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COVID-19 Pandemic: Lived Experiences of Teachers Supporting Students' Social-
Emotional Learning Needs Upon Returning to Face-To-Face Instruction

A dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

February 2023

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Emotional Learning Needs Upon Returning to Face-To-Face Instruction

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I end with a quote that kept me going throughout this journey from R.S. Grey,

“She believed she could, so she did.”

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 Pandemic: Lived Experiences of Teachers Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Learning Needs Upon Returning to Face-To-Face Instruction

by

Valerie Cover

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology: This phenomenological study identified and described San Bernardino County elementary school teachers' experiences supporting students' social-emotional needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants were purposively chosen based on specific criteria of working in a public kindergarten through sixth grade setting within San Bernardino County. The participants answered 15 semi-structured questions. The transcribed data collected by the researcher during the 12 interviews and artifact collection were then uploaded to the software program NVIVO where patterns and themes were developed to answer the research questions.

Findings: The shared experiences of participants and the supports given socially and emotionally were: (a) behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions, (b) provided access to a variety of coping strategies, (c) built relationships with students and parents/guardians, (d) emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff, (e) low self-management skills that led to undesired

behaviors, (f) collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff, (g) positive communication and strategies to manage one's behavior, (h) adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions, (i) empathy-focused lessons and discussions, (j) lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills, (k) encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills, (l) inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions and (m) nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Conclusions: The three conclusions are: (a) continued supports in self-management and social awareness are essential in developing appropriate behaviors, (b) COVID-19 has dramatically impacted students' abilities to make caring and productive decisions, and (c) education needs to continue to build emotional support systems that are adequately staffed and trained properly.

Recommendations: Three recommendations are: (a) a replication study with a larger sample size, (b) a study identifying emotional support programs and resources aligned to current classroom needs, and (c) a study zeroed in on mental diagnosis after COVID-19 pandemic in students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Background..... | 4 |
| COVID-19 Pandemic..... | 4 |
| Conditions for Families | 5 |
| Childhood Trauma | 5 |
| Historical Perspectives..... | 6 |
| History of Social-Emotional Learning..... | 6 |
| Theoretical Background..... | 7 |
| Emotional Competence Theory | 7 |
| Ecological Systems Theory | 7 |
| Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Framework..... | 8 |
| Social-Emotional Integration in the Classroom..... | 9 |
| Family and School Relationships | 9 |
| Social-Emotional Learning and the COVID-19 Pandemic..... | 11 |
| Statement of Research Problem..... | 12 |
| Purpose Statement..... | 14 |
| Research Question | 14 |
| Research Sub-Questions | 14 |
| Significance..... | 15 |
| Definitions..... | 17 |
| Theoretical Terms | 17 |
| Operational Terms | 18 |
| Delimitations..... | 19 |
| Organization of the Study | 19 |
| | |
| CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE | 21 |
| The COVID-19 Pandemic: Affecting the Youth | 21 |
| School Closures | 22 |
| Conditions for Families | 23 |
| Childhood Trauma | 24 |
| Historical Overview of Social-Emotional Learning | 26 |
| Theoretical Background..... | 29 |
| Emotional Competence Theory | 29 |
| Ecological Systems Theory | 31 |
| Microsystem..... | 32 |
| Mesosystem | 33 |
| Exosystem..... | 33 |
| Macrosystem..... | 34 |
| Chronosystem | 35 |
| Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Framework | 37 |
| Self-Awareness | 38 |
| Self-Management..... | 38 |
| Social Awareness..... | 39 |
| Relationship Skills | 39 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Responsible Decisions-Making | 40 |
| Social-Emotional Integration in the Classroom..... | 40 |
| Effectiveness of Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom | 41 |
| Family-School Connection | 43 |
| Responding to COVID-19 Through Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom..... | 45 |
| Behavior Implications of COVID-19 in the Classroom | 47 |
| Importance of Social-Emotional Learning After the Pandemic | 48 |
| Literature Gap | 50 |
| Synthesis Matrix | 52 |
| Summary | 52 |
| | |
| CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY | 53 |
| Purpose Statement..... | 53 |
| Research Questions..... | 53 |
| Research Sub-Questions | 54 |
| Research Design..... | 54 |
| Population | 55 |
| Sampling Frame | 56 |
| Sample | 56 |
| Sample Size..... | 56 |
| Purposeful Sampling..... | 57 |
| Sample Selection Process | 58 |
| Instrumentation | 59 |
| Interview Instrument Development..... | 60 |
| Reliability..... | 60 |
| Validity | 61 |
| Data Collection | 62 |
| Data Analysis | 63 |
| Inter-Coder Reliability | 63 |
| Limitations | 63 |
| Summary | 64 |
| | |
| CHAPTER IV RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS..... | 65 |
| Purpose Statement..... | 65 |
| Research Question | 65 |
| Research Sub-Questions | 66 |
| Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures | 66 |
| Interviews..... | 66 |
| Artifacts | 67 |
| Population | 68 |
| Sampling Frame | 68 |
| Sample | 69 |
| Sample Size..... | 69 |
| Purposeful Sampling..... | 70 |
| Sample Selection Process | 71 |
| Demographic Data | 72 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Presentation of Data..... | 72 |
| Central Research Question..... | 73 |
| Data Analysis by Participant..... | 75 |
| Participant 1 | 75 |
| Research Sub-Question 1. | 75 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 76 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 76 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 77 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 78 |
| Artifacts..... | 79 |
| Participant 2 | 79 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 79 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 80 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 81 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 82 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 82 |
| Artifacts..... | 83 |
| Participant 3 | 84 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 84 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 84 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 85 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 86 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 87 |
| Participant 4 | 88 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 88 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 89 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 90 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 90 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 91 |
| Artifacts..... | 92 |
| Participant 5 | 93 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 93 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 94 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 95 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 95 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 96 |
| Artifacts..... | 97 |
| Participant 6 | 98 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 98 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 98 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 99 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 100 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 100 |
| Participant 7 | 102 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 102 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 103 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 104 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 105 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 106 |
| Participant 8 | 107 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 107 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 108 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 109 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 110 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 110 |
| Participant 9 | 112 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 112 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 112 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 113 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 114 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 114 |
| Artifacts..... | 115 |
| Participant 10..... | 116 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 116 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 117 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 117 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 118 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 119 |
| Artifacts..... | 119 |
| Participant 11 | 120 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 120 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 121 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 122 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 122 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 123 |
| Participant 12 | 124 |
| Research Sub-Question 1 | 124 |
| Research Sub-Question 2 | 125 |
| Research Sub-Question 3 | 125 |
| Research Sub-Question 4 | 126 |
| Research Sub-Question 5 | 126 |
| Results by Research Question..... | 128 |
| Research Sub-Question 1..... | 128 |
| Research Sub-Question 2..... | 131 |
| Research Sub-Question 3..... | 134 |
| Research Sub-Question 4..... | 136 |
| Research Sub-Question 5..... | 138 |
| Summary | 141 |

| | |
|--|---------|
| CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 142 |
| Summary of the Study | 142 |
| Purpose Statement..... | 142 |
| Research Questions..... | 142 |
| Research Sub-Questions..... | 142 |
| Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures | 143 |
| Interviews | 143 |
| Artifacts | 144 |
| Population | 144 |
| Sampling Frame | 145 |
| Sample..... | 145 |
| Sample Size..... | 146 |
| Purposeful Sampling..... | 146 |
| Sample Selection Process..... | 147 |
| Major Findings..... | 148 |
| Research Question 1: Self-Awareness | 148 |
| Major Finding 1. Participants provided access to a variety of coping strategies... 148 | |
| Research Sub-Question 3: Self-Management..... | 149 |
| Major Finding 2: Participants reported low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors | 149 |
| Research Sub-Question 3: Social Awareness..... | 150 |
| Major Finding 3: Participants reported adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions | 150 |
| Research Sub-Question 4: Relationship Skills..... | 150 |
| Major Finding 4: Participants noticed that students lacked in verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills | 151 |
| Research Sub-Question 5: Responsible Decision-Making..... | 151 |
| Major Finding 5: Participants noted inadequacies in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions..... | 151 |
| Unexpected Findings | 152 |
| Conclusions..... | 152 |
| Conclusion 1..... | 152 |
| Conclusion 2..... | 153 |
| Conclusion 3..... | 153 |
| Implications For Action | 154 |
| Implication 1..... | 154 |
| Implication 2..... | 154 |
| Implication 3..... | 155 |
| Recommendations for Further Research..... | 156 |
| Concluding Remarks and Reflections..... | 157 |
| REFERENCES | 159 |
| APPENDICES | 185 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Table 1. | Emotional Regulation, Self-Efficacy, and Social Skills Along with Mental Health and Their Relevancy in the Time of COVID | 46 |
| Table 2. | Reunite, Renew, Thrive | 50 |
| Table 3. | Artifact Data Collected | 68 |
| Table 4. | Study Criteria..... | 71 |
| Table 5. | Demographic of Study Participants | 72 |
| Table 6. | Theme Codes in Response to Self-Awareness | 74 |
| Table 7. | Theme Codes in Response to Self-Management | 74 |
| Table 8. | Theme Codes in Response to Social Awareness | 74 |
| Table 9. | Theme Codes in Response to Relationship Skills | 74 |
| Table 10. | Theme Codes in Response to Responsible Decision-Making | 75 |
| Table 11. | Common Themes for Sub-Question 1: Self-Awareness..... | 131 |
| Table 12. | Common Themes for Sub-Question 2: Self-Management | 134 |
| Table 13. | Common Themes for Sub-Question 3: Social Awareness..... | 136 |
| Table 14. | Common Themes for Sub-Question 4: Relationship Skills..... | 138 |
| Table 15. | Common Themes for Sub-Question 5: Responsible Decision-Making..... | 140 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 1. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning History Timeline | 28 |
| Figure 2. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Competencies | 37 |
| Figure 3. Participant 1: Themes in Response to Research Question | 79 |
| Figure 4. Participant 2: Themes in Response to Research Question | 83 |
| Figure 5. Participant 3: Themes in Response to Research Question | 88 |
| Figure 6. Participant 4: Themes in Response to Research Question | 93 |
| Figure 7. Participant 5: Themes in Response to Research Question | 97 |
| Figure 8. Participant 6: Themes in Response to Research Question | 102 |
| Figure 9. Participant 7: Themes in Response to Research Question | 107 |
| Figure 10. Participant 8: Themes in Response to Research Question | 111 |
| Figure 11. Participant 9: Themes in Response to Research Question | 116 |
| Figure 12. Participant 10: Themes in Response to Research Question | 120 |
| Figure 13. Participant 11: Themes in Response to Research Question | 124 |
| Figure 14. Participant 12: Themes in Response to Research Question | 127 |

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Today's classrooms are experiencing many students lashing out after returning to face-to-face instruction from the Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic through behaviors such as crying, tantrums, disruption, bullying, and violence. Students are suffering from grief, anxiety, stress, and depression at higher rates than ever before. Many students hold their thoughts, experiences, and feelings inside thus making school pressures too much to handle. Therefore, teachers spend more time helping students with social and emotional needs than usual. Everyone from the state down to schools are talking about how social-emotional learning (SEL) can help students get through the effects of the pandemic. It is a time to have all hands-on deck to respond to the mental health demands that the pandemic has brought to the youth.

American lives on a large scale are personally and socially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was a virus that attacked the respiratory system and was easily transmitted from person to person. On February 19, 2022, it was reported that the United States had 78,269,789 cases and 930,811 deaths that had occurred since the pandemic began in December 2019 (Statista, 2021). As the numbers grew tremendously, the country went into lockdown where stay-at-home orders were in place and mandates for wearing a mask, social distancing, and quarantining became a part of everyday life.

In California, the most recent data is that 525 districts house elementary schools; within those districts, 5,887 schools serve 2,979,617 elementary students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020). As many elementary school districts returned to in-person teaching after a year of virtual instruction, several students and communities faced trauma and recovery from the continued restrictions and challenges of the COVID-

19 pandemic. Trauma is exposure to and contact with adverse experiences, such as abuse, neglect, household concerns, or community worryment (Bartlett & Jacks, 2019).

Accordingly, Niemi and Adams (2021) indicate that, “Social-emotional learning (SEL) can help heal the traumas of the last year, uplift marginalized voices, and support students and adults as they grow together — not only in our schools but in our communities as well” (para. 3). Therefore, schools and families must build solid relationships for students’ well-being and success through SEL. By schools and parents working together, the two groups play a crucial role in helping students manage and understand emotions and relationships with others (Fredericks et al., 2005). In addition, SEL is a way to restore a sense of safety, provide self-regulation strategies, and promote resiliency for students and families (Kuban & Steele, 2011).

SEL is essential in human development, education, and creating safe and healthy environments. SEL is a process where children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop personal identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020c). In addition, SEL allows dynamic relationships between schools, homes, and the communities play a role in developing and educating the whole child. Epstein et al. (2018) claim that students who feel cared for and secure, develop positive attitudes and appropriate school behaviors, manage to accomplish their full potential, and remain in school where they have the benefits of support from the school, home, and community. Overall, SEL empowers students to thrive in school and stay safe and healthy.

Students are coming into school with different levels of home support in SEL. Thus, for the students to thrive in school, adults need to give them opportunities to learn about SEL and a reassuring sense of belonging to develop and apply SEL competencies at the highest rate. According to Zins (2004), social and emotional programs have nurtured students' autonomy, sense of belonging, and competence. Therefore, with more exposure to SEL, students can take control of their feelings and avail themselves of learning opportunities. Schools must observe the quality of social and emotional programs that enhance students' cognition, emotions, and behaviors to meet the school climate (Zins, 2004). Schools that implement quality SEL programs help students thrive by developing and learning strategies to keep them safe and healthy.

SEL is crucial in building resiliency vis-a-vis the COVID-19 pandemic. SEL has become an intervention that supports a safe and healthy environment by building resiliency. Students who learn to adapt to life-changing and stressful situations experience resiliency. Many students have faced trauma. Therefore, students need guidance to think and cope resiliently to restore their sense of safety (Kuban & Steele, 2011). Most importantly, students must practice mindfulness, escape adverse emotional problems, and take care of their bodies (American Psychological Association, 2012).

In the 2020/2021 school year, San Bernardino County served 399,356 students (San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools [SBCSS], n.d.). Many students spent the previous year isolated and socially distanced from friends, family, and schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, mental health statistics in 2017/2018 showed that 41% of those provided mental health services fell within the age range of zero to seventeen (San Bernardino County, 2020). Given these statistics, the

schools within the county must assist in the mental crisis through SEL to help students 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.

In conclusion, the research of Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2020a), Epstein et al. (2018), Kuban and Steele (2011), and Zins (2004) has powerfully shown that SEL provides knowledge and skills that enable students to flourish in school and feel safe and healthy. SEL focuses on the whole child for growth, development, and life-long success.

Background

COVID-19 Pandemic

Education changed drastically in the United States on March 13, 2020. In the subsequent weeks, schools had mandatory shutdowns. A global pandemic referred to as COVID-19 had hit the United States with force. At the peak of the pandemic, school “closures affected at least 55.1 million students in 124,000 U.S. public and private schools” (Education Week, 2020, para. 4). Consequently, social distance, lack of childcare providers, and employment insecurity created unusual circumstances for families within their homes (Gadermann et al., 2021). Daily family routines were disrupted or halted, and many households also had to deal with the death of family members and close friends. As a result, and unfortunately, many families are now confronted with daily uncertainties that continue to cause trauma to students.

Conditions for Families

During the COVID-19 pandemic, families faced mandated restrictions in daily life that caused many hardships and stressors. Parents soon found themselves in financial and emotional stress, they had to work from home, supervise and educate their children through distance learning, face social isolation, make hard decisions about health, and unanticipated childcare issues (Cluver et al., 2020; Gadermann et al., 2021). The mandated or recommended restrictions kept family outings to a minimum. Outside-of-the-home social interaction was almost non-existent and kept families confined for a year or more. As a result, parents engaged in more negative interactions with their children, including yelling, impatient disciplining, and resorting to harsh language (Gadermann et al., 2021). However, according to Gadermann et al. (2021), some parents reported sharing positive experiences of more quality time with their children as well as the feeling of togetherness, displays of love, and experiences of building resiliency together. COVID-19 was not the first disease to attack the United States and will not be the last. Families and communities must learn to create effective strategies to respond, care for, and protect the world's future.

Childhood Trauma

The definition of childhood-based trauma is being involved or witnessing an event(s) where a child feels threatened (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018). If not appropriately treated, trauma can affect the child's transition into adulthood (Copeland et al., 2018) and even be revealed early in life by the inability to form healthy relationships with peers and adults (Aspelmeier et al., 2007). External factors (societal issues, pandemics, politics) cause most trauma that can result in life-altering situations for

all ages when not dealt with promptly. A survey by America's Promise Alliance (2020) demonstrated that students are experiencing collective trauma with the COVID-19 pandemic. Collective trauma occurs when children experience uncertainty because of a variance in their circumstances and uncertainty (Carr, 2021). In addition to collective trauma, students may experience another form of trauma called toxic stress. Toxic stress appears when a student suffers strong, numerous, or lengthened childhood hardships without sufficient adult support (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2018). Collective trauma and toxic stress need treatment to help the student's overall well-being.

Historical Perspectives

History of Social-Emotional Learning

SEL began to appear in the educational environment around 1990. At that time, there was a worry about how susceptible the children were to numerous social and psychological problems and how the school potentially had a role in alleviating such risks; the focus then became to help children gain social and emotional competency (D. M. Hoffman, 2009). As a result, multitudes of resources are now available through social-emotional programs, professional development, websites, blogs, and various social media platforms. In addition, D. M. Hoffman (2009) shares that many states have begun to develop specific SEL standards for K-12 grades. Over the last couple of years, SEL has been pushed to the forefront of the educational realm as educators confront the global pandemic called COVID-19.

While traditionally the elementary classroom has been in charge of the core content areas: history, science, language arts, math, and physical education, the research

states there is a connection implicating teaching SEL through direct and explicit instruction in the classroom just as the core content areas are taught. "Social-emotional and life skills must be taught explicitly at the elementary and secondary levels. Like reading or math, if social-emotional skills are absent systematically, they will not be internalized" (M. J. Elias & Arnold, 2006, p. 7). There has been a push for schools to incorporate and explore SEL skills to aid students' development overall. However, teachers have observed SEL as being in opposition to academic demands due to academic standards and adopted academic curriculum (D. M. Hoffman, 2009). Teachers may see SEL as a separate curricular area rather than an integration tool in the classroom.

Theoretical Background

Emotional Competence Theory

Students experience a wide array of emotions in the academic environment. Pavlovic et al. (2021) state that emotional competence is a student's ability to understand, express, and manage emotions, which are essential characteristics of different learning outcomes. If the feelings are positive, the learning outcome will improve, but the reverse can happen, and learning outcomes can become hindered when a negative emotion is involved. According to S. A. Denham et al. (2012), parents and teachers are crucial to developing emotional competence in early childhood as they provide experiences that promote or dampen its development. Emotional competence is essential in addressing self-awareness and self-management in the academic setting, even up to the college level.

Ecological Systems Theory

Understanding a child is an intricate process. To truly understand a child, one must fully consider the ecological system that includes home, school, community,

culture, and other social factors that affect children's learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are the five systems connected within the ecological system that influences the development of a person's center (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem represents the relationship a child has with significant others; the mesosystem is comprised of numerous microsystems; the exosystem plays an indirect role with the child; the macrosystem consists of the cultural values, traditions, and laws with which a child grows; and the chronosystem registers environmental events and upheaval in a child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Framework

For the last 27 years, CASEL has promoted the importance of SEL among the youth (CASEL, 2020c). CASEL has assisted in shaping educational policy in the majority of the United States with its strength-based framework modeled on SEL competencies (Dusenbury et al., 2019). Most importantly, it has given the education environment clear pictures of actionable two-step interventions by addressing the how, what, where, and the why of SEL. Currently, CASEL focuses on five complementary and expansive competencies: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020c). Each competency is introduced throughout childhood and into adulthood.

The five social-emotional competencies guide leadership and stakeholders in setting priorities and implementing strategies for SEL. According to CASEL, one competency is self-awareness, which focuses on feelings, thinking, and beliefs and their relationship to behavior. The second is self-management, where one learns to manage

emotions, ideas, and behaviors in different circumstances to attain desired goals. Third, social-emotional competency is social awareness, which focuses on others' perspectives and shows empathy. Fourth, relationship skills build and maintain healthy relationships to navigate changing environments. Fifth, the last social-emotional competency is responsible decision-making and it is the skill to generate caring and effective choices about behavior and social encounters in diversified events (CASEL, 2020c). Together all five competencies give students and adults competence through the trials of life.

Social-Emotional Integration in the Classroom

The educational system requires students to stay motivated and work hard at achieving learning goals. To keep students focused on education and their goals, schools must provide quality social and emotional programs that enhance students' cognition, emotions, and behaviors to meet the school climate (Zins, 2004). Additionally, Zins (2004) states that social and emotional programs should nurture students' autonomy, belonging, and competence. SEL lessons and strategies help in the social-emotional development of learners. According to Lewkowicz (2007), by promoting SEL, schools and teachers will dilute students' frustrations, meet their needs in healthy ways, make classroom time more productive, limit behavioral problems, and construct students of character. The attributes of SEL provide an answer to help cope with students' frustrations after the pandemic.

Family and School Relationships

Students spend most of their time in the two environments of home and school. Learning outcomes, motivation, and students' health are highly impacted by the partnership of home and school, along with an essential component of academics in

education (Ariane et al., 2021). However, the idea of a partnership between home and school promoting SEL is relatively new. Historically, home and school have had specific roles: Formal education was the school's job, and extracurricular areas were the job of the home (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Currently, the roles are no longer distinct; instead, school-family collaboration plays a vital role in social and learning activities.

As the saying goes, *it takes a village to raise a child*. Parent and school connections are essential to building students up academically and socially. In a study by Azar (2018), parents agreed that schools and homes are both responsible for teaching SEL. Over the years, there has been an increase in economic and social pressures on families and a weakening of community support to nurture a child's emotional, moral, and social development, along with unlimited access to the internet and media, which all can cause damage to a child's well-being (Zins, 2004). Schools and parents must communicate and collaborate for the common goal of developing successful students socially and emotionally. Currently, there is little research on informing, sharing, and gaining parents' perspectives on SEL strategies. However, the research discusses barriers for both parents and teachers: The lack of trust between them, cultural confusion, and lack of appreciation of those cultures with differing behavior expectations that are misunderstood or not being heard (Christenson & Reschly, 2009). Additionally, as the world becomes more diverse, ignorance of spoken languages and technology are also part of the barriers affecting family and school relationships. It is essential to be open to all obstacles and work together to overcome them to build healthy relationships for all students.

Social-Emotional Learning and the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 resulted in a vast disruption of in-person schooling. In the spring of 2020, educators, families, and students faced the novelty and challenges of remote teaching. Teachers, students, and families were not prepared or trained to move into a completely virtual environment for education. According to Diliberti and Kaufman (2020), not only did educators find themselves in unfamiliar instructional circumstances with limited guidance from their districts, but they were also coping with the direct threat of COVID-19. The immediate change in the educational environment caused excessive stress on families and students.

As time went on, the COVID-19 pandemic became more challenging as it exacerbated feelings of isolation, stress, and loss for children, adults, families, and communities. Teachers now had to strategize about communicating academics virtually and how to meet the needs of their students and families. For students' learning and development, the social and emotional impacts of the pandemic were coming to the forefront. Dealing with the pandemic and the challenges it engendered, awareness grew about the importance of empathy, resilience, building relationships from a distance, and coming together to strengthen the schools and communities (CASEL, 2022). Unfortunately, current research lacks information on building authentic partnerships between schools and parents to ensure school communities recover from the COVID-19 trauma. However, using the CASEL five core competencies when addressing social-emotional needs, work has begun to build empathy, resilience, and relationship for many students, families, and communities despite the barriers constructed by the pandemic.

After several months and for some schools after more than a year, it was time to return to in-person teaching and learning. When schools opened up while COVID-19 was still lurking, they did not look the same as before the shutdown. Families were unable to come on to school campuses to volunteer or attend invites, along with classrooms having to social distance, wear masks, desk shields between one another, designated tables at lunch, and be placed on quarantine for any cold symptom. Schools are now finding a solid need to plan for SEL. According to CASEL's (2020b) Reunite, Renew, and Thrive Roadmap, schools must focus on building relationships and giving adults time to heal and connect. Additionally, schools need to create safe, supportive, and equitable learning environments and use data to continue to deliver what is necessary while supporting students, families, and staff.

Statement of Research Problem

All the changes, restrictions, and unknowns of daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic have left many wondering how they will affect the development of children. The pandemic forced many countries to lockdown, leading to drastic changes in personal, school, work, and family life. As a result of the lockdown, parents were challenged to homeschool and reorganize childcare while working at their jobs (Vogelbacher & Attig 2022). These changes taxed the home environment emotionally and physically. The fear of the spread of COVID-19 caused the development of sedentary behaviors like sitting too long, watching television excessively, lying down needlessly, and playing on mobile devices during the quarantine (Güzel et al., 2020).

