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Teacher Perceptions of the Connections Between Social and Emotional Learning and Student Success

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Beth Ann Hoistad Washle 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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Acknowledgments

As I tossed around ideas for my doctoral research, my professors always said to choose a subject I had a passion for because I would live with the subject for a long time. During my third semester of coursework, I was assigned a task for my current position to research and create a learning module about Morning Meeting. My district would implement this routine at the elementary level to incorporate social and emotional learning into the classroom. The more I learned about it, the more I became convinced that social and emotional learning was the missing piece to growing children socially, emotionally, and academically. I looked for evidence of social and emotional learning in schools. I compared classrooms where social and emotional learning was happening to classes where it was not. I wanted to see if there was a difference. That was when it became evident that I had found my topic to research.

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Abstract

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS. Washle, Beth Ann Hoistad, 2023: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This qualitative study was about teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses the social-emotional needs of students and relates to student success. Teacher perceptions help inform educational leaders and policy makers about the impact social and emotional learning can have on students and their success. The findings of this study led to three emerging themes. Those themes were teachers believe (a) there needs to be direct instruction in social and emotional skills; (b) social and emotional learning helps students academically by becoming self-driven, taking ownership of their learning and actions, building confidence, and persevering through challenging work; and (c) incorporating social and emotional learning into their daily classroom routines helps students develop essential social competencies, as shown through their interactions with adults and other students, showing kindness and empathy, handling their feelings and emotions, and making responsible choices. These themes helped to conclude that teachers perceive a connection between social and emotional learning and student success. This conclusion adds to the existing literature regarding the need for and benefits of social and emotional learning.

Keywords: social and emotional learning, social and emotional development, essential social competencies, educational environment, emotional regulation, school climate, classroom climate, emotional development, social development, academic achievement, cognitive development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Take a moment to picture yourself as the administrator of an elementary school. You walk down the hallway of your school and come to the classroom of Mr. Tranquil. The noise level is a busy hum. His students are actively engaged in group discussions to collaborate on a math task. You observe Mr. Tranquil walking around, speaking to the groups, asking probing questions, and taking anecdotal notes. He notices the students at one table disagreeing with one another and walks over to observe and determine if he needs to intervene. One student in the group seems visibly upset. That student had stopped working, crossed their arms, and looked as if they could cry. Another student in the group stops the conversation and asks the first student to take a few slow breaths to refocus. When the student seemed calm, the second student then asked them to explain what was wrong and how the group could help. The breathing technique is something Mr. Tranquil has taught his class to gather their emotions, calm down, and refocus. The student explained their frustration, and the group worked together to help. Mr. Tranquil watches the group get back on track, makes some notes, and then continues moving about the room, seeing that the group does not need him to intervene. Mr. Tranquil has taught his students strategies to help them work on their self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills.

Across the hall in Ms. Turbulent's classroom, you hear a scream and rush to see what has happened. A flying workbook narrowly misses you as you walk through the door. You stop and take a moment to gather yourself and assess the situation. Across the room, you hear a girl cry and say, "I cannot do it!" She then proceeds to flop down on her desk and hide her face. The girl is emotional and frustrated. Ms. Turbulent rushes to the

girl's side and proceeds to try to calm her down. The other students' reactions show that her classmates do not know how to react. A couple of students tell the girl to shut up and quit crying. Some other students smack their desks, throw their arms up, and sigh loudly in frustration. One student comments loudly, "Not again! Every day she does this!" Some students cover their ears, roll their eyes, and try to continue working. None of the students try to engage with the girl. The students in this classroom do not understand how to help their classmates like those in Mr. Tranquil's classroom. The teacher is the only person who responds to the girl to attempt to calm her down.

Why might the experiences in these two classes be so different? The student in Ms. Turbulent's class could have a problem with self-management, or the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). The girl clearly did not have her emotions or behavior under control. Many of the other students in the class could have a problem with social awareness, understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others (CASEL, 2020). These are two of the five social competencies outlined by CASEL (2020). Children need social and emotional learning to develop the five essential competencies defined by CASEL (2020): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL (2020) explained that social and emotional interventions of the five essential competencies lead to increased academic performance and behavior improvement. A meta-analysis study by Durlak et al. (2011) showed that students who participated in social and emotional learning programs had an academic performance increase of 11 percentage points over students who did not participate in such a program. Research from the National

Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) suggested that students should have their social and emotional needs met to be prepared and open for academic learning. Prior evidence suggests that legitimate success academically and personally cannot happen without social and emotional skills (Elias et al., 1997). The neuropsychology field reinforced the significance of social and emotional learning and its connection to academic success. Neuropsychology shared how numerous learning components are relational, meaning learning is rooted in relationships (Elias et al., 1997).

How might society be impacted if social and emotional skills are not taught in schools at all levels? There are stories in the news frequently about shootings where the gunman said they were reacting to being picked on or disagreeing with another person's life choices. There have also been reports about guns brought into schools post-COVID. These are examples of students and adults lacking social and emotional skills. On the other hand, what impact could there be on society if social and emotional skills were taught in schools at all levels?

Social and emotional skills are often woven into curriculum standards. The North Carolina English Language Arts Speaking and Listening Standards have two domains in kindergarten through eighth grade that incorporate social and emotional skills: (a) collaboration and communication, and (b) presentation of knowledge and ideas (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018a). Each grade level's standards build on the skills of the previous grade level. The description of what students need to do for these standards states the student contributions should be accurate, respond and build on others' ideas, effectively use data and evidence, and listen to others attentively (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018a). The North Carolina speaking and

listening standards are incorporated in all subject areas in school and translated into everyday life.

The speaking and listening skills are woven through the eight math practices that develop essential competencies in math (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018b). Rutherford (2015) explained that the math practices portray student behaviors, assure mathematical understanding, and concentrate on developing reasoning and communication about math. The eight standards for mathematical practice listed in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for K-8 Mathematics (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018b) are

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools and strategies.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

Communication and listening are critical in the eight math practices and the speaking and listening standards. Looking closer at the math practices, each aligns with one or more of the five competencies from CASEL's (2020) social and emotional framework. One example is how the first math practice requires a student to use the competencies of self-management and responsible decision-making to keep working on a problem and try different approaches to reach an answer. Another example is how the

third math practice connects with responsible decision-making as students construct their arguments and social awareness as they critique other students' arguments. That practice also requires students to use their self-awareness and self-management as they respond to critiques of their arguments by classmates.

While social and emotional learning is vital to student success, standardized academic testing is the primary tool for measuring student success and the educational system's success (CASEL, 2007; Elias et al., 1997). Modern standardized testing began in 1965 after President Lyndon Johnson enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Gilman, 2020; National Education Association, 2020; ProCon.org, 2020). This act was a catalyst for new and expanded applications of testing to evaluate programs (Gilman, 2020; National Education Association, 2020). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act included testing and accountability provisions with the hope of raising standards and making education more equitable (ProCon.org, 2020). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk,* a report commissioned by President Ronald Reagan, was released (ProCon.org, 2020; Strauss, 2018; Toch, 2018). This report painted a picture of a failing educational system that needed changes, such as extending school hours, incorporating more challenging materials, and raising academic standards (Kamenetz, 2019; Lynch, 2018; ProCon.org, 2020; Strauss, 2018; Toch, 2018).

In 2001, standardized testing became a mandate for all states with the signing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation for education reform by President George W. Bush (Gilman, 2020; National Education Association, 2020; ProCon.org, 2020). As part of the NCLB legislation, reading and math progress would be assessed annually through standardized testing in Grades 3-8. Schools were expected to show adequate

yearly progress or face sanctions, such as being taken over by the state or being closed (Gilman, 2020; National Education Association, 2020; ProCon.org, 2020). Test results could also have consequences for students, including not being promoted to the next grade level (ProCon.org, 2020). NCLB was an underfunded government mandate that made expensive demands, and no resources were provided to meet such demands (Noddings, 2005).

Standardized tests were a one-size-fits-all approach that did not produce the desired results. Standardized tests, as a sole measure of a student's knowledge, generally do not help with improving learning (Greenstein, 2010). Greenstein (2010) stated that there is little proof linking standardized tests to improved student achievement. Tanner (2011) stated that standardized tests were not designed to improve instruction but to rank order children for the purpose of comparing them within the school and among schools. Not achieving the desired results from standardized testing led to the introduction of the Every Student Succeeds Act, passed by Congress in 2015. The focus of the Every Student Succeeds Act was to reduce standardized testing and disconnect testing from high-stakes decision-making (National Education Association, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Standardized test scores have become the primary focus in society's effort to hold schools accountable, while developing social and emotional learning has been sidelined. In the United States, the public gets notified through the schools, state governments, and federal governments of student performance on standardized tests, but that provides a fragmented picture (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Test scores are only one piece, not a complete picture, of a student's academic story. Scores do not shed much light on other

pieces, such as social studies, science, art, a connection to the community, or the school's and students' social and emotional health (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Colleges and universities look at more than test score data for admissions. They look at a bigger, more complete picture of the applicant's academic story–grades, sports, club involvement, involvement in the community, and internships (Gilman, 2020).

Darling-Hammond (2018) wrote that educators naturally know the importance of social and emotional learning and development for the well-being of children. Educators have problems working on children's social and emotional needs due to the ever-pressing push for school accountability and higher standards. Years of research maintain that students' social, emotional, and academic development are not separate but woven together, making each crucial for learning (Darling-Hammond, 2018).

In an interview, Rhodes, a licensed psychologist, suggested that as elementary schools moved away from social and emotional skills, high school graduates entered college unprepared for controlling their emotions (ASO Staff Writers, 2021). These college students lacked competence in self-awareness and self-management skills and also struggled with accepting others' perspectives, empathy, and relationship skills (ASO Staff Writers, 2021). In addition to the skills mentioned above, the college students showed a lack of competence in social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Rhodes claimed that standards-based testing and teachers' jobs connected to student test scores were prime reasons social and emotional skills in schools stopped being addressed or developed (ASO Staff Writers, 2021). In the same interview, McNall, CEO of Respectful Ways, added that social and emotional learning is not done in more schools because of fear, time, stress, and money (ASO Staff Writers, 2021).

Since 2001, when standardized testing became the priority, the balance between social and emotional learning and academic learning has shifted (ASO Staff Writers, 2021).

In December 2007, CASEL briefs described what students needed to succeed in and out of school. The briefs stated that students needed to be engaged, interested, and excited when in school. Students needed to know how to focus their attention, persevere through setbacks and frustrations, work effectively with others, communicate, and solve problems (CASEL, 2007). These skills are part of the competencies developed through a strong program focused on social and emotional learning. According to CASEL (2007), evidence suggested that social and emotional learning and academic learning are not separate but are intimately connected.

Theoretical Framework

This study falls under the constructivist view. How a person interprets events and reacts to them is connected to their social and emotional development. That interpretation is constructed from personal experiences from similar life experiences (Gray, 2004). Gray (2004) wrote that constructivism suggests that truth and meaning exist by how the subject interprets the world through their interactions in that world. Each individual constructs their own meanings, which may differ from others who experience the same interaction (Gray, 2004). Mcleod (2019) shared that the central idea of constructivism is that new learning is built on the base of prior knowledge. Prior knowledge impacts how a person builds new knowledge or adjusts the prior knowledge from the new situation (Mcleod, 2019). Learning is an active and social activity, meaning we do it together through interacting with one another (Dewey, 1938; Mcleod, 2019). This philosophy connects well with the study's focus on teacher perspectives, defined as a particular way

of considering something (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, n.d.). Creswell and Creswell (2018) went a step further with constructivism and stated that researchers strive to rely on the views of the participants of the subject being studied. The theoretical perspective often linked with constructivism is interpretivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gray, 2004).

This study used an interpretivism theoretical framework. Interpretivism assumes that people create meanings as they interact with the world around them (Butin, 2010; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Lapan et al., 2012). These meanings are not permanent; they evolve with experience (Gray, 2004). Weber is generally considered the founder of the interpretivism movement, which focused on the manner of human social actions (Edwards, 2019). Gadamer further expanded the ideas of interpretivism (Edwards, 2019). One of the tenets Gadamer used to describe interpretivism is that the goal is not to understand the world objectively but to understand it differently (Edwards, 2019). Interpretivism contends that truth and knowledge are personal because they are based on lived happenings and their perceptions of those experiences (Ryan, 2018). For this study, I defined the world where the interactions occurred as the school where the participants worked and the classrooms where they taught. This framework supported my study regarding teacher perspectives about the connection between social and emotional learning and student success.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study sought to explore teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social and emotional needs as it relates to student success. Some programs have specific lessons that teach character traits;

relationship skills; and recognizing, understanding, and dealing with feelings. Caring School Community, the PATHS Program, and Sanford Harmony are examples of such programs. Other programs work through a routine that can be incorporated throughout the day and help develop the classroom culture.

Morning Meeting and Leader in Me are two of many programs or methods that educators may use to incorporate social and emotional learning into the routines of the classroom setting. Morning Meeting allows teachers to address social and emotional learning daily in their classroom, with four sequential components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message (Kriete & Davis, 2017). These four components create opportunities for students to learn and practice social and emotional skills needed to succeed in school, at home, and in the community (Kriete & Davis, 2017).

Some schools use the Leader in Me program to incorporate the five essential competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Covey et al. (2014) discussed how schools had three evolving challenges based on deficits. The three evolving challenges are academics, culture, and life skills. Covey et al. identified that life skills went by several names: workforce skills, career skills, college-readiness skills, or social and emotional learning skills. These authors also maintained that many students leave school lacking those skills, regardless of which name they use (Covey et al., 2014). Gardner (2008) asserted that schools prepared students for the world of the past instead of the possible world of the future. Likewise, Tough (2013) insisted that schools focus on the wrong skills and abilities because they focus on academic knowledge and test scores rather than character skills like perseverance and self-control. Wagner and Dintersmith (2016) noted that

innovation is moving forward rapidly, thus banishing factory-style, meticulous routine jobs. The authors also noted that skills needed for 21st century careers in innovation are weakened by schools still preparing students for that world of the past (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2016). Wagner and Dintersmith believed that schools need reimaging to give every child a chance to have a good life.

Wagner and Dintersmith (2016) asked the question, "What is the purpose of education?" (p. 35). The desirable answer the authors provided regarding the purpose of education was to teach cognitive and social skills; prepare children to be trustworthy, engaged members of society; build character; guide students in discovering themselves; and prepare them for fruitful careers (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2016). In reality, the authors' perception of the answer to the question seems to be to increase test scores, have adequate graduation rates, get students into desirable colleges to make parents happy, and compare children by their placement on a senseless bell curve (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2016).

Research Questions

This study focused on teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social and emotional needs and relates to student success. The study sought to answer one central question, "How do teachers perceive the connection between incorporating social and emotional learning strategies and student success?"

Three associated subquestions were used to support the central question.

1. How can the integration of social and emotional learning be described?
2. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into

their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on the academic achievement of their students?

3. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on developing the essential social competencies in their students?

Definition of Terms

This section defines social and emotional learning and the five competencies outlined by CASEL (2020). These terms are frequently discussed as they relate to varying aspects throughout this study.

Social and Emotional Learning

The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities; manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and maintain supportive relationships; and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2020).

S*elf-Awareness*

The ability to understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts (Borowski, 2019**;** CASEL, 2020). It is also recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses while being grounded with confidence and optimism (Borowski, 2019).

Self-Management

CASEL (2020) defined self-management as effectively managing one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations and setting and achieving goals and

aspirations. Borowski (2019) added that managing stress, impulses, and self-motivation is also a part of self-management.

Social Awareness

Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts; understanding behavioral norms; and recognizing resources and supports available (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020).

Relationship Skills

Establishing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships and effectively navigating settings with diverse individuals and groups. Skills include clear communication, active listening, cooperation, resistance to negative social pressure, conflict negotiation, and pursuing and extending help to others (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020).

Responsible Decision-Making

Making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations while considering safety, societal norms, possible consequences, and the well-being of all parties (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020).

Assumptions

Assumptions are things that researchers and peers accept as being true or at least believable (PhDStudent, 2013). As the researcher, I chose to assume and believe the following for this study. I believe teachers care about their students and want them to succeed socially and academically; however, with the demands of standardized testing, teachers feel pressured only to teach the academic piece and do not feel like they can take the time to teach social and emotional learning. Due to current accountability

expectations, most teachers may consider students successful if they pass the end-of-grade (EOG) state test. Teachers also know that a piece of their evaluation is based on their students' proficiency on the EOG. Society, federal and state education departments, local school boards, and district leaders measure student success by EOG test scores because test scores are tangible. A test can easily measure reading, math, and science content; however, a standardized test does not easily measure social and emotional skills. Therefore, teachers are more likely to teach for test success rather than lifetime success.

My assumptions could cause my view to be biased. I had to ensure I did not lead the teachers who agreed to participate in saying what I wanted to hear during the interviews. I also had to observe with an open mind and not only see what I hoped to see.

Limitations

Limitations are weak points that the researcher cannot control (PhDStudent, 2013, 2016; Simon, 2011; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Teacher recruitment for the study was done through email. I sent a recruitment email to the school's principal and asked if they would forward it to the staff. The email explained the purpose of the study and the requirements to participate. Since participation was voluntary, the teachers I recruited could accept or decline. I aimed to attain three to five teachers from various grade levels in kindergarten through fifth grade. I reached out to five teachers who had been recommended by colleagues, and three accepted to participate. The participants could choose to withdraw before the research was done, but they all remained in the study. When I was in the building, I usually worked with the teachers, so how the students received me in the classroom for observations was not within my control. The students in the lower grades were fascinated by the Swivl device and how it followed their teachers

when they moved. It was a distraction for a very brief moment. I was not a distraction to the learning environment and was able to remain in the room taking field notes.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries set and controlled by the researcher to keep the research manageable and possible to complete (PhDStudent, 2013, 2016; Simon, 2011; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). I recruited teachers from a school I have worked with for multiple years as academic support for this study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) referred to this decision as working in my own backyard. I recruited participants from this school because I have established a good rapport with those teachers. Due to the size of the school, I only chose three to five teachers, preferably from different grade levels; however, having a grade level or two with more than one teacher was accepted. This study was a short-term study. Gray (2004) described these studies as cross-sectional, where the data are gathered at one point due to time limitations and resources.

Scope

This research spanned 2 weeks in the spring of 2023, during which the participants, three elementary classroom teachers, were observed and interviewed by me. The interviews occurred face-to-face after school. Next were two 30-minute observations in the teachers' classrooms. My research occurred at a suburban school in southwestern North Carolina. The school contained prekindergarten through fifth grades and qualified as a Title I school. The student body had a diverse makeup based on race, ethnicity, and special needs.

Significance

This study aimed to understand teacher perceptions of how incorporating social

and emotional learning addressed students' social-emotional needs and related to student success. The findings of this study may lead to conversations within various educational communities, ranging from the school, the district, the state, and society. That discussion could help enhance teacher understanding of social and emotional learning, which was the basis for their perceptions. That discussion could also shed light on what determines the success of a student. Perhaps the findings of this study will bring about a change in how society holds schools accountable for student success.

