the teachers’ comfort and support received and provided during their return to instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were able to respond to the three Likert items by

selecting one of four options: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. The results were gathered and an independent t test was run to determine if the teachers' responses about their comfort returning to instruction at the height of the pandemic (Q22), their perspective of the SEL support they received when they returned to instruction (Q23), and their perspective of the SEL support they provided to their students when they returned to instruction (Q24) indicated any statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the Midlands and Upstate participants. The first statistics that were explored were group descriptive statistics. The purpose of this measure was to examine the mean and standard deviations between the two groups. The results of the group descriptive statistics can be further explored in Table 13.

Table 13

Research Question 3 Group Descriptive Statistics

Question topics	Comfort returning during pandemic		SEL support received		SEL support given	
Group	1	2	1	2	1	2
Mean	2.90	2.40	2.18	1.76	2.81	2.12
SD	0.70	1.08	0.98	0.72	0.60	0.72
SE	0.21	0.21	0.29	0.14	0.18	0.14

Note. Group 1, Midlands, N = 11 Group 2, Upstate, N = 25

Table 13 indicated the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of measurement for the last three questions (Q22, Q23, Q24) of the survey. Teachers were able to select from four Likert options with a maximum of 4 and a minimum selection of 1. There were 36 total respondents with 11 in Group 1 and 25 in Group 2. Q22 asked teachers to rate their comfort level returning during a pandemic. Midlands had an average rating of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.70, where Upstate had a mean of 2.40 and a

standard deviation of 1.08 regarding comfort levels with the return to instruction. The mean for Q23 was 2.18 with a standard deviation of 0.98 for Midlands, and the mean for Upstate was 1.76 with a standard deviation of 0.72 when the respondents answered questions about the SEL support they received. The final question in the survey asked teachers to rate the SEL support they believed they provided to students at the height of the pandemic. Scores from Midlands had a mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation of 0.60, and Upstate had a mean of 2.12 and a standard deviation of 0.72 for Q24.

The last three questions were also explored quantitatively. An assumption test and three individual *t* tests were run for each of these questions. The purpose of running the independent *t* tests was to compare the mean differences between the Midlands and the Upstate. The results of the statistical measures can be further explored in Table 14.

Table 14

Research Question 3 Independent t Test

	Levene's assumption	<i>t</i>	Df	<i>p</i>
(Q22) Comfort returning during pandemic	0.02*	1.43	34	0.16
(Q23) SEL support received	0.28	1.44	34	0.15
(Q24) SEL support given	0.453	2.78	34	0.00

Note. Student's *t* Test

* Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the equal variance assumption.

Table 14 includes the results of the assumption tests and the three independent *t* tests. Results from Levene's test for Q22, the comfort returning during a pandemic, indicated that the assumption was violated because $p < 0.05$. For Q23, the assumption was met, indicating the Midlands and Upstate had equal variance. Likewise, for Q24, the

assumption was met, indicating both Midlands and Upstate groups had equal variance. The next step was to interpret the findings of the independent sample t test results. No further interpretations were made for Q22, comfort returning during a pandemic, due to the previously explained violation of the assumption. When examining the results of Q23, SEL support received, the Midlands mean was 2.18 with a standard deviation of 0.98 and Upstate had a lower mean of 1.76 with a standard deviation of 0.72; however, the p value was greater than 0.05, suggesting there was not statistically significant mean differences between the Upstate and Midlands. For Q24, SEL support given, Midlands had an average score of 2.81 with a standard deviation of 0.60 and Upstate had a slightly lower mean of 2.12 with a standard deviation of 0.72; however, the mean score of Midlands was significantly higher than Upstate because the p values were smaller than the 0.05 threshold.

The last three survey questions were also asked to the participants of the focus group. A fourth question, the comfort returning during the pandemic, was asked of the focus group participants but previously had not been asked of the survey participants. The participant responses were analyzed by dividing them into codes. The codes are presented by region in Table 15.

Table 15*Research Question 3 Focus Group Codes by Group*

Focus group topics	Midlands responses	Upstate responses
FGQ5: Teachers' feelings regarding their return	Anxiety Continual change Lack of preparation Resilience	Anxiety Resilience
FGQ6: Support provided to teachers when returning to instruction	Professional development Communication	Resources Communication
FGQ7: Impact of COVID-19 on teacher SEL skills	Resiliency Flexibility Adaptability	Resiliency Flexibility Adaptability
FGQ8: Impact of COVID-19 on teacher provision of student SEL skills	Worked harder Struggled to gain rapport Poor student work ethic Navigator of politics	Worked harder Created new systems of support Became a better teacher

FGQ5 asked about teacher feelings regarding their return to instruction. The respondents indicated that the change was continual and never allowed them to settle into a routine. Midlands 1 described that there was anxiety at the beginning, but then it changed to acceptance, and finally, it [constant change] became humorous. Upstate 2 explained how they were excited to see their students again, but that quickly turned into anxiety when they were informed they would be teaching both in-person and virtual at the same time. Midlands 2 was further informed that they would be teaching different students than they were usually assigned. Upstate 2 discussed that their schedule was frequently amended which created anxiety, but they found that supporting their students through one-on-one Google meets was an unexpected success. Upstate 1 explained that they had anxiety at first, but it ended up being a good thing because they enjoyed

teaching virtually.

FGQ6 asked about teacher support. Both regions' respondents reported communication was a way support was provided to teachers during the return to instruction. Midlands respondents reported offerings of professional development. Midlands 1 said, "We are a Google district. They suggested but did not require us to obtain Google certification." Upstate 2 respondents reported how resources, specifically Google Classroom resources, were offered to them.

FGQ7 asked about the support provided for teachers. All participants reported resiliency, flexibility, and adaptability. Upstate 2 said, "I learned things are going to change, constantly change, so we are going to go with the flow." Midlands 2 said, "We found we couldn't control things. We became more focused on what we had to do, to be honest." Midlands 1 stated, "I'm a better teacher when they're [students] in the room and I found they were better students when I'm in the room." Upstate 1 explained how they started in person at a career center first semester and then they were moved to virtual teaching second semester. They said, "I second guessed myself. I wondered how I was going to get through it and through it all. It ended up being a blessing. I really enjoyed working with those middle school kids."

FGQ8 focused on how teachers perceived their support of student SEL. All participants reported having to work harder to gain rapport with students, to make those connections, and to support SEL when school was virtual. The Midlands teachers reported how they spent their time focusing on students who were not working toward their full potential. Midlands 2 said,

It's one thing when you have them sitting across from you at a table and you can

read their body language and you can tell when they are having struggles and when things are not right, but when they are behind a screen, it's different and I feel I had to make more of an effort.