Children today are faced with severe mental health challenges. Before the pandemic, pediatric mental health reported emergency room visits were already rising,

with suicide as the second leading cause of death amongst children between the ages of 10 to 19 (J. A. Hoffmann & Duffy, 2021). Then as the events of March 2020 caused a massive disruption in routines for children, a large number of them suffered the stressors of interruption of educational patterns, decreased physical and recreational activities, caregiver anxiety, reduced responsiveness, and loss of social interaction (De Young et al., 2021). The mental challenges that came with the pandemic showed a 24% increase among children ages 5-11 years old and 31% among children ages 12-17 years old seen in the emergency room between March 2020 and October 2020 from the same period in 2019 (Leeb et al., 2020). These numbers are alarming. Addressing the problem is essential for the youth's future success.

The focus of schools for years has been on math, reading, writing, science, and social studies. However, with the increased stress, depression, and anxiety brought on by COVID-19, many students cannot grasp, focus, and reach their full academic potential. Currently, there are not adequate mental health services for youth to confront the increasing mental issues affected by the pandemic (J. A. Hoffmann & Duffy, 2021; Leeb et al., 2020; Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021). Schools can significantly support students' mental health by implementing SEL programs. SEL can combat many of the mental issues faced by children as it has proven to offer practical and efficacious methods in acquiring the knowledge and skills to understand and manage their emotions while positively affecting social, emotional, educational, and career consequences (Varghese & Natsuaki 2021). Once children's developmental and mental needs are met through SEL, coping skills and resiliency will help children navigate through and past the COVID-19 pandemic damage.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon their returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question

The research was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon their return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Sub-Questions

The following research sub-questions were developed to help answer the research question:

1. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?
2. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?
3. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?

4. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?
5. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?

Significance

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the youth both mentally and emotionally. The Children’s Hospital of Chicago conducted a poll to understand parents’ experiences monitoring and managing their children’s mental health after a year of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic (Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, 2021). The results revealed that 71% of parents believed the pandemic had affected their child’s well-being; 69% reported it being the worst thing that has ever happened to their child; and 67% of the parents wished they had been more attentive to their child’s well-being from the start of the pandemic (Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, 2021). The poll also identified six pillars of mental health that have been affected by the pandemic. All six pillars are essential to a child’s development and well-being and include:

- Socializing
- Exercising
- Eating well
- Sleeping well
- Varying activities/taking breaks

- Talking to parents (Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, 2021)

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act set aside \$123 billion devoted to finding systemic approaches to SEL that thoroughly support students and schools through the pandemic and more (CASEL, 2021c). The CASEL (2021a) recommended three areas of focus that would most effectively strengthen a systemic implementation of SEL:

“promote SEL for students, support adult SEL competencies and capacity building, and align SEL efforts across schools, families, and communities” (p. 1). This research is significant because it examines systemic approaches by elementary school teachers in implementing SEL strategies to contend against students’ mental and emotional needs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, this study will contribute to the existing literature by identifying and describing how elementary school teachers integrated SEL using the CASEL competencies: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making to help combat the emotional and mental issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to McAuley (2019), there is justification for investigating a more comprehensive and integrated approach to implementing SEL.

School organizations in the public and private sectors may benefit from this study by understanding integration techniques used upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining the perceived understanding of SEL integration, schools may take a more robust approach to align SEL efforts across schools and districts.

Definitions

Definitions of terms used in this study are provided.

Theoretical Terms

Childhood trauma. Trauma occurs when a child is involved or witnesses an event(s) where it feels threatened (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018).

Chronosystem. A system connected to the ecological system of human development that focuses on environmental events and any upheaval in a child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Collective trauma. This type of trauma occurs when children experience a variance in their existing circumstances and uncertainty (Carr, 2021).

Ecological system theory. A theory of human development. It emphasizes that home, school, community, culture, and other social factors affect children's learning and development. Five systems connected to the ecological system influence the development of a person's center: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Härkönen, 2007).

Emotional competence. The ability of a student to understand, express, and manage emotions are essential characteristics of different learning outcomes (Pavlovic et al., 2021; S. A. Denham et al., 2012).

Emotion knowledge. The capacity and ability to understand emotion in facial expressions, behavioral cues, and social contexts (Trentacosta & Fine, 2010).

Emotion regulation. The ability to use emotions productively and express feelings appropriately, including awareness and modification when coping with various situations (S. A. Denham et al., 2012).

Exosystem. A system connected to the ecological system of human development states that parts of an environment play an indirect role in a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Härkönen, 2007).

Macrosystem. A system connected to the ecological system of human development consisting of the cultural values, traditions, and laws with which a child grows (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Härkönen, 2007).

Mesosystem. A system connected to the ecological system of human development is composed of two or more interconnected microsystems that assert influence on one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Härkönen, 2007).

Microsystem. A system connected to the ecological system of human development that represents the relationship a child has with significant others (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Härkönen, 2007).

Operational Terms

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). An organization that strives 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 from preschool through high school (CASEL, 2021a).

COVID-19. A contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. The symptoms range from mild to severe illness (Centers for Disease and Control Prevention [CDC], 2021a).

Pandemic. A worldwide outbreak and spread of a new disease that affects many people (CDC, 2021b).

Social-emotional learning (SEL). A process through which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop personal identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020c).

Supports. Strategies used to support students socially and emotionally that could include curricular concepts, created artifacts, newsletters, room setup, flyers, etc.

Trauma. Exposure and/or contact with adverse experiences, like abuse, neglect, household concerns, or community worryment (Bartlett & Jacks, 2019).

Delimitations

The study was delimited to public elementary school teachers that teach transitional kindergarten through sixth-grade students full time in southern California within San Bernardino County. In addition, teachers must have taught before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I introduced the topic, along with the research problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, definitions, and delimitations. Chapter II thoroughly reviews the COVID-19 pandemic and SEL literature. In addition, emotional competence and ecological system theories are explored in detail, along with integrating SEL in the classroom. Chapter III provides the methodology of a phenomenological study and qualitative method process, including the population, sample size, data collection procedures, instruments used, and research design. Chapter IV reports findings and data analysis pertaining to the research questions. This study

concludes with Chapter V, which reports the major findings, any unexpected findings, and recommendations for any further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review starts by discussing the global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the youth and schools. Next, it examines the historical development of SEL and the theoretical backgrounds of emotional competence theory and ecological systems theory as they relate to developing a student's overall well-being. Then, a discussion follows on the five competencies of SEL constructed by the CASEL and how the competencies are a framework for educators. Also, the review explores the effectiveness of integrating SEL in the classroom and aspects of family-school socialization. The review concludes with the importance of and barriers to SEL when returning to face-to-face instruction after the pandemic.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Affecting the Youth

While the COVID-19 virus was not as harsh on the youth as the illness itself was on adults, it still caused incomparably difficult circumstances for many students socially and emotionally. According to Calderon (2020), who reported the findings of a Gallup panel poll in 2020, three out of 10 parents noted their children had experienced harm, and another 14% said their children were reaching their limits emotionally. In a survey conducted in California involving 49 school districts and 653 students, over half of the students surveyed reported feeling the need for mental health support during the pandemic (Youth Liberty Squad of ACLU Southern California, 2020). Furthermore, the survey reported that 51.6% of students had rated their mental health as between 8 and 10 (10 being the highest mental health wellness) before the pandemic. During the pandemic, the percentage of students being high on the scale of mental health wellness dropped to 26.9% (Youth Liberty Squad of ACLU Southern California, 2020). Across the globe,

youth's mental health was affected by school closures and the conditions the pandemic wrecked on families (Carr, 2021; Gadermann et al., 2021; Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021; Vogelbacher & Attig, 2022).

School Closures

The world of education in the United States changed between March 6-15, 2020, as schools mandated shutdowns (Education Week, 2020). A global pandemic referred to as COVID-19 had hit the United States with force by disrupting students' social networks and interactions with teachers and other students (Calderon, 2020). At its spike, school "closures affected at least 55.1 million students in 124,000 U.S. public and private schools" (Education Week, 2020, para. 4). Schools around the United States were forced into remote learning, which caused disarray in children's daily life.

The switch to remote learning caused a disruption in education for children because of the need for technology, as many families did not have stable access to the internet or devices (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). In addition, Domina et al. (2021) stated that many software programs that schools relied on were difficult to operate for children during remote learning (Domina et al., 2021). Also, as stated by Chaabane et al. (2021), in their study, children lost many pivotal school-based services, such as healthcare services, structured learning environments, specialized educators for resource programs, and school and childcare-based meal programs. Furthermore, "School closure also contributed to increased anxiety among children and loneliness in young people along with a significant increase in child stress, sadness, frustration, indiscipline, and hyperactivity" (Chaabane et al., 2021, p. 13). Overall, remote learning due to school closures increased the youth's stress and emotional reactions (e.g., frustration, sadness).

Conditions for Families

During the COVID-19 pandemic, families faced mandated restrictions in daily life that caused many hardships and stressors in family, personal, and work-life (Vogelbacher & Attig 2022). Social isolation, school and child care closures, and employment instability created unparalleled conditions for families at home (Gadermann et al., 2021; Lamar et al., 2021). Anecdotally, Grose (2021) and Hsu (2020) state that these instabilities of home life left parents and children struggling. Furthermore, the instabilities of the family household intermingled with job and income loss, material hardship, social isolation, and grief added to the struggle for many families (Gassman-Pines et al., 2022). Home and school interactions were blurred as physical space was shared (Roy et al., 2021), and parents shuffled between work and family responsibilities (Garbe et al., 2020). The move to remote learning in March 2020 left parents trying to manage work, home, and school on top of the uncertainty, loss, and grief that came along with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Children's behavioral issues have traditionally been associated with the instability of the family environment (Fomby & Mollborn, 2017). The research involving the COVID-19 pandemic and the well-being of children has shown increased behavioral issues and psychological distress since the pandemic's beginning (Ehrler et al., 2021; Gadermann et al., 2021; Gassman-Pines et al., 2022; Steimle et al., 2021). Additionally, according to Gassman-Pines et al. (2020), heightening exposure to pandemic-related stressors, such as job loss and family illness, are correlated to behavioral and psychological problems in youth. Since the beginning of the pandemic, behavioral and psychological issues in children have increased (Ehrler et al., 2021; Gadermann et al.,

2021; Steimle et al., 2021). Furthermore, the disruptions in everyday life, challenges parents had in supporting their children's learning, and their mood and behavior through the pandemic have also contributed to negative behaviors in children (Gassman-Pines et al., 2020). In the Kaiser Family Foundation Tracking Poll, 84% of adult respondents revealed significant disruptions in their life in response to the pandemic (as cited in Kirzinger et al., 2020). Many families struggled to balance work, homeschooling, childcare, family illness and loss, and household responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Childhood Trauma

The definition of childhood-based trauma is involvement in or witness of an event or events where a child feels threatened (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018). There is a connection between exposure to childhood trauma and neurophysiological, psychological, and behavioral problems, such as aggression, anxiety, depression, as well as academic and social struggles (Rasmussen et al., 2004; Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman, 2003). When trauma factors are not considered in children who are demonstrating problematic behaviors, a mislabel of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder, bipolar disorder, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), anxiety disorders, and depression may occur (Veach, 2021). Veach (2021) asserts that these labels can cause re-traumatization and be detrimental to children if the underlying trauma factors are not addressed. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate and consider any political, societal, or global conditions that have happened or are happening when looking at problematic behavior in children.

As a child experiences trauma, its brain structure and functions are often altered (Perry et al., 1995), leading to possible cognitive and neuropsychological shortfalls (Gabowitz et al., 2008). Neuroimaging is reflected in structural differences in the brain when complex trauma is involved (Veach, 2021). According to Gabowitz et al. (2008), these differences in brain structure can include smaller amounts of brain volume, corpus callosum, prefrontal cortex, and cerebrum development. Additionally, studies show that with trauma exposure, disruptions in the mirror neurons can occur, causing attachment problems (Keyzers, 2011) which may lead to a reduction in self-regulation, stress management, and empathy (Oehlberg, 2008).

Massive social, cultural, and economic tragedies have happened with the COVID-19 pandemic (Stanley et al., 2021), causing trauma and stress. A survey conducted by America's Promise Alliance (2020) determined that many children are experiencing "collective trauma" induced by the pandemic. Collective trauma occurs in children when uncertainty is combined with immediate changes in their experiences (Carr, 2021).

While some stress is normal and healthy, some children may develop toxic stress (Veach, 2021). As defined by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2018), toxic stress can occur in children with experiences of trauma that are strong, persistent, or prolonged without sufficient adult support. During the pandemic, toxic stress was provoked in children from social isolation, stay-at-home orders, risk of illness, and the escalation of tension put on parents and caregivers (Liubiana et al., 2021). Students affected by such a high-stress level will often display behaviors that seem unmotivated, apathetic, or disruptive in the school setting (Veach, 2021). Additionally, Veach (2021) states that children of trauma struggle with peer and teacher interactions.

Emotional or behavioral tantrums may make students less likely to meet school norms, resulting in low grades and attendance problems. It is suggested by America's Promise Alliance (2020) that students' concerns are explored and acknowledged, mental health along with social and emotional well-being is a priority, and schools move towards equity to shape students' health and well-being as many have been affected by the pandemic.

Historical Overview of Social-Emotional Learning

SEL concepts can be traced back to Ancient Greece. In the text, *The Republic* by Plato suggested a holistic approach to education that requires a balance of training in physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral development (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011). Plato explained, "By maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing, you produce citizens of good character" (as cited by George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011, para. 5). As in the time of Plato, the goal of education today continues to focus on developing children to be responsible, productive, caring, and active citizens (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011).

In the 1960s, a child psychiatrist named James Comer began the Comer School Development Program. The mission of The Comer School Development Program is a commitment "to the total development of all children by creating learning environments that support children's physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical development" (Yale School of Medicine, 2019, para. 1). Part of the program was to establish a collaborative management team composed of stakeholders (teachers, parents, administration, and mental health workers) within the organizations (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011). The teams focused on making decisions on issues that seemed to be a factor in the behavior problems through the lens of academic and social

programs along with school procedures (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011). Comer's school development program led two schools to high achievement, low truancy, and a drop in behavioral issues while excelling in academic performance (Carr, 2021).

Many New Jersey schools reviewed The Comer School Development Program and developed "Best Practices" as a result (Azar, 2018). Azar (2018) recommends that schools build a collaborative team composed of teachers, administrators, parents, counselors, mental health personnel, and community members to make decisions to improve the schools in the district. The collaborative team took charge of reviewing social programs to enhance the whole child and develop strong character in students while monitoring academic progress (Azar, 2018). According to Dryfoos (2005), the result of New Jersey's program was that social learning began to gain momentum in eliminating truancy and behavior problems while promoting success in academics as well.

In 1994, a multidisciplinary collaborative team including researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates came together to look at the "missing piece" in education, which was believed to be the absence of attention to students' social and emotional needs (CASEL, 2021b). CASEL was established to focus on developing a high-quality SEL evidence-based program that would become essential from preschool to high school (CASEL, 2021b). As CASEL (2021b) explained,

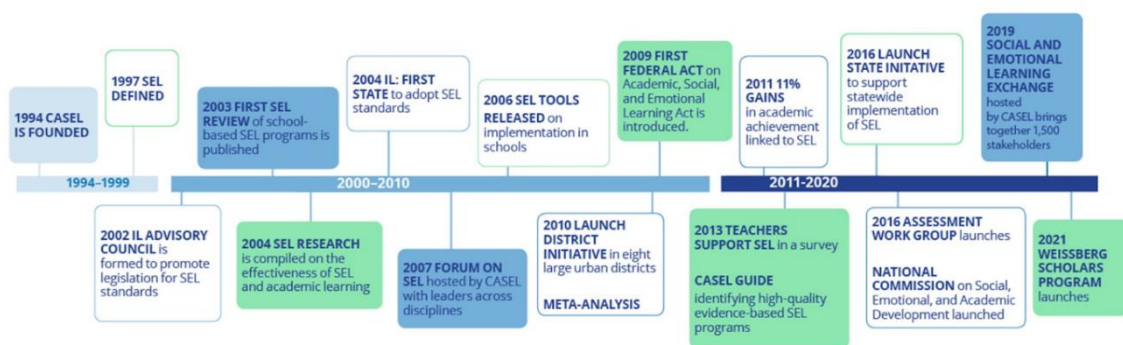
Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive

relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. (para. 2)

Several states have adopted CASEL’s framework that promotes family, community, schools, and classrooms in strengthening programs socially, emotionally, and academically (CASEL, 2021d). CASEL continues with its goal of establishing high-quality, evidence based SEL, and the research has demonstrated the efficacy SEL has in supporting students’ academic and long-term achievements (CASEL, 2021b). Over the last three decades, CASEL has continued to research, review and set school guidelines, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning History Timeline



Note. From “Our History,” by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2021b. (<https://casel.org/about-us/our-history/>).

CASEL continues to be the leader for communities, schools, districts, and states in promoting, researching, guiding, and directing policies in SEL.

Theoretical Background

Emotional Competence Theory

S. Denham (2005) developed the emotional competence theory based on Linda Rose-Krasnor's social competence theory. The term emotional competence indicates the skill to understand one's own emotions, the skill to listen to others and empathize, and the skill to express feelings adequately (Steiner, 2003). In addition, Goleman (1995) states that emotional competence is the ability to self-motivate. Also, emotional competence is understanding the information within emotions, defining the value of emotions and their interrelationships, and using emotions to help with thinking and decision making (Mayer et al., 2004). The three primary components in demonstrating emotional competence are: (a) emotion expressiveness, (b) emotion knowledge, and (c) emotional regulation (White, 2008). According to White (2008), the three components of emotional competence allow a child to recognize the feelings and emotions of others while managing personal feelings. "This ability strengthens social competence with teachers and peers, thus laying a foundation for a positive adjustment to school" (White, 2008, p. 5). Overall, White states all three emotional competence components are essential for social competence.

A child's ability to reveal positive and negative emotions is the first component of emotional competence: Emotional expressiveness (White, 2008). White (2008) states that positive emotion is crucial and leads to stronger relationships with peers and teachers.

The second component is emotional knowledge which requires an individual's understanding of the emotions of self and others (White, 2008). The skill to notice emotions in others empowers a child to be receptive toward others. For example, if a child sees another student who has tripped and fallen, the child may go to comfort the fallen student. White (2008) states these emotional actions build positive peer relationships.

The skill to adapt to the magnitude and extent of emotions, defined as emotional regulation, is the final component of emotional competence (White, 2008). S. A. Denham et al. (2003) report previous research findings that emotion regulation is the most valuable predictor of social competence out of the three components of emotional competence. When they are young, children are just learning how relationships work and what it takes to negotiate relationships with one another (White, 2008). Additionally, White (2008) explains that a child learns to regulate emotions through sharing materials, taking turns, getting in line, and grasping routines in the classroom.

Cognitive development is affected by emotional competence, especially emotional regulation (White, 2008). According to White (2008) and S. A. Denham et al. (2012), emotional regulation allows children to manage feelings and social interactions, allowing for higher cognitive processes in learning tasks. It is rare for a child to participate in classroom learning activities when a child is overwhelmed with emotion (S. Denham, 2005; White, 2008).

Parents and teachers are deemed essential socializers of emotion, providing children with experiences that encourage or impede the development of emotional competence (S. A. Denham et al., 2012). S. A. Denham et al. (2012) report that by

spending substantial time with children, teachers display many caregiving tasks and become sources of emotional security for them. Some teachers recognize that learning and well-being can be related to their own and the children's emotions and focus on this when classroom issues arise (Zembylas, 2007). However, teachers new to teaching admit that there is little training on developing a child's emotional competence or regulating how to help children with their feelings and demonstrations of emotion (Garner, 2010; Marlow & Inman, 2002; Poulou, 2005).

Ecological Systems Theory

An ecological mindset emphasizes the various systems in which children grow, develop, and make transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), and assists in clarifying children's social-emotional development during their many paths in school (Schumacher, 2021). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), a child's development is affected by interactions between the developing individual and the people, objects, and symbols within the environment. Furthermore, the developmental processes collide with the children's immediate environmental and social situations in which those ambiances are planted (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The ecological theory stresses the importance of understanding children's and families' transitions and relationships amid home, school, and the community (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Within an ecological mindset, the parent-child relationship, home-school connection, community setting, and socioeconomic status influence a child's readiness for school and the ability to adjust during transitional times in elementary school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The elementary years are a delicate time of development. Transitioning to school is not just a single event but a process (Bohan-

Baker & Little, 2004). This process embeds social situations and is achieved through interactions and relationships (Schumacher, 2021). The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are the five systems connected within the ecological system that influences the development of a person's center (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Microsystem

The microsystem includes the totality of the environments and structures a child has regular and direct contact with as it develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For young children, the experiences in the home environment and with those who live with them are formative during their first few years of life (Schumacher, 2021). The subsequent social interactions with the world outside the home are built on the foundations laid down by the parents (Kuczynski & Knafo, 2014). Landry et al. (2003) suggest that by helping build connections and relationships in and out of the home, parents play an essential role in stimulating the learning and development of a child's cognitive, social, behavioral, and physical growth. In fact, providing environments to children that are safe, secure and rich in sensitive, responsive caregiving and exposure to a variety of learning opportunities is in a child's best interest (Ainsworth, 1979; Landry et al. (2003).

When a child enters school, the classroom environment becomes another important microsystem. Teachers play an essential role in molding a child's educational experiences by providing a safe, enhanced, and invigorating environment outside the home (Schumacher, 2021). Therefore, teacher and student relationships are crucial in early learning experiences (Crosnoe et al., 2010). The relationship between teacher and

student gives students the support needed to adapt to the school social environment and fosters social and emotional development early in childhood (S. A. Denham et al., 2012).

Mesosystem

The next level of the ecological theory is the mesosystem, which represents interactions and connections in a child's initial, immediate environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A child's home and school relationship become essential to the mesosystem (Schumacher, 2021). A child's home and school are two settings where the most meaningful learning and development occur, which is why a positive relationship between the two settings is essential (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Children's academic and social-emotional success has long contributed to home and school connections (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Serpell & Mashburn, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2010). Parent involvement in their child's education empowers home-school communication, recognition of child difficulties, and consistent behavioral expectations across the two settings (Schumacher, 2021).

Exosystem

The exosystem may influence the developmental path of children's social-emotional skills, parent-child relationships, and home-school connections (Schumacher, 2021). One factor is that the community setting plays a vital role in children's experiences, opportunities, and resources available in home and school environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Miller & Votruba-Drzal, 2013). There is a difference between rural and urban communities regarding home environments, educational practices, population, access to resources, and economic circumstances (Conger, 2013; Miller & Votruba-Drzal, 2013). According to Schumacher (2021), these differences between rural

and urban communities speak to the risks and protections regarding children's transition to elementary school, along with parent-child relationships and home-school connections. Schumacher goes on to say that rural areas are more socially isolated than urban areas, which makes family qualities and characteristics play a more prominent role in influencing the development of children. Rural areas tend to have lower population density, more accessibility to nature and green spaces, safety, and closeness to extended family (Vogt et al., 2014). This set of circumstances promotes positivity in parenting and early development. While in contrast, urban areas that tend to have more single-family homes and fewer relationships with extended family hamper development and desirable parent-child relationships (American Psychological Association, 2005).

Children who are in rural areas are more likely to attend less-resourced schools and enter behind in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Robinson et al., 2017), as they are less likely to have ever attended preschool programs (Malik et al., 2018; M. Smith et al., 2008) compared to children in urban areas. Additionally, research suggests that rural area children are at higher risk than urban children for experiencing mental, behavioral, and development disorders (Lenardson et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2017), not to mention externalizing behaviors (Sheridan et al., 2014) and difficult temperaments (Neumann et al., 2020). The difficult behavior problems are attributed to the barriers to services in rural areas (Anderson et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2017; Sheridan et al., 2014).

Macrosystem

The macrosystem, the most ambiguous and proximal system that influences a child's development, includes economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems

where the child's microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem lie (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Low family socioeconomic status is an example of a macrosystemic variable that affects the social structures and activities (or the lack of) that occur during child development (Schumacher, 2021). Schumacher (2021) explains that the home's learning environment, the parents' psychological well-being, the neighborhood, childcare settings, and schools that the children attend can be impacted negatively by low socioeconomic status and affect the developing child's environment.

Given that interactions with others are essential in learning, understanding the influence of family culture and home language is vital for understanding a child's social and cognitive skill level (Schumacher, 2021). When there is a mismatch between school and family culture, challenges begin to arise in socialization and acculturation for children and families along with communication and relationship building with teachers and peers (Antony-Newman, 2019; Halle et al., 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Therefore, making solid connections with families is crucial, taking the time to learn and understand the cultures within the classroom, and building relationships with students to be socially and cognitively sound.

Chronosystem

Changes that occur over time and across environments as a child develops, the changes children make with themselves, and the meaningful relationship between the two processes are referenced as the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Relationships like parent-child relationships and home-school connections change over time and can either assist or threaten a child's development and adjustment (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Transitions, shifts, and discontinuities in parent-child

interaction patterns occur in early childhood during formal schooling (Schumacher, 2021). In addition, Schumacher (2021) contends that it is expected for the home-school connection to change as children move between grade levels and occasionally different schools. With each passing grade, parents must build new relationships with teachers and build a home-school rapport that may not be supported throughout the years or with new teachers (Schumacher, 2021).