Summary

This study focused on the incorporation of social and emotional learning in the classroom's daily routine and its relationship with student success through classroom teacher perceptions. Since the 1960s, standardized tests have been a source for measuring the success of America's public schools (Gilman, 2020; National Education Association, 2020; ProCon.org, 2020); however, standardized tests only measure the content knowledge of students. The scores are also supposed to represent the effectiveness of the teachers in planning and imparting rigorous lessons based on state standards for students to master the grade-level content. School systems use a one-size-fits-all test to make high-stakes decisions without considering the effects on the teachers and students (Gilman, 2020; National Education Association, 2020; ProCon.org, 2020). Studies have shown that social and emotional learning can directly impact student success (CASEL, 2007; Durlak et al., 2011).

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on and the background of social and emotional learning: what it is, why it is important, and the benefits of its incorporation. It discusses the research conducted to connect students' social and emotional needs with

academic success. Research related to the theoretical philosophies behind educating the whole child and thus preparing them for academic and lifetime success is also explored. That discussion ends with connections between how the brain functions, social and emotional learning and development, and academic learning.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology used for this study in detail. This study was a qualitative study with a case study design. The data came from observations and interviews completed in the participants' natural settings (McMillan, 2016).

Chapter 4 explains in detail the analysis of the data collected from the observations and interviews of the participants. The explanation includes how the data were sorted and coded. It ends with a summary of the findings.

Chapter 5 includes recommendations for further studies and ideas for replications of this study on a larger scale. The chapter also includes a summary of my conclusions and the implications of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

Social and emotional learning is not new. Its roots go back to ancient Greece, as shown in Plato's *The Republic* (Edutopia, 2001, as cited by Beaty, 2018). Plato proposed that a sound education system should include a holistic curriculum (Edutopia, 2011). Additionally, Plato believed there should be a balance of training in physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral judgment paired with upbringing to produce citizens of good character (Edutopia, 2011). Dewey (1902) also touched on social and emotional learning over 100 years ago and suggested that for genuine learning to happen, it must be active (Tienken, 2021). For a student to genuinely learn, there needs to be a connection between social and emotional learning and the school curriculum (Dewey, 1902; Tienken, 2021).

Social and emotional learning encompasses intrapersonal competencies, interpersonal competencies, and cognitive skills developed from a blend of four theories. The first theory is the Behaviorist Learning Theory, based mainly on the work of B. F. Skinner and John B. Watson. This theory emphasizes that external environmental factors influence learning and stress repetition and reinforcement to develop habits (McLeod, 2003; Padgett, 2019; Saunders & Wong, 2020). The second theory is the Cognitive Learning Theory based on the work of Jean Piaget. The Cognitive Learning Theory is about how the mind processes information to produce learning (McLeod, 2003; Padgett, 2019; Saunders & Wong, 2020). Our brains process, categorize, and store knowledge, referred to as schema. The brain draws upon the schema to create connections as one encounters new information (Saunders & Wong, 2020). The third theory is the

Constructivist Theory based on the work of Lev Vygotsky. Constructivists believe learning occurs when the learner uses prior knowledge to interpret experiences and interact with the world around them (McLeod, 2003; Padgett, 2019; Saunders & Wong, 2020). Learning is a collaborative process with individuals and groups interacting (Padgett, 2019; Saunders & Wong, 2020). The final theory is the Humanist Theory based on Maslow's work, which focuses on an individual's cognitive, social, and emotional needs (Padgett, 2019).

An ageless goal of education has been to produce students who are responsible, productive, compassionate, dependable, and engaged citizens in society (Beaty, 2018; Edutopia, 2011). This goal parallels Plato's and Dewey's beliefs in a sound education with genuine learning. With that goal in mind, the question became, how do we achieve that goal? This question gave rise to the beginning of the research to find an answer. In 1994, the Fetzer Institute gathered educators, researchers, and child advocates together to pursue the development of ideas to reach that goal of education (Beaty, 2018). Through this meeting of the minds, the term "social and emotional learning" evolved and made its way into the educational lexicon (Beaty, 2018; Edutopia, 2011). The same year, the organization that leads in encouraging social and emotional learning, CASEL, began (Beaty, 2018; Edutopia, 2011).

CASEL still leads the charge for integrating social and emotional learning for all children in school, from preschool through high school (Beaty, 2018). The organization's mission is to institute social and emotional learning as a fundamental piece of education (Beaty, 2018; Edutopia, 2011). In 1997, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and CASEL joined forces and presented a "framework" that outlined the

needs of children (Beaty, 2018). This collaboration led to an in-depth list of strategies for educators to address the "missing piece" (CASEL, 2017, as cited by Beaty, 2018) in education. These strategies are found in Elias et al.'s (1997) book *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Beaty, 2018). In their book, Elias et al. (1997) discussed the need for social and emotional learning through an integrated and coordinated framework to provide synergy.

Emotions and relationships are tied to how we learn and what we learn (Elias et al., 1997). A deficiency of social and emotional competencies causes students to become less and less connected to school as they move from elementary to high school (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011). Blum and Libbey (2004) and Durlak et al. (2011) pointed out that deficiency adversely affects academic performance, behavior, and health. Society, federal and state departments of education, local school boards, and district leaders have expectations that graduates are competent with core academic subjects and able to work collaboratively with others from a variety of diverse backgrounds in socially and emotionally adept methods (Durlak et al., 2011). Graduates should also maintain healthy behaviors and be responsible and respectful. Put another way, schools play an essential role in nurturing healthy children by cultivating their cognitive and social and emotional development (Durlak et al., 2011).

Durlak et al. (2011) completed a meta-analysis on the impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning interventions. The study included 213 school-based programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students. The findings showed that the students who participated in social and emotional learning improved in multiple areas (Durlak et al., 2011). The students showed notable

improvements in skills associated with social and emotional learning, attitude, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). The results revealed an 11-percentile-point gain (Durlak et al., 2011). This study supported the notion that social and emotional learning positively impacts the healthy development of children (Durlak et al., 2011).

Taylor et al. (2017) conducted a similar meta-analysis. The focus of this study was on the follow-up effects of social and emotional learning interventions. Eighty-two school-based interventions involved 97,406 kindergarten through high school students. This study showed multiple critical findings, including positive benefits extended for a year or more for the students involved in the intervention programs (Taylor et al., 2017). Another finding was that the impact of the intervention could be both positive and preventative. A critical finding was that the intervention worked across geographically diverse groups, poor or wealthy backgrounds, and the ages of students (Taylor et al., 2017).

Decades of research have revealed that the five significant domains of human development are social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and academic (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Each of these five domains is interwoven in the brain and in behavior. As a result, all are crucial for learning. A strength in one area could promote development in another; however, a weakness in one area could hinder development in another (Jones & Kahn, 2017). The significance of social and emotional learning is often left out of academic discussions by society and educators (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Jones and Kahn (2017) described how there seems to be an ongoing challenge to find a common definition for social and emotional learning. Some see it as a set of tools

used for learning. Some see it as being resilient during stressful situations (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Others see it as character-building. Finally, some see it as neurocognitive skills. Jones and Kahn pointed out these differences to show that social and emotional learning is complex and fundamental to academics.

Social and emotional learning is viewed as a methodology for students and adults of all ages (National University, 2020). It is a behavioral framework that includes skills that affect academic and life success (ASO Staff Writers, 2021). Social and emotional learning is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (Borowski, 2019; CASEL, 2020). These skills are the foundation for a successful life (CASEL, 2007). For people to manage their emotions, they first must recognize their emotions, which is self-awareness. Upon recognition of one's emotions, social and emotional learning helps a person collect themselves when upset or angry, appropriately resolve a conflict, and make safe choices, which is self-management and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2007).

Borowski (2019) discussed the five competencies within the CASEL framework: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are how the framework aligns the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive skills with the definition of social and emotional learning.

The intrapersonal, or within oneself, competencies are self-awareness and self-management. Self-awareness includes the recognition of one's emotions, the influence on

behavior those emotions cause, accepting oneself as distinctive and idiosyncratic, and the ability to gauge one's strengths and weaknesses, confidence level, and mindset (Borowski, 2019; Menon, 2019). Vega (2017) wrote three questions to ask oneself to help with self-awareness:

- What are my thoughts and feelings?
- What causes those thoughts and feelings?
- How can I express my thoughts and feelings respectfully? (1. Self-Awareness section)

Self-management includes regulation of self, managing stress healthily and effectively, controlling impulsivity, personal and academic goal setting, working to achieve the goals, motivational level, and organization (Borowski, 2019; Menon, 2019). For self-management, Vega (2017) gave two questions to consider:

- What different responses can I have to an event?
- How can I respond to an event as constructively as possible? (2. Self-Management section)

Interpersonal, or between people, competencies are social awareness and relationship skills. Social awareness includes accepting the diverse and cultural perspectives of others, the ability to empathize, understand behavioral norms, and recognize where resources and support are found (Borowski, 2019; Menon, 2019). Vega (2017) offered two questions to think about when working on social awareness:

- How can I better understand other people's thoughts and feelings?
- How can I better understand why people feel and think the way they do? (3. Social Awareness section)

Relationship skills include straightforward communication, being an active listener, having meaningful interactions in social settings, being an active and cooperative team member, defying negative social pressure, working through conflict, pursuing and extending help, and initiating and building long-term relationships (Borowski, 2019; Menon, 2019). Vega (2017) shared three questions to assist with relationship skills:

- How can I adjust my actions so that my interactions with different people turn out well?
- How can I communicate my expectations to other people?
- How can I communicate with other people to understand and manage their expectations of me? (4. Relationship Skills section)

The cognitive, or intellectual activity, competency is responsible decision-making. Responsible decision-making includes recognizing problems, assessing the possible consequences of actions, solving problems, knowing the why behind different rules, and knowing the full scope of responsibilities (Borowski, 2019; Menon, 2019). As described, each of the five competencies is directly reflected in the definition of social and emotional learning, as stated previously (Borowski, 2019; Menon, 2019). For consideration regarding responsible decision-making, Vega (2017) suggested three questions:

- What consequences will my actions have on myself and others?
- How do my choices align with my values?
- How can I solve problems creatively? (5. Responsible Decision-Making section)

Payton et al. (2008) compared their findings with other researchers' findings to

suggest that social and emotional programs rank among the most eminent interventions offered for children of school age. Konishi and Wong (2018) discussed social and emotional learning interventions as a method to shield children from unstable outcomes by aiding their affective, behavioral, and cognitive capacities. Those competencies fall within the realm of the five competencies outlined by CASEL (Konishi & Wong, 2018). When students fairly evaluate themselves and their abilities (self-awareness), control their emotions and behavioral responses (self-management), respond appropriately to social cues (social awareness), productively settle conflicts with others (relationship skills), and make positive decisions for challenges (responsible decision making), they are on a path for success in life (Payton et al., 2008).

Why is Social and Emotional Learning Important?

Jeff Wagenheim stated in *Harvard Ed Magazine*, "SED [social and emotional development] is not a detour from a pursuit of academics, it's an on-ramp" (Johnson & Wiener, 2017, p. 13). Schools in the 21st century are tasked with preparing students for life success. School is still viewed as a place where people go to be prepared for employment rather than where the whole person is prepared to realize their full potential as a human being (Menon, 2019). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2007, as cited by Payton et al., 2008; Goldberg et al., 2018) stated that to prepare students for lifetime success, students must have a balanced education, including mastery of academic skills and preparation to become responsible adults. The world is constantly changing and becoming more and more diversified (National University, 2020). Student exposure to a diversified population of people is in school, which is many times their first exposure. Social and emotional skills are necessary to navigate the waters

of an ever-diversifying world (National University, 2020). Social and emotional learning, when done effectively, is the foundation upon which the skills everyone needs to be a happy, constructive, and well-balanced adult are built (Duffell et al., 2016).

Educational policy is still tied to the age of manufacturing when schools were to turn out students who could memorize and recite information, pass cognitive tests, and get a job working on the production line of a factory (Duffell et al., 2016); however, the global society in which we live has moved into the information age, where the skills needed are different (Duffell et al., 2016). Success in college and careers is no longer just about academic comprehension (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). It is also about social and emotional skills, such as not giving up, relationship skills, and self-management (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Employers are looking for employees who can relate to clients and work in a multi-disciplined, collaborative, and unified environmental design (Duffell et al., 2016). Employees may work with others virtually and be able to connect with that person who is not in the same room (Duffell et al., 2016). Social and emotional skills are critical pieces to success in the 21st century (Duffell et al., 2016).

Honan of the Harvard Graduate School of Education asked a group of principals at a conference how they knew when their school was successful (Hoerr, 2017). After a time of sharing their ideas, Honan shared that our schools should focus on the end result, students who become happy, productive, respectful, and honest citizens (Hoerr, 2017). Hoerr (2017) pointed out that educators need to discuss and distinguish between what it takes to be successful in school and what it takes to be successful in the world beyond school. Friedman and Mandelbaum (2012) pointed out that new technologies have removed boundaries that used to keep people disconnected. These connections bring

together people and opportunities from around the world. Friedman and Mandelbaum referred to this result as a flattened world. The implications are that although traditional skills taught in school are essential, those skills are insufficient (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012). Research by the Carnegie Institute of Technology found that 85% of a person's financial success is credited to one's personality and ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead (Jensen, 2012). Smith et al. (2016) pointed out that at one time, being successful in school translated into success in life. Now, social and emotional skills are equal to intelligence in determining life success (Hoerr, 2017; Smith et al., 2016).

CASEL (2007) stated that research in multiple fields found that how and what we learn is impacted by our emotions and relationships. Further research suggested that because emotional and academic learning is closely connected, developing a student's social and emotional skills impacts a vast range of results (CASEL, 2007; Goldberg et al., 2018; Johnson & Wiener, 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Johnson and Wiener (2017) referenced the results of several studies to support the need for social and emotional learning. A 2011 meta-analysis highlighted an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement in the treatment groups as to those in the control group (Durlak et al., 2011; Johnson & Wiener, 2017). A 2012 study found that learning engagement increased while interfering behaviors decreased (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). A 2015 cost-benefits study showed that social and emotional learning results in an $11 return in long-term benefits, such as but not limited to earnings, health, and reduced crime (Johnson & Wiener, 2017).

The neuroscience field has branched into a new area of inquiry called educational neuroscience to focus on students' social and emotional development (Sousa, 2021). Fastenrath et al. (2014) noted that memory is enhanced by emotions. For this reason,

people are more likely to remember the best and worst events they experience in their lives (Sousa, 2021). Further advances in neuroscience have found that emotion and learning are interdependent (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Immordino-Yang, a neuroscientist at the University of California, claimed, “It is neurobiologically impossible to build memories, engage complex thoughts, or make meaningful decisions without emotion” (Johnson & Wiener, 2017, p. 5). As our brains develop, the area responsible for social behavior begins in early childhood and matures much faster than other systems (Sousa, 2021). The next area to mature is the emotional system, which happens in the preteen years, around 10 to 12. The area of our brains responsible for the cognitive system is the last to mature and happens around 22 to 24 years of age. This evidence strongly suggests that developing social skills should start with preschool students (Sousa, 2021).

Further neuroscience research found that social and emotional maturation notably impacts cognitive development due to an intricate connection between the two systems (Sousa, 2021). The development of the two systems is interdependent (Jones & Kahn, 2017). The gateway to cognition and learning is opened by emotions (Tomlinson & Sousa, 2020). If the curriculum and instruction invoke an emotional response, such as relevance, pleasure, or amazement, the gateway to cognition will be open to productive and sound learning (Tomlinson & Sousa, 2020).

Researchers have found that teachers are a critical in-school piece in students’ academic growth (Kane & Staiger, 2012). Teachers can impact students’ social and emotional development using various methods (Glennie et al., 2017). One study questioned teacher influence on their students’ learning styles, social awareness,

relationship skills, and self-management. The findings showed that kindergarten teachers had more effect on behavioral skills than academic skills (Jennings & DiPrete, 2010). Upper-grade teachers shared that due to testing policies and scheduling, they do not feel they can take time away from academics to address social and emotional learning (Glennie et al., 2017).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015) published a report from a study on the types of social and emotional skills needed by children to drive their future outcomes. This longitudinal study's findings showed that cognitive skills and social and emotional skills are essential to the improvement of economic and social outcomes (OECD, 2015). Since social and emotional skills progressively develop more between early childhood and adolescence, investing early in those skills is very important. Without intervention, small social and emotional gaps that start early in childhood could turn into consequential long-term gaps (OECD, 2015). Those gaps could be a contributing factor to heightening economic and social imbalances. In contrast, interventions and ongoing investment in social and emotional skills may cause the opposite effect on disadvantaged populations (OECD, 2015).

Greenberg and Weissberg (2018) shared that all stakeholders (educators, parents, and policy makers) believed that children need a broad education to adequately prepare them to be actively engaged citizens who contribute positively to their families and community. The achievement of the education desired by the stakeholders requires the development of children's social and emotional competencies along with their academics (Greenberg & Weissberg, 2018). CASEL's framework connects those requirements through the five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Greenberg & Weissberg, 2018). The five competencies are a requirement for academic success, school acclimation, and adult employment acculturation (Greenberg & Weissberg, 2018).

In their meta-analysis, Goldberg et al. (2018) wrote that schools are an ideal setting for developing social and emotional skills in children due to the amount of time they spend at school. The school allows a place where socialization is placed into a context for learning a range of vital skills for life and academic success (Goldberg et al., 2018). Research has suggested that successful intervention outcomes happen when daily integration of the skills occurs in all settings within the school (Goldberg et al., 2018). Jones and Bouffard (2012) advocated that for integrations to occur daily, a move toward whole-school enactment of social and emotional learning should be considered. This enactment of whole-school social and emotional learning would provide consistent repetition in multiple settings and contexts, allowing for a simultaneous application of skills (Goldberg et al., 2018).

Mahoney et al. (2018) examined four meta-analyses on the use of social and emotional learning programs. All four studies concluded with two common findings. The first finding showed that students who participated in a social and emotional learning program had tremendous growth in their social and emotional skills, which resulted in positive results in attitudes, social behavior, and academic performance (Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008). The improvements decreased behavioral problems and emotional anguish. The second finding conveyed increased academic achievement, leading to a gain of 11 percentile points (Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008). These findings have been replicated in studies done in the United States and in Europe,

which included several hundred thousand students ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade. With the studies continuing to show similar findings, the conclusions offer powerful evidence of the benefits social and emotional learning have on children (Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008). With the current findings in context, social and emotional programs are among the most lucrative interventions offered to children (Payton et al., 2008).

There have been studies on the link between social and emotional learning and career success (Jones et al., 2017). Kriete and Davis (2017) discussed how specific competencies are needed in the 21st century. The level of student engagement and effort to meet college and career readiness standards requires well-developed social and emotional skills (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). In school as children, teachers work to teach them how to communicate ideas and information. In jobs as adults, employers want employees who can communicate ideas and information clearly. The abilities to collaborate and exhibit versatile leading-edge thinking are also skills employers seek in employees (Kriete & Davis, 2017). In today's global society, higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information from various sources, are skills needed for success. Many studies have acknowledged that children in this day and age need to develop cognitive and proficient social and emotional skills (Kriete & Davis, 2017).