Midlands 1 described how the beginning of the year was “terrible,” the middle of the year was “humor,” and they guided their class to laugh at the changes, such as another day of virtual. By the end of the year, they described themselves as a “mask mediator.” Upstate 2 stated, “I think a lot of my students rose to the occasion. I was really proud of them. They got really comfortable doing Google Meets on their days. They knew exactly what time they could schedule time with me.” Upstate 1 explained how many of their students’ families were not home during the day and they spent a great deal of time on more than academics. They said, “I felt like more than just a teacher. I felt blessed that I developed rapport with most of them.”

Again, I arranged the codes into expected codes, surprising codes, and unusual codes. There were nine expected codes, one surprising code, and one unusual code found. These codes are described in more detail in Table 16.

Table 16*Focus Group Questions 5-8 Coding*

	FGQ5: Describe how you felt about the return to instruction in the fall of 2020?	FGQ6: How did your district support you regarding the return to instruction in the fall of 2020?	FGQ7: Explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your social emotional skills.	FGQ8: Explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supporting students' social emotional skills.
Expected codes	Anxiety, continual change	Professional development, resources, communication	Resiliency, flexibility, adaptability	Worked harder, struggled to gain rapport, poor student work ethic
Surprising codes	Resilience			Became a better teacher
Unusual codes	Lack of preparation			Mediating politics

Table 16 shows 11 expected codes. Participants from both groups reported anxiety and resilience. Midlands reported lack of preparation and continual change were the expected feelings during the return to instruction. There were personal struggles with comfort in returning to instruction at the height of the pandemic; however, participants were comforted by the communication provided by their schools and districts. Midlands 1 stated, “I think my administration was very transparent which did wonders in a situation where you don’t know what tomorrow holds.” The teachers found ways to adapt and become flexible in response to the changes. Upstate 1 shared how it was more than just what happened at school. Their family came down with COVID-19 and that impacted them inside the classroom as well. Teachers found new ways to support students. Upstate 2 said,

I could schedule time with students when they were on their home days. I would

answer their questions. It was actually a piece that I missed when we went back to full time, because that part really allowed me to address needs one-on-one and when we went back to full time, I lost that time.

Upon analysis of the data, the teachers reported additional fatigue in providing services to students in a different way.

There were two surprising codes. A surprising code was the resilience that both groups reported. Upstate 1 reported they became a better teacher. Upstate 2 stated they became a better teacher through the virtual experience. There were two unusual codes and they both came from Midlands. The feeling of lack of preparation was noted by Midlands 2. Upstate 1 reported feeling like a “mediator of masks,” and described this as a political responsibility. They explained that the wearing of the mask or properly wearing the mask became their responsibility.

Research Question 3 asked, “How can teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?” The data were analyzed through the use of Quirkos software. Through the entering of participant responses, codes, specifically resilience, communication, adaptability, and working harder, were developed.

Resilience. FGQ5 asked participants to describe how they felt about the return to instruction in the fall of 2020. Midlands 1 shared that they had anxiety before the year began because of the unknown, but after the year began, they learned how to cope with it, and by the end of the year they were doing well. Upstate 2 shared that the fear factor was there, but that quickly went away as the students adapted successfully to the changes and they enjoyed getting to make personal relationships through one-on-one meetings. They

indicated by the end of the year it was “amazing” how they all got through it. Midlands 2 said, “[Virtual], it was hard. It was hard not knowing how to meet all of the expectations.” They went on to explain that getting students after the holidays improved things for them. They explained that by the end of the year, they noticed laughter again.

Communication. FGQ6 asked participants how their district supported them during their return to instruction in the fall of 2020. Upstate 2 said, “I feel like we had lots of specific communication whether it was emails, PD [professional development] and Google classroom resources. It was very structured on the school level.” Midlands 1 said, “I’ll second that [in response to Upstate 2’s answer]. I think my administration was very transparent which did wonders in a situation when you don’t know what tomorrow holds.” Midlands 2 explained that they did not have support; however, at the beginning of the return to school, their school offered a virtual professional development and sent out forms asking if anyone needed any assistance. Upstate 1 said, “I feel our districts’ communication department did a good job. We got constant information. My administration went above and beyond, going into deeper explanation when needed.”

Adaptability. FGQ7 asked participants to explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their social emotional skills. Upstate 2 stated, “I think I learned resiliency.”

They then said, “I learned to be less stressed and willing to adapt.” Midlands 1 said,

As a staff at my school, we learned how to let some things go, especially control.

We found we couldn’t control things. We became more focused on what we had to do. For me personally, I learned to be more flexible.

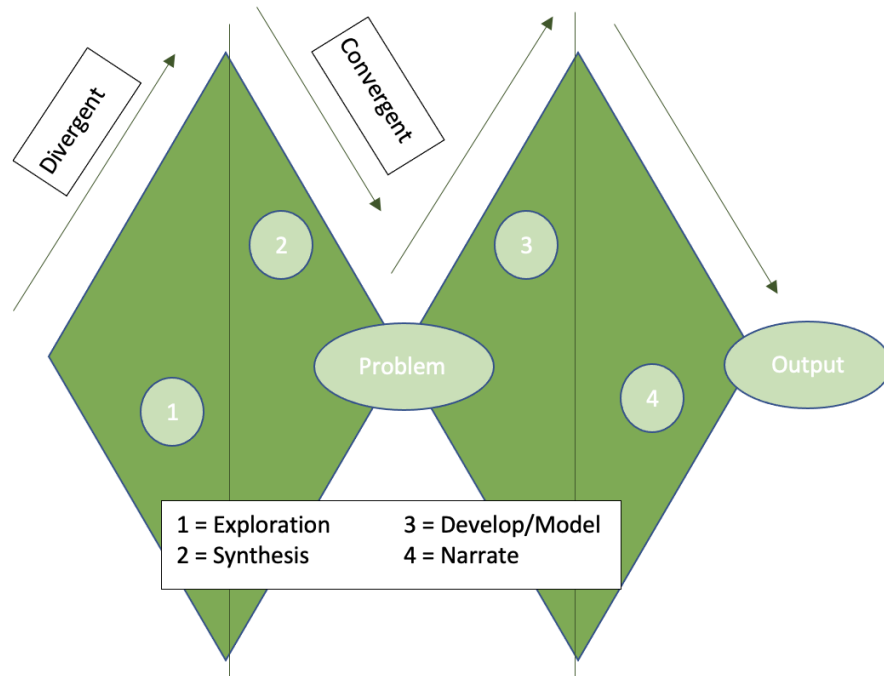
Upstate 1 shared that through teaching in-person to a change to teach virtually, it (the job) ended up being something they enjoyed doing even with all the changes.