Complex interactions are related to the transitions that occur in school. The different systems in the child's environment and a child's social-emotional skills play a massive role in transition success (Schumacher, 2021). Continually, Schumacher (2021) states that improved social-emotional adjustment in early childhood is linked with the parent-child relationship and home-school connection. Repeatedly, the research emphasizes the importance of parent-child relationships and home-school connections.

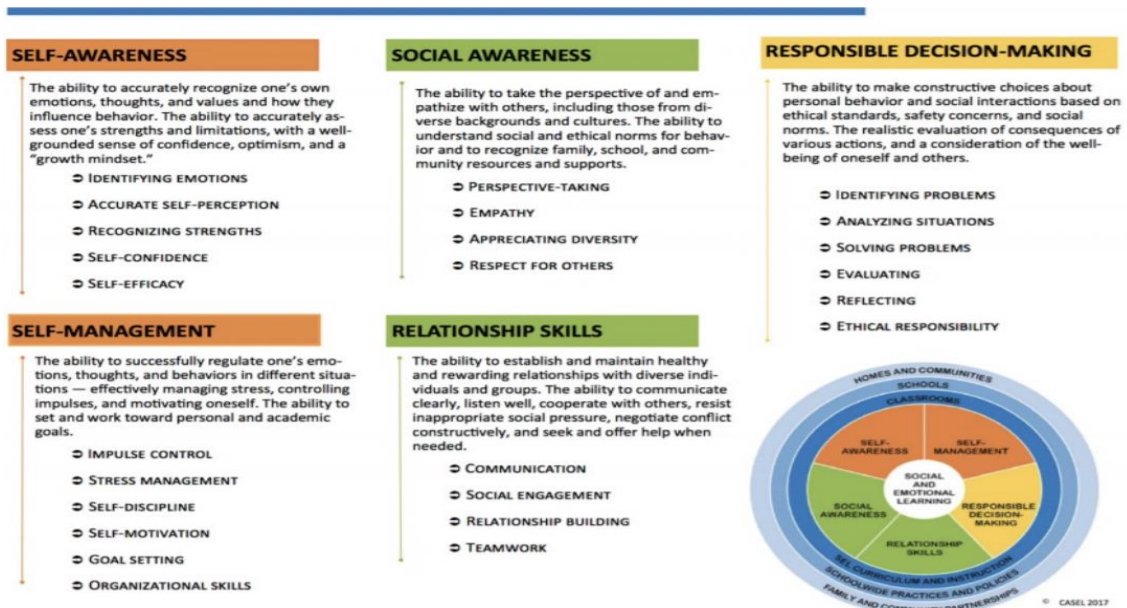
The ecological systems theory presents a "framework for understanding how those day-to-day changes in the circumstances from day to day likely altered the proximal processes between children in early and middle childhood and others, primarily parents" (Gassman-Pines et al., 2022, p. 2). During a pandemic, parents may feel unable to support their children's learning which is essential when school or childcare has been disrupted (Roy et al., 2021). Additionally, prior research confirms that disruptions from the school and childcare settings increased the difficulty of balancing work and family needs (Garbe et al., 2020), driving increased parental stress (Ashforth et al., 2000; Pleck, 1995). These changes in routines, parental moods, and parent-child relationships during periods of uncertainty in a pandemic can affect a child's behavior and well-being.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Framework

The CASEL as a theoretical framework for SEL, was founded in 1994 to establish “high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning” (CASEL, 2021b, para. 10) as a critical part of education. SEL is defined as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2020a, para. 2). SEL focuses on the development of five key areas: (a) self-management, (b) self-awareness, (c) social awareness, (d) decision-making, and (e) relationship skills as outlined in Figure 2 (CASEL, 2021c; M. J. Elias et al., 2006).

Figure 2

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Competencies



Note. From “What is SEL?,” by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020. (<https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>).

CASEL continues to be the leader for communities, schools, districts, and states in promoting, researching, guiding, and directing policies in SEL. The succeeding sections define the five key areas: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the capacity to understand that behavior is impacted by the ability to identify one's feelings, thoughts, and principles. With confidence, one can evaluate resiliency and restraints (Basu & Mermillod, 2011; CASEL, 2021d) and demonstrate self-confidence and a growth mindset (CASEL, 2021d). With self-awareness, individuals understand themselves, their emotions, thoughts, and how they feel about their identity (CASEL, 2019). Self-awareness is about being in touch with one's identity, recognizing why a particular feeling occurs, and understanding the emotion that ensues (Shaw, 2021). One who can handle, take control, and understand one's emotions and experiences, has reached self-awareness (CASEL, 2019).

Self-Management

Self-management characterizes the control one has of personal emotions, thoughts, and actions in any given situation. Also, it is the competence needed to achieve personal goals, suspend gratification, manage stress, and embrace motivation (Basu & Mermillod, 2011; CASEL, 2021d). People with self-management skills can motivate themselves and work towards their academic and personal goals (Shaw, 2021). The CASEL (2019) stated that self-management is not limited to self-understanding but was the information to aid in guiding actions and express emotions. In addition, CASEL reports that self-management is the ability to turn feelings and emotions into positive

action of advocacy for what one believes. Calmness and relaxation are achieved to regulate one's feelings and emotions. Furthermore, self-management includes learning to stay focused and engaged at all times (CASEL, 2019).

Social Awareness

Social awareness is the ability to understand and respond adequately to the emotions of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It is the awareness of the social environment and people surrounding an individual (Basu & Mermillod, 2011; CASEL, 2021d). It engenders compassion towards others (CASEL, 2021d). Shaw (2021) states that self-awareness is the ability to understand different cultures and backgrounds and also perspective taking on those differences. Additionally, Shaw explains that social awareness is having the skill of ethical and social norms for behavior and determining support and resources when needed. Social awareness is acknowledging and appreciating diversity while empathizing with others (CASEL, 2021d). Understanding others and recognizing emotions, reading body language, and showing respect are also examples of social awareness (CASEL, 2019).

Relationship Skills

The CASEL (2019) explains relationship skills as the building of positive relationships and working as a team with others. Relationship skills are the ability to form and maintain healthy and delightful relationships with other individuals and groups, the ability to communicate, get along with others, resolve conflict, and ask for help when needed (Basu & Mermillod, 2011; CASEL, 2021d). To establish relationship skills, one learns to listen closely, work with others, and communicate openly and clearly (CASEL, 2021d; Landmark School Outreach, n.d.). Additionally, it is essential "to have skills in

negotiating conflict constructively and knowing when to seek or offer help to others when it is needed” (Shaw, 2021, p. 58). All these skills are groundwork that can be learned and matured to improve relationships.

Responsible Decisions-Making

Responsible decision-making speaks to making practical decisions about one’s behavior and the skill in social interactions to make rational decisions based on moral standards (Beland, 2007; CASEL, 2021d). In responsible decision-making, one evaluates the outcomes of an action while showing concern for the well-being of others and oneself (Shaw, 2021). The CASEL (2021d) describes responsible decisions as identifying problems, analyzing and evaluating solutions, and solving problems. One making the responsible decision does it ethically, reflects on the situation, and makes the right choices (CASEL, 2021d). When making responsible decisions, one thinks critically and avoids deciding impulsively (CASEL, 2019). Overall, responsible decisions involve thinking through all parts of a problem and making logical choices.

Social-Emotional Integration in the Classroom

The knowledge and interest in SEL have grown over the last two decades (Oberle et al., 2016). Schools have been in an era of high-stakes testing; therefore, to be receptive to SEL, several studies were conducted to examine the impact of SEL in the classroom and to measure, evaluate, and review the outcomes of programs (Brackett et al., 2010). Consequently, 500 SEL programs with evaluations for each have evolved (Weissberg et al., 2015). The evaluations concentrated on classroom based SEL programs, demonstrating that desirable outcomes for students occurred with well-designed and implemented programs (Durlak et al., 2011).

SEL happens through coordinated strategies focusing on social, emotional, and academic skills inside the classroom and within the school setting, along with families and communities (Weissberg et al., 2015). While all the research has led to an increase in SEL programs being purchased in schools, the high-quality implementation is lacking what is necessary to reach desirable outcomes academically, socially, and emotionally (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). According to Theodore (2018), schools implement several interventions, preventions, and promotion programs focusing on social and behavioral programs. However, these programs end up fractured or pieced together, lacking comprehensiveness and coordination, which means SEL is unlikely to be sustained and fostered (Stoiber, 2011). To assist in nurturing and sustaining support for SEL programs, researchers, scholars, and organizations recommend that schools have a whole school approach (CASEL, 2015; Oberle et al., 2016; Osher et al., 2016). School-wide SEL programs that are integrated systemically embody an ecological view (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) with several circumstances that enhance SEL development (Theodore, 2018).

Effectiveness of Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom

All children's SEL skills and development need to be supported in the class to enhance education (M. Elias et al., 1997). Since there is an expansive knowledge that physical, mental, and behavioral health plays an essential role in learning and performance, educational organizations need to focus on the whole child by adjusting practices and policies that support SEL (Murray et al., 2015). When families, school administrators, and stakeholders work together for a common interest, meaningful relationships are created (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007).

SEL programs are backed by abundant knowledge about design, composition, and effectiveness (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). Over several years, research has proven that SEL programs:

- Reinforce skills that include regulating emotions and developing long-term positive relationships
- Increase positive social behaviors
- Strengthen attitudes towards self, others, and school
- Increase academic achievement and performance
- Decrease problem behaviors and anti-social behaviors
- Lower internalizing problems for many children (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012)

Research has been encouraging for SEL programs. However, D. M. Hoffman (2009) states that “shallow, decontextualized, and narrowly instrumentalist approach” (p. 539) has left programs not producing the expected positive outcomes. Teachers and counselors implementing SEL may be focused too much on the evidenced based “recipes” and rules that come from a SEL manual, averting from the key of SEL programs which is building and keeping caring relationships that hone in on social and emotional skills (D. M. Hoffman, 2009). There is a call for an approach to SEL, which integrates SEL across the school environment and manifests in those who teach it, making SEL authentic with caring relationships (Gerics, 2019). Despite the literature supporting this approach (Weissberg et al., 2015), there are very few examples of implementing it in educational settings (CASEL, 2017; Hamedani et al., 2015). For SEL

to be effective in the classroom, it needs to be implemented authentically, in the real-life setting of school, integrated throughout the school day, and adopted school wide.

Family-School Connection

Much research states the importance of balanced parent involvement in schools (Azar, 2018). Children benefit more and have enduring and pervasive long-term effects when home-school connections are consistent and proactive when implementing SEL (M. Elias, 2008). Elementary schools are seeing many children with school phobia, anxiety, and weak social skills (Azar, 2018). According to Azar (2018), for home environments to support SEL, school and community resources must be combined, coordinated, and consistent. A few examples on how to support parents is guiding them to make sure that nightly routines are set acknowledging children sleeping patterns, establishing morning routines to help students arrive at school on time, or keeping up communication no matter when a conflict arises. Guidance like this will not occur without the proper staff and systematic, continued monitoring (M. Elias, 2008).

Children's emotional development has been thoroughly studied about connections between parents' socialization formalities and beliefs about emotions (Azar, 2018). Azar (2018) states that when a baby is born, and the secure attachment process begins, parent and child socialization and relationship begin to build. Emotional and socialization practices taught through modeling, relationship building, direct teaching, and reactions by parents (S. Denham 1998; Eisenberg et al., 1998), along with an emotional climate of the home environment (Kochanskam et al., 2000), play an essential role in developing a child's social and emotional skills (Azar, 2018). Research for years has shown that the parent's understanding and beliefs reinforce the growth from a child's early childhood

skills about emotions and impact their socialization practices (J. Dunsmore et al., 2009). J. C. Dunsmore and Halberstadt (1997) argue that the schemas about the emotions children develop are shaped through attributes that their parents have in beliefs regarding emotions and their expressive behavior as a parent. In addition, J. C. Dunsmore and Halberstadt's research looked at the guidance parents give their child for emotional regulation and the dangers linked with parents' own emotional experience and expression along with the child's recognition of parental emotions. Similar sentiments were created with implications in the classroom when teaching social-emotional skills (Craig, 2007). Additionally, it is suggested that children, through the association of an experience with their parent and their beliefs about emotions, whether positive or negative, that those experiences might affect the way a child expresses themselves (J. Dunsmore et al., 2009).

Consequently, since the environmental experiences of parents affect the teaching of social-emotional skills, then a teacher's experiences would have a similar impact (Azar, 2018). Azar (2018) continues to emphasize that conflict arises when teachers and parents have preconceived thoughts or differing opinions about SEL. To increase positive developmental experiences and have fewer negative developmental experiences (Catalano et al., 2004), it is important to remember that academic achievement, social functioning, and emotional adjustment all benefit when parents and teachers come together as a united front between home and school (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Partrikakou et al. (2005) share that because the parent-teacher relationship affects academic achievement and behavior in needs more than conference after a conference. In superior relationships between parents and teachers, communication and interpersonal links are related to a child's functioning, including social skills and

competence (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2003). When behavior becomes socially unacceptable, the parent-school relationship is what can help decrease the unwanted behavior (Azar, 2018).

When a parent and school relationship is solid and positive, that encourages healthy behaviors. School experiences for children tend to be more positive, supportive, and safe when parents feel connected and have strong, positive, respectful relationships with teachers (Azar, 2018). When SEL skills are merged with integrated, comprehensive, multi-component programs, it is more likely that a significant impact will be made (B. H. Smith & Low, 2013). Therefore, social-emotional programs should have a vital family component to succeed.

Schools should include and engage families in the learning and development of children within their organization. All families are affected by social and emotional issues in our schools and communities (M. Elias et al., 1997). Schools must address emotional learning and development, even though, many, still view it as the responsibility of families (M. Elias et al., 1997). A shared partnership with a common goal is essential in developing children's social-emotional skills and development.

Responding to COVID-19 Through Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom

Unfortunate events throughout history have served as starting blocks for improvements in quality of life (Coleman, 2022). At this moment of time, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened the advancements of SEL in the education field. Throughout the pandemic, many students' lives were disrupted by a loss of socializing activities and structure, such as extracurricular activities, community and religious organizations, after-school and summer programs, and invaluable interactions and expectations in school

participation (Coleman, 2022). Coleman (2022) states that due to these barriers, there is a pressing and often unfulfilled need for available support of SEL to help students manage emotions, problem solve, build relationships, and gain coping strategies to rise above the difficulties faced during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the need to take a more holistic approach to student development and learning and the crucial role of SEL in focusing on that approach (Yorkie et al., 2021). According to Yorkie et al. (2021) there are specific SEL aspects that are relevant to COVID-19 and are of critical importance (see Table 1).

Table 1

Emotional Regulation, Self-Efficacy, and Social Skills Along with Mental Health and Their Relevancy in the Time of COVID

| | Definition | Relevance in the context of COVID-19 |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Emotional Regulation | Emotional regulation refers to the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them (Gross, 1998). | May have relevance for how students cope with unexpected and difficult circumstances such as school closures, and may also impact their motivation for returning to school and learning. |
| Self-Efficacy | This refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977). | May have relevance for students' return to school and catching up on lost learning, but may also have relevance in the context of future school closures. |
| Social Skills | These are the tools we use to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others, and which guide our interaction with each other (Gresham, Sugai and Horner, 2001). | The lack of interaction caused by school closures may affect students' social skills. Social skills may be important for eliciting support from others in times of crisis. |
| Mental Health | Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2018) | May be negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing students' mental health needs is important to enable them to engage with education and learning. |

Note. From “The Importance of Students’ Socio-Emotional Learning, Mental Health, and Wellbeing in the Time of COVID-19,” 2021. *Rise*. (<https://riseprogramme.org/publications/importance-students-socio-emotional-learning-mental-health-and-wellbeing-time-covid-19>)

Behavior Implications of COVID-19 in the Classroom

Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have a detrimental effect on children's physical and mental health (Imran et al., 2020). Children have limited understanding of events such as pandemics which makes them more vulnerable during these times (Imran et al., 2020). Imran et al. (2020) explain that children are more at risk because of the limited coping strategies to escape the physical and mental harms occurring around the event. Furthermore, unlike adults, children may not be able to communicate their feelings as clearly (Imran et al., 2020).

Today's children have been through something no one could have imagined: school closures. These closures not only left children without a physical building to attend school in but separated them from their friends, causing stress and anxiety (Imran et al., 2020). The pandemic has stirred up robust, negative emotional responses in children, such as fear, anger, anxiety, stress, and panic (EducationLinks, 2018). Additionally, the most common behavioral problems identified in children since the pandemic started are clinginess, distraction, irritability, and fear that family members may contract a disease that has proven deadly (Jiao et al., 2020).

A preliminary study conducted during the pandemic found that children three to six years of age were more likely to exhibit clinginess and fear of family members being infected than children six to eighteen (Singh et al., 2020). The study states that older people tended to inquire more about COVID-19 and experience inattention (Singh et al., 2020). In all age groups, the study disclosed severe psychological conditions increasing in the areas of irritability, inattention, and clinginess (Viner et al., 2020). Additionally, survey results from parents revealed that children had feelings of uncertainty, and

fearfulness, and felt isolated during the pandemic (Singh et al., 2020). Also, according to Jiao et al. (2020), children were experiencing disturbed sleep, nightmares, poor appetite, agitation, inattention, and separation anxiety. Children may have pent-up feelings of distress, which can cause fear within themselves, or they may act out negatively (Liu et al., 2020).

Importance of Social-Emotional Learning After the Pandemic

As many students and adults have encountered unimaginable stress and trauma, it is vital to pay close attention to students' social, emotional, and academic development (CASEL, 2020b). Trauma, defined by the CASEL (2020b), occurs when a disruption happens during development caused by an extraordinary event and produces changes in mood, focus, concentration, memory, behavior, emotions, and trust. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a memorable event that has traumatized many families and students.

Most students may appear only to have mild or momentary psychological effects, and recovery is a norm when they are presented with intense and distressing experiences (Capurso et al., 2020). Despite most children being able to recover, prolonged or unmanaged exposure to stress can lead to depression and misbehavior, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders (Danese et al., 2020). In addition, Hong et al. (2020) state that although COVID-19 may have less of an infection rate for children than adults, from a psychological stance, children are more delicate (Jiao et al., 2020) and display anxiety, behavior problems, and fear when it comes to isolation (Capurso et al., 2020).

Federal programs, states, and local districts must intentionally coordinate SEL efforts to promote positive mental health (Coleman, 2022). Coleman (2022) states that SEL should be implemented as a support system and resource for mental wellness,

including promotion, prevention, early intervention, and treatment. By having local districts involved in the coordinating efforts in SEL to promote positive mental health for students, it is easy to see that schools will play a vital role in implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that schools play an essential role in supporting not just skills in numeracy and literacy but also in the aspects of children's development (Yorke et al., 2021). School closures made students, especially those who are disadvantaged, miss out on additional supports that would typically be available in a school setting (Yorkie et al., 2021).

The CASEL (2020b) calls for our school communities to expand the social and emotional competencies and establish equitable learning environments for students and adults to process, heal, and thrive after the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continues to change the traditional school setting, it is vital to understand the significance of the CASEL five core competencies and how they can help navigate through the difficulties of the pandemic (CASEL, 2020b). CASEL has given a roadmap to each of the five competencies and what needs to be done now because of the pandemic (see Table 2).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted schools and student learning, intensifying the importance of SEL (Bond, 2020). According to Bond (2020), students' safety and mental health is the top concern for students, teachers, and parents. By emphasizing SEL, there will be sustainability and preparation to keep students learning when many feel anxious and uncertain (Bond, 2020). The core of SEL is students' well-being, which needs to be the top priority at this time (Bintiff, 2020). During this time of high stress and worry, the desire should be to support students which will motivate the emphasis that is needed to be placed on SEL in the school environment

(Payton et al., 2008; Weissberg et al., 2015; Zins et al., 2007). SEL is the key to supporting students’ mental well-being, continued development, and creating positive outcomes for now and into adulthood.

Table 2

Reunite, Renew, Thrive

| COMPETENCY DEFINED | SKILLS WE NEED NOW |
|---|---|
| <p>SELF-AWARENESS, which is the ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior; and accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”</p> | <p>As we process the current pandemic and racial injustices, self-awareness is critical to identifying and processing our complex emotions when things are uncertain and socially turbulent, reflecting on our strengths; understanding our cultural, racial, and social identities; and examining our implicit biases.</p> |
| <p>SELF-MANAGEMENT, which is the ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations—effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself; and the ability to set and work toward goals.</p> | <p>Self-management is critical now as we cope with grief and loss, develop our resiliency, and express our agency through resisting injustices and practicing anti-racism.</p> |
| <p>SOCIAL AWARENESS, which is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.</p> | <p>Social awareness allows us to understand the broader historical and social contexts around the inequities exacerbated by COVID-19 and ongoing individual and institutional impacts of systemic racism.</p> |
| <p>RELATIONSHIP SKILLS, which is the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups, communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.</p> | <p>Relationship skills are essential to help us build and maintain meaningful connections across race, culture, age, and distance; support one another during collective grief and struggle; and collaboratively find solutions to new obstacles.</p> |
| <p>RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING, which is the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms, and the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.</p> | <p>Responsible decision-making is particularly important as we analyze the consequences of our individual and institutional actions on others’ health and safety, make decisions that promote collective well-being, and engage in collective action to form a more just and equitable society.</p> |

Note. Social-emotional learning competency defined and skills we need now regarding the effects of COVID-19. From “Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Reopening School,” by CASEL, 2020. (<https://casel.org/casel-gateway-sel-roadmap-for-reopening/?view=true>).

Literature Gap

This literature review examined an extensive and considerable amount of research on COVID-19 and how it has affected many students in the school system. SEL is a crucial part of recovery. In today’s educational environment, there is a high need to help students handle emotions, problem solve, build relationships, and rise above this challenging time (Coleman, 2022). However, continuous research has documented that although the educational system and communities know the importance of SEL, it has not become the priority in most school settings.

Students exhibit behaviors such as fear, anger, anxiety, stress, panic (EducationLinks, 2018), clinginess, distraction, irritability, fear that family members may

contract the disease (Jiao et al., 2020), and the list goes on. Many students may have several pent-up emotions from the disruptions and experiences with COVID-19, that they are feeling fear within themselves or may act out negatively (Liu et al., 2020). A monumental amount of research expresses that students who participate in social-emotional programs experience less anxiety, perform better academically, are less hyperactive and more attentive, and show less aggressive behavior in school (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Meyer (2021) recognizes the many different academic and social settings of school during the pandemic and how the return to face-to-face instruction comes with the understanding that additional support is warranted for students' social and emotional knowledge and skills. Continued research emphasizes the importance of SEL at the federal, state, local, and district levels and the ability of it positively affecting mental health and overall student well-being. However, further research is needed to explore the specific increased behaviors in the classroom, why SEL is necessary as well as the barriers and supports for SEL facing teachers after the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is still a part of daily life, with new discoveries and updates. This research study will focus on San Bernardino County public school teachers' lived experiences about the needs of students socially and emotionally upon their return to face-to-face instruction, the barriers teachers have encountered with SEL, and what supports are provided by teachers regarding SEL.

Synthesis Matrix

A synthesis matrix was developed to support the organization of the variables identified and explained in this literature review; authors and APA citations organize the synthesis matrix data and variables (see Appendix A).

Summary

Educators and educational systems must meet the needs of all students socially and emotionally after the experience of so much trauma in the pandemic. Students need to be able begin rebuilding, trusting, and thriving in the current environment. It is essential for educators to implement SEL to support and guide students and families past the COVID-19 pandemic. By making SEL one of the focuses in education, students will acquire the five core competencies of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, decision making, and relationship skills to help them rise above the aftermath of the pandemic, progress in school, and become lifelong learners. This literature review explains that research has identified SEL as a way to cope with trauma and the possible psychological consequences that come with it. Minimal progress has been made in looking at what teachers faced returning to in classroom instruction regarding the needs of students socially and emotionally and the barriers and supports given regarding SEL. Further research is needed to probe into this area more deeply.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The following chapter details the methodology used to complete this research. Initially, the chapter restates the purpose and research questions, followed by a description of the methods used to collect the data presented in Chapter IV. Next, it gives an overview of the study population is, with an in-depth explanation of the purposeful sampling and snowballing technique used. The chapter also describes the research instruments and supports their reliability and validity. This section follows up with an explanation of the procedures used to collect the data for this study and the methods used to analyze that data. This chapter presents a summary of the research, and its limitations.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon their return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Sub-Questions

The following research sub questions were developed to help answer the research question:

1. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?
2. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?
3. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?
4. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?
5. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?

Research Design

The research design chosen for this study was phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological study captures and describes an individual's experience with a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2015). As data was gathered from individuals in the study, the researcher specifically looked for "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about

it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). The research design was selected to study the lived experience of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County who returned to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the purpose of phenomenological methodology “is to transform lived experience into a description of “essence,” allowing for reflection and analysis” (p. 24). Through the analysis and reflection of the descriptions of the lived experience of the participants, themes emerge.

The qualitative research method allowed the researcher to inquire, discover, explore, and employ inductive logic through open-ended, semi-structured questions with the study’s participants and artifacts that were collected. Inductive analysis empowers the researcher to reveal patterns, themes, and categories in the data collected for the study (Patton, 2015). Then through the patterns, themes, and categories, the researcher could demonstrate the inter-relationships that are occurring without making assumptions.