Berman (2018) served as superintendent of four school districts and a member of the Council of Distinguished Educators of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. In each school district he led, social and emotional learning was implemented. This implementation was central to improving

school climate, student academic achievement, student connection to the school, and teacher morale (Berman, 2018). Through this process, Berman cited nine vital lessons that played a part in effective social and emotional learning. Lesson 1 indicated that the social and emotional curriculum was equally as important as the academic curriculum. Instructing and learning are intrinsically social and emotional (Berman, 2018). Lesson 2 recognized that 30-minute lessons each week were inefficient. CASEL's five competencies are an excellent place to start; however, social and emotional learning needs to be incorporated into daily lessons and modeled by adults (Berman, 2018). Lesson 3 stated that it was essential to experience belonging to a community. The realization was that as a group, students are working for the good of the collective. Lesson 4 showed that classrooms that teach social and emotional skills were inclusive and allowed students to honor their cultural identities in a safe environment (Berman, 2018). Lesson 5 demonstrated that integrating social and emotional learning into academic learning helped connect the two. Lesson 6 suggested real opportunities for students to practice their social skills and consideration through service to others helped strengthen their social and emotional skills. Lessons 7 and 8 were professional learning and administrative support was crucial. The final lesson found that progress was step-by-step and gradual (Berman, 2018). Berman stated that it is the time that social and emotional learning can have the most notable impact on the future of our nation.

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

CASEL created the Collaborating Districts Initiative to research the effects of integrating social and emotional learning into eight large urban school districts' core activities (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Each district accepted yearly grants of $250,000

for 6 years (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). The grants supported a district-wide implementation of systematic social and emotional learning into their core activities. With each year of implementation, the districts reflected the benefits of implementing social and emotional learning. Some benefits listed were increased grade point averages, improved attendance rates, and decreased suspensions. The American Research Institute used staff surveys, teacher ratings of young students' social and emotional competencies, and older students' self-reporting to evaluate how social and emotional learning implementation was going. School climate consistently improved each year in three of the districts. Six of the districts measured the social and emotional competencies of third graders, and four of those districts showed improvements (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Of the eight districts studied, four showed improved grade point averages, and six had improvements in discipline (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

The benefits of social and emotional learning have become more recognized by school districts as valuable and crucial for every student (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Yoder, 2014). Kendziora and Yoder (2016) cited studies by Durlak et al. (2011), Sklad et al. (2012), and Zins and Elias (2006), which found that social and emotional programs built up social and emotional competencies and improved classroom behavior. Student connections and viewpoints about school were positively augmented. The school environment became safer due to a reduced rate of aggressive behaviors, leading to a decline in behavioral referrals for discipline. The fourth benefit was an improvement academically (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014; Zins & Elias, 2006). One study showed that students who participated in a social and emotional program in school showed an 11-percentile-point increase academically (Dusenbury & Weissberg,

2017; National University, 2020).

Bridgeland et al. (2013) conducted a national teacher survey about social and emotional learning and its effects on children. The survey had three findings. The first finding was that social and emotional learning should be for all students. After supplying teachers with the definition of social and emotional learning, 93% of the teachers surveyed believed it was fairly to very important for these skills to be a part of the in-school experience (Bridgeland et al., 2013). With the move to more rigorous standards requiring students to be more engaged through discussions, explanations, and collaboration, students need to learn communication, regulation skills, and how to work with others (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Social and emotional learning aids with all those requirements. Adding to the first finding, 94% of the teachers surveyed believed that social and emotional learning would improve relationships between teachers and students, improve relationships among students, reduce bullying, and improve academic performance (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Teachers from high-poverty schools staunchly believed in the social and emotional learning benefits discussed (Bridgeland et al., 2013).

The second finding of the survey was that teachers believed that social and emotional learning benefits students from achievement in school, work, and life (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Social and emotional skills are not predetermined (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Skills evolve and surface as we encounter experiences throughout early childhood through the teen years (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Teachers across the nation expressed that social and emotional learning was the key to solving readiness issues in education and the workforce (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Studies showed that when children were engaged in high-quality programs, the benefits were school accomplishments, social

development, reduced crime, and economic improvement in the community (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Schools, families, communities, employers, and the economy benefit from preparing children for the real world with social and emotional learning (Bridgeland et al., 2013).

The third finding from the survey was a critical catalyst for social and emotional learning in schools (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Teachers identified a need for a program that would be used school-wide. Embedding social and emotional learning language into state standards was an agreed-upon catalyst for 85% of the teachers surveyed (Bridgeland et al., 2013). For social and emotional learning to be taught effectively, teachers need improved and increased professional development (Jones & Kahn, 2017). The final piece was to get parents/guardians and families involved (Bridgeland et al., 2013).

A considerable amount of documentation revealed that students learn more when they have the skills and competencies to control their emotions (Jones & Kahn, 2017; McVay, 2014). When their emotions are under control, students can concentrate, build relationships with other students and adults, persevere when things are complicated, and solve problems (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Students with skills and competencies result in constructive and more productive classrooms. Social and emotional development in school has positively impacted children's academic achievement and behavior (Jones & Kahn, 2017). The labor market has increased its demand for people with social and emotional skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

According to Durlak et al. (2011) and Jones and Kahn (2017), social and emotional development is a financially good investment. When enacted in schools along with cognitive development, social and emotional development yields an $11 return for

every $1 invested (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). This use of public funds may bring long-term social and economic benefits to the community (Jones et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Investing in social and emotional learning for all children may raise the number of influential, stable adults and generate future economic rewards (Jones et al., 2017).

Borowski (2019) listed students' social and emotional learning benefits in three categories: short-term, intermediate, and long-term. One short-term benefit is an improved attitude (Borowski, 2019). Students may see themselves and others more positively with social and emotional learning. They may also view their assigned tasks differently (Borowski, 2019). The second short-term benefit is how students view the climate of their classroom and the school. The progression to the intermediate benefits builds on the short-term benefits. Students improve their social behaviors with an improved attitude about themselves, leading to better relationships (Borowski, 2019; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Behavioral problems may become less in number as students learn how to handle their emotions, leading to less emotional anguish (Borowski, 2019). A better attitude about self and the ability to handle one's emotions guides choices, such as avoiding drugs and alcohol or risky behavior. Many of these benefits contribute to success in school (Borowski, 2019; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Finally, looking through a long-term lens, the benefits continue to build upon the intermediate ones. Students who experience academic success are more likely to graduate from high school, leading to increased graduation rates (Borowski, 2019). Social and emotional competencies contribute to the skills needed in college and careers. Self-awareness and self-management play a part in reducing questionable behavior options that could lead to

criminal activity (Borowski, 2019). Social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making contribute to engaging one in being an active citizen within the community (Borowski, 2019).

Jones et al. (2017) discussed long-term benefits in two categories, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal skills include social skills, communication, and teamwork. Those skills were further broken down into relationship skills, conflict management, persuasiveness, working with others, following the rules, being agreeable, and being influential (Jones et al., 2017). Intrapersonal skills include being hardworking and dependable, having a positive self-concept, being responsible, having self-control, engaging in higher-order thinking skills, making decisions, demonstrating sincerity and honesty, having a positive attitude, and being self-motivated. Within those skills are abilities such as grit, persistence, self-awareness, accountability, executive function, problem-solving, optimism, and intrinsic motivation (Jones et al., 2017). These skills fall within the CASEL (2020) framework for social and emotional learning.

Connections to Equity

Kochhar-Bryant and Heishman (2010) characterized vulnerable children as those living in long-standing poverty, family violence, and turmoil within their community whose number one daily goal is survival. These vulnerable children have barriers that prevent their development of social and emotional competencies (Simmons et al., 2018). For all children to benefit, social and emotional learning must be based on equity. This direction will pinpoint and tear down the barriers that limit many children's access and benefits to social and emotional learning (Simmons et al., 2018). This question was asked, is it possible to attain success academically and personally without social and

emotional skills? All the evidence implies that the answer is no (Elias et al., 1997). When students are at a high failure risk and are provided with the basic skills of social and emotional learning and become involved in learning, new prospects open, and new life courses become available. Social and emotional skills may help youth resist the temptations of questionable behaviors, such as drugs, teen pregnancy, gangs, and skipping and dropping out of school (Elias et al., 1997).

According to Duchesneau (2020), bias matters because interactions between teachers and students are affected by the adult's ideology, expectations, and moves, which affect the student's social and emotional development. The teacher's biases are how they determine what is acceptable or punishable, what is play or a threat. When teachers do not wholly understand or know the child, their bias can contribute to the decisions regarding how they react to a situation (Duchesneau, 2020). A teacher may assume that a child who did not complete their homework is either lazy or irresponsible when the reality may be that they go home and take care of a younger sibling. The assumption comes from the teacher's expectations; however, if the teacher develops a relationship and an understanding of the child's life, they will understand and react differently to the demonstrated behavior.

Simmons et al. (2018) listed three levels of barriers (systemic, institutional, and individual) characterizing five contributing barriers to inequitable access to social and emotional learning for all children within those levels. Those five barriers are poverty, exclusionary discipline practices and policies, lack of trauma-informed practices, implicit bias in school staff, and teacher stress and burnout (Simmons et al., 2018).

Poverty

Payne (2013) defined poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (p. 7). Resources are not limited to monetary means. Payne identified the following as resources that may be missing or limited: financial, emotional, mental/cognitive, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, knowledge of hidden rules, and language/formal register. When needed, friends, family, and others close by make up a child's helpful support system and work to promote success (Payne, 2013). Hidden rules are inferred signals and habits of a group. These systems exist between and among racial, ethnic, and economic groups. Access to the hidden rules comes from either living in specific environments or being taught by someone from that environment. In a study on language, the researchers found that a 3-year-old in a household with parents in the professional world had more vocabulary than an adult living in a welfare household (Payne, 2013). Hart and Risley (1999, as cited by Payne, 2013) researched children, ages 1 to 4, living in various economic groups on language development. Their study showed children who lived in a welfare setting were exposed to 13 million words. Children living in working-class homes were exposed to 26 million words. Children living in a professional home were exposed to 45 million words over that period of time. Those same children have been exposed to at least 30 million more words than a 3-year-old living in a welfare home (Hart & Risley, 1999, as cited by Payne, 2013).

Some other resources that may be limited or nonexistent to impoverished children are medical care access, health insurance, and safe and stable home lives (Payne, 2013; Simmons et al., 2018). Poverty affects the brain area connected to stress regulation and

emotion processing in young children. The result is a heightened chance of difficulties with inattentiveness, impulsivity, defiance, and peer relationships (Simmons et al., 2018).

Exclusionary Discipline Practices and Policies

In schools, consequences for inappropriate or harmful behavior are often suspension or expulsion (Simmons et al., 2018). An in-school suspension is a form of isolation where the student is separated from their classmates and not allowed to participate in class or other school functions. Out-of-school suspension is another form of isolation completed at home. An expulsion is a third type of isolation for the student where they do not return to school for the remainder of the year. Simmons et al. (2018) pointed out that these types of consequences decrease opportunities for students to gain life experiences and weaken their standard of living. Students who are not in school or class miss vital opportunities for social and emotional learning, development, and experiences (Simmons et al., 2018).

In addition to missing social and emotional learning, students also miss academic learning, which causes more gaps and deficits. In some cases, the gaps in social and emotional learning and development cause challenges for students (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). When students get frustrated due to academic struggles, a deficiency in self-awareness and self-management aggravates the situation. Integrating social and emotional learning into daily instruction allows all students to grapple with rigorous academic content (Johnson & Wiener, 2017).

The forced isolation from one's peers causes a disconnect from school (Simmons et al., 2018). The importance and power of relationships help shape social and emotional development (Osher et al., 2018). Osher et al. (2018) used the term ecological context,

which in this context would be school. The school context, students, and adults include a variety of relationships, settings, and social structures (Osher et al., 2018). Without this context, children miss key learning opportunities and how those skills can be transferred into other settings (Osher et al., 2018). Developing healthy social and emotional learning school-wide and using discipline practices that are compassionate and restorative could open up pathways to equitable educational opportunities (Sanchez, 2021; Simmons et al., 2018).

Payne (2013) explained that the goal of discipline is to cause change, but for those in poverty, it is more about penance and forgiveness. Discipline is often negative because the focus is to stop the behavior, not change the behavior (Payne, 2013). Educators often form their ideas about discipline around middle-class ideals and expect disciplinary action to change the behavior (Payne, 2013). This misconception needs to be changed because it does not apply to all. Suspensions and expulsion guidelines are not followed when different disciplinary actions are given for the same offense across race, gender, and disabilities (Simmons et al., 2018). Restorative discipline versus punitive discipline practices, plus a positive social and emotional school climate, create prospects for more equitable results (Simmons et al., 2018).

In 2012, the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports program was set in motion (Wechsler, 2018). The program provides four tiers of responses for dealing with discipline. The teacher dealt with Tier 1 behavior by finding out the reason behind the behavior. Behaviors that are continuous move to Tier 2 and are referred to someone like the guidance counselor or social worker to help (Wechsler, 2018). If the behavior moves to Tier 3, outside experts are enlisted to help. At Tier 4, students get transferred to a

school that specializes in dealing with problematic behaviors. The program's goal is to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions by getting to the root cause of the behavior and putting interventions in place to help (Wechsler, 2018).

Trauma-Informed Practices

The statistics about children experiencing trauma are shocking. Simmons et al. (2018) stated that approximately 60% of youth aged 17 and under had adverse childhood experiences. According to the National Survey of Children's Health (2011/2012, as cited by Souers & Hall, 2019), almost 35 million children in the United States suffer one or more types of trauma. ChildHelp (2012, as cited by Souers & Hall, 2019) stated that a report of child abuse occurred every 10 seconds. In 2010, suicide was the number two cause of death among 12- to 17-year-old children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011, as cited by Souers & Hall, 2019). Those experiences can cause a troublesome risk to the development of a person (Blodgett, as cited by Souers & Hall, 2016). Some adverse childhood experiences are abuse, neglect, bullying, homelessness, violence, parental divorce, substance abuse in the home, the death of a loved one, or a jailed parent (Simmons et al., 2018; Souers & Hall, 2016). In 2010, over half of all children in the United States experienced parental divorce and violence in their families (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010).

One definition of trauma is an unprecedented experience where unimaginable and alarming events overwhelm one's capacity to cope (Rice & Groves, 2005, as cited by Souers & Hall, 2016). A few examples of trauma are abuse that can be physical, psychological, or sexual; the death of a close family member; homelessness; or neglect. Some adverse effects of trauma are post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression,

and behavioral problems (Simmons et al., 2018). For students who have experienced some form of trauma, some effects are not being ready to learn, lower IQ, serious inadequacies in attention, and abstract reasoning (Simmons et al., 2018; Souers & Hall, 2016). Remember that trauma is not biased; has no limits; and happens in all communities, cultures, and settings (Souers & Hall, 2019). Trauma has a damaging effect on the brain and body (Souers & Hall, 2016). When humans face a threat or a perceived threat, our brains release into our bodies chemicals that help us adjust to the stress. Excessive chemicals released can impair the body's and the brain's development (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Teachers do not have the training to recognize or handle the needs of students dealing with trauma's effects (Souers & Hall, 2016). This limitation threatens the equity of a significant number of children (Simmons et al., 2018). It is important to note that the risk does not have to be permanent. Properly treated brains can be repaired (Souers & Hall, 2016). Relationships are a huge factor in making vital repairs. Meaningful connections through high-quality relationships are crucial to every person's development (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Before learning happens in the classroom, children need to know they are safe, physically and emotionally. Knowing we are safe comes before anything else. Teachers must create an environment where everyone feels safe (Souers & Hall, 2019).

Classroom management needs to be framed differently (Souers & Hall, 2019). Souers and Hall (2019) maintained that a need is expressed behind every behavior. These needs tend to fall into one of four areas: emotional, relational, physical, or control. Emotional needs occur when a child feels unsafe and acts out to bring themselves into a

normal state. This reaction connects to a gap in the development of self-management. Relational needs are belonging, feeling connected to others, and feeling loved (Souers & Hall, 2019). Physical needs are our basic biological or physiological needs. A student may be unaware of attempting to meet those needs. A control need is to have some control or say in what is happening around oneself, craving a sense of power or chaos. This need often presents itself as a power struggle or defiance. Understanding how these needs can present themselves as what appears as undesirable behavior can help teachers be proactive instead of reactive with classroom management (Souers & Hall, 2019).

Implicit Bias in School Staff

Implicit bias is stereotyping that happens subconsciously and inadvertently and influences behaviors and decision-making (Simmons et al., 2018). An educator's implicit bias can adversely impact student academic success. This effect happens when expectations are low, the quality delivery of content taught is low, or exclusionary discipline is used (Simmons et al., 2018). Culture is a critical factor in social and emotional learning. Differences in culture between the teachers and the students can lead to someone misconstruing what was said or done (Simmons et al., 2018). Souers and Hall (2019) pointed out that humans quickly make judgments. Judgments might hinge on dress, address, family, or behavior. These biases may sound like,

- I have that one child on my list who was always in trouble last year, so I am sure he will be trouble.
- That student is from a low socioeconomic family and goes to a Title I school. I am sure they have a rough home life, which is why they behave that way.
- That child does not have much support at home because someone in the

family is always in jail (Souers & Hall, 2019).

Each statement above shows an assumption based on little information that could impact students academically. Children could have experienced trauma (Souers & Hall, 2019). A school and classroom with a physical and emotional safety culture are a must to open the pathway for learning (Souers & Hall, 2019). A feeling of safety comes before all else, including academics. The talk samples above can affect the feeling in the room (Souers & Hall, 2019). The question that we must ask ourselves is, do our own implicit biases contribute to the problem and create inequities? For change to happen, there needs to be a focus on relationships, responsibilities, and regulations with a focus on the whole child in a positive learning environment (Souers & Hall, 2019). Building relationships with students, finding their good, understanding and accepting their reality, and accepting them for who they are without comparisons can help teachers move past their conscious and subconscious biases (Pate, 2020).

Teacher Stress and burnout

Simmons et al. (2018) reported that approximately 50% of the nation's teachers reported experiencing high levels of daily stress. Stress can lead to teachers being hostile to their students and coworkers, lacking self-regulation, and having an inability to model ways to manage their stress (Simmons et al., 2018). A teacher's own social and emotional competencies get tested in this situation. Stress and burnout also lead to higher levels of teacher turnover. High turnover levels compromise the instruction level because novice teachers would be learning the standards and content as they are teaching them (Simmons et al., 2018).

These five barriers can restrict or impair students from social and emotional

learning and the development of their competencies (Simmons et al., 2018). Duchesneau (2020) stated that adults need to change their assumptions and mindset from focusing on deficits to focusing on strengths. Teachers can no longer teach like one size fits all. There needs to be recognition of the ethnic and environmental influences within the class (Duchesneau, 2020). Schools should focus on making an ongoing effort to reduce bias. Systems and policies need to change to promote students' sense of belonging, stimulate them to achieve their full potential, and contribute academic and holistic help (Duchesneau, 2020).

Educating the Whole Child

Educating the whole child is not a new idea, but many thought it was sidelined during the period when NCLB legislation was enacted (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The central focus of NCLB was raising test scores or suffering the consequences. Noddings (2005) described this legislation as an unfunded mandate. The consequences, which included threats, retribution, and detrimental comparability, were motivationally loathsome (Noddings, 2005). That focus brought a hostile and discouraging environment for students and teachers (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Within the last 10 to 15 years, there has been a renewed interest in this teaching and learning approach.