Worked harder. FGQ8 asked participants to explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to provide support for student SEL development. Upstate 2 shared that they had to work differently, specifically working harder with parents to make sure their children completed all requirements, much more than would have happened at the high school level in the past. Upstate 1 shared that they knew the students were home alone and were not taking care of their health. They reported asking students about well-being and healthy exercise and eating, which would not have normally been part of their support of students. Midlands 2 said, “I felt like I had to go extra to build those relationships and to check in on my students.” Midlands 1 explained how they became someone who had to mediate mask wearing, which was not part of their job description usually.

Research Question 3 asked, “How can teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development be described?” The teachers described they were able to develop their students’ SEL because they as teachers were resilient. The themes that supported their resiliency were communication, adaptability, and hard work. The teachers reported that they were able to reach their students’ needs.

Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The overall results were explored using the four phases of data analysis with convergent and divergent factors. The four phases are often described as a “double diamond” (Peng, 2018, para. 3). The double diamond can be viewed in Figure 11.

Figure 11*Peng (2018) Double Diamond Figure*

Note. This figure was created based upon a hand sketch from Peng (2018).

Problem. As seen in Figure 11, two different data sets were combined. The data gained quantitatively of teacher perspectives of student SEL and the data gained qualitatively of teacher perspectives of their SEL supports provided during the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 were examined. Step 1 of the double diamond was applied, and all possibilities were explored. Through this step, I examined the differences in responses and how the data collected were different. In Step 2, the data were synthesized by determining similarities of how the data from the focus group were similar or the same. This led to the development of three reasonable assumptions, and each assumption aligned to a research question.

Exploration. The divergent results are the different data sets. The different data

were collected during the quantitative (teacher support of student SEL) and qualitative (teacher feelings of SEL support) phases. CASEL (2021) explained that supporting adult SEL not only helps maintain educators in the profession and creates a positive climate, but it directly relates to how those teachers provide SEL support to their students. The exploration phase gave me the opportunity to explore the analyzed data together and determine different possibilities for the assumptions I was making.

Quantitative exploration. Quantitative findings indicated teachers who completed the SEL survey of their perspectives of their SEL support for their students were confident in supporting student SEL development during their return to instruction. The MANOVA and the descriptive statistics for Research Question 1 indicated no statistically significant differences existed between the teachers from Upstate and Midlands. The univariate ANOVA, however, did note statistical differences in self-management and relationship skills. For Research Question 3, three independent sample *t* tests were conducted for the last three survey items, and the comfort returning during COVID-19 violated the assumption. There was a statistically significant difference found in mean scores (Q24) where the Midlands mean was higher than the Upstate mean.

Qualitative exploration. The focus group data can be summed up in one word: adaptability. Each of the participants explained how they adapted to the change. Three of the four educators felt that overall, their colleagues, school administrators, and district administrators did an exceptional job supporting them and their SEL during a very difficult time.

Synthesis. The convergent data were the bringing together of the separate data sets into one solid interpretation. Based on the results of the quantitative and qualitative

analysis, I made three reasonable assumptions. These reasonable assumptions are supported with data collected from the findings in the narrative section.

1. Teachers felt that they had the skills to support student SEL even in an unusual time, such as the return to instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Most teachers felt supported during their return to instruction at the height of the pandemic.
3. Teachers were anxious about the return to instruction but rose to the occasion and even adapted to the continual change caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Develop/Model. The purpose of this section is to visually demonstrate how the divergent data sets converged into a single interpretation. A model depicting the process of conversion is seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Divergent to Convergent SEL Outcomes Model

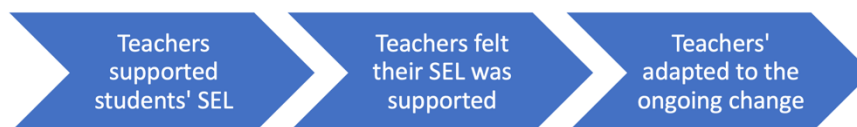


Figure 12 shows the two separate data sets and how each fed into the convergent finding. The convergent finding explains that through adversity, a positive outcome is possible. The Committee for Children (2019) explained how educators are the most important people in the development of a child's SEL and to support that position, adults must receive SEL support too. The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (2021) said, "the ability of citizens to adapt, be resourceful, respect, and

work well with others, and to take personal and collective responsibility is increasingly becoming the hallmark of a well-functioning society” (p. 11).

Narrative. The three assumptions made during the synthesis phase of analysis are supported here by evidence gathered during the findings stage of the study.

Teachers felt that they had the skills to support student SEL even in an unusual time such as the return to instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This assumption was made because of the results of the descriptive statistics. The descriptive results indicated a mean score that ranged between the lowest score of 3.08 from Upstate for responsible decision-making to a high score of 3.63 from Midlands for relationship skills when examining all group means. A score of 3 on the Likert scale meant that the teachers agreed with the SEL statement.

Most teachers felt supported during their return to instruction at the height of the pandemic. This assumption was made because of the focus group responses to questions about the support they received. Midlands 1 said, “We have someone [administrator] whom we are to report to. They’ve [school site] never come out and said it, but that is who I would go to if I needed support.” Midlands 2 said, “I have a peer group and team. We are very good at taking care of each other and we know who we can go to when we need something.” Upstate 1 said, “I had morning coffee with a colleague. I was the only special educator [at the career center], but I could reach out by email, phone, in-person if I needed to talk to someone.” Upstate 2 said, “Our district offers an EAP, an Employee Assistance Program, to adults and on a school basis we have a social worker who puts together activities for teachers at our school.”

Teachers were anxious about the return to instruction but rose to the occasion and

even grew through the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This assumption was made because the mean scores ranged from 1.76 from Upstate for SEL support received to 2.90 from Midlands for comfort from the return during a pandemic. The focus group responses provided depth to the low numbers indicated from the survey results.

The participants indicated struggles but great resilience. Upstate 2 said,

I think I learned resiliency. I think I have always had that, but even more so. I learned to just, things are going to change, so we are going to have to go with the flow. I learned to be less stressed and willing to adapt.

Midlands 2 said, “I have never been known to be the most flexible person on the planet, but I learned how to be flexible and learned how to let things go.” Midlands 1 discussed how when they returned to in-person instruction they were grateful the students were in front of them, specifically stating, “I found that I really liked my job!”

Output. The output phase included examination of the designed model and the narrative. The overall output from the separate quantitative and qualitative data collections was examined and it was determined that teachers grew through a very difficult time.

Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 examined the quantitative and qualitative data gathered and analyzed for the three research questions. The data were displayed and explained by tables, figures, and a narrative that provided a full explanation of the findings for the study. The COVID-19 pandemic created a climate for a new educational theory. The transformative change theory was then linked back to the findings.