Population

A population is defined as the entire group of individuals, objects, or events, in a research study where results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). At the time of this study and according to the latest published statistical information published in 2020/2021, during 2018/2019 California had 1,029 school districts and 548 public elementary schools, and 146, 521 public elementary school teachers. (CDE, n.d.). The population for this study represented elementary school teachers. By narrowing and redefining the population, the researcher then determined a sampling frame on which to focus for this study.

Sampling Frame

The population is defined as a group of individuals, objects, or events, that comply with criteria outlined in a research study that results in generalizations of findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sampling frame provided the data that were collected. After establishing the sampling frame from the overall population, the researcher is ready to interpret the data and inferences effectively. At the time of this study, San Bernardino County in southern California consisted of 34 districts, 338 elementary schools, and 19,304 teachers (EdData, n.d.). The sampling frame from which participants in the study were selected were public elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County who currently are teaching transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. Approximately 9,770 elementary teachers in San Bernardino County were the target population for this study (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.).

Sample

The participants selected in a study from a population the researcher intends to generalize are called the sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The definition of a sample is given by Creswell (2014) and Patton (2015), who give it as a subset of the target population that is representative of the whole population. For this study, the sample came from 9,770 elementary teachers representing San Bernardino County out of 19,304 teachers in San Bernardino County.

Sample Size

Qualitative studies generally require a smaller number of individuals in the sample size compared to quantitative studies. In qualitative research, the researcher must collect enough data to generalize to a population sufficiently. The data collected must

have all perceptions represented, which will lead to the attainment of saturation. According to Fusch et al. (2018), saturation occurs when the research objectives have been met, and no new relevant information can be obtained. Depending on the study, the number of participants may vary to reach data saturation. However, when considering data saturation, researchers generally agree that saturation is met when there are no new data, no new themes, and no new coding, and there is the ability to replicate the study (Guest et al., 2006). It is suggested by Creswell (2014) to have at least five to 25 participants and Morse (1994) suggests to have a least six. The selected sample for this study included 12 public elementary school teachers within San Bernardino County that completed an interest survey for this study. The number 12 fell within the parameters suggested by Creswell and Morse outlined.

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to select the study sample. Patton (2015) defines purposeful sampling as selecting “rich cases” that provide in-depth information about the purpose of the study. For this qualitative research study, purposeful sampling was used to attain relevant information to identify public elementary school teachers’ experiences with students after the COVID-19 pandemic and how SEL was used to support students upon returning to face-to-face instruction. The criteria used to purposely identify and select public elementary school teachers for this study included:

- Teachers actively teaching in San Bernardino County.
- Teachers actively teaching transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth grade.

- Teachers returning to teach face-to-face when schools reopened after the closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Teachers using SEL to help support students who returned to face-to-face instruction.

Sample Selection Process

For this study, purposeful sampling was selected to be able to describe the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers and the support given through SEL upon the return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic. This research looked at 12 southern California San Bernardino County educators. The sample selection process was as follows:

- A need for participants for the study was posted on LinkedIn, the Facebook Group Inland Empire Teachers, and UMass Global Ed.D.
- An email was sent out for a need of participants to local union leaders and known colleagues in education.
- Each identified teacher, through social media or email, was then sent an interest survey link to fill out.
- An invitation to participate and the informed consent material were sent to teachers who filled out the interest survey (see Appendix B, C, D, and E).
- Out of 21 possible participants, only 12 replied confirming continued participation.

Interviews were then scheduled with the 12 participants with the request to provide any artifacts at that time.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the primary instrument for data collection is the researcher (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). With the researcher being the primary instrument in collecting data, possible bias may occur deliberately or unintentionally through the researcher's tone of voice, the handling of different participants, and projected attitudes (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, according to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), additional effects on data collection may occur because of the researcher's age, race, sex, and education level. The researcher must be upfront with the participants by letting them know they are employed as public elementary school teacher who returned to face-to-face instruction after the pandemic and embraced social-emotional learning to support their students. In addition to the researcher's bias, participants of the study may also have a change in behavior during the data collection time that could affect the responses given. The difference in behavior could be caused by their awareness that they are the study subjects (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

The interview questions were tested for qualitative research to ensure consistency and certainty. Additionally, the research questions of this study were reviewed and evaluated by the dissertation chair and committee members to establish alignment, purpose, clarity, and valuable feedback. All of the qualitative interviews for this study were held using the Zoom platform. In Zoom, interview questions and responses were recorded using the Zoom recording application and uploaded to a MacBook Pro device.

Qualitative interviews may take several forms, including an interview guide approach or a standard open-ended interview (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, an interview guide approach was chosen because topics were pre-selected, and the

researcher decided the sequence and wording of all questions (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The interview guide approach supported this study's organization, purpose, and alignment (see Appendix F).

Interview Instrument Development

Instrumentation for this study included semi-structured/open-ended interview questions developed by an Interview Questions-Alignment Tool. The questions for this study identified the significant variables:

- The experiences of elementary school teachers supporting students socially and emotionally upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the pandemic.
- What specific supports were used to help students socially and emotionally.

Interview questions were analyzed by two professional colleagues experienced with SEL and working with teachers to ensure alignment, organization, and clarity.

Reliability

During the data collection phase of the study, the researchers are the instrument because they are collecting data from the interviews they conducted. For the researcher to have reliability, the results of the studies must be dependable by being repeatable with the same context, methods, and participants (Shenton, 2004). To establish reliability within a study, a researcher must be descriptive and in-depth with all procedures and protocols. When the researcher is thorough, any variation in results will affect the independent variable rather than just random chance.

To assure reliability for this study the researcher requested that the dissertation chair and committee review and give feedback on the content, clarity, and appropriateness of the interview questions. Another method used to ensure reliability was

the field test of the interview questions. Through the field test, feedback was given by an observer regarding any biased behavior and by the interview participant regarding clarity of instructions and questions. Once all feedback was given and adjustments were made, the researcher conducted another field study when deemed necessary. For the interview component of the study, when interviewing each participant, the researcher used a standard format to introduce the study and then presented all open-ended semi-structured interview questions in the same format (see Appendix G). All responses were recorded through the Zoom application. Digital transcripts were then reviewed by the researcher and were checked against the Zoom recording.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity lies in the data collection and analysis (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010) from the participant's responses. To reach validity, the researcher took steps in participant selection, interview question alignment, data collection, and data analysis. Each participant was selected based on the criteria of being a public elementary school teacher who works within San Bernardino County, who returned to face-to-face instruction after the pandemic, and had some experience with SEL to help support students. Therefore, the credentials of the chosen study participants enabled their responses to be valid to the interview questions. The Interview Questions-Alignment Tool used for this study aligned the interview questions with the research questions guiding elicited responses needed to answer the research questions. Triangulation or the "cross-validation among data-sources [and] data collection strategies" (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 379) ensured that the data gathered addressed the research questions and variables. The researcher compared each participant's responses for

patterns. Participants were asked to provide artifacts during their interview. All transcribed interviews were sent to the participant to check for accuracy to fulfill the triangulation method for validity.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this qualitative study, data were collected through interviews and artifacts. The researcher was granted permission from the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board (see Appendix H) along with completed coursework to meet the requirement for the National Institutes of Health (see Appendix I) to conduct interviews. Twelve one-on-one interviews were conducted via Zoom or face-to-face with public elementary school teachers who returned to face-to-face instruction after the pandemic in Redlands Unified School District, Colton Joint Unified School District, Rialto Unified School District, and Chino Valley Unified School District.

Procedures for the interviews included:

- Communication with participants via email formerly inviting them to participate and an explanation of the purpose of the study.
- Consent of voluntary participation, audio release, and confidentiality procedure.
- Follow-up email verifying participants' voluntary consent of participation via Zoom and scheduled interviews were discussed.
- Interviews consisting of using semi-structured/open-ended questions completed.
- A numerical code was given to each participant, P1-P12, to uphold confidentiality requirements during the interview process and data collection.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, NVIVO was used to analyze the data given in the interviews. To prepare for the coding, the researcher had the interviews transcribed, and organized into 12 different documents labeled P1-P12, each numerical code representing the assigned participant. Themes were identified and recorded based on the transcribed interviews. Subsequently, the data were coded using NVIVO establishing which data supported the development of themes and patterns for this study. After the data were coded, findings were analyzed and presented in frequency tables and in narrative format.

Inter-Coder Reliability

To increase both validity and reliability and reduce bias during qualitative data collection and analysis it is highly recommended to implement inter-coder reliability procedures. According to Patton (2015), inter-coder reliability refers to having at least two different coders analyze and review data and themes. To improve the reliability of the study, the researcher engaged a peer to review the data collected and the themes inferred by the data. The review process allowed the researcher to clarify wording and combine any themes if needed. During this process, the confidentiality of the data and the participants were maintained at all times.

Limitations

Limitations of this study were that it was conducted only in Redlands Unified School District, Colton Joint Unified School District, Rialto Unified School District, and Chino Valley Unified School District. The sample size for this study was limited to 12 public elementary school teachers and although the researcher wanted a random selection of participants across the districts, the snowball sampling technique could limit that idea.

Also, looking at the total population of teachers in each district, the actual number of participants was small in comparison. An additional limitation is possible researcher bias since the researcher is an elementary public-school teacher who returned to face-to-face instruction and embraces the importance of SEL. Additionally, a limitation included participants' self-reported information to answer the interview questions. The timing of this study is also a possible limitation as it is taking place during the second full year of returning to face-to-face instruction.

Summary

This chapter presented the overview of the methodology for this study in an organized manner. The information presented was research design, population, sample population, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis procedures, and possible limitations of the study. Chapter IV includes beneficial data findings for the study. Chapter V establishes findings and conclusions of this study, along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER IV RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

The following chapter begins with an overview of its contents, a review of the purpose of the study, the research question and sub-research questions, the procedure for data collection and analysis, population and sample. Each participants' data are presented according to the themes that were developed for the research sub-questions. In addition, the data show underlying themes that were developed by all participant responses concerning the research sub-questions. This chapter concludes with a summary of the interview findings in this study.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon their returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question

The research was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon their return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Sub-Questions

The following research sub questions were developed to help answer the research question:

1. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?
2. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?
3. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?
4. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?
5. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Interviews

This qualitative study used semi-structured open-ended interview questions to determine the lived experiences of 12 San Bernardino County elementary teachers supporting students' SEL needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the

COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews consisted of three questions to answer each of the five research sub-questions. Each participant received a shared copy of the Letter of Invitation and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights with details of the study. Additionally, the participants gave electronic consent to participate and record conversations via the Zoom platform. All interviews were transcribed using the Zoom platform. Once transcriptions were verified by the researcher and participants were sent a copy of them. The transcriptions were then uploaded to the NVIVO platform. In NVIVO, patterns were identified from the participant responses. A doctoral expert coder verified the transcription themes and transcribed information between the expert codes and the researcher, which consisted of an agreement between the coders. Both researcher and coder obtained a high percentage of integrated agreement, and as a result, potential bias was eliminated when coding.

Artifacts

Concurrent with the interviews, the researcher reviewed artifacts, as supports in SEL were evident from the artifacts as well as in the responses of the participants. Table 3 identifies the types of artifacts collected and the number of items collected of each type.

A total of 87 artifacts were analyzed. Artifacts were requested from each interviewee but only 50% of the participants submitted artifacts. All artifacts were presented and then sent through email to the researcher. The criterion for the artifacts was they must include SEL, such as flyers, newsletters, written material used with students, and pictures of materials or stations in the classroom. All artifacts were then added to the participant file in NVIVO for coding.

Table 3*Artifact Data Collected*

| Artifacts | Number |
|--|-----------|
| District provided curriculum overviews | 13 |
| Student worksheets | 20 |
| Social-emotional journal slide | 30 |
| Flipgrid read aloud share | 3 |
| GoNoodle support | 1 |
| ClassDojo Mindfulness | 4 |
| Stop and Think Poster | 1 |
| Room environment (specialty seating, calming corners, support bulletin boards) | 14 |
| Buddy bench | 1 |
| Total | 87 |

Population

A population is defined as the entire group of individuals, objects, or events, in a research study where results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). At the time of this study and according to the latest published statistical information published in 2020/2021, during 2018/2019 California had 1,029 school districts and 548 public elementary schools, and 146, 521 public elementary school teachers (CDE, n.d.). The population for this study represented elementary school teachers. By narrowing and redefining the population, the researcher then determined a sampling frame on which to focus for this study.

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The population is defined as a group of individuals, objects, or events, that comply with criteria outlined in a research study that results in generalizations of findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sampling frame provided the data that were collected. After establishing the sampling frame from the overall population, the researcher is ready to interpret the data and inferences effectively. At the time of this

study, San Bernardino County in southern California consisted of 34 districts, 338 elementary schools, and 19,304 teachers (EdData, n.d.). The sampling frame from which participants in the study were selected were public elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County who currently are teaching transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. Approximately 9,770 elementary teachers in San Bernardino County were the target population for this study (NCES, n.d.).

Sample

The participants selected in a study from a population the researcher intends to generalize are called the sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The definition of a sample is given by Patton (2015) and Creswell (2014), who gives it as a subset of the target population that is representative of the whole population. For this study, the sample came from 9,770 elementary teachers representing San Bernardino County out of 19,304 teachers in San Bernardino County.

Sample Size

Qualitative studies generally require a smaller number of individuals in the sample size compared to quantitative studies. In qualitative research, the researcher must collect enough data to generalize to a population sufficiently. The data collected must have all perceptions represented, which will lead to the attainment of saturation. According to Fusch et al. (2018), saturation occurs when the research objectives have been met, and no new relevant information can be obtained. Depending on the study, the number of participants may vary to reach data saturation. However, when considering data saturation, researchers generally agree that saturation is met when there are no new data, no new themes, and no new coding, and there is the ability to replicate the study

(Guest et al., 2006). It is suggested by Creswell (2014) to have at least five to 25 participants and by Morse (1994) to have a least six. The selected sample for this study included 12 public elementary school teachers within San Bernardino County. These numbers fall within the parameters Creswell and Morse outlined.

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to select the study sample. Patton (2015) defines purposeful sampling as selecting “rich cases” that provide in-depth information about the purpose of the study. For this qualitative research study, purposeful sampling was used to attain relevant information to identify public elementary school teachers’ experiences with students after the COVID-19 pandemic and how SEL was used to support students upon returning to face-to-face instruction. The criteria used to purposely identify and select public elementary school teachers for this study included:

- Teachers actively teaching in San Bernardino County
- Teachers actively teaching transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth grade
- Teachers returning to teach face-to-face when schools reopened after the closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Teachers using SEL to help support students who returned to face-to-face instruction

Table 4 provides a breakdown of study criteria met by each participant.

Table 4

Study Criteria

| Participant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| The participant was teaching in San Bernardino County | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| The participant was in an elementary setting (grade TK-6) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| The participant came back to face-to-face instruction after the pandemic | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| The participant has some experience in using social-emotional learning to support students' needs | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Note. TK-6 = Transitional kindergarten through grade six.

Sample Selection Process

For this study, purposeful sampling was selected to be able to describe the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers and the support given through SEL upon the return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic. This research looked at 12 southern California San Bernardino County educators. The sample selection process was as follows:

- A need for participants for the study was posted on LinkedIn, the Facebook Group Inland Empire Teachers, and UMass Global Ed.D.
- An email was sent out for a need of participants to local union leaders and known colleagues in education.
- Each identified teacher, through social media or email, was then sent an interest survey link to fill out.
- An invitation to participate and the informed consent material were sent to teachers who filled out the interest survey.

- Out of 21 possible participants, only 12 replied confirming continued participation.

Interviews were then scheduled with the 12 participants with the request to provide any artifacts at that time.

Demographic Data

Twelve elementary school teachers within the grade span of transitional kindergarten through sixth grade in San Bernardino County were selected to participate in this study (see Table 5). The data was reported without referencing any individual or district for confidentiality purposes. Each participant was assigned a number for confidentiality purposes.

Table 5

Demographic of Study Participants

| Participant | Years of Service | Current Grade Level |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 3-9 | 5 |
| 2 | 10+ | 3 |
| 3 | 10+ | K |
| 4 | 10+ | 2 |
| 5 | 3-9 | 4 |
| 6 | 10+ | TK-6 (RSP) |
| 7 | 10+ | 6 |
| 8 | 10+ | 6 |
| 9 | 10+ | 2 |
| 10 | 10+ | 1 |
| 11 | 10+ | K |
| 12 | 3-9 | TK-6 (Independent Study) |

Note. TK-6 = Transitional kindergarten through grade six; RSP = Resource specialist program.

Presentation of Data

The following section introduces the theme codes for each of the themes identified in the study. Also, this section provides summaries of each participants’

responses to the five research sub-questions and artifacts, if provided. In addition, the most common themes amongst all participants are shared under each sub-question.

Central Research Question

The main research question asked: *What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The CASEL developed five core competencies in SEL: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making. Emerging themes were determined by themes that referenced a minimum of 50% or more of the participants. When participant criteria of a minimum of six participants were met, the researcher then determined that an emerging theme must meet the criteria that the referenced themes represented a minimum of 20% or more of all data coded with that construct. Coded data not included in the study failed to meet one of the two thresholds: 20% or more of all data coded or 50% of participant references. Therefore, the data that failed to meet the two thresholds were unutilized in the study.

The extensive coding process resulted in 13 themes with 191 interview transcript frequencies from the 12 interviews and 87 artifacts from the review of the curriculum, pictures, slides, and lessons provided by participants. Themes and frequencies were distributed across the five core competencies of SEL: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making. Tables 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 are labeled by the five competencies, the themes that emerged from the participant interviews for each one, and a code for each theme.

Table 6*Theme Codes in Response to Self-Awareness*

| Theme in Response | Code |
|--|------|
| Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions | A |
| Provided access to a variety of coping strategies | B |
| Built relationships with students and parents/guardians | C |
| Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff | D |

Table 7*Theme Codes in Response to Self-Management*

| Theme in Response | Code |
|---|------|
| Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors | E |
| Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff | F |
| Positive communication and strategies to manage one's behavior | G |

Table 8*Theme Codes in Response to Social Awareness*

| Theme in Response | Code |
|--|------|
| Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions | H |
| Empathy-focused lessons and discussions | I |

Table 9*Theme Codes in Response to Relationship Skills*

| Theme in Response | Code |
|---|------|
| Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills | J |
| Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills | K |

Table 10

Theme Codes in Response to Responsible Decision-Making

| Theme in Response | Code |
|--|------|
| Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions | L |
| Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting | M |

Data Analysis by Participant

The following sections give a summary of each participants interview transcription. A table is included for each participant showing the number of coded references per theme code.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a fifth-grade teacher who taught between three to nine years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 1 shared that many students knew how to state their feelings but did not necessarily know how to cope with them. Participant 1 shared a particular experience where a student came up to her and revealed she was experiencing some anxiety. The student was unsure of what to do with this feeling. Participant 1 began asking her questions to ascertain what she may need. The questioning led the student to options about coping with what she was experiencing at that moment. The student shared, “This is how I'm feeling. An adult will respect how I'm feeling and help me get through it.” The participant showed respect for the student who had reached out for assistance. The participant supported this student by taking the opportunity to step outside to speak to the student privately, recognizing and acknowledging how she was feeling, giving some

coping suggestions, and letting the student know she was there to support her whenever needed.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 1 said that self-management was an area of continuous focus. Participant 1 stated, “A lot of the kiddos had to get used to sitting in their seat, sitting for long durations of time, and going longer durations of time without a break. It was a struggle.” Self-management issues exploded on the playground, where students struggled to keep their hands to themselves. One student struggled in the classroom but also became upset multiple times a day on the playground. This student would always choose to play soccer at recess, but invariably came in crying about something that disappointed him. He was larger than the other students, so he often used his size to solve the problems that were happening when he was upset or was not doing well. To help this student, Participant 1 consulted with the school psychologist and family to help with self-management skills. It was decided that soccer was off-limits and that other things, like jump rope or swings, should be tried during recess. The conversation started with, “Who are your other friends and what are they doing at recess instead of soccer?” The student was reluctant at first, but with work, accepted what was being asked of him.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

For the most part, Participant 1 said that the students are strong in social awareness. Participant 1 stated, “I noticed that this group, especially this year, that they are very receptive and responsive to what is good for the whole group.” In addition, Participant 1 shared “...the students are considerate of what is fair, accurate, and correct. The students hold each other accountable and often show an awareness of others’ feelings, even mine.” A particular student who seemed to lack social awareness by not knowing how to interact with others or demonstrate classroom etiquette would interrupt instruction and ask to have a conversation unrelated what was being taught. Participant 1 supported this student by being patient, giving reminders, using cues, and building a relationship with a supportive home.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 1 shared issues in relationship skills across the board, but it seemed more evident in girls. There were many concerns about what was being said on the internet about one another. Participant 1 stated, “And so there were a lot of interpersonal relationship issues with who is associated with whom and who's a friend of whom.” Often the dialog went something like this, “I am not friends with that girl, so you cannot be friends with her if you are my friend.” Participant 1 spent time on how to engage in appropriate communication with friends when a disagreement occurred and how to advocate for one another instead of tearing each other down. One particular girl always seemed to be at the center of all the issues. Participant 1 supported that student by reaching out to the family to check in and let them know what was happening, working

with the student on identifying things being said that were not positive, assisting the student in mending some relationships, and encouraged the formation of new friendships.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 1 shared that there was a relearning curve with responsible decision-making. Participant 1 explained,

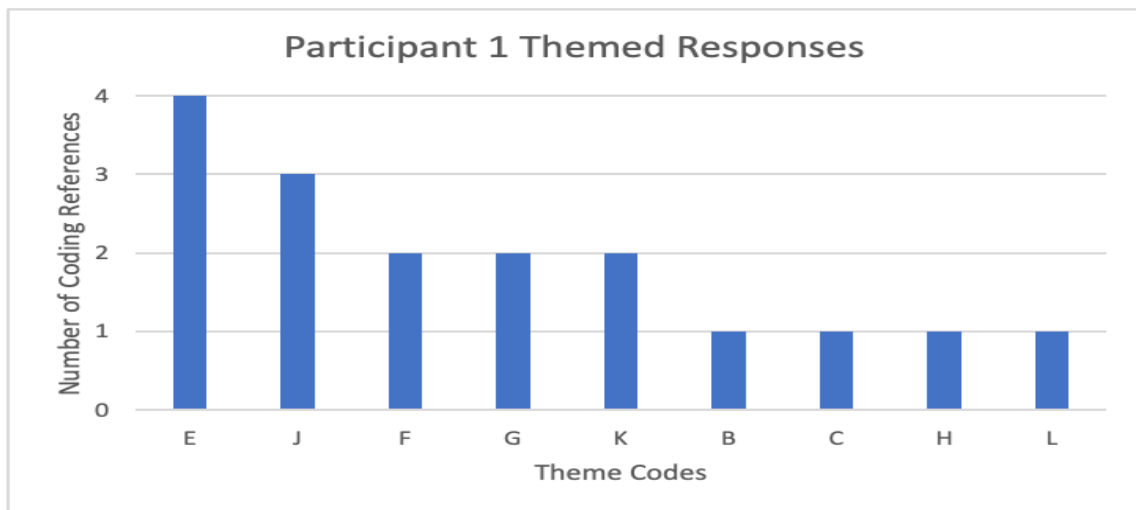
There have been lots of reminders of the school's expectations, of how to respond to others, and how to resolve conflicts. And the proper kind ways to do that. The ways to do that with people that are not related to you and are not family members to you. How one responds in a family situation can be very different in a school situation when you have to navigate difficult things with people that are not your siblings and not in your family.

Also, Participant 1 shared that a particular student always went with the crowd, never making his own decisions. As a whole, it was very much a group mentality mode, according to Participant 1. To support this student, Participant 1 had multiple conversations with the student and family about positive decision-making and representing yourself in the decisions being made. Participant 1 also discussed how decisions could affect one's future. The school psychologist was looped in by Participant 1. As a team, Participant 1 and the psychologist worked on motivating the mom to get the student involved in a sport to boost the student's self-confidence and self-esteem.

Artifacts. Participant 1 shared artifacts related to curriculum. The curriculum that was used came from the program Second Step. Second Step lessons focused on growth mindset and goal setting, emotion management, empathy and kindness, and problem solving. Participant 1 provided the overview of each unit and any student handouts that accompanied the lessons. See Figure 3 for the themed responses from Participant 1.