O'Leary (2020) defined the intent of educating the whole child as establishing that every child is healthy, safe, involved, supported, and challenged. This approach connects social and emotional learning with education. Its focus is to assist and foster all areas of a child's development and learning (McVay, 2014; O'Leary, 2020). There is an understanding of social, emotional, and individual health needs being met for a child to

be open to developing cognitive skills (McVay, 2014; O'Leary, 2020). Kochhar-Bryant and Heishman (2010) defined the whole child approach or holistic education as a cultivation of the whole person so they can reside in a cognizant manner in their communities and environments. Ron Miller (2008, as cited by Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010) took this definition even deeper:

> A holistic approach recognizes that to become a full person, a growing child needs to develop—in addition to intellectual skills—physical, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, moral and spirited potentials. The child is not merely a future citizen or employee in training but an intricate and delicate web of vital forces and environmental influences. (p. 7)

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) listed six takeaways from the research in neuroscience, developmental science, and learning sciences:

1. The brain and development are malleable.
2. Variability in human development is the norm, not the exception.
3. Human relationships are the essential ingredient that catalyzes healthy development and learning.
4. Adversity affects learning.
5. Learning is social, emotional, and academic.
6. Children actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, relationships, and social contexts. (p. 3)

These takeaways helped develop the Framework for Whole Child Education (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The framework has four domains: social and emotional development, individual supports, positive school climate, and productive

instructional strategies. CASEL's (2020) social and emotional learning framework encompasses the classroom, school, families and caregivers, and communities, which also connects the four domains from the Framework for Whole Child Education.

The work of Epstein et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of the partnerships between the school, family, and community. Together, all facets of the learning and development of children flourish when those partnerships join forces (Epstein et al., 2019; Schlund, 2021). These partnerships help to bolster positive child-adult relationships that are nurturing, sensitive, and stable (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Enhanced school climates, enriched programs for the school and classroom, and aid in teachers' understanding and appreciation of parents are reasons to cultivate these partnerships (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Schlund (2021) drew a connection between social and emotional learning and whole child education. Both approaches are structured to focus on school, family, and community partnerships. Other connections are the learning environments, encounters, climates, associations, and continuous improvement (Schlund, 2021). Within classrooms, both approaches highlight the use of working together, contemplating one's work, thinking evaluatively, and problem-solving. Whole child models incorporate social and emotional learning as one part but stress it more across all areas (Schlund, 2021).

Social and Emotional Learning and the Brain

Kahneman (2011) described the brain as having two systems for thinking. System 1 is quick, reflexive, emotional, and without thought. System 2 is deliberate, exacting, and knowing. When a person has a knee-jerk reaction to an event, that person is using System 1. In the same situation, another person might stop, take a breath, and assess the

situation before responding, using System 2 (Kahneman, 2011).

The brain has a system of filters that control the messages our body receives about events or experiences. This first filter is the brain stem, which receives messages from our senses (Sprenger, 2020). The message gets blocked if threatening information is received, and the brain stem sounds the alarm. The alarm goes to the limbic system and starts multiple actions (Sprenger, 2020). Filter 2 is the amygdala, which examines the information next. The hypothalamus prepares the body and the brain for a fight-or-flight response by releasing chemicals (Sprenger, 2020). If the information stays in the reflexive brain, any memories of similar experiences will come to mind, and we will assume that the same result will occur (Sprenger, 2020).

Brain development is built upon the occasions to participate actively and without risk with enriching and significant environments, social connections, and ideas (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). Experience on those occasions shapes patterns of the brain's anatomy and physiology that reinforce one's changing skills and tendencies over time. Those experiences prompt and organize brain development and, thus, one's preparedness and capability to learn (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). A learning environment organized with consideration of how the brain develops often includes social and emotional encounters of foremost importance, exploration and discovery that is age-appropriate, and support for adaptable and logical thinking, and helps students gain habits of mind and character. A developing brain needs social relationships, emotional experiences, and cognitive opportunities (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018).

Emotions and learning are connected (Sprenger, 2020). When the brain receives new information, our emotions decide where in the brain it gets processed. A memory is

created when that learning moves through the amygdala (the emotional filter) to the prefrontal cortex or the evaluative part of the brain (Sprenger, 2020). Sylwester (1995) said that emotions drive attention, which in turn drives learning, memory, and just about everything else.

Students enter the classroom on the first day of school with their bookbags and other school supplies for the new year. They also enter the classroom with emotional baggage people do not see. This baggage determines a student's readiness and willingness to learn (Sprenger, 2020). Sprenger (2020) highlighted Maslow's work on basic needs and how, until those needs are met, a person is not open to learning. At school, students need to feel like they are safe and belong (Barron & Kinney, 2021). As students gain a sense of belonging and start building relationships, the brain releases a chemical that reduces stress and anxiety (Sprenger, 2020).

Summary

This chapter discussed the literature regarding social and emotional learning. The discussion started with a thorough description and definition of social and emotional learning. Jones and Kahn (2017) pointed out that social and emotional learning is complex and fundamental to academics. The following section outlined why social and emotional learning is important. Friedman and Mandelbaum (2012) pointed out that technology connects people worldwide, so traditional skills taught in school are no longer sufficient. Social and emotional skills are necessary to navigate the waters of an ever-diversifying world (National University, 2020). The third section highlighted the benefits of social and emotional learning for students, adults, the school, the community, and society. Studies showed that social and emotional learning builds competencies, reduces

behavioral issues, increases academic achievement, and has economic impacts. The fourth section drew connections between social and emotional learning and equity. Social and emotional learning helps to give all students access to learning. The fifth section discussed how social and emotional learning is connected to education for the whole child. Social and emotional learning is a critical piece of educating the whole child. The final section described the effect on the brain that social and emotional learning causes. A developing brain needs social relationships, emotional experiences, and cognitive opportunities (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018).

Chapter 3 chronicles the methodology and process for this study. A summary of how the participants were chosen and the data collected is provided. The reasoning for choosing ethnographic strategies for this case study is explained and shared.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study explored teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success. Society, the federal government, state governments, and school districts currently measure student success based on the results of state standardized tests. Test scores are tangible as a measurement of knowledge but not a tangible measure of life skills. Wagner and Dintersmith (2016) asked the question, "What is the purpose of education?" (p. 35). They wanted the answer to be that education aims to teach cognitive and social skills; prepare children to be trustworthy, engaged members of society; build character; guide students in discovering themselves; and prepare them for fruitful careers (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2016). Standardized test scores are not a guarantee that the aim will be achieved.

Interestingly, employers generally do not ask for grade point averages or state test results when a person interviews for a job. Employers look for other qualities and characteristics. Indeed Editorial Team (2022) listed 14 top qualities that employees look for in potential employees. A few on the list are communication skills, honesty, dependability, teamwork, determination, and problem-solving skills. Brooks (2019) pointed out that employers seek employees with soft or transferable skills, such as listening and communication, time management, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and initiative. Those skills are not tested on the standardized tests used in school, and yet test scores are how society determines if a school is successful or not. The standardized tests only assess students' academic knowledge of particular subjects, usually reading,

math, and science.

Research Question

This study sought to answer the central question, “How do teachers perceive the connection between incorporating social and emotional learning strategies and student success?”

Three associated subquestions supported the central question.

1. How can the integration of social and emotional learning be described?
2. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on the academic achievement of their students?
3. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on developing the essential social competencies in their students?

Research Design

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described three research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods for choosing a research design. Quantitative research uses numbers and close-ended questions and responses. Qualitative research uses words and open-ended questions and responses. Mixed methods use a combination of the two (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Qualitative research stems from the anthropological tradition of describing culture (Butin, 2010; Lapan et al., 2012; Wilson, 1977). Observation and interviews are frequently used as data collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection for the qualitative study includes fieldwork (Lapan et al., 2012). Lapan et al. (2012)

stated that qualitative research seeks to observe things in the world. These researchers do not emphasize studying cause and effect (Creswell, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012). Creswell's (2013) working definition of qualitative research is as follows:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/ theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

This working definition by Creswell eloquently stated what qualitative research is and what it does.

According to McMillan (2016), qualitative studies are now commonplace in educational research. The work is holistic to grasp the social context through a whole-picture view (Janesick, 2016). Butin (2010) and Yin (2018) described this type of research as empirical. Data are found in the field and are designed to answer the "how" and "why" questions (Butin, 2010; Wikfeldt, 1993; Yin, 2018). Yin described the purpose of a case study is to investigate a present-day case comprehensively and within real-world conditions. Wikfeldt (2016) described a case study simply as a comprehensive study of a particular thing to further one's understanding of that thing. This qualitative

research was a case study. Case studies involve small groups of participants and research bounded by time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case studies seek to learn from a single case to understand a more extensive study (Wikfeldt, 2016). I recruited three teachers for this case study and conducted the research for 2 weeks.

Qualitative research has multiple characteristics: natural setting, researcher as key instrument, direct data collection, rich holistic narrative, process orientation, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, participant perspectives, socially constructed meaning, emergent research design, and reflexivity (Creswell, 2013; McMillan, 2016). This study was conducted by gathering data in a natural setting, the school where the teachers work and the classrooms where they teach. The natural setting is where the participants interact directly in their surroundings with the studied issue (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010; Lapan et al., 2012). Using inductive and deductive reasoning, qualitative researchers use their data to establish patterns, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2013). The story told from the research is from participant perspectives and is reliable, diligent, and authentic (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010; Lapan et al., 2012).

In this study, I completed observations to examine how the participating teachers incorporated social and emotional learning into the classroom's daily routine. As Janesick (2016) described, the observations gave a complete picture view, which included the setting, actions, and reactions. Observing the classroom placed the participant in their natural setting when teaching and allowed direct data collection (Butin, 2010; McMillan, 2016). Byrne (2001) explained that researchers might take an etic or emic orientation during their study. An etic orientation is viewing from the outsider's perspective, whereas

an emic orientation is viewing from an insider's perspective (Byrne, 2001). Since I was a classroom teacher for 20 years, I had an emic orientation or insider's perspective.

In addition to observations, I interviewed each participant individually and asked the same set of predetermined questions. The open-ended interview questions helped gain data about participant perspectives (Butin, 2010; McMillan, 2016). The interviews were done face-to-face.

Before deciding on a case study, I explored other qualitative research methods. Narrative research focuses on studying an individual or individuals and their lives and zeros in on a specific factor, such as telling the chronological story of their battle with an illness or dealing with a family member's illness (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). That structure did not fit my study's focus since I was not chronicling life experiences. Next, I explored phenomenological research methods. Phenomenological research focuses on the commonality of an experience among people, such as nurses working with COVID patients during the pandemic (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With the focus of this study being on teacher perspectives, I did not feel that this methodology fit. Grounded theory research methods focus on developing a theory from data gathered over multiple periods, involving participants to be interviewed several times throughout the study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research method could be a consideration in the future to further expand on this study after the group of participants has had more experiences to draw upon for comparisons and connections that would cause their perceptions to evolve. I was only looking at the current year of experiences for this study with a single interview with each participant. The participant group was small but could be increased to expand the study and the

findings in the future. I decided not to use the grounded theory research methods for these reasons.

Target Population and Sample

This section focuses on describing the target population for this study. The description of the target population is followed by a description of the sample recruited to gather data for the research.

Population

The target population for a qualitative study is the study's people (Schensul, 2012). Casteel and Bridier (2021) defined this group as the possible participants accessible to the researcher. This study focused on teacher perceptions, meaning my population was teachers. The participants for this study were selected from a population of approximately 1,900 classroom teachers in kindergarten through 12th grade. The focus was on classroom teachers since they have more direct exposure to students and thus could significantly impact student success.

Sample

In my position, I mainly work with elementary-level classroom teachers. Fetterman (2010) stated that sometimes the population is chosen where a researcher can get their foot in the door. I have five elementary schools where I have direct contact with classroom teachers. Gay et al. (2012) defined good characteristics of a participant as being able to communicate and be comfortable around the researcher. These factors led me to decide to recruit teachers from a Title I elementary school where I provide district-level content support in math and science.

I have worked with the leadership team and the teachers at this school for 4 years

and have established a positive rapport. The teachers there have worked with me on other projects throughout my journey toward achieving my doctorate. I was confident they would support me with this last part of my journey. Being an employee of the district could have made some participants feel like they needed to answer questions in a particular manner; however, the staff at this school had always been very forward with me regarding their thoughts, opinions, and feelings, whether positive or negative. Since this work was for my dissertation research and not the district, the teachers may have been more inclined to be less guarded and open with me. A sampling of this type falls under two categories, convenience and purposive (Gay et al., 2012). Since I had an existing rapport with the staff at this school and the teachers were very willing to work with me, it was purposeful and convenient for me to recruit participants from this site. I have worked closely with some teachers and not as closely with others, so asking for volunteers from all the teachers lessened the bias toward participants.

The plan was to recruit three to five classroom teachers in varying grade-level assignments from kindergarten to fifth grade with at least 2 full years in the classroom. I chose to use teachers from various grade levels to have a variety of perspectives to consider. Gay et al. (2012) pointed out that samples, due to the nature of the study, tend to be smaller to fit the goals of the studies and the level of depth to which qualitative studies go.

Procedures

This section describes the procedures for my research process: recruitment and selection of participants and protection of the participants. A description of how data were collected following the institutional review board's (IRB) approval and how the

data were analyzed and verified is also included in this section.

Participant Selection

The research was conducted at an elementary school in southwestern North Carolina. This Title I school had a diverse population of students, with approximately 99% falling in the economically challenged category. I worked with this school for 4 years as academic support for math and science. I worked with the teachers to aid their understanding of the content standards and plan lessons. Conducting the research in this setting is what Creswell and Creswell (2018) would call "backyard" research because I conducted the study within the organization where I worked. This school was one of several that I supported, so I was not in the school daily. I served as neither a supervisor nor an evaluator in my role. I chose this location for my research due to the makeup of the staff and student body. I was a familiar face, so my presence in the classroom should not have been obtrusive or distracting.

At the time of the study, the school had 20 full-time classroom teachers. That number included 17 homeroom teachers, one reading and math interventionist, one academically and intellectually gifted teacher, and one exceptional children's teacher. The participants were recruited from the 17 homeroom teachers since the children were with them most of the day. The other teachers mentioned pull small groups from all grade levels throughout the day and week. An additional qualification for inclusion was that participating teachers had completed 2 full years in the classroom. During the first couple of years in the classroom, a new teacher has a lot to learn about managing a classroom, learning the curriculum, and discovering who they are as a teacher. By the third year of teaching, many early aspects are more secure. Then teachers begin to see how to meet

their students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Before attempting to seek teachers to be a part of my research, I sent an email (see Appendix A) to the principal seeking permission to recruit for my study. Once the principal approved, an email was sent for the principal to forward to the staff with an attached survey seeking recommendations from the staff for names of teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning in their classrooms (see Appendices B and C).

Once recommendations were received, a recruitment email (see Appendix D) was used to seek three to five classroom teachers in varying grade-level assignments from kindergarten to fifth grade as volunteers. Gay et al. (2012) stated that when selecting a small number of participants, choose individuals who will be good contributing informants for the researcher to aid in their understanding of the topic of the study. The following criteria were used for selecting participants:

1. The participants will be certified elementary homeroom teachers.
2. The participants will have a minimum of two full years in the classroom.
3. The participants will be from various grade levels, with at least one from kindergarten to second grade and at least one from third to fifth grade.
4. The same interview protocol and questions will be used with each teacher.
5. The same observation protocol will be used in each classroom for gathering data.
6. Two or more peers (administrator and/or teachers) recommend the participants through a survey (see Appendix C), which will be sent out to the staff through an email (see Appendix B).

Once I received recommendations, I sent the five recommended teachers the

recruitment email (see Appendix D). Once the five teachers responded with an acceptance or declination to the recruitment email, I sent a follow-up email with more details to the teachers who agreed to participate (see Appendix E).

Protection of Participants

The rights and welfare of all participants were safeguarded throughout the study and beyond. One step to ensure participant identities were kept anonymous was assigning a code number (or pseudonym). Code numbers were used in connection with any data for that participant, thereby keeping participant names from being used in the report. The list containing the codes connecting participant names to their codes was kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. The data collected from observations, interviews, and recordings remained private and confidential. The security of that data was stored in a lockable nonshared file on my personal computer, which is password-protected. All hard copies of data from observations, interviews, and video recordings were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. Three years after my graduation, all digital and hard copy data collected, including videos, recordings, and notes, will be destroyed by a method appropriate to the data source. Digital material will be deleted, and hard copy data will be shredded and used as a fire starter.

As part of the consent form each volunteer participant signed, all rights regarding their participation in the study were explained. This step was completed in a brief meeting to review the information in the follow-up email sent upon the teacher agreeing to participate. Likewise, all rights to withdraw from the study were explained. The participants were assured that they had the right to stop participating in the interview without penalty at any time by signaling they wished to stop. It was also explained that

their data would be removed from the study should they decide they no longer wished to participate.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) described the data collection process as a collection circle with an entrance at any point within the circle. The steps in the circle are locating a site/ individual(s), gaining access and making rapport, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data.

Locating Site/Individual(s). In a narrative study, a researcher needs to find a site that is and individuals who are accessible (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the site where the participants were recruited is a Title I elementary school where I have worked for 4 years, so I have access to this site and the teachers.

Gaining Access and Making Rapport. I have worked with the site for 4 years. A rapport has been established with both the school's leadership and the staff. The leadership and the teachers supported other projects of mine while pursuing my doctorate. Gaining approval from the school district and the university's IRB was also part of this step within the collection circle (Creswell, 2013).

Purposeful Sampling Strategy. This study included three classroom teachers from various grade levels. Each participant had a minimum of 2 years of experience in the classroom. Fetterman (2010, as cited by Creswell, 2013) suggested a big-net approach to choosing potential participants. Since I had an existing rapport with the staff, I had already cast that big net. These teachers were recruited using a recruitment email (see Appendix D). When the teachers responded with their willingness to participate, they received a follow-up email (see Appendix E) giving further details about participation,

including an informed consent letter.

Forms of Data. The data that were collected came from observations and interviews. Each participant was observed two times for 30 minutes each time. The observations were video recorded and documented through field notes. The video served as a way for me to go back and view each observation multiple times to facilitate catching details of events within the classroom that might not have been noticed at the time of the observations. The interviews were also video recorded using a cell phone and Swivl device to ensure they were transcribed with the exact wording of the teacher's responses to the questions, which were shared with the teacher to check for accuracy. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning I prewrote the central and possible follow-up questions to clarify or probe deeper.

Recording Procedures and Storing Data. I used the observation protocol (see Appendix F) to take field notes during the observations. This protocol contains specific behaviors and/or actions I looked for during the observation and boxes for field notes to be recorded. The videos helped add to the field notes to make them more accurate. This exact process was used for the interviews too. I recorded participant responses to the interview protocol (see Appendix G). All recordings will be stored in a secure file on my personal computer for 3 years, at which time they will be deleted. All hard copy field notes and interview transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home for 3 years, at which time they will be shredded and used as a fire starter.

Field Issues. Creswell (2013) brought to light several potential field issues. One issue mentioned is gaining access to the site and the individuals who could be the potential participants. Access was not an issue since there was a previously established

rapport with leadership and teachers at the site. Possible issues with observations and interviews were pointed out by Creswell (2013). With observations, issues can arise with the researcher being a participant observer, nonparticipant observer, or somewhere in the middle. Video recording of the observation helped alleviate this issue since I could go back and watch the video as many times as needed to ensure that no details were omitted because of being an active participant. Ethical issues are bound to arise while working with human subjects (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As part of agreeing to participate in the study, participants were notified that they could withdraw without penalty at any point. After the data were collected and analyzed, participants were asked to look over the final findings to ensure they agreed with the findings and that they were accurate.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, they needed to be analyzed. Before the data could be analyzed, they were organized. All field notes needed to be reread and notes added in the margins. Creswell (2013) referred to these notes as memoing. The interviews were transcribed and read several times to grasp their details. The two data types were coded and compared for similarities or patterns (Fetterman, 2010). That comparison provided validity through triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010). The data were then broken down into smaller, more manageable pieces. The smaller pieces are called codes or categories (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010).