Chapter 5 discusses the entire study. The Chapter 5 discussion provides an

overview of the study, research findings by research question, the impact of the research, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Study

This study reviewed the perspectives of teachers on how they supported student SEL during the return to instruction at the height of the pandemic caused by COVID-19. In addition to teacher perspectives of the support they provided to students, the study also examined their perspectives of the SEL support teachers received during the same time period. The research was conducted through the application of a convergent mixed methods design. The quantitative data were gathered through a survey to measure teacher perspectives of the SEL support they provided to the students, and qualitative data were collected from a Zoom focus group with items centered on the SEL support provided to teachers. Each method was analyzed separately and then the results were combined to determine the convergent findings. The findings were then examined through examination of the dual theoretical framework, transformative learning theory and change theory.

Research Questions

The convergent mixed methods study examined participant responses to three research questions. The first question was answered through the collection of quantitative survey responses from 36 participants. The second question was answered through the examination of qualitative responses from two participants from the Midlands region and two participants from the Upstate region of South Carolina. The third and final question combined quantitative data (36 respondents) and qualitative feedback (four respondents) to complete the mixed methods research. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?
3. How can Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?

Development of the Educational Transformative Adaptation Theory

Beginning in March 2019, learning was forced to transform as change impacted educators, families, and students immediately. Transformative learning is impacted by new experiences, completed tasks, and problems solved that are developed from personal feelings, desires, and needs. Learning from shared perspectives with others impacts our actions (Mezirow, 1991). The research and participant feedback supports that during the COVID-19 pandemic, educators, families, and students were transformed while experiencing extensive change. Hall and Hord (2020) indicated that the process of change takes 3 to 5 years. During the pandemic, many schools, families, and students had 2 weeks or less to move through the change process. Garcia and Weiss (2020) explained that children moving to alternative learning was unique and the impacts were severe on schools, families, and students. The backbone of change theory is the 8-step process: sense of urgency, collaborative groups, vision, delivering the vision, action that is empowered, short-term success, consolidation of change, and a change culture (Kotter, 2012). It is evident that by the immediate shutdown of schools and the subsequent return

to instruction in the fall of 2020, the full change processes had not had enough time to be fully implemented, which caused a drastic reaction to some of those experiencing immediate change, such as internal struggles (i.e., depression, post-traumatic stress disorder), or the ability to adapt with support from others (i.e., family, colleagues, or upper-level management). A June 2020 CDC report detailed a substantial increase in mental health disorders, many being severe (Gordon, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on society, education, and our practices will be felt and examined for years to come. For this study, two established theories, transformative learning theory and change theory, were originally selected to support this study as a dual theoretical framework. As study data were examined, it became evident that a new theory, educational transformative adaptation theory, emerged due to the culture and climate of the world at the time of this study. Teachers were forced into extensive change, often while not understanding how to implement that forced change. Despite the turmoil, they adapted to the immediate change and carried on. An interesting thing happened when teachers returned to instruction in the fall of 2020: The experience of this sudden, ongoing change created a transformation in the educators and their personal characteristics which, in turn, created resiliency. The teachers then adapted to the change.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, previous ideas, theories, and beliefs developed new meaning as the world experienced never-before-seen changes. Garcia and Weiss (2020) explained that students were impacted by their access to learning and recreational activities, whereas families were impacted by their ability to access online services for food, health, and learning. Upon interpretation of the data collected for this

study, a new theory naturally emerged. This finding led to the decision to create a new theoretical framework: educational transformative adaptation theory. It can be viewed in Figure 13.

Figure 13

Educational Transformative Adaptation Theory

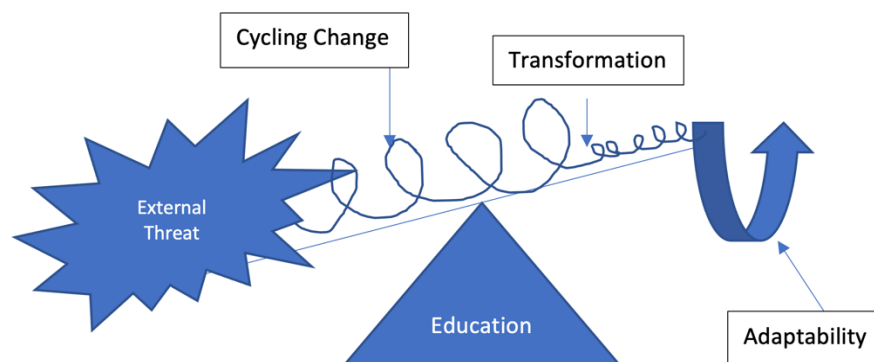


Figure 13 visually explains how an external threat that requires an immediate change to common practice, such as the global pandemic caused by COVID-19, creates cycling change that forces transformation. In this case, teachers experienced a transformation that created an unforeseen outcome of adaptation. The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (2021) stated, “the ability of citizens to adapt, be resourceful, respect, and work well with others, and take personal and collective responsibility is increasingly becoming the hallmark of a well-functioning society” (p. 9).

Summary of Findings

This study explored teacher perceptions of the social emotional supports given and received at the height of the global pandemic caused by COVID-10. A mixed methods study was conducted to explore the data results and make recommendations for SEL implementation and future studies. The results of the study indicated that teachers do feel stronger in delivering instruction to students. This study also provided information

that stated teachers did feel support from their colleagues, schools, and districts during their return to instruction. The final interesting finding was that teachers adapted to the continuous change throughout the return to instruction. The findings are explored further in relation to each of this study's research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, "What are the differences among Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of their provisions of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to students at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?" This question was answered through the collection of data quantitatively, specifically, a survey containing 21 items. A MANOVA was utilized to compare the differences in the two groups regarding their responses to the five SEL tenets: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The results indicated that overall, there were not significant differences between the two groups' responses to the items connected to each of the five SEL tenets; however, when the univariate ANOVA was conducted to explore the individual components, results indicated statistical significances in group responses for self-management and relationship skills. For self-management, the mean square was 0.77 and the $p < 0.05$; for relationship skills, the mean square was 1.66 and the $p < 0.01$.

Research Question 1 Implications. The examination of teacher perspectives of the SEL support they provided to their students is tied to the development and improvement of student SEL. Students improve their SEL when adults collaborate to develop a classroom culture that accepts all students and supports their learning, cultural, and behavioral needs (CASEL, 2020b). In addition, students need to figure out what SEL

means to them and reflect upon how it can be used to support who they are as individuals. Finally, students must be given a voice in their SEL learning (CASEL, 2020b).