Figure 3

Participant 1: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; F = Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was a third-grade teacher who had taught for over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 2 shared, “The whole school setting was so distant to them.” Students were not used to being around peers or teachers and dealing with school all day. Participant 2, spoke about random sounds constantly happening in the classroom during instruction and independent time and that often the room sounded like a zoo. It did not matter who was talking; someone was always making a noise. Participant 2 shared with parents what was going on through a classroom application called ClassDojo. This platform also allowed Participant 2 to acknowledge positive behavior points that turned into rewards at the school store. Additionally, Participant 2 would let the students know when they were making noises, remind them of how distracting they were, and re-teach the expectation.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 2 felt that the learned habits with distance learning trickled over to face-to-face instruction. During distance learning, Participant 2 shared that many students did not attempt or see the importance of schoolwork even after reaching out to parents. Therefore, when the students came back to face-to-face instruction, they brought in the learned habits that occurred during distance learning with the thought process, “I don't have to do that, it won't matter if I don't turn this in or if I don't get to that, oh well. I would prefer to talk or doodle on an extra paper.” Participant 2 felt there was no management in the area of self-responsibility. A particular student could work but chose to socialize and not complete assignments constantly despite clear expectations, practice, and models. To support this student, Participant 2 provided constant reminders and kept

the parents aware of the situation. Participant 2 reminded parents about ClassDojo and how easy it was to see their student's day by checking the app. Also, Participant 2 took the time to explain each symbol in the app that the parent may see when checking up on their student. It was suggested to provide positive reinforcement at home when positive behavior was notated on the app. Once the parents and Participant 2 started working together, the student began to understand the rewards of positive behavior and was able to make improvements.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 2 shared, “Many of my students struggled greatly in this category when they returned just due to not having the practice of being around people, talking and working off non-verbal cues, or not having to consider somebody's feelings.” This lack of social awareness led to conflicts, tattling, and arguments commonly not seen at this grade level because students were focused on themselves and unaware of those around them. Participant 2 shared that a particular student struggled socially every time there was a 10-minute recess. Anything that involved the use of a ball would have him fall apart, with a temper flare-up and inappropriate responses towards his peers. Participant 2 supported this student by supplying a calming box that allowed the student access to tactile items. Once the student was calmed down, Participant 2 would then lead a discussion with the student and peers involved. During this conversation, Participant 2 worked on communication skills when resolving a conflict and had students practice those skills with one another.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 2 stated that basic relationship skills like being friendly, saying nice things, and not hurting others were definitely missing. For example, Participant 2 shared about a girl who was terrific in the classroom, but was a mess on the playground. Participant 2 concluded, “It was happening because she lacked the skills on managing friendships, managing emotions, how to have relationships and just not having that practice.” The social skills were not practiced during COVID-19 and distance learning. Therefore, this particular student struggled socially during unstructured times. The chosen supports by Participant 2 were positive behavior points on ClassDojo and referring the girl to a social group facilitated by the counselor on site.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

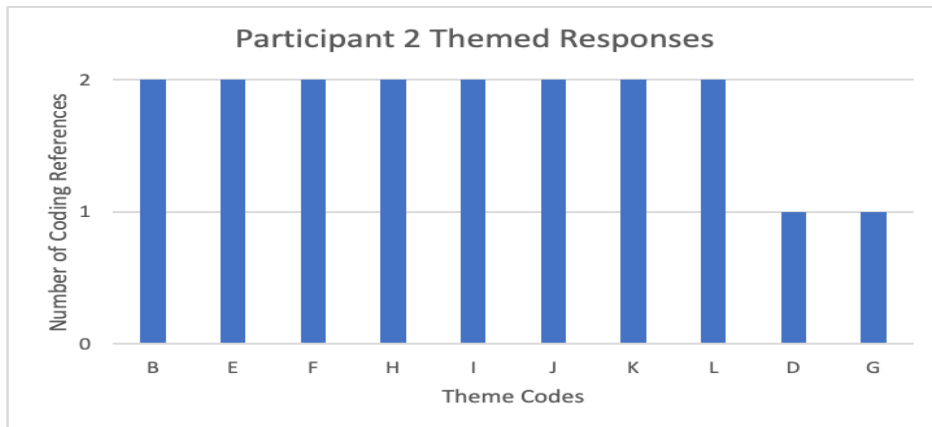
Participant 2 stated that the learned behaviors of distance learning, like the idea that ‘the school cannot do much to me,’ was brought into the classroom. Participant 2 shared an experience with a boy that affected her classroom, “His decisions caused great havoc, discord, and stress because he was just choosing the wrong behavior on purpose.” Participant 2 said that the student caused constant disruption. Then, when spoken to about it, he would deny it and argue back. Very little work could be accomplished because of these behaviors. Participant 2 supported this student by giving him a moment to shine and receive everyone’s attention. The students were assigned a weekly SEL slide to complete,

and then they could share it in front of the class on the Promethean board. Participant 2 shared that this student enjoyed this activity along with the feedback from the listeners. Additionally, Participant 2 used the technology platform entitled Flipgrid. Flipgrid is a student voice platform where students can share a topic and then leave comments for their peers. Participant 2 said the slide and Flipgrid assignments gave this student a chance to get attention from others. That is all he needed for his behaviors to improve.

Artifacts. Participant 2 shared a picture of a break box that had tactile items it for students to use to calm down. Participant 2 also shared a multiple of social-emotional slides that students responded to weekly. Additionally, Participant 2 sent picture of Flipgrid assignments that support SEL. See Figure 4 for the themed responses from Participant 2.

Figure 4

Participant 2: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; F = Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; I = Empathy-focused lessons and discussions; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was a kindergarten teacher who has taught over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 3 discussed how self-awareness is difficult for kindergarteners in general, but with the pandemic and the lack of interactions, the lack of self-awareness was heightened. Many students only thought of themselves and what they needed right at the moment. One particular student had limited guardian support at home. Participant 3 stated, “He had so few interactions with adults that he didn't accept being told what to do or when to do it. He took that very personally, and he would become upset, emotional, and hurt.” The student did not know how to cope with all his feelings and would shut down. Participant 3 said there was no pulling the student out of this behavior until he felt ready. To support this student, Participant 3 used a lot of SEL strategies like deep breathing, tapping with positive affirmations, mindfulness breaks, and one-on-one conversations about the incident. There were class discussions about the growth mindset, literature read-alouds, and discussions using the Spot Series about feelings.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 3 stated self-management is also a tough one for kindergartners, but said that after COVID-19 the students demonstrated a need for more organizational skills, self-discipline, and motivation. Additionally, they had no impulse control, and if they wanted something, they took it. They simply needed to gain essential skills. Participant 3

shared an experience with a student who was an only child with defensive parents. The student only did what he wanted and needed more basic organizational skills, like keeping his pencil in his pencil box. Participant 3 said the student was constantly breaking his crayons and losing his pencil. To support this student, Participant 3 stated, “I started out again, forming the relationship, and then I had to make a concerted effort to form a relationship with the parent.” After a conference with the administration, the parent realized that what was being asked, expected, and needed was for the child to become more independent. Participant 3 strategically sat the student next to peers with solid organizational and stress management skills so they were not affected when the student had a meltdown. Also, Participant 3 provided a lot of specific reminders for this student.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 3 stated that the students were empathetic towards other students and naturally concerned about one another. However, Participant 3 did encounter one self-centered girl. Participant 3 shared,

She formed something I used to call a mean girls club because not only was she not very nice, not kind, not compassionate, but she would get other little ones that were maybe a little bit lost, and bring those girls in, and kind of get them to be thinking her way.

To support this girl, Participant 3 had discussions with parents, conducted restorative conversations, and practiced role reversal techniques to engender more awareness in the student.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 3 discussed how many parents were essential workers in the school area; therefore, the students were left with older siblings who seemed to have not interacted with them much. Participant 3 stated,

When they came in they didn't know how to interact with each other. They didn't know how to interact with me. We really had to work on being able to say, turn to me, and have a dialogue. We had to talk about specifics and had to do direct instruction on what a conversation looked like. Telling them it meant that I talk sometimes, then you get to talk, and that you have to listen to what I say because you want to hear it.

Participant 3 implemented and practiced lots of directed conversations with specific expectations. A particular student in Participant 3's classroom had challenges and often had tantrums that caused him to throw and kick things. The student also had a tendency to pace. Participant 3 supported this student by respecting his need and giving him an area to pace when needed. In addition, Participant 3 temporarily put aside the academics, worked on soothing techniques, and built a relationship with the student.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 3 stated that decision-making skills are always discussed and reinforced in kindergarten. The students did come to school more physical towards one another than in past years. Participant 3 allowed the consequences of bad decisions to stand, such as “If you break a crayon, you are stuck with the broken crayon. You do not get another crayon.” There was an experience with a particular student who knew how to get under another student's skin and would just do it to see what would happen.

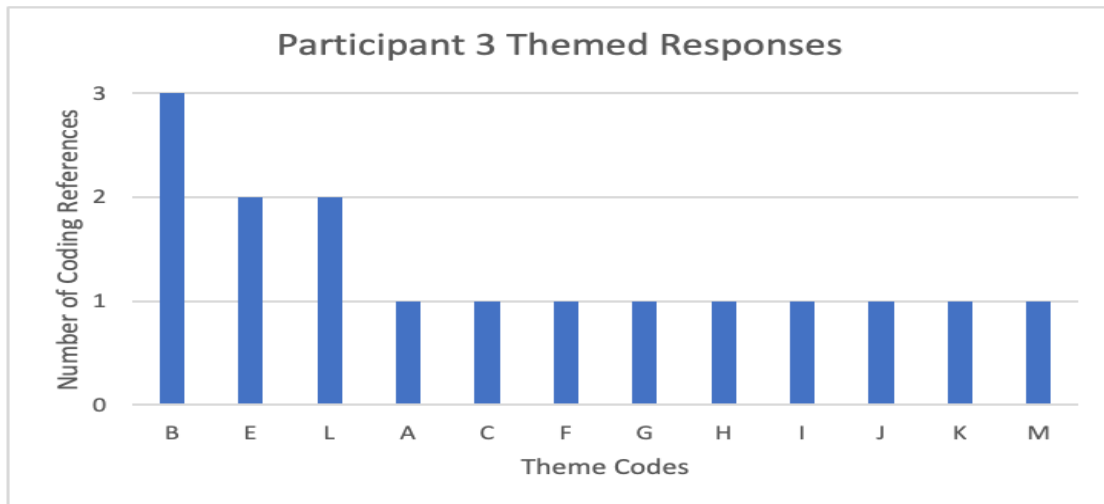
Participant 3 stated,

He had a mind that could see the far-reaching consequences of what was going happen if he messed with kid number X. He could get kid number X to blow up. He's going to throw a chair and that's going to be cool. So, I'm thinking I'm going to mess with kid number X, and then we'll see it. We'll see some real stuff go down.

To support this student, Participant 3 focused on relationship building and helping the student recognize and understand that school rules apply to him. See Figure 5 for the themed responses from Participant 3.

Figure 5

Participant 3: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions; A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; F = Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; I = Empathy-focused lessons and discussions; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; M = Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Participant 4

Participant 4 was a second-grade teacher who had taught for over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 4 described self-awareness as being a steep learning curve for kids returning to school. Students needed to learn how to act without their parents being right there to intervene. When attempting to talk to each other, there was no eye contact. Also, many students would scream across the room that someone was looking at them wrong,

even when that was not the case. Participant 4 just felt the students needed clarification and needed to hone in the skills to interact with one another. Participant 4 shared that a girl would just burst out crying, interrupting the learning that was taking place. As soon as the teacher could get over to her, the girl was already smiling and could not remember what upset her. Participant 4 stated,

It was constantly, every day, sometimes there was no other lesson other than how to deal with each other, how to touch or not touch each other. It was just constant lessons on what the district gave us for social and emotional, and then some other resources that they told us we should use.

It was difficult, according to Participant 4, one teacher with 28 students. In addition to the curriculum by the district, Participant 4 supported students by pulling them one-on-one or in a small group when an issue arose and supplied writing, coloring, and music opportunities to try to get them to respond appropriately to emotions.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 4 reported that every touch was considered a hit by several of the students. Participant 4 shared, “If they thought that person didn't like them, and looked down the wrong way or smiled at them when they looked at them, then they thought they were being made fun of or something like that, and they were in tears.” Often items were being thrown across the room, and the boys were particularly physical with one another. Yelling and arguments occurred daily, causing interruptions within the classroom setting. Participant 4 said every day was just exhausting. To support the classroom, Participant 4

gave students deep breathing strategies, broke up the day with GoNoodle lessons on breathing and stress management, found lessons on Teacher Pay Teachers that supported SEL, and implemented community circles where students had the opportunity to hear from each other.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 4 shared that students struggled socially and had a hard time coping with the emotions. As students felt that they may have been looked at wrong, they would scream, argue, and throw pieces of crayons across the room. In addition, there were a lot of impulsive incidents that involved hitting, pushing, and choking. In response to these incidents, Participant 4 stated, “There seemed to be very little support because they (the administration) were just like, ‘deal with it, it’s social and emotional, there are no repercussions as far as behavior.’” The counselor would support the teachers, but all that counselor had time to do was to go from one major behavior and social and emotional explosion to the next. Participant 4 supported students with the curriculum given by the district, but shared that there was no training for it and that there was so much of it on top of the academics that it was hard to do everything thoroughly. Additionally, Participant 4 supported students by focusing on deep breathing strategies, having a growth mindset, and GoNoodle social and emotional breaks.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 4 shared that emotions were extreme in relationships. Students would often come in crying or have a physical altercation just because a friend decided to shun them at recess. Participant 4 would try to get to the students when there was time to help solve the problem, but often they had already returned to being friends again. There were issues of offensive things being said. Participant 4 stated, “You could say something to your brother at home a whole different way, and he doesn't get upset. But if you say it here at school to a new friend who doesn't know you as well, then they're broken-hearted.” Students struggled with understanding what was acceptable in-home relationships was not necessarily acceptable with school relationships. Participant 4 shared that feelings were often hurtful through facial expressions and the use of words. To support these conflicts in relationships, Participant 4 would pull the parties together, calm them down with coping strategies, and then have them share their what and why of their feeling. Additionally, Participant 4 would give them role-play opportunities of telling their friend, “I need some space right now or please do not talk to me right now” and then letting the friend express if they hear that it is okay, and just walk away for a bit.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

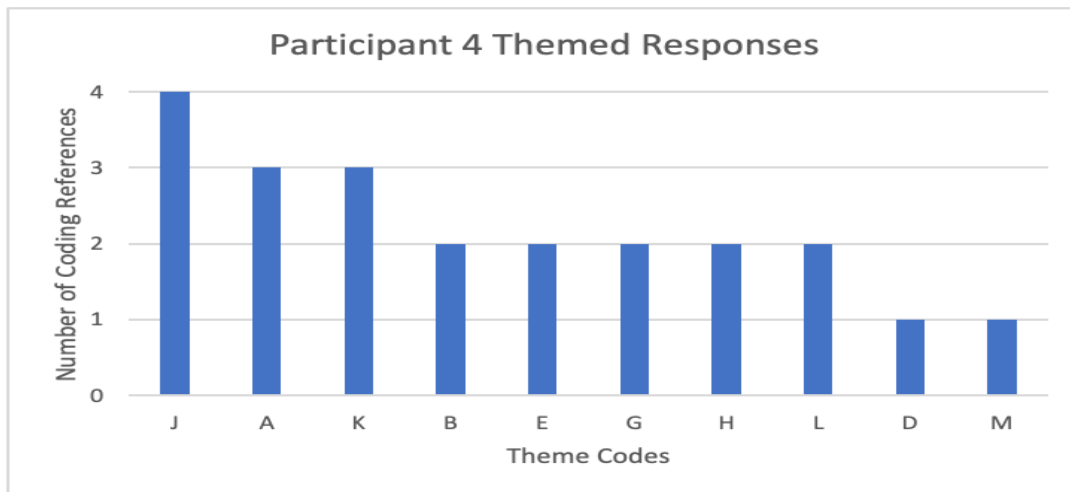
Participant 4 stated, “They were so impulsive. It was all about emotions. They couldn't stop and make responsible decisions.” Things would occur, and when she asked a student *why*, the response was, “I do not know, they looked at me wrong.” Participant 4 stated that students would automatically have some sort of adverse reaction to how they

were feeling. An experience was shared by Participant 4 where a student was allowed to walk out of the classroom when they needed a break. The school counselor set this up. Participant 4 said the problem was that once that one student started doing that, so did four or five other students. However, Participant 4 stated the problem was that they would just scream or throw a desk and run out instead of letting her know that a break was needed. Participant 4 supported these students and the class by discussing how to properly control your emotions and share them. Additionally, Participant 4 would reteach previous social and emotional lessons, speak about using the stress ball to cope, and have empathy discussions on how the behaviors affected their classmates.

Artifacts. Participant 4 shared a Brave Campaign curriculum that was constructed by district teacher on assignments. The topics for the grade level were self-awareness, social awareness, trusted adults, and coping skills. See Figure 6 for the themed responses from Participant 4.

Figure 6

Participant 4: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; M = Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was a fourth-grade teacher who has taught between three to nine years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 5 shared that students struggled to recognize their emotions, know the difference between right and wrong, and had low self-esteem. During a SEL lesson where the class talked about what upset students and what can make them feel better, the topic of apology arose. Participant 5 stated,

The topic of apology came up and a student thought that an apology would make someone else more upset. That's when it I was like whoa and it just really showed what they thought, and their words were that an apology would make them upset, because they will get more angry because you are trying to talk to them, you are trying to make them feel better, and they are just mad. That really showed me that with their emotions, that it's all backwards. An apology is supposed to make you feel better.

Participant 5 assumed that many students must have had bad experiences, which made apologies a negative experience. To support the students, Participant 5 taught the students the importance of breaking with the class break box, giving space, deep breathing, and then addressing the issue, giving both parties time to calm down. Additionally, Participant 5 has implemented something called a peace card. The peace card gives students a chance to express their feelings, address what caused the feeling, and how they would have liked the situation to be handled.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 5 stated, “They just get really upset abruptly. They'll just be doing their iReady minutes, and then, suddenly, they'll just shut down out of nowhere.” Behaviors seemed to come out of the blue, and students struggled to regulate their emotions. Participant 5 shared that before COVID, students were quick to help those who had outbursts, but now they do not even acknowledge the situation. Additionally, students struggled with following directions and often were fine sitting out of activities

for consequences. To help all students, Participant 5 worked with them to set goals, and the students seemed to thrive off this activity. Participant 5 shared about a student wetting herself, having horrible attendance, verbalizing through grunts and growls, and rolling on the floor. The teacher recognized many behaviors as self-soothing, but not everyone would necessarily see it that way. To help this student, Participant 5 got a mental health intern to work with her. The student is now part of check-in and check-out, has simple goals that are easily attainable, like writing her name on the paper, has special assigned seating that gives her room to move and receives praise when directions are followed.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 5 discussed how students were more empathetic towards one another but did not always express it correctly since the return from COVID. One student who struggled with social awareness would crawl under the table to calm herself down or get attention. Participant 5 stated, “It didn't matter if it is negative or positive attention. She wanted that attention, and she was not aware that her actions did not just affect her.” It does not affect her that she is disrupting the learning time. She just wanted attention. Participant 5 has established a class mantra about having courage and being kind that the student repeats when times are rough, giving her personal space, access to flexible seating, her own break box, and a token board that establishes work and break time.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 5 noticed the gap in growth in relationship skills with students who were the only child. They struggled more with relationship skills after the return to face-to-face instruction. In addition, a majority of the class lacked basic skills such as how to greet one another, use appropriate language, and responding when something negative is happening. Participant 5 shared an experience with a girl who wanted to make more friends and play outside with others. Participant 5 stated, “So her way of going about it is like chasing people, poking people, or just following them around, which other kids perceived as annoying or weird.” To help support all students, Participant 5 tried to center the SEL around what was being seen in the classroom. Participant 5 had three aspects to the SEL: (a) a greeting, (b) sharing, and (c) an activity. The lessons would be specific, give strategies to help students through situations, and were paired with modeling and brainstorming.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 5 shared that many students lacked respect for adults and basic manners like saying please and thank you. Additionally, Participant 5 noticed a lot of stealing happening in the classroom and across the school campus. There was a particular incident in the classroom where Participant 5 stated,

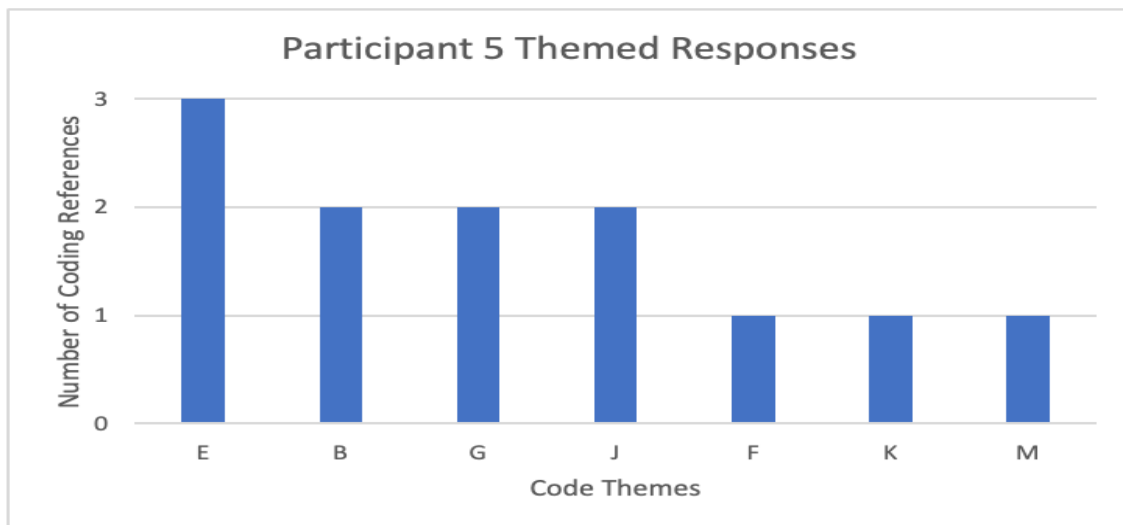
It was a Rubik's cube, and I knew who it was, I saw it take place. I saw that they dropped it, and they broke it instead of telling me... ‘Hey, [redacted], I broke this, I'm sorry.’ They decided to put it in their backpack and try and take it home that day.

Many students noticed the student put it in his backpack but did not say anything. Participant 5 took this opportunity to address the whole class. Another intervention that students enjoyed was used in this exercise. There was role-playing and discussion about being the person who had their item broken. An opportunity was given for students to think about what the right thing to do was, and then a solution was modeled. Participant 5 also reiterated that mistakes happen to everyone but what we do with them is the deciding factor between right and wrong.

Artifacts. Participant 5 shared a multiple of slides that showed pictures of seating arrangements, room environment, a break box, and walls that represented SEL. See Figure 7 for the themed responses from Participant 5.

Figure 7

Participant 5: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; F = Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; M = Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was a Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher who has taught for over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 6 shared that several students' behaviors were driven by their emotions. Participant 6 noted the rise in vocabulary and discussions about feelings after COVID. Participant 6 worked as a special education teacher. Often, her students only understood basic emotional words, would just generally cry, and shut down from participating in groups. Many times, Participant 6 had to use yes and no questions to get to the root of the feeling and what was happening. Participant 6 used picture support and social stories to help support the students.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 6 shared that students lacked control of impulsiveness regarding their emotions. One student during testing became upset when he did not get his snack as soon as he completed the test. Participant 18 stated, "He had finished his part of the test for the day, and he felt like he wanted his treat immediately at that point, and it was like, 'well, there's other kids testing.'" Before testing, it was explained that snack time would be after the testing period. Participant 6 said the student became vocal and attempted to flee the classroom because his demands were not being met. While staying calm, Participant 6

reminded the student that he should be sitting and thinking about making the right choice. Also, Participant 6 redirected him to a more desired activity: Drawing. These tactics worked, the student calmed down and eventually got the snack he wanted after the testing period.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 6 shared that more special education students were struggling to fit in and believe in their self-worth. This was especially noticeable during award celebrations where special education students are rarely recognized. Participant 6 even had a Hispanic boy from Mexico say he wanted to be White because all White boys stay in America. Participant 6 stated,

I said 'it's not just White people who are in America.' I said 'I'm here and I'm not White. I see you're here and there are other kids who are here from different types of backgrounds. I think that you have to realize that this country was not just for one particular individual. We need everybody here...you're important, and it's not necessarily about the color of your skin. I understand you're actually conscious of the fact that there's something going on as far as immigration.'

This was an example of a special education student struggling to see where he fits in.

Participant 6 supported this student by making him more aware of his surroundings and that America is made up of many colors.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 6 shared a difference in relationship skills between lower (K-3) and upper (4-6) grade elementary students. Upper grade elementary students sought out the cool kids. While lower grade elementary students did not realize they should be connecting with students in their classroom and preferred solitary play. Both situations were visible after the return from COVID. Participant 6 shared a playground experience with two students. Participant 6 shared the incident as follows,

It was fine when he (a second grader) was the one who was in control of it (the game), and got to do what he wanted to do. But as soon as another second grader kind of took charge, and was doing better than he was then it automatically turned into this big fight and he had to go tell the teacher. I just happened to be there when he was telling the teacher, and it was like ‘you guys were playing just fine,’ but it was that kind of wanting to have the upper hand or control of things and wanting to kind of be better than the other child. So, it was kind of one of those things where you talk about valuing your friends.