Creswell (2013) stated that the categories might be broken down into more categories or combined to create fewer categories depending on the data. It is through this process that patterns and themes emerge. Using the themes from the data, the researcher

creates a descriptive narrative to describe the findings of the data. The descriptions may also include classroom drawings or tables to provide further details (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010).

I anticipated that a possible theme of my research would be that teachers believe that for students to be open to learning, their social and emotional needs must be recognized and met. Another possible theme that could have come out is that teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning are connected to not just academic achievement but lifetime achievement.

Methods for Verification

Researchers use eight verification strategies to validate their findings: prolonged engagement and persistent observations; triangulation; peer review or debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick descriptions; or external audits (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2013) recommended that researchers use at least two strategies.

For validation and authenticity of the research for this study, triangulation using the observations and the interview data was one strategy employed. Common threads and themes showed the authenticity of the data. The second strategy that was employed was member checking. In the request for participants, checking the findings to verify the accuracy was listed as part of what they would do. Thirty minutes was allowed for this activity, which was included in the time commitment for the study.

Instruments

For this study, several instruments were utilized. A description of each instrument used is included in this section.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, I collected data through observations and interviews. These two collection methods were considered fieldwork. Both the observations and interviews were completed in situ, meaning they were done in the participants' natural settings where the action took place (Butin, 2010; McMillan, 2016; Riemer, 2008). The participants' classrooms in the school they teach for this study were in situ. As a former classroom teacher, I was a participant observer in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Riemer, 2012). Being a participant observer means I was actively involved in the setting while allowing time to adequately observe and take notes for data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetterman, 2010; Riemer, 2012). I interviewed each participant individually using predetermined open-ended questions with possible prepared follow-up questions to elicit a more detailed response from the participant (Gray, 2004). Once the data were collected, my role became an analyst of data collected to look for commonalities, such as patterns or common themes in teacher perceptions (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2013). My final role was to weave all the pieces together to tell the story of my findings (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010).

My role in the school district at the time of the study was as an academic facilitator. Specifically, I supported a group of Title I schools with math and science. The school site I chose to recruit participants for this study was one of the schools I supported. I worked with this school for 4 years, where I checked in with the school leaders and staff once or twice a month and when they specifically reached out for support. The staff was very open and supportive of me while pursuing my doctorate. They worked with me on several semester projects, and I believed they would be

agreeable to participating in this study as a final piece of my doctoral work.

The school leadership strongly believed and desired to grow their staff in their craft to benefit the staff and students. One method they employed pre-COVID was grade-level and vertical lab sites. For the lab site routine to continue post-COVID, classroom recordings were utilized using a phone or Swivl device rather than visitors coming to observe. The teachers and students were accustomed to observing visitors in the classroom or making recordings, so I did not anticipate that my presence in the classroom would be intrusive.

Observations

Observations were used as an instrument to collect visual information and record that visual information in writing, allowing the audience to glimpse what was observed. Gray (2004) described observations as a composite of everything you see, hear, touch, smell, and possibly taste with perceptions. Observations allow a researcher to see participants' actions in practice in their natural setting. This opportunity allows the researcher to get past a person's opinion of how they see themselves (Gray, 2004). The observation was conducted in an overt participant observation style for this research. Participant observations focus on finding the participants' meaning in their actions. An overt observation means the participants know they are being observed when it happens (Gray, 2004).

As a participant observer, I was not completely immersed; however, given the established rapport, I was considered a member of the staff even though my employment was with the district, not the school site (Hall, 2000, as cited by Gray, 2004). A cell phone was utilized as a recording device to ensure that interactions were captured entirely

for accurate data. The cell phone was attached to a device called a Swivl. The teacher wore a microphone connected to the Swivl device, allowing it to rotate and follow the teacher as they moved around the room and recorded what was said. A recording device allowed me to view the observation multiple times and write meticulous details within the field notes (Gray, 2004). The two observations were split across the day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each lasted 30 minutes. I positioned myself and the recording device in a location that would cause the least distraction and had the best view of the teacher at work.

Interviews

When the research is mainly exploratory, involving teacher perspectives about the topic, Gray (2004) stated that interviews are a relevant technique to use. Arksey and Knight (1999, as cited by Gray, 2004) noted that interviewing is a potent method to help someone articulate implied perceptions. Interviews encourage people to open up and talk about clearly established topics. Questionnaires do not allow for clarification if the respondent does not understand the intent of what is being asked (Gray, 2004). An interview allows opportunities for probing further about a response.

The interview tool for this study was a semi-structured interview. This type of interview allows the researcher to have a list of pre-prepared questions and potential follow-up questions to expand responses when more information or clarification is needed (Gray, 2004). A cell phone and a Swivl were utilized as recording devices to ensure that all responses were captured entirely for accurate data. Using a recording device also allows the researcher to maintain control through verbal and nonverbal cues, listening to the responses given carefully, and keeping the interview focused (Patton,

1990, as cited by Gray, 2004).

The interviews were done face-to-face. They were conducted after school. Forty-five minutes was designated for the interview length. There was only one interview for each participant out of respect for the teachers' limited time. Any clarifications were made during the interview with the follow-up questions.

Guiding Interview Questions

The interview questions were written to discover information that helped to connect the three supporting questions to the overall question for the study. Some questions had possible follow-up questions for classification purposes or to probe deeper. Table 1 shows the correlation between the first supporting question and the related interview questions. This supporting question is about how to describe social and emotional learning integration.

Table 1

Correlation Between Supporting Question 1 and the Related Interview Questions

Question 1	Related interview questions
How can the integration of social and emotional learning be described?	How do you help your students become self-aware of their thoughts and feelings?
	What strategies do you teach your students to help them with self-management of their thoughts and feelings?
	How do you help your student recognize social cues to help them with social awareness?
	What do you do in your class to help your students build and develop relationship skills?
	How do you help your students develop the ability to make responsible decisions?

The interview questions in Table 1 were designed to determine how teachers meet

their students' social and emotional learning needs. These questions helped determine how the teachers incorporated social and emotional learning in their classrooms and what it looked like.

Table 2 shows the correlation between the second supporting question and the related interview questions. This supporting question makes a connection to student academic achievement.

Table 2

Correlation Between Supporting Question 2 and the Related Interview Questions

Question 2	Related interview questions
How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on the academic achievement of their students?	Why do your students believe they can be successful in school? • How do you contribute to their belief in themselves? How do your students show they are independent learners? • In what ways have you contributed to your students' independence? How often do you check to ensure your students understand the taught material? • Why do you do that? • What do you believe is the effect that action has on your students? What role do you believe social and emotional learning strategies have in your classroom for your students? • How do they connect to the success of your students? • What are some examples of those connections in your classroom? How engaged are your students when allowed to participate in a class discussion? • How do you encourage everyone to participate? • How do you prevent some students from dominating the classroom discussions, so everyone feels they have a voice? How often do you provide time for your students to experience productive struggles? • Why is it essential for them to struggle at times? • What benefits do they gain from it? When you have students explain their answers in class, what tools do you incorporate to teach them how to do that?

The interview questions in Table 2 were designed to determine teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning affects student academic

achievement. These questions helped determine how the teacher's classroom actions connected to how their students engage and perform academically.

Table 3 shows the correlation between the third supporting question and the related interview questions. This supporting question connects to the topic of student development of essential social competencies.

Table 3

Correlation Between Supporting Question 3 and the Related Interview Questions

Question 3	Related interview questions
How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on developing the essential social competencies in their students?	How respectful are your students to you? • Why do you believe they are respectful to you? • Are they equally respectful to other adults in the building, and why might that be the case? How socially aware are your students? • How do you see your students considering one another's perspectives and showing empathy? How do you help students in your class who struggle to get along with others develop the relationship skills necessary to help them? What do you do when your students want to give up because something seems challenging? How well do your students listen to each other without interrupting one another • What strategies do you use to help your students learn to listen and wait their turn to talk? • How do you help your students develop the essential competency skill of social awareness? • What strategies do you incorporate into your day to teach your students to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations?

The interview questions in the table were designed to determine teacher perceptions of incorporating social and emotional learning into the students' development

of essential social competencies. These questions helped determine how the teacher's classroom actions connect to that development.

Ethical Considerations

In the past, some research raised concerns about the ethical treatment of human participants in research studies. In 1979, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research created the Belmont Report, encompassing three basic principles as research guides: beneficence, respect, and justice (Mertens, 2012).

The first principle, beneficence, can be defined simply as magnifying the good and keeping down any risk or harm to participants (Mertens, 2012). Fetterman (2010) discussed several principles that relate directly to beneficence. Those principles are permission, honesty, trust, and pseudonyms. Researchers should seek informed consent for their work with the participants. I sought volunteers using the recruitment email to introduce the study (see Appendix B). The consent included an explanation of the study and any instruments used, such as recording devices, and protections that would be put into place for the participant's protection, such as using pseudonyms (Fetterman, 2010). The volunteers then received a follow-up email to disclose the objectives of my study, the equipment used, time requirements, and the protections used for the participants (see Appendix C). I was open and honest with my objectives for the study to support establishing trust with my participants and obtaining informed permission (Fetterman. 2010). For this study, observations and interviews were used. The interviews and observations were recorded using a cell phone and a Swivl device. The risk of harm to the participants was no more than minimal.

The second principle, respect, means being kind and respectful to the study participants (Mertens, 2012). One way I followed this principle was by remembering that the volunteers' time is precious and not taking advantage of it, which also helped to establish trust.

The third principle, justice, says that the study participants should benefit from the study and that those benefits happen through the procedures used by the researcher (Mertens, 2012). The participants benefit from the researcher's honesty and trust (Fetterman, 2010). Participants often give their time, so researchers owe them something in return. Fetterman (2010) referred to that benefit as reciprocity. A further explanation of reciprocity could be the researcher giving their time back by allowing a participant to share and feel heard openly, sharing their final results, and in some cases, payments (Fetterman, 2010). The participants for this study were asked to review the findings for credibility to assure me and the participants that the findings were accurate. In addition to accuracy, the participants saw that their privacy was protected as promised.

Summary

This study sought to answer the central question, "How do teachers perceive the connection between incorporating social and emotional learning strategies and student success?" The research design used included observations and interviews.

Chapter 4 includes a complete description of the data collected and the methodology for analyzing it. A discussion of the resulting findings from that analysis concludes this study's data piece. Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions drawn from the data, any implications that could contribute to the current knowledge base, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and share the research findings. This qualitative case study explored teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success. In 2020, I was drawn to my research topic after researching a program that incorporated social and emotional learning as a part of the daily routine in the elementary classrooms in the district where I worked. Realizing the impact and need, especially after the isolation of COVID, I became very passionate about looking at teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning and the connection to student success. At the time of the study, student success was measured by standardized state tests, which only measured student content knowledge. There is more to success than having content knowledge.

The participants in this study included teachers who incorporated social and emotional learning throughout their daily classroom routines. This requirement was essential to support the primary question of my research. The data were gathered by conducting one face-to-face interview and two classroom observations with each participant. As the researcher, I built connections and interpreted the data using the constructivism and interpretivism theoretical frameworks. Creswell and Creswell (2018) said this combination often addresses the processes of interactions among individuals with the researcher's aim to make sense of others' meanings of the world. So rather than start with a theme, the researchers develop patterns of meaning from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Three subquestions supported the central question. These questions were the

foundation for the interview questions and observations. The questions were as follows:

1. How can the integration of social and emotional learning be described?
2. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on the academic achievement of their students?
3. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on developing the essential social competencies in their students?

The subquestions organize the findings using the related interview questions and observations. Detailed descriptions of emerging themes are analyzed and discussed. The chapter concludes with a summation of the findings.

Research Setting, Participants, Data Collection Process

The site chosen for my research was a school where I supported the teachers for 4 years with math and science. Over those 4 years, I established rapport with the leadership and staff. To use that site, I followed district procedures to use a particular site for my research, including filling out a Google Form to seek approval. Once approval was granted, I emailed the principal (see Appendix A) to request permission to use their school for my research. The principal approved the use of the school, a Title I elementary school in southwestern North Carolina. The diverse population of students had approximately 99% falling in the economically challenged category. There were 20 full-time classroom teachers, of which 17 were homeroom teachers.

With the principal's approval, a follow-up email was sent with a survey for the staff (see Appendices B and C) to recommend colleagues from the 17 homeroom teachers

who incorporate social and emotional learning in their classrooms. From the recommendations, I recruited five classroom teachers with a recruitment email (see Appendix D). The five teachers I recruited fit the criteria of being licensed teachers, completing at least 2 years in the classroom, having been recommended by two or more colleagues, and having incorporated social and emotional learning in their classrooms. Two of the five declined to participate, and three agreed. The three who agreed received a more detailed email with more details of the study and the consent form for participation (see Appendix E). Any further references to the participating teachers will be Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C. This step ensured their confidentiality to protect their rights and welfare. Table 4 gives information about each participant's grade band level and years of teaching.

Table 4

Information About Participants

Participants	Grade band level	Years of experience
Teacher A	3-5	11
Teacher B	K-2	22
Teacher C	K-2	15

Each of the research participants has over 10 years of experience. One teacher teaches in the third- to fifth-grade band and the other two teachers teach in the kindergarten to second-grade band. Even though two teachers are in the same grade band, they teach different grade levels within that grade band.

The data collection process involved conducting a one-time face-to-face interview with each participant. The interview questions were prepared prior to the interview. Each participant was asked the same 18 questions. Some of the questions had follow-up

questions to be used if needed. A cell phone, a Swivl device, and the interview protocol (see Appendix G) were used during the interview for note-taking purposes. The recording allowed me to be sure that I accurately captured the responses when transcribing. The transcripts were shared and verified for accuracy by the research participants.

A second piece of data used were observations in the research participants' classrooms. There were two 30-minute observations completed in each classroom. The observations were recorded using the devices previously mentioned and the observation protocol (see Appendix F) for note-taking purposes. The recording of the observations allowed me to observe the classroom multiple times to ensure I captured as many details as possible. The research participants viewed and verified the observation notes to validate their accuracy.

Findings

The findings of this qualitative study relate to the central focus of teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success. The subquestions organize the findings in a format Yin (2018) called question-and-answer. I have provided the number of teachers who gave the coded responses and shared ideas that emerged from the analysis.

Subquestion 1: How Can the Integration of Social and Emotional Learning Be Described?

This first subquestion was about describing the integration of social and emotional learning. Each research participant was asked five interview questions correlated to it for gathering data. Table 5 contains those interview questions.

Table 5

Interview Questions Correlated to Subquestion 1

Interview questions
1. How do you help your students become self-aware of their thoughts and feelings?
2. What strategies do you teach your students to help them with self-management of their thoughts and feelings?
3. How do you help your student recognize social cues to help them with social awareness?
4. What do you do in your class to help your students build and develop relationship skills?
5. How do you help your students develop the ability to make responsible decisions?

The five questions were designed to help gain insight into how the teachers described integrating social and emotional learning using the lens of CASEL's (2020) five social competencies. The five social competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020).

Interview Question 1: How Do You Help Your Students Become Self-Aware of Their Thoughts and Feelings? The participating teachers were each asked this question. Self-awareness is one of the five social competencies for social and emotional learning and development related to thoughts and emotions. The responses were analyzed for patterns, such as actions matching a strategy, and those strategies became codes. Table 6 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who said those strategies between the three interviews.

Table 6

Interview Question 1 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Morning Meeting	2
Modeling	3
Naming emotions	3

Two of the teachers mentioned Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting is a 15- to 20-minute session done usually first thing in the morning, The purpose of this time is to build and establish a classroom culture of respect, connections, belonging, and trust (Kriete & Davis, 2017). They shared that the Morning Meeting is done before any content instruction begins when social and emotional learning is the focus. To learn about self-awareness, Teacher A explained, “We had to actually learn the names of emotions and feelings because some of the kids did not even know how to name some of what they were feeling.” Teacher A uses books and videos to teach that concept, followed by a class discussion where students voluntarily share their thoughts and feelings. Teacher B brought up one part of the Morning Meeting called the Share. She said, “I encourage my students to share what they are feeling on whatever with the group or with me, so I know what they are dealing with at that time.”

All three teachers brought up modeling. The way each teacher modeled varied. Teacher C mentioned that she models by thinking aloud to herself. She said, “Modeling and verbalizing that thought process for them helps this age group.” Using books or videos and asking questions about the character’s feelings and emotions is a way all three teachers model. Teacher A said, “I use the Spot books that teach my students what emotions are and how they look. Then we talk about those emotions and show our own

version of what it may look like." Teacher B stressed that she uses books to help with the modeling of the emotion. During read alouds, she will ask, "How do you think the character is feeling right now? What clues did you use to decide that?" Teacher B added that she will draw her students' attention to various details, such as the characters' actions or facial expressions.

The final code for this question is naming emotions. All three teachers said naming emotions was important. They each felt that it is vital for children to know how to name their emotions and feelings to be self-aware. Teacher A talked about naming the emotion as one part, but what that emotion looks like is another part of the process. Teacher B talked about how it was important to encourage her students to share and talk about what they were feeling. She felt she needed to know how her students were feeling so she could act upon those feelings appropriately with the student. Teacher C does a lot of thinking aloud about her thoughts and emotions to help her students hear how to verbalize their thoughts and feelings.

Interview Question 2: What Strategies Do You Teach Your Students to Help Them With Self-Management of Their Thoughts and Feelings? Self-management is the social competency related to controlling ourselves and our reactions to our thoughts and feelings. The responses given by the teachers were analyzed and coded. Table 7 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who said the response between the three interviews.

Table 7

Interview Question 2 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Breathing exercises	2
Movement	3
Modeling	3

Breathing was a strategy two of the teachers mentioned. Teacher A mentioned deep breathing and rainbow breathing, inhaling while moving your hands out and exhaling while bringing your hands back together. Teacher B mentioned breathing like a whale (deep breathing) and bee breathing, breathing in and then buzzing like a bee on the exhale. Teacher A said, “That is something they [the students] can do at their desks very quietly that no one sees.”

The second strategy mentioned was movement. All the teachers mentioned incorporating movements throughout their day, such as yoga stretching or Go Noodle videos found on YouTube, that lead active movements to music. Teacher A incorporates breathing and movement, as she said, “So my students learn how to manage big thoughts and feelings.” Teacher B and Teacher C said students get antsy if they sit working for long periods and lose focus. Teacher B said, “To help my students get refocused and calm their frustrations, I get them up out of their chairs and play a Go Noodle video that leads them in moving.” Teacher C will verbalize the feeling by saying, “Class, I am feeling a little squirmy in my chair like I need to move and it is hard to do my work. I think I need to take a short brain break to get refocused.” She would follow that by either leading the class in some movement activity or using a Go Noodle video to lead the movement. Each teacher said that stopping and moving for just a minute or 2 helps the

students refocus their thoughts and emotions so they are ready to learn.

Each of the strategies mentioned requires modeling to teach the students how to do the breathing and movements and address their social and emotional needs. Teacher C spoke about modeling thinking aloud often so it becomes an automatic process for her students. She models her thinking for the feeling or emotion and what strategy she uses to manage that feeling or emotion. One way Teacher A said she models is through her actions and how she treats her students. Teacher B said she does the movements or breathing exercises with her students.