Research Question 1 Connection to Theory. Midlands and Upstate teachers explained their perspectives of their provision of the five SEL tenets (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) during the return to instruction during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational transformative adaptation theory is defined as an educator's sudden ability, through reflective practice, to transform and emotionally change their perspective during a traumatic event, leading to resilience and ultimately adaptation to the new normal.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "How do Midlands and Upstate teachers describe the SEL supports they received from their districts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?" The data were gathered through an online Zoom focus group. Four participants, two from the Midlands and two from the Upstate, responded to four questions. The responses were transcribed and coded. Midlands teachers indicated they were unaware of district SEL support, whereas Upstate teachers were aware and felt supported. Midlands teachers indicated that their district loosened requirements and offered rewards for self-care, whereas Upstate teachers indicated their self-care was provided by check-ins from administrators and district leaders. Participants from both districts indicated they did not have a policy for leadership support, but they sought out a trustful person in leadership when support was needed. Gaining support from colleagues was accomplished by both groups through members of their department or other teachers. The Upstate participants went beyond that and indicated that they also received support

through technology collaboration with others in the district. During the height of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, teachers indicated that they felt supported by their districts through the provision of the EAP, tangible rewards, trusted leaders, and seeking support from a trusted colleague. Stress, or more specifically anxiety about the return to instruction, was a common theme shared by respondents. Jennings (2019) explained that supporting social emotional skills positively can help heal stress. The provision of assistance programs, tangible rewards, and support from leaders and colleagues provided a safe and supportive climate for teachers and their students during this difficult time. In the same vein, to have the ability to successfully support a student's SEL development, adults must know and understand SEL themselves (CASEL, 2020b).

Research Question 2 Implications. Research Question 2 explored teacher perspectives of the support they received. The respondents indicated that they felt supported by their colleagues, school, and district-level leaders. The results of this research question indicated that even amid cycling change, teachers adapted because of the support they were offered. District administrators need to continue to support the adults. CASEL (2020b) recommended offering teachers time to connect, interact, and reflect on the pandemic. Panorama Education (2021) offers survey resources for district leaders to consider asking their adult and student population to complete. The Panorama surveys measure adult or student SEL. Understanding where adults are in their own SEL can help district leaders offer the appropriate support for staff. Another important item for district leaders to practice is to offer time for teachers to collaborate and build their SEL skills (CASEL, 2020b).

Research Question 2 Connection to Theory. The teachers shared their

perspectives of the support they received through their responses to the focus group questions. The teachers indicated that their feelings, flexibility, and resilience led to their ability to adapt to the cycling changes happening during their return to instruction. The findings from Research Question 2 aligned with the new educational transformative adaptation theory. The educators transformed through their reflective practice and interaction with colleagues and leaders, which allowed them to adjust and change their perspective during a traumatic event, the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to their adaptation of continual change.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, “How Midlands and Upstate teacher perceptions of the impact of student SEL development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic be described?” The data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods. First, quantitative results were explored through individual independent sample t tests for the last three survey items. Results indicated that (Q22) comfort returning during a pandemic violated the assumption. When examining the results of (Q23) SEL support received, the Midlands mean was 2.18 with a standard deviation of 0.98 and Upstate had a lower mean of 1.76 with a standard deviation of 0.72; however, the p value was greater than 0.05, suggesting there was not statistically significant mean differences between Upstate and Midlands. For (Q24) SEL support given, Midlands had an average score of 2.81 with a standard deviation of 0.60 and Upstate had a slightly lower mean of 2.12 with a standard deviation of 0.72; however, the mean score of Midlands was significantly higher than Upstate because the p values were smaller than the 0.05 threshold. Next, focus group responses were analyzed. Midlands respondents indicated anxiety, continual

change, lack of preparation, and resilience were feelings they experienced with their return to instruction, whereas Upstate respondents indicated anxiety and resilience. Midlands respondents expressed that they struggled to gain rapport, navigated poor student work ethic, and had to navigate the politics of the COVID-19 mandates. When examining the perspectives of the support offered, both groups indicated communication was a characteristic of the support provided. Midlands respondents explained that they received professional development, whereas Upstate respondents indicated that they were provided with resources to help with the new instructional expectations. The impact of COVID-19 on teacher SEL was described by both groups as resiliency, flexibility, and adaptability. Both groups indicated that one impact of COVID 19 was that they worked harder supporting students. Upstate respondents indicated that they created new systems of support for students and that the process helped to develop them into better teachers. When outlining how they would describe the impact of student SEL skill development at the height of the pandemic, the themes noted were communication, resilience, and adaptability.

Research Question 3 Implications. The teachers indicated that through communication, they developed resilience and adapted to the constant change. CASEL (2020b) shared,

Now, more than ever, we will need to take care of ourselves and our colleagues, strengthen our partnerships, pool resources, develop common goals, and identify opportunities to work together to support all members of our school community and sustain this [SEL] work over time. (p. 53)

Most importantly, we need to continue to transform our practices to support SEL

development in the future. Communication is key to helping develop teacher and student SEL. Teachers, through this process, were forced to adapt, which eventually led to resiliency. These changes are tied to open, honest communication. During this challenging time, teachers recognized student needs because their own needs were being met. This lesson is an important one for school and district leaders.

Research Question 3 Connection to Theory. Midlands and Upstate teachers perceived that they were able to support their students' SEL development virtually and while on a hybrid schedule during their return to instruction. The teachers reported giving support to students that looked different than it normally did, but they were still able to build rapport with students and make connections. This ability to transform previous practice to support students during a traumatic event highlighted teachers' ability to become resilient, ultimately leading to adaptation of new and different successful practices. This process mirrors the components of the newly formed educational transformative adaptation theory.

Overall Research Theme

An overarching theme emerged from the qualitative data. The participants reported resiliency and the ability to adapt during the return to instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. This adaptability in teaching practice contradicts Hall and Hord's (2020) components of change theory, which states that once a new initiative has begun, participants experience a long-term implementation dip that eventually leads to growth. This process of adapting to change takes a lengthy 3- to 5-years, yet the educators returning to instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic had to adapt immediately while continuing to experience change throughout their school year. These

teachers did not have the luxury of moving through the eight stages of change Kotter (2012) recommended: “establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the culture” (p. 22). Midlands 1 summed up the experience, “The whole year was ever changing, ever evolving, and I think my role as a social emotional support was also evolving, so I had to be on my toes.” In a period of never-before-seen transformation, teachers reported flexibility and resiliency that caused change to occur at a much quicker pace. These teachers were forced to adapt immediately to change and, in most cases, continue with more changes throughout the year. In fact, everyone seemed to be affected by adaptability, including the administration (district and school level), the teachers, and the students. Upstate 2 said, “I think I learned resiliency.” Upstate 1 shared that they have always been flexible but that this year tested their flexibility. Midlands 2 reported never being a flexible person, but they shared how they learned to be. Teacher adaptability was supported by communication and resiliency as visually demonstrated in Figure 14.