Participant 6 reminded the student about the school’s emphasis on integrity and respect and modeled to the student how to acknowledge his friend for doing a good job versus getting upset.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 6 shared,

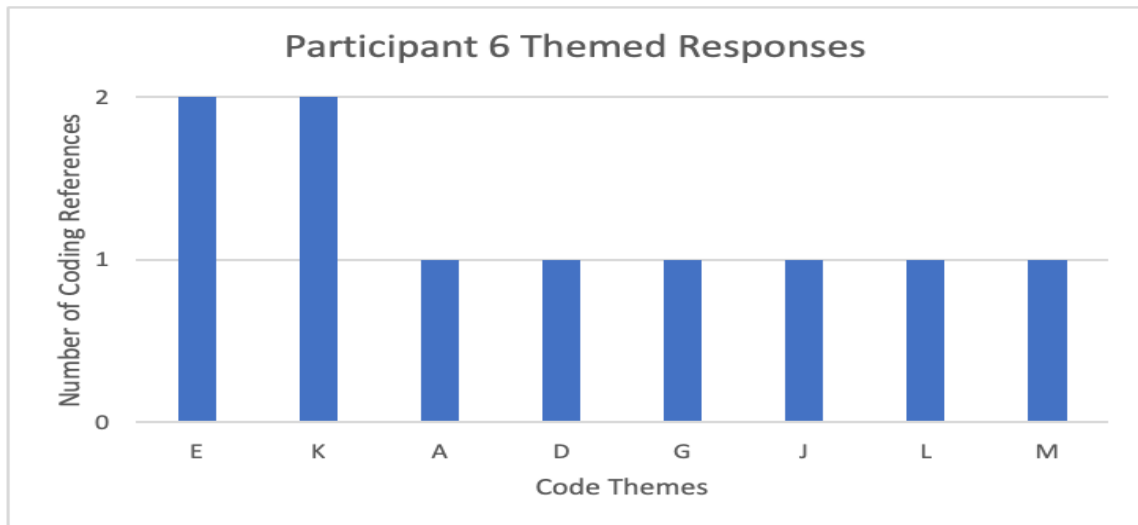
I want to talk about older kids in this situation, fourth to sixth graders, because a lot of that to me has to do with their executive functioning skills and being able to start to do things more independently. For example, cleaning out that backpack, making sure that they have their homework, or they're doing it the night before. Bringing it back into school, and just those kinds of things that as you get older you need to become more independent.

Yes, this was somewhat of a problem before COVID but became more concerning afterwards because of apathy. Participant 6 supported students by reminding them about filling out agendas, taking notes, and creating a checklist of items to be done.

Additionally, Participant 6 shared that a particular student in special education has parents doing everything for him, including his homework, even to the point where the student lacks basic self-help skills like tying their shoes or putting on a jacket. To support this student, Participant 6 went over the homework from the night before and the child had to explain how to get the answer. In addition, Participant 6 communicated with the parents about building independence in their child. See Figure 8 for the themed responses from Participant 6.

Figure 8

Participant 6: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions; M = Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Participant 7

Participant 7 was a sixth-grade teacher who had taught for over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 7 shared, “They (students) were happy, elated to be back, but they were also struggling immensely with day-to-day routines: Coming to school on time, having to be back in the routine of doing a full day of work at school, and then still having homework.” Participant 7 also felt that self-awareness was the worst the second year back because students started to realize how far they were behind after COVID.

Participant 7 shared two different issues in the classroom. The first issue is with two boys who are clinically diagnosed with mental illnesses and can struggle every 10 minutes. Their whole day is chaos. Another situation is with a girl who has anxiety every morning before school, which often causes her to miss school. Participant 7 experienced student meltdowns, cursing, and psychiatric holds on a few students. The first immediate support was to reach out to parents and find out what life was like at home and what supports were available. Next, Participant 7 referred them to the school counselor. If that service was already in place, Participant 7 sought out outside services to support the student. As far as inside the classroom, Participant 7 said the students were street savvy, so the best way to handle them was to be straightforward and relate to them through TikTok and jokes. Also, Participant 7 had to find the middle ground, keep calm, and offer choices in high-demand issues.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 7 shared that students struggled with managing themselves and their time. Several of the students were not completing or turning in assignments. The two boys referred to in the previous question were often on inappropriate sites or playing Google games when they were supposed to be working on assignments. Participant 7 took advantage of conference time, reached out to each parent with a struggling student, and let them know work was not being done. Some conversations were tough. Participant 7 stated, “They (the parents) were like ‘what, they told me they did their homework all the time.’ Then I as the teacher said ‘well, they have lied. Have you never seen someone

lie? I know you love them, and they love you, but they have literally lied to you.’” To support students past the conferencing period, Participant 7 reinforced filling out agendas and implemented a one-to-one Google chat for each student where questions could be asked and answered. The expectation was that if the student had a question, they would reach out to Participant 7 for assistance. If the student still did not get it, after assistance, then it would be handled the next day in class. Participant 7 insisted that the students reach out and show their attempt to get help. Participant 7 worked on redirecting the most challenging students through tactile objects and clay projects.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 7 stressed the importance of being kind in all situations. However, there were incidents of students bantering back and forth with one another which led to unkind things being said, students getting wrapped up in other students’ bad decisions, and an incident where a Burn Book appeared in her room for the first time ever after COVID. Participant 7 shared,

I can give you one example of something that went really well. It wasn't with my boys. So, it was with my mean girls. I had a girl take out a composition book to lunch hidden in her sleeve shirt. I said, ‘hey, what so you have?’ She said it was a book but wasn't, it was a diary. It was actually painted pink and was a Burn Book. When I say mean girls, I mean literally from the movie. The book said Burn Book on the front, and in it was an annihilation of one of my students in our class. After

investigation through the office, it was determined that a handful of my female students had decided that they were going to be mean girls.

This caused the student in the book to be ostracized in the classroom. After investigation, the administration, counselor, and Participant 7 decided it was a good time to implement a restorative circle. All the girls that were part of the Burn Book were brought into one room for this circle. The circle started quietly until Participant 7 specifically brought it down to the nitty-gritty and asked each student what was their part in the situation and how other students contributed. Eventually, everyone shared and got their feelings out. Participant 7 shared that many misunderstandings and bad decisions led to the Burn Book, but in the end, everyone apologized and hugged each other.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 7 discussed how more students communicate electronically and do not communicate orally or in person. Participant 7 commented on a few students continued use of a mask. Participant 7 shared,

I know that's not a relationship thing, but really it is in sixth grade. The reason that students are continuing to wear masks still to this day has absolutely nothing to do with COVID. It might be two kids that wear a mask because of COVID but the rest of them, it is all social. It is all about internal self-loathing, not liking the way they look, and not wanting anyone to see them. It's a cover. It's a hiding mechanism and strategy to stay hidden.

Furthermore, Participant 7 shared that at the age of the students, right before middle school, their life revolves around what others think about them. Participant 7 shared that it was hard for relationships to form when facial expressions were never seen. To help support the students hiding behind the mask, Participant 7 assigned Flipgrid projects where masks had to be removed. Students were allowed to complete the assignment privately. Participant 7 discussed strategies for preparation, like practicing reading and pausing before recording. Additionally, to be more comfortable around their peers, Participant 7 assigned group work. Sometimes, students got to choose their group, and others were assigned to a group.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 7 shared that students did not understand that consequences came from their decisions. Participant 7 shared,

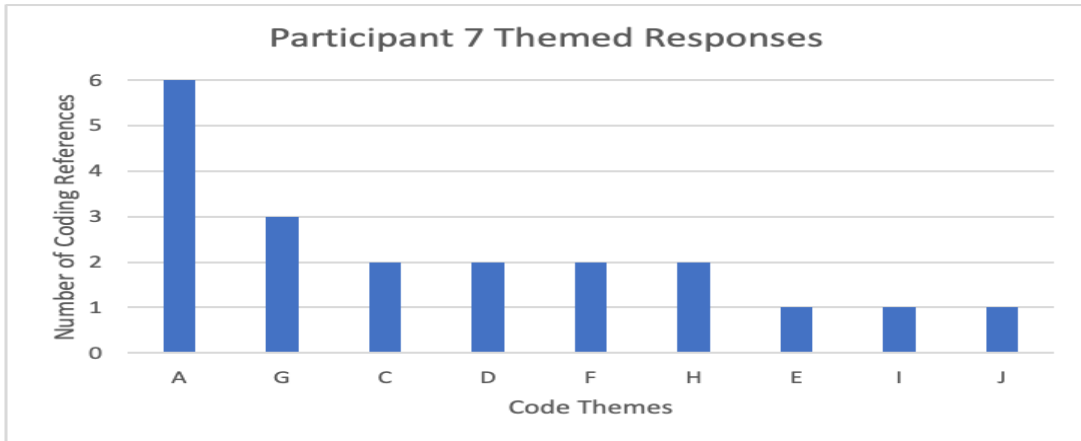
I have many quotes that I love. But one of them is *live with your consequence*. I tell students this from the very beginning of school. That ‘we’re all human, we all make mistakes, but when we do, we have to have to live with the consequence’.

Several students struggled with making irresponsible decisions and then suffering from the consequence. For example, Participant 7 shared about a student that was kicked out of the associated student body (ASB) for not attending meetings. The student was warned but continued to miss the meetings. That student did not understand why they were being kicked off the team. Participant 7 supported students by setting clear expectations, warning them by giving them another opportunity to make the desired choice, and

making them aware of the available positive and negative consequences. See Figure 9 for the themed responses from Participant 7.

Figure 9

Participant 7: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; F = Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; I = Empathy-focused lessons and discussions; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills.

Participant 8

Participant 8 was a sixth-grade teacher who had taught for over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 8 shared, “I think prior to this (COVID) I don’t think they knew what emotions were or what may had been triggering them.” Students are more self-aware of their emotions and more emotional than ever before. Participant 8 shared a yearly project the students completed called the Ofrenda Project. To the participant, this was one of the

most emotional years for the project. A girl in class insisted on doing her project about her dad, whom she lost during the pandemic (unrelated to COVID). However, the student never talked about her dad because of her negative interaction with another student regarding her father's death. Participant 8 supported the student by letting her know she only had to share what she was comfortable with. Participant 8 started by allowing the student to share with her before sharing with the class. Also, Participant 8 contacted the mom and updated her on how it was going. Additionally, Participant 8 strategically planned for her to go right before recess in case a break was needed and made sure to have the counselor on standby. Supporters surrounded the student after her presentation. Participant 8 stressed the importance of a network and helped students establish their network of support.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 8 felt that students had a toolbox before COVID to help with self-management. Still, upon returning to face-to-face instruction, students struggled with opening that toolbox and using the previously taught skills. Participant 8 shared, "They just needed that prompt that this is a time for this. So, 'this is a time you could try that.'" With a particular student, Participant 8 shared that there were some family issues during COVID where the dad was out of the picture, and when the student returned to school after COVID, the dad was back in the picture. Participant 8 shared that the student struggled with self-management after weekends with his dad. To support this student, Participant 8 had three tokens, each indicating a different activity on them. The activities

on the tokens would change, but a few examples were: Take some space away from the group or write down his thoughts and do whatever he would like with the paper, throw it away, crumple it up, or tear it to pieces. The tokens were only used when Participant 8 felt the student needed to be prompted to handle his emotions appropriately so he could have a good rest of the day. Participant 8 also wanted the student to have a positive role model that was male, so there was a check-in system with the vice principal when needed. The student also had a relationship with the counselor and was able to seek help from her.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 8 shared,

I think their school relationships have become more intense. I think that, yes, they were happy to see each other, but I feel sixth graders always have great friends, then they don't have them, the falling out, and all of that happens. But I have found all of that to be more intense.

The relationship issues used to be amongst a couple of students, but since COVID, the relationship issues involve larger groups. Participant 8 shared about a particular student who struggled socially and was autistic. The student worked with basic skills like keeping his shoes on in the classroom and not challenging the teacher whenever he disagreed with what was said. The students were respectful but wondered where the student got some of the stuff he said. Participant 8 supported this student through videos and role-play of undesired behaviors. The student recognized the unwanted behavior and even questioned

why someone would do that, and then Participant 8 would remind him of some of his actions. This gave the student a different perspective on some of his behaviors.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 8 shared, “I feel like they work harder in some ways for relationships now. I think they see the value of relationships after being kind of starved from normal school relationships.” Their relationships are more intense, and there are more fallouts. Participant 8 had a bistro table outside the classroom door where students could go out and work out their problems. Participant 8 only interfered if the students asked her to. Participant 8 shared about a boy in the classroom who seemed content with sticking to himself. He struggled with relationships before COVID, so he did not experience the same starvation of connections as the other students. He was okay in his bubble. Participant 8 supported this student by sending him on little tasks with students with whom he had something in common. Also, Participant 8 spoke to parents about finding another outlet besides electronics for the student to gain experience being around others.

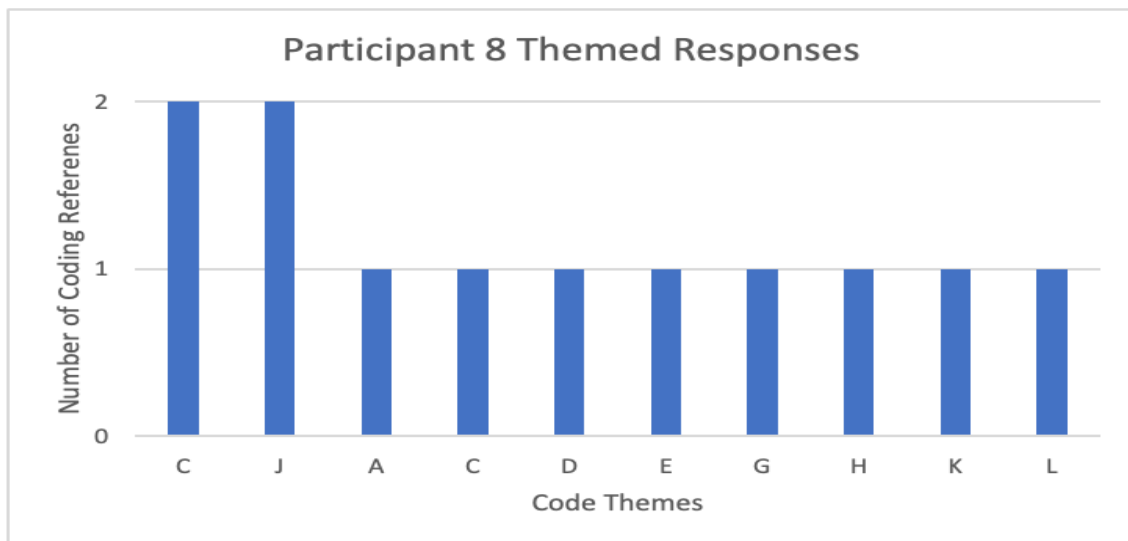
Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 8 shared that responsible decision-making has suffered with the COVID lockdown. Participant 8 shared, “They just do quirky things they always have and maybe I'm just more in tune with them, or maybe it could just be the wave of kids we've had the last couple of years.” Additionally, students were just doing ridiculous

things that had never been done before. For example, Participant 8 shared two experiences with white glue. The first incident involved a student filling their pop-it with glue, and in the second incident, the student completely removed the cap from the glue and used it. In the second incident, the student was asked if he knew how to use the glue properly and said yes. In both incidents, the students just wanted to make a mess. To help support students in positive decision-making, Participant 8 used incentives like the desk fairy that left pixie sticks for clean desks, Starbucks gift cards raffled off monthly for meeting individual goals, and positive phone calls home. See Figure 10 for the themed responses from Participant 8.

Figure 10

Participant 8: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; C = Built relationships with students and parents/ guardians; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions.

Participant 9

Participant nine was a second-grade teacher who had taught for over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 9 shared that students returned more emotional and unable to express whatever they were feeling. There was a lot more anxiety and stress. Participant 9 said that all those emotions and the inability to handle them led to behavioral issues and refusal to anticipate in class or interact with each other. Participant 9 shared about a student who lacked many academic skills upon returning to school after COVID. This student was not even confident in speaking due the lack of English development, so he was quiet and in his own shell. With encouragement, praise, and being assured mistakes are okay he eventually began opening up. Also, Participant 9 spoke with the parents who felt they could not help because they only spoke Spanish. Participant 9 helped them realize they could help by sending weekly YouTube videos for the student to watch while at home to increase his language skills and academics. Participant 9 shared, “I’m not going to say that he was one of my highest students, but he flourished with his self-awareness. He was a lot more confident in himself.”

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 9 shared that students time management was of upon returning after distance learning. Participant 9 shared,

So, it's like, 'okay boys and girls we're going to work on it for 20 minutes. We're going to read the story. We're going to do the questions. And then we're going to move on to writing.' I'm in the middle of the story, and they're like 'when is it over?' because they weren't used to sitting still for so long. Or their attention span was off. It took a long time to build that back up. Then they would ask, 'what time is recess? When's lunch? I'm hungry. Can we just have a snack right now?' By the end of the day, they were asking 'what time do we go home? Is it almost time to go home?' That was every other question, too.

To help students with time management, Participant 9 added a daily schedule to the board. The schedule listed the subject matter, the time for it, and all activities that were to be completed with the time frame. Then as activities were completed, Participant 9 would erase them from the board. Participant 9 felt that the visual schedule helped the students build up their time management awareness.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 9 shared that students came back lacking respect. One particular student chose to make bad choices one minute and the next minute would say he loved Participant 9 to try to lessen the consequence. Participant 9 shared,

That was one instance or situation (above) that really stood out to me. There was a huge problem with and empathy because they were so used to just being on their own and fending for themselves, that it was hard for them to empathize with each other. Also struggled to get along with the other kids their age or to play

appropriately with other kids their age, because at home, they rough housed more or cussed and all that stuff.

To support students, Participant 9 did a lot of mindfulness activities on ClassDojo and lessons on empathy. The mindfulness videos helped mostly because it gave the students visual context at their level.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 9 shared that student were withdrawn, independent, and preferred to play by themselves instead of initiating play with others when they first returned back. All play seemed to be very individualized. Participant 9 shared,

My classroom was very kumbaya, and we talked about being a big family. We spent all our day together. We talked about how we had to love and respect each other, and we needed to play together because it makes us feel happy. I had to continuously encourage them to invite everyone to play.

Participant 9 also taught the students about the yellow buddy bench. The bench was for those who did not have anyone to play with. Then as a student when you saw someone sitting on it, as a student you were supposed to go over there and ask them to join you in whatever you are doing. By the end of the year, Participant 9 felt the class had a strong emotional connection to one another that had never been seen before COVID.

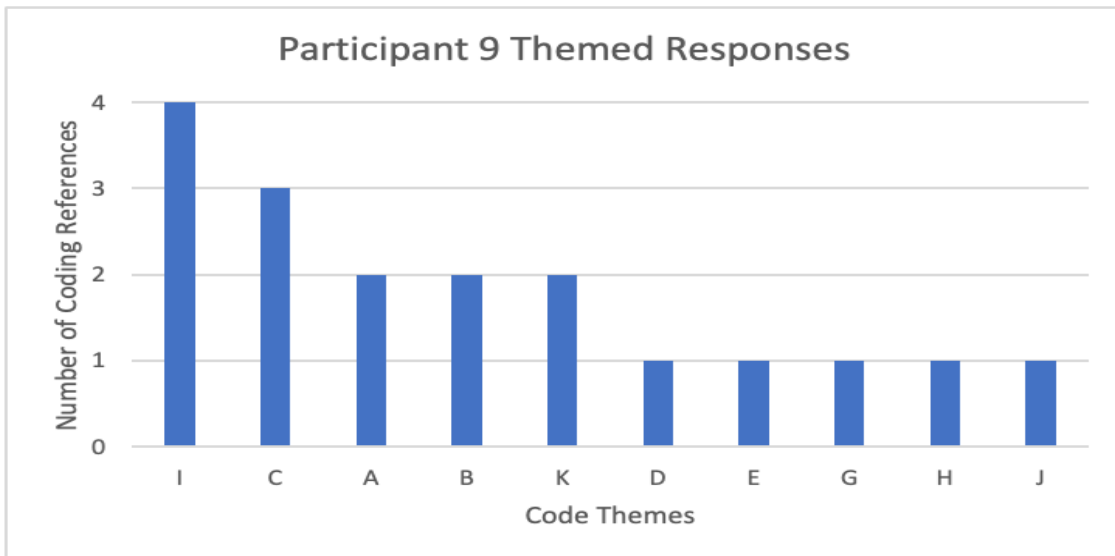
Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 9 reported that students returned with two extremes, either they had no skills on making responsible decisions or they were perfectionists. Participant 9 had to point out responsible decision-making constantly to build up that skill while letting the perfectionist know it is impossible to be perfect. One particular student struggled with this skill because everything was done for him at home, so he did not know how to make an appropriate choice independently. To support this student, Participant 9 worked with the parent. Participant 9 guided the parent to hand over some control to the student in baby steps throughout the year. Participant 9 shared, “It's crazy how much of a counselor we are to parents. We have to provide the services to the parents, too, because obviously, the parents affect the kid.” By the end of the year the student began developing and showing his own personality and feeling more comfortable in his own skin.

Artifacts. Participant 9 shared artifacts related to curriculum. The curriculum that was used came from the program Second Step. Second Step lessons focused on growth mindset and goal setting, emotion management, empathy and kindness, and problem solving. Participant 9 provided the overview of each unit and any student handouts accompanying the lessons. Also, Participant 9 shared a picture of the yellow buddy bench and a picture of the mindfulness lessons in ClassDojo. The ClassDojo lessons were entitled, Mindful Breathing with Mojo, Mindful Movements, Mojo Meets the Beast, and Draw your Beast. See Figure 11 for the themed responses from Participant 9.

Figure 11

Participant 9: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. I = Empathy-focused lessons and discussions; C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills.

Participant 10

Participant 10 was a first-grade teacher who had taught over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 10 shared students lacking in self-awareness. They were not able to understand or regulate their emotions. They struggled participating and having the appropriate response. Participant 10 shared about an experience with a student whose first reaction was beating somebody up or hurting them when there was a problem. It

took quite a while for the student to realize this is not how we deal with our emotions. To support this student, Participant 10 worked with the school counselor and had lots of one-on-one discussions about other ways to handle emotions and dealing with problems. There was a check and balance system in place to help the student recognize when he started to go down the wrong path and then positives when he made a good choice.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 10 shared, “I have found that since returning we have many more kids who are struggling with anxiety. Many more kids who are struggling with the inability to regulate themselves and their emotions.” There has been an increase in anxiety too. Participant 10 had a student that came in late and cried daily just because she had to walk past the fifth graders. The student was afraid she would be harmed by one of the fifth graders. Participant 10 felt that it was an irrational response to a daily occurrence. To support this student, Participant 10 picked up the student at the entrance gate and helped her map out a route to class where she felt safe. Participant 10 also referred the student to the school counselor and got counseling support for home.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 10 has seen two variations of students since returning back to school in the area of social awareness. The two variations are either the students are completely lacking the social skills or they are super sensitive. Participant 10 shared about a student

who struggled socially in and out of the classroom. Participant 10 shared, “So he does not realize how his actions impact others. He doesn't understand how his behaviors impact others. Everything is focused on him, and it's caused issues in the classroom and the playground.” When this student does not get his way, Participant 10 says he yells, throws things, and flees the classroom. To support this student, Participant 10 worked with the counselor and parents on targeted behaviors. The student would receive little plaques on his desk from Participant 10 and the counselor to monitor his behavior. The student struggled verbalizing how he felt, so Participant 10 used a series of visuals that the student could use to share how he was feeling. Participant 10 also created a calming corner in the classroom for the student use when he was upset.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 10 shared that students are arguing over more things now than before the pandemic. They struggled seeing situations from other people’s perspectives and have a hard time sharing. Participant 10 shared, “‘Oh, you mean you want to play basketball with me, but I want the ball.’ I know that that's a normal age thing, anyway, but it seems much more pronounced since returning.” One particular student struggled to relate to her peers because she was accustomed to being around adults while at home during the pandemic. To support this student with relationships, Participant 10 referred the student to counseling but the parents refused. Participant 10 found a way around the refusal by sending the student to Lunch Bunch with the counselor on Wednesdays, where the counselor played games with the students.

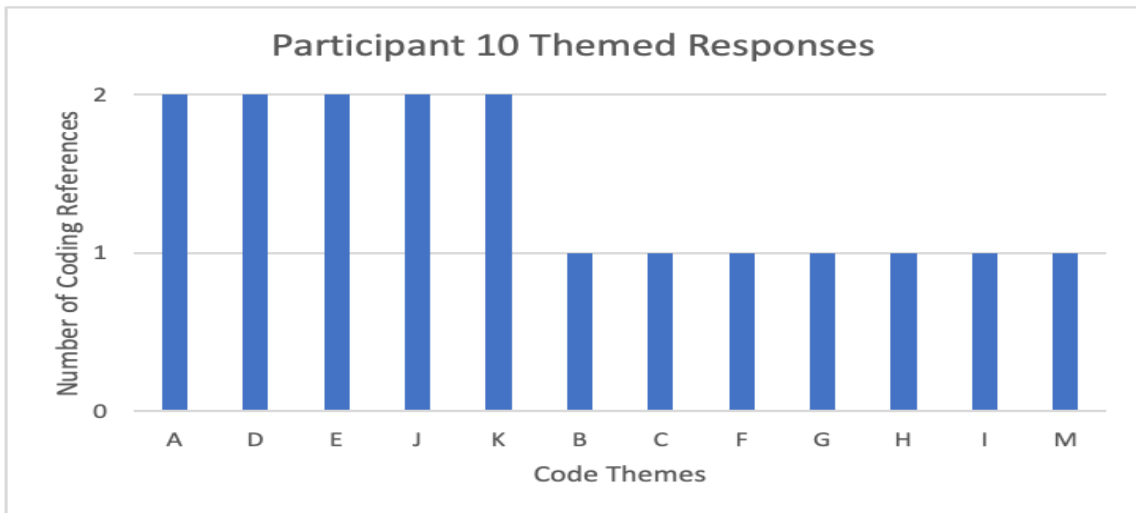
Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 10 felt that coming back from COVID many students lacked this skill because they were so used to parents making every decision at home. With a particular student, Participant 10 shared, “It was someone else's fault. It was not his fault. He didn't do it. Parents would say, ‘Oh, well, it's okay it must have been somebody else.’ There was no understanding that his actions were his responsibility.” To support this student, Participant 10 worked with the counselor, provided small group opportunities working on making the right choices, and worked on how irresponsible choices had better choices.