Interview Question 3: How Do You Help Your Students Recognize Social Cues to Help Them With Social Awareness? A third social competency is a social awareness, which is related to recognizing social cues and empathy. The responses given were analyzed and coded. Table 8 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who mentioned the response between the three interviews.

Table 8

Interview Question 3 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Talks about it	3
Examples	2

Each teacher stated that talking about and sharing examples of social awareness is a topic that they spend time doing daily. Teacher C mentioned Morning Meeting again as a time when this social competency was a focus and discussion topic. She said the class learned about respect and empathy through sharing during the meeting. Teacher B said she did lessons on social awareness at the beginning of the year with the whole class. As the year progressed, she would ask questions during read-aloud like, “How do you think

the character is feeling, and why do you think that?" Teacher A said she spends time practicing recognizing social cues during read aloud and Morning Meeting. Teacher C said she spends time pointing out facial expressions and body language. She asks the students how their actions may affect their friends.

Interview Question 4: What Do You Do in Your Class to Help Your Students Build and Develop Relationship Skills? Relationship skills are a social competency for making and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships. The responses given were analyzed and coded. Table 9 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who said the response between the three interviews.

Table 9

Interview Question 4 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Teachers
Morning Meeting	2
Seating arrangements	2
Small group work	3

Each teacher discussed the importance of giving their students lots of opportunities to be with different classmates. By working with different classmates, students develop their ability to build and develop relationships. During the Morning Meeting, Teacher A mentioned that her students learn how to respect each other and build unity in the class. Her students work on listening to each other to ask questions or add to what was said. Teacher B talked about how her students have learned to be encouraging to one another through Morning Meeting.

Teachers B and C brought up their room arrangements and small group work. They have round tables that can seat up to four students. Teacher B said she frequently

changes her grouping at the tables so the students can connect with different classmates. She also does a lot of small group work time throughout the day. In response to the seating and small group work, Teacher B said, “I think that really helps their communication skills, especially during math games and in other subjects when we do small group work.” Teacher C helps her students learn to take turns, have responsibilities, and get along by having them sit in table groups. Each student has a role in the table groups, and those roles switch often. Each table also has a role, and that switches each day. Teacher A does a lot of collaborative partner work. Teacher A shared how her students also work in small groups of three to five students. She said that as they have worked on listening to one another, the conversations have gotten more focused and detailed.

Interview Question 5: How Do You Help Your Students Develop the Ability to Make Responsible Decisions? The social competency of responsible decision-making involves making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions. Table 10 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who gave the response.

Table 10

Interview Question 5 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Discussions	2
Reminders	2
Modeling	2

Each teacher had a slightly different answer to this question. Teacher A said that her class would discuss being responsible using various scenarios during Morning

Meeting. She asks the students questions like, “What would be the responsible thing to do in this case scenario,” or “What would be the respectful thing to say?” Teacher C works on this skill during small groups by discussing how to behave, using our listening ears, and waiting our turn rather than interrupting, blurting out, or not following directions.

Teacher B used scenarios to remind her students of the responsible thing to do at various times throughout the day. She always tells them, “You are responsible for your actions.” Teacher B feels that it is important to remind them at their age. Teacher C uses reminders by pointing out the positive, responsible behaviors when they happen or later in the day. An example she gave was saying, “Oh, when I had Group 3 with me for math today, they worked so hard and were so focused.”

Teacher A used the scenarios during Morning Meeting to let the students, after the discussion, model how they would handle the situation. Teacher C used the students as models by pointing out positive actions with praise either directly to the student or to the class.

Observations. There were two 30-minute observations with each participating teacher for this study. The focus of the observations was to see examples of

- ways the teachers supported the five essential competencies
- ways the teachers developed the five essential competencies
- ways the teachers incorporated social and emotional strategies during the day
- ways the teachers modeled any of the five essential competencies

Each of the above items is listed in the observation protocol (see Appendix F). These data are organized by the sections on the protocol and support Subquestion 1.

Examples of Ways the Teacher Supports the Five Essential Competencies.

During the observations, there were a few common examples of ways each teacher, A, B, and C, supported the essential competencies. Table 11 lists the commonalities and how many teachers used that support.

Table 11

Support Examples and Number of Teachers

Example	Number of teachers
Reminders	3
Encouragement	3
Questioning	2

Teacher A supported the essential social competencies in multiple ways during the two observations. She used reminders, for example, during Morning Meeting. She reviewed with the students what empathy meant by saying, "Empathy is when we put ourselves…," and the students completed the sentence. When students seemed hesitant, she encouraged them not to be scared and said she wanted them to talk to her. In math class, she asked questions to start the discussion and then stepped back. She let the students lead the conversation and show examples of problems. She allowed the students to do the work. Teacher A encouraged her students to step out of their boxes and try new and challenging things.

Teacher B used a combination of a reminder and a question when her students were struggling to find a page in their science journals and were calling out. She asked the students what to do if they could not find the page. Then she repeated their responses of "raise our hand" or "ask a friend." To correct a behavior, she asked the student if they were doing what they were supposed to do. She told them that she needed them to make

good choices.

Teacher C used encouragement as a reminder. Before I started the observation, the class had done a partner discussion, and they were beginning to share what had been discussed. Teacher C asked a student what his partner said. After he shared, she said, "Thank you, you have great listening skills." When she gave directions, she used hand signals as a reminder of the expectation. During writing, she said, "I like how [student name] has her finger down and ready to help her with spacing."

Examples of Ways the Teacher Develops the Five Essential Competencies. I only observed the essential competencies developed in two of the three teachers' rooms. In both cases, Morning Meeting was taking place during the time observed.

Teacher A talked about an interesting fact of the day. The fact of the day was how "Boo," in the movie Monsters Inc., had a real name. She asked the children if they knew that and what was the character's real name. On the projected slide was a picture of the character with a piece of art with Mary written on it. Teacher A used this moment to talk about paying close attention to details and how a name is important. Today's skill was building on what they had already learned about empathy by learning about gratitude. After watching a video about gratitude and thankfulness, the class discussed it. The discussion entailed why and how to show gratitude and its effect on the giver and receiver. This discussion and activity supported all the essential competencies.

Teacher C did Morning Meeting by starting with a message by having the students echo read. Echo reading is when the teacher reads first and then the students read what the teacher read as if to echo the teacher. The message talked about how the teacher was glad they were there and then reminded them what big ideas they were learning

about in science and math. The next part was a class greeting to each student in the class. This activity was done by standing in a circle. Before they began, Teacher C reminded them to greet each person in the class and not to stop once they got their greeting. Then they went around the circle and greeted everyone, one at a time.

Examples of Ways the Teacher Incorporates Social and Emotional Learning Strategies During the School Day. During the observations, there were a couple of common examples of ways that each teacher, A, B, and C, incorporated the essential competencies. Table 12 lists the commonalities and how many teachers used that support.

Table 12

Incorporation Examples and Number of Teachers

Example	Number of teachers
Specific praise	3
Group/partner work	2

During Morning Meeting in Teacher A's room, the activity was to make thank you cards for adults in the building to show gratitude. The students went and delivered the cards to the people. Teacher A questioned the students during math to help explain their work and other people's work. As the students provided answers, Teacher A would give specific feedback, such as, "I really like how you shaded the bars to show that fraction. We can see the answer very clearly." She also did a couple of turn-and-talk activities, where student partners turned to one another and talked about the task, while the teacher walked around and listened to student conversations.

Teacher B was conducting a science lesson during one of the observations. After a review of weather instruments, she began an activity where the students worked on it in table groups. She circulated to the tables and said, "I love the teamwork." Another

example was when she said, “I love how this table is using their science journals to help them.” In the second observation, she was doing word work. The students were spelling words using the phonics rules they had learned. She gave them a multisyllabic word to challenge them. As the students succeeded, she said, “Good job, guys! That was a really hard word, and you spelled it right.”

Teacher C was teaching a writing lesson. When it was time for the students to write, she gave specific feedback about letter formation. She told one student, “[student name] remember that the letter p goes below the line.” At the end of the lesson, she commented, “As I walked around, I noticed that everyone had slowed down and took their time to write their letters. They looked much better.”

Examples of Ways the Teacher Models Any of the Five Essential Competencies. During the observations, there were a few common examples of ways that each teacher, A, B, and C, modeled the essential competencies. Table 13 lists the commonalities and how many teachers used that example.

Table 13

Modeling Examples and Number of Teachers

Modeling example	Number of teachers
Thank yous	3
Respectful to students	3
Listens to students	3

Teacher A was respectful and empathetic during math when a student seemed upset. She asked if he was okay. When the look on his face suggested he was not, she said, “Do not be sad. No, no, we are here to help you.” She continually encourages her students to try whether it is right or wrong. She showed respect by listening to a student

during math talk about something off-topic, and she politely asked the student if they could talk later since it was math time. She walked around the room and checked in with students to see if they were okay or needed help. To encourage her students to push through challenging tasks, she told them to try because there were no wrong answers. When a student was struggling with a fraction problem in math, Teacher A helped him, then asked, “Do you see it now? Guys [the other students], are you proud of him?” She told that student, “Thank you for letting me help you.”

Teacher B had a visitor from another grade level come to see her and deliver a card. When the teacher read the card, she hugged the student and told him that she needed that card today. A little while later, another student came and gave the teacher a card. Teacher B commented on a picture the student had drawn on it. The teacher said it looked just like her, with the bun in her hair, and hugged him. The student told her he missed her. Before the teacher started the science lesson, a student brought the wireless computer keyboard to her. She thanked her for trying to be helpful by doing that. At one point, a student was talking to her softly, so Teacher B asked her to talk louder because she wanted to hear what she was saying.

In Teacher C’s room, for one of the observations, she was leading a writing lesson about using adjectives. She had a picture projected on the LCD monitor. She asked the students to give her one word to describe something they saw in the picture. When a student said a color she saw, Teacher C asked the student to tell more about where she saw that color. As she listened to the student and looked at the picture, Teacher C saw what the student saw. During the Morning Meeting observation, a student told his teacher that he liked her shirt as they were finishing up and getting ready to line up. Her back had

been to him when he said it. She turned around, thanked him, and said she liked his shirt, too.

This section focused on the observations. The observations aimed to see classroom social and emotional learning in action. The data connected to the discussions for the first five interview questions by showing how social and emotional learning looks in action within the classrooms.

When exploring Subquestion 1, the interview data focused on how elementary teachers described the incorporation of social and emotional learning into their daily classroom routines through the lens of the five social competencies defined by CASEL (2020). The observation data focused on how it looked when those teachers implemented social and emotional learning in their classrooms. A theme emerged that teachers believe there needs to be direct instruction in social and emotional skills through discussions, modeling, scenarios, and collaborative work. This theme became evident from the teachers' answers in the interview and their actions in the classroom. The following section explores Subquestion 2, focusing on the teachers' perceived impact of social and emotional strategies on academic achievement.

Subquestion 2: How Do Teachers Who Incorporate Social and Emotional Learning Strategies Into Their Classroom Routines Perceive the Impact of Those Strategies on the Academic Achievement of Their Students?

This second subquestion was about how the teachers perceived the connection between the social and emotional learning and their students' academic achievement. Each research participant was asked seven interview questions correlated to this question for gathering data. Table 14 contains those interview questions.

Table 14

Interview Questions Correlated to Subquestion 2

Interview questions
6. Why do your students believe they can be successful in school?
7. How do your students show they are independent learners?
8. How often do you check to ensure your students understand the taught material?
9. What role do social and emotional learning strategies play in your classroom for your students?
10. How engaged are students when allowed to participate in a class discussion?
11. How often do you provide time for your students to experience productive struggles?
12. When you have students explain their answers in class, what tools do you incorporate to teach them how to do that?

The seven questions were designed to help gain insight into how the teachers perceive the impact of social and emotional learning on their students' academic achievement. Each of these questions connects to the five social competencies. Table 15 shows the connection between those competencies and the questions.

Table 15

Connection Between the Social Competencies and the Interview Questions

Social competency	Interview questions
Self-awareness	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Self-management	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Social awareness	9
Relationship skills	9, 10
Responsible decision-making	7, 8, 9, 11

Many social and emotional skills incorporated into each competency played a part in the interview questions for this section. The questions were designed to glean how the

teachers perceived students' social competencies applied to their academics.

Interview Question 6: Why Do Your Students Believe They Can Be Successful in School? This question is about the student's self-awareness. Do they have confidence in themselves? The coded responses are in Table 16.

Table 16

Interview Question 6 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Telling	3
Classroom culture	2
Real world connection	2
Building confidence	3

Each teacher mentioned that they always tell their students they can succeed. Teacher A tells her students constantly, "No one is allowed to tell you how far you can go. The only thing you are allowed to be told is that you can do whatever you want to do." Teacher B said she tells her students every day that they can succeed and always encourages them to try and try again. Teacher C said she tells her students daily they can succeed, and the school principal tells every student during the morning announcements that each can succeed. She also encourages her students by checking on them and giving positive feedback while they are working. Teacher C said the principal tells the students they can grow up to be whatever they want and to work hard to make it happen.

All three teachers shared that establishing a culture in the classroom for success is a big part. Teacher A tries hard to cultivate in her room what she calls, "There are no I cannot, I just cannot yet." Her students pump each other up and encourage one another. Teachers B and C also talked about how they have tried to create a positive classroom culture by encouraging their students to keep trying and their students to do the same for

each other.

Making real-world connections was discussed by Teachers A and C. Teacher A did that by talking about things that her students might want to do in the future, like owning and driving a car or having a house of their own. Teacher C did that by telling the student that she could see him as a teacher one day because his classmates listen to him and he is very kind.

Telling the students they can be successful is one part, and building their confidence is another. All three teachers mentioned how they see their students' confidence building. Teacher A heard her students say, "I think I can do this." or "Look at my diagnostic results, I am on green. I did not think I would ever reach green." Each success her students achieve builds their confidence. Teacher B noticed that when she gives her students specific encouragement and feedback such as, "what great problem-solving skills," she finds her students will try even more and not give up. Teacher C said that when she comments on what she pictures a student's possible future could be to them, it builds them up.

Interview Question 7: How Do Your Students Show They Are Independent Learners? This question fits with self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making competencies. Students need to know how they feel about the tasks they are being asked to do and manage themselves to get them done by making responsible decisions. Table 17 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who gave those responses.

Table 17

Interview Question 7 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Observations	3
Self-driven	2
Ownership	2

Teachers A, B, and C each said they use observations to assess their students' independence. Teacher B brought up the point that a student recognizing they need help and asking for it is a sign of their independence. Teacher C said seeing her students making choices shows their independence; for example, choosing an animal to research for a project rather than being told an animal to research. She said, “To watch my students getting on their Chromebooks, going to Epic, and choosing a book about their animal by themselves is amazing!” Teacher A said, “Oh they actually love doing that. When I do partner work, they are actually engaged in debates as each partner takes ownership in their own answers.”

Two teachers said seeing their students complete assignments without being repeatedly reminded is a sign of independence. Teacher A commented about not just seeing individual students focused on completing their work but seeing partners or small groups having the same mindset complete the work. Teacher C’s example of her students researching an animal of their choosing would also be an example of being self-driven.

According to Teachers A and C, students taking ownership of their work is another way they show they are independent learners. Teacher A discussed how her students would take ownership of the answers to questions, even wrong ones, until they had been shown their errors. Even then, the students take ownership of their mistakes and

learn from them. Teacher C used the research example again to show ownership by her students. She said watching her students own their time and do their research was like "having little college students in my room."

Interview Question 8: How Often Do You Check to Ensure Your Students Understand the Taught Material? This question may seem related only to the teachers' actions, but it connects to the students' self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making competencies. Table 18 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who gave the response.

Table 18

Interview Question 8 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Constantly	3
To direct my teaching	3

When asked about checking for student understanding, all three teachers answered with a resounding "constantly!" Teachers A, B, and C said they constantly check for understanding in various ways, such as observations, student work samples, and hand signals. Teacher A incorporates exit tickets. Both Teachers A and B also mentioned quizzes and unit assessments.

I asked a supporting question of why they continually check for student understanding of taught material. Teachers A, B, and C said that it is data for them on their teacher effectiveness. They also use the data to meet student needs by creating small groups of students with similar needs. Teacher C expressed that this process helped to discover a student's thought process when finding an answer.

A second follow-up question I asked was how this action affected their students.

Teacher A said it helped her students become more self-aware of what they knew and needed to still work on to master the standard. Knowing what they still needed to work on helped the students self-manage and make responsible decisions for achieving mastery of the standard. Teachers B and C commented on how it helped them help their students by knowing what they needed help with in mastering the standard.

Interview Question 9: What Role Do Social and Emotional Learning Strategies Play in Your Classroom for Your Students? This question connects to all five social competencies. The coded responses and the number of teachers who mentioned them are in Table 19.

Table 19

Interview Question 9 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Safe place	3
Social connections	3
Mindsets	3

Each teacher mentioned students' lives outside of school. Teacher A talked about how her students come to school with a lot of what she called, "baggage." She said that as teachers, "We must remember that academic issues are not the only thing our students deal with in their everyday lives." Teacher A said that school has to be a safe place for the students. Teacher B said that Morning Meeting helps to create a safe space for her students to express their thoughts and feelings. Teacher C talked about how Morning Meeting is when her students learn how to relate to one another, which creates the feeling that the classroom is a safe place to share.

Building connections with the students was expressed by all three teachers, A, B,

and C. Each of them also said that Morning Meeting is a time that helps build connections between the teacher and students and between students. Those connections help develop social awareness and relationship skills. Teacher A also mentioned that she had established connections with her students' families. Those connections have helped her better understand her students' homelife and cultural backgrounds to support them in class.

Teachers A, B, and C discussed the students' mindsets. Teacher B stated, "Social and emotional skills play a large role in my classroom. I mean, if a kid is not socially or emotionally okay, then they are going to struggle in academics." She said that Morning Meeting plays a significant role in developing social and emotional skills and that those skills are practiced throughout the day. Teacher A discussed how she had created a caring, kind, and empathetic atmosphere in her classroom. Checking her students' social and emotional needs is a first go-to with her. She wants to be sure her students have the mindset of being supported by her and their classmates. Teacher C builds her students' confidence by creating a safety net of support so her students have a mindset of "I am not alone."

Interview Question 10: How Engaged Are Your Students When Allowed to Participate in a Class Discussion? This question relates to the social competencies of self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills. The coded responses and number of teachers are listed in Table 20.

Table 20

Interview Question 10 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Depends on the subject	2
Classroom culture	2
Confidence	3

Teachers A and C expressed that the students' engagement depended on the subject. Teacher A said her students were engaged in math discussions but were much more hesitant about reading discussions. She added that for a few students in her class, it was part of their native culture for children to be seen but not heard. Her multi-lingual students struggle with finding the words to express themselves, so they are embarrassed to speak out. Teacher C said it depended on a student's background knowledge of the topic for how engaged the students were or were not.

Teachers A and B talked about how it is part of their classroom culture to try. Teacher A built into her classroom culture that mistakes are learning moments and that the classroom is a safe place to take risks. Teacher B said she has a very talkative group because engaging in the conversation has been a norm from the beginning through Morning Meetings.

Teachers A, B, and C said that confidence is a huge factor in their students' level of participation. Confidence in finding the right words, knowledge of the topic, and the willingness to take a risk make a difference in the students' engagement in the conversation. Each teacher mentioned ways to encourage students to talk, such as using sentence starters or calling someone who is a leader and will get the conversation started. That also helps keep some students from dominating the conversation.