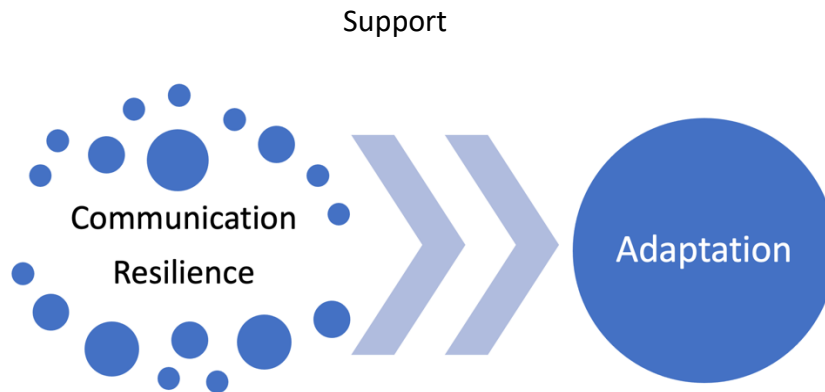
Figure 14*Overall Theme*

Figure 14 shows an overall theme of adaptation that was the result of their own personal resilience and how they offered and were provided support through communication from their leaders and colleagues.

Communication. The teachers’ comfort level with the return to instruction was supported by the communication of their school leaders, district leaders, and colleagues. During the return to instruction, the teachers reported transparent communication, cooperation in groups, collaboration with their peers, and leaders who admitted when they did not know something. Hall and Hord (2020) explained the importance of checking in on teachers. Midlands 2 stated that her administration would inform them when they were unaware of how to answer their staffs’ questions. There was so much they were unaware of when it came to mandates regarding COVID-19 in the schools. Midlands 1 explained that they appreciated their administrations’ “transparency” when they were unsure or unaware of responses to staff. The district- and school-level administration supported their staff with communication. Upstate 1 said they received

information from their district and their director about updates anytime something changed. Upstate 2 explained that their district provided resources to teachers for them to be successful. Midlands 2 explained that their district offered professional development for online learning.

Resilience. All focus group respondents reported resilience during the year they returned to instruction from the COVID-19 shutdown. Upstate 2 said,

I think I learned resiliency. I think I've always had that, but even more so [I learned about resiliency during the pandemic]. I learned things are going to change, constantly change, so we are going to have to go with the flow. I learned to be less stressed and willing to adapt.

Midlands 2 agreed by sharing that they became flexible and learned to let things go.

Aguilar (2018) highlighted her “A resilient you” conceptual framework that includes “who you are, where you are, what you do, and how you are” (p. 7). Aguilar’s resilience conceptual framework was used to explain the resilience during the return to instruction during the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. The participants reported knowing who they were before COVID-19 and how the year of intense change impacted them and allowed them to develop or increase their resiliency during the pandemic. The participants knew where they were and they could not change the health crisis or the ongoing changes in the expectations that happened to them, so they found a way to adapt. The participants reported what they did, which was to find a way to persevere through the difficulties. The resiliency is supported by these participants’ “habits and beliefs” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 9). Finally, the participants reported that they were going to accept the challenges of the constant change and rise to meet them through adapting to the constant

change.

Study's Overall Impact

The findings of this research indicate that teachers supported their students' SEL development during the continual changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent reopening of schools. Secondly, most teachers reported that although their districts did not provide an explicit SEL program to develop their SEL during the return to instruction at the height of the pandemic, they nonetheless felt supported socially and emotionally. I believe that even if support was not provided from school and district leaders, the teachers received support from their colleagues. The support from school, district leaders, or colleagues provided enough self-care for teachers during the pandemic and even assisted in their adaptation to the ongoing change. Teachers quickly adapted to the chaos of continual change during the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant reported no specific support, yet they, too, discussed their adaptability to their new normal. Results from this study indicate that through adversity and constant change, a person can experience resilience with or without a district framework for support and with or without supportive administration and that may occur because of the support they receive from their peers.

Recommendations for Daily Implementation

A great deal of information came out of this study that could be applied to daily implementation of SEL with adults and students. SEL should begin with adults (Woolf, 2020). I am hopeful that school districts will see the results of this study and begin first supporting adult SEL. One way to begin supporting adults is by using an adult SEL survey. By collecting adult feedback, district administrators can learn exactly what the

staff needs and then support them based on the results. “Adults who recognize, understand, label, and regulate their own emotions are less likely to report burnout, demonstrate higher levels of patience and empathy, encourage healthy communication, and create safe student learning environments” (Woolf, 2020, para. 3). Likewise, students should have a voice in what they need to be successful. CASEL (2020b) stated,

create equitable and developmentally appropriate structures for students to regularly communicate with adults about their perspectives on what’s working well and any additional needs. Consider how to meaningfully engage students through formal and informal connections, such as lunch or snack break conversations, class activities, school meetings, or community gatherings. (p. 13)

SEL is an overarching support system that has immense power in improvement in schools. I am hopeful that school districts will see the potential impact SEL supports have and apply them to support adults and students.

Recommendations for Future Studies

One of the topics for future exploration is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both teacher and student mental health. We now know that the COVID-19 shutdown and subsequently modified schedule and a hybrid or virtual return to education impacted adults and students. The impact was not only in educational loss but also in mental health. I see future research on mental health in schools and COVID-19.

Future studies could also explore the positive aspects gained from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the change to educational structure and routine. The experience will hopefully guide future change that could impact education for the better. Research on how COVID-19 benefited educational change is a future area of research.

SEL will continue to be studied. Research groups are currently and will continue to develop adult and student supports of SEL. One area I believe would be beneficial would be to examine how SEL supports of administration could benefit the administrative role.

Limitations of Results

All studies are impacted by limitations, both in the planning stages and again after the data have been collected and analyzed. There were two limitations noted in the findings of this research.

The first limitation of the completed study was the difference in participants from the two South Carolina regions. The Upstate group consisted of the proposed 25 participants, whereas the participants from Midlands were a little less than half of what was proposed, at 11 participants. While I used statistical measures that corrected for a difference in my sample size, it is still possible that the difference in sample size may have impacted the comparison results in the qualitative findings.

The second limitation was that the focus group only contained four total participants, two from the Midlands region and two from the Upstate region. Knowing the ideal sample size for a focus group is six to eight participants, the fact that I had fewer than the recommended participants is a limitation.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on our schools, teachers, and students. Rickles et al. (2020) explained that a dip in instructional hours impacted outcomes for students. The importance of SEL was highlighted during this time because families were reporting emotional and mental health challenges in their children (Calderon, 2020).

Prothero (2020) reported that American's Promise Alliance conducted a survey, and teens reported increased levels of unhappiness or depression, lack of sleep, and lack of confidence after the pandemic. For students to feel supported, they must have teachers who are interested in their self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. In addition to SEL supports for students, adult SEL was also brought into the light as an area of importance. The Committee for Children (2019) indicated that SEL begins with adults. CASEL (2021) explained that supporting adult SEL not only helps maintain educators in the profession and creates a positive climate, but it directly relates to how those teachers provide SEL support to their students. As such, teachers are the key factor in student SEL (Will, 2020).