Artifacts. Participant 10 shared artifacts related to curriculum. The curriculum that was used came from the program Second Step. Second Step lessons focused on growth mindset and goal setting, emotion management, empathy and kindness, and problem solving. Also, Participant 10 shared a picture of the calming corner and the visual support used for the student who struggled verbalizing his emotions. See Figure 12 for the themed responses from Participant 10.

Figure 12

Participant 10: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; J = Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills; K = Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills; B = Provided access to a variety of coping strategies; C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; F = Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff; G = Positive communication and strategies to manage one’s behavior; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; I = Empathy-focused lessons and discussions; M = Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Participant 11

Participant 11 was a kindergarten teacher who had taught over 10 years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 11 noticed a lack of maturity in being aware of one’s actions.

Participant 11 shared, “We really have noticed they’re just having a hard time taking turns, getting along, being kind to one another, just that sort of thing, just like they had

been in their house for a year and a half, and hadn't socialized." Additionally, participant 11 stated,

There is a student who reacts to the extreme when he does not want to do things.

He will jump across desks, break other student's things, and rip things off the wall with no regard to his actions affecting the classroom environment.

To support this student, Participant 11 said the room set-up was changed, the counselor created a behavior chart and reward system, and home support was provided by an outside service company.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 11 said that students were coming back with less self-management skills than before COVID. Students struggled putting on their jackets independently and also waiting their turn. Participant 11 shared there were more issues with toiletry training than ever before. One student in particular struggled with self-management and often did so by choice. He would promise to be good today to get a cupcake, and he would have great day. However, many days he would injure those around him to the point that Participant 11 had to file a physical assault complaint with the district. To support this student the school counselor and principal were involved. There was also support given to the home. Often the student would be put on a Chromebook to do what he wanted to, just putting a temporary band aid on the situation.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 11 shared that the students came back sweet, kind, and compassionate but recognized that was not the truth in every classroom. Participant 11 spoke about a student in the classroom that struggled with social awareness. This student often would grab things from other students without asking because that's what he wanted. Also, the student was hyperactive and described as squirrely and often unaware of his surroundings. To support this student, Participant 11 said the district worked closely with the family and offered lots of one-on-one support.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 11 did not see a difference in relationship skills after COVID. The same interaction problems of students stating, "I do not want to play with you or I do not want to be your friend," still occurred. Participant 11 did share about one boy,

He just runs around and sort of plays (with others), really all he is doing is following them. He doesn't say 'come on or let's go. Let's go to the swings or play with the ball.' He just follows them or just aimlessly walks around, looking at everybody.

To support this student, Participant 12 asked for support from the psychologist and home. Mom shared that he does not interact or talk much at home either. The

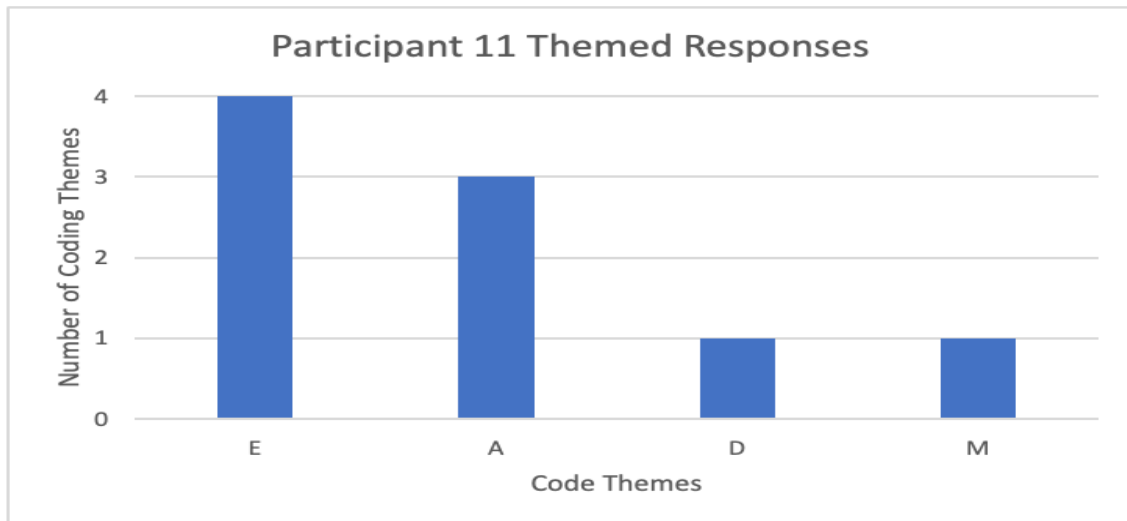
solution was pulling the student and his brother to help build his comfortability with talking.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Participant 11 shared that for the most part the students came back making good decisions and when a bad decision was made, they were able to explain it and think about alternative choices that may have been better. There was an incident where Participant 11 was carrying a bunch of items and dropped them. One student laughed instead of helping to pick up the mess. Several students intervened by telling the offender that laughing was not nice and helped the teacher. To support responsible decision-making, Participant 11 shared literature stories such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* that demonstrated what a lack of responsible decision-making looks like. The books gave opportunities for great discussions on what not to do and what could have been better choices for the characters. Also, Participant 11 completed five to 10 minutes a day of SEL where the class would watch a program and then have a discussion about what they saw and how the outcome could be different. See Figure 13 for the themed responses from Participant 11.

Figure 13

Participant 11: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; D = Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff; M = Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting.

Participant 12

Participant 12 was an independent study teacher who taught between three and nine years.

Research Sub-Question 1. Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Participant 12 stated that students needed to be more self-aware and needed a lot of guidance regarding face-to-face instruction. One particular experience Participant 12 had with a student was that the student felt superior to the learning presented in the classroom and refrained from interaction with the students in the class. The student became emotional because she was not connecting with her class and had a self-harm incident in the restroom at school. By the end of the year, the student did have a

connection with Participant 12 but still had little interaction with peers. To support this student, Participant 12 stated, “I would call her every morning and remind her that I was looking forward to seeing her that day.” In addition, lessons were created to motivate the student by incorporating her interests in the lessons.

Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Participant 12 reported that students were disorganized in many ways, specifically with their binders. The binders were often out of order daily. Strategies were taught daily for binder upkeep, so Participant 12 did not understand why the disorganization was happening. One particular student’s mom noticed how the student “became so disorganized at home with her work, her binder, and getting her schoolwork done like she was supposed to, and everything, that her mom ended up selling her horse.” The student was an avid horse rider. Once the horse was sold, the student improved her self-management of her folder and completing work. Participant 12 supported her by helping her put her binder back together and working with her on asking for help when it was needed to keep her organized.

Research Sub-Question 3. Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Participant 12 shared that it was noticeable that students had been stuck at home for a while. Yes, they wanted to socialize with their peers but were unsure of how to start a friendship. Participant 12 stated, “It’s been a lot of guidance and recommendations of,

‘well, go ahead and talk to them, mention that you like their shirt because it's something that you're into.’” One student found someone he wanted to become friends with in class. However, he chose the wrong time to socialize. The student became a distraction for the desired friend and himself during work time. While the student was interested in socializing, he lacked the skill of knowing when it was a good time. The teacher supported both students by setting up designated times when they could talk about their common interests.

Research Sub-Question 4. Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Participant 12 shared that while many could begin building relationships with others, maintaining those relationships was a struggle. Simple things like being switched from one reading group to another while their friend stayed in the original group made them second guess their friendship. To help students understand how relationships work, Participant 12 supported by stating, “...it was just guided reminders of their interactions, and that friends don't always constantly interact.” Additionally, participant one spoke about the importance of open communication and letting your friend know how you feel.

Research Sub-Question 5. Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

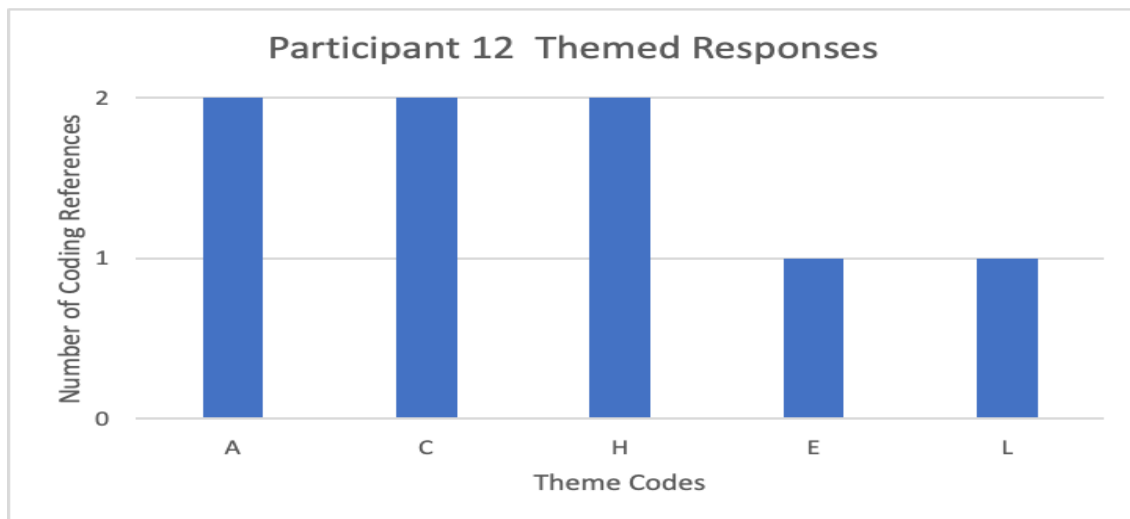
Participant 12 stated that there were a lot of reminders about responsible decision-making. Participant 12 spoke of the frequency of reminders: “After every break, after a 3-day or 4-day weekend reminding them of classroom expectations which normally you

would only have to do at the beginning of the school year and after Christmas break.”

Furthermore, Participant 12 states that rules like cell phone use, completing work online, and not playing games are being reinforced every couple of weeks. Also, Participant 12 shared about a particular student who had a strict diet and times to eat. The school offered snacks, and students could get one whenever they wanted. This student chose not to follow his diet restrictions and often grabbed multiple snacks. To support this student's needs, the school set up a boundary that an adult must be present when a student gets a snack. Participant 12 reminds the student of his mom’s diet expectations and praises him often when the student follows them. See Figure 14 for the themed responses from Participant 12.

Figure 14

Participant 12: Themes in Response to Research Question



Note. A = Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions; C = Built relationships with students and parents/guardians; H = Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions; E = Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors; L = Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions.

Results by Research Question

The following sections describe the analysis of the most common themes based on participant data and responses to each research sub-question. A table is included for each sub-question.

Research Sub-Question 1

Research Sub-Question 1 was: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?* There were four common themes for Sub-Question 1. The most popular theme was that students returned to face-to-face instruction with behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions. During the interviews 75%, or nine out of 12 participants, reported this while answering Research Sub-Question 1. For example, Participant 11 shared about a particular student,

When he reacted to emotion, he acted out, he really acted out. He jumped on the desks and walked across the room, picked on a kid who had glasses by picking up the glasses and breaking them in half and throwing them and going through the teacher's room and just ripping everything off the walls.

In addition, Participant 9 shared students came back from the COVID quarantine with waterfalls of emotions. Participant 9 shared,

There's an issue with just having an overwhelming sense of emotions and not knowing how to deal with them. And then, you know it turns into behavioral issues or being really sad or not wanting to talk or participate or play with other kids. There's this isolation aspect, too.

The next three common themes regarded the support that the participants offered students in the area of self-awareness. The first common theme out of the three themes had 58%, or seven out of the 12 participants, share that they provided a variety of coping strategies. Artifacts sent to the researcher were pictures of break boxes (Participant 5), emotional-learning slides and Flipgrid activities (Participant 5), a calming corner picture (Participant 10) and a visual chart to assist a student on verbalizing his emotions (Participant 10). Participants worked hard on individualizing strategies for what a particular student needed. Participant 1 shared an incident where a particular student was experiencing anxiety and needed help. Participant 1 offered help by asking the following questions,

What do you feel like you need to do right now? Do you need time by yourself? Do you need time on the carpet with a friend? Do you need time to refocus? Do you need some time to play a quiet activity? Do you need some time to read silently? What's going to be beneficial for you?

The student asked if she could go take a quick walk and the Participant respected that choice.

The second most common theme in supporting students with self-awareness had 58%, or seven out of the 12 participants, share that they built relationship with students and parents/guardians. One participant had a couple of boys that were constantly in need of support and de-escalation strategies. Participant 7 stated, "I tried to relate to them any way that I could. I talked with them about TikTok, and I tried to joke around with them. I often defused many of their explosive moments with comedy." Also, Participant 9 spoke

about building a relationship with a parent to help the student. Participant 9 wanted the parent to realize she was part of the solution, and shared the following:

I had to build her confidence in helping her son. That's the one that really stood out to me because at the end of the year she was so appreciative, and she came in crying saying I've seen such growth with my son. I see confidence in him that I never thought I would.

For Participant 9, this was a successful strategy that supported the student and family.

The last common theme for supporting students with self-awareness had 50%, or six out of 12 participants, share that emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff. Three participants shared artifacts showing the overview of a program that was purchased by their districts called Second Step (Participant 1, 9, and 10). Second step units focused on growth mindset and goal setting, emotion management, empathy and kindness, and problem solving. Some of the participants (Participant 11, 7, and 10) mentioned referring to the school counselor and seeking outside support to better support students in need. Participant 7 shared that, "My two young men that were obviously severely traumatized in life and in mental health, both had outside services that came to school and worked with them. They also got outside services at home."

Table 11 identifies the common themes and frequency count for Research Sub-Question 1.

Table 11

Common Themes for Sub-Question 1: Self-Awareness

| Common Theme | Number of Participants (n=12) | Frequency |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Behaviors dominated by the inability to regulate emotions | 9 | 22 |
| Provided access to a variety of coping strategies | 7 | 15 |
| Built relationships with students and parents/guardians | 7 | 15 |
| Emotional support was given through curriculum, district resources, and school support staff | 6 | 11 |

Research Sub-Question 2

Research Sub-Question 2 was: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

There were three common themes for Research Sub-Question 2. The most popular theme was that students returned to face-to-face instruction with low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors. During the interviews 100%, or 12 out of 12 participants, referred to this while answering Research Sub-Question 2. For example, Participant 1 shared about a particular student by stating,

He kept on having a problem with soccer for whatever reason. That was something that he wanted to do during recess, and it seemed that time after time he was coming back just in tears, so upset because the game didn't go the way he wanted to, he wasn't performing like he wanted to, or the game wasn't going how he wanted it to. He was much larger than other children, he would get himself into some trouble there.

Since the student was unable to handle his emotions on the court he then resorted to physical contact. Participant 3, when referring to the whole class shared,

After the COVID-19, after the COVID break, they came back with minimal management skills. They had no organizational skills. They had no self-discipline. They really didn't even know what motivation was. They had no impulse control whatsoever. They wanted it. They took it. They wanted to draw on something. They scribbled on it. When they came back, my whole, 24 of them, were just kind of a huge mess.

It was as if the relaxed atmosphere and isolation aspect of distance learning fed into the classrooms upon returning to face-to-face instruction.

The last two common themes for self-management had to do with the supports given to by participants in this area. The first common theme out of the two themes had 83%, or 10 out of the 12 participants, share that positive communication and strategies to manage one's behavior helped with self-management. Two artifact pieces shared by Participant 6 and Participant 9 showed examples of mindfulness strategies called Own Your Power, Be Kind, Be Nice, and Mindful Movements. Participant 2 discussed how the classroom application ClassDojo allows for a teacher to give positive points throughout the day for students and parents to see. Participant 2 shared "I mean every little thing you could think of they got a positive. I mean, it's almost crazy. So, anything you do positively, you got a positive point." Several students took ownership of their choices and started making better ones to earn those points that turned into fake money to go to the school store or participating in an extra fun activity after school.

The last common theme for supporting students with self-management had 58%, or seven out of 12 participants, share that they collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff. Participant 3 struggled with a particular student regarding self-management. In both the student's eyes and the parents this child could do no wrong even though he would destroy items he came in contact with. Participant 3 shared,

I started out forming the relationship (with the student), and then I had to really make a concerted effort to form a relationship with the parent. The parent was really hostile and defensive. I had to have her in with the principal and me before we could get to a level where we all realized, where she realized that we were all on the same page, and that we were working to help her son become an independent student.

While there was progress made once everyone sat down together as a team, the student still needed lots of support at the end of the year.

Participant 1 shared a story about a student who was coming in from recess really upset. Participant 1 shared,

Two or three times of coming back after recess with him in tears, and really struggling to have self-management and to work with others, I talked with the school psychologist and we came to a conclusion that we were going to have him play a different game during recess.

The student was resistant at first, but with support from Participant 1 on finding other activities and friends to play with the student became more successful in self-management.

Table 12 identifies the common themes and frequency count for Research Sub-Question 2.

Table 12

Common Themes for Sub-Question 2: Self-Management

| Common Theme | Number of Participants (n=12) | Frequency |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors | 12 | 27 |
| Positive communication and strategies to manage one's behavior | 10 | 15 |
| Collaborated and built supports by reaching out to home and support staff | 7 | 10 |

Research Sub-Question 3

Research Sub-Question 3 was: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

There were two common themes for Research Sub-Question 3. The most popular theme was that students returned to face-to-face instruction with adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions. During the interviews 75%, or 9 out of 12 participants, referred to this while answering Research Sub-Question 3.

Participant 2 stated,

Many of my students were struggling greatly in this category when they returned just due to not having the practice of being around people, talking and working off of non-verbal cues, or not having to consider somebody's feelings. So, they were greatly socially unaware coming back to the classroom. Then this would

lead to conflicts because they weren't aware of what other people were feeling; they weren't reading the nonverbal cues.

Participant 2 goes on to share that there were many conflicts, arguing, and tattling in and out of the classroom because students struggled being around other students. Another participant also discussed the issue of nonverbal communication and how it affected the classroom. Participant 4 shared,

With the reaction on someone's face, they would throw things down and break up little pieces of crayons to throw at other students if they didn't like the way they were looking at them. There was a lot of impulsive things like hitting, pushing and choking. Seriously, it was crazy.

Students just struggled with social interaction due to misinterpretations of someone else's feelings and the confusion of their own emotions.

The last common theme for social awareness had to do with the supports given to by participants in this area. The common theme had 50%, or 6 out of the 12 participants, share that empathy-focused lessons and discussions helped support social awareness.

Participants 1, 9, and 10 shared artifacts of an overview from a unit in the Second Step curriculum that was entitled Empathy and Kindness. The lessons focused on looking at situations from a different perspective and how to be kind in various situations.

Participant 9 shared in the interview,

We did a lot of mindfulness, especially the ClassDojo Mindfulness Series, and just really hitting on empathy. But definitely, just going through all of those mindfulness videos really helped them visually see it at a level to where they

understood, since the cartoons are very direct and simple. I feel like that definitely helped them understand more.

Table 13 identifies the common themes and frequency count for Research Sub-Question 3.

Table 13

Common Themes for Sub-Question 3: Social Awareness

| Common Theme | Number of Participants (n=12) | Frequency |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions | 9 | 13 |
| Empathy-focused lessons and discussions | 6 | 9 |

Research Sub-Question 4

Research Sub-Question 4 was: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?* There were two common themes for Research Sub-Question 4. One theme was that students returned to face-to-face instruction and lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills. During the interviews 83%, or 10 out of 12 participants, referred to this lack while answering Research Sub-Question 4.

Participant 10 shared,

I've seen that a lot of the kids are struggling. There's a lot of arguing over things that I don't remember there being arguments about before. Not being able to talk to somebody and resolve a conflict. It's just that everything is my way.

There's no looking at it like, 'okay... Well maybe you're right. Let's talk about it.'

Part of interpersonal skills is listening well and being able to resolve problems in group.

Participant 4 spoke about some non-verbal communication issues stating,

Well, they didn't know how to interpret facial expressions, or they didn't even know how to handle if their friend just didn't want to hang out with them for a few minutes, or if they wanted to play with somebody else. Instead, they would come back from recess in tears, three or four girls at a time. Usually sometimes the boys but they weren't as tearful. They were more physical usually.

The lack of interpersonal skills disrupted both playground and classroom time for many of the participants' classrooms.

The last common theme for relationship skills had to do with the supports given to by participants in this area. The common theme had 83%, or 10 out of the 12 participants, share that they encouraged and guided students to strengthen interpersonal communication skills. Participant 1 spoke of lots of time spent on lessons about interpersonal communications. Specifically, Participant 1 shared,

Focusing on how to communicate with somebody when you disagree with them. The steps to take when you disagree with what someone has to say, and for lack of a better word, not being a bully but instead being someone who advocates for others.

Participant 8 also shared a strategy that was in place for students to use the bistro table, which was right outside of the classroom door that gave them space and a place to work out a relationship conflict. Participant 8 shared,

So, giving them that space. I have a bistro table this year. It's outside my door, and I give them just that bistro time basically to just go out and have the time to talk it out. And then, if they need me, come and ask me, can you step in for a minute? But I'm just giving them the space to talk it out, and if it's bigger

than that, then I give them that space with our counselor to talk it out. But it's a part of what we have to do is figuring out how you own what is yours in a relationship conflicts.

Most of the participants stressed the importance of communication and having to guide students through interpersonal communication skills to help them deal with relationships that may have been struggling.

Table 14 identifies the common themes and frequency count for Research Sub-Question 4.

Table 14

Common Themes for Sub-Question 4: Relationship Skills

| Common Theme | Number of Participants | |
|---|------------------------|-----------|
| | (n=12) | Frequency |
| Lacked verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills | 10 | 22 |
| Encouraged and guided students to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills | 10 | 17 |

Research Sub-Question 5

Research Sub-Question 5 was: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

There were two common themes for Research Sub-Question 5. One theme was that students returned to face-to-face instruction demonstrating an inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions. During the interviews 58%, or seven out of 12 participants, referred to this while answering Research Sub-Question 5. Participant 1 shared,

Not to say that all students struggled in this area with responsible decision-making. But there was definitely sort of a relearning curve that we had to undergo. Reminding students of the school expectations and reminding students of how to respond to others and how to resolve conflicts. And the proper kind ways to do that. The ways to do that with people that are not related to you because that can be a very different social situation when you have to navigate difficult things with people that are not your siblings and not in your family.

Students got accustomed to being home on their own for the most part, having parents/guardians right there to make decisions for them, and handling situations with family members like siblings. School is different. Participant 2 shared about a particular student who was a disruption in class to the extreme of rendering ineffective the lessons being taught. Participant 2 stated, “His decisions were causing just great havoc and just discord and stress because he was just choosing the wrong behavior on purpose. What he did was he would just have disruptive behavior.” The student did not seem to care about the effect he had on the classroom environment. Participant 8 gave an example about the misuse of white glue with upper elementary students. Participant 8 shared,

I have never in upper grades had a kid like totally take the lid off (white glue) and try to do something with it, and it's like, ‘what are you doing?’ Or they were filling their poppits with it. It's just like stuff that I've never had in sixth grade.

It was issues like the ones just shared that showed the students’ inadequacy in making caring and productive decisions daily.

The last common theme for responsible decision-making had to do with the supports given to by participants in this area. The common theme had 50%, or 6 out of

the 12 participants, share that they nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting. Participant 10 shared about supporting a student through a small group intervention. In this group, Participant 10 shared “I would have students model good choice making and also demonstrate and reflecting on bad choices after the situation happened by asking, how could we have done this differently? What would have been a different choice?” It is important for students to see models of good decision-making from peers and the adults in their lives. By observing others, students gain more independence in making decisions that will be to their best benefit (Participant 6). Participant 3 said a fun way to get students to start making decisions and reason the why of them is with “would you rather questions.” Participant 3 stated, “They're hilarious, sometimes like today it was just, ‘would you rather be Captain America or Iron Man?’ But sometimes it is ‘would you rather lick your shoe or eat a boogie from your nose?’” Would you rather questions give the students a chance to start independently making decisions without repercussion.

Table 15 identifies the common themes and frequency count for Research Sub-Question 5.