Interview Question 11: How Often Do You Provide Time for Your Students to Experience Productive Struggles? Productive struggle connects with self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making competencies. Struggles can frustrate students and make them want to give up. That is where those competencies come into play. Students can become frustrated when they struggle, so being aware of and managing those feelings helps them make the decision to persevere and not give up. Table 21 lists the coded responses and the number of teachers who gave the response.

Table 21

Interview Question 11 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Often	3
Confidence building	3

All three teachers, A, B, and C, said they often let their students experience productive struggle to help their students build self-confidence. Teacher A said she had to have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) for this strategy. She pointed out that when I supported her school, I told her to let them struggle and not jump in to save them so quickly. Teacher A said, "I have found that, shockingly, my students enjoy the struggle. It has made their confidence in themselves soar." She reported that she has gotten much better about standing back, watching, and waiting. Teacher A questioned if this strategy worked in the beginning, but has discovered it does, and said, "It is amazing!"

Teacher B wants her students always to try first before she provides support. Her class may do tasks independently, with their table group, or with a partner. While the students are working, Teacher B circulates the room and checks on her students. She thinks it is crucial not to jump in and give support or answers because that would prevent

the students from developing their confidence and the social competency skills they need for success.

Teacher C answered, “I would say often because productive struggle is where the magic is. That is when the light bulbs are flickering and trying to come on. So I want them to try to figure it out themselves or try to think about what they could do next before I just show them and just model for them.”

Interview Question 12: When You Have Students Explain Their Answers in Class, What Tools Do You Incorporate to Teach Them How to Do That? This question relates to the competencies of self-awareness and self-control. Sharing explanations can be stressful for students, whether from their desks or in front of everyone. Table 22 shows the coded responses and the number of teachers who gave the response to this question.

Table 22

Interview Question 12 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Sentence starters	3
Document camera	2
Modeling	1
Questioning	3

Sentence starters were shared by all three teachers, A, B, and C, to teach their students how to explain their answers in class. Two examples of sentence starters for math were, “I need help understanding …” or “One thing I like about my partner’s strategy is …” A reading sentence starter example was “I see similarities between this text and [blank] because [blank].” Teacher C stated, “The sentence starters are a launch pad for getting students started.” Teacher A shared, “Using sentence starters was a game

changer because it gave the students a direction for starting." Teacher B commented that her class uses sentence starters when doing math discussions.

Teachers B and C mentioned using a document camera so the student's work is shared and projected for everyone to see while explaining it. Teacher C uses that as an opportunity to model and tell the students to point to the parts they are explaining while doing it. She clarified that everyone knows what you are talking about by pointing to the parts while explaining them.

To help guide the students to deepen their explanations or guide them as they are explaining, Teachers A, B, and C question the students. Through questioning, the teachers said each part or step being explained gets clarified for each student. Teacher A shared that she gets the discussion started and then sits back and watches the students take over the conversation.

When exploring Subquestion 2, the data focused on how elementary teachers perceived that incorporating social and emotional strategies into their daily classroom routines impacted their students' academic achievement. An emerging theme from this data was that the teachers believe that social and emotional learning helps students academically by becoming self-driven, taking ownership of their learning and actions, building confidence, and persevering through challenging work. The following section explores Subquestion 3, focusing on the teachers' perceived impact of social and emotional strategies on their students developing the five essential social competencies.

Subquestion 3: How Do Teachers Who Incorporate Social and Emotional Learning Strategies Into Their Classroom Routines Perceive the Impact of Those Strategies on Developing the Essential Social Competencies in Their Students?

This third subquestion was about how the teachers perceived the connection between social and emotional strategies and their students' development of essential social competencies. Each research participant was asked six interview questions to gather data. Table 23 contains those six interview questions that correlate to this subquestion.

Table 23

Interview Questions Correlated to Subquestion 3

Interview questions
13. How respectful are your students to you?
14. How socially aware are your students?
15. How do you help students in your class who struggle to get along with others develop the relationship skills necessary to help them?
16. What do you do when your students want to give up because something seems challenging?
17. How well do your students listen to each other without interrupting one another?
18. What strategies do you incorporate into your day to teach your students to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations?

The six questions were designed to help gain insight into how the teachers perceive the impact of social and emotional learning on their students' development of the essential social competencies. Each of these questions connects to the five social competencies. Table 24 shows the connection between those competencies and the interview questions.

Table 24

Connection Between the Social Competencies and the Interview Questions

Social competency	Interview questions
Self-awareness	16, 18
Self-management	16, 17, 18
Social awareness	14, 17
Relationship skills	13, 15
Responsible decision-making	16, 18

Many social and emotional skills incorporated into each competency played a part in the interview questions for this section. The questions were designed to glean how the teachers perceived students' social competencies applied to their development of the essential social competencies.

Interview Question 13: How Respectful Are Your Students to You? Why Do You Believe They Are Respectful to You? This question and the follow-up question are related to the social competency of relationship skills. The coded responses are found in Table 25.

Table 25

Interview Question 13 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Respectful of me	3
Showing children respect	3

Teachers A, B, and C all said that their students were respectful of them. When asked why they believed their students were respectful of them, all three teachers said they felt it was because they showed their students respect. Teacher A said she listens to her students, even when their words do not make sense. She will redirect her student to what they should be focused on by telling them, "Let us talk about this later." Teacher A

said, “Handling my students with that level of respect makes my students feel good, heard, accepted, and respected. The students then respect me back.” Teacher B said, “I show my students respect and love.” She believes that kids will not respect you if they do not think you care about them. Teacher C said, “It is about relationships. My students know that I do not expect them to be perfect, but be themselves.” Teacher C also wants her students to feel loved and safe. She believes that that is why her students show her respect.

Interview Question 14: How Socially Aware Are Your Students? This question is related to the social competency of social awareness. There was no pattern found in the response of the three teachers. I will share data from each response separately.

Teacher A said she did not feel that her students were aware of social cues. She suggested that COVID played a role in this lack of awareness due to social isolation during the pandemic. She feels that is why she has had to work on naming emotions and describing what they look like and sound like during Morning Meeting. Empathy has also been part of the Morning Meeting. As a class, Teacher A said, “They learned what it means to walk in someone else's shoes.” She shared that her students had heard the saying but had no idea what it meant.

Teacher B felt like her students were pretty socially aware and able to recognize how other classmates were feeling. She shared that she has a couple of students who are autistic, and so they sometimes misunderstand some social cues and have to be talked through the misunderstanding.

Teacher C also felt that for the most part, her students could recognize how others

were feeling. She shared that her students are still fairly impulsive and do not always think about their words and actions until afterward.

Interview Question 15: How Do You Help Students in Your Class Who Struggle to Get Along With Others Develop the Relationship Skills Necessary to Help Them? This question relates to relationship skills competency. Only one coded response was mentioned by more than one of the three teachers, A, B, and C. All three teachers said they use discussions. Teacher A said that she has discussions. To aid those discussions, she utilizes sentence starters and role-playing of what it looks like to be a friend or be kind to another person. Teacher B said her class discusses different relationships and how to develop them. She said this happens mainly during the Morning Meeting. Teacher C said she explained how the student's actions might make others feel. Her class will discuss how they should feel safe at school, and when we do wrong things, our classmates might not feel that way. Teacher C will also praise the students who struggle with getting along with others when she catches them being helpful or friendly to a classmate.

Interview Question 16: What Do You Do When Your Students Want to Give Up Because Something Seems Challenging? This question relates to the social competencies of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. The coded responses and the number of teachers who gave the response are listed in Table 26.

Table 26

Interview Question 16 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Provide support	3
Classroom culture	1
Encouragement	3

Teachers A, B, and C all said they provide support when their students are facing academic challenges. Teacher A said that when a student struggles with something challenging, the class practices pumping them up. To pump up the struggling student, the class cheers for them and encourages them by assuring them they can do it. She said it had become part of their classroom culture through this process, so her students are not embarrassed to say they do not understand something. Teacher A said her students know they will be encouraged by their peers instead of judged when they struggle. Teacher B said she encourages and supports her students by guiding them through their struggles and sometimes breaks tasks into smaller chunks. Teacher C encourages them to try a different way and supports her students by reteaching or remodeling the topic. She even lets a peer step in to help. Teacher C pointed out that sometimes her students understand something better when a peer explains it.

Interview Question 17: How Well Do Your Students Listen to Each Other Without Interrupting One Another? This question relates to self-awareness and self-management competencies. The coded responses are found in Table 27.

Table 27

Interview Question 17 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Discussions	3
Reminders	2

Teachers A, B, and C shared that they have class discussions about this topic. Teacher A said her students are not very good about not interrupting. She said that part of that is her fault because they get pumped up, so she has to reign them back. Teacher B read a book called, *My Mouth is a Volcano*. The book starts the discussion about not

interrupting. Teacher C said her students are good at not interrupting one another during instructional times. It is during noninstructional times that her students struggle with this skill. She has discussions with the students who need it when the problem occurs.

Teachers A and B also incorporate reminders to help their students remember. Teacher A reminds her students, saying, “Okay, wait, what is the respectful thing to do when a peer is talking? What is your role at that time?” Teacher B uses signals, such as putting her finger over her mouth.

Interview Question 18: What Strategies Do You Incorporate Into Your Day to Teach Your Students to Manage Their Emotions, Thought, and Behaviors in Different Situations? This question relates to the social competencies of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. The coded responses are listed in Table 28.

Table 28

Interview Question 18 Coded Response and Number of Teachers

Coded response	Number of teachers
Morning meeting	2
Breathing exercises	2
Movement	2
Brain breaks	2
Discussions	2

Teachers A and C spoke about the Morning Meeting. Teacher A explained that these were the skills they work on daily in Morning Meeting and they apply that learning throughout the day. Teacher A stated, “My students are learning that their emotions do not control them, they control their emotions. They have really big feelings and little bodies. So sometimes I know, it is really hard for them.” Teacher C said that Morning

Meeting is one way she helps her students with their social skills. She said, “Letting my students have the time to greet one another helps to teach them socially how to look at a person when greeting them” She uses books to bring up emotions and help the student relate to the characters by sharing their thoughts or experiences similar to those in the book.

Teachers A and B taught their students breathing exercises to help them manage their thoughts and emotions. Teacher A said that her students take moments as they need to stop and breathe to help refocus and regain control of themselves. Her students will do that independently. Teacher A also encourages her students to get up and stretch for a minute to refocus and get the blood moving. Teacher B will have the class take a moment to breathe and refocus. She even gets her students up and moving to give them a break from sitting. Teachers A and B referred to those strategies as brain breaks.

Teachers B and C discuss their students’ emotions, thoughts, and behaviors with their classes. Teacher B uses scenarios for her class discussions, such as "How should you handle seeing a classmate being mean to another classmate?” Teacher C uses books to provide situations characters get into to start discussions and help her students relate if they find themselves in a similar situation. Teacher C shared a story about a book she read at Christmastime about a little girl whose feelings got hurt by a classmate. The class drew names for a gift exchange, and she had that classmate’s name. She decided that she was not going to bring him a present. Teacher C said, “I had the students talk about how the little girl was feeling and acting, then they talked about how the classmate might feel if he did not get a gift.”

When exploring Subquestion 3, the data focused on how elementary teachers

perceived that incorporating social and emotional strategies into their daily classroom routines impacted their students' development of essential social competencies. An emerging theme from these data was that the teachers believe incorporating social and emotional learning into their daily classroom routines helps students develop essential social competencies. Evidence of that impact is shown through their interactions with adults and other students, showing kindness and empathy, how they handle their feelings and emotions, and making choices.

Six codes were common between at least two of the three subquestions. Morning Meeting was mentioned several times during the interviews as critical in incorporating social and emotional learning into the classroom. Modeling was mentioned as a tool for teaching social and emotional learning. Modeling helped the students see how social and emotional skills looked and sounded. Ways to self-manage thoughts, feelings, and emotions were through breathing exercises and movement. Another common code was discussions. The tools used to help the discussions were sentence starters, questioning, and scenarios. Reminders were mentioned as a way to keep the social and emotional skills fresh with the students.

Summary

The focus of this chapter was to describe and share the data collected regarding teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success. The data were collected from interviews and observations with the three participating teachers who worked in a Title I school. Colleagues recommended each one as a teacher who incorporated social and emotional learning in their classrooms, was certified, and worked in grades

kindergarten to fifth. Their experience ranged from 11 years to 22 years.

There were three emerging themes from these data. The first theme that emerged was that teachers believe there needs to be direct instruction in social and emotional skills through discussions, modeling, scenarios, and collaborative work. This theme was based on the first five interview questions and classroom observations. Teacher A said, “My students do not know how to name or manage their feelings and emotions, so I have had to do a lot of instruction on those skills.” While I observed Morning Meeting in Teacher A’s classroom, her students discussed what gratitude was and how a person could show gratitude. In Teacher B’s classroom, I observed her remind her students to raise their hands by modeling or ask a friend for help. In Teacher C’s classroom, I observed students sharing what their partners had said during a turn and talk. One partner did an excellent job sharing, and Teacher C said, “Thank you, you have great listening skills.”

The second theme was that the teachers believe that social and emotional learning helps students academically by becoming self-driven, taking ownership of their learning and actions, building confidence, and persevering through challenging work. This theme came about from Interview Questions 6-12. Each teacher commented, “I tell my student daily that they can be successful.” Teacher C commented, “Productive struggle is where the magic happens. When students struggle and figure out the answer to the problem, that builds their confidence and drives them to do more.” During the observations in each classroom, I observed each teacher tell their students at various points in their lessons comments like, “I knew you could do it.” Each teacher was encouraging and supportive of their students.

The last theme was that the teachers believe incorporating social and emotional

learning into their daily classroom routines helps students develop essential social competencies. Evidence of that impact is shown through their interactions with adults and other students, showing kindness and empathy, how they handle their feelings and emotions, and making responsible choices. This theme was developed from the data that came from Interview Questions 13-18. Each participating teacher said that their students were respectful to them and they believed it was because they treated their students with respect. Teacher B said, “I show my students respect and love. I believe that children will not respect you if they do not think you care about them.” Teacher A said, “The social competencies are a work in progress, and progress was being made each day.” I observed Teacher C present a scenario about how a student might feel after a classmate was not sharing. The class discussed how the problem could be solved. Teacher C had her student discuss how to show gratitude and then had her students make cards for an adult in the building for whom they were grateful. While in Teacher B’s classroom observing, some of those students from Teacher A’s class brought her cards to thank her for having been their teacher. Teacher B hugged them, and the students told her they missed her as their teacher. It was evident to me as an observer that Teacher B created a relationship with those students and that she still was impacting them.

The next chapter discusses how this study contributes to the existing literature on social and emotional learning and makes recommendations for possible research in the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

This qualitative case study intended to explore teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success. Teacher perceptions of the connections between social and emotional learning and student success could help leaders look for other ways to define and measure success other than a standardized test. Standardized tests only measure one piece of a student's educational life journey, their content knowledge. Standardized testing was acceptable for measuring success when we were in the age of manufacturing. Educational policy is still tied to when it was the school's job to turn out students who could memorize and recite information, pass cognitive tests, and get a production line job in a factory (Duffell et al., 2016). Duffell et al. (2016) further pointed out that today's society has moved to the information age, where different skills, such as social and emotional skills, are needed.

Other findings have shown that students who participated in social and emotional learning improved in multiple areas. The students involved in the studies showed notable improvements in social and emotional learning skills, attitude, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). School leaders need to be aware of teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning to plan professional development on how to teach and connect it to academics throughout the day. The participating teachers in this research study all pointed out that their students come to school with experiences children should not have to go through. The participating teachers' students deal with a lot outside of school. The students bring those issues to school without knowing how to deal with the

feelings and emotions attached to them and then try to focus on learning.

This study's central question was, “How do teachers perceive the connection between incorporating social and emotional learning strategies and student success?”

Three associative subquestions fostered and supported an understanding of teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning and student success.

1. How can the integration of social and emotional learning be described?
2. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on the academic achievement of their students?
3. How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those strategies on developing the essential social competencies in their students?

The data revealed how teachers perceived the connection between social and emotional learning and student success encompassing three themes. The themes were determined using a combination of constructivist and interpretivist lenses, meaning the themes were determined based on the data of the participants’ views gathered during the interviews and my experiences while observing their classrooms. The first theme identifies that teachers believe there needs to be direct instruction in social and emotional skills through discussions, modeling, scenarios, and collaborative work. The second theme is that the teachers believe that social and emotional learning helps students academically by becoming self-driven, taking ownership of their learning and actions, building confidence, and persevering through challenging work. The last theme is that the teachers believe incorporating social and emotional learning into their daily classroom

routines helps students develop essential social competencies, as shown through their interactions with adults and other students, showing kindness and empathy, handling their feelings and emotions, and making responsible choices.

Discussion of the Results

To understand teacher perceptions of connections between social and emotional learning and student success, I needed to determine how teachers described social and emotional learning integration. This inquiry led to the design of the first subquestion, "How can the integration of social and emotional learning be described?"

The theme that emerged from the interview and observation data indicated that the participating teachers from the study believed there needs to be direct instruction in social and emotional skills through discussions, modeling, scenarios, and collaborative work. In a meta-analysis done by Goldberg et al. (2018), the authors stated that schools are an ideal setting for developing children's social and emotional skills because of the time children spend at school. Goldberg et al. also stated that school is where socialization is placed in a context for learning vital life skills and academic success. The teachers participating in this study commented that their students come to school with, figuratively speaking, "a lot of baggage." The participating teachers all shared that the students at their school deal with a lot at home, more than children should deal with at a young age, and those issues come to school with them. Starting the day with direct instruction on social and emotional skills through a strategy like Morning Meeting helps the students put the baggage down and focus on what they are at school to do, learn. While observing the three classrooms, each teacher would stop and listen to their students when they had things to say. While observing in Teacher A's classroom, one student was

going off topic, and Teacher A listened and then asked if they could talk about that after math. The students in Teacher B's classroom were willing to take risks, as was evident when I observed a phonics and word working lesson. The teacher asked the students to spell the word remember. Teacher B told them it was a challenging word, but she wanted to see how they would do with it. She walked around the room checking the students' attempts and supported them with praise and thinking through all the sounds in the word and the rules of multisyllabic words they have been working on in class. While in Teacher C's classroom, she used a strategy called turn and talk. This strategy is where two students, or partners, turn to one another and discuss a topic being worked on in class. As her students talked, Teacher C moved from one pair to another, listened in on their conversations, and asked clarifying questions. Teacher C also reminded the students to be good partners and use their listening skills. According to Payton et al. (2008), social and emotional programs are among the most lucrative interventions for children. An examination of four meta-analyses on incorporating social and emotional learning had two common findings: (a) students showed tremendous growth in their social and emotional skills, resulting in positive improvements in attitudes, social behavior, and academic performance; and (b) increased academic achievement of 11 percentile points. The improvements showed decreased behavioral problems and emotional anguish (Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008).

The second piece I sought to understand was how teachers perceived the connection between social and emotional learning and student achievement. This inquiry led to the design of the second subquestion, "How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines perceive the impact of those

strategies on the academic achievement of their students?"