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[revolution-or-roses-by-](https://www.mcrel.org/rti-pbis-and-mtss-an-evolution-a-revolution-or-roses-by-othernames/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA88X_BRDUARIsACVMYD9BSVFbh_W1zXeFNVrfr-vUqsMSzmyZSYQK2gKLMRb8_INPZt32RFoaAv4-EALw_wcB)

[othernames/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA88X_BRDUARIsACVMYD9BSVFbh](https://www.mcrel.org/rti-pbis-and-mtss-an-evolution-a-revolution-or-roses-by-othernames/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA88X_BRDUARIsACVMYD9BSVFbh_W1zXeFNVrfr-vUqsMSzmyZSYQK2gKLMRb8_INPZt32RFoaAv4-EALw_wcB)

[_W1zXeFNVrfr-vUqsMSzmyZSYQK2gKLMRb8_INPZt32RFoaAv4-EALw_](https://www.mcrel.org/rti-pbis-and-mtss-an-evolution-a-revolution-or-roses-by-othernames/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA88X_BRDUARIsACVMYD9BSVFbh_W1zXeFNVrfr-vUqsMSzmyZSYQK2gKLMRb8_INPZt32RFoaAv4-EALw_wcB)

[wcB](https://www.mcrel.org/rti-pbis-and-mtss-an-evolution-a-revolution-or-roses-by-othernames/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA88X_BRDUARIsACVMYD9BSVFbh_W1zXeFNVrfr-vUqsMSzmyZSYQK2gKLMRb8_INPZt32RFoaAv4-EALw_wcB)

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Appendix A
Social Media Post

RESEARCH STUDY: Teacher perceptions of SEL provided to support student development of SEL during a global pandemic. CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS: Are you a K-12 public school teacher in South Carolina? If you are interested in completing a digital survey on the social emotional supports you provided students upon the return to instruction in the fall of 2020 follow the link and complete the form. LINK:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1k0gIVYEvRhAVE-UeD_2fr2hPkc9bTvjHCecb_n4gex8/edit

Appendix B
Second Social Media Post

RESEARCH STUDY: Teacher perceptions of SEL provided to support student development of SEL during a global pandemic. CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS: Are you a South Carolina K-12 public school teacher who teaches in the **BLANK** region? I am looking for **NUMBER** of teachers to participate in a digital survey on the social emotional supports you may have provided students upon the return to instruction in the fall of 2020. If you are interested in being part of this study, follow the link and complete the form. LINK: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1k0gIVYEvRhAVE-UeD_2fr2hPkc9bTvjHCecb_n4gex8/edit

Appendix C

Focus Group Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
 Informed Consent for Focus Group
*South Carolina Teachers' Perceptions of the Social Emotional Support Received
 Following the Return to School During the Global Pandemic*

The purpose of the research is to determine teacher's perspectives of the Social Emotional supports they may have received to help students following the return to school during the global pandemic. As a participant in the study, you will be asked to answer eight questions regarding your perspectives on this topic. It is anticipated that the study will require about one hour of your time. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be confidential, which means that your name will not be linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the Zoom meeting. Data from this study will be used or distributed for future research studies.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Researcher's name: Mindy L. Duckworth, Ed. S

Researcher's telephone number: 864-423-3485

Researcher's email address: mduckworth1@gardner-webb.edu

Faculty Advisors' name: Dr. Jennifer Putnam

Faculty Advisors' telephone number: 704-406-3019

Faculty Advisors' email address: jputnam2@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Sydney K. Brown

IRB Institutional Administrator

Telephone number: 704-406-3019

Email address: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

If you do not consent to participate, please close this window.

*** Required**

If you consent to participate in this study, please type your name and district in the blank below. *

Appendix D**Third Social Media Post**

RESEARCH STUDY: Teacher perceptions of SEL provided to support student development of SEL during a global pandemic.

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS: Are you a K-12 public school teacher in South Carolina and you teach in the **BLANK** region? I am looking for **NUMBER** of teachers to participate in a Zoom focus group on the social emotional supports you were provided to support your return to instruction in the fall of 2020. Follow the link and complete the form.

LINK: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1k0gIVYEvRhAVE-UeD_2fr2hPkc9bTvjHCecb_n4gex8/edit

Appendix E
Survey Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
 Informed Consent for Online Survey
*South Carolina Teachers' Perceptions of the Social Emotional Support Received
 Following the Return to School During the Global Pandemic*

The purpose of the research is to determine teacher's perspectives of the Social Emotional supports they may have received to help students following the return to school during the global pandemic. As a participant in the study, you will be asked to answer 24 Likert items regarding your perspectives on this topic. It is anticipated that the survey will require about 20 minutes of your time. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be confidential, which means that your name will not be linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. Data from this study will be used or distributed for future research studies.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Researcher's name: Mindy L. Duckworth, Ed. S

Researcher's telephone number: 864-423-3485

Researcher's email address: mduckworth1@gardner-webb.edu

Faculty Advisors' name: Dr. Jennifer Putnam

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Dr. Sydney K. Brown

IRB Institutional Administrator

Telephone number: 704-406-3019

Email address: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

*** Required**

Clicking the link below to continue on to the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study: *

I do not agree with the informed consent. By clicking no, I will be exited from the survey.

☐ No

I have read and agree to the Informed Consent. If I agree, I will follow the link to the survey.

☐ Yes

https://coresmsz5h6m6zjg9xx3.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cZ1DVYCOrrjqJo

Appendix F

Survey Items

Gardner-Webb University Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Survey Purpose

The purpose of the study is to determine your perspectives of the Social Emotional support you provided to students following the return to school during the global pandemic. The entire survey should take approximately twenty minutes of your time. Identifying information collected from this survey will be treated confidentially. The only personal data that will be collected is the setting, experience, and geographic region where you teach. Before progressing to the survey, you should have agreed to the Informed Consent. You will participate in selecting four possible responses for 21 items and will then proceed to the 3 closed-ended questions.

Before you begin it is essential for you to know the definition of Social Emotional Learning. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2020) defined SEL as, "the process through which all young people and adults acquired 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 (para. 1).

Before proceeding to the Gardner-Webb University SEL Survey please review the following information and definitions of each rating.

Part B. Teacher Social and Emotional Competencies. Now think about your own social and emotional competencies and how those competencies influence your ability to implement the social interaction teaching practices. Please use the scoring guide below to rate yourself on how your SEL skills influence your social interaction teaching practices with your students. Consider each statement and score yourself according to where each statement holds true for you.

Strongly disagree. I have a difficult time with this practice. I know I do some of the things mentioned, but I do not necessarily find them relevant to my teaching.