Table 15

Common Themes for Sub-Question 5: Responsible Decision-Making

| Common Theme | Number of Participants | |
|--|------------------------|-----------|
| | (n=12) | Frequency |
| Inadequacy in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions | 7 | 10 |
| Nurtured responsible decision-making through modeling and reflecting | 6 | 6 |

Summary

This chapter presented summaries from 12 study participants in response to a set of open-ended, semi-structured interview questions designed to explore lived experiences of teachers who support students in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making upon return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were public elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County. Once the participants agreed to participate and signed all the consent forms, the researcher scheduled individual Zoom appointments and conducted the interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed through Zoom. Once the transcriptions were reviewed and sent out to participants to check, the data was analyzed using NVivo coding software. The researcher analyzed and coded the data. Additionally, the researcher identified common themes and patterns among participant responses. To reduce research bias, intercoder reliability was used and another researcher also coded part of the data. Each transcript was analyzed for its own set of themes and once all interviews were analyzed, the researcher combined all data to find common themes and patterns from all participant responses.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Chapter V starts with a review of the purpose statement, research question and sub-questions, methods, population, and sample for the study. Then the researcher shares the study's major findings, including unexpected findings and conclusions that can be made from the data analysis. Lastly, the researcher makes implications for action, recommendations for future research, and offers concluding remarks.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon their return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Sub-Questions

The following research sub-questions were developed to help answer the research question:

1. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?

2. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?
3. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?
4. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?
5. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Interviews

This qualitative study used semi-structured open-ended interview questions to determine the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary teachers supporting students' SEL needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews consisted of three questions to answer each of the five research sub-questions. Each participant received a shared copy of the Letter of Invitation and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights with details of the study. Additionally, the participants gave electronic consent to participate and record conversations via the Zoom platform. All interviews were transcribed using the Zoom platform. Once transcriptions were verified by the researcher and participants were sent a

copy of them, the transcriptions were uploaded to the NVIVO platform. In NVIVO, patterns were identified from the participants' responses. A doctoral expert coder verified the transcription themes and transcribed information between the expert codes and the researcher, which consisted of an agreement between the coders. Both researcher and coder obtained a high percentage of integrated agreement, and as a result, potential bias was eliminated when coding.

Artifacts

Concurrent with the interviews, the researcher received artifacts from the participants, as supports in SEL were evident in the artifacts as well as in the responses of the participants. The researcher analyzed a total of 87 artifacts. The researcher requested artifacts from each interviewee but received items only from 50% of the participants. All artifacts were presented and then sent through email to the researcher. The criterion was that the artifacts must involve SEL, such as flyers, newsletters, written material used with students, and pictures of materials or stations in the classroom. All artifacts were then added to the participant file in NVIVO for coding.

Population

A population is defined as the entire group of individuals, objects, or events, in a research study where results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). At the time of this study and according to the latest published statistical information published in 2020/2021, during 2018/2019 California had 1,029 school districts and 548 public elementary schools, and 146, 521 public elementary school teachers (CDE, n.d.). The population for this study represented elementary school teachers. By narrowing and

redefining the population, the researcher then determined a sampling frame on which to focus for this study.

Sampling Frame

The population is defined as a group of individuals, objects, or events that comply with criteria outlined in a research study that results in generalizations of findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sampling frame provided the data that was collected. After establishing the sampling frame from the overall population, the researcher is ready to interpret the data and inferences effectively. At the time of this study, San Bernardino County in southern California consisted of 34 districts, 338 elementary schools, and 19,304 teachers (EdData, n.d.). The sampling frame from which participants in the study were selected were public elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County who currently are teaching transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. Approximately 9,770 elementary teachers in San Bernardino County were the target population for this study (NCES, n.d.).

Sample

The participants selected in a study from a population the researcher intends to generalize are called the sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The definition of a sample is given by Creswell (2014) and Patton (2015), who gives it as a subset of the target population that is representative of the whole population. For this study, the sample came from 9,770 elementary teachers representing San Bernardino County out of 19,304 teachers in San Bernardino County.

Sample Size

Qualitative studies generally require a smaller number of individuals in the sample size compared to quantitative studies. In qualitative research, the researcher must collect enough data to generalize to a population sufficiently. The data collected must have all perceptions represented, which will lead to the attainment of saturation.

According to Fusch et al. (2018), saturation occurs when the research objectives have been met, and no new relevant information can be obtained. Depending on the study, the number of participants may vary to reach data saturation. However, when considering data saturation, researchers generally agree that saturation is met when there is no new data, no new themes, and no new coding, and there is the ability to replicate the study (Guest et al., 2006). It is suggested by Creswell (2014) to have at least five to 25 participants and by Morse (1994) to have at least six. The selected sample for this study included 12 public elementary school teachers within San Bernardino County. These numbers fall within the parameters Creswell and Morse outlined.

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to select the study sample. Patton (2015) defines purposeful sampling as selecting “rich cases” that provide in-depth information about the purpose of the study. For this qualitative research study, purposeful sampling was used to attain relevant information to identify public elementary school teachers’ experiences with students after the COVID-19 pandemic and how SEL was used to support students upon returning to face-to-face instruction. The criteria used to purposely identify and select public elementary school teachers for this study included:

- Teachers actively teaching in San Bernardino County.
- Teachers actively teaching transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth grade.
- Teachers returning to teach face-to-face when schools reopened after the closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Teachers using social-emotional learning to help support students who returned to face-to-face instruction.

Sample Selection Process

For this study, purposeful sampling was selected to be able to describe the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers and the support given through SEL upon the return to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic. This research looked at 12 southern California San Bernardino County educators. The sample selection process was as follows:

- A need for participants for the study was posted on LinkedIn, the Facebook Group Inland Empire Teachers, and UMass Global Ed.D.
- An email was sent out for a need of participants to local union leaders and known colleagues in education.
- Each identified teacher, through social media or email, was then sent an interest survey link to fill out.
- An invitation to participate and the informed consent material were sent to teachers who filled out the interest survey.
- Out of 21 possible participants, only 12 replied confirming continued participation.

Interviews were then scheduled with the 12 participants with the request to provide any artifacts at that time.

Major Findings

Chapter I and Chapter II introduced the research questions and the literature surrounding COVID-19 and SEL. The data suggested that teachers experienced several different behaviors from students and offered social and emotional support for students upon return to face-to-face instruction.

Research Question 1: Self-Awareness

Research Sub-Question 1 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?*

Major Finding 1: Participants provided access to a variety of coping strategies

Most participants acknowledged that upon returning to school after the COVID-19 shutdown, students showed lack of emotional competence. The three primary components of emotional competence are (a) emotion expressiveness, (b) knowledge, and (c) regulation (White, 2008). Many students could not identify or regulate their emotions according to the data collected. The lack of emotion identification and regulation left participants to develop different coping strategies to meet individual needs. Participants created:

- Break boxes
- Calming corners
- Areas where students had extra space when needed
- Slides and Flipgrid's focusing on social-emotional topics

- Added curriculum for social-emotional support on an already full academic plate
- Focused on deep breathing strategies
- Set aside time for small groups and one-on-one support
- Pictorial support to help identify emotions
- Mindfulness breaks
- Writing and coloring opportunities to support emotions and help to regulate them

By providing access to various strategies, students began growing in emotional competence by acknowledging their emotions and being able to express and regulate them in a safe environment.

Research Sub-Question 3: Self-Management

Research Sub-Question 2 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?*

Major Finding 2: Participants reported low self-management skills that led to undesired behaviors

According to participants, students came back to school unable to sit for long periods, lacked organizational skills like keeping a binder organized, struggled with time management skills, had issues with self-discipline in and out of the classroom, and brought many undesired habits created during the distance learning back into the classroom environment. The ecological systems theory supports these issues of self-management. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) shared that a child's development is

affected by interactions between the developing individual and the people, objects, and symbols within the environment. COVID had all families and students isolated, leaving very little interaction for students in the surrounding environment.

Research Sub-Question 3: Social Awareness

Research Sub-Question 3 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?*

Major Finding 3: Participants reported adverse social interactions that led to playground and classroom disruptions

Shaw (2021) explains that social awareness is having the skill of ethical and social norms for behavior and determining support and resources when needed. Several participants related how students came back unaware of what to do with verbal and nonverbal cues. This unawareness caused many conflicts in and out of the classroom. It resulted in an increase in arguments, tattling, yelling, screaming, and handling social problems physically. Students struggled to interpret other students' facial expressions and reacted with their emotions to what they thought they were seeing.

Research Sub-Question 4: Relationship Skills

Research Sub-Question 4 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?*

Major Finding 4: Participants noticed that students lacked in verbal and nonverbal interpersonal skills

Participants reported that students returned arguing about things that were never argued about before and could not talk to someone to resolve a problem. Every child seemed to want their way and struggled to listen and understand the other students' perspectives. Students would become highly upset when their friend went to play with someone else, often resulting in crying or physical altercations. Students took what they wanted when they wanted it, even if it was out of another student's hands. Students struggled with basic social awareness skills, such as communicating, getting along with others, and resolving conflict.

Research Sub-Question 5: Responsible Decision-Making

Research Sub-Question 5 asked: *With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of responsible decision-making with students?*

Major Finding 5: Participants noted inadequacies in making caring, productive, and responsible decisions

Not all students returned with a deficit in responsible decision-making. However, some re-teaching had to be done on school expectations because behaviors that may be tolerated at home are not necessarily tolerated at school. Students returned accustomed to the lax conditions of distance learning, and to parents who were always there to help with decision-making. Often students made poor decisions in completing work and chose on purpose to interrupt the classroom and playground environment and to just be quirky. Most of the time, decisions and actions did not consider others around them.

Unexpected Findings

The data collected showed a massive amount of support offered to students to support SEL. Participants created and used given resources and sought out additional help when needed. Despite all that was done, some alarming data was shared by a few participants. The researcher never expected to hear how upper elementary students, regardless of the many supports in place, still resorted to self-harm and other acts of harm that led to psychiatric holds. Such behavior presents an alarming statistic beginning to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic regarding youth and mental health.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1

Based on the findings of this study, as supported by the participants and the literature on the importance of SEL to combat trauma events like COVID-19, it is concluded that early and continued supports in self-management, and social awareness are essential in developing appropriate behaviors. The findings emphasized the importance of social interactions with people, objects, and symbols within the environment to help a child's stunted development during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without limited or no social interactions, it is evident that students suffered in acquiring organizational skills and impulse control, which led to disruptions on school campuses upon returning to face-to-face instruction. Students must have access to and interactions with others daily to support their social and emotional development regarding the regulation of their emotions, self-motivation, and respect of others.

Conclusion 2

Based on the findings of this study, as supported by the participants and the literature, it is concluded that COVID-19 has dramatically impacted students' abilities to make caring and productive decisions. The findings characterized students as making decisions without thinking through the consequences of their choice or the result that may occur because of the choice they made. Initially, students' work habits and decisions about completing assignments experienced in distance learning spilled over into the classroom when they returned to school after the shutdown of schools. There were no repercussions for not attending or completing work during distance learning, so students returned to school with the same expectations. It is essential always to set high expectations and, when those expectations are not being met, to do everything possible to support students so they are able to meet expectations.

Conclusion 3

Based on the findings of this study, as supported by the participants and the literature, it is concluded that education needs to continue to build emotional support systems with staff adequately trained in social-emotional support for students. While the findings showed many different strategies being implemented to support students, it was clear that there was a lack of sufficient support to meet all needs of all students, which has led to student anxiety, stress, and other mental instabilities. Data is just starting to emerge about the effects that COVID-19 had on the younger population. It is expected to take years to evaluate and understand the aftermath of social-emotional health from the pandemic. In education, it is essential to invest in the staff and training needed to support

our students and give students the best chance to come out resilient after all is said and done regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implications For Action

Based on the major findings and conclusions from this study, the following implications for action are recommended for elementary education and SEL.

Implication 1

This study revealed a definite need for an increase in SEL opportunities within schools to support student needs in and out of the classroom. Despite the nation's leaders talking about how important SEL is, districts continue to put academics as the highest priority. There are endless curriculum demands and mandated testing that leave teachers with little or no opportunity to thoroughly address the social and emotional needs of all students.

To help meet the demands of SEL, teachers need to be provided research-based training opportunities to build their understanding of social and emotional development to better support their students. In addition, teachers need to be able to implement flexibility within a school day without feeling they are behind in the academics. Several times while interviewing the participants, it was mentioned that there is not enough time for SEL, it is just one more thing on top of an already stacked high plate of demands, and there has been no real training in meeting the current social and emotional demands.

Implication 2

School districts need to review budgets to put an emphasis on hiring more support staff to help address the most at-risk students that they are serving. It is evident in this study that classroom teachers do not have enough support in their classrooms to support

many of the behaviors that are occurring upon return from COVID-19. Many of the teachers participating in this study talked about the unsafe behaviors that exist because of emotions and students not knowing how to self-regulate those emotions. Often the participants mentioned being torn between working with the one student who needs immediate support socially and emotionally and then the other student bodies present. Teachers call counselors and administration for support, but often they were busy with other students. Schools are just spread too thin to reach every student who needs extra support. Districts need to focus on getting more counselors, mental health professionals, and behavioral specialists on to school sites to better support their schools socially and emotionally.

Implication 3

Schools need to work on building a connection between home and school around SEL. Parents spent a year and half being not only the parent, but also teacher. Before COVID-19, parental support was already decreasing in many schools. Now after COVID-19, in many cases it is much worse. A couple factors contributing to this decrease of parent involvement was distance learning where learning was placed more in the parents' hands and then the many restrictions that were set forth with the return to face-to-face instruction. While conducting the interviews for this study, a few of the participants spoke about building a relationship with parents to help the student in need. Participants shared how it was an endless battle at times with lots of conversations, support strategies, and just making parents understand the concern of the teacher. Many parents just do not understand or know what to do with their child's social and emotional needs.

In all school site plans, parent involvement is addressed. A strategic goal and actions to meet that goal are written up yearly. Districts and schools need to develop plans that require parents to participate in the solutions by taking more active roles in supporting their students. Too often, one can hear a teacher saying it is pointless to talk the parent because nothing changes. Changes do not occur overnight, but as a whole if there are set priorities and continued follow through, eventually change will begin to happen. One way to help parents become more involved is by offering parent professional development opportunities regarding SEL. Schools need to make these professional development opportunities accessible by providing them multiple days and times, in person and online, and have them recorded and posted on the school webpage.

While it used to be that schools were for academics and home took care of the social emotional piece, this is just not the case anymore. Academics are crossing over into the homes and social emotional well-being is playing a big factor in the classroom. It is time schools and families realize this and that they become team, not two separate entities working against each other. There has always been the common goal of wanting what is best for the students, but it is time to show that with actions. Schools and homes need to be united to provide all students with the best opportunity to grow socially and emotionally. As the saying goes, *It takes a village to raise a child.*

Recommendations for Further Research

There is research about how SEL plays a role in academic success and children's development that later supports them in other life milestones. However, this research focused on the behavioral experiences on campuses and the support teachers used to

alleviate the emotions and reactions of students returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researcher recommends this study be repeated with a larger sample population from around California to confirm the findings of this study. A larger sample frame from across the state of California would give a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences with student behaviors and supports. The findings from a study like this could have some significant implications for the support that government entities need to invest in to support all students' social and emotional needs.

In addition, further research is also needed to identify solid emotional support programs and resources that are more aligned with what classrooms face daily. Research that supports SEL needs in the most at-risk neighborhoods is needed to support students with diverse needs in and out of the classroom. In the future, it will be essential to continue replicating this recommended study to support the ever-changing world.

Lastly, it is recommended that future research look at the specific mental disorders students exhibit that is a result from the COVID-19 pandemic. The data in this study did implicate a rise in psychiatric needs for student in upper elementary. This study may lead us to a better understanding of how major trauma events such as COVID affect the most vulnerable populations. It may also lead to better support systems if something like COVID happens again.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

I enrolled in the doctoral program after a two-year reflection of what I wanted to do with my career. The truth is that I had hit a wall and was contemplating leaving the field of education. I needed more than successfully meeting the everyday demands placed

upon me through district mandates, curriculum maps, and the never-ending wheel of required assessments. I began the doctoral program knowing I wanted more out of my educational career.

Throughout the doctoral program, I focused on SEL based on my own personal need at the time, my experiences with my son, who struggled socially and emotionally, and the need I began to see for my students in the area of SEL. What I did not expect was how much it changed me inside. Focusing on SEL developed a sense of calm and patience that I had not experienced in a long time. It enabled me to control my emotions, which made work and home life much happier for me. I gained the power of connecting with my student families through sharing my own experiences and being able to have the tough conversations that needed to be had to support my most at-risk students better.

The narrative in elementary education still reflects a high need for knowledge of SEL and the time to implement lessons and strategies. Districts and leaders are still focused on testing and the scores that come with it. However, with an increased emphasis on SEL, the probability is great that levels of achievement will increase.

I chose to dedicate the past two and half years of my life to research on SEL and plan to not stop that focus. I believe my future lies in education and supporting students and families socially and emotionally to the best of my ability. I look forward to continued research at my pace and without any due dates.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Synthesis Matrix

| Author and Date | References | COVID-19 | School Closures | Conditions for Families | Childhood Trauma | Collective Trauma | Toxic Stress | Well-being/behaviors | History of Social Emotional Learning | Emotional Competence Theory | Ecological Systems Theory | Casell's five competencies | Classroom Integration | Family School Relationships | SEL after COVID-19 | Problems Identified | Methodology | Statistics |
|--|---|----------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------|
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|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|
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APPENDIX B

Letter of Invitation

Study: COVID-19 Pandemic: Lived Experiences of Teachers Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Learning Needs Upon Returning to Face-To-Face Instruction

XXXX _____, 2022

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative methods research study about the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The main investigator of this study is Valerie Cover, Doctoral Candidate in University of Massachusetts Global Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are identified as a teacher of elementary students from San Bernardino County.

Approximately 19,304 public elementary school teachers currently serve San Bernardino County, and a total of 12 public elementary school teachers will participate in this study. Participation should require about one hour of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

As part of the interview process, share any artifacts you have that have supported students regarding social-emotional learning. Examples of artifacts could include, but are not limited to: flyers, newsletters, pictures of a social-emotional learning station/corner, handouts (ex. Zone of proximal development, breathing star, 5-fingers, positive affirmations, etc.).

PURPOSE: This study is being conducted for a dissertation for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at UMass Global. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

PROCEDURES: Your participation in this study is voluntary. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share your experiences as a teacher of elementary students. The interview session will be audio recorded using Zoom and transcribed.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation in this study, but your feedback may help add to the research of teachers' experiences returning to face-to-face instruction and the coping strategies used by teachers to support student's self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, decision making, and relationships skills in the classroom after the return to face-to-face instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

Thank you for your valuable time and feedback. You are welcome to ask questions, at any time. You may contact me at [redacted] or you can also contact Dr. Tamerin Tooker by email at tamerin.tooker@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. Truly with Grace, Patience and Perseverance, Valerie Cover Doctoral Candidate, University of Massachusetts Global.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: COVID-19 Pandemic: Lived Experiences of Teachers Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Learning Needs Upon Returning to Face-To-Face Instruction

INVESTIGATOR: Valerie Cover, Doctoral Candidate

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Valerie Cover, a doctoral candidate from the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts Global (“UMass Global”). The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic.

By participating in this phase of the study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes and will be conducted electronically using Zoom. Completion of the individual interviews will take place November, 2022. Questions in the interview will pertain to the experiences teachers are having with students in the areas of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, decision making, and relationships skills upon the return to face-to-face instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a password-protected digital file that is available only to the researcher. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

- b) I understand that the interview will be recorded digitally (both video and audio). The recordings will be available only to the researcher. The recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. A text transcript of the audio will be generated by Zoom, and checked by the researcher for accuracy within 48 hours of the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

- c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research of teachers experiences returning to face-to-face instruction and the coping strategies used by teachers to support student's self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, decision making, and relationships skills in the classroom after the return to face-to-face instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Valerie Cover (researcher) at [redacted] or Dr. Tamerin Tooker (advisor) at tamerin.tooker@umassglobal.edu

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received an electronic copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible

Date

Signature of Witness (if appropriate)

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D

Research Participant's Bill of Rights



UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Research

Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX E

Audio Release Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: COVID-19 Pandemic: Lived Experiences of Teachers Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Learning Needs Upon Returning to Face-To-Face Instruction

**UNIVERSITY of MASSACHUSETTS GLOBAL
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618**

I authorize Valerie Cover, University of Massachusetts Global Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give the University of Massachusetts Global and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Date

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol Script and Interview Questions

Interviewer: Valerie Cover

Interview time planned: Approximately one-hour

Interview place: Zoom

Recording: Zoom Recording

Make personal introductions.

Opening Statement: [Interviewer states:] I greatly appreciate your valuable time to participate in this interview. To review, the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of San Bernardino County elementary school teachers in supporting students' social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional five competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, decision making, and relationship skills.

Interview Agenda: [Interviewer states:] I anticipate this interview will take about an hour today. As a review of the process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate via letter and signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for the purpose of this study. We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent form, UMass Global Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release form. Next, I will begin the audio recorder and ask a list of questions related to the purpose of the study. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue on with the audio recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recorder and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy prior to the data being analyzed. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the questions?

Background Questions

1. Briefly introduce yourself and describe your position.

Interview Questions:

1. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of self-awareness?
2. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with self-awareness and describe that in as much detail as possible?
3. How did you support the student from the previous question with self-awareness?
4. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of self-management?
5. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with self-management and describe that in as much detail as possible?
6. How did you support the student from the previous question with self-management?
7. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of social awareness?
8. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with social awareness and describe that in as much detail as possible?
9. How did you support the student from the previous question with social awareness?
10. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of relationship skills?
11. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with relationship skills and describe that in as much detail as possible?
12. How did you support the student from the previous question with relationship skills?
13. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of responsible-decision making?
14. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with responsible-decision making and describe that in as much detail as possible?
15. How did you support the student from the previous question with responsible decision-making skills?
16. Do you have any artifacts that can contribute to the strategies you have used to support students socially and emotionally (curricular concepts, created artifacts, newsletters, room setup, flyers, etc.).

APPENDIX G

Research Questions and Semi-Structured Interview Questions Alignment Table

Qualitative Research Question

What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in San Bernardino County supporting students’ social-emotional learning needs upon returning to face-to-face instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic?

| Sub-Questions | Interview Questions | Rationale for Alignment to the Research Sub-Question |
|---|--|---|
| <p>SQ 1. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-awareness with students?</p> | <p>IQ 1. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of self-awareness?</p> <p>IQ 2. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with self-awareness and describe that in as much detail as possible?</p> <p>IQ 3. How did you support the student from the previous question with self-awareness?</p> | <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experiences teachers are facing with students in the area of self-awareness after the return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19.</p> <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experience of a teacher from start to finish. It attempts to have the respondent share their experience for one particular student.</p> <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the “how” teachers are supporting students in self-awareness. It attempts to get the experience the respondent had by sharing the process that was used to help the student.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>SQ 2: With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of self-management with students?</p> | <p>IQ 4. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of self-management?</p> <p>IQ 5. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with self-management and describe that in as much detail as possible?</p> <p>IQ 6. How did you support the student from the previous question with self-management?</p> | <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experiences teachers are facing with students in the area of self-management after the return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19. This interview question attempts to investigate the experience of a teacher from start to finish. It attempts to have the respondent share their experience for one particular student. This interview question attempts to investigate the “how” teachers are supporting students in self-management. It attempts to get the experience the respondent had by sharing the process that was used to help the student.</p> |
| <p>SQ 3. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of social awareness with students?</p> | <p>IQ 7. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of social awareness?</p> <p>IQ 8. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with social awareness and describe that in as much detail as possible?</p> <p>IQ 9. How did you support the student from the previous question with social awareness?</p> | <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experiences teachers are facing with students in the area of social awareness after the return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19. This interview question attempts to investigate the experience of a teacher from start to finish. It attempts to have the respondent share their experience for one particular student. This interview question attempts to investigate the “how” teachers are supporting students in social awareness. It attempts to get the experience the respondent had by sharing the process that was used to help the student.</p> |
| <p>SQ 4: With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and</p> | <p>IQ 10. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been</p> | <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experiences teachers are</p> |

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| <p>supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of relationship skills with students?</p> | <p>your experiences with students in the area of relationship skills?</p> <p>IQ 11. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with relationship skills and describe that in as much detail as possible?</p> <p>IQ 12. How did you support the student from the previous question with relationship skills?</p> | <p>facing with students in the area of relationship skills after the return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19.</p> <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experience of a teacher from start to finish. It attempts to have the respondent share their experience for one particular student.</p> <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the “how” teachers are supporting students in relationship skills. It attempts to get the experience the respondent had by sharing the process that was used to help the student.</p> |
| <p>SQ 5. With the return to face-to-face instruction, what experiences and supports are teachers in San Bernardino County experiencing in the area of decision making with students?</p> | <p>IQ 13. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, what have been your experiences with students in the area of decision making?</p> <p>IQ 14. Upon return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19, can you share one particular experience where a student struggled with decision making and describe that in as much detail as possible?</p> <p>IQ 15. How did you support the student from the previous question with decision making?</p> | <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experiences teachers are facing with students in the area of decision making after the return to face-to-face instruction during COVID-19.</p> <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the experience of a teacher from start to finish. It attempts to have the respondent share their experience for one particular student.</p> <p>This interview question attempts to investigate the “how” teachers are supporting students in decision making. It attempts to get the experience the respondent had by sharing the process that was used to help the student.</p> |

APPENDIX H

University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board



Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>
to me, ddevore, tamerin.tooker, irb

4:33 PM (6 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Valerie Cover,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
irb@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.

APPENDIX I

National Institutes of Health



Completion Date 19-May-2021
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 42558776

This is to certify that:

Valerie Cover

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research

(Curriculum Group)

Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Brandman University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w4f589794-fb39-40f4-bbb8-d17d96c97d10-42558776