The second theme that emerged from the data revealed that the teachers at the study site believed that social and emotional learning helps students academically by becoming self-driven, taking ownership of their learning and actions, building confidence, and persevering through challenging work. According to Elias et al. (1997), how and what we learn is tied to emotions and relationships. Blum and Libbey (2004) and Durlak et al. (2011) affirmed that social and emotional learning deficiencies adversely affect academic performance, behavior, and health. One teacher in the study stated that if a child is not socially and emotionally okay, they will struggle with academics. Each teacher stated that they continuously check their students' levels of understanding of taught material. This action helps the students become self-aware of what they know and still need to learn. Those continual checks of student understanding also help the teachers know what their students need help with to master a standard. Berman (2018), a superintendent of four school districts where social and emotional learning was implemented, cited one lesson he learned: Instructing and learning are intrinsically social and emotional. A considerable amount of documentation by Jones and Kahn (2017) revealed that students learn more if they have the skills and competencies to control their emotions. The teachers in the study believe that, which is why they directly teach and incorporate social and emotional skills in their classrooms.

The third piece I sought to understand was how teachers perceived the connection between social and emotional learning and student development of essential social competencies. This inquiry led to the design of the third subquestion, "How do teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning strategies into their classroom routines

perceive the impact of those strategies on developing the essential social competencies in their students?"

The last theme is that the teachers believe incorporating social and emotional learning into their daily classroom routines helps students develop essential social competencies, as shown through their interactions with adults and other students, showing kindness and empathy, handling their feelings and emotions, and making responsible choices. Kendziora and Yoder (2016) cited studies by Durlak et al. (2011), Sklad et al. (2012), and Zins and Elias (2006), which found that the incorporation of social and emotional learning built up social and emotional competencies and improved classroom behavior. The school environment became safer due to a reduction in aggressive behaviors. The participating teachers mentioned that creating an environment where the students feel safe is crucial for them to be open and willing to take risks with learning. Through the incorporation of Morning Meeting, the participating teachers have created a classroom culture of trust and respect, built relationships, and established their classrooms as safe spaces. Souers and Hall (2019) stated that before learning happens in the classroom, children need to know they are physically and emotionally safe. Souers and Hall (2019) further stated that behind every behavior, a need is expressed. Those needs fall into one of four areas: emotional, relational, physical, or control. Teacher A stated in her interview that she has worked hard to create a safe learning environment for her students. Using Morning Meeting as a launching point, Teacher A has built student knowledge of emotions and how to manage those emotions. She uses that knowledge throughout the day to encourage her students to try hard things and to know that it is all right to not be good at everything; that is part of the learning process. She shared how the

students' conversations and willingness to ask questions have improved so much throughout the year. Teacher B mentioned that her students work harder when they feel safe, which has been evident over the year.

Conclusions Based on the Results

Social and emotional learning integrates the essential social competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development started a collaboration in 1997 that created a list of strategies for educators to address these "missing pieces" in education (CASEL, 2017, as cited by Beaty, 2018). Emotion and relationships are tied to what and how we learn (Elias et al., 1997). That connects to what Teacher A and Teacher B said regarding their students dealing with a variety of issues at home that affect them at school. All three teachers discussed how the students needed to feel safe at school, in their classrooms, and with their classmates and teachers. When social and emotional needs are met, students are open to learning, thus improving their academic performance. Based on the data collected from the study, teachers believe that social and emotional learning should be incorporated into the daily routine to help meet students' social and emotional needs and develop essential social competencies. I predicted that teachers believed that for students to be open to learning, their social and emotional needs must be recognized and met. This prediction was accurate, as the participating teachers stated multiple times in the interview and modeled in the classroom during the observations.

Beaty (2018) stated that an ageless goal of education was to produce students who are responsible, productive, compassionate, dependable, and engaged citizens in society.

That parallels Plato's and Dewey's beliefs in a sound education with genuine learning. There are five domains of human development which include social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and academic. Each of these domains is interwoven in the brain and in behavior, therefore making all of them crucial for learning (Jones & Kahn, 2017). This information led to a second prediction that teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning are connected to not just academic achievement but lifetime achievement. Lifetime achievement connects to the end goal of education which is life after and beyond school. This prediction was accurate, as the data show. The participating teachers believed there was a connection between social and emotional learning and academic achievement. During the interviews, there was some discussion about applying social and emotional connections to the world beyond school. Other discussions brought up seeing the future for the students, such as having a job, a home, and a car.

The findings of this qualitative research study supported the combined theoretical frameworks of constructivism and interpretivism. The teachers who participated in the study perceived the connections between social and emotional learning and academic achievement based on their interactions in their world, which for this study was the school where they worked and the classrooms where they taught. For the teachers, their truth and knowledge were personal based on their experiences with their students.

Limitations

Limitations are weak points that the researcher cannot control (PhDStudent, 2013, 2016; Simon, 2011; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that one limitation often attached to this type of study is the sample size. To help other researchers not suffer from the same weakness, the author accepts it, explains it,

and suggests future research themes. This study's limitations were a single site, a small sample size, and the observer lens.

The research was limited to a single school site. The school was a Title I elementary school in southwestern North Carolina. The school was located in the district where I worked; therefore, I had access to connect with the participating teachers for the interviews and observations. Due to the work I had done there for 4 years, an established relationship existed with the leadership and teachers, which made gaining access to the school possible. The teachers trusted me and were open and honest with their answers during the interview.

The research group size was partly small due to the study's time frame and the number of possible participants in the school. Gay et al. (2012) stated that when selecting a small number of participants, you should choose individuals who will be good contributing informants. This logic was the reason the set criteria for selecting participants was implemented. I sought three to five participants from various grade levels in kindergarten to fifth grade. The teachers had to be certified, have completed at least 2 full years in the classroom, and have been recommended through a survey (see Appendix C). Of the five potential teachers for the study, only three chose to participate.

The third limitation was the observer lens. As the researcher, I used the combined lenses of a constructivist and interpretivist to analyze the data gathered through the interviews and observations to look for patterns and develop emerging themes about what the teachers perceived. Creswell and Creswell (2018) said this combination often addresses the processes of interactions among individuals with the researcher’s aim to make sense of others' meanings of the world. This interpretation of the data is shaped by

my own experiences and background and written in my words. To be sure that I interpreted and constructed teacher perceptions accurately, they read through my interpretations and confirmed or corrected the accuracy of the findings.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries set and controlled by the researcher to keep the research manageable and possible to complete (PhDStudent, 2013, 2016; Simon, 2011; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). I recruited teachers from one school and used a determined set of criteria to select possible participants. I chose the school for the research site due to an established relationship with the staff after working with them for 4 years. The staff trusted me and were open and honest, allowing me to collect the data needed. The study was a short-term study, which Gray (2004) described as the data gathered at one point due to time limitations and resources.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study implied that teachers perceived a connection between incorporating social and emotional learning and student success. Based on the findings, specific recommendations could be applied. There is a need for policies to be implemented to support social and emotional learning, including training school staff to implement direct instruction and incorporate social and emotional learning. With the training, specific goals must be outlined, such as developing a clear understanding of what is social and emotional learning, the why for teaching it, and how to incorporate it throughout the instruction. To ensure continuity and equity, resources must be provided to support the teachers' efforts to teach and incorporate social and emotional learning.

The teachers in the study stated that if the students are not socially and

emotionally well, they will struggle academically. Advances in neuroscience have found that emotions and learning are interdependent, meaning one needs the other and vice versa (Johnson & Weiner, 2017). With this knowledge, teachers should incorporate social and emotional skills into their daily classroom routines. State and local school districts should provide access to training on incorporating social and emotional learning for anyone in the district who directly works with students. Multiple curriculums provide professional development for social and emotional learning, such as Fly Five (Fly Five SEL, 2021), Harmony SEL (Harmony SEL, 2023), and Second Step (Second Step, 2012). A district could adopt one of those curriculums and line up training for the teachers in the district. The state could have social and emotional learning-aligned standards and provide a list of state-approved curriculums for districts to consider purchasing and using.

Teachers believe that incorporating social and emotional learning daily impacts their students' academic achievement. One impact teachers saw is improved communication between students, which has deepened their understanding of the material taught. One teacher in the study said that once the conversation starts, she sits back, listens, and is awed by the beauty of what is happening among her students. More rigorous standards require students to engage more through discussions, explanations, and collaborations. For this to happen, students need to learn communication, regulation, and how to work with others (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Those skills come from social and emotional learning and are part of the essential social competencies. Teachers need resources to support the learning and development of essential social competencies. There are many options for resources available. Some are free, and some have a cost. One free resource is ClassDojo (ClassJojo, 2020), with videos teaching social and emotional

skills with discussion questions. The Little Spot of Emotion Series by Alber (2019) teaches about emotions and how to manage them. The books can be purchased, or the videos can be accessed through YouTube.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addressed students' social-emotional needs and related to student success. The participating teachers for the study consisted of three elementary teachers ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade who all worked in the same Title I school. Each of the teachers was recommended by colleagues as a teacher who incorporates social and emotional learning in their classrooms. These teachers seemed socially and emotionally competent when observed and interviewed. They each had an understanding of the need to teach their students social and emotional skills and do it. What about teachers who are not socially and emotionally competent? Would those teachers be able to teach and support their students with social and emotional learning? With training and resources for teachers, future research could be conducted to assess the effectiveness of that effort to incorporate social and emotional learning in the classroom.

My research could be replicated by using a larger group of teachers from multiple schools or cast a bigger net by exploring multiple districts within one or more states. The study could expand across kindergarten through 12th grade to further the research of the connections beyond the elementary school level. Social and emotional learning is often connected to the elementary grades, so the expansion to the 12th grade could give further insight. These recommendations could further develop teacher perceptions regarding the connection between social and emotional learning and student success. A more detailed

perception could lead to changes in policies regarding how success is measured.

A second recommendation would be to change the study from short-term to long-term to determine the impact over a school year. A 2012 study found when social and emotional learning was provided, learning engagement increased while interfering behaviors decreased (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Based on that study, additional data could be included, such as end-of-year assessments to determine academic success, graduation rates, behavior referral data, and school suspension data. The additional data would give a clear picture of the overall impact that social and emotional learning has on student success and through these data see if similar themes emerge regarding teacher perceptions as in this study.

Conclusion

There is significant research on the benefits of social and emotional learning. CASEL leads the charge to integrate social and emotional learning for all preschool through high school students as a fundamental educational piece (Beaty, 2018). Elias et al. (2017) noted that social and emotional learning needs an integrated and coordinated framework to provide synergy. This study was about teacher perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success.

The theoretical framework for this study was a combination of constructivism and interpretivism. The research goal was to depend as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants were classroom teachers who met the requirements of being licensed, having 2 or more years of experience, and were recommended by at least two colleagues as incorporating social

and emotional learning into their daily routine. Using this framework, I engaged in the participants' world through the interviews and observations to gather the data. My experiences and background helped arrange the construction and interpretation of the data as I looked for similarities and patterns to understand teacher perspectives on the impact of incorporating social and emotional learning on meeting students' social and emotional needs and student success.

The findings of this study led to three emerging themes:

- Teachers believe there needs to be direct instruction in social and emotional skills.
- Teachers believe social and emotional learning helps students academically by becoming self-driven, taking ownership of their learning and actions, building confidence, and persevering through challenging work.
- Teachers believe incorporating social and emotional learning into their daily classroom routines helps students develop essential social competencies, as shown through their interactions with adults and other students, showing kindness and empathy, handling their feelings and emotions, and making responsible choices.

These themes helped me conclude that teachers perceive a connection between social and emotional learning and student success. This conclusion adds to the existing literature regarding the need and benefits of social and emotional learning.

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Appendix A

Access Permission Email

(date)

RE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Dear Principal *(name)*,

My name is Beth Washle, and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Gardner-Webb University. I want to let you know about an opportunity for your teachers to volunteer for my research. I am seeking teachers with at least two full years in the classroom. My study seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success.

This study will include two classroom observations, a one-on-one interview, and one data verification session. The total time for their involvement in the study will be two and a half hours; this includes 30 minutes for each classroom observation, one 45-minute interview, and one 30-minute data verification session.

If you agree to allow your teachers the opportunity to participate in this study, please let me know. I will then send you the recruitment email and ask that you forward it to your staff.

Your consideration in allowing me to recruit your teachers is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or want more information about this Institutional Review Board-approved project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Beth Washle
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(704) 685-7743
bwashle@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(910) 619-1588
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

Appendix B

Recommendation Survey Email

(date)

RE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Dear Staff,

I am seeking to recruit three to five teachers to participate in my research for my doctorate. I am studying teachers' perceptions of the connections between social and emotional learning and students' success. First, I need your help identifying teachers in your building who incorporate social and emotional learning in their classrooms.

Please take a moment to fill out the attached survey to make your recommendations. You may type more than one name for your response.

Staff Recommendations Survey *(to be linked in the email)*

Thank you in advance for your help with identifying your colleagues that are incorporating social and emotional learning in their classrooms.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Beth Washle
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(704) 685-7743
bwashle@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(910) 619-1588
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

Appendix C

Staff Recommendations Survey

Staff Recommendations Survey

For my study, social and emotional learning is defined 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 (Borowski, 2019; CASEL. 2020). This definition describes CASEL's five social competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Based on the above definition, please provide the names of teachers in your building whom you would recommend for this study. Your responses are confidential.

Recommendations

Long answer text

Appendix D

Recruitment Email

(date)

RE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Dear Classroom Teachers,

My name is Beth Washle, and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Gardner-Webb University. I want to let you know about an opportunity to volunteer for my research. I am seeking teachers with at least two full years in the classroom. My study seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success.

This study will include two classroom observations, a one-on-one interview, and one data verification session. The total time you will be involved in the study will be two and a half hours; this includes 30 minutes for each classroom observation, one 45-minute interview, and one 30-minute data verification session.

If you participate in this study, please know that your information will be kept confidential.

A follow-up email with additional information will be sent when you reply that you are a willing participant.

Your consideration to be a participant is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or want more information about this Institutional Review Board-approved project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Beth Washle
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(704) 685-7743
bwashle@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
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Appendix E

Follow-up Participation Email With Informed Consent Letter

(*Date*)

RE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the teachers' perceptions of the connections between social and emotional learning and student success study. I wanted to provide you with additional details about my research. These details will also be reviewed during our one-to-one interview.

Purpose

My study seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of how incorporating social and emotional learning addresses students' social-emotional needs and relates to student success.

Procedure

What you will do in the study: In this study, there will be two video-recorded observations of your classroom interactions. The researcher will be using an observation tool to write observation notes. The video recording allows the researcher to review the classroom interactions multiple times later to ensure parts were not missed and recorded in the notes accurately from the original observation. In addition to the observations, you will be interviewed. The interview will last for 45 minutes. It will be conducted using questions related to incorporating social and emotional learning and student success and be video-recorded for accuracy. The interview will not be related to the observation. You may skip any question in the interview that causes you discomfort. You can also stop the interview or observation at any time. Once the observation and interview notes have been analyzed, you will be asked to review them to ensure the data captured has been accurately reflected.

Time Required

The anticipation is that the study will require about 2.5 hours of your time. The breakdown of that time is; one hour for two 30-minute observations and video recordings, 45 minutes for the interview, and 30 minutes to verify the data captured.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. During the interview, you have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. You have the right to withdraw at any time without any penalty. Should you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your collected data be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

Data collected from observations, interviews, and recordings will be private and confidential, as protection for participants' anonymity is a priority of the researcher. A lockable nonshared file stored on the researcher's personal computer will hold any digital information to ensure the confidentiality of the material and data collected. Hard copies will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. After three years from the

researcher's graduation, all digital and hard copy data collected, including videos, recordings, and notes, will be destroyed by a method appropriate to the data source. Digital material will be deleted, and hard copy data will be shredded and used as a fire starter.

Data Linked with Identifying Information

The information you give in the study will be assigned a code number (or pseudonym) to ensure confidentiality. Code lists connecting participants' names to their code will be located in a locked file. This list will be destroyed after the study and the data analysis are completed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Risks

There are no foreseeable or anticipated risks of participating in this study.

Benefits

Participation in this study has no direct benefits associated with it. The study may help the educational community and society begin discussing the connections between incorporating social and emotional learning and student success. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment

Participation is voluntary, so there is no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio (or video) tape will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw From the Study

- To withdraw during the study, tell the interviewer to "stop the interview. I wish to withdraw." Withdrawing has no penalty.
- To withdraw after the submission of your materials, please contact Beth Washle at (704) 685-7743.

Future Research

The data collected for this research will be made available to other parties for the purpose of further research by means of the published final dissertation. There will be no names or identification of the participants or site location included.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Beth Washle
EdD Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(704) 685-7743
bwashle@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Michelle Bennett
Faculty Research Advisor
Curriculum and Instruction, Gardner Webb University
(910) 619-1588
mbennett1@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

_____ Date: _____
Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix F

Observation Protocol

Teachers' Perceptions of the Connections Between Social and Emotional Learning and Student Success Observation Protocol	
Observation Behaviors or Actions	**Notes**
Examples of ways the teacher supports the five essential competencies (ex., gives praise for exhibiting a skill or encourages the practice of a skill): • Self-awareness • Self-management • Social Awareness • Relationship Skills • Responsible Decision-making	
Examples of ways the teacher develops the five essential competencies (ex., any direct teaching of skills): • Self-awareness • Self-management • Social Awareness • Relationship Skills • Responsible Decision-making	
Examples of ways the teacher incorporates social and emotional learning strategies during the school day (ex., working in small groups, persevering through a challenge, or encouraging classmates to support one another).	
Examples of ways the teacher models any of the five essential competencies in the classroom (ex., showing empathy, thinking out loud through a challenging problem, or encouragement).	
Additional information	**Notes**
Classroom Setting	
Reflections	

Appendix G

Interview Protocol

Teachers' Perceptions of the Connections Between Social and Emotional Learning and Student Success Interview Protocol	
Questions	**Notes**
1. How do you help your students become self-aware of their thoughts and feelings?	
2. What strategies do you teach your students to help them with self-management of their thoughts and feelings?	
3. How do you help your student recognize social cues to help them with social awareness?	
4. What do you do in your class to help your students build and develop relationship skills?	
5. How do you help your students develop the ability to make responsible decisions?	
6. Why do your students believe they can be successful in school? • How do you contribute to their belief in themselves?	
7. How do your students show they are independent learners? • In what ways have you contributed to your students' independence?	

8. How often do you check to ensure your students understand the taught material? • Why do you do that? • What do you believe is the effect that action has on your students?	
9. What role do social and emotional learning strategies play in your classroom for your students? • How do they connect to the success of your students? • What are some examples of those connections in your classroom?	
10. How engaged are your students when allowed to participate in a class discussion? • How do you encourage everyone to participate? • How do you prevent some students from dominating the classroom discussions so everyone feels they have a voice?	
11. How often do you provide time for your students to experience productive struggles? • Why is it essential for them to struggle at times? • What benefits do they gain from it?	
12. When you have students explain their answers in class, what tools do you incorporate to teach them how to do that?	

13. How respectful are your students to you? • Why do you believe they are respectful to you? • Are they equally respectful to other adults in the building, and why might that be the case?	
14. How socially aware are your students? • How do you see your students considering one another's perspectives and showing empathy?	
15. How do you help students in your class who struggle to get along with others develop the relationship skills necessary to help them?	
16. What do you do when your students want to give up because something seems challenging?	
17. How well do your students listen to each other without interrupting one another? • What strategies do you use to help your students learn how to listen and wait their turn to talk? • How do you help your students develop the essential competency skill of social awareness?	

18. What strategies do you incorporate into your day to teach your students to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations?	