Disagree. I demonstrate some of these skills with my students. I think with more practice and/or more support, I could demonstrate these skills more to improve implementation of this practice.

Agree. I am strong in this area. I know I do a good job modeling these skills for my students. I use these skills most of the time when I implement the instructional practices.

Strongly agree. I am very strong in this area. I am able to use these skills when I am implementing the instructional practices.

Thank you for reviewing the directions. Follow the link to the QUALTRICS SURVEY.

https://coresmsz5h6m6zjg9xx3.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cZ1DVYCOrrjqjJo

Gardner-Webb University SEL Survey

Start of Block: Self-Awareness

I am aware of social teaching practices that need to improve upon and grow professionally.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I can effectively implement social teaching practices with my students.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I am usually aware of how my emotions, culturally grounded beliefs, and background are precursors to my emotional reactions, and I understand how they impact my social teaching practices with my students.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

I understand how student responses (positive and negative) affect my emotions and my behaviors during social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I am aware of how my cultural beliefs and background affect my social teaching practices with my students.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

End of Block: Self-Awareness

Start of Block: Self-Management/Emotion Regulation

I continuously refine my personal goals about how I will best implement social teaching practices with my students.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I effectively use multiple strategies (e.g., breathing techniques and mindfulness) when I have a strong emotional reaction in the classroom (e.g., stress, anger) when implementing social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

Through the effective management of my emotions (e.g., use of stress reduction techniques), I am better able to implement social teaching practices, use positive approaches to discipline, and develop a positive learning environment that is free from bias and prejudice.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I model behaviors (e.g., form guidelines, set boundaries) to help students learn to regulate emotions during social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Start of Block: Social Awareness

To effectively implement positive social teaching practices, I usually understand the perspectives of my students and can pay attention to their emotional cues during classroom interactions.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
-

I try to understand why my students are or are not actively participating, and I am usually successful at providing my students the necessary skills to participate in the social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
-

I successfully support positive emotions and respond to negative emotions during social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
-

I address the commonalities and differences (e.g., racial, ethnic, cultural) that exist among students when I implement the social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

End of Block: Social Awareness

Start of Block: Relationship/Social Skills

I clearly communicate behavioral and academic expectations in a manner that addresses students' individual needs and strengths when implementing social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I am comfortable helping my students resolve interpersonal conflicts that come up during social teaching practices, and I have experienced success with this.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I use the social teaching practices to help form meaningful relationships with my students and cultivate their SEL skills, and I am usually successful at building meaningful relationships.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I use the social teaching practices to help cultivate my students' SEL skills, and I am usually successful at building their SEL skills.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

End of Block: Relationship/Social Skills

Start of Block: Responsible Decision Making

I am effective at considering multiple forms of evidence, such as balancing the needs and the behaviors of my entire class, while implementing the social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I regularly include my students and/or collaborate with colleagues to solve problems that arise in the classroom related to the social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I stay focused and consistent when I implement social teaching practices.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

When I implement the social teaching practices, I balance students' emotional needs and academic needs.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

End of Block: Responsible Decision Making

Start of Block: Block 5

I felt comfortable with the return to instruction in the fall of 2020 during the global pandemic.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I believe that teacher's SEL development was positively supported throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

I believe that student's SEL development was positively supported throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Thank you for participating in the survey.

If you are interested in participating in a focus group through Zoom to discuss the SEL supports you were given during the return to instruction in the fall of 2020, please provide your email in the space below. If selected, you will receive more information about the focus group procedures.

End of Block: Thank you for participating in the survey.

Appendix G

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7/31/2020

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RE: Self-assessing social and emotional instruction and competencies

C Copyright Help Desk-Prof Svcs <copyright_PS@air.org>

Tue 6/23/2020 3:11 PM

To: Mindy Duckworth

Cc: Copyright Help Desk-Prof Svcs <copyright_PS@air.org>; O'Brien, Kim <kobrien@air.org>

AIR_Self-Assess Soc-Emot Ins...
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Kind regards,

Kim O'Brien
 Editor and Copyright Specialist
 Publication and Creative Services



From: Mindy Duckworth <mduckworth1@gardner-webb.edu>
Sent: Monday, June 22, 2020 11:50 AM

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Yoder, N. (2014). *Self-assessing social and emotional instruction and competencies*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/SelfAssessmentSEL.pdf>

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Date: July 31, 2020By: Kim O'Brien

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RE: Self-assessing social and emotional instruction and competencies

C Copyright Help Desk–Prof Svcs <copyright_PS@air.org>
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Tue 2/9/2021 3:17 PM
 To: Mindy Duckworth
 Cc: Copyright Help Desk–Prof Svcs <copyright_PS@air.org>; O'Brien, Kim <kobrien@air.org>

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Hi, Mindy,

It's perfectly fine to enter your survey data into a digital platform given social-distancing restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you very much for checking with us!

Kind regards,

Kim O'Brien
 Editor | Copyright Specialist
 AIR Publication and Creative Services
kobrien@air.org



From: Mindy Duckworth <mduckworth1@gardner-webb.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, February 9, 2021 1:58 PM
To: Copyright Help Desk–Prof Svcs <copyright_PS@air.org>
Cc: O'Brien, Kim <kobrien@air.org>
Subject: Re: Self-assessing social and emotional instruction and competencies

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Good Afternoon!

When you originally gave your approval, I was not going to take your survey and enter the information into a digital survey platform, now I would like to. This change was made due to COVID.

Just to refresh your memory, I'm requesting copyright permission from the American Institutes for Research to enter the information from the AIR (2014) Part B. survey into a digital platform, specifically, Qualtrics.

I am specifically interested in page 6 & 7, which is Part B. Teacher Social and Emotional Competencies.

Appendix H

Focus Group

Focus Group Introduction:

The entire Focus Group should take 1 hour of your time from the beginning of the process until the end. This focus group will be confidential. You will be provided the names of Upstate 1, Upstate 2, Midlands 1, Midlands 2, Pee-Dee 1, Pee-Dee 2, Lowcountry 1, or Lowcountry 2 to protect your identity. The only personal data that will be collected is the setting, experience and geographic region where you teach. Before moving into the focus group, you must agree to Informed Consent. After your agreement to participate in the study you will review the definition of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and answer 8 open-ended questions.

SEL Definition:

The Collaborative for (CASEL) defined SEL as

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (para. 1).

Focus Group Questions:

1. Explain how your district offers SEL supports for adults?
2. Describe the self-care support that your district promotes for teachers.
3. How do you receive support from someone in a leadership position when you need emotional support?
4. How do you receive support from a colleague when you need emotional support?
5. Describe how you felt about the return to instruction in the fall of 2020.
6. How did your district support you regarding the return to instruction in the fall of 2020?

- 7. Explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your social emotional skills.**
- 8. Explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supporting students' social emotional skills